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# The Pathfinder

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ALY GOODWIN

*The Pathfinder*

for L.

Towards the middle of the Great Depression, the tobacco crop  
having failed  
for the third year, and at the end of money saved, my grandfather  
set out on a journey.  
They said he just unlatched the gate and kept walking, walking  
past John Caine's  
pasture, past Cader Gwinn's woods where leaves mellowed to  
russet and burgundy  
and deep, deep brittle brown, the last of fall and the best, in  
Bryson's Cove,  
and disappeared into sun so bright no one could see him or keep  
up or follow,  
past the *Get Right With God* wooden cross and chickens in the yard  
at Miller's Store,  
and he never stopped,

taking the love of his life,  
a beagle named *Reason*,  
along the path with him.  
All this was told to us children.  
All this was before I learned  
they only lied about important things.

One night the following May, air drenched with pear-blossom  
scent, while Britta slept  
and Brady slept, I crept to the dim step landing, drawn by Preacher  
Shaw's low drawl:  
*The shots were heard by the Lockes across the state line in Tennessee.*  
I pictured old Matthew Locke standing drunk under his one fruit  
tree before first frost,

tossing Golden Delicious apples alive with yellow jackets into a  
dirty sack  
while inside his young, pretty wife jerked and doubled up at the  
shotgun sounds  
once, eyes dark and fixed toward Cope Creek Community, bit her  
lip savagely  
until blood came, and checked again that the grandfather clock  
was properly wound.