

Bluegrass Accolade

BCTC Literary Journal - Issue No. 3



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2010

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BCTC “In Your Words” Poetry Contest

Contest Coordinator: Teresa Tope

Contest Judge: Christina Lovin

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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.

2009-2010 Arts in Focus Literary Arts Subcommittee

Chair: Maureen Cropper **Members:** Joe Anthony, Charles Bagley, Melinda Baker, Angie Davis, Rae Ann Gill, James B. Goode, and Tammy Ramsey.

DON BOES

Special Sneak Preview Pantoum

Two thumbs up from America's top critics.
An awesome masterpiece not to be missed.
Riveting entertainment for the entire family.
A terrific blend of comedy and passion!

An awesome masterpiece not to be missed.
Provocative, glamorous, lush, and romantic.
A terrific blend of comedy and passion!
Daring, explosive, rollicking, and funky!

Provocative, glamorous, lush, and romantic.
Truly original! Irresistable! A pure delight!
Daring, explosive, rollicking, and funky!
One of the decade's most spellbinding films!

Truly original! Irresistable! A pure delight!
Riveting entertainment for the entire family!
One of the decade's most spellbinding films!
Two thumbs up from America's top critics!

DON BOES

Three Geese

On their way to the bogus pond
three geese swing over crowded soccer fields.

Try to distinguish one goose from two other fliers,
the sound of one violin from a long row of instruments,

one pin from the dozens stuck in your mother's pincushion.

The breeze still matters to that trio of travelers
and so does the temperature

and the clock of the earth

while between the white lines
many, many, many games are in progress

contested over acres of subdivided meadows,

and then come the snacks
individually wrapped

and devoured in the backseat

DON BOES

Lessons I Learned While Unemployed

Crowd the coffee table with coffee.
Pay a visit to every booth in the bar.

According to lots of presidents and pro athletes
hardships are in fact opportunities.

Scan the local swimming pool
for bumblebees in distress
and old high-school friends
who might also bother the surface,
buzzing, with something like panic.
A simple net at the end of a long handle
often does the trick.

Sometimes I am not bored enough.
The phone lines are open.

All my best ideas
happen to be your ideas.
All I require are your last four digits.
Will you stay for dinner?
I have microscopic fish to fry.

DON BOES

Balloon

Near the tracks, feral cats scatter.
Plastic bottles glitter and flash
and yesterday's gripes give way
to base hits and strikeouts
and ladders against houses and picnics
assembled with warm wine. The greening

of the grid all over again. The season
is like one of those shiny unreadable
balloons snagged in the delicate branches
of a dogwood. What I am afraid of
is the ground and how eagerly

it rushes to make my acquaintance.
The fractured ground

where I run my seven-mile loop
slower every year. The ground
where mounds of rubble
open for extended hours. The ground
where the lottery is news. Where
my father and mother and brother

are buried. Roller coasters and bulldozers
draw blood. Rivers flood
and too many people marry.
Most accidents happen at home,
wherever that is. I prefer winter.

The splendid lack of movement.
And the promise of spring.

DON BOES

On The Anniversary of the Beginning of the War

At least we can journey to the mall.
At least we can make the commitment
to think less about thinking less.

In the food court, the menus
facilitate our meaningful decisions.
And when the sun retreats beyond the bypass

we can't be bothered. We celebrate
by consuming and we grieve the same way
and what we can't consume we pretend to consume.

In my weaker moments, I am partial to devilled eggs.

The concourse is not to be feared.
Those mannequins, although they do not
resemble us, are not our enemies.

JOANIE BROWN

Advice for the Restless Soul

The whispering pines, the scents of summer, the sunset on the bay
Pervade my dreams on a winter's eve; like the tiger stalks her prey.
I long for the sounds of the ocean; the kiss of the evening breeze
I return again to my childhood days; to live my life with ease.
The songs of the ancient poets fall silent on this earth
Each man will toil relentlessly; from the moment of his birth.
God is a myth, a story, to the wretched human race.
Acquire more in seven days, but never slow your pace.
How foolish we appear to Him, how insolent, how lame.
The beauty of creation; reduced to just a game.
Time's heavy hand will quiet the soul, we reflect on yesteryear.
We judge, we change, renew the heart with hopes that we can hear.
The laughter of a baby, the voice of dear old friends;
then pray that God will guide us until the very end.
The whispering pines, the scents of summer, the sunset on the bay,
Take time my friend to savor life, for we're given just a day.

JAMES B. GOODE

Leasing Ideas

I'm leasing my ideas to you
with conditions.
of course,
careful attention required--
they may fly by
like the white stitches
on the centerline of the highway. . .
You and I have a covenant of quiet enjoyment
but note
all this has been carefully phrased,
dipping toward you with tilted wings,
each adjective and adverb
gliding one breath closer to the truth.
There is meaning
in the varied patterns and shapes,
even behind waterfalls
where colonies of ferns
green and alive
with moisture
dip in perfect dives
toward the river.
Meaning in currents reflected on the stone walls,

The light blowing across rough surfaces. . .

There is really no charge

(maybe one dollar to keep it legal)--

just a pause for consideration

no non-emergency notice-to-enter clauses

under all conditions

there is an opt out clause for each of us

but you can only make improvements

with my permission

without regard

to time

place

and circumstance

these ideas

may be assigned/sublet

ad infinitum.

JAMES B. GOODE

Has Elvis Left the Building?

"The passage of time is the enemy of all investigations."

Now

after over an hour in the examining room

I can hear the low din of Elvis the gastroenterologist

arguing with his nurse

over the misplacement of a blood order

she denies ever seeing it

the poor sap whose blood it is waits next door

twiddling his thumbs

and looking at the stains on the wall

where nurses have made bank shots

with the sanitary caps from the digital thermometer

I've counted all my money

cleaned my billfold of old business cards

tossed bits of notes with long since forgotten messages and names

I lift my head and ear like a deer sensing danger

Elvis' voice is fading,

moving away into the mysterious place

behind the door leading to his green room

I yearn for him to come in

like a hunk of burning love

and give me the answers

but now I panic
I think he's retreated to his bus
parked outside the clinic
where his women are
so I place my ear against the cool, blonde wood
of the inner sanctum door
all I can hear is the faint rustling of paper
I decide the investigation
into my demise
is about to end abruptly
I've had it
now I really don't care what is wrong with me
so I jerk the open the door
and stare into the startled, sanctimonious face
of his battle-axe nurse,
shouting
"Has Elvis left the building
or what?"

JAMES B. GOODE

The Poem is a Prisoner I

The poem is a prisoner
encased in razor wire
ideas sanitized
deloused
words all lined up in neat rows
neatly clipped
they're in here and can't go anywhere
trapped in their own little meters
what's said is said--
the sentence is in
someone will try to read between the lines
and conjecture
and speculate
the poem may even claim it's not guilty
but at the end of the day
the door will slam shut
and it will be left alone
on its spare bunk
to contemplate its sins
to go over and over what it did
and to wonder
how its life might have been different
if it had just said it another way.

AMBER JACKSON

Crucifictitious Cruxes

feet shuffling
and here we come!
marching like good soldiers,
to the beat
of your nails on tabletops
with our uniformed
heads and toes
brandished by
our iron-on crucifixes
and morbid curiosities,
intermingling with
rosewood karmic beads
dangling mindfully down
our breastplates.
we have come!
so that they may find rest
in death and breath, alike
clouded lens call for
weepy handkerchiefs
and ants' armies,
one by one,
stepping on
stones brought down
from babylon's skyscrapers,
to reach higher mind
constructed of readied ashes
free-falling from pillared incense
smelling sweet like india
and attracting us all.

AMBER JACKSON

Anti-Mercurial Matters

words finally failed me
having depleted descriptive resources
when it comes overflowing
from my lips
how much i love you
or what i absolutely feel
it is far from diminishing
instead ever-increasing momentarily
surpassing the english language
inspiring me to learn a new tongue
and speak sweet exotic murmurs.

AMBER JACKSON

Eons of Adventure

thoughts drift to climbing
cliffs' faces with bared hands clenching tight, knuckles white
as though we've grabbed at ghosts
and maybe we have in the spirited outdoors
stretching climatic history over miles and millennia
christening old traditions with ropes of technicolor
and clips with no rust
i commence my ascent, reaching for chains that bind
my body to this rock
aged, yet with built strength from decades of withstanding
forces both natural and not
never forgetting the ones who pierced and bolted
those that came before but here i am today
clinging and clutching building a strength of my own
in enduring endearing pain carrying pleasure
like buckets of water over my shoulders weighing me down
just enough for the challenge, stopping to dissect route
analytically picking holds best for gripping
no chance of slipping though i know i won't fall
still determined to stretch legs and stand on my own
reminders of life and inherent needs for control
independen on others, i do this alone with my mind
reasonably reassured that you're watching my every reach
and pull, climbing stairs to the astral sky
blinding enlightenment awaiting and peace in the making
inhaled breath of filled smoky lungs
calming exhale is meditation
i go for the next at increased pace instinctively running rough hands
across smooth stone, eyes closed and i've found the fit
fingers rigidly respectful keeping close to the wall
empathizing with blinded men reading faces, seeing in mind's eyes
is how i climb finding footholds, rubber soles of shoes on toes squeezed
now i swing and play
descending deciding only to rise again
feeling fearlessly for new paths less worn

the abstract like painting a perfect portrait of nothing
musing of ease far too soon as the ache seeps up arm's length
radiating around radius and ulna alike
you take it in strides to allow rest for fretting forearms
two seconds and i am off again on a tangent toward the tops of trees
feet protesting at heights undefined and i find myself at the end of my rope
reflectively dazed and lungs crashing
systematic systolic pumps blood to nervous branches shaking
rock hard overexertion and in that moment i see self-worthy science
when the heat in your voice ringing upward approval
melts me into black pupils' reflection
and it appears i am the man in the moon.

ROGER L. GUFFEY

Through a Glass Darkly, Then Face to Face

Everyone knew that Hattie Glass was a witch, so when she died, feelings of grief in the Alex Valley were tinged with a general sigh of relief, especially from the children whose parents had told them that Hattie stole little babies and baked them into pies. An elderly black-shrouded spinster whom many thought to be over a hundred years old, Hattie saw little of the people in the valley unless someone ran into her rummaging through the woods for herbs and roots to make the potions she used for God knows what.

No one could recall the last time she went to town. She preferred to survive on the vegetables she grew and an occasional rabbit or squirrel she charmed to its doom in one of her snares. No one knew about any source of income she may have had, but the mailman sporadically delivered mysterious packages from faraway places. Even he did not dare to confront her face to face. So he would leave the packages near the front door, ring the bell, and hotfoot it back off the dilapidated porch. Sometimes a scraggly, withered hand would emerge from the door to retrieve the package, but usually the package would lie there until Hattie could fetch it inside under cover of darkness.

Her house lay in a shallow swale that people had dubbed "The Hainted Bottom." Even before Hattie's arrival strange apparitions and creepy goings-on had been reported there for years: a pig that had escaped the butcher's cleaver was seen to run along the top of a rail fence

during the full moon, a young black man who had been lynched for some peccadillo would hitch a ride in the back of a pickup truck: and the nearest neighbors saw and heard piteous wails at night. Some folks claimed to have seen Hattie conjuring up spirits to join in the satanic revelry. One old man known for his drinking habits swore he saw Hattie bewitch a table and make it walk across the room, though most people discounted this story as the hallucinations of a drunk.

Such a character was bound to generate controversy, gossip, and feelings of distrust among the community. A few of the older residents in the valley recalled that when she moved there as a young lady, Hattie was quite attractive with long dark tresses, beautiful pale skin. She wore a dark dress with a high bustle that had gone out of style in the last century. Elmore Hancock remembered seeing her parents move her into the house, but no one had seen them return for a visit after the last load of furniture, which included a large steamer trunk, was carried inside. Neighbors who visited to welcome her recounted that her cool, but polite, behavior seemed nervous and suspicious, as though she was concealing something. There were no second visits.

To a community of folks on a first name basis with poverty and need, it seemed obvious that this well-to-do woman was hiding some kind of treasure in her house. Stories of money, gold, and jewels began to percolate through the community, with each teller adding something of even greater worth than the last until, for all intents and purposes, Hattie secreted the Holy Grail itself on her premises. But the only thing anyone saw her bring out of the house besides

herself was what appeared to be a long handled silvered mirror which she seemed to use to primp her hairstyle.

One determined young gold-digger, Otis Hurt, decided to relieve Hattie of her treasure by courting her until he could gain entrance to her house. He began to leave bouquets on her porch and send her candy through the mail until, finally, he received an invitation to join her for tea one afternoon. The tea was indeed a short affair; it had hardly started when an ashen-faced Otis stumbled out the door and fell off the porch. When Hattie's neighbors came to his rescue, they inquired about her house and habits.

Clearly shaken, he replied, "She told me that I had liver cancer and would die within a week." And sure enough, he died five days later.

Outraged by what was clearly the work of the devil, the community began to rally for expelling this she-devil from their midst. But with the disposition of a doctor performing an autopsy, Hattie informed them that she had no intention of leaving her home on account of the unfortunate death of a local resident, particularly since she had thought she was doing him a favor by giving him warning to get his affairs in order. When pressed for details on how she knew about Otis's cancer, she replied matter-of-factly, "I know the signs." Though unsatisfied with her answers, people lost their resolve to force her out when she stared them down, her black eyes burning through the wispy fingers of her breath in the cold November air.

But Hattie after mysterious letters written in elegant penmanship predicting severe illness and even deaths began to appear in the community the locals redoubled their efforts to ostracize Hattie. The letters appeared in the mailboxes of those people who had walked by Hattie's place when she was sitting on her porch fixing fix her hair. Invariably, trips to the doctor confirmed the warnings of severe illness; those unlucky enough to receive a death notice learned to make their funeral arrangements. The uncanny accuracy of these predictions convinced even the most skeptical that Hattie was a witch who had cast spells on these poor unfortunates. Fearing some supernatural reprisal, folks chose to leave her alone and the letters eventually ceased.

At last her isolation became so complete that the locals deduced her demise only from a pile of packages that accumulated outside her door. After a week, the foul stench of decaying flesh oozed from the crevices of the house and I, as the medical examiner, was called to verify what everyone already had guessed: the witch was dead. The sheriff and I found her shriveled body, clutching a worn Bible in her left hand and her notorious mirror covered with shiny black tape in her right, lying on an overstuffed couch. Vials of strange potions and ancient books with magical-sounding titles cluttered the tables and shelves. As a forensic scientist, I later determined that the "eyes of newts" vials contained nothing but dolls' eyes, and the leathery "wing of bat" jar held only pieces of an old shoe. In fact, although the witches' "ingredients" of her containers bore a passing resemblance to the names on their labels, they were actually fakes.

The house was furnished with antiques and the fine accoutrements one might expect to find in a castle from Europe. The mantelpiece featured an ornate coat of arms bearing a griffin and a unicorn atop a carved gilt-framed oval mirror with the phrase *Homo Unus Facies Verus* inscribed below it. In the bedroom we found a baroque canopy bed and a matching vanity lined with bottles of perfumes and cosmetics. At the foot of the bed was an old-fashioned trunk with a domed lid and rusty iron straps holding it together with a velvety maroon spread partially covering it.

When the sheriff went to his car to call for an ambulance, I gently removed the mirror and Bible from her dead hands. The quick-silvered mirror was a trifle dark, but it still presented a clear image of my face. The Latin phrase from the large mirror over the mantel was also embossed in the tracery on the handle. The mirror intrigued me, and I made a mental note to ask the sheriff if I might keep it for my daughter. The Bible contained a picture of what appeared to be her family when she was a little girl posed before what might have been a Scottish castle. As I thumbed through the ragged volume, a folded scrap of ratty parchment fell onto the floor. I laid the Bible on the sofa arm, retrieved the paper, and carefully unfolded it to reveal an odd poem written in Old English script:

The inky mirror you hold now in your hand
Possesses a power mortals cannot understand.
For it can see the truth revealed in the by and by.
It sees the sick and dying, knows the reason why.
It serves all God's souls, with one master at a time,
But his is the soul whose pain it cannot divine
You who first grasp this mirror in your hand,

Will see other's flaws, but not your own understand
You cannot reveal the mirror's secrets for love or purse
You must struggle alone with the mirror's curse
Until the day your dying eyes lose their shine
When the mirror a new damned soul entwines.

I read the poem again and tried to decipher its garbled verses. I looked at the mirror again. None of it made sense, so I continued to ponder the odd imagery until the sheriff returned to the room. To my surprise, he said, "Doc, I bet your little girl would love that mirror. Hattie had no heirs, and I won't tell anybody if you take it to her."

Relieved that I would not have to make an awkward case for taking the mirror, I mumbled a "Thank you" and placed the mirror along with the parchment scrap into my medical bag.

II

The local folks were glad to see out-of-town collectors buy most of the estate as they considered it good riddance to blight on their community. My wife and I fell in love with the old steamer trunk and were determined to have it as a hope chest for our young daughter. The opposing bidder drove the price higher than I thought reasonable, but my stubbornness and two hundred dollars finally claimed my prize.

The auctioneer not opened the trunk prior to its sale. We finally picked the lock and raised the lid. Inside we found pieces of paper bearing incantations and weird recipes. We put these inscriptions into a smaller box. I wanted to add to the romance of the mirror and also to

cover the questionable way I had come by it, so I had carefully cleaned the mirror and hid it in the trunk. When my daughter, Janice, entered the room and opened the chest, I handed her the mirror and said “Well, look here! A mirror fit for a princess! How do you look in a princess’s mirror?”

Janice looked at her reflection and replied, “Why, I look perfectly natural in it. Where are all the Prince Charmings when you need one?”

We all laughed and took turns gazing at ourselves in the dark surface of the mirror. Janice put the mirror back in the trunk, and my wife, Gloria, and I carried it to the garage until we had time to refinish it. I returned to my schedule as a family doctor, delivering babies, binding wounds, treating fevers and, of course, occasionally serving as the official medical examiner.

In early April, Gloria was on vacation from school teaching, and a warm breeze was blowing through the countryside, so she decided it was time to restore the trunk. We carried it out of the garage and opened the lid to find the mirror still there. I picked it up and laid it on a shelf above the garage door. We used noxious chemicals to strip away the peeling paint and varnish accumulated over generations. In two days, we managed to reveal light oak panels and dark metallic bands decorated with fine tracery of flowers and vines. We discussed how we could refurbish the trunk.

Gloria exclaimed, "I think I have it! We'll stain the wood a burnished mahogany and paint the metal a flat black. Then I'll paint the designs with metallic gold. It will still retain an antique look, but fit in with any décor Janice has when she is on her own."

"Yes, dear, that sounds quite nice. Make out a list of what you'll need and I'll bring it home tomorrow so you can start."

"Actually, I have enough stain from my last project to do the wood. I'll need a quart of flat black and a pint of the gold. Oh, I'll need some artist's brushes and some turpentine to clean up with, too."

With a lot of elbow grease and help from Janice, over the next two weeks Gloria and Janice transformed the trunk into a collector's item. When they were done, they had placed the trunk in front of the garage so I could not drive the car inside when I came home and ran out of the house to pose proudly by their work. Gloria handed me the camera and I shot several pictures of them with the trunk from different angles. A few gold flowers were still sticky, so I said, "We should leave it in the garage until it dries completely. Let me clear a little space."

As I pushed the lawn mower to one side and reshuffled garden tools, I happened to see the mirror I had laid on the shelf a few weeks before. Smiling, I turned the mirror toward them on the driveway beside the trunk, shouting, "Let's see how it looks in our enchanted mirror!"

I looked over the mirror as they primped and preened themselves and oohed and aahhed over their work. Then I shifted my gaze to look directly the back of the mirror and

nearly dropped it at what I saw. Viewed through the mirror, the trunk showed all its flaws and imperfections. I rubbed my eyes and checked again to see the same thing. When I looked over the top of the mirror, the trunk appeared in its new finery.

“Hey, Honey, would you come here for a sec?” I called to Gloria.

“Sure. What’s up?” she asked as she walked to where I stood.

“Hold the mirror like this and look at it.” I reversed the mirror and asked, “What do you see?”

“Well, silly, I am going out on a limb here, but it looks like me!”

I leaned in and looked with her, and sure enough, , both of our reflections stared back at us. “I guess I’m working too hard. Here, help me put this trunk inside for the night.”

I ate dinner so distractedly quiet that Gloria asked, “Honey, do you feel all right? You’re awfully quiet. Bad day? “

“No, not really,” I muttered. I wanted to say something about the weird hallucination I had seen in the mirror but I couldn’t mouth the words. After dinner, I went back to the garage and held the mirror up to the trunk: same result as before. I looked through the mirror at the right front fender of the car where I had hit a tree in a snowstorm two years ago. The repaired fender look as good as new, but when I turned the mirror around, it clearly showed the crumpled metal. I whistled for the dog, “Here Rex, come here, boy!”

The family Labrador bounced into view. As a pup, he had broken his right front leg, but the vet had set the bone so well that the healed leg showed no sign of injury. But when I looked at the dog through the mirror and I saw the broken bone as clear as an x-ray. I began to ponder the true potential of this mirror and wonder why no one else could see its effects. Suddenly, Gloria ran out of the house crying, "Honey, come quick! Janice is very sick! She's throwing up and hurting in her side!"

I raced into the house, absentmindedly still carrying the mirror. Janice had collapsed into a pool of vomit on the bathroom floor and was barely conscious. I knelt beside her and felt her forehead to find her burning up with fever. As if in a dream, I stared at her right side through the mirror and saw her inflamed appendix on the verge of rupture. I laid the mirror on the vanity, loaded Janice into the car, and rushed her to the hospital for an emergency appendectomy.

Of course, I could check on her progress every day but, after a long day of several patients, I came home to rest while Gloria was staying with Janice. Gloria had laid the mirror on the dresser and I picked it up. I sat on the side of the bed, contemplating the meaning of the poem I had never shared with anyone. I wondered if the episode with Janice had been a fluke, so I decided to take the mirror to the office to see if I could diagnose patients' medical problems.

The results astonished me. I would joke with patients that this was a poor man's x-ray as I looked at them through the mirror. Then I would let them see their own reflections in the

mirror to see it was just a mirror. I could see ulcers, infections, cancer, heart problems, blood clots, or any ache or pain. I soon learned that the mirror proved invaluable in discovering congenital defects in children. I was able to save many children who were too young to describe their pains because I could diagnose their illnesses so quickly. Then I had an epiphany. Hattie was not hexing people; she was actually diagnosing them! That was why only people who walked in front her house where she could see them had received the letters. When people avoided walking by the house, the letters had stopped.

With my secret new diagnostic tool, I was able to see a lot more patients now and my income ballooned beyond my wildest dreams. Before long, our family moved into a custom-built mansion on a large farm outside the town. My reputation grew, and the next year several large city hospitals approached me about joining their staff. I really liked the quiet simplicity of the country life, especially for rearing Janice, and deep down, I feared that my secret might come to light, so I declined their offers. I did agree to offer my services as a consultant for really difficult cases.

III

The power of the mirror had engendered me with an unforgiving and arrogant attitude. I had become sort of a medical celebrity over several states and that served to create in me a belief of my own omnipotence. I appeared on television talk shows where my following increased dramatically. When other doctors consulted me, I began to see signs of suspicion and

envy. At the same time, a gnawing paranoia came over me, and I retreated into my own little world so I could jealously and constantly guard the mirror. Janice had gone away to college, but I spent as little time as possible with Gloria, for I did not even trust her. By now, I had interpreted some of the verse on the old paper and came to understand that I alone could use the mirror's power because I was the first one to touch it after Hattie had died. It was my secret and only I could make it work its magical spell.

They say that a doctor who treats himself has a fool for a patient. I had enjoyed good health my entire life and followed guidelines for diet and exercise and I avoided harmful habits. The demands and stresses of my busy schedule began to take its toll, but I was oblivious to the early signs of problems. A random pain here, a bit of weight loss there and a few episodes of neurological symptoms were dismissed as too much stress. But the problems escalated and their cumulative effect made me look emaciated and sick.

I made appointments with several doctors and specialists, but none could diagnose my illness. So now I had to become the fool of the proverb and try to use the mirror to diagnose myself. The veil lifted from the last un-deciphered verses on the paper. I could look at my limbs through the mirror, but no matter how I tried I could not position to examine my torso, back or head. Trying to look through the mirror into another mirror failed to work and because of the curse, I could not let anyone else use the mirror to diagnose me. Now I understood: I was the one the mirror could not diagnose.

Taunted by the mocking mirror, I tried to smash it with a hammer, but no blow could dent its shiny dark surface. I threw it into a roaring fire, but even that failed to have an effect. Apparently, the mirror was indestructible. All I could do was to tape over the surface with black tape so I did not have to see my withering self in it.

The first sign of insanity is the loss of a sense of time. That is true, for after I realized what was going on, I was not sure of the sequence of events that landed me here in a sanitarium, or how long I have been here. My condition continues to worsen and, although I spend hours poring over obscure medical texts, I am no closer to finding the problem. Gloria visits infrequently because it pains her too much to see me in this condition. The past and present meld into some disjointed jigsaw puzzle whose picture shifts continuously around a faint memory of my life before I found the mirror.

I sit rocking back and forth, muttering the last lines of the curse:

*Until the day your dying eyes lose their shine
When the mirror a new damned soul entwines.*

AMANDA KELLEY

The Original Singles Collection

I make my way down the walk to my car without any sense of accomplishment. I have just rented a three-bedroom house, which normally would be cause for celebration, but I have been a property manager long enough to know that these tenants aren't going to last their lease term. They're too different, I could gather that from spending the hour with them it took to collect the first month's rent, sign the lease and give them the keys.

There are three of them, a couple and a single guy. The couple, Mickey and Mallory, seem like a mismatch to me. He's too good-looking for his own good and she's older and draws a disability check. I give their relationship four months, tops. And then there's Owen. The whole time we were getting things squared away he was aloof and barely made eye contact, except when he was talking about music.

"It's okay if our band practices here, right?" he had asked me.

"I guess. As long as you don't play too late at night the neighbors shouldn't give you any trouble. I play too, so it doesn't bother me."

He brightened when he asked, "What do you play?"

“Guitar and bass,” I said. “Right now I’m playing bass in a three-piece band with some friends of mine.”

“What kind of music do you play?”

“It’s hard to put a finger on it, but our guitar player mostly uses an acoustic and we have a female vocalist.”

“That’s really cool,” he said. “I’ve always wanted to play with a girl.” From the expression on his face I didn’t know if he was hitting on me or making fun of me.

“We should play together sometime,” he said.

“Yeah, sure, that’d be cool,” I said with no intention of ever doing so.

•

I pretend to adjust a knob on my amp as I turn my back to the audience and crouch down to take another swig from my flask. I doubt anyone notices, and as the night goes on I will care less and less if anyone sees me drinking or not. This coffeehouse is not really our scene but it’s the best we can do right now; we haven’t found a venue yet that really suits our band. It’s dark and warm with the smell of fresh-baked cakes and doughnuts lurking under the coffee scent that follows you out the door. The stage is small and so is the crowd, most of them ignoring us as they sip their lattes and talk amongst themselves, but as we move through the

songs in our set the three of us will become engrossed in our music, and it won't matter to us if anyone is listening or not.

•

Having made it a month, I go to collect rent from the new tenants. I see Owen sitting on the front porch drinking a beer and strumming an acoustic guitar.

"How's it going?" he asks. From his slurred speech, this is obviously not his first beer of the evening.

"Do you guys have the rent?" I ask getting straight to the point.

"Yeah, Mallory has it, she's inside," he says and watches me as I walk inside. His stare makes me uncomfortable and I don't know if he is trying to intimidate me or if he's just drunk. I get the rent from Mallory and leave.

"Thanks," I say on my way out.

"*No, thank you,*" Owen says sarcastically. I look at him quizzically and keep walking, get in my car and leave.

•

After half a bottle of E&J I'm still playing all right and practice is going well. We finished a new song today and it feels good to be writing, creating. It came easy; too, all the

parts just fell into place. It has a country feel to it and reminds me of the hills and hollers back where my family comes from. We called it “My Father’s Home.”

There’s a place I would go

Where the rocks are my bones

And the rivers run

To the rhythm

Of the blood in my veins...

When we play it I can see my father’s home—mine and my family’s home—and feel a heavy sadness because it was so long ago that I last made the drive down there. I can imagine the shift in temperature as I get outside the city away from all the asphalt and machines. I can picture the colors of the sky and trees becoming more defined through Pleasant Valley. I remember the smell of the air at the top of the hill in Fleming County, and I can see the front porch at home like it looked when we built the place all those summers ago.

•

I get a call at eleven pm on a Saturday night. I’m usually well on the way to a good drunk by that time on weekends and don’t want to be bothered. It’s Mallory. She’s crying.

“I’m sorry to call you so late, but I didn’t know what else to do,” she says.

“Calm down,” I say. “What’s going on?”

“It’s Mickey. He got drunk and we got in a fight,” she says. “I got hurt pretty bad.”

I wait on the other end of the line for the part of this story that concerns me.

"I think he's gonna leave and I'll be stuck here by myself and I can't afford it," she says.

"I wanted to see if you could rent me a smaller place somewhere else."

"I guess I could do that," I say feeling a little sorry for her. "But there's nothing we can do right now, so if Mickey does anything else tonight call the police. I'll come by tomorrow and talk to you about it."

"All right," she says. "Thank you for understanding."

I hang up wondering if she means understanding as a landlord or understanding as a woman.

•

The next evening I go to see if Mickey and Mallory's lover's tiff is really going to be permanent. The first thing I notice is a broken window and a little blood smeared on the woodwork. I knock on the door and Owen answers. Before he can say anything I ask him what happened to the window

"Mickey accidentally fell into it," he says.

"Is he here?"

Owen nods and lets me in. He doesn't say anything in Mickey's defense.

"I'll go get him," Owen says and runs up the stairs. I can hear them talking but I can't make out what they're saying.

Mallory comes down the stairs before Mickey and before I can ask her anything she says everything is fine and they will take care of the window. I notice she has a bruise on her face and a brace on one of her wrists. Then Mickey comes down the stairs behind her.

"Do you want to tell me what's been going on here?"

He looks at the ground. "I'm sorry," he says. "I just get out of control when I drink. I'm going to fix the window," he puts his arm around Mallory's waist. "And I'm not drinking anymore."

I can feel the blood run to my face and the anger well up inside me as I listen to what is really a poor excuse for completely disrespecting both me and the property. I can't help but take things personally because it will be me who has to clean up after these people and they know it. "I don't give a damn whether you drink or not. I don't want anything else like this happening again," I say. "I'm coming back here tomorrow and if this is not fixed you're all out of here, understand?" I look at Mickey and Mallory and they both nod. When I look over at Owen he just locks eyes with me, his expression indifferent to what's happening and indifferent to my anger, he just looks into my eyes.

"I'm sorry," Mickey says again. "I'll take care of it tomorrow. It won't happen again."

I look at him but don't respond and then I walk out.

•

The next day I drive by and the window is not fixed. I give them a couple more days and I am surprised that they actually do replace it, on the third day.

•

A few weeks later rent is due. I knock on the door and Mallory answers.

"Do you have the rent?" I ask.

"Well," she begins, "we're still trying to get it together. Mickey lost his job and we had to pay a big electric bill this month so we don't have it yet."

"How much are you short?" I ask.

"Well, we're still trying to get it together," she says again.

"So you don't have anything for me?"

"Not right now," she says.

"Well when are you going to have it?" I ask.

"In about a week," she says.

"You'll have *all* the rent in a week?" I ask.

"I think so," she says.

"All right," I say and leave empty handed.

•

A week later I prepare a seven-day eviction notice before I go to try again to collect the rent. It's about three in the afternoon when I pull up and Owen is sitting on the porch with his guitar and a beer, there is only one car in the driveway and the front door is open.

"They're gone," he says as I walk up. "They moved out."

"Did they leave you their part of the rent?" I ask already knowing the answer.

"Nope."

I notice about six empty bottles on the porch. "Why aren't you at work?" I ask.

"I got fired," he says matter-of-factly. "And I don't have anyplace else to go," he says almost laughing.

I sigh and hand him the seven-day notice. "Do you mind if I go in and take a look around, you know, to assess the damages?" I ask.

"Go right ahead."

I walk through each room quickly and notice holes in the walls, trash everywhere, another broken window, and a missing light fixture. I go back outside feeling utterly defeated and now *I'm* ready for a drink.

"How soon can you find a place to go?" I ask.

"I think I might be able to line something up back home in Knoxville," he says.

For some reason I believe he is telling the truth, and besides, it would take two weeks, seventy-five dollars and an early morning court date to legally evict him.

"All right," I say. "You've got a week."

"I really appreciate it," he says. "You want a beer?" he asks holding one out to me.

"I think after this I need something stronger than that," I say referring to the condition of the house.

"I'm sorry about the house. I didn't do any of that."

"Of course not." I sigh and start heading for my car.

"Wait. Would you care for some company?" he asks and smiles at me. "You won't be my landlord much longer."

I look at him for a moment and decide he's right, our business relationship is practically over and I drink alone too much. "Why not?" I say.

He smiles again and gets up from the porch.

•

We get back to my place with a bottle of cheap tequila. My house comes with the job. It's kind of win-win for me and the owners, I don't pay rent and they can put off remodeling the place to suit the standards of paying tenants. Owen spent his last six dollars on the tequila and I threw in the rest. He brought his guitar, a red California Series Fender Stratocaster.

"I'll go get some shot glasses," I say leaving him in my living room.

There are none clean and as I start to wash two I find on the kitchen table I hear Hank Williams come on my stereo.

"I haven't heard this in years," I say returning to the living room and handing him a glass. "I bought that album when I moved up here, kind of a way to bring part of the country with me."

"To the good stuff," he says handing me a shot and holding up his glass. We take them straight because we hadn't had the money to buy chaser.

"I'm surprised you picked this out of all that music to choose from," I say motioning to my CD collection.

"I like musicians who are the best at what they do," he says. "And Hank Williams was the best country musician there has ever been."

"I'll drink to that." We take another shot and he starts strumming along on his guitar. I'm surprised to find all the words to these songs are as fresh in my mind as if I'd heard them yesterday. Hearing them again makes me feel at home and at peace.

About halfway through the bottle he says, "I want you to have this," and hands me his guitar.

"What?"

"I know you play too and I want you to have this for being so cool," he says.

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah," he says. "It's the least I can do."

"Thank you," I say looking it over. It is in really good shape, I can tell it was his baby. He smiles at me and I sit it down on the couch between us so we can take another shot.

"You know I've never played this kind of music," I say pointing to the stereo and wiping a spilled drop of tequila off my bottom lip. "It sounds simple but I've never been taught."

"It is pretty simple," he says sitting the guitar on my lap and moving closer to show me where to put my fingers on the guitar's neck. "It's mostly major chords, and you don't really need a pick," he says as he puts his right hand over mine and brushes my fingers across the strings.

"See?"

I look at him and smile. He kisses me and we don't make it through disc two of Hank Williams' Original Singles Collection before we move things to my bedroom.

•

A week later he's gone and I'm draining the last of the whiskey in my flask. I sit on a stool with a red California Series Fender Stratocaster facing a half-empty coffeehouse and begin:

Hear that lonesome whippoorwill

He sounds too blue to fly.

The midnight train is winding low

I'm so lonesome I could cry...

Conversion

I was converted one August night, just after I turned twelve. It was not a religious conversion. Instead, it had something to do with my view of the world—and of my grandmother—and of myself. I ought to say that the process actually took longer than one night, but it began that night. The seeds of my conversion were planted in my mind as I sat cross-legged under some bushes in my uncle's back yard, enjoying the dubious pleasure of that illicit childhood trespass: eavesdropping on adult conversation.

The whole family was gathered for Grandmother Essie's funeral. As the oldest grandchild I was assumed to remember the most about her. It was not much. After the children had gone to bed, past ten at night, the adults sat around talking about her life. We were staying at Uncle Norman's and the conclave was held in his back yard, on the deck.

I listened for a while, watching the fireflies, then drifted away into my own thoughts. A word recalled me.

"Psychic?"

"That's what I said," repeated my father. "Essie thought she was psychic."

There was a respectfully skeptical silence—after all, Essie was dead—and then someone asked, "Did she ever have any . . . experiences?"

"Actually, she did," my father said.

For a few years before that night, I had been thinking that I might be psychic. I had dreams that oddly foreshadowed events in my waking life. In one notable dream, I was wading along the top of a concrete wall with a lake on one side and a rushing river down below on the other side. The next morning my mother read aloud to my father from the local newspaper: due to prolonged heavy rains, water was going over the top of the local reservoir's spillway for the first time since the dam had been built thirty-seven years earlier. I never told anyone about that prescient dream, but I never forgot it, either.

The adults were silent after my father spoke. Uncle Amos lit his pipe, causing Aunt Rachel to look at him from the corner of her eyes. Trouble later.

"So . . . tell!" Aunt Naomi leaned toward my father, panting slightly. She always breathed with her mouth open.

"Of course you all know about Jovan," my father said. Everyone nodded, some with pursed lips.

I did not know about Jovan. I knew of him: he had been my grandfather, Essie's first husband.

Well then," my father went on, "after he left, Essie had to go to work. She had never held any job before. She had three young children, no marketable skills, and it was the middle of the Depression. She got a job in a foundations department. Fitting girdles on fat ladies, she used to say. There was never enough money, never enough food, and always too much work and too much worry."

Some of my older relatives exchanged glances, that adult shorthand of shared memories.

"Ruben's Grocery Shop—it's still there, run by Ruben's son, now—had a little lottery game every week. You picked a number, and put down a dime. If your number won, you got twenty dollars. Essie never played. She couldn't spare the money." My father shifted in his chair, and lit a cigar. He waited until the smoke began to waft over Naomi's head, then squinted at the dark sky. Someone made an impatient motion with a leg, crossing and uncrossing.

"One night Essie had a dream. She dreamed that she got a check in the mail. Jovan had sent her a check for twenty dollars. The dream was so vivid that the next morning she could remember the bank numbers on the check. It made such an impression on her that she mentioned it to Ruben when she shopped for groceries that day. He said, 'I'll tell you what it meant. It was a sign. You put some money down on that bank number in the weekly Chances.' She tried to protest, but he insisted. He told her to put a dime on that number." My father shook his head. "She didn't want to do it. A dime was a lot of money back then. Money meant

food for hungry children. Money meant shoes for herself; books to educate the family. Money was not something to gamble away. But Ruben was insistent. He overrode all her objections and anxieties." My father puffed on his cigar. "Well, she did it. And all week she was sure that the money was thrown away. On Friday Ruben came down to our apartment with twenty dollars for her. He told her that her number had won."

Rachel gave a loud sigh.

My father looked at her sharply. "On the basis of that one incident, Essie was converted. Forever after that she believed in psychic powers, and believed that she had them."

"Nothing else ever happened?"

"Not to her."

Great-Aunt Elza spoke up. She had a tale of telepathy from World War Two, where two of her sons were killed and one was not.

Other relatives chimed in with other stories.

I remembered that second sight was supposed to be transmitted through the females in a family line. I knew I could not have gotten it from my mother. Perhaps the mischievous gene had skipped a generation, coming to me from grandmother Essie. I had heard of such things.

At some point I fell asleep behind the witch hazel bushes. I woke up in a bed; when I finally arrived in the dining room no one scolded me for having been up late without permission.

The cousins were out in full force. Soon we were shooed away so the adults could talk over their lox and bagels. I asked cousin Rebecca if she wanted to walk down the block with me. I did not tell her where I planned to go.

We set off, her chatting about school and their family's new puppy. I was watching the storefronts, nodding occasionally at what she said, and pretending to be window shopping.

She had just gotten to the part about choosing names for the puppy's unborn possible future offspring, when I saw it.

"Let's look in there," I suggested.

"Okay," she said agreeably, and went right on chatting as we turned in to Ruben's Grocery Shop. Which of course is why I chose her to walk with. Donna, or Aaron, or any of the others would have wanted to know what I was doing.

It was dark inside, and smelled of lettuce, ammonia, tobacco, and old books. Ruben Junior was behind the counter, smoking a stubby pipe and reading a paper. I just stood looking at everything.

Suddenly Ruben folded his paper, removed his pipe, and looked at us. "Help you?" he barked.

"Just looking," I said. And he opened his paper and reinserted his pipe.

If he said something to us again, Rebecca might notice.

I stood in front of the counter and looked up at the bulletin board behind Ruben. It was cluttered with notices. There was nothing about any lottery, though.

Ruben folded his paper again. Before he had a chance to remove his pipe, I asked quickly, "Do you still have Chances here?"

"Chances? Oh, you mean the lottery. No, everything's got to be state run, now."

"My grandmother once won the lottery," I said. He looked at me, rubbing his hand over his beard. So I told him the story I had heard last night. Before I was finished, he was nodding his head, rocking slightly back and forth, and smiling.

"I know that story," he said. "I was helping in the store then. I hadn't taken it over yet. I remember."

Rebecca had wandered away to the back of the shop. I leaned towards Ruben and spoke softly. "Was it true?"

"Well now. You say you're here for her funeral?"

I nodded.

He nodded too. "It's true. But there was more to the story. Your grandmother was a proud woman. She had a lot of friends in this neighborhood, and we didn't like to see how hard she had it. She had a terrible life after your grandfather left. So when she told my father about her dream, he told her to put a dime on that bank number. Then he went round to all the neighbors and told them about her dream. Everybody chipped in. And on the Friday he took her twenty dollars."

Ruben tapped his pipe against his palm, looking out the front window of his shop. "She wouldn't have taken the money any other way, you see. Not even from her friends. But she thought she had won it. She thought it was meant to be, because of her dream." He smiled at me. "Her number didn't win. That dream was just a dream. It didn't mean anything. But she never knew that, and we kept it that way."

Ruben smiled again, and picked up his paper. "A proud woman," he said, not looking at me. When I left, he was still smoking his pipe.

JAMES B. GOODE

The Hold Up

When I concocted my several plans to escape the unbearable life of my childhood home in eastern Kentucky and the prison where I felt I had been kept by my so called parents, Delcie Biddle and Luther McCan, I had no idea that one of them would lead me down an unforgettable road paved with guilt, pain, and regret--what I was later to discover was called by the therapists a classic “dysfunctional” life.

One such plan came to me as I loitered on the banks of the Cumberland River one early spring, waiting for a catfish to suck in a wad of red worms wound around an Eagle Claw hook, pull down the brown, mottled cork, and then run along the rocky bottom until I could grab the river cane pole and lift the slack out of the green nylon line.

I’ll build an airplane and fly my ass out of here, I remember thinking. I had only seen airplanes in magazine pictures or the Starfire, Balsa wood, rubber band glider plane I’d gotten for Christmas, and the occasional real ones that spit and sputtered over our bottom land along the river. I’d shade my eyes with the span of my hand and marvel at how something so heavy could stay up in the air so long.

My mind turned this over like the dirt from the plow we used in the bottom pasture. After a few days, I had at least figured out the cockpit—two wooden, black powder boxes my father had brought home from the mines. There were several in the barn where we kept the milk cow—*Hercules Black Powder* printed right above a black ink silhouette of the muscular demi-god with a club slung over his right shoulder, his body draped with a narrow strip of animal fur. On one side was printed: *Hercules Powder/High Explosives/Red H Permissible*. I figured that two of those with

one end removed from each would be long enough to accommodate my slender, ten-year-old frame. I searched until I found an eight foot, oak 2 X 12 my father had shoved up under the chicken house. This, I thought, would make the fuselage. I busied myself with assembling all the parts. I studied the Starfire and fashioned a tail out of the thin boards found on the sides of wooden lettuce crates used to haul produce to the market in town. Two narrow strips of thin plywood found under the chicken house became the wings.

One day my father caught me banging around in the barn looking for something from which to make a propeller.

“What’s going on here boy? I know you’re up to something,” he said.

“Nothing,” I said.

“By God, don’t lie to me boy, I know you have something up your sleeve,” he said as he examined the 2 X 12 and the powder boxes lying nearby.

“I’m making an airplane,” I finally admitted.

“Oh you are, are you?” He said. “And what are you fixing to do with this here airplane?” He asked.

“I’m flying out of here and moving to Detroit where Bobby lives.” Bobby, my older brother, had gone there to work for Fisher Body. He was the coolest because he had a white, Impala convertible and a wife name Beverly who the feed store clerks claimed was built like a brick shithouse. And besides, I had watched her change clothes one time through the window at the back of the house. She was naked and then she put on black lace panties and a black lace bra over cantaloupe shaped breasts. When she came to visit, she always greeted me with a two-armed hug that brought me off the floor, thrusting my head into her cleavage while declaring I was the cutest boy she’d ever seen.

I could have just stayed there forever, drowning in her sweet perfume.

My father looked me up and down, with a look as serious as a heart attack.

“Goddamned Gifford,” he said as he stepped forward and rapped the top of my head soundly with his rough knuckles, causing a now familiar instant, bursting flash-of-light headache. Gifford was a slow-witted, hair-lipped great uncle whose antics were legendary. You realized when he called you Gifford, you were dumber than anybody on earth.

He shook his head, lowered one of his bushy eyebrows, and said, “Gifford, you’re about as full of shit as anybody I’ve ever seen.” Then he walked out the door and across the barnyard toward the house in his *I’m disgusted with you* stride of long, sweeping steps. He mostly treated me with indifference or like a bug that needed to be swatted or shooed away.

The problem with making a propeller solved itself when I found an old Sassafras sled runner that was just twisted enough to resemble the one on my Starfire. I got into my father’s tools and found an old rasp used to fashion rungs and back slats for the ladder back chairs he sometimes made. After much filing, the sassafras helix vaguely resembled an airplane prop. A hole drilled through its center with a brace and bit, a long eye bolt passing through the hole and attached to a bicycle inner tube nailed to the front powder box completed my design.

The highest point on our farm was the ridge of the barn roof and I had calculated that if I could haul this contraption to the top, attach it with ropes with the nose pointed downward, pull the stick from the wound up prop, and chop it loose at the appropriate time, I could fly my ass out of there. I could just see myself flying out over the river bottom, banking sharply to the left, swooping over the tiny shack where we lived, and then gliding over the river toward the county seat of Harlan. I’d be gone from this life where I had a father who thought I was dumber than Gifford and a mother who whipped me at the drop of a hat for about anything, sometimes for just thinking about some misdeed. She had whipped me with

everything from cherry tree switches, wire coat hangers, to five gallon zinc water buckets and cast iron skillets.

One spring day, the sun slid up from the ridge, setting the land glowing in an orange light. The sky was blue as mother's Irises and there wasn't a cloud in sight. A perfect day for flying. I had the plane ready—the propeller wound so tight that a knot appeared in the inner tube every few inches. So I gathered my flying gear—a leather football helmet my father had used in school, his welding goggles, and one of Mother's knitted wool scarves. I ascended the crude wooden ladder at the back of the barn and settled into the powder box cockpit, winding the scarf around my neck, pulling on the worn helmet, and adjusting the straps on the goggles to fit my skinny head. I was ready.

I looked out over the bottom and toward the house. Mother had come out with a basket of clothes to hang on the clothesline. I could see her ample behind as she bent over to remove the first item. I watched her carefully, wondering what she was thinking as she shook the clothes, making them crack like a whip, then removing clothespins from where she held them in her tightly clamped lips and jabbing them downward on the edges of the clothes folded over the galvanized line. Was she thinking about her life before my father rescued her?

My grandfather was a drunk—a madman who had beaten my grandmother, mother, and my aunt Velma Lee. She had grown up rough and ended up rough. There were no soft edges to my mother—they were all jagged and rusted like the tin on our barn roof. She went about life fighting everyone and everything around her like swatting yellow jackets. If it wasn't my father or me, it was the weeds in her vegetable garden where she often cursed every time she brought the hoe down on the relentless weeds. She had a temper so fierce that it often led her to place a clenched fist in her mouth and bite down with such force that I expected blood to squirt from her fingers.

Now, I don't know what possessed me to do this, but I yelled from my improvised runway, "Hey you old bitch . . ." She stood up straight as a Poplar tree, turned her head, peering from beneath her bonnet with those beady, black eyes. One act of unabashed ignorance did not seem to be enough for me, so I yelled again, "Hey you old bitch. I'm tired of living in this pile of pig shit, so I'm flying my ass out of here."

"What did you say?" She reached over, pulled one of the hickory stick props from beneath the clothesline, and started coming toward me in wide strides.

"You heard me old bitch," I said. "I'm leaving this pig shit farm forever." I reached over, pulled the stick from the prop with one hand, and chopped the rope loose with the other. In seconds, I realized my engineering had gone terribly awry. The contraption slid down the barn roof and toward the pig lot nose first. As it fell, I could see the pig trough through the revolutions of the prop and then I was abruptly thrown forward like a cannon ball, rolling into the pig wallow. I don't know how she got to me so fast, but before I could even think a thought, she was on me, like a cloud shadow appearing suddenly on the land. I rolled up in a ball and let the hickory stick rain down upon me like a hail storm.

All I could hear was her screaming, "Bitch, huh? Bitch, huh. I'll show you bitch."



It was a few months before I had sufficiently recovered enough to plan my second major attempt at an escape. This time I hatched a plan to leave by Greyhound Bus from the station on Mound Street in Harlan, a distance of some 15 miles. The only problem was that I didn't have the bus fare. I had seen their advertisement when we went to pick up Velma Lee at the station—A LOT MORE TRAVEL . . . *FOR A LOT LESS MONEY*. I didn't know exactly how much it was going to cost,

but I figured it would probably be more than the two dollars I had saved selling *Grit* papers to the neighbors.

My mind seemed to work differently than most boys I knew. It operated from a twisted kind of naiveté that made me into more of a risk taker than most. The only place I could think of to get the money was to rob the Louisville and Nashville train as it came through the Rosspoint tunnel. My father had said the train carried payroll cash for the coal company. In the cowboy movies I had seen at the Coralee Theater, the robbers sat high upon a hill with bandanas pulled up over their noses, ready to unleash their trusty steeds to gallop down the hill. They ran alongside the train, firing Colt revolvers or Winchesters until the engineer gave in, stopping the train in a cloud of steam as the outlaws demanded the money to be pitched from the train in cloth bags.

The only trusty steed I had was Peanut, a brown and white Shetland pony my father beat and cursed when he plowed with her. I had learned to ride her using an old saddle that had belonged to one of my grandfathers. For my eighth birthday, Bobby had given me a Red Ryder lever action Daisy BB gun and Beverly, a red cowboy paisley bandana. In one of the only kind moments I can remember, my father had bought a felt cowboy hat for me at Ft. Sequoia near London, Kentucky, a glorified glass barn pretending to be a real pioneer fort besieged by Indians in fake headdresses three times a day. With this, my costume was complete.



Mother sensed there was something cooking in that expansive, pointed head of mine.

"You look like a hound dog trying to eat a mouthful of briars," she said as I chewed my least favorite breakfast of plain corn flakes drowned in rich cow milk. "I know you're up to something. Now, what does that evil little mind of yours think it can get away with this time?" she asked.

"I ain't doing nothing but eating my cornflakes," I said.

She looked menacingly across the table at me—ever suspicious and looking for any opportunity to strike. “You know I can read your thoughts don’t you? I got a way of knowing.” One of her bushy black eyebrows cocked like the arch in a bridge.

Early on, I believed in her magical powers. She kept me wondering about where she was all the time. I’d be down on the river bank fishing or frog gigging or in the barn petting Peanut and she’d appear out of nowhere—step from behind a sapling or into a doorway like a ghost calling me into next week. Today was the day . . . I guess she did possess some antenna that sucked radio waves out of my brain and decoded them.

I had already saddled Peanut and hidden my clothes in an unused stall in the barn. The train was due in the tunnel at 10 a.m. About 9:30, I pretended I was going out to play, but made a beeline for the barn as soon as I was sure she wasn’t looking. I slipped into the stall, tied the bandanna in a triangle around my neck, put on my hat, and slid my rifle into the homemade sling I’d fashioned from the leg of an old pair of pants and tied to Peanut’s saddle. I cocked my leg, stepped into the wooden stirrup, vaulted into the saddle, and rode out the opposite side of the barn from the house so as not to raise suspicion. The promontory overlooking the tunnel was a rock crag sticking out of the ridge like a dinosaur spine. I came up the side opposite the house, wheeled Peanut around so we faced downhill, pulled back on the reins to let her know to stop, and then sat with the lines through my fingers and both palms on the saddle horn, like I’d seen cowboys do in the movies. In a few moments, I could hear the clanging of the engine bell as it approached and then a one long blast and one short from the air horn to signal it was about to enter the mouth of the tunnel. As soon as I saw the rotating headlight, I pulled the bandana up and over my nose, slid the lever action from the sheath, held it high in the air with my finger on the trigger, dug my heels into Peanut’s withers and down the crag we charged. Peanut stumbled, but recovered quickly as we zoomed toward the track. I leaned forward, rising up on the stirrups, my butt bouncing on the old saddle

like a basketball. As we approached the side of the train, I reined Peanut with my free hand and she turned quickly, running parallel to the train and only two cars back from the engine. As we galloped along, Peanut began to pick up speed. Much to my alarm, she began to outrun the engine. I had intended to slow her down as we got beside the cab of the locomotive where I would get the engineer's attention, threaten him with my Red Ryder, and signal for him to stop, but Peanut bolted. I'd never seen her run that fast. Soon, we were ahead of the engine and she was running full blast, with her ears laid back, nostrils flaring, and sweat coming up on her flanks like soapy water. Across the way, Mother was standing on the front porch waving her arms; she was yelling something, but the roar of the engine covered her voice. I could see her white apron flashing like a beacon. She ran to the edge of the porch, waving frantically. Then Peanut did the unthinkable—she crossed in front of the engine. The white Cyclops eye of the engine burned into the side of my face. I dug my boots into Peanut and reined her hard to the left so we could cross at a sharp, right angle. As soon as we cleared the second rail and the hot breath passed my back, I glanced back toward the porch. I saw Mother tumble from the cut stone steps and fall face forward into her flower bed filled with her irises. I rose up in the stirrups, guiding Peanut through the open gate in the fence around the house. I dismounted on the run, bringing Peanut to a halt in a swirl of dust. I ran into the flowerbed, frantically rolling Mother over on her back and then shaking her with both hands. She was as limp as a sack of feed.

When my father came home, he took the thick razor strap from the nail on the back porch, made me bend over and grab my ankles with my hands, and slammed the wide, slick leather into my butt until it glowed like a cigarette lighter in a car. That evening, I hid in the back bedroom nursing my bruises and listening to the conversation between Mother and Father roar throughout the living room.

"I goddamned can't take this anymore. He's killing me as sure as I'm standing on this linoleum," Mother said.

"I can't figure for the life of me how the little bastard can cook up such hair brained schemes. It's like he's two bricks shy of a load," my father said.

"He's got to go. By God, I've had it up to my neck. We've got to see if Bobby and Beverly can do anything with him. Otherwise, he's going to the damn boy's home at Grundy," Mother said. "I was too old to have a baby when I got pregnant with him. There comes a time when people ain't fit for raising a baby," she said.



You can't imagine what it's like to be the principal in a conversation like that between your parents. You feel as helpless as the frogs I stuck with a gig. You wiggle and wiggle, trying to get free, but the barbed prongs are in you deep and can't be pulled away without tearing you apart.

My belongings were soon packed. I was taken to Harlan and put on a Greyhound bus headed north to Detroit to live with Bobby and Beverly. I reckon my father just couldn't cope with trying to rear a ten year old boy he thought was a sack of shit and Mother's weak heart couldn't survive any more of my dangerous antics and her temper tantrums. I felt alone. No one would understand that I wanted more than anything just to be loved. That I wanted to live in a world where there was no yelling and hitting when milk was spilled at the table. I wanted to live in a home where the strap was never taken from the nail except to hone the straight, keen blade of the straight razor—where I wasn't a little bastard. I just wanted to flee a life filled with the lead weight of agonizing pain.

I guess I did get *A LOT MORE TRAVEL*, but the cost was high. Soon enough, I found that Beverly wasn't all black lace panties and bras when she slapped me winding because I wouldn't eat her damn plain assed oatmeal. That wasn't the only time she caught my brother gone and beat the shit out of me.

I should hold my father, mother, and Beverly McCan responsible for the way I am today, but sometimes life takes us down briar strewn and rocky paths. Sometimes other people have the steering wheel, but sometimes you do and you have the perfect chance to veer off on a better path and don't. You don't because the white Cyclops eye of the engine is burning into the side of your face. You don't because you're scared and you don't know what's down there, so you stay on a familiar path filled with yelling and hitting over shit that really doesn't amount to a hill of beans. It can lead you through a littered labyrinth of wrecked marriages. It can lead you to live a life where you never feel at home anywhere.

BCTC “In Your Words” Poetry Contest

The BCTC “In Your Words” Poetry Contest was created this year by BCTC’s Director of Fine Arts, Teresa Tope. Winners, runners-up and honorable mentions from the contest are published below, as a special added feature of this year’s *Bluegrass Accolade*. The two top winners, Margaret Wyse and Brittany Thompson, were awarded \$150.00 cash prizes for their winning poems “Foundations” and “Escape,” with funds from entrance fees for the contest. The 2010 contest judge was Christina Lovin, Kentucky poet and BCTC faculty member.

WINNER

(Faculty Category)

MARGARET WYSE

Foundations

House-goblins, radon and gray river water
leak upward from the cellar and
only one iron post spears to bedrock.
Tin, lath, even stonework
deconstructed long ago;
we patched, we patched the chimney,
windows, lattice and clapboard facings,
tucked them together with string and super-glue
while the river rose, the acid sun fell, the stones slid away.

Where lilacs and hydrangeas once bloomed, where
old roses fill our inhalations this afternoon,
children once cavorted and lovers caressed —
their cries resounding like anguish.
Back then, we were the children, we
ripped stones from the foundations
to build our pipedream palaces.
And we saw that they were good,
entangled though we were in Drunkard’s Path,
Flaming Star, extremities and orifices.

Calm as encroaching nightmares,
the bare backside of rotting boards
shoved against the underlying earth,
the billboard front, stone porch,
pristine white shutters and window-boxed petunias.
Friends and relations, beware! Behind you
lies very little.

The roses' fruit we have reduced
to bitter tea, gulped under tattered bedclothes;
the hound and parlor dog, alley cat, old woman, ghosties
all shiver together in the darkness
alleviated only by fumes rising out of the floor cracks
instead of dawn this icy November morning.

BRITTANY THOMPSON

Escape

Life is a virtual reality drug-induced coma of dizzy lights and siren sounds
close your eyes and go sit down before you faint

Rolling-tripping-falling-slipping into a modern gothic aesthetic myth
Stumbling-crumbling-tumbling-fumbling in a beautifully cruel mirage
And now you're gasping-grasping-almost-collapsing for another sip
of holy water on your lips before they pump your guts

But you don't care that happiness is dangerous
with very sense intoxicated, intelligence is suffocated
but you're way too inebriated to ever give a damn

Ecstasy never felt as sweet as this, pulled under by fleeting sands of bliss
Clinging to your porcelain goddess, forcing you to be more modest
as you pray you make it through this

Now you're lying on the floor, alone and empty, craving more
Acidic transient deities left you feeling like a whore:
lying-dying-crying-trying to meet them just once more
conceding-needing-bleeding-beating down the church door

In this endless roller-coaster-freefall-cosmic-pitfall-emotional-seesaw
of paranoia, confusion and fear and words of wisdom you don't hear
You feel the end is coming near but you say you'll touch the stratosphere
...if it kills you.

RUNNERS-UP

JASON LEE MILLER

Julie Shrooms the Black Doom Bloom

(Inspired by "Impending Doom," a painting by Julie Nord)

This is the sunrot, the moonblood
The last pinch of cloud and sprayworm
This is the stretchleg, the dreamrip
The first look at coffee and yawns

The tea it turns to bunny stew
Where the wild things are wanting boys
'Cept Stuart, little he needs
But butterflies and strawberries

This is the shellgirl, the crumbcake
The windowfaced worryfish rising
This is the halfgirl, the pigtale
The cow-eyed wondercurrent stilled

The world she runs Technicolor
Where the red fern grows forgetful
Of yellow hats, little boys blew
The house in. They're not invited

JAMES CAUDILL

Vines are the Veins

Ferns speak,
Oxygen.
Bones & red sand,
Vines are the veins.
Something about the light,
Something unseen underground.
Creek bed flooded swelling,
Country road bending breaking.
Painted vase,
Of deception.
Painted face,
Of silence.

Phone rants,
Answers.
Letters & numbers,
Wires are the words.
Something about the noise,
Something unseen moving mouths.
Grid blacks out swallowed,
Interstate exits bending branching.
Plastic vase,
Of deception.
Plastic face,
Of Silence.

HONORABLE MENTIONS

ROSANNA NAPOLEON

I Speak

This, I believe
Uganda, Sudan, Rwanda, Iran
They are people, they are people too
We live our lives here, sunset dawning one after the other
We breathe fresh air
Black smoke, to fill up our lungs with
Red lips to speak our wrongs with
Blue skies to fill new mornings
Then we waste our lives on something disgusting
We build houses, white picket fences
Big gardens luminous in shine
Stand straight, take our time
Then we tear them down, no causes found
We hope for something bigger, something new
Just to do it all over again
We make dog beer and cat houses
T-shirts with built in ACs and high tech cellular phones
One for every year we've existed
And, she is right, he is correct
Next we'll be making machines to blink for us
But only when we say, "why bother?"
Mr. President is it true that we can change?
That you have "seen the desperation and disorder of the powerless"?
That "yes we can" revise and edit this moon projected world I reside in?
Though I still must speak!
I get this feeling, a vomit sensation
My thoughts hemorrhage illusions in my head
That maybe this country just might care about my 9 year old sister in Sudan
Or my baby brother in Uganda
Fighting so that I may keep my dreams at night,

So that I may keep myself from myself
They say again and again,
There is nothing to fear, nothing to fear, nothing to fear but them...
Baby brother I cannot see you
I do not know how you feel
But I realize, that I may be the cause of your fear
I can save you or destroy you
I, your big sister

BRITTANY THOMPSON

My Scarlet Letter

I wiped back tears and *stared so hard* at the mirror
the glass nearly cracked from the pressure
I stared and I wondered: *Am I different on the outside?*
My reflection replied: *Unchanged. Still the same.*
As beautiful, imperfect and familiar as yesterday.

But inside, my doctors say I'm "abnormal"
A candy-coated guess at cancer, they say:
Your smallest parts grow beyond their confines.
Can I blame them?
Can I grow to be more than what I am?

Life: it starts and ends the same, but we
treat our mortality as news. Me?
I took my "news" sitting down
in an itchy blue gown on a cold silver table
my back pressed awkwardly in uncomfortable pillows
surrounded by *menacing white walls*
and strangers with stethoscopes
with no one to tell me: *It will be okay.*

Denial faded to fear - and I felt robbed!
My ego, pride, and confidence unconscious
I just held my breath, squeezed
my eyelids shut, choked
down the knowledge, my new "self"
like castor oil tainted with shock
and anger and pain and humility and...

Now: my disease, my cancer, my cells
could become my scarlet letter. Me?
I rushed through life, my foot to the pedal
with overdrive inertia bringing me here to this:
a lifelong battle, insults punching my face

critics spitting their words, labels, rejection, and pain
But I'll also be welcomed and appreciated
I'll be hugged and I'll be loved

Like my cells, I'm bigger than this
I'm bigger than anything holding me back
I'm braver, stronger, better than this.
That girl you knew was a prototype
of the woman she'll become



Sleepy Cloud PATRICIA HOLLAND



Olivia OLIVIA LAYTON



Snow and Barn JOSH MERS



Flowerman ALEXIS MEZA



Untitled KRISTEN PACE



Untitled KRISTEN PACE



Into Pink TERESA TOPE



Reflections on the Kentucky TERESA TOPE



Enlightened BRITTANY THOMPSON



Drops KIMBERLY WILSON



Reflections KIMBERLY WILSON

Biographical Information/Notes from Contributors:

Don Boes teaches at BCTC. He teaches composition, literature, and creative writing. His poetry and reviews have appeared in approximately 75 magazines and journals. He has been awarded three Al Smith Fellowships from the Kentucky Arts Council. His first book, *The Eighth Continent*, was chosen by A. R. Ammons as the winner of the 1993 Morse Poetry Prize and published by Northeastern University Press.

Joanie Brown is a student at BCTC. She is a wife, mother, daughter, sister and friend who is blessed with a wonderful family and enjoys writing poetry.

James A Caudill is a writer who draws a lot of his writing from music he makes. The music reflects personal experience from a lonely Eastern Kentucky background which gives the words a certain feel. James' poetry, like his music, tries to impress a feeling rather than adhere to conventional structure.

James B. Goode is a Professor of English at BCTC. He has published poetry, fiction, and essays since the 1960s. He is currently a candidate for an MFA in Creative Writing: Fiction at Murray State University. He is a creative writer, essayist, photographer, and Appalachian scholar, who has written about the Appalachian region since the 1960's. He has authored four 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 BCTC. He has taught math at the college for 24 years. He also teaches 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 and is in the process of setting up a web page.

Patricia Holland teaches English online and on the BCTC Winchester campus. For over 25 years, she worked as a writer and editor for the National Geographic Society. During that time, she took several photo workshops and seminars taught by the excellent photographers who worked there--"Among the photography department staff, there was an oft-told joke that if you gave enough writers enough free film and camera gear, one would eventually take a publishable picture. I ruined that joke. I have had several photographs published."

Amber Jackson is a student at BCTC studying both Psychology and English with great fervor. Writing has and always will be a huge part of her life.

Amanda Kelley is a first generation college student. She earned her AA from BCTC in 2009. She was born in Lexington, Kentucky but recently moved back home to rural Nicholas County to be with family and raise her son.

Olivia Layton lives in Lexington. She is an eighth grader who enjoys reading, using Facebook, traveling, participating in Lexington Children's Theatre workshops, and playing with her dogs and cats. She is interested in becoming a psychologist.

Martha Victoria Rosett Lutz is an adjunct faculty member in Natural Sciences at BCTC. She collects children (her own), pet insects, pretty rocks, old books, chocolate, and track shoes. When not writing poems and stories, or running around in track shoes, she teaches biology at the Cooper Campus.

Josh Mers is a student at BCTC and currently resides in Boyle County. He enjoys working with Kentucky Landscapes as a subject matter in photography and shoots with a Canon T1i D-SLR.

Alexis Meza is a BCTC student. She enjoys spending time with her family and friends. Art is one of her many passions. She would like to have her own gallery one day. She also likes to write poetry. She graduated from Garrard County High School and is originally from Veracruz, Mexico.

Jason Lee Miller is a member of the adjunct faculty at both BCTC and Eastern Kentucky University. Holding an MFA in Creative Writing from Spalding University, Mr. Miller hopes one day an appropriately lofty title for terminal degree holders is adopted by the academic community. Since "doctor" has been usurped by the PhD crowd, he votes for "wizard" and to be known henceforth as Wizard Jason Lee Miller, should the academic community approve. Wizard Miller lives in Lexington with his wife, Jenny, his stepson, Alex, and his daughter, Cerridwyn

Rosanna Napoleon is a student at BCTC. She is the youngest of four girls and was born in Andres Boca Chica, Dominican Republic. She loves to write slam poetry and is working on a book about her mother and family that she plans to call *Carrot Juice*

Kristen Pace is a first-year student at BCTC. She graduated from Dunbar High School, Lexington. She is originally from Alabama. She enjoys taking pictures and seeing pictures. She now lives in Lexington with three roommates.

Brittany Thompson is a student, artist, designer, writer, and world traveler. A Lexington native, her award-winning poetry has been featured on Medusa Literature (where she's been awarded "Poet of the Day" and "Featured Poem of the Week") as well as published in a *Poetry.com* collection. She currently runs her own freelance design business, Pixels and Media, and has recently been named magazine editor for DMAG, Lexington's Digital Media Artists Group. When she's not busy working or creating artwork, she can usually be found listening to jazz at local coffee shops, learning new languages, eating too much chocolate or trotting the globe in search of inspiration.

Teresa Tope is an associate dean and Director of Fine Arts at BCTC. She was born and raised in Oak Hill, which sits at the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains in southern Ohio. She is a published poet and enjoys taking photographs, as well as supporting the arts in many ways at BCTC and in the community.

Kimberly Wilson is a BCTC student. She is from Lexington, KY. She enjoys all aspects of art. She particularly finds an interest in taking photographs of nature and people.

Margaret (Peg) Wyse has degrees from the University of Iowa and the University of Kentucky and teaches developmental reading and writing at the Lawrenceburg BCTC campus. She has two published, mass market, books: Peg Shull, *Children of Appalachia* (Julian Messner), and M.A. Windsor, *Pretty Saro* (Athenaeum).

