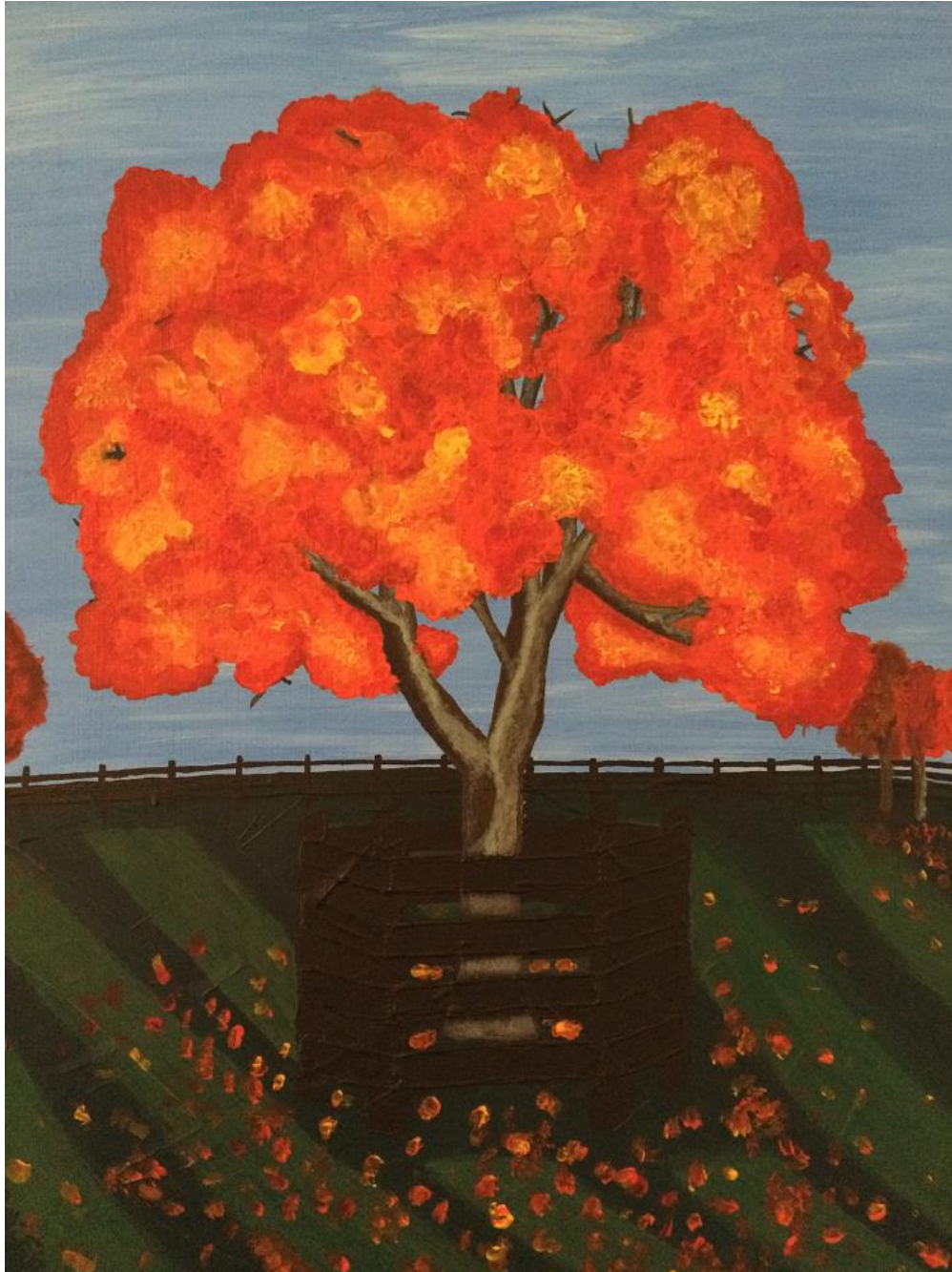


Bluegrass Accolade

BCTC Literary Journal - Issue No. 8



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2015

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The *Bluegrass Accolade* is 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 project possible, including the writers, poets, and artists who contributed their work, and the committee members who contributed their time and effort to the production of this issue.

2014-2015 Arts in Focus Literary Arts Subcommittee

Chair: Maureen Cropper **Members:** Nancy Bronner, Barbara Elzey, Mary Gammon, Kevin Jensen, Danny Mayer, and Deb Vantreese

DON BOES

BCTC Humanities Retirement Riff

(for Joe Anthony, Jan Holland, & James Goode, Spring 2014)

Retirement is not a requirement for travel. Retirement
is old hat. Is now more than just a notion.
Retirement is a critical initiative. Retirement
is Friday morning without a meeting.
Retirement is a proverbial carrot.

Retirement will be navigated by mouse
and jalopy. Will be measured by satellite and keystroke.
Retirement is not the Frankenstein monster. Retirement
will not include essays with or without comma splices.
Retirement will improve your posture.

Retirement is a shock. Retirement
is synonymous with something else. Is a mall that never closes.
Retirement is not even Quasimodo. Retirement
is forgetting your copier code.
Retirement is a celebrity you can trust.

Retirement is a grey area. Retirement
is now more than just an option. Will not include PeopleSoft.
Retirement is leaving Cooper and Leestown and Newtown. Retirement
is saying hello and saying goodbye.
Retirement is saying goodbye and saying hello.

DON BOES

Childhood: An Epigram

Alone, I explored
the cornfield, startled
rabbits and crows.

Now, I fumble
with what I know:
fur and feathers

on a barbed wire fence.

No Hatred

A child is born, no hatred, no discrimination.
And the first thing he, or she, will hold sacred, is your explanation.
Their education begins at home. Yeah, sticks and stones can break the bones.
But stop the games, words can also be the cause of pain.
Going insane, now he's crying in the falling rain
Fists clench until the nails break the skin, everything they say, he just takes it in.
Those who his mind made enemies, fill nightmares and awaken memories.
His palm opens, blood dripping from his fingertips.
Eyes filled with tears and rain, his fears remain.
And still he hears the names they called him weird and lame.

He's big, ashamed. "A face not even a mother could love"
The chants play back, no matter what he says they won't take it back
Told his teachers to see what they would make of that.
They shrugged and said "sticks and stones," uncaring that he sits alone
Never even asked him how he lives at home.
As he nears insanity from woes of family. A broken home, and a recent woeful tragedy.

A complacent system, lighting flashes, thunder crashes. He wipes his eyes, dries his glasses.
As the skies clear and a moment of peace is shown.
His eyes reflecting the lights shining from the streets below.

"A face not even a mother could love"
Words the orphan never rose above.
Like not fitting into their selective perspective means he deserves to be alone.
And never know a loving embrace when he is home.
"Sticks and stones" like the pain is less.
When it's not physical, it's not treated with the same respect.

His mind says "Nobody will ever fall in love with me."
"Or treat me like I'm the one who holds their sun above the sea"
"Never got to meet her, but my mama died last week."

Now he holds the bridge in desperation, unwilling to live in devastation.
Fingertips slick, but just a bit of hesitation.

In his mind, he sees it as a limitation.
Breaks squeal to a car crash, as he releases a sharp laugh.
His arms straining.

As he lets go, another hand grips his wrist.
He was saved, but three days later he slit his wrists.
And left with blood dripping from his fingertips.

Sticks and stones, will you tell me that the pain is less?
When in the end, it can have the same effect?
Does it still not deserve the same respect?

It all starts, with education.
A child is born, no hatred, no discrimination.
And the first thing they'll hold sacred, is your explanation.

MARY GAMMON

Bale Therapy

There is something comforting, therapeutic, in knowing that I don't affect the seasons,
that summer comes as summer wills,
grasses grow from seed that's sown
and each June, July, August, and September,
copious fields of tall languishing Kentucky grasses
will be mowed, thrashed, and rolled into bales,
abandoned and stranded in fields to dry and bake to a golden (shredded) wheat brown
then stored under cover in silos and bins
until the meager months of winter
when all that remains
are grass stubs, nubs and earth that is bare
until spring, until summer
return once again.

JAB

Peonies

A month ago it was the daffodils
that broke my heart wide open.

Tonight peonies haunt the May evening air.
Their pools of exuberance, their spell-binding scent,
Their lives fleeting, like the daffodils...

I pause to smell their dew-dripping petals and am flung,
immediately and willingly into a vast countryside of desire.

I am freely carried away on blooms of ravishing resplendence.
It is not enough.

I rub the petals unto my wrists and neck and blanket
my pillow with them so they may pervade my dreams.

C. DENISE MABSON

Aaahhh

AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!!!

Am I a brown noser!?

A people pleaser!

Oh God!

Dear GOD!

I promise I was only trying to be on top of things

Put my best foot forward

Apply myself

Make business associates.

You know build a good resume,

Some job skills?

Have a social life

Be on top of my to do list

Dot all my I's cross all my T's

Strive for perfection!

Make a relationship

Get my name out there

Be all that I can be

Make good enough grades

Make some decent money

Take care of my kids

Putting in all the programs

And I...

Just wanted to be the best for everybody and everything but...

You.

PATRICK MALONEY

Reverie of a Poet Working at Disneyland

Chernabog tees off on the Epcot Ball
after he mops up Mickey,
tea cups with vertigo vomit drunks,
Minnie kisses Goofy while he whistles
When You Wish Upon a Star,
Space Mountain crumbles
into a spectral galaxy,
Buzz Lightyear is frozen
in time, cliches cyclical as the moon
are reincarnated on It's a Small World,
acid trips Alice, then all the redundant
nostalgia falls into a rabbit hole
and everyone lives happily
never after.

BILL MCCANN

A Summer Game of Baseball at My Grandmother's Farm

"Boys against the girls," someone said.
"Girls in the outfield," another voice chimed in.
"Boys bat left-handed," proclaimed an aunt.
Uncle John, tall and rangy batted first
 And got a hit.
Jim stood in and rapped one well enough to get on base.
Followed next by cousin Dave.
"Bases full, get a hit, Bill."
Standing awkwardly
Swinging wildly
I struck out.
"Try again," someone in the outfield yelled.
"Bat right-handed," said Dad as he placed his hands on mine.
We got a hit.
Everyone cheered
As Uncle John ran home:
I wanted to crawl under a rock.

MARY MONEYPENNY

My Love

My Love
Carries the wounds of life.
He struggles every day to carry on
Alone --
A tearless, tireless contest with the elements,
Alone.

My Love
Smiles with a natural grace;
He captures hearts and minds
With his great flair and style,
Recalling all the while
That he's
Alone.

Oh, why cannot his fellow man
Comprehend his pain,
And lend a helping hand
To shelter him from the rain?

My Love
Would have it no other way;
For he takes nothing,
And he asks nothing
Of Life
But Life.

SAVANNAH NETHERTON

Thoughts as I Watch You Tumble

I watched it wash over you
the sludge drug you down
it's cool wafts breathed carelessly across your neck
and sunk you down with waves

there was a crack of silence
you never spoke a word
sat there as your empire buckled
a mute speechless fool

let legions lick fire to your heels
and pour out your hot blood
onto the stage around your convictions
it is okay
to become a casualty in a war you at least tried to fight

SAVANNAH NETHERTON

Up and Down

happiness
loves sorrow
always consuming, dying forever
running fears scattered violently
hearts beating to fallen hope
time forever
people changed by distorted actions
desperately crying
loved always

always loved
crying desperately
actions distorted by changed people
forever time
hope falling to beating hearts
violently scattered fears running
forever dying, consuming always
sorrow loves
happiness

RYAN RIVARD

Essence

Peaceful perfect place,
bright with no sun.
Beautiful lilies adorned with smiles,
waving as I walk by.
In silent greeting, the wildlife pause,
all here know my name.
She moves in poetry,
her elegant white dress swirls.
Our eyes meet, in happiness she twirls,
We come together, as lovers greet.
my patient heart leaps,
The world exhales as we embrace,
So familiar in this place,
frozen in time, I love her, I know.
She whispers "wake my lover, it is time to go,"
I wake in my bed alone.
Breathing her last perfumed essence,
Contemplating what she seems,
A ghostly love affair, meeting in my dreams.

RYAN RIVARD

Truth Be Told

I found your gift
In a gentle kiss
Your breath upon my lips
I found your gift
Waking me with your kiss
Your goodbye hurt, but, you got your wish
I found your gift
In a gentle kiss

KATHY SKINNER

Memories How They Haunt Me

The memories they haunt me
The memories they taunt me
I lay awake at night as they flow through my mind
Circling and circling time after time
A child afraid in the dark
As that old man left his scarred mark
A young girl growing up in a rage
Life's secrets and pain dropping tears on her page
Her words hidden inside it would seem
Only to come out in a scream
No one could hear all the things she needed to say
Instead the anger and pain led the way
Can't they hear her behind the ugly words
Don't they know she is just waiting to be heard
Memories so bad and so good
All twisted up, so misunderstood
He came into her life
She filled with such anger and strife
Then a little boy is born
But yet still she is torn
Her love for this son so real and so strong
But something still haunts her, something still wrong
Then a daughter so loved and so sweet
What more did she need to make life complete
A brown eyed baby boy
To fill her life with joy
These memories they taunt me
The good and the bad they haunt me
No matter how hard she tried
The pain and the anger would spill from inside
Please hear me, hear my pain she would cry
So many mistakes, so much pain
Always he stood by her time and again
As she fought battles she just couldn't win
Now everyone has left and are all gone
But the memories still haunt on and on
The words no longer hidden, she is through with the rage

She is through with the screaming and tears on her page
He is still there beside her but only can see
That girl so full of pain and rage, he cannot see me
His memories are damaged, he remembers only the bad
He cannot remember the love that we had
The memories they haunt me, will I never be free
The memories they taunt me, if only he'd see

KATHY SKINNER

The Voice

What good is a voice if nobody will hear
What good is a voice with nobody near
Yet still the words keep coming and will never stop
They fall from my fingers as the rain falls with each drop
I don't know if this is how it really should be
But this voice it is coming from deep inside me
The words from my mouth come out all wrong
But on paper the words just sing out my song
If nobody hears me that is okay
For that voice, inside me will no longer stay
On paper they stumble and tumble on out
My voice no longer silent, now wants to shout

TIM STALEY

One In, One Out

In the waiting room
parents recline together,
some scream at the TV in ecstasy
as their Dallas Mavericks
alley-oop, fast break,
and foul the Miami Heat
for the NBA title.

In the other corner
a couple is told
by a surgeon in scrubs
their baby has a tumor
in her brain.

I'm not a sports fan
so I notice the husband
shake, cry, and pout.

His wife says,
it's going to be hard...

I put in ear plugs, draw
the hood of my sweatshirt
clean over my eyes.

ROGER L. GUFFEY

A Servant of Two Masters

Flonnie stood, arms akimbo, watching and hearing the bees sporadically blurt out low humming choruses as they wove an invisible network over her flower bed. She had suffered of a sting just last week, but she gave little sign of apprehension as she ambled over to the end of the flower bed, plopped herself down onto the sere, sparse patches of crabgrass and weeds, and began to pull weeds from the flowerbed. The yard was man's work and if he was content with the sorry excuse for a yard, so be it. Her joy in life lay in knowing that the flower beds flanking the gray stucco-shingled house were the envy of everyone in the small rural valley.

She hummed along with the droning refrain of the bees as she slid her leathery, liver-spotted hands among the flowers to find and uproot stubborn clumps of dandelions and plantain that invaded her beds. Occasionally, she would find a small pokeweed among the tall multicolored zinnias and touch-me-nots or even the petite rusty marigolds and sprawling petunias. She had tended these same beds for thirty-seven years. Each year she had felt secure that she had rid the beds of the last of these tenacious vagrants only to have them reappear the following year from seeds that lay dormant in the soil. Even now in July after repeated weedings, she found one six inches tall that she used to shoo a bee away from her sweat-beaded face.

She paused to sweep the wisps of thin gray hair from her blue eyes before plunging in again to clear weeds and random scraps of tarry shingles littering the ground. The sun lay in

the west so she benefited from the shade cast by the squat house whose sides and roof were punctuated at irregular intervals by missing or slightly askew shingles. Spencer cared little that the house had fallen into such disarray: he and their son, Jerry, saw no financial merit in maintaining a building which they used only as a diner and a flophouse. Flonnie answered the questions of neighbors by saying they were too busy in the crop fields to do much about it. Still, in her heart she wished they took more pride in keeping the place up, so that maybe someday her flower beds would be on the cover of the local newspaper, or maybe even in color in RECC magazine.

She sighed. "They don't seem to unnerstan' that you has to work to have anythin' purty. Ever year I pull weeds until I'm blue in the face and they keep comin' back, but I don't quit. I guess maybe I miss some and the seeds come back next year. No matter what you try to have nice they's always something trying to tear it down. Dog digs in my flowers or Jerry walks through them, they's always something. This old house could be so purty with these all flowers here, but it is so ugly. I think that's the reason nobody comes to visit. They think the house might fall in on them. Only people that comes here anymore are trying to get Spencer to haul coal or wood or mow a field. Spencer says nobody visits because they are scared of me after they had to take me to Danville. No reason to be scared of me. I ain't goin' to hurt nobody."

She struggled to her feet, but the effort of raising herself made her head spin and she fainted. She collapsed into a heap beside the flowerbeds.

Of course you wouldn't hurt a fly, but everybody thinks you would because they think she is you. You do look alike they say. She uses your clothes and your house and threatens the neighbors and Spencer with your voice. And nobody has ever seen you both together at the same time. What are they

supposed to think? Every time she appears you disappear and come back saying the same old excuse of a bad headache. Even Spencer can't tell you apart and neither he nor Jerry believes your story that she isn't you. Is it any wonder that Spencer is letting the house go to ruin? Maybe he hopes it will fall in on you. Why shouldn't Jerry curse you to your face? Maybe he thinks she is you and he is simply trying to banish her to get his natural mother back. Wouldn't you? Would you want people to think that your mother had to be carried off in a straitjacket to the nut house in Danville? You remember Danville, don't you, Flonnie? Laying there watching the ceiling fan go round and round and round like a whirligig in the wind. Remember how thirsty you got? They told you it was the drugs, but it was Spencer and Jerry and this whole community trying to poison you. Trust me, Flonnie, they are out to get you.

She reawakened with a start so violent that butterflies feeding on flowers fluttered away abruptly. She heaved herself vertical, staggering to the corner of the house to steady herself lest she blackout again. Equilibrium regained, she noticed the grayish clouds rolling in over the top of Poplar Mountain.

"Gosh, it looks like rain is headin' this way. If I'm goin' to do any visitin' this afternoon, I'd better get to it."

She slipped her dusty, grass-stained hand into the pocket of her flowery, broadcloth dress to retrieve a tube of Chapstick, removed the cap and slid the waxy stick over her dry lips. A gnarled apple tree stood over a rickety wash stand leaning against the lichen-encrusted trunk for support. She splashed a small dollop of water into the white porcelain pan and reached for the Lava soap resting in the upturned carapace of a terrapin stuck in a crotch of the tree. She smiled at the reticulated shell bleached by exposure after she had recovered it from the roadside a few years before.

"I don't see why them kids around here are so afraid of that thing. They say it looks like a skull. Looks like a turtle shell upside down to me. Makes a good soap dish. And it didn't cost nothin'."

She ladled a dipperful of clean water from the galvanized bucket over her hands and dried them on her dress. A gray tabby cat carrying a field mouse emerged from the pasture field next to the yard.

"Well, kitty, ain't you the smart one. I'll give you some milk in a minute to go with your mouse."

The rusty screen door, warped by uneven tension over the years, clapped against the door jamb behind her as she entered the kitchen. A worn linoleum rug patterned in huge swirls of floral patterns covered the uneven floor that creaked softly as she walked toward the bedroom to comb her hair. She raked a wide tortoise-shell comb through the thinning strands of hair and leaned closer to the mirror to check her chapped lips. She picked up the bright cylinder that she bought herself once a year and contemplated using the bright red lipstick to conceal her cracked lips

"It's just Wilma. She knows how bad my lips get in the summer. I'll save that lipstick for a special occasion. Chapstick is good enough for everyday visitin'."

A fine mist of cologne from a small atomizer obscured the musty odor of perspiration staining her dress in splotches. She folded a floral handkerchief and shoved it into her right pocket and ambled into the kitchen to remove her dentures the pearly dentures from a teacup over the sink. A quick flick removed the water from the dentures and she gingerly placed them

in her mouth. A half glass of milk and two drop biscuits still sat on the table from her lunch: she gathered them up to feed the cat and dog waiting outside the back door.

“Here, kitty,” she cooed as she poured the milk into a cracked saucer. A scraggly yellow dog ran up to her wagging his tail expectantly.

“Here you go, fella.” The dog took the biscuits from her hand and slunk over to the shade of the apple tree to dine in peace. Flonnie seldom petted the gaunt dog, which spent the biggest part of the day dodging cars on the road where he scrounged the fat brown grasshoppers killed by passing traffic. He contented himself with keeping Flonnie company for the irregular offerings of table scraps, even though many days she would forget to feed him so he relied on the grasshoppers as his sole meals. In exchange, he protected Flonnie, growling at anyone who entered the yard, and chased hobos away when they tried to panhandle a sandwich from Flonnie. The gray tabby cat left the scant serving of milk to rub against her calves in an effort to garner some affection. With some effort, Flonnie picked the cat up and cradled her as a mother with a baby.

Closing her eyes, she sighed, remembering. At sixty-two, her fertile years were behind her in a dream time with visions of a large family: stout sons with strong arms tanned in the summer sun as they worked alongside their stoic father, and daughters so beautiful they should be in fairy tales. At the beginning of their marriage, she had dreamed of standing in Keene’s Chapel Methodist Church in her finest dress and cultured pearls beside Spencer in his cheap suit as they watched their children getting married to start their own families.

*Yes, Flonnie, that is the natural order of things isn't it? But who says you're natural? You can't be as long as she is alive because everybody thinks she and you are the same person. Can you really blame Spencer for not wanting to give you any more children? He still remembers that fit she threw in Jerry's room and what a tussle it was to wrestle you down to the floor until it passed. You know he told everybody that you had that wild glazed look in your eyes like you were going to hurt his son for crying too loud. You know that's why he always had Wilma Brown come stay with you and Jerry until he got big enough to walk. He didn't trust you. He thinks you are her, Flonnie, and when she is in you, you are too strong to hold. And you know Spencer told Jerry the whole thing as soon as he could understand it. Why do you think that Jerry abandoned his mother, the heart beating the first sounds he would ever hear? Spencer knew that he could not take a girl on farm machinery. Remember the mysterious visit from Doctor Roberts when he and Spencer stayed alone in the tobacco barn for over an hour? Remember how Spencer picked at his food at supper and slept in a separate room that night? Oh, they are all in on it, Flonnie, all of them: Wilma making up stories of your weird behavior when it was really **her**. Dr. Roberts convinced Spencer to forsake the marriage bed lest some other devil seed issue from your union. Oh, that Doctor Roberts took your husband and your dreams of those beautiful children that you would take to Sunday School: the little girls in dresses you had made of broadcloth and the little boys in shirts you wrenched out of Spencer's feed sacks. He was the one who led the two men in white coats here, invading the sanctity of your home, to strap you into that straitjacket so that he could give you a shot to knock you out. He is the devil himself my dear, the devil himself . . .*

The cat wriggled herself from Flonnie's thick arms that were contracting violently around her body. Flonnie snapped her eyes open and set the cat on the grassless ground near the weather-curved planks of the back porch. She stepped inside to check the time.

"I've got time for a cup of tea before I go to Wilma's," she said to herself.

She always kept a tea kettle warm on the wood stove for little sips of tea during the day. She dropped a Lipton teabag into a black and gold porcelain teapot decorated with bright roses and fancy curlicues and added a cupful of hot water. She refilled the pot and returned it to the stovetop.

"Maybe I better check that fire before I leave. I just hate having to relight it for supper. Still, it might catch the house on fire if I'm gone too long."

She opened the door to the firebox to see how much longer the fire would burn. The fire she had lit to fix Spencer and Jerry their breakfast that morning had nearly died out, leaving just a few embers glowing in the soft ashes. She licked her finger and gingerly checked the temperature of the stove top. Satisfied that the stove was safe to be left unattended, she sat down at the table to enjoy her tea. She smiled as she sipped her tea and began to talk to the cat that had let herself in through the battered screen door.

"That teapot shore is purty, don't you think, kitty? I was lucky to win it from Kay's Drugstore. Spencer had took me up to see Doc Roberts and while I was waiting I saw this teapot in a contest. All I had to do was to play a punch board for a quarter for three punches. Spencer gave me a quarter and I won this teapot on the first punch. Then I didn't win anything else. But I was happy to have this teapot. I like tea, Kitty, like you like milk."

The warm tea and the tick-tock of the clock lulled her into closing her eyes, to savor the warm tea, before picking up the cup and moving to the front room to finish it. A velvety duskiness filled the room which smelled faintly of perfume and perspiration seeping from overstuffed chair and sofa. A few neighborhood children who ignored the rumors about Flonnie would

stop by to sell her seeds. Invariably, they would find themselves nodding off to a light nap brought on by the aromas of dust bunnies under the heavy walnut furniture and her houseplants.

As she sat in the huge velveteen chair, she set the teacup down on a small end table before she leaned over to inspect her amaryllis plant. Its solitary pedicel bore a lone vermilion bud, pleated with deep flutes of scarlet. Each day for the past week, the elliptical bud had grown more fiery, more impatient to burst open into a glorious display. Flonnie sat there at least once each day, cooing softly as she gently caressed its plump form. Nobody else could get them to bloom in the summer as they were often given as Christmas presents that bloomed only by forcing them during the winter months. Its red trumpet would grace the room for a week or ten days before shriveling into a moist clump. A sheaf of shiny green blades would emerge from the bulb and begin to store the food for the next season. When they yellowed signaling a dormancy Flonnie would put the pot to a dark corner of a seldom used closet.

“You’ll be blooming any day now. You’re awfully red this year. You are about the reddest thing I’d ever seen. Everybody ought to like red. I bet the forbidden fruit was red; that’s why Eve couldn’t resist it.”

As she drained the last drop of tea from the floral china teacup, she relaxed, gradually slumping over the arm of the chair.

But Flonnie, you know everyone wondered how you knew the right hole to punch. A lot of people wanted that teapot and you get it on the first try. You must be a witch. You do look the part, don’t you? Your hair is thin and stringy, your nose is an eagle’s beak. Then here you are coming out of the office of

the devil himself eating his magic pills and drinking his potions to bolster your powers of divination. That teapot had set there for three weeks and you win it on the first punch. It was her evil eye, wasn't it? The right one that jitters just a little bit as it searches out the depths of people's souls. It's not even your eye, it's hers; but everybody thinks it's yours. Remember how they told you how that eye went to jittering just before you chased that Charlie Roberts out of the house with a poker? It wasn't even hot. How could you have hurt him? You wanted to scare him away before he could steal a start off your lilac bush. The next thing you know is his parents and Doctor Roberts are here and that van arrives with the men carrying the white jackets, trussing you up again for another stay in the crazy house. You put up a good fight for a while, didn't you? Screaming and kicking, tearing the rug in the front room. The neighbors all say that you keep those pretty little rugs down in there to hide the tracks of your fingernails on the hard wood floor. Could a normal human do that, Flonnie?

But then you just gave up and let them throw you into that ambulance like a slab of hog. You kept telling yourself that it was just a dream, that you would wake up from the last thirty years to find a whole houseful of beautiful children standing over you, mopping your forehead with a cool cloth to relieve the fever that had driven you to madness. They would call you 'Mother,' the mother that nurtures and protects her family at all costs, not the 'Mother' emblazoned on a shiny red ribbon around a bouquet of long stem red roses and white carnations enshrouding a granite-colored box burnished so fine to reflect the dimmest light streaming through the church window. But every time you woke up, all you could think of was the only son who cursed you to your face and a husband who tolerated your presence only because you kept house for him. And you had to think about them as you lay there staring at the ceiling, discolored with age and the fumes of urine, among people crying aloud. Most of them wore straitjackets, some bashed their heads against tables or walls, and others slobbered and chewed their tongues to the quick.

But you could escape: all you had to do was to talk to the doctors there and admit that you and she were the same person. They wanted to blame you for all the evil she had done: winning the teapot, chasing after the boy with a poker, throwing fits. Do you remember how they tried to make you admit that you threw a whole litter of new puppies into a ditch to starve because you didn't want to be bothered feeding them? They didn't know their mother had been run over or you had tried to nurse them yourself. Which is better: to have Spencer sling their brains out on a rock or to let them die of starvation? You knew it was her that made the decision to throw the pups in the ditch; you could not admit to something that you had not done. So you lay there, strapped to a bed as comforting and loving as your bed at home, denying and crying and retching and praying that God heal you, waiting for an answer that would never come. You prayed the wrong prayer, Flonnie. God knew it was she that was sick, not you. How could he cure you when you were not sick? Finally, even you confused her with you and you began to take the blame for things she had done. They said that you could go home if you would admit to every wrong she had done. You had no choice; this was your cross to bear, a cross that you bore upon your shoulders more out of exhaustion and resignation than repentance, for you could never decide which was the greater sin: refusing to admit to sins you had committed or confessing to sins that you had not committed. Does that sound familiar, Flonnie? Yes, Flonnie, they convinced even you that you are a witch. No wonder your neighbors hide from you when you go visiting. You knock and knock and no one answers, but you know they are in there, hiding behind their doors with their fears and superstitions, waiting for you to give up and leave in search of an unfortunate victim working outside who did not have time to hide before you stopped by. So go, Flonnie. Walk the hot narrow road that bubbles with tar in the afternoon sun when any sane person would sit in the shade resting or breaking beans. Walk up to Wilma's or out to Evalee's or Ora's or even all the way around to Mally's. Go, and I'll tell you what you'll find: empty houses full of people scared of the old witch who everyone, even her husband and son, hates and fears. But go, Flon . . .

Flonnie jerked herself upright in the chair so suddenly the startled cat scrambled out the back door. She stood up, smoothed her dress and exited the back door into the hot July afternoon. The clouds she had seen earlier had grown larger, looming a little higher above the horizon. She hesitated, calculating whether she had time for even a short trip up to Wilma Brown's house. A storm seemed inevitable, but her past experience had taught her that she still had plenty of time to make the half-mile trek up the country road to Wilma's.

The swallowtails and fritillary butterflies fluttered briefly when she walked by of the house toward the hot sticky, asphalt road where heat mirages of snakes slithered across the shimmering surface to disappear in the tangle of weeds and fescue alongside the road. The thrushes and sparrows that had sung so gleefully in the cool morning now sat hushed and hidden in the stands of sassafras saplings. The humidity was stifling, forcing her to mop her brow with the handkerchief, a ritual part and parcel to the neighbors of Flonnie Correll: the crazy old woman with false teeth making clacking noises because they no longer fit properly. Sometimes her dentures would be so troublesome that she would have to interrupt her conversation to take them out to reposition them or even stand holding them in her hand while she continued talking without them, her sunken cheeks so altering her speech that she sounded like a different person. Both Wilma and Doctor Roberts had cautioned her about wearing them as she might swallow them during a seizure. She agreed and wore them only when she was away from home.

Two cars passed her, but neither driver slowed to offer her a lift. She would have demurred anyway unless she knew the driver. Sweat ran in little rivulets down her body, staining her dress by the time she had reached the shaded incline to Wilma's house. Her

breathing became labored as she mounted the hill to Wilma's house, a small house surrounded by cleome, touch-me-not and zinnias.

She climbed the three steps to the front door and knocked loudly. No answer. She knocked again and cried, "Wilma? Is anybody home? It's just Flonnie. I thought I'd come up to visit, maybe help you break beans. Anybody home?"

Hearing no answer, she walked around the side of the house to try her luck at the kitchen door.

"Wilma, is anybody home?"

She tried the door, but it was locked. Maybe Wilma's sugar got high again and she had to go to the Doctor, she thought. Or maybe she's gone to get groceries. I might as well go on back. Maybe stop off by Ora's.

"I'll just wait a few minutes in the shade in case they come back. I need the rest anyway."

As she leaned against the white oak tree at the edge of the yard, she eyed the house that the Bethesda Methodist Church had built to replace the one burned by burglars six years ago. Wilma's husband, Marvin, was a second cousin to Flonnie. She and Wilma had grown up with Marvin and his brother, Joe Willie, playing and attending church together as children, going to weddings and funerals as adults. Wilma was highly regarded by everyone in the community, for she was always quick to help and offer a kind word to anybody. Many people said that if Wilma Brown wasn't in heaven, they didn't want to be there, because there wasn't anybody more fit for it if Wilma wasn't. She and Flonnie had traded flower starts and seeds and used to

spend the long winter days piecing quilts, most of which had burned up in the fire. Once she had told Flonnie that Marvin's family, especially Joe Willie, had not wanted Marvin to marry her, a secret that Flonnie pondered occasionally but kept to herself.

She shrugged off the daydream and, satisfied that no one was home, she began the journey home. She did not see the lacy curtain in the bedroom move to one side to expose Wilma's bespectacled face relieved that she had abandoned her search for company.

Wilma watched Flonnie disappear down the road before she turned to talk to Ora. She shook her head, sighing, "Poor old thing. I feel so ashamed to hide from her. But with just us two women here, I'm afraid to be alone with her. If she had one of them spells, there ain't no way we could hold her down. She could hurt one of us or herself."

"I know, Wilma. That's the way I am. Flonnie and Spencer have always been good neighbors to us. We used to carry water from their house until our well got drilled. But since she started having them spells, I'm afraid to be alone with her. If it's just me and the kids there and we see her coming, we lock the door and hide. I am really ashamed of it. And she is such good company when she is acting okay. Once she stopped to check on Roger when he was sick. She just kept on admiring the quilt I had over him. Poor thing forgot that she helped me quilt in the basement a few years ago. How many times have they had to take her off to Danville?"

Wilma dropped her head, "Two, I think. I tell you Ora, the way Spencer and Jerry treat her, it's a wonder she is still alive. They won't let her go anywhere or buy anything nice for herself. They spend all their money on tractors and machinery."

Ora nodded her agreement, "They are awfully mean to her. One day Johnny was collecting butterflies for his science class down there in the woods above their house and he said that Jerry cussed Flonnie up one side and down the other. We can hear him sometimes all the way up to the house, yelling at her."

Wilma picked up her crocheting and sat back down. "It's a shame."

"Have they ever figured out why she has them attacks?"

Wilma's eyes teared up again. "She's had them off and on her whole life. They just got worse lately. Flonnie and I grew up together, you know. I know that when she had that attack after she married Spencer, just after Jerry was born, Doc Roberts stopped by here one day to talk to me. He told me that they thought Flonnie had a tumor in her head. There's a big knot at the base of her skull, right here. He thought the tumor was putting pressure on her brain from time to time, causing her to go off. He asked Spencer if it would be okay for me to go help Flonnie out until Jerry got old enough to go with him. He was afraid that she would have one of them spells and hurt Jerry. Spencer said that it was fine with him if I'd do it. Doc told Spencer that Flonnie could die from that tumor and leave him with a houseful of kids to raise by himself. Spencer and Flonnie had wanted a big family, but Doc told Spencer there was no way to guarantee how long she would live or if she could handle another pregnancy. Now, Ora, I'll tell you, Spencer really loved Flonnie when they got married, but over the years all that changed. 'Course, now Flonnie has lived a long life, Jerry is grown and they don't even have each other."

She paused to scoot her chair closer to Ora. "Now Ora, I'm going to tell you something that I have never told anybody else. Marvin knows it 'cause he was there. You got to promise not to tell anybody."

Ora saw the serious look in Wilma's eyes. "I promise," she whispered.

"I know where that tumor came from. Once me, Flonnie and Marvin and Joe Willie was riding to town in the back of a wagon. Joe Willie started teasing Flonnie about being a tomboy 'cause she is so big and raw boned. Flonnie kept telling him to leave her alone. That just encouraged him. Finally, she got up in the wagon and punched him in the arm. He hauled off and pushed her out of the wagon. She hit her head on a big rock. That's where that big knot came from. We thought she had died. Mom and Dad rushed her to the nearest house and sent for Doc Powers. He finally managed to revive her. Now don't you tell a soul. My own children don't know that. "I'm telling you, Ora, it breaks my heart to hide from Flonnie, but I ain't as strong as I used to be and she scares me. I'd give anything if she could be well again and, God knows, I pray for her every night. I don't think she even remember what happened. If it would have made any difference, I'd told on Joe..."

Flonnie had stopped by Ora's house, not knowing she was at Wilma's. She paused to look at the zinnias, larkspurs and gladioli growing along the top of the retaining wall formed by the rocks children had carried off the land. No one answered when she knocked and she decided to go back home before the storm

She had walked only a few paces when the rain clouds began to drizzle. First one, two, and then a slow sprinkling of cool raindrops pitter-patted on her sweaty body. The soft rustle

of the summer shower on the thirsty thistles and milkweeds enticed her to slow her pace before a sudden cloudburst made her run cow-like home.

She burst into the kitchen through the backdoor, scaring the cat that had already come in out of the rain. Shivering, she snatched up a dish towel to dry her face and hair. The kettle contained enough water for a pot of tea; she decided to use the same teabag she had used before and sat breathing heavily as the tea steeped in the lukewarm water. As her breathing eased, she felt her face flush as she crumpled, exhausted from the exertion of her short run, onto the oilcloth-covered table. Without warning, she jerked herself upright, screamed unintelligibly, and flung the teapot across the room, where it shattered. The table vibrated so violently from the thundering tremors of her feet on the floor that the salt and pepper shakers and her saucer plummeted to the floor. The cat hissed and arched its back as she dodged the flying debris. She escaped through the hole in the screen door to seek the safety of the haystacks in the barn.

Flonnie's eyes bulged and rolled erratically in their sockets and she staggered into the front room where she collapsed into a trembling heap in the easy chair. The room faded to black as she sank into a heaving mass of mindless flesh. Her quivering was punctuated irregularly by spasms, striking herself, her chair, and finally, the fragile amaryllis bud that recoiled and broke free to tumble onto the musty floor. The spasms ceased; she slept fitfully.

*Sleep, my dear. Maybe even dream of starting over far away from here, in an Eden so remote even **she** ca not find you. Just you and your dreams of beautiful little girls in long tresses curled on your fingers and freshly pressed and starched dresses, sipping tea and eating dainty cookies. Dream of you and Wilma teaching the girls to piece and quilt, and how deep to plant the seed of every flower you can imagine, or of chatting with Ora and her children as they fill their water buckets at the pump behind the*

*house. Dream of Spencer and your sons coming home, the sons greeting you with sweaty, musky kisses and Spencer stealing a peck on your rouged and powdered cheek before you all sit down to a huge meal you and the girls have fixed. Dream of the carefree days of childhood, riding up Harmon Hollow on a buckboard, laughing with Wilma and Marvin and Joe Willie. Dream of lying in a crib, blowing little bubbles of drool as your Mom tickles your face with posers of violets. Dream that **she** never existed: there is only you and your family and friends, and the flowers. Dream that all of your life is but a dream.*

The mantle clock struck four, rousing her from sleep. She stood up, rubbing her eyes as she headed toward the kitchen to prepare supper. She heard the crunch of a shard of pottery before she saw the broken teapot in the kitchen. Leaning heavily on the doorjamb, she sobbed uncontrollably, asking loudly “Why, why, oh Lord, why did this happen?”

Hoarse from crying and the yelling of the attack, she found herself speechless, other than the soft murmurings of choked back tears as she swept the broken pottery into a dustpan, then into the trash can. She washed her face and started a fire in the stove to fix supper for Spencer. The rain had stopped for now, so that the only sounds in the room were the soft creaking of the floor sagging under her weight, the tick-tock of the clock, and the occasional sizzling pop of the burning wood. Mechanically, she peeled the potatoes into a porcelain pan, rinsing them off before placing them in an iron skillet with a spoonful of lard. She placed a few strips of jowl bacon in another skillet and sliced some cucumbers and tomatoes.

By the time she finished, Spencer had pulled his red International truck into the back yard. He stopped at the rickety wash stand to wash up before entering the house. He trudged across the grassless patch, stepped into the kitchen and grunted a rough greeting. Muddy clumps and bits of sawdust littered the rug.

"Rain here much?" he grunted.

"Quite a bit I guess. I dozed off just as it started so I don't know. We needed it. Some of my flowers was getting awfully dry. I'm frying taters and bacon for supper. There's cold biscuits from dinner I didn't want to waste.

"Jesus Christ, woman, ain't I good enough for hot bread? You got time to sleep and work in them goddamned flowers but you ain't got time to cook hot bread! We get any mail?"

"No, you didn't."

"Anybody come looking to get something hauled or mowed? You been here all day or did you go gallivanting around again?"

"I went up to Wilma's, but she wasn't home. I wonder if her sugar is acting up again."

"I ain't heard nobody say. Is supper about ready? I got some things to do in the barn. Jerry broke a tine on the hay rake that needs to be replaced."

Flonnie took the simple meal up into china bowls networked with cracks and chips. She set plates on the table and they ate in silence. She decided not to mention the teapot since Spencer did not drink tea anyway, but she bolstered her courage to ask, "Spencer, I've been thinking if we could take some of that tobacco money and buy a television to keep me company. It gits real lonesome around here. There's lots of westerns and Lassie on Sunday night."

"Everybody says that we can't get a good picture here. Too far from Nashville. Besides, we need that money to buy a new disk. You got your flowers and radio and animals."

Flonnie dropped her head disconsolately while Spencer gobbled down the last bits of food off his plate. He sat picking his teeth, watching her stack the dishes on the counter top by the sink.

"I'd better get that rake fixed for tomorrow. Supposed to cut hay for Willie McCutcheon."

As he started out to the barn, he noticed that the hole in the screen door was larger than it was when he left that morning.

"Did you kick the door?"

"No, it must have been the cat. She came in to keep me company."

"Umph. Damned cat got no business in here. House ain't the place for animals."

"I'm going to rest a few minutes before I do the dishes. It's about time for the local news," she said as he left the kitchen for the barn.

"It's starting to rain again. If it starts to thunder and lightning, turn the radio off. I don't want the house struck by lightning."

Flonnie shuffled into the living room, flipped the switch on the radio and took a seat in the chair. As she sat down, her eye caught a glimpse of a patch of red on the rug. Frantically, she turned on the lamp beside the table to reveal the broken amaryllis bud lying beside the pot.

"Oh no. Not this, too. Oh Lord, why do you let these things happen to me? I try to live..."

She gasped audibly.

"If Spencer sees this, he'll start looking around and find the teapot. He'll know what happened and he'll have me put back in Danville. I can't go there again. I've got to hide it! I'd rather wait another year for this to bloom than go back up there!"

She pushed the pot out of view behind the big chair, and thrust the bud into her dress pocket until she could throw it away. The radio cracked with the static of a new storm; each pop of electrical discharge stabbed her brain with flash of light. Dizzy and confused, stumbled into the bedroom and fell stomach-down into the soft feather mattress. She stared blankly, clenching the red bud, the crimson juices flowing out, leaving pale reddish trails on the yellow chenille bedspread. Her mind alternately raced and stalled in random misfires of synaptic connections: *kitty... takers... Wilmaareyouhome... pokeweed ... rain ... rock ... hurt ... black ...*

That's right, Flonnie, go to sleep. Sleep deep and still where no one not even her can find you. Here's your chance to be free of her once and for all. Sleep, sleep, my dear, among the beautiful flowers and soft church music...

Spencer entered through the kitchen door and heard the radio popping and crackling. The storm had arrived full force and he ran into the front room to turn the radio off.

"Flonnie, didn't I tell you not to have that thing on if the storm got bad? Where are you, anyway?"

He walked into the bedroom where Flonnie lay.

"Goddamn it, woman, answer me when I call you. You trying to burn the house down? The best thing I could do is send you back to Danville. Is that what you want? Flonnie, are you listening to me? Flonnie?"

DAVID N. RIGEL

How I Lost the Sunbeams

Good people bundle up their belongings and begin the trek that is their life into adulthood. If only the world worked the way it should; you get what you put into it. The ones who usually achieve greatness are the terrible people who ascended from the pits of Hellfire before writhing their way through their mother's loins.

It is highly discouraging to be a bearer of light in a world of perpetual darkness. In fact, good people walk in darkness for so long that we forget what it is like to dance in the sunlight. Why is it that the good are dismantled by the vile, greedy, and corrupt? Oh, what I would give to feel free and full of delight concerning simple life pleasures.

At this point in the war of the oblique-minded, I am contained in bunker beneath the depths. As time goes on, society drifts onward and my presence fades like lacquer on a roll-top desk. I silently hope that my kindness prevails, carrying my wayward, selfless name for longevity to come.

Yet, painted horizons of unjust and cruel intentions splatter over my love and commitment. The cruelty of the word inflicted much pain upon my gentle brow until it permanently furrows, creating a line between the indignant and the shallow. Fearing I have lost what I never gained and yearning for a touch I will never receive; that is the burden, the insufferable strife, that is this life.

Thin, delicate slices upon my wrist for each day I fall into the ascension abyss. Who is to blame for this state of mind? Will there ever come a day when the skies will clear and dementia will dance with delight and my forlorn smile?

I laugh with the utmost honesty but with a heavy heart. I watch as they pillage the land I sought to preserve. The land is a threshold for creativity, where others gather to dazzle and delight behind a mask of self-defiance or self-reliance; a balance not all can achieve.

Who they are is another question in its entirety. They are the ones who inhabit my thoughts when slumber does avoid me. They are the ones who made the yearning for acceptance ooze into my body like an IV drip along a back alley in Mexico. It burns, it gives a bittersweet kiss as it infects my body. The rush of danger fuels my inhibitions.

My journey was to attain my talents with the highest probability of chasing my dreams. Years of others lighting matches and tossing them at the chapel of my desires, challenged my heart to become bold; though my demeanor was frightened. I was not one to boost or declare ambivalence upon those less fortunate of talent. I took everyone into my arms of acceptance and kept the floodgates of my judgment locked tight within my iron chest cavity.

Though, I may have the purest of aspirations and honest intentions, it does not mean others perceive such as strength but, weakness. With one sheep leading the herd away from myself, it does not take long for seven to proceed. The leader is a vicious-red, harlot wolf in immoral sheep's clothing. With a blind eye and lack of a conscience, they lead the simple-minded sheep towards a treacherous path that is paved with lies and intolerance.

With a heavy heart, I reflect upon how I took in an orphan of social status, or lack thereof. The leader of the sheep did not have true friends, only a boyfriend who controlled her every motion as if she was marionette. I saw her worth behind those sea foam eyes but was blinded by naivety. I held onto this belief that if you treat people justly, they will do the same unto you. This experience made me realize that people will use you until you are as dry as the Mohave Desert floor.

As days trickle by like the stubborn drip of the kitchen sink, faith fades away. So, I look to the beginning and I wonder: could I have done anything differently to produce different results? Yet, would I be compromising myself by flipping over the hourglass of time and redoing all the wrongs; redoing my personality and shaping myself into a mold of others' wishes?

Why is the march of independence so lonely? I always stay true to myself but the wolves have bitten and my wounds are infected. Isn't it a conundrum that I wish I was someone else? Because every second is a second that I ache and before I know it . . . six months flickered away like moths to a flame.

I'm still hurting, I'm still bitter, I am still aflame with anger at the wrongdoings/ injustices served upon me by ones who wear plastic smile and craft their pitchforks behind my back. So, I lay in the dark wishing for an end concerning the sufferings of solitude and forged swords illuminating malice . . . Deceit, agony, perseverance, envy, and hushed whispers of brutality.

The answer is forgiveness, right? If I forgive, then I will be set free from this torture. The shackles these hellhound thespians placed upon my wrists dig deep—deep into my past; a reminder that I've never been accepted. The gay one or the wrong one; those are the cards humanity chose to place upon my forehead.

At the ripe, developing age of seventeen, I was shoved into conversion counseling as soon as my grandmother realized I was no longer the grandson she envisioned. In her eyes, I transformed into a demon. I can see the sadness and remorse twinkling in her eyes. In that moment and for every second after, I suddenly became a disappointment to all of those whom I held dear.

I often wonder why those who were sanctioned to love unconditionally chose to enslave those who are different. I vie for my mother's love and my grandmother's acceptance. I suffer wishing I could become anyone else. Yet, no one realizes that I'm aching because there is a mirror of reflection upon their faces. They reflect upon their own selfish whims and desires. My path should be one approved by elders and their self-proclaimed wisdom?

Here is the church, here is the steeple. Open the doors and there are his hypocritical people; deacons of demise, pastors of painstakingly ignorant assumptions, choirs of cancerous candor, altar boys agonizingly becoming brainwashed. The water in the baptismal is tainted with false prophets and debauchery. The scripture becomes misconstrued to prove a selfish point and not a path for walking along this life with the Purest of Sacrifice. Image becomes more important than perspective. Yet, honest intentions do not equal honest hearts.

I want to forgive my family but they are not willing to accept their faults. These people are not willing to understand who I am or the man I have become. Commanded to be compassionate somehow transitioned to condescending acts of homosexual defiance. How is it that my whole life is equal to the epitome of a grain of sand because I was stricken to love those of the same sex? Suddenly, I no longer have a future, only a war with Satan and a curse from God.

I want to hold onto the rays of sunshine that are ahead. I have to do so before I run out of reasons to live. Everyday becomes another day that I lose the fight and the darkness consumes another vessel in my body. I am trying to remain strong but . . . I am fading into nothing but memories and cotton blossoms along the winds of change. I want to be remembered, I want to rise above, and I want to seek a life useful. How can I do so if I cannot see the sunbeams or feel their delightfully warm kisses upon my worn, olive skin?

RHIANNON SPENCER

Achluophobia

The lights flickered once and my eyes glanced at the illuminated ball of glass. Reaching up to give it a tap, there were no further flashes.

“What was that?” my younger brother asked.

He’s always been afraid of the dark. Once when he was a child and I was no more than thirteen, there was a blackout. He had come running into my room, streams of tears flowing from his eyes. I held him close to me as I found a flashlight and some candles for the night.

“It was nothing,” I answered, going back to my History book. “Just a flicker.”

“Is it time to change the bulb?” he asked, giving me a look of discomfort.

“Not really,” I told him. But when I looked up and saw the despair in his eyes, I let out a sigh. “Fine, go get a new bulb.”

He lightly smiled and went to the closet. Opening the door, he plucked one from the stock of light bulbs we had and brought it over. I reached over to the coffee table and took the flashlight I had there, turning it on. I held it up to him as he exchanged the objects. The new bulb was in and a slightly brighter light was covering the room like a protective blanket I could never really feel.

“That’s better,” Kyle said, grinning at the glow.

"Now please," I grumbled. "I need to study. I have a test tomorrow."

"You're always studying," he mumbled.

"Well I'd like to get into college for free. We barely have enough money as it is. I'd not like to think about how much money we wouldn't have if I was paying for the tuition."

I saw him roll his eyes, but he immediately regretted the small action.

"Would you like something to eat?" I asked him.

"It's okay. I can make it myself. You keep studying."

I raised my eyebrows at his statement but didn't push it.

After a couple minutes, Kyle came back in empty handed. "We're out of cheese," he stated.

"Is a ham sandwich okay for tonight?" I questioned.

"We have no bread either," he added.

I sighed and glanced at the clock. "Get your coat on. We'll make a quick run to the store."

He nodded and left the room. Placing a random piece of paper between the two pages I was on, I sat the thick book on the table and got to my feet, heading towards the front door.

Kyle had already slipped on his shoes and was working on the zipper of his thick coat. I had to

help him fasten it. "Go ahead out, but stay in the hallway. If I catch you down the stairs, we're not going," I told him.

He nodded and was gone.

As I shoved my feet into my shoes and reached for my coat, my eyes went to the picture frame on the table. The two people smiling there looked so alien now, though I looked like one of them, Kyle matching the other. It... hurt looking at them, at our resemblance. Every time I passed by, I laid it face down on the table.

And every time Kyle put it back up.

I exited our apartment, leaving it unlocked, and saw Kyle at the top of the steps. Though he followed my order, he was on the edge of disobeying it. I moved to his side and we stepped down the stairs. They ended at the main door and Kyle opened it, skipping outside. I followed, closing it behind me and hearing the automatic lock click.

The air was cold and when the wind blew, it bit at my skin. I tightened the hood over around my hair and reached for Kyle's hand. I found it and he squeezed mine tight, making sure I was there. We started walking in silence.

"Sis?" Kyle said through the peaceful night.

"Hm?" I responded, not bothering to look down at him.

"Do you ever miss them?"

There was a pause and I gave his hand a caress with my thumb. "I don't know who you're talking about."

I left the subject at that.

We made it to the small store a couple blocks over and I grabbed a hand-held carrier to hold our tiny list of items. We only placed two things inside: cheese and bread. There was only one cash register open and we stepped up to it. The woman there was an elderly one, who looked like her skin had outgrown a hundred bodies. Her hair was gray and very thin: I could see her scalp underneath. Her fingers were long and lean, like they would cut you just from the contact of their tips. Her eyes were almost black as night, boring into my skull when she gave me a rotten teeth smile. I pushed Kyle behind me just a tad.

She took our bread and scanned it slowly, "You kids are out late," she said, her voice hoarse and raspy.

I slightly nodded, "Yeah, ran out of sandwich stuff."

A spine shuddering laugh escaped her cracked thin lips. "I guess you're all set then!" she choked out as she scanned the cheese.

"Yeah," I muttered, reaching for my wallet.

She placed the two items in a bag and tied them up. "No charge," she grinned.

"It's okay ma'am, I have mon--"

“No,” she insisted. She stopped to cover her mouth, hacking on something caught in her throat. I saw something slide out over her lip, mucus or maybe even blood, and she merely wiped it on her pants. “It’s on the house,” she added, her eye twitching in what looked like a wink.

“W-well thank you,” I said, reaching for the bag.

Her hands suddenly clasped on my wrist. I gasped and with unnatural strength, she pulled me over the counter in a bent position. “But be warned,” she almost spat. I started struggling, trying to get free from her grip.

“Ma’am,” I gasped hoarsely, “That hurts.”

“Let go!” Kyle exclaimed somewhere behind me, tugging on my coat.

The woman ignored our protests and tightened her grip, making pain ripple through my arm. She pulled me even closer, so close I could smell the disgusting perfume on her body and the bile in my throat. “You’re in terrible danger,” she whispered.

“W-what?”

Her sharp fingers released and I was sent backward, knocking over the metal rack that held Get Well cards. I snatched our groceries and Kyle’s hand, quickly exiting the store.

I didn’t slow down until we were a block away.

“What did she say?” Kyle asked.

I was still so shocked, I almost didn't hear him. "I... I don't know," I lied.

We kept walking and through the silence, Kyle spoke, "Where is everybody?"

I finally looked around and saw absolutely no one. There were no cars, no stores open, no people walking down along with us. The streets were never this... empty. Suddenly the light at the end of the street blew out.

"W-what was that?" Kyle stammered.

The one opposite of it on the other side went black.

"What's happening?" he questioned.

"It's okay," I told him.

The next two in line exploded, glass shattering onto the ground.

Not... not again.

"Kyle," I said, turning to him. On the side behind us, I could see the street lights shutting off as well, locking us in a circle of darkness. "Get your flashlight out," I ordered.

"But--"

"Now!" I almost screamed. He lightly flinched but did as I said, reaching into his pocket and pulling out his small white flashlight. "Turn it on and keep it on yourself." I could hear the shattering of glass and out of the corners of my eyes could see the darkness getting closer.

"I'm scared," Kyle choked out.

"It'll be okay," I lied again. Every nerve in my being was on fire, crackling and singeing my blood. I felt like I couldn't breathe, like my air was being stolen by my fear. Breaking the pattern, all the bulbs shut off except for the one above us.

I could hear the sound now just like the first time: the sound of wings. They tore and ripped through the air like blades, cutting at my eardrums. They surrounded us and threatened me with their presence. For the second time tonight, I felt like I was going to throw up.

Kyle huddled close, me wrapping my arms around him, hoping that maybe, my embrace would protect us.

I don't want to go yet.

"I love you," Kyle whispered.

"I lov--"

The light above us shattered, glass falling into the air around us, into my hair. I thought it would last longer than this.

It was silent.

Kyle started to move. "Don't," I muttered.

He did as I said.

"Keep the light on the ground," I told him in a hushed voice. "Don't look at them."

"Look at who?" he softly asked.

Before I could answer, he was ripped from my arms.

What?

“Kyle!” I screamed into the black.

It’s not... me?

The flashlight hit the ground and through the darkness I could hear it break into pieces, the only source of light destroyed.

“No! You can’t take him! He’s too young! It’s me!” I shrieked. What felt like a soft hand caressed my shoulders, sending chills down my back.

“Not your time,” whispered the unknown being.

“More planned for you,” softly said another.

“Please! Not again! You can’t take him too!” I screamed, tears welling in my eyes. “Give him back. Please,” I begged.

“Not done yet.”

Suddenly all the lights on the street were back on. Tears were running down my cheeks when I looked up.

Kyle was gone, only his mangled white flashlight remained.



Blue Moon of Kentucky BEVERLY FLAGG



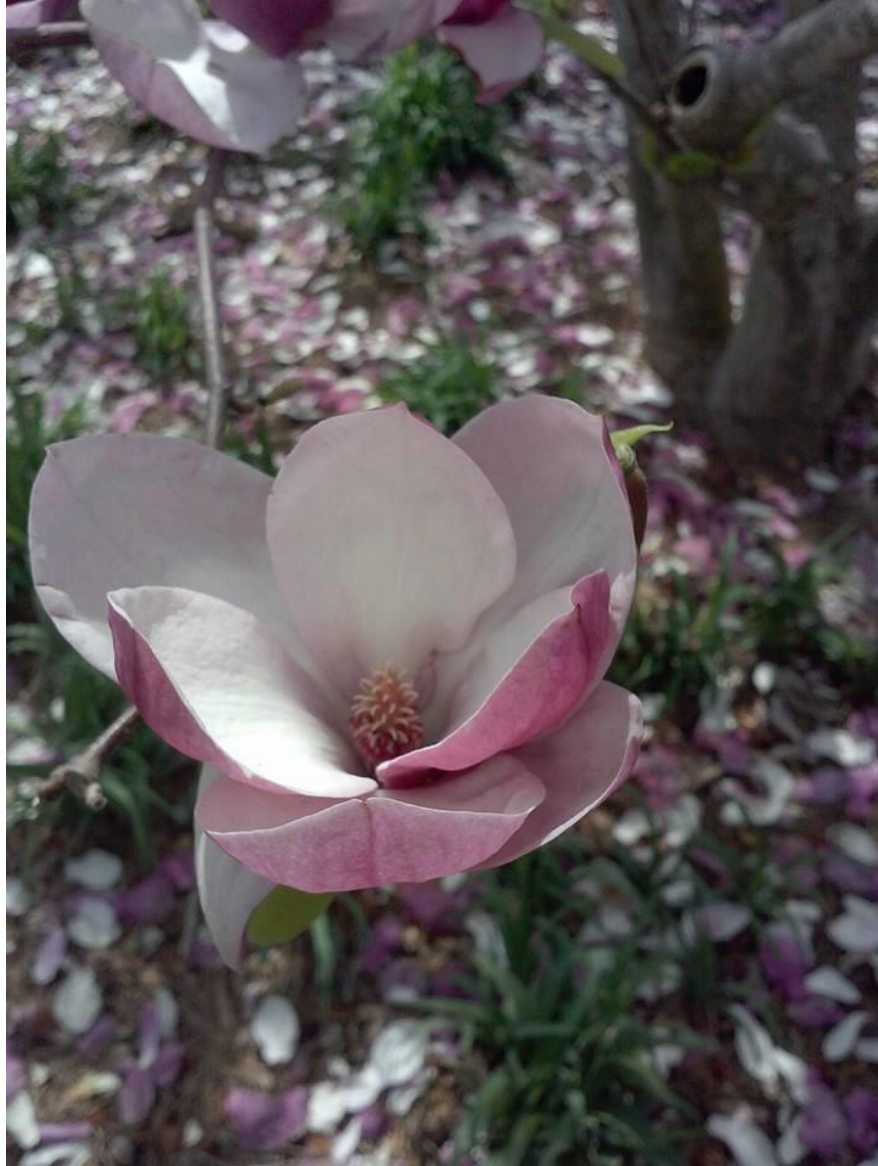
Redbuds, Daffodils, and Creeping Phlox BEVERLY FLAGG



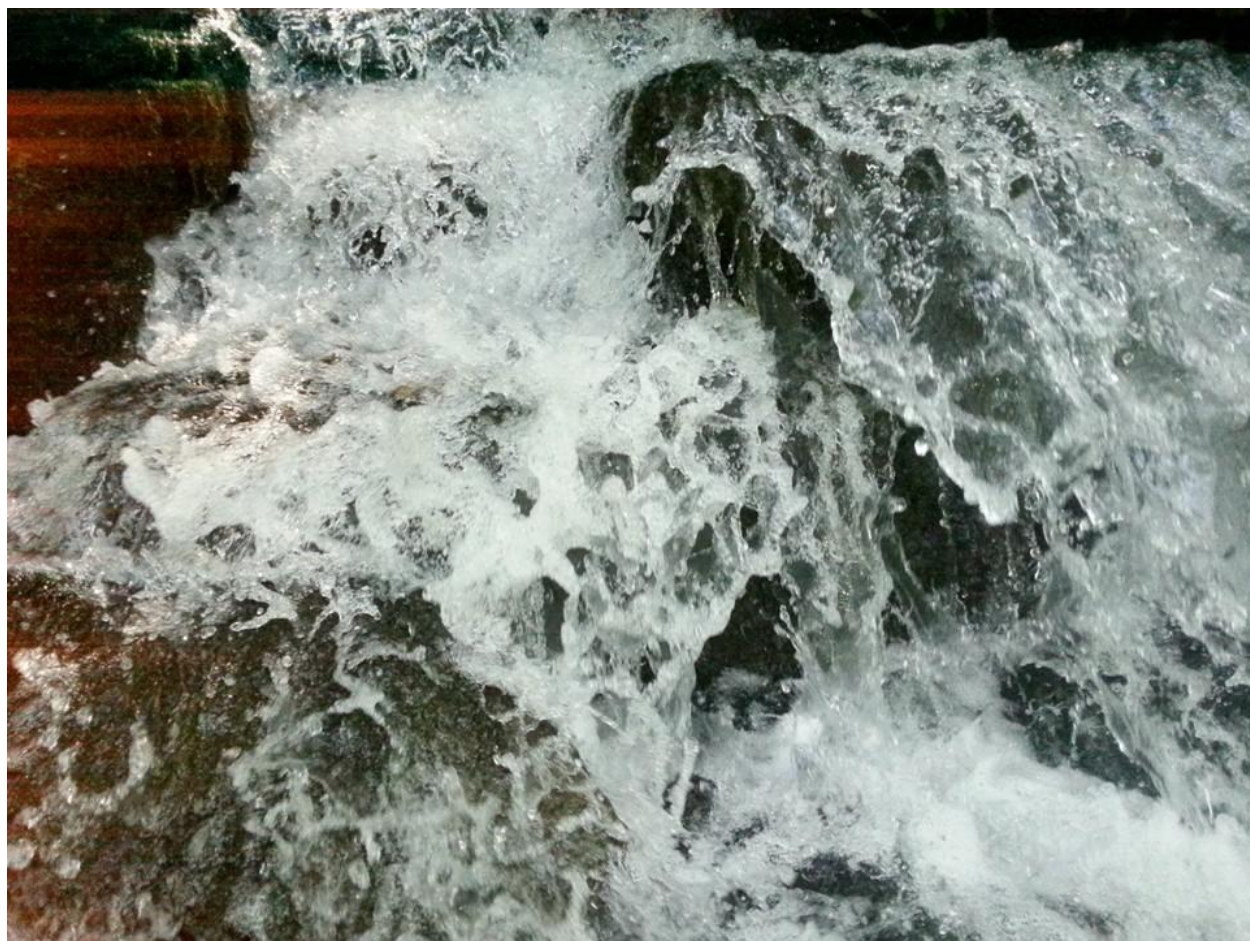
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Untitled BETH GALLAGHER



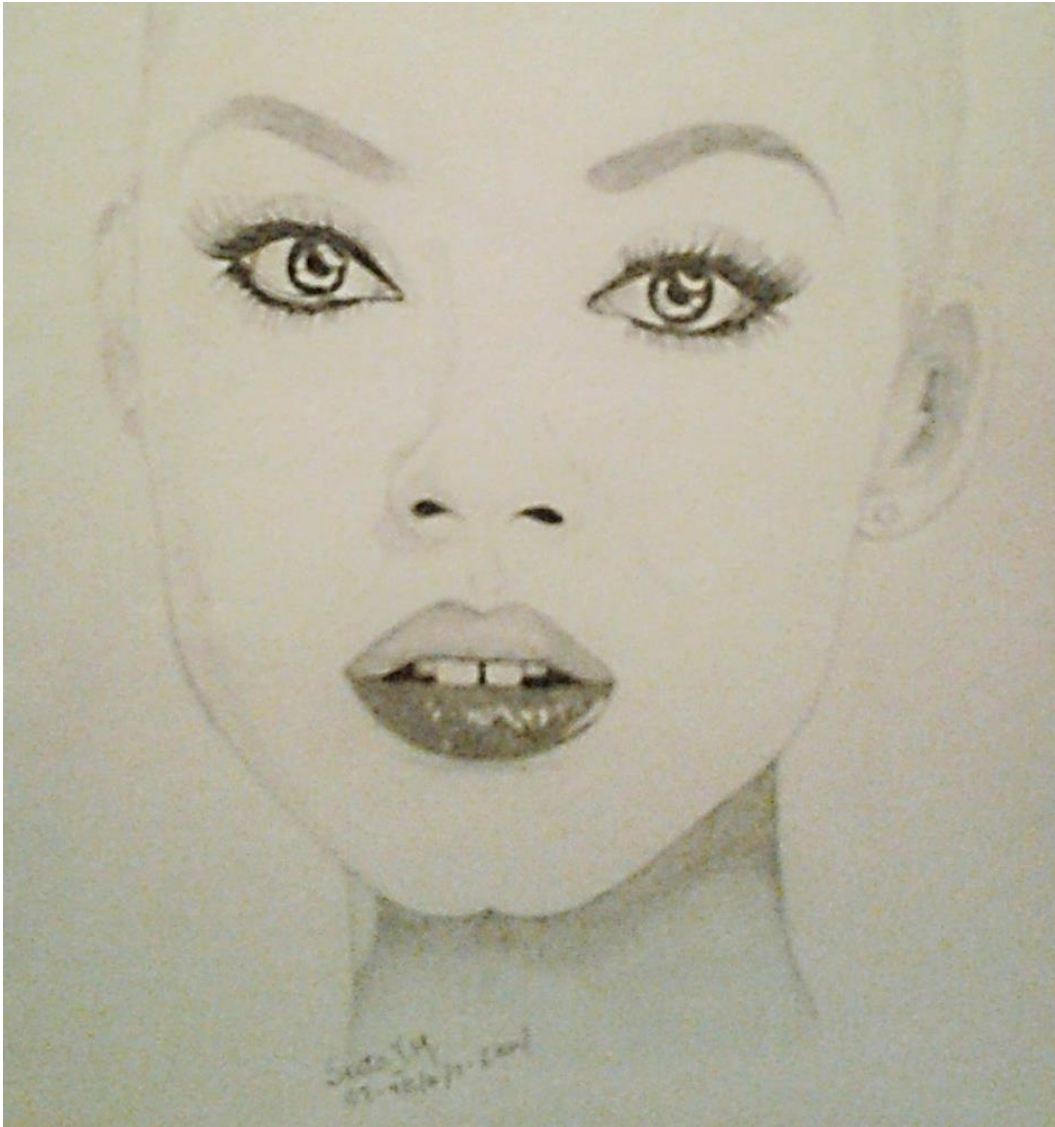
Untitled BETH GALLAGHER



Kentucky Water ELIZA-JANE GOODLETT



Watch This ROGER L. GUFFEY



Inhale SARITA MUNSEY



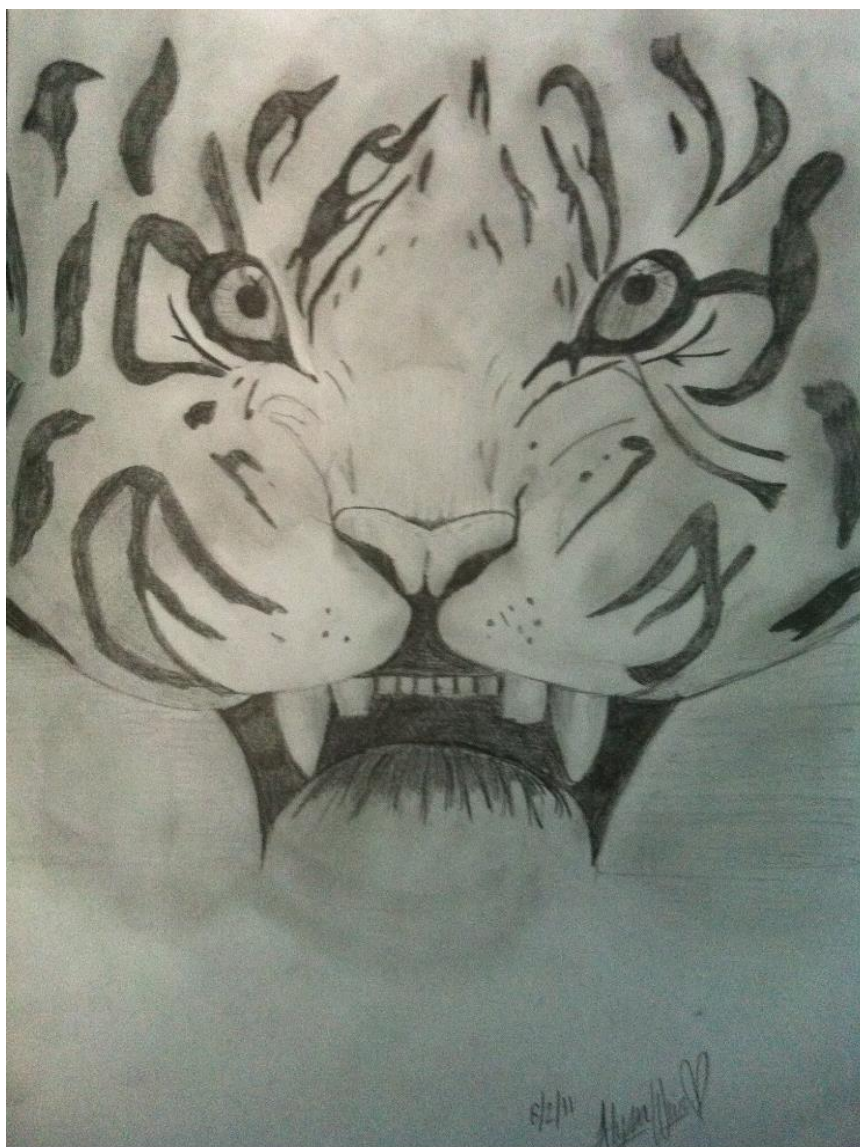
Secrets in the Pantry SARITA MUNSEY



Take It Away GRACE SEARS



Untitled MONTANA VELESQUEZ



Untitled ALYSSA WEIR

Biographical Information/Notes from Contributors:

Don Boes teaches at Bluegrass Community and Technical College. His poetry appears in two recent anthologies: *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. His other books include *The Eighth Continent* and *Railroad Crossing: Poems*. He has been awarded three Al Smith Fellowships from the Kentucky Arts Council.

Gabriel Ellsworth was born in Panama and moved to the U.S. at a young age. To deal with his frustrations in life he started writing poetry at a young age. Currently he lives in Lexington, Kentucky and is studying for a degree in Biology.

Beverly Flagg enjoys drawing and painting whenever she has a chance. When she paints her medium of choice is acrylic. Her inspirations usually come from nature. Kentucky is such a beautiful state inspiration is easy to find. She is originally from Pike County, Kentucky but now resides in Woodford County, Kentucky. She has been creating art since she was six years old when she asked for her first art kit and sketch book

Kyra Fobear lives in Lexington with her three children and her husband. She's getting ready to transfer to University of Kentucky to complete her B.A. in art education, with the goal of one day being a high school art teacher.

Beth Gallagher is a non-traditional student in Medical Information Technology. She and her husband, Eric, live in Frankfort, along with their two cats, Pixel and Lily. Beth is originally from Ohio, and made Kentucky her new home in 2008. Besides photography, Beth quilts, sews, paints, dabbles in pastels, belly dances, and makes some seriously delicious gooey butter cookies.

Mary Gammon has been a BCTC Developmental English adjunct since the spring of 2013. Prior to that, she taught Spanish at BCTC's (then known as LCC) Winchester Campus beginning in 1990-2005, and elementary Spanish at St Agatha Academy and Seton Catholic School, 2006-2013. She resides in Lexington with her husband Kevin; she has 3 kids, Ben, Jacob, and Katie; and two cats, Cocoa and Ladybird. She loves languages, reading fiction, the arts, music and historic homes.

Eliza-Jane Goodlett enjoys taking pictures of nature and animals. She lives in Harrodsburg, Kentucky. She spends her free time reading and playing with her two cats. Whenever she can she tries to snap a picture. She has been interested in photography since she was 14 years old.

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.

JAB is a composer and musician who has been working with juvenile delinquents and marginalized people through the power of music for over twenty years. He has recently returned to college to obtain a certification in Music Therapy.

C. Denise Mabson is a student at Bluegrass Community and Technical College.

Patrick Maloney is a poet and rapper from Lexington, Kentucky. He enjoys a good sense of humor, reading, writing, freestyling, surprising himself, and staring off into space. He has been writing poems for about four years now.

William (Bill) H. McCann, Jr. is a playwright and poet who teaches at Bluegrass Community and Technical College. He lived in Lexington most of his life before moving to Corinth in May 2012.

Mary Moneypenny has written 26 songs in 26 years, setting other people's poems to music, as well as creating original lyrics and melodies. She lived in Illinois, California, and Florida after spending her seventeenth summer in Bolton, Lancashire, England as an exchange student through The Experiment in International Living. She traveled extensively with her husband, children, and parents during twenty years' employment as Reservations Sales/Passenger Service Agent for Pan American World Airways, collecting music (and recipes via *Pan American's Complete Round-The-World Cookbook* (Myra Waldo), as well as writing a jingle for Pan Am.

Sarita Munsey enjoys poetry and art of all mediums. She has had a creative spark since she was 5. At the age of 16, she developed a love for creative writing. Currently Sarita is 25 and goes to Bluegrass Community and Technical College to work on her dream career of being a zoologist.

Savannah Netherton was born in Lexington, Kentucky. Her passions consists of reading, writing, and watching movies. She plans on writing a novel over the next few years while she attends college.

David N. Rigel is a student at Bluegrass Community and Technical College and has taken classes at Eastern Kentucky University in the area of English/Creative Writing. He would like to work in publishing someday.

Ryan Rivard is a student at Bluegrass Community and Technical College. About his poem, "Essence" he writes, "I was in a dream this morning, a perfect place. A whispering voice said to me "wake my love, it's time to go". When I opened my eyes I was in my bed alone, however, I felt a lingering love in my room, an essence of something that had been lost. I wrote her (my ghostly lover) this poem."

Grace Sears is inspired to capture the world through her eyes, and wishes to capture everything around her. She was born and raised in Lexington, Kentucky and her passion for photography started her senior year of high school. She is specializing in commercial, fashion, stylized sessions, and weddings. Shoots are featured-on location and shot with natural lighting. Outside of school and photography she enjoys gardening, hiking, and playing volleyball.

Kathy Skinner is a married mother of three grown children and grandmother to six. She is 61 and now going for a college degree. She lives in Georgetown, KY, originally from Central New York. She sat down one night and just started writing poetry. Her poem, "Memories How They Haunt Me" is about child abuse. Her poem "The Voice" is a response to her feelings when not being able to communicate with a seriously ill family member, so instead of speaking out she writes.

Rhiannon Spencer is from Winchester, Kentucky, and enjoys writing, drawing and painting. She lives with her father and sister and has been writing since she was around 13. Her favorite types of novels are romance, supernatural and non-fiction.

Tim Staley was born in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1975. He completed a Poetry MFA from New Mexico State University in 2004. His chapbooks are available for purchase at the Grandma Moses Press online store. Journal publications include *Border Senses*, *Canary*, *Chiron Review*, *Circumference*, *Coe Review*, *Malpais Review*, *Magnapoets*, *RHINO: The Poetry Forum*, and *Sin Fronteras*. His hobbies include thinking, eating taquitos, and waiting. He lives with his wife and daughter in Las Cruces, New Mexico.

Montana Velesquez is a student at Bluegrass Community and Technical College. About the photograph: "This is a picture of my daughter standing in the aftermath of my mother's devastating house fire . . . The baby doll in her hands was one of the first baby dolls she ever had, and amongst all of the rubble, it is what she found. Although it pulls at my heart, it reminds me to never take a single thing for granted . . . because tomorrow truly is not promised, and to appreciate all that we have."

Alyssa Weir enjoys sketching during her free time. Although she doesn't sketch very often anymore, any free time she has she spends on her art. She is a pre-vet student and hopes to one day own her own vet clinic.

