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The *Bluegrass Accolade* began as a project of the Literary Arts Subcommittee of the Bluegrass Community and Technical College’s Arts in Focus Committee. Our thanks go out to all who helped make this year’s issue possible, including the writers, poets, and artists who contributed their work, and the editorial board members who contributed their time and effort to the production of this issue.
TAHREEM ALI

Why?

Life seems like a blur but why
13 years will pass by since a loved one died
He lives in our hearts though
Guiding us through living better lives than our ancestors when I lose hope and think about dropping out
Why do I hear his voice echoing in my head
Saying you’re not done yet
Your special day is going to come only if you continue education
He is why I fight and why I have gotten so far in these years
14 years will have gone by but yet the moment I have a degree his essence will be with me
So that is WHY!
DON BOES

Fan Favorite

Instead of a bat boy or bat girl
a dog retrieved the lumber
after every lazy fly or sharp hit
down the line. This was low-A,
a step above rookie league,
so awkward slides and pitches
to the backstop were part of the show.
I struggle to clean the gutters
and assemble the bike rack.
The dog always ran at top speed,
centering each stick in his mouth.
Right now I need the ladder I gave away.
At least I remember my password.
Although he left a few unavoidable marks,
he was accorded the loudest applause.
Until the flyby all we understood
fit on a postcard. Until
that awkward brunch
we listened to the same channel.
Now we crave a closer look
from three billion miles away
while legitimate planets
remain in kilter
and assume defensive positions,
as I did, pretending
to enjoy the shrimp.
Although I ordered my headstone
the menu never provides the actual cost.
All that’s left is to chisel the date
on the right side of the hyphen.
The geography is complicated:
valleys and craters and ridges.
And we can only guess
at the viruses and fossils.
Our next mission will uncover new shapes,
some to love and some to hate.
Mountains of ice will present challenges.
Travel expenses will be an issue.
The number of dancers will be an issue.
Chorography is always an issue. Additional globes
will be crucial if the production is to continue.
The Cellar of My Heart

The murky cellar
That I keep my bottles,
Each waiting for a teller
Each collecting dust.

Four chambers of cold glass
Divided by age,
Hoping one day to surpass,
And flip to the next page.

What’s this? Something new?
Could she be the one?
My bottles spew,
And my chamber floods.

My bottles I use to hide;
Some even locked,
But now I confide
The secrets my bottles hold.

How refreshing this feels
To use these bottles,
Till they are wiped clean.

I close my cellar,
With all messages used.
My cellar a ghost town
With nothing left to open.

We walk to a beach,
A fresh bottle,
A new secret,
Each other we will teach
This secret in a bottle.
A winter home

and all the space you keep in between

is ugly.

Brown and sharp,

needles in the air,

the stinging curve

of something lush that has died.

Kerosene flicker

and thump of ignition,

hands to your breast

to stave off the cold

like a robin. Some small bird

whose eyes follow

the sun,

never knowing

when it will return.
ANDREA MCKINNEY

Daughter of an Addict

Do you see that?
The way she hides
Why does she do that?
She always has
Who made her afraid?
They say her father was a monster
Why would they say that?
No one knows for sure but rumors of torture
What rumors?
Rumors that would burn into your brain and you could never forget
Do you see that?
That scar above her eye
What happened there?
They say it was the bottle but who really knows.
Why would someone hurt a precious soul?
Because the bottle is hell
Can you break free?
It is very rare, but some do
Why does she have to suffer his bottle?
Because no one believes
Why won’t they?
they say her father is perfect
why do they think that?
he keeps his bottle a secret
MEGAN PROFFITT

Alaska

Alaska.

Snow on the mountain peaks.
The sun reflecting off the calm water.
Serenity washes over you,
Like the brisk wind on a snowy day.

You get sleepy as the sun goes down.
Your eyelids fall heavy.
The natural, undamaged beauty puts you into a cool slumber.

It’s quiet, tranquil.
You are at peace,
With yourself and the life around you.
This is Alaska.
This is your being.
There’s the chicken coop, where you’ll sweat sweat that smells like what you’re scraping off the floor with a rusty shovel and carrying across the road in a five gallon paint bucket, past a possum who got brave about the same time a truck came through. There’s food, corn dust leaking through the bag onto your shoulder while you carry it to the storage bin, if you can keep from tripping over the cat. There’s straw the animals need, behind a tumbleweed of rusty barbed wire in the barn that’s only still standing because Papaw built it and Nanny looked out at it every day, and you don’t mind the sagging posts and peeling roof because love is there, even though they aren’t. There are the weeds, oh, the weeds, thriving in the garden and behind the barn and in the fencerows—you’ll spend those precious summer months caring for the weeds and growing too much squash and the coons will get the corn. There’s ice to stomp in the winter,
and hot water to carry
in old tea pitchers
from the bathtub inside.
There’s dust and there’s wind,
and wondering what that is
on your boot,
but the horse fence needs patching
and you don’t have much time
to think about it.
HANNAH TAYLOR

Cow Paths

I can trace my heritage
in cow paths.
I can walk them
and I’ll find Papaw in the field,
wading in the dewy grass,
searching the almost-dawn for Holsteins.
I can trace my heritage
years back, still.
I can see folks red with sweat,
scarred by barbed wire,
grinding dust in their teeth
and always stepping around something
in the grass.
My people are here with your people,
cow,
my ancestors with your ancestors,
spitting out the ancestors
of these same flies.
We’ve all taken our food,
taken our pay,
straight from the Father’s hand.
My bloodlines are here
where the beggar lice grow
thick over the trail.
GREGORY WARD

Back at Thirty

Coffee Brewed
Children Rude
On the Bus
Off to School
    Orange Juice
    PowerBar
    Sockless Feet
    Dirty Floor
Back Pack
Click Clack
Muscles Ache
Bones Crack
    Lap Top
    Good Chair
    Hot Mess
    Don’t Care
Homework
Deadline
Need to Pee
Third Time
Push SEND
Deep Breath
Will I Pass?
Scared to Death
Lose Yourself
MP3
Tuesday’s Gone
Can’t You See?
Need a Break
Children Home
Want to Cry
Time has Flown
Homework
(Not Mine)
Dinner, Dishes
Bed Time
GO TO SLEEP!
Children Rude
PLEASE LAY DOWN!
Coffee Brewed
Long Day
Late Night
Back at 30
Future Bright.
TYLER WOOD

Career Controversy

Two faces, both uniquely beneficial; an internal battle to win this indecisive standstill, I follow to stay afloat.

They say don’t mix business with pleasure, so I lean towards one while flirting with the other.

My words, my vigilante justice; my pen the sword, my calculator the shield.

The fight between my wallet’s hero and villain; threatening my personality; forcing a Jekyll and Hyde.

Morning comes, then the conflict. Like Superman, I dress in a suit, suppressing a pen in my pocket.
Identify Yourself

The cold hum of electric machinery was the only sound I heard, a cacophonous symphony of metal and machination. Though I’m sure my panicked breath and own electronic hum took part in the auditory experience of the hallway as well. I stood, partially hunched over. Exhaustion and pain from my wound kept me anchored there, at the end of the hallway, staring at the reflective floor beneath my feet. I would have been staring at my own reflection, had it not been for the lack of light. The constant dull illumination of the docking station, was now entirely absent. However, there were a few faint flickers on the maintenance deck, which I had viewed through the window I was standing in front of; seemed to be working. From that little luminescence I could see through the small, transparent opening in the door. However, the door was barred. The intelligence in the ship prevented me from progressing.

“Please, identify yourself,” the synthetic female voice mused. A pleasant sounding voice, yet, something seemed so… metallic. The uncanny line all of machine-kind walked on was so human-like it perturbed me, but it was easy to see through the guise of an artifice such as that, so my aversion never amounted much more than to a passing thought. Perhaps it came down to my knowledge that the voice itself was entirely robotic, and was only mimicking that of a normal adult female.
Did that knowledge inform me though? Without visual confirmation, could I actually tell the difference? Trivial thoughts to be sure, especially considering the circumstances, but when one loses as much blood as I had, the mind, no matter how sharp, becomes a bit faulty. Everything about me felt confused. I was nothing more than a cat in a box with a vial full of randomly triggered poison, both alive and dead. I possessed a newfound loathing for the brand of irony that Schrodinger engineered for me.

That voice was chameleonic; it could blend in with everything, changing the colors of its skin to fit its surroundings, but no matter what, if one examined close enough, it would be ever so slightly out of place. Something that, up until that point, I had taken for granted.

I wasn’t sure why it intimidated me so. Nowadays there was always a part of someone that was robotic or artificial, myself notwithstanding. So why was it, that something that I more and more resembled, managed to bother me? It was hardly something new. We adjusted. We adapted. Humanity evolved, and we eased slowly into the future, the gradual acceptance for the new status quo became easier and easier. I sometimes felt I was the only one who was bothered by the uncanny. I never voiced my concern because it was unfounded, and not to mention, I was a man of science, this was the kind of thing that any wide-eyed child with visions of the future would dream about. Most would assume the technology, and furthermore, the sound, was the progression of us all coming closer to engineering perfection. Despite my rational side shoving all other inclinations to dark recesses of my brain, I never could quite shake a general mistrust for what we had created. What I helped make. Once reached,
perfection would outpace us, and then what? What use were humans if we could make something to do our job, only better? If I dwelled on it too long, it seemed sinister. Like it wanted to blend in, so that when it was finished, no one could tell the difference. A scientific ouroboros.

I didn’t bother with actually identifying myself again. I was restricted to my wing and quarters, the maintenance deck was reserved for station authorities and engineers, of which I was neither. This was done due to the many counts of industrial espionage committed in the wing I was contracted under. Only other workers could let outsiders into their sections. I ran the logistics and algorithms, charting how much time we would be extracting in one location, what tools needed to be used to maximize efficiency, and other such activities. My job was rather inconsequential. I was more of a backup plan to make sure nothing ever went wrong. A babysitter for objects whose use I dictated.

It advanced.

I could hear it coming toward me. It was this low, guttural growl that sounded like needles, in a sharp, harsh crescendo that transcended the realm of typical noise, but in this slow, primal draw, as if the sound itself was stepping on the floor, creeping in my direction.

It was closer, perhaps within reach. The expression, ’my life flashed before my eyes’, is a cliché found in every description of a near death experience fathomable. But there are truths in clichés. My brain would flash forward and backward between staring at my hands, my left hand covered in whatever mechanical bile had leaked onto me from my previous struggle, my
right covered in the deep, crimson shade of red that was my blood. I moved my right hand, attempting to slow the bleeding from the open wound in my torso. There was little hope for survival, but something inside me propelled me from giving in— not entirely at least. The body is only capable of withstanding so much. Without warning or ease, everything went black. Cold. A void where even darkness didn’t exist. Thankfully it ceased quickly, and of all things, I slowly began to recall the last interaction I had with an actual person.

My last conversation I had was two weeks ago. I got to see my family once a month. I looked forward to it more than a leper would yearn for a cure. I was up there, in the station, working on the monolithic intricacies of this place. I ran simulations most of the times, and changed various settings to adjust to gravity and other such forces that one would encounter in the orbit of space. It may sound important, but I was simply one of many others just like me, all fulfilling the exact same tasks in order to get the most accurate and thoroughly checked answers. A cycle of inconsequence. Round and round I went. An equation here, a setting change there, round and round we spun in a perpetual hamster ball. The difference between myself and most hamsters is that they do not reside in space, constantly staring at either machinery, numbers, or the vast, endless, void that was the abyss of space. I suppose you could say I was slightly jealous of them.

Which meant I looked forward to seeing my family more than anything else in the world or any other. Seeing human faces reassured me that people still existed. Sadly my communications were limited because video chat was absurdly expensive for how far apart we
were. We were allowed one transmission every month that was to last about ten minutes.

However, large corporations like the one I was contracted under were stingy, so every second was dollars being lost. They would cheat me out of my last couple seconds each time. That was the only thing I manually wrote anymore. The time codes of the videos. I had a small clipboard that I would write how many seconds the call lasted, and subtracted it from 10 minutes, or 600 seconds. Over the 12 years I have worked here, I totaled around only 8 minutes of extraneous time. That was almost one more full call. Cheap scumbags.

I needed to do it though. The infections began 15 years ago. Antibiotics had become so widespread and normal that the typical human body was to susceptible to infection and disease. People's thyroid glands were useless. So companies contracted people to go up and do the hard work that no one else wanted to do. Since I was a mathematician, I got first dibs out here. If I worked here, the company provided them a safe and clean living environment safe from any and all earthborn pathogens and diseases. It was worth it. So many died, I lost friends, family even, but my wife and kids were given a second chance. I was finally relieved that they were safe. I didn't have to worry about them anymore. I may have sacrificed a lot, but in the end it was worth it. They were protected. I was too.

How ironic. The thing that was supposed to save my life, my family's life, was going to be the end of me.

“You worry too much. You only deal with absolutes and certainties. You'd be a control freak if you weren't so sweet,” my wife had said in our last conversation.
I took a minute to absorb her words, and let the statement drift in my mind. Her voice was so lovely. So warm and welcoming. She was a teacher, and taught children. She even had the exact voice you would expect of a woman who taught younger kids. She was like a rose without thorns, slightly wilted but her slight imperfections only added to the mystique of her beauteous allure. I saw the lines on her face, not that many, but she was getting older. 46, 47, now? I couldn’t remember. I was too busy looking at her divinely blue eyes. I rarely saw the color anymore. Too many grays, too many darker colors, only colors I got were on caution statements and alarms, reds and yellows. No calm colors besides whites and grays, colors that had no personality. I missed greens and blues and purples.

“I just hope his family can make it up here. They’re one of the few who haven’t made it up here who’ve managed to survive. Not that I’ll get to see him or his family that much. Will you take pictures when you get to the monthly gathering?”

She smiled. The air around me felt warmer.

“Of course I will. I’ve got around 100 different pictures I wanna send already. I’ve got pictures of Tali in a dress, they finally got a shipment of them up here and gave out one to the families who had younger girls. She looks adorable in it.”

The thought of my daughter in a dress was terrifying. The last time I saw her she was an infant, and despite me seeing her, she remained that way in my mind since it was last time I physically held her.
“Of course she does, she looks like you.” I said, still giving my wife an unbroken childlike stare. To most people I might appear kind of creepy, but to her, I was endearing. Thank whatever God watches me, she found me endearing.

She blushed slightly. Her pale face was slightly illuminated by her cherub-like blush.

“Still charming as ever. Do you flirt with the machines for practice?” she asked me.

The blinking red light interrupted my thought process, warning me I only had a minute left.

I was brought back to my present situation. The blinking light I saw in my memory had somehow faded into the blinking red light in the control panel that was denying me access.

“Please identify yourself.” the woman stated again.

No real point in trying. No one was coming. The guy in the section next to me was away. I thought he was reassigned. Or maybe he had quit. Maybe he died. I didn’t remember.

The noise came closer. I could hear it but I couldn’t see. It was dark. It must've killed the lights. Did I even notice? How long was I in the dark?

So close. If it could breathe I would hear it breathing. I had to move but everything hurt so badly. My enhanced ligaments hurt from the struggle. The gash in my torso leaked a combination of blood and synthetic liquid, I think it ruptured the kidney I had fixed. It felt like my body was at contest with itself, fighting for control. Pain against willpower. I pushed myself
up against the wall, slowly, but with the determination of a man who would not die. I leaked, partially, unknowing what exactly was spilling out of me. The various combinations of liquids, all different consistencies and colors. I wondered what it would look like for a brief moment, whether or not it mixed together and made some sad shade of brown, or whether it would look like water and oil and a container.

Closer. Closer. Its footsteps, if it even possessed an apparatus akin to feet, were so close. With every intent, deliberate movement it made there was a cacophony of miscellaneous clicks and whirs, combined with a strange fleshy noise that was like stretched mesh. The noises it made, they were unintelligible, it even sounded like the sum of his sounds attempted to form a voice. Like it was talking. But it couldn’t talk... could it?

As it drew nearer, I could feel the rush. The adrenaline was entering me. I had to use it. My pain was fading away, my body in conflict obeyed my mind. I knew whatever monstrous autonomous creature was stalking me wasn’t taking up the space of the entire passageway.

I ran. The top half of my body was lurched forward slightly more because of my attempt to hold everything together. Hopefully it wouldn’t strike another blow, because I would be done for. Cybernetic enhancements wouldn’t be able to save all of me. Even as I was moving, if I lived, I was going to be more machine than I would man. One thought flashed in my mind: “How far could this go?” Would my wife look at me with the same ocean blue eyes she did before? Would she see me, or what I turned into?
I hobbled to the right side of the hallways. There were no lights on, so the hallways was only dimly lit by the few windows we had in the station. The only light was from space. There was the horrifying contrast between pitch black absence of light and the utter blackness of space. There was this faint line that separated the two, and I was still leaning on the right side, so I was walking the route that my eyes could adjust too slightly more.

The creature, which I couldn't see still, was right beside me. I did not stop. However, it was my brain that slowed down everything. My eyes drifted to my left, ever so briefly, and I caught a glimpse of the beast. It showed no interest in me, seemingly. Like it was pursuing my scent, and by delay, did not see me. But my glimpse still caught it. What I saw was that of horror. It was metallic, shiny, like it was made entirely of metal. I couldn't make it out, but it seemed like it had several appendages. Around the metal there was a thin, watery layer of liquid that seemed to leak everywhere, increasing its sheen. The noise it made was sharp, like two sides of an edged sword scraping one another. With each step, it seemed to make a thunderous rattle. The echo of the steps nearly shook me. I expected the steps it took to be deliberate and robotic, but it seemed to move like a large animal. Its weight shifted in such an unrefined manner. I saw several sharp objects attached to it, but they were various sizes and shapes and at completely different parts. It was this overly produced metallic mastocytosis that lumbered like a roused dragon. It didn't even attempt to notice me, it followed its own path. Even as I passed it, it didn't even attempt to pursue me. What did it want from me? How was I to reason with something like this? I just wanted to see my family.
I kept on moving, and the noises the beast made were growing even fainter. My blood and bile was leaking slightly more, perhaps my movement had opened the wound again. But I had to push forward. If I could make it to my quarters, make it to an emergency contact station and radio for help.

But where was I? There was only one room and only one hallway. Suddenly I was inside this room I didn't even recognize. How could I have been lost in this environment that was so streamlined? This was point A and Point B stuff we were dealing with here, I ran calculations all day, but I somehow got lost going in a straight line?

The room looked vaguely like my normal quarters, everything arranged similarly, but not exact. My vision was getting more blurred and I couldn't make out the various imperfections. It didn't matter, if the room had what I needed, how I wound up here was null and void.

I slumped over slightly. It seemed my adrenal glands had run their course in the usefulness department. I could feel myself becoming emptier, as I could feel somehow that I weighed less. None of the lights were on, and I doubted that I could reach the buttons that might turn them on. Luckily for me the emergency call unit was next to the trash incineration unit. A good six or seven feet away, I could manage to drag myself along. As I began to undertake the endeavor, I felt more and more emptied. I began to sweat, how I managed to have any fluids left to lose was a miracle in and of itself. Then it happened, I heard something pop. My first instinct to alien sound was to assume the beast had come back for me. But this
noise was accompanied by something worse – immeasurable pain. The kidney I had replaced which was entirely synthetic seemed to have burst. The rupture had led to a violent burst of fluid. The synthetic parts that were made for people still had nerves in order to accurately merge with the body and brain. I felt it. I would have made noise but the pain caused such irrevocable agony my entire vision went white for a few seconds. I look at my wounds for a second. Since the burst, I felt even lighter than before. The shock even made me feel like I was filled with helium. There were drag marks from my blood, but now it was the strange black liquid that was kept inside most synthetic organs. It practically washed away the blood as it kept flowing. My brain was in overdrive so my ability to have cared simply vanished with my blood.

I kept on. My body even begin to slide with the liquid as an odd lubricant that reduced friction between me and the metal floor. I actually managed to use that to my advantage, and I outstretched my arm to barely tap the little red button on the board that was labeled ‘For Emergency Use Only’. It was strange because it was next to a counter that led to the hallways, just like my actual quarters.

I hit the button. And nothing happened.

The way all of it worked was that if you hit this button, it was going to patch you in with some emergency response unit. At least that was what I was told. I never once had to use it simply because I never encountered any problems up here. As I waited anxiously for something to respond and say it was going to help me, I actually found myself yearning for the isolation I
grew tired of. I missed looking forward to seeing my wife. I missed being alone and 
contemplative with myself. I missed even the loneliest of moments, like when I talked to myself 
just to hold a conversation. I missed the simplicity. A near death experience will do that to you, 
I suppose.

I lay up against the wall. I was still leaking, but not quite as much, as I was running out 
of whatever was left inside me. I tilted my head to the side to wait nervously for what was to 
happen. Would I bleed out? Would the beast come back for me? My fate was a roll of the die in 
the vast upheaval of chance in the universe. I was small, unimportant. I guess the way I died 
was unimportant too in the great scheme of things. At the end of the day, my wife and kids 
would never see me again, I would be replaced, and everything would move on. It was funny 
how I waited until I was close to dying to have an existential crisis, death has a way of putting 
things in perspective.

My recent crisis was interrupted. The noise immediately made me look at the panel next 
to me, but it was sadly still blank. This stomach churning observation led me to looking down 
at the trail of my once working kidney. It led to the hallway, and the sound was erupting from 
the end of the hall. It appears the beast had finally decided to come my way. This was it. At 
least my fate had been decided so the fear of uncertainty was gone. Maybe I would bleed out 
before it got there.
Then, like manna from heaven, a light broke the faint inky darkness of the room. It was the com. It was a simple white screen at first, but something was happening. I had experienced hope for the first time in an hour of unadulterated dread and darkness.

“Hello? Are you there?” a melodious voice rang out.

At first no one appeared. It was still blank. The voice felt so familiar, but distant. Like an old friend I hadn't talked to in years.

“Hello?” It asked again.

I managed to gasp out a group of words. The concept of a sentence seemed to have alluded me.

“Y-yes. I'm here... please send someone... I'm badly injured.”

I looked up to stare at the hallway. The noise of the beast was faint, but I could hear it still, it was still coming.

“It's okay. You’ll be okay. I’m here now.”

I turned, very slowly back to the screen. The voice pierced my consciousness like a rapier. I knew that angelic voice.

“Honey, it’s alright. You’re going to be alright,” my wife said.

The com had her behind the screen. Just like in all of our communications. She looked as fantastic as ever, I must've been a sight in comparison. She looked so beautiful, just like when I
saw her two weeks ago, but with the added illumination of the screen and the alleviation of my fear, she was the simply the best single image my brain had ever processed.

“Just breathe slowly, help is on the way.” she said, flashing her small, but angelically white smile.

Tears were streaming down my face. I would have begun to sob but the pain prevented me from significant breathing.

“I love you so much... I just... wanted to tell you that... I know it’s hard with me being so far away... but I did this for you. Because I love you. And I love the kids. I just want you to be safe and happy.”

She gave me a piteous, melancholy smile. Her short blonde hair was done perfectly, she wore no makeup but still looked immaculate. It was like she was right out of a catalog filled with nothing but perfection.

“I know. We are safe, and we are happy. And we all love you very much. Just remain calm. They’ll be here soon.”

She meant help. I didn’t know in what form or fashion, but something was coming to help me. But how did she know?

“H-how did you know? Y-you answered my call?” I asked wearily.

The beast was closer now. But I was too distracted, I wasn’t focused on it anymore.
“They patched me in when they saw you were in trouble. They’re coming to help. Since you were injured while working you’ll get to be sent home for a few months because of our insurance. Won’t that be nice? I’ll get to see you every day for a while. How does that sound?”

I imagined it. It became my reality. I envisioned waking up and seeing her staring at me, her sparkling blue eyes. I imagined seeing my daughters, giving them a hug as I saw them for the first time in years. I imagined eating meals made by people again. Doing simple tasks around the house but being interrupted by the pleasant distraction of humanity. It was wonderful. My reality faded briefly.

“Just make...sure they get here. I want to go home,” tears were pouring from me like a fountainhead, “I just want to see you all again. I- I want to go h-home.”

She placed her hand on the monitor, and remained silent, the only thing she did was soften her gaze. I returned the gesture, placing my fingertip on the screen. It made contact with her. First it felt flat, plastic like, like any other screen. Then, after I closed my eyes, I could feel her skin on mine. It was like silk, or freshly laundered linen. Soft, but flawed, unlike the flat, plastic, synthetic nature of most screens.

“Good. I’ll be there soon,” I said, trying not to stutter. I was going to be strong. I would live for her.

“They should be there now honey, just relax. They’ll fix you,” she said, removing her hand from the screen.
I didn't hear the beast anymore. It had either forgotten me or had left in pursuit of something else. Maybe I would live after all. I had to be strong for them.

Then my vision faded again. My blood loss was massive, but I would not close my eyes. They were all I had to make sure I was still alive. I would be strong for her, and for them, and for myself. She said they would be here soon.

The door next to me creaked opened. They were here. They were here and I was saved.

One figure came out of the door, and closed it, slowly, without the slightest sense of urgency. My wife on the screen had frozen, as if our connection had been severed. The screen flickered, and then a message that covered her face popped up.

'Connection Lost' it said, and another message popped up on top of it, 'Connection Failed'

The error message had made the screen go black, so I was back to seeing nothing in the blackness of the room. But the figure was still there, standing over me. I wanted to say something, but I couldn’t move my mouth. I was slipping away, faintly, but surely. They needed to get me out but I couldn’t communicate. I was mute in the moment that mattered most.

The figure kneeled down beside me. I expected someone like a security guard, or an engineer was coming to get me, but it looked like this person wasn’t wearing a uniform. It had slender, shapely legs and a slender figure. Around the legs were slightly form-fitting brown
pants. It was a woman, I thought, wearing brown pants, and oddly enough, no shoes. She wore socks. And what I could only make out as a T-Shirt. How casual.

She bent down, and her face was still concealed in the darkness. She took out a small flashlight, and shined it directly in my face. I would have reacted had my motor functions were still properly functioning.

“Can you see now?”

“Yes,” I answered faintly, “It’s too dark... just...”

She placed a single finger over my lips. It felt so warm. So smooth.

“Shh, save your strength. Don’t worry now. I’m here to help.”

The light from the small flashlight illuminated the space around me. I could make out the edges of her face. She had short blonde hair.

“What did this to you?” she asked me.

“A m-monster... it’s still here... we should go...” my voice faded.

There was no sense of urgency in her movement. It was disconcerting, but she was here. Someone was here, with me. And they were going to save me. Finally.

“Just be quiet. Everything will be fine,” she said.

The light captured a bit of her face for a moment. It was familiar. Had I seen this person before? She felt so... inviting.
I tried to usher out some words but I forgot what they were entirely.

I looked into her eyes to attempt and convey my urgency. I wanted to say we needed to leave, and as I ushered the pure force of will it took in order for me to talk, I was interrupted.

The woman was her. My wife was here. She finally came to save me.

I moved my arm and grabbed her hand that held her flashlight. I could barely feel anything at all, my nerves were simply being lazy. I moved the light to illuminate her gentle, welcoming, face with that delightful expression she always wore. My savior.

“You came,” I said, my face was now buried in a trench of tears.

“I did. And now we’re together.” she said.

I touched her face, but I could only faintly feel the skin that I touched.

I stared, deeply, intently, into her eyes. I felt so calm, at ease, a perfect balance to what I had felt before. She always had that effect on me.

I was slipping. Quickly. But neither of us moved.

“I love you,” she whispered.

I tried to say it back, but I couldn’t manage to get my mouth to form sounds anymore. She faintly shook her head.

“It’s okay. I know.”
She knew. As I faded into the shadowy, recess of my mind, I was content. If I was going to die, I wanted to die in the arms of the woman who I loved, and who loved me. There was no place that was better than this one, as I viewed my situation with the omniscience of the events that had occurred, I realized she was here for me, and that was all that mattered.

She was the last thing that I saw. As I died, I stared at what I thought was the most beautiful thing in the world. Her eyes. They were quietly lit by the shine of the flashlight. Her eyes were so dark, a color I barely remembered them being. They were so dark.

The crimson of her eyes lit up the space between us. Like roses or the shades of vermillion you’d see in a sunset just before it would end, giving way to the night. Beauty the likes of which I had never seen before, perhaps I never appreciated her in the way she deserved. But she looked happy. And I was happy. So happy.
Modern Day Antique

Bloink. The electronic sound of the alert from the calendar app on my cell phone somehow registers at the periphery of my mind, letting me know that it is time to start the day. Groggily, I stumble to the coffee area in the kitchen, pour a few beans in the grinder and press the button. The whining, straining, grinding noise that ensues makes that grating little alert from my phone seem like a fond memory. Wincing, I pour some water into the espresso maker, press a few buttons for the desired setting, and scoop some of the now perfectly ground coffee into the filter basket. Meanwhile, a small light has flickered on and a beep has emanated from this clever little machine to tell me that it is ready to do its job. I push another button and the machine in turn produces another weird and rather annoying sound, a sort of bastardized cross between a moan and a gurgle. At least I’m smelling coffee, and that by itself is a beautiful thing at 6:00 in the morning. Leaning against the counter and watching the coffee pour into the cup, I decide that I will drink it black this morning. I just don’t feel like dealing with the fancy milk frother right now and facing another set of buttons, beeps, and lights.

Now I am leaning against the railing outside on my deck, finally feeling more awake and really enjoying this cup of coffee. It’s early yet, and fairly quiet until I hear a rooster crow. Even though we live in the suburbs, some of our nearby neighbors have recently gotten some chickens (apparently that’s sort of a “thing” now for us suburbanites). Then I hear the muted
barking of a dog in the distance and the faint sound of a car engine moving somewhere down the street. Feeling more peaceful and somewhat contemplative, I start thinking about and wondering why this set of sounds and stimuli feels somehow much more relaxing to me then what I have been experiencing so far this morning with all my little machines. The answer occurs to me that these are the kinds of sounds that I grew up with. These sounds just seem more natural to me than all the beeps, various other noises, and ubiquitous LED lights of our modern electronic gadgetry. "But, a car engine is not natural," I think to myself. Then it comes to me with a jolt. "Oh dear God," I think, "I've become old! This is one of those generation gap things!" Yes, that's surely the answer in a nutshell. My twenty-something year old kids would probably feel at least vaguely uncomfortable without a nearly constant background sound of beeps, clicks and the ever present glow of tiny red, green and blue LED lights. Come to think of it, even my (at least somewhat younger than me) wife has said that she wanted to choke that rooster for waking her up some days, but my cell phone alarm doesn't seem to remotely faze her when it goes off in the mornings.

Later, as I slog through my daily grind, that revelation just won't seem to leave me alone. Everywhere I go and everything I do seems to involve futuristic beeping, whirring and blinking electronics. Now my car is even talking to me. I am reminded of a favorite TV cartoon from my childhood in the sixties, "The Jetsons", which was set in what seemed to me then to be to be an implausible future replete with personal jetpacks, thinking computers, live video
telephones, and yes, even talking cars. Now I'm trying to make my way through a life that is unbelievably similar to what seemed to me than to be an impossible fantasy.

I finally make it through the workday and now it's time for me to go to school, but my thoughts won't stop nagging me. School is certainly a lot different in this electronic age. It's not exactly an idyllic, old ivy covered edifice; come to think of it, sometimes it's not even a building at all! It's just a computer with teachers and students somewhere on the other end, maybe somewhere out in space for all I know. Am I going to be able to do this? Is it possible to teach new tricks to an old dog? Will I be able to figure out how to download, upload, cross-platform, post to a thread, access online content, find tutorials, transfer files, get the apps, link the email accounts, obtain multiple device tech support, submit the assignments, contact the instructors, avoid the spam, the spyware and the viruses, and on and on and on, seemingly ad infinitum, all for an education? It suddenly seems as if I will have to get an education just to get an education! College at my age, what was I thinking? I am suddenly so very tired.

I find the quietest place in the house and sit down, just trying to relax, let it go and breathe. My 20-year-old daughter, who actually does know it all, walks by me with her head down and her thumbs dancing above the screen of her phone. How she even sees me I don't know, but she says "Whatcha doin'?"

"I think I'm going to try to meditate," I say.
"Oh, there's an app for that." she shoots over her shoulder as she walks away.  "An app," I mutter under my breath to her retreating form as I mute my phone and close my eyes.

"That's just what I need. A nap."
The crackling fire roars back to life as the boy adds another log to the fire with a deep sigh; it’s his turn to keep watch while she sleeps the starry night away. He promised her he would be able to handle it, but the dancing shadows make him question his own vow. The trees shudder with the breeze, sending embers flying towards the noises in the dark.

“There is nothing out there, Mark,” her words echo in his mind, “they are only there if you believe they are.” As long as he can keep his mind at ease then he will be fine until sunrise, then the two will be that much closer to being home. Their last trial, then it would all be over, no more rustling or watching shadows dash from the corner of their eyes, no more sudden panics like someone is following them, and no more cruel voices.

Mark snaps his gaze behind him when a branch snaps, shadows dance around the small camp site as the fire tries to die away. To him the fire was fading faster than it should, like someone was eating the light. He tosses some pre-gathered branches into the fire; the crackling embers roar back to life and send the darkness further back.

“Only a few more hours,” he whispers, rubbing his shaky palms on his pants, glancing again at his friend with the visible air leaving his lips. Still, she sleeps peacefully though the rustling and crunching of the night. With a deep breath Mark looks at the sky, trying to focus on
the stars, but a thud from the woods distracts him. The noise was distant but not far enough away for his liking. They have no weapons and if they had to run because of him then they would be lost in the dark. The only light they have is the fire on this new moon night.

Like a trick of the light, a shadow seems to charge at him and he barely contains his scream while flinching. The fire rises, burning whatever charged him. With a shaky breath Mark moves closer to his friend, to swallow his fear, and keeps watching the swaying shadows teasing him. Glowing eyes from the trees chill him to the bone but he won’t wake her; she was pale and needed rest. If she didn’t sleep through the night, then she would never wake again.

“I trust you with this. As long as the fire burns, then you will be fine. Just don’t let your mind wander,” she’d warned him, before her slumber. The dim light in her eyes never showing fear, but he was scared.

Another thump resounds but closer. A whirlwind tries to blow the fire out while the shadows grow, laughing. He could almost hear them cursing him and welcoming him to join with a sickly-sweet music at the same time. The wind picks up carrying the music to the pair, clearly, for him to hear.

“Already too far gone,” they cried.

“Won’t make it through the night,” another echo, “no one can help now.”
Chewing on his lip, he looks at her again, then to the stars, trying to model his nerves into steel with his own voice. “Dawn will be here soon. We will be fine as long as the fire burns; we are safe here,” he whispers to himself.

Crunch. The stomps were closer. This time it sounded maybe minutes away. With a trembling breath he tries to dry his moist palms, staying close to her. The shadows dance around them like a cage. Each one whispering words of false comfort about how easy the dark is. The dark would cradle them in its comfort and warmth for eternity once they gave up.

He dashes closer to the fire but once he leaves his friend’s side the darkness starts to envelop her. “No,” he gasps and gently pulls the slumbering girl closer to the fire with him and out of their grasp. “It is still warm here,” he mutters and holds his friend closely, glaring at the forest with a knot in his stomach. They are getting closer; the night won’t end before It arrives.

With the last of the wood added to the fire, the light forces the shadows back, but more glowing eyes stare at them. Each one with its own intent for the pair huddled close to the only prominent light source. A crack from the twigs in the fire cause embers to roar from the top, catching Mark’s attention from the beady eyes. The small embers dance to the sky to be swallowed by the darkness above them the instant they left the safety of the dying light.

With one more shaky breath Mark stares at the mass darkness stopped at the edge of the light caused by the fire. Burning dread fills him while he holds his friend closer, protectively, while he trembles and shivers, praying for the last day to be over.
“She will never wake.” The dark voice hits him hard, while he holds her as closely as he can to warm her. With a fearful glare and fear locked inside him, the darkness’s voice floats through him again, “give up.”

“Never,” he chills like the night, “she is mine, she promised we would be together forever!” He growls, while the darkness shakes, making him rage, “Once this night is done we will be free of you forever!”

Dark windy laughter pierces his heart as the darkness whispers, “only one is free.”

“We are one” he mutters, shivering as the fire dwindles and the darkness slowly inches forward. “We are going together,” but he doesn’t believe his own shaky voice, laced with lies and terror. He closes his eyes tightly, holding her closely, as the last ember of light fades, with the frozen darkness overtaking them.

A new voice rings through the air but what it says is indecipherable. As it rings through the night filled forest something drags him away, leaving his friend to be led into the darkness like an old friend, while the terror of the day is left for him to face alone.

“Maybe next time, good luck,” a kind female voice smiles sadly, as she is swallowed by the darkness, and he is engulfed by the light of another day with beeping filling his ears, along with the strangely familiar voice begging him to wake up.
Untitled  RACHEL ANN ALLEN
Untitled   BRIDGETTE GIBBS
Untitled  LAURIE OAKES
Untitled  CAITLIN RILEY
Untitled  CAITLIN RILEY
Some valleys last longer than others, some just never seem to end. You hope they all lead you to higher places, but some only dip down again. The sun rays on your back feel warm at first—welcoming and warm. You turn your face up to embrace it. But the longer you walk, the hotter the burn and you can’t seem to find any shade. You’re slowing down, your breath drawing longer—left foot, right foot, you tell yourself to keep going. Your knees begin to buckle and your weight’s just a little too heavy. Handfuls of dirt, you find yourself on all fours—you turn your face up to embrace it once more.

**Skull Valley**  LOURAE STACY
Lunchtime  JAMIESON TEMPLIN
Nice Bones  JAMIESON TEMPLIN
Touch  JAMIE SON TEMPLIN
Winter Farm    JAMIESON TEMPLIN
Biographical Information/Notes from Contributors:

Tahreem Ali is a student at Bluegrass Community and Technical College. She has been very active on campus and off campus for a long time. She sometimes writes using the name “Angel.” This poem is about her grandfather who at 65 left this world. Tahreem is a presidential student ambassador and will be returning as one this fall semester--“Look out world!”

Rachel Ann Allen is an eighteen-year-old self-taught artist from Kentucky. She has loved to draw since she was little. She uses a wide variety of mediums. From pencils to oils, acrylics, pastels, and markers…she has used them all. She says that she paints and draws “somewhat caricaturesque people, most have no names or human counterparts to match. I guess they’re all just figments of my imagination. When people look at art they try to find meaning, but I always tell people there is no meaning in my pieces…not that I know of at least…there’s just a wacky face looking back at you.”

 Jake Anderson is a Bluegrass Community and Technical College student, and has been a writer as soon as he could pick up a pen. He has published three books on Amazon (Those Who Dwell the Dark series) and he hopes to grow his audience and improve further.

Bill Buckman lives in Lexington and has a wife, five children, and five grandchildren. He loves language and stories, and says he is constantly amazed at the complexity and beauty of the world around him.

Don Boes teaches at Bluegrass Community and Technical College. His books of poetry include *The Eighth Continent, Railroad Crossing*, and *Good Luck with That*. He has been awarded three Al Smith Fellowships from the Kentucky Arts Council.

Landon Carter is a sophomore at Bluegrass Community and Technical College. He is an English major, and hopes to be an English professor someday. He also loves reading, writing prose, and writing poetry. He wants to write books of either poetry or prose, and someday have them published.

Amanda Crum is a writer and artist whose work can be found in publications such as *Dark Eclipse, Blue Moon Literary & Art Review*, and *SQ Magazine*. Her first chapbook of horror-inspired poetry, *The Madness in Our Marrow*, made the shortlist for a Bram Stoker Award in 2015. Her most recent novel, *Ghosts of the Imperial*, was published in 2017. She currently lives in Kentucky with her husband and two children, where she fosters a healthy obsession with all things horror.
**Sarah Freeman** is a student at Bluegrass Community and Technical College. She says she’s been doing art since she was in the womb. Her main medium is drawing, but she also enjoys creating works of digital art. She likes to create whatever her mind allows her to see, and then she goes with the flow until she believes the artwork to be “done.”

**Bridgette Gibbs** moved to Kentucky when she was around 8 years old. She is twenty-two years old and has two brothers. She is currently going to school at Bluegrass Community & Technical College, then plans to return to EKU as a Pre-Art/Graphic Design major. She loves to draw, paint, and write poetry. She used to love going to art shows with her mom whenever she had time to go places. Sadly, her mom passed away not so long ago of breast cancer. Bridgette misses her mom, and has been working on ways to cope with her loss, while still pushing through to follow her dreams of becoming an artist or a musician.

**Andrea McKinney** is a freshman at Bluegrass and Technical College and a Business Management major. When she graduates, her plan is to have her own business. When she is not doing school work she is reading, writing, or working outside. She lives on fifty acres with three dogs and lots of chickens. She says she enjoys going to “chicken swaps” a place where farm animal lovers meet to sell and trade their animals.

**Henri Jonathan Mertens** is a student at Bluegrass Community and Technical College, and lives in Georgetown, Kentucky. Originally majoring in journalism, he discovered his passion for art after taking an introductory course in drawing. He enjoys drawing wildlife with graphite and charcoal.

**Laurie Oakes** is a Northerner from Maine who has recently relocated to Kentucky. She says her “drawings come from the deep pockets of my mind and heart. They represent my thoughts and emotions regarding life and its ability to bring both confusion and joy. In addition, I love to write fiction. Taking a blank piece of paper and filling it with powerful stories or dramatic art is therapeutic for me.”

**Megan Proffitt** is a twenty-year-old student at Bluegrass Community & Technical College. She enjoys writing poetry and creating digital art. She says that “The poem I have here I wrote when I was having trouble dealing with body image. I was looking through random scenery pictures online and I saw one of Alaska. The words in the poem are immediately what came to mind, and so I had to write it down.”

**Caitlin Riley** uses many types of mediums when creating her art pieces sometimes more than one medium, but her favorite is acrylic paints. She loves making mixed media art pieces. She
has have been making art for as long as she can remember and plans on becoming an advertising artist.

Darien Rizzi is a nineteen-year-old Bluegrass Community & Technical College student. She has been cultivating her writing style for a few years. She says, “Though I don’t usually write short stories, I grew up reading and getting lost in a good book would help me from getting lost from worries about the world around me. I get inspiration for my writing from what I hear or see around me, and from my imagination. Writing helps me understand my own feelings and helps me relax. One day I hope my writing will inspire someone like reading did for me.”

LouRae Stacy (E. LouRae Stacy) is a twenty-four-year-old student at Bluegrass Community & Technical College. She is an aspiring artist with interests in web design, digital illustrations, and animations. She has always loved drawing since she was a child and says she is grateful for the opportunity to take classes that help her hone her craft here at BCTC. She also loves to write, typically in songwriting form, and often combines mediums to create accompanying art that captures the feeling of her lyrics.

Hannah Taylor is a farm girl through and through. When she’s not working the circulation desk at the library, she’s playing music or spending time with her animals.

Jamieson Templin sees beauty in the world, and she loves sharing that beauty through her photography and writing.

Gregory Ward is a thirty-year-old husband and father. He is majoring in Civil Engineering Technical at BCTC-Leestown Campus, and loving it. He enjoys spending time with his family, studying Scripture, fishing, and ministering at his local church. He hopes to become a Civil Engineering Technician after graduation.

Tyler Wood (J. Tyler Wood) has had a couple pieces published in 2012, but says he’s never really considered himself a writer. He is a banker and lives life as a professional, but enjoys writing to make people feel good. He says, “There’s so much negativity in the world, so why not lighten the mood?”