Bluegrass Accolade

BCTC Literary Journal - Issue No. 6



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2012-2013 Arts in Focus Literary Arts Subcommittee

Chair: Maureen Cropper **Members:** Don Boes, Charles Coulston, Angie Davis, Kevin Jensen, Daniel Livingston, Tammy Ramsey, Mary Rouse, and Dan Schuman

SHELBY BEVINS

Baptism

It is morn.
There is a god that I pray to
in which I don't even believe.
A god who won't protect me.
A god who I can't even say.
There are words to accept,
but only in name.
I give my soul to a lord with
no heart and no face.

Here is my absolution, my confession
of sin by diving in waters cold and
standing before crowds of faces
I've known since birth.
Here is my restitution; I have
pleased those who cared
to see me walk into the arms
of God. But it is a god
who remains silent
and a god of crackers and juice. Later,
I spit the blood and body from my mouth.

SHELBY BEVINS

December (is a sky uncharted)

Born atop a barren hill,
amidst dormant trees--
their gnarled fingers protecting
the babe--the fleeting sun
sparked, flashed, then died.
With a gust of wind, the
snow rolled o'er fields,
meadows, forests, ponds
and settled in my sight.
The city is far from me.
There are many names for
what we have.
We can call out to one another,
but we have no words, just
feelings, just touches.
I praise the silence;
I cherish you.

Diluted morning, a time for vespers.
A time for night to slither to
the other side, but slowly, please
ever so slowly, I beg.
I step outside-the breath coiling
from chapped lips-and seek
deliverance from the malaise of
the dollar and coin.
I want to reach into the expanse
and pull the colour, spread it across
my body so that maybe, just maybe,
I'll be a muse unto myself.
But, with the smoke and breath dissipating,
I return to your warmth and watch you
sleep ever so peacefully.
I'll take that over anything.

DON BOES

Desire

"I have my Bob Dylan mask on." -- Bob Dylan

In the early nineties my younger brother
sold our baseball card collection,
including the complete 1973 season,
so he could buy another pint.
That's how some people measure happiness.
At some point, the patio lights go out
and all the bugs fly elsewhere to burn.

Bob Dylan completed Desire
in six sessions at Columbia Studios.
He had no time to fiddle with couplets
or fuss over egos and recording levels.
None of the background vocals got fixed.
That album is filled with gangsters,
pyramids, earthquakes,
and middleweight fighters

even though, as usual,
Dylan didn't choose the best takes
and Scarlet Rivera's violin is out-of-tune.
The idea is to be a creator
instead of a critic. I'm no baseball encyclopedia
but in 1973 Oakland beat the New York Mets
4 games to 3 in the World Series.
To make a long story even longer, the last track
on Desire is a hymn to Sara, Bob's wife.

"Don't ever leave me, don't ever go," is part
of the chorus. Don't ever leave me, don't ever go.
Of course, she leaves him. No matter
that he sings such a lame lyric
in such a believable manner.
Those baseball cards are why I remember
what happened in 1973. Now that he's been dead
since 1993, I know less about my brother
than I can confidently say.

To support Desire,
released in 1976, Dylan assembled
an entourage of nearly one hundred hipsters
and appeared onstage in white face.
His band, the Rolling Thunder Revue,
dressed like vaudeville fanatics
and delivered “Romance in Durango”
and “One More Cup of Coffee,”
sometimes performing for five hours.

DON BOES

In Praise of a Three-Legged Cat

One of my neighbors is moving.
There's no sign in the yard
and she gave me no reason.
Her tabby cat could care less he is missing
his right front leg. He could care less
I call him Patch and his owner calls him Presto.
When my neighbor sells her house,
I'll miss the missing leg. I'll miss those mornings
when I open the front door
and that cat looks up at me,
his three feet planted on the black welcome mat.

DON BOES

In Praise of Turkey Vultures

Night-blind and passive,
they circle above the suburban grid.
They feast on last year's spark.
They toggle between before
and after. When irritated,
and who isn't, they vomit
bone and fur. With no voice box,
they hiss and grunt. If you have faith
in the resurrection, they shake it.
If necessary, they scarf
roadkill and stranded fish.

ALEX BURRUS

Burning of Currency

As noble faces do wither and char,
So is the true value of money.
For he who has it in society has everything,
Though he who has it on a deserted island, has kindling.

CHRISTIAN VINCENT CHAMPE

Whatever Happened to Old-Fashioned Romance

Whatever happened to old-fashioned Romance?

Romantic kissing while we Dance,
Whatever happened to love at first sight's Glance?
Giving our hearts a leaping Chance.

Whatever happened to endless nights gazing up at the Stars?
Falling so deeply, madly in love that the world could be Ours,
Whatever happened to long, romantic love Letters?
Hurting with my heart, Loving with my mind, Go-Get-Her.

Whatever happened to Love?

ANGELA CLEMONS

The Smile

The illusion that you might perceive
It is not what you may think you see
Behind the smile hides tears of pain
From long years of not and so far away
From behind the eyes hold hurt that cannot be erased
It cannot be found outside; it is gone without a trace
Behold not in the glory of what you believe to be
For I cannot always see
These tears flow from deep within
From the start to the never end
Wanting to erase the tragic in my heart
Yearning for a fresh start
Bear with me through these trials and do not once again believe the smile
To help is to hold my hand
A hand that needs some reassurance that time shall heal and love will be ready
When that hand pulls away, hold again tight and steady
Pain causes much despair and hope without light
I can assure there is love again
It takes but a gentle soul
To understand the toll of the crying within
Take my hand and lead the way, I will not stray
Take my hand and I shall follow
Into a world of love, that lifts the darkness from above
If I grow tired, take my hand
And let us walk along this land

FRANCES ELZEY

The Unveiling

She was afraid to come out from behind the mask.
For fear others would ask
Questions she didn't have answers for
Because long ago she'd closed those doors
Onto the secrets from which she hid
Into adulthood since she was a kid
But finally she began to come out
Of hiding from all her fears and doubt
As she allowed the mask to slightly lower
She was amazed at the things around her
Each time she dealt with an issue of the past
She filled its place with good things that would last
Gaining confidence with each passing day
She was tearing, little by little, the veil away
Slowly she began to emerge into who she could be
For all the world to see
This unveiling takes courage I know
For it is me who is doing so

CARRIE FRENCH

Going Far

Quick, fast, get in the car.
Grab a map you're going far.

Away from the city, away
from this town.
You keep driving, not daring
not daring to turn around.

Driving with the radio up listening
to the words not the song.
Why did leaving take so long?

It's only you who knows the truth.

Going north, going west, or maybe south.

Get back in the car without a care.
They want you home but
you do not dare.

Grab a map you're going far . . .

SHERRIE GODBEY

Granny Hazel Kisses

Five little pecks on the cheek
A big hug and a pat on the back
Granny Hazel kisses.

Lipsmacks on the phone
The words: "I love you sooooo good"
Granny Hazel kisses.

"Good morning; did you sleep well?
Let's make some coffee and set a spell."
Granny Hazel kisses.

A card in the mail at Christmastime
Xs and Os added to the greeting
Granny Hazel kisses.

Blow me a kiss
Wave at the door until I drive out of sight
Granny Hazel kisses.

JAMES B. GOODE

Bambi Waits in Big Lots for Jesse to Meet With His Parole Officer

They ate their pre-prom dinner at a White Castle--
Four stomach bombs apiece
Washed down with a 24 ounce Big Red cola
And now,
In a last-ditch chance at a relationship,
She stands at the end of the Big Lots counter,
Her black, floor-length prom dress
enhanced with a bouquet of genuine plastic
Flowers attached with a rubber band to her wrist,
Chatting with a friend at the checkout,
A glistening gold stud in her nose
Dances
Accented by tattoos--
A string of flowers circling her neck
And
Bambi eating a sprig of grass
On her fat, white arm.
She thanks the friend
For taking her place behind the register,
"After all, I will only be a senior twice," she says
And laughs.
"I hope Jesse's meeting
with his parole officer
Goes okay . . .
After all the tests to get this far,
It comes down to passing a drug test . . ."
She looks wistfully out the door and
Crosses her arms.
A crease in the flaccid fat
Folds Bambi
Into a shorter deer.

JAMES B. GOODE

Contemplation During an Untimely Snow Early in an Appalachian Spring

Snow on spring flowers
Birds call from the pine tree limb
Warm days far away

Corn plants lie cold now
Scattered shucks spin in cold winds
Birds scratch and chatter

Roses bud in green
Colors hide so deep within
These trapped blossoms shake

Locust trees are black
Against a grey sky
Blossom cells lurk there

Sometimes love is cold
Like ice crystals on tree limbs
Transparent feelings

Tulips pierce soft earth
Pale green slips forward today
Tomorrow flowers

Split rail fence zigzags
Down the rocky mountain creek
Divides snow in lines

Wind shakes pine branches
Snow rides spirals in blue wind
Frozen Daffodils

Beneath pine trees snow
Lies on brown needles and cones
Seeds snuggle and yawn

Sycamore branches
Mottled like shiny trout skin
Snow tracing the fins

Brown sandstone islands
Float in a sea of white fluff
Strength in kind waters

JAMES B. GOODE

A Sign at the Longview Farm

"For this is what America is all about. It is the uncrossed desert and the unclimbed ridge. It is the star that is not reached and the harvest that's sleeping in the unplowed ground." -Lyndon Baines Johnson

Only in the South
Where the peaches
Are sweeter
Than the inside
Of sugar cane
And where people
Can be cool as the center seed
Of a cucumber
In the middle of July--
Only in America
The land of the free
Could somebody like Will Rogers
Declare
That no one can live here for nothing
And John Barrymore could editorialize that
"America is the country
Where you buy a lifetime supply of aspirin
For one dollar
And use it up in two weeks."
Only in America
And only in the South
Would you see someone
Selling
Sweet corn,
Strawberries,
And Barbeque hogs
All in one location.

JENNIFER MERTZ

Power

Blackness that was concealed
Hidden beneath a perfect smile
The icy coldness of a winter storm
No warmth of blood and life
Speaking in the wrong tone
Cooking the wrong food
Sitting in the wrong place
The fear of making a mistake
Hiding in the dark hoping it will walk on by
Paralyzing terror taking control
Slicing through the skin like a cold sharp wind
Leaving you gasping struggling to breath
With each blow you draw from within
Searching for a power
Power you never knew you had
A strong bright blinding light
Light that no darkness can touch
No pain can smother
No wind can douse
Hidden power no longer contained
Struggling to break through
To feel the warmth of sunlight
To hear the birds singing
The desire for life

VICTORIA MILLS

Drifting Away

As time goes by,
my dreams drift away.
Far away into non-existence.
Like the leaves falling from the trees,
caught by a gust of wind, carried
away far off into the distance.
Until they are no longer visible, gone forever.

Holding on tight, the fear of letting go
haunts me.
My grasp becomes as weak as the branches that snap in the depths
of the cold winter months.

I lose more of myself as time goes by.
It hurts, my heart is breaking,
for who I am and who I thought
I would be.

My dreams are fading.
I can no longer fight it.
All strength within me dissolved
throughout the years.

I've been defeated by time.
My dreams gone forever.
Drifted away off into the distance.
I'm letting go.

HAILEE WILBURN

Little Girl

Oh, little girl, remember when,
Your hair was blonde and bright.
We'd play together, rain or sun,
I've never felt so right.

Remember your huge crooked smile,
Your lovely brown-green eyes.
I'd ask your favorite color,
You'd laugh and say "the sky".

Remember how over the years,
We grew and left behind,
Our dolls and forts for poolside fun,
Long talks with hands entwined.

Remember how we fell in love,
With boys who caught our eyes.
We'd giggle, gush, and dance about,
We couldn't see their lies.

Remember how I got away,
But you just couldn't grasp,
How such a lovely butterfly,
Was secretly a wasp.

Oh, little girl, please tell me why,
You let him make you cry.
No matter what he does to you,
You stay with him and try.

Oh, little girl, please tell me why,
He broke your things and hit you hard.
And when I tried to comfort you,
He locked me in the yard.

Oh, little girl, remember how,
You cried into my arms.
You hurt so deeply I could feel,
The scars caused by his harm.

Oh, little girl, why don't you see,
I want to rescue you.
I want to take you far away,
And help you through and through.

But, little girl, what I wish most,
Is for you not to lie.
For you to laugh and understand,
Your limit is "the sky".

JAMES B. GOODE

The Emergency Room

They come through the shiny, aluminum, automatic sliding doors of the Emergency Room of the Lone Pine Medical Clinic--a dumpy man with a pepper gray goatee toting two identical small red-and-white, flat-top Igloo coolers and a taller, red-bearded one with a wide leather belt cinched around the bulging bicep of his right arm. I look at them over my reading glasses from my perch behind the triage desk.

"A gracious good afternoon. What can I do you boys for?" I say in my best Lily Tomlin impersonation.

"Jehoshaphat done got hisself bit with a rattler," the shorter one with the coolers declares matter-of-factly.

"Did you bring the snake, so we'd know for sure what kind of serpent actually put the hurt on you?" I ask.

"Shore did. Orville's got it in one of them coolers," Jehoshaphat says.

“Hit’s a rattler, ‘cause hit’s got rattles on hit.” Orville says smartly as he heaves the coolers upward and slides them across the counter in front of me, making a grating, gritty sound from the sand stuck on the bottoms.

"Which one, might I ask, has the snake in it?"

"We'll, that's the problem. One of them's got our cans of Budweiser in it and t'other's got the rattler. We don't know which is which. We done and got mixed up," he says. "We been collectin' snakes to sell to one of them fellers down at Salvisa that milks their venom for some kind of doctorin' use."

"You mean for antivenin . . . never mind . . . you lost track?

"Yep, that's how Jehoshaphat got bit. Went to get us a cold 'un and that son-of-a-bitch nailed him on the arm, just above his Black Jesus tattoo.

"We goin' to dick around all day or are you goin' to get this goddamn poison out of me 'fore it rots my hand off Sweetcheeks?" Jehoshaphat says.

"I don't like snakes," I say. "Dead or alive. Why don't you just open them both and get the serpent out ORVILLE, and show me so I can match it against my chart? And while you're at it, don't call me Sweetcheeks, my name is Cindy." I rummage around in my file drawer and bring out my "Poisonous Snakes of Eastern Kentucky" laminated, all-color chart. Neither of them say anything; giving me the classic *dumbass* stare I've seen so many times before. Jehoshaphat rubs his swollen forearm and winces. Purple and red streaks have begun to creep up his arm in a labyrinth of spider-like webs.

"Hit ain't dead," Orville says in a calculated voice.

"What the hell do you mean 'Hit ain't dead?' I shout, suddenly reverting to my mountain hillbilly roots. "Holy sssss . . . hhhhit!" I spit the words out, stuttering and stammering at the same time while trying to get my breath. I hit the transmit button on my pager. "Code Green, Dr. Johanaphur, I need you at the triage desk immediately." I turn away from the counter, cradling the transmitter. "There's two idiots up here and they've put a LIVE snake in a cooler up on MY counter. I need you up here STAT!" I say in a raspy half-whisper. As I spin around on the high stool to make my escape, my elbow catches the corner of the nearest cooler, knocking it over and allowing the unlocked lid to flip back as it disappears over the counter and lands on its side on the tiled floor. I am hoping to hear cans rolling and spinning around, instead there is only an ominous hissing sound, like that of air escaping from a leaking hose. I know what that sound means. I have heard it once before . . . when we were in the Huckleberry fields up on the mountain one late spring.

ROGER L. GUFFEY

The Road to Damascus

The Family Tree Restaurant lying five miles from the foot of the steep incline of Jellico Mountain, Tennessee, was a last chance for the semitrailer truckers to fuel up themselves and their rigs before tackling the ascent up the long tortuous interstate. The interstate from the base of the mountain provided a long straight shot to gain speed to start the climb preceding many gear changes needed to negotiate the only north- south corridor in this section of the state. The road clung like a four lane ribbon winding up the mountain before reaching a straight stretch along the top of the ridge where the steep sandstone cliffs plunged into the abyss on either side. A panoramic vista lying on either side invoked a real sense of vertigo for those unfamiliar with the route. Wintry weather often closed the road for short periods thereby aborting futile attempts for traffic especially long-distance truckers from attempting the life threatening conditions.

During these times, travelers and truckers alike took refuge in the Family Tree while they waited out the delay. The restaurant served typical southern comfort food, but it was noteworthy for its homemade meatloaf, chicken and dumplings and delicious pies. A retinue of truckers traversing the north-south road formed the nucleus of a sort of fraternity of habitués whose life depended on making the trip several times a week. George Bates, Harold Shearer

and Junior Rigney stopped in to eat and shoot the breeze on both the trip up and down the mountain and each delighted in picking at the waitresses Lois Riddle and Imogene Cooper. A lot of good natured teasing with a heavy undercurrent of sexual innuendo flowed constantly, but everyone knew that such indelicacies were just talk as acting on such fantasies would destroy the camaraderie and platonic affection binding them together.

A typical day in the restaurant started around five in the morning when George, a large bearded man habitually dressed in flannel shirts and greasy khaki pants would bluster in with the subtlety of a north wind. Three or four days a week his compatriots, Harold and Junior, would join him as they made their trek either up or down the mountain.

On a warm July morning George burst in with his usually bluster, "Morning, Lois, Imogene. How are my two best girls?"

Imogene nodded and replied, "We're fine. Yourself?"

"Great. Heading down to Atlanta. Hey Doll, how about the breakfast special eggs over easy and a cup of your world famous coffee?"

"Coming right up," said Lois as she motioned ever so slightly with a head motion to tell George to look to his left. A gaunt, unshaven man sat hunched over his plate, eating his breakfast.

George turned toward him, "Howdy, partner. You're up early. You a trucker?"

"Yep."

"Where you heading?"

"North."

George began to feel uncomfortable with the stranger's laconic replies. "You know, I passed a wreck in the north bound lane about half an hour ago. You might get held up."

The stranger nodded without making eye contact. "Thanks for the heads up."

George knitted his brow as he walked over to greet the man "I'm George Bates," he said, extending his hand.

The man turned for a quick handshake. "Paul Koger."

"Who you drive for?"

"Latham."

"I have not seen you in here before. Every trucker on seventy five stops here. How long have you been driving?"

"About six months."

Sensing the man was not interested in conversation, George said,

"It's nice to meet you, Paul. Have a safe trip north. I guess you know about Jellico Mountain."

"Yeah, I have been over it a few times."

George returned to his seat to eat his breakfast as Paul quietly finished his meal, paid, and left for his truck. All three of the people at the counter watched as he pulled out.

George said, "Not much of a talker is he?"

Lois shook her head in agreement. "Something about him kind of creeps me out. Ordered his breakfast and never said a word. Just held up his cup when he wanted more coffee. Creepy."

Imogene added, "Maybe he was just tired, He ain't been trucking long. It takes some getting used to. I'm not going to worry about it. Probably never see him again."

George shrugged, "I ought to have got his CB handle, but I doubt he'd have given it to me. You're right. Probably never see him again."

They were wrong. In a couple of days, the man walked in while George, Harold and Junior were noisily eating lunch and flirting with the waitresses. The man slipped in the door and took his seat against the wall.

George welcomed him. "Well, howdy, partner. Fellers, this here is a new trucker. Name's Paul ain't it? This here is Harold and Junior."

The man shot them a quick glance and muttered, "Nice to meet you."

"Didn't you tell me you were out of Lexington?"

"Yeah."

"You get caught in that wreck Tuesday?"

"No," Paul replied as he pointed out his lunch selection to Lois, "This here and coffee to drink."

"I meant to get your handle but forgot. You got a CB handle? Mine is Loudmouth, Harold is Big Daddy and Junior is Papaw."

"You can call me Nashville."

"Well, it is always good to know who your name in case you need help along the road."

"Appreciate that."

"You heading north or south?"

"North."

"Well, have a good trip. We're all heading to Tampa. Always nice to have running buddies on long hauls."

"I guess so."

Feeling an uncomfortable pall settle in, George turned to rejoin his friends to finish his lunch. Paul ate his lunch hurriedly, paid, and left without saying a word.

Harold watched out the window as Paul got into his truck and pulled out of the parking lot. "Not much of a talker is he?"

"Nope. I think you're right Lois. He's kinda creepy. Well, we tried to be friendly so I ain't going to worry about it. Let's hit the road. Lois, give me a cup of coffee to go."

"I didn't hear the magic word."

"Please? Damn, woman you're such a hardass."

A wave of laughter washed over the diner. The men paid and drove off.

II

Paul became a regular at the diner, but never revealed any more details about his life. Soon trying to decipher him became a cottage industry. Occasionally, one of the men would say they had heard him on the radio, but even there he refrained from idle chitchat.

After he left one night on a northbound trip, Imogene said to Harold as he finished his dinner. "I don't care what you say. There is something not right about that man. Never seen a trucker so quiet."

Harold responded, "Quieter than a church mouse. Lois is right … sorta creepy."

"Sorta? Damned creepy, if you ask me."

"I heard a Smokey pull him over the other night for being in the left lane up the mountain. I think it was Larry Powell. I'll try to raise him on the radio and see if he found out anything about him."

"You know, he comes off as being real empty inside. Never talks about family or women or drinking or nothing."

"You sure he is a trucker?" Harold asked.

"Good point. See what you can find out."

The usual gang happened to meet three days later. Imogene brought a coffee pot and three mugs over to their table. "Morning guys. Harold, you learn anything about Mr. Blabbermouth?"

"Not one damned thing. Larry checked his license and registration. Paul Koger like he said. Clean driving record. Told Larry he had a headache and was a little slow in changing lanes."

"He give him a ticket?"

"Nope, just told him to pay more attention and have a safe trip. I mean, what can he say to the man, tell me your life story?"

"You know if any of you fellers had any sense you might try to get the ball rolling by telling him more about yourself. He might open up a little. I don't mind telling you that I'm getting to be very curious. Ain't right for a trucker to be that quiet."

George and Junior nodded. "You know, you might have something there. Next time I see him I'll try that," George said.

The opportunity presented itself three days later. George and Junior had stopped by for dinner on their way to Detroit and found Paul sitting at the counter instead of his usual table that was taken by a young couple eating quietly alone as usual. They sidled up to the counter to take a seat beside him. "Mind if we join you, Paul?" Junior asked.

"Free country."

"George was trying to tell me that his daughter looks like him. George, show him that picture."

George pulled his wallet out of his back pocket, flipped open the picture sleeves and slid the wallet to Junior. "That's her on the right. What do you think?"

Paul looked at the picture quickly. "Yeah, she looks like you."

George asked, "You got any family?"

"No."

"I have to tell you, Paul, you're the quietest trucker I have ever met. After all these months we still don't know much about you."

"Not much to know."

George said, "Hey man, that's cool. We're just trying to be friendly. You ain't been trucking too long or you would know how important it is to have friend on the road. You never know when you might need them."

Paul pursed his lips, lowered his head and took a deep breath. "Okay, here is the story. I used to have a family but I don't now. I used to be an accountant, but decided that long distance trucking might help me think some things through and maybe forget some things. Sometimes I don't talk because I get migraine headaches. Sometimes, I just don't have anything to say. Sometimes I have things on my mind. Look, it is not like I don't appreciate your interest and I don't mean no disrespect, but I just need to work through some things, okay?'

Shocked by his candor, George and Junior got up to leave. "Okay man, but if you need to talk to somebody let us know. Us truckers are just one big family. Be glad to do what we can."

"Thanks. Like I said, I appreciate your concern, but some things you have to work out alone."

"Hey, Buddy, we'll put a good word for you with the man upstairs . . ."

"Do me a favor. Don't." Paul snapped back as he threw a ten dollar bill on the counter. "Keep the change."

He walked swiftly across the diner and disappeared into the night.

Lois came over and said to the men, "Like I said, he is one creepy son of a bitch. Have you ever known anyone turning down a prayer for them?"

Junior replied as he scratched his head, "Can't say as I have. He seemed real pissed off by it too. Now he's got me wondering what his story really is. Why would anyone turn down an offer of prayer for him?"

Imogene sniffed, "Must be one of them atheists. They don't believe in God. Never thought I'd see the day I had to serve one of their kind. I wonder if I have to serve him?"

George made a clicking noise. "Now let's not jump to conclusions. He never said he didn't believe in God, just not to pray for him. Some people are just naturally afraid of such talk. I say we go ahead and pray for him and just go on treating him the same way. Maybe he'll tell us what he is thinking."

Harold added, "I told you that he seemed empty inside. Now I know why."

George replied, "Now hold on everybody. Maybe he is just going through a rough time and has lost any faith he had. Don't tell me that all of you have not done the same thing in rough times. Lord knows I have."

Junior nodded in agreement. "You all know the story of Job. Even he lost faith in God. Just because he asked us not pray for him doesn't mean we can't. I have always felt that as strange as he is he is basically a good guy. What do we have to lose anyway?"

Everyone agreed and pledged to pray for Paul to be able to confront whatever demons possessed him. George whispered, "And nobody tells him anything about this. No point in risking making him mad at us."

III

Paul appeared only sporadically over the next few weeks, and many of the group feared that their nosiness had driven him away. When he did show up, they all tried to treat him the way they always had without betraying any hint of their plan. Paul obliged them by remaining as quiet and stoic as he always had been. He continued to respond to questions with terse, even abrupt, answers and deflected any attempts to delve deeper into his personal life. Weeks became months with no perceptible change. One by one, each of the group began to doubt that their efforts were worthwhile.

One day after Paul had stopped by and left, Lois said, "You know some people can't be saved. The Bible says so. I have prayed and prayed that he'll tell us what's wrong. I ain't afraid to tell you that I'm wondering if we're wasting our time here. He ain't changed any."

Harold agreed. "You know, this would be a lot easier if we just got some kind of sign that he was trusting us or something was happening."

Imogene added, "I find it real easy to forget to say a prayer for him. You'd think he would be a little more appreciative. I mean why is he so down on God? Everybody has trials, so why does he think his are so bad?"

Junior echoed her doubts. "They say faith is believing in things unseen and I gotta tell you I have faith that he ain't going to change because I sure have not seen any."

George listened intently. "I thought we were doing the right thing when we started this but now I'm not so sure. Maybe he is an atheist and God wants nothing to do with him. Maybe some of us are not praying hard enough. I gotta tell you I find myself praying for a sign that something is going to happen and I don't see any such sign. It's real tempting to just give up and wash my hands of the whole thing. I guess we can still be civil and courteous toward him, but if he is unwilling to confide his troubles with us there is no point in keeping up this waste of time."

They all nodded their silent assent. As the weather turned more wintry, Paul stopped by more frequently, but more and more Lois and Imogene noticed him taking painkillers. When asked if he was okay, he replied with "Just another damned migraine. Sometimes they blind me. Is there some place I can sit that is not too lit up? The light makes the pain worse."

Little by little, the people who were so concerned about Paul's health and spiritual came to regard him with the same indifference they showed a chair in the restaurant. Conversation deteriorated to a series of grunts, a specious "How ya doing?" or sometimes just a silent nod of

acknowledgement. As the Christmas season approached, a last ditch effort to spread good cheer toward Paul fizzled out when they saw him sitting in his dark corner crying to himself.

Lois took some coffee over and asked, "You okay, sugar? I hate to see you so down. Anything I can do?"

Paul wiped his eyes and nose with a handkerchief, "No, thank you very much, Lois. I appreciate your concern but the holidays are tough on me sometimes. Could you put that coffee in a go cup? I gotta hit the road.'

"Sure thing. I'll get you an extra large cup. Looks like you could use it. Sure there is nothing I can do?"

He shook his head as he wrestled some bills from his wallet. He poured a little cream and sugar in his coffee, placed the lid on tightly and left the diner.

Lois sauntered over to the counter where Imogene and Junior were chatting. "I really hate to see a man so down in the holidays. But it ain't like we haven't tried to help. Shame, real shame. Maybe we should say some more prayers for him," she said.

Junior replied, "Hey, we tried that and nothing changed. Some people just want to be miserable and I think he is one of them. Pour me another cup of coffee to go. I gotta head out too."

By the end of the week, all the regular customers knew about the crying episode. Some began to speculate on how Paul would spend the holidays.

George threw up his hands. "Hell, I would invite him to Christmas dinner, but we don't even know where he lives. Guess we could ask. Day after tomorrow is Christmas Eve. Wonder if he'll be back in."

Lois said, "If he is, I'll ask him to come to Christmas dinner at my house. I felt so sorry for him tonight, but I don't know what we can do. I'm pretty sure he would not accept any gifts from us."

Junior shrugged, "Guess we'll play it by ear. I should see you all before Christmas, but if I don't Merry Christmas. G' night."

IV

Paul did not return until Christmas Eve. He sought out his usual seat in the low light section and popped a pain pill. He motioned Lois to bring him coffee and a menu.

"Evening, sugar. You still feeling bad?"

"Just the damned headache. I think I'll have the roast beef dinner with mashed potatoes, green beans and a piece of pecan pie. And a glass of water and a cup of coffee."

"You know, if you're going north you might want to hurry, honey. It is supposed to snow tonight and they might close the road. You got big plans for Christmas?"

Paul exploded into a standing position. "Do I have big plans for Christmas? Let me tell you about my damned Christmas. I used to be an accountant with a beautiful wife. We were expecting our first child. Something went wrong during the delivery and our son was born with severe brain damage from hypoxia . . . oxygen shortage to the brain. But he was our son and we loved him. For ten years, we raised Stephen and helped him learn to function at a minimal level. Then, last year we were going to Nashville for Christms with a friend. I hit a patch of black ice and turned the car over three times. Stephen was thrown out of the car and broke his neck. Ginny sustained burns over half of her body and died. I wound up in a coma for three months. I never got to see my son's or my wife's funeral. When I woke up, my whole world had vanished. I became a trucker hoping to get way from all the pain and endless questions. Seems like I can't escape those."

He pointed over to where the regular crew was sitting. "So now you know why I don't want your goddamned prayers. What kind of God would do such a horrible thing to anybody? I'll have to relive that nightmare every Christmas Day for the rest of my life, so please don't tell me of how Jesus came to save us from sin and death. He ain't done too good a job by me. If I wasn't such a coward, I would kill myself but I'd probably screw that up too and wind up in worse shape. So if you want to believe all this Christmas story crap, whatever gets you through the night, but please spare me and let me grieve in private."

He stormed out the door, walked swiftly to his rig and began the drive to ascend the mountain road that snow was rapidly obscuring. Lois gathered the dishes from his table and

carried them to the kitchen sink. She poured herself a cup of coffee before joining the others at the counter. A cold blast blew into the diner when George and Harold entered, stomping their feet to remove the snow.

"You people look like your best friend just died. Why is everyone so down?"

Junior motioned for them to take a seat. "We know Paul's story down and it is a real bummer."

They listened intently as Junior and the waitresses recounted Paul's story. Harold and George sat silently before Harold said, "Well, we kept bothering him to find out his story. Now I wish we had let well enough alone."

Lois said, "I don't know about you guys, but I'm going to be thinking about that all day tomorrow so Christmas is really going to suck. No wonder the poor guy is so down on religion. I would be too. I'm not sure I could even go on living."

They all nodded. George said, "Yeah, I think tomorrow is going to be pretty hard for me too. Like Harold said, though, we brought this on ourselves. We kept sticking our nose in somebody else's business."

Imogene interrupted, "We were just trying to help the guy as he seemed so miserable. It seemed like the Christian thing to do."

Junior added, "Maybe so, or maybe like George said we were just being nosy. Well, like the old curse says: 'May you get what you think you want.'"

After a few minutes, the men went out to sleep in their trucks, the women put things away before they too left to go home. The snow was falling heavily as they looked up the mountain and wondered how Paul was making out on his drive.

V

After he left the diner and started up the mountain, Paul spent a few minutes regaining his composure after his outburst. He regretted snapping at Lois and the others.

"I'll apologize next time I stop by. Damn, this snow is really coming down."

He maneuvered his truck slowly up the sloping road, finally reaching the level stretch running across the top of the mountain. He geared down as he entered the downhill side.

Suddenly, a sharp pang ran through his head and a bright light flashed from the rear view mirror. He eased off the gas so the truck slowed down. He rubbed his eyes with one hand, but the light had blinded him, so all he saw was the bright light.

"Holy shit, what am I going to do now? I can't stop here."

The CB radio crackled and a voice asked, "You got problems, man?"

Panicked by his predicament, he picked up the CB phone and screamed back, "I can't see where I'm going. I think I had a migraine that has left me blind. I'm trying to hug the right side of the road until I can feel the guardrail but . . ."

The voice answered, "Yeah, I saw that. Just stay calm and listen to me. There is a pull-off for people to see the view not far from here. I'll guide you the best I can. You with me?"

Paul felt his heart pounding violently, "Dammit, I'm a dead man . . ."

"No, you're not. Just listen to me. Now your trailer is drifting too close to the rail. Ease it back to the left a bit. That's better. Now don't go too far. Straighten her up. Not too fast or you'll slide. You can straddle both lanes. There's is no one behind you. You're doing fine. Whoa, back to the center again . . . There, that's better."

Paul felt his panic subside a little as he struggled to hear and obey the instructions.

"Okay, the pull-off is just up ahead, so start gearing down. Now this is going to be tricky, so don't rush it. Start steering to the right a little. That's good. Okay, you can probably put her in neutral and let her coast to a stop. Slow, slow . . . you go it, Nashville."

The truck coasted to a stop and Paul collapsed over the steering wheel. Still unable to see clearly, he listened for the other trucker to either come up to check on him or drive by in his truck, but he heard nothing. He fumbled around until he found the CB radio. "You there? Hey, man you saved my life. I owe you big time. How did you know my name?"

He heard no answer, so he repeated, “Hey, man, thanks for saving my life. Can you hear me?”

He heard no answer, so he reached over to the radio to turn up the volume. His body went limp as he heard the radio switch click from “off” to the “on” position with a static crackle.



Hook Light *ROGER L. GUFFEY*



My Father's Shoes *ROGER L. GUFFEY*



Monkey Waterdrop ***ALICIA HERRMANN***



Two Birds *ALICIA HERRMANN*



Barn ***RUDOLPH FINAMORE***



Untitled *LINDSAY TUTTLE*

Biographical Information/Notes from Contributors:

Shelby Bevins enjoys writing poetry about anything that strikes her as a muse. A native of Paris, Kentucky, now living in Lexington, she bides her time earning her degree and plotting which cookie jar to steal next. She wishes that, along with double majoring in English and History, she could major in Mad Science.

Don Boes teaches in the Humanities Department at Bluegrass Community and Technical College. He has been published here and there. Mostly there. He has authored two books, *The Eighth Continent* and *Railroad Crossing: Poems*. He has been awarded three Al Smith Fellowships from the Kentucky Arts Council. Poems by Don Boes also have appeared in several anthologies, including *What Comes Down To Us: 25 Contemporary Kentucky Poets* published by University of Kentucky Press and *Bigger Than They Appear: Very Short Poems* published by Accents Publishing.

Alex Burrus (C. Alex Burrus) enjoys writing about everyday life. A graduate of East Jessamine High School, Charles, or Alex as he prefers to be called, also enjoys rock climbing, and playing basketball. He currently resides in Nicholasville, Kentucky.

Christian Vincent Champe is a student at Bluegrass Community and Technical College.

Angela Clemons currently lives in Lexington, Kentucky and returned to college a few years back as a non-traditional student. She has always enjoyed writing poems but never thought about submitting anything until she was at the writing lab; a teacher recommended that she should send in one of her poems. She describes her writing as leaning "towards creative writing even when it shouldn't in some of my classes, which in turn summons not the best grades at times." She summarizes her poem, "The Smile," in this way: "'The Smile' depicts what people want to believe; however, a smile is not what one may always think."

Frances Elzey moved to Lexington almost two years ago. She met her husband Mark here, and they were married last June. They now have a puppy, Sammy, who is the joy and pride of their lives. They love to go for walks with their puppy, watch movies, and sports together. Frances is attending college again, after many years of working at a full time job as an office assistant.

Rudolph Finamore is a production assistant for LEX 18, the NBC-affiliate television station in Lexington, Kentucky. His job includes operating the studio cameras during the news and airing local and national content. A native of Corona, California, he graduated from the University of

Kentucky with a bachelor's in Telecommunications and considers Lexington his new home. He enjoys black and white photography when he's not working.

Carrie French is a student at Bluegrass Community and Technical College. Her English professor told her about this opportunity. Her poem, "Going Far," was written during her sophomore year of high school.

Sherrie Godbey teaches at Bluegrass Community and Technical College. She grew up in a small community in south central Kentucky. She has written songs, short stories, poems, and prose since the early 80s. Besides writing, she enjoys traveling, reading, cooking, and playing the piano.

James B. Goode is a Professor of English at Bluegrass Community and Technical College. He has published poetry, fiction, and essays since the 1960s. He is a creative writer, essayist, photographer, and Appalachian scholar, who has written about the Appalachian region for many years. He has authored several books of poetry and two technical books on coal mining, produced and directed two documentary films, published short stories in two major anthologies, published over 500 poems in national and international magazines, and written over two hundred columns for the *New York Times*, the *Lexington Herald-Leader*, *Harlan Daily Enterprise*, *Coal County Extra*, and various other newspapers and magazines.

Roger L. Guffey is an adjunct faculty member at Bluegrass Community and Technical College. He has taught math at the college for over 24 years. He also has taught full time at Lafayette High School. He enjoys writing fiction and is currently working on a collection of short stories. He also does a lot of photography.

Alicia Herrmann is a twenty-six year old mother of two. She is originally from Grant County, Kentucky. She currently resides in Georgetown, Kentucky with her husband and two children. Alicia is scheduled to receive her Associate's Degree in Information Management & Design: Web Design in spring 2013. She also plans to receive a Certificate in Graphic Design.

Jennifer Mertz enjoys reading, cooking, animals, and writing. She is originally from New Castle, Kentucky and now lives in Frankfort, Kentucky. She has three cats, Baby, Abu, and Rink and one dog, Bodi.

Victoria Mills Victoria Mills is an avid reader and enjoys writing about her life experiences in her free time. She is originally from Michigan and currently lives in Crab Orchard, Kentucky with her daughter and five dogs.

Lindsay Tuttle first started drawing after she took an art class as a freshman at Estill County High School. She is now a freshman at Bluegrass Community and Technical College, studying radiography. She lives in Irvine, Kentucky.

Hailee Wilburn enjoys writing in her spare time when she isn't penning papers for classes or working at the library, her second home. She hopes that her writing will take her places one day.