

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.