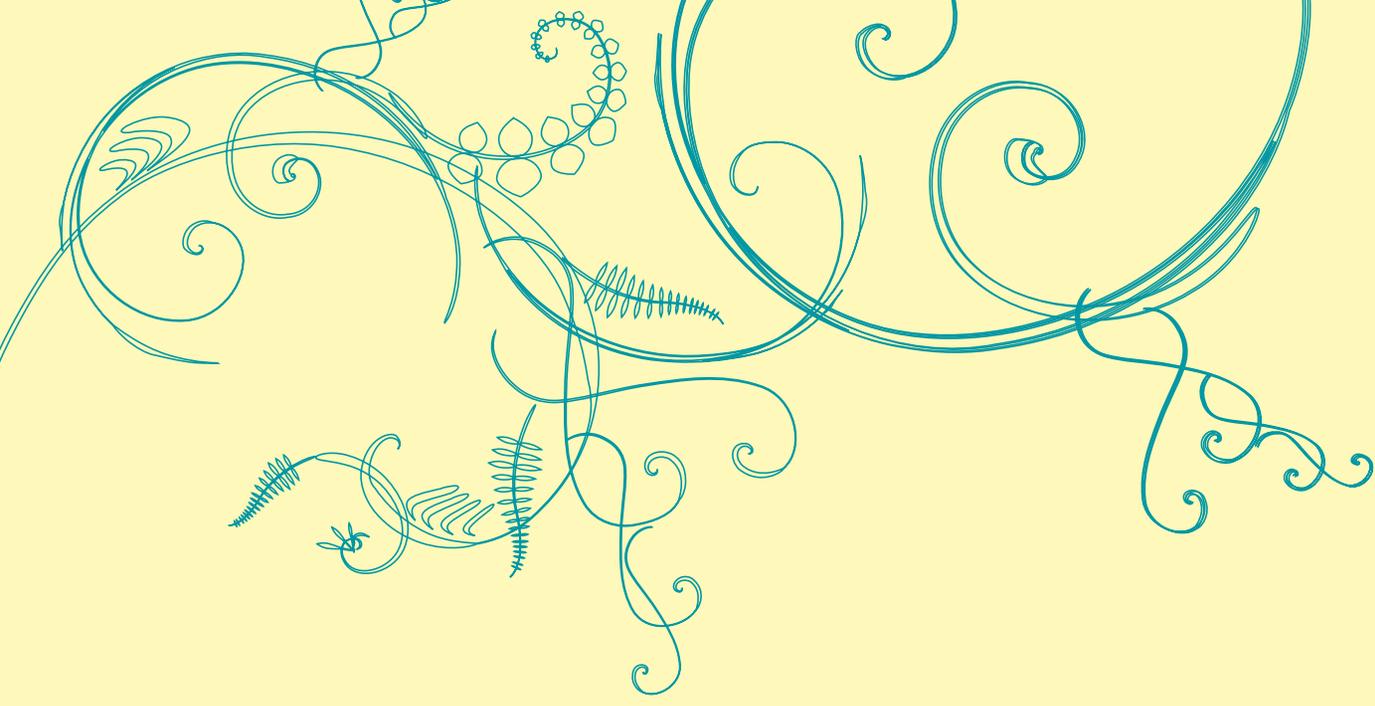




collage

a journal of creative expression
volume vii

spring 2008





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A publication of the Middle Tennessee State University Honors College

letter from the editor

I am blessed to have countless people supporting me. My family at home and my family here at school encourage me in whatever endeavor I choose to undertake. The Honors College staff and the Collage advisor, Marsha Powers, have also been tremendously supportive during my tenure here. Without the help of these people, especially my dedicated staff, Collage would not be possible.

For three years, I have spent countless hours pouring over submissions, waiting eagerly to see the product of a semester's worth of hard work. I will not equivocate; too often, I get frustrated, and this semester in particular, I have spent more time than I would prefer stuck inside the Collage office. However, regardless of any transient disenchantment I might experience, I feel a great sense of delight in every stage of the production process. From the arrival of the first submission to the return of the magazine from the printer, there is something to love in every step.

Though seeing the finished magazine might be the most exciting moment of the semester, for me it is not the most rewarding. I find the most joy in viewing and grading all the submitted pieces. If you ever encounter anyone with doubts about MTSU, just send them to me because I can tell them with absolute confidence that the students here are unbelievably talented. It is so rewarding to immerse myself in the creativity and skill that MTSU students have to offer, and when I come across those pieces that cause me to pause in admiration, I experience an unmatched sense of pride in my university. I sincerely entreat anyone with even a smidgen of artistry to submit. Your contribution benefits not only me but the MTSU community as a whole.

Consequently, I would like to dedicate this issue of Collage to those individuals who submitted their work, both this semester and the previous six. Your work has been a brilliant part of my life. Accordingly, I would like to present volume seven of Collage back to those who make it possible: the students of MTSU.



Carolyn Crawford

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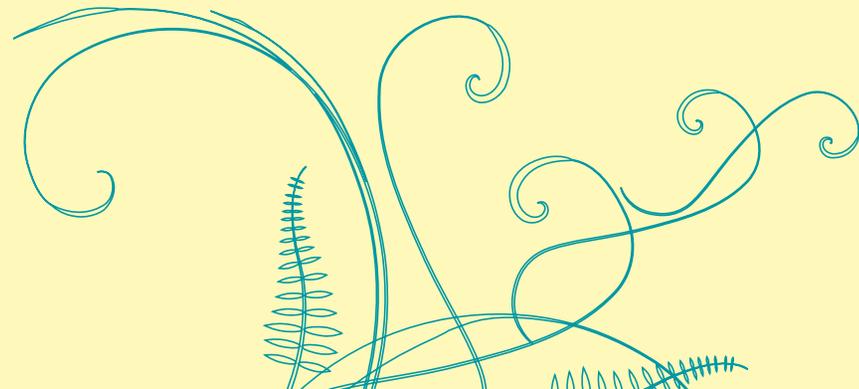


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a muse
marcus laxton

holiday postcards of the paranoid alex grant

Icicles dangle from gutters
eyeing the family inside and
waiting to defend
the white new world

The shovel frozen face down
imprisoned under the overhang
Christmas lights choke the trees
somewhere under that white sheet

The field across the road,
swollen and ashen,
marked by deep cuts
and lacerations in the landscape

Frosted cardinals wobble
reckless back-and-forths
amongst the holly,
drunk on the smell
of apple cider
in the postcard they call home

And somewhere
off in the distance
(in front of the cottage
but behind the stamp),
an iced out tree holds himself
as still as possible

and thinks,
“If I don’t move,
this new coat
will not break my limbs”

But a little to his left,
if I hold the card just right,
I can see a squirrel
with a wicked look in his eye,
at the base of that tree
beginning to gently tickle
his roots

fishers of men
jason barnett
[house paint, mixed media]

journey of love
cassandra knorr

The rain pours down
Stinging through the cold
And I am at a loss for words
Your love had held me tight
And I could feel your warmth
But I got lost and couldn't find
What was so rightfully mine
I want to sleep away the pain
Because it is the only way for me
To truly forget, even for a second
And I feel like crying
Because it has been a release
But nothing works now
So, my Father, I ask You
To work in me
Although as I ask
I can feel you moving
And you're changing me
The pain stings still
But you are here
I find in you that
Even if it feels like the end
It cannot be, for you
You are love, and love
Will never, ever fail
It lifts us up when we cry
It holds us through the night

When we cannot sleep
And are in so much pain
You, God, are love.
You cannot fail
And you are my all
I can depend on you
When all else fails and disappears
I can cry and you will
Always shelter me
Even if all you do
Is hold me as I bawl
My heart can break
And my defenses will drop
My beliefs may fall down
But you are steady
You are my rock
My light and my salvation
Will you hold on to me?
I know the answer
Yes, you will
My praise is so inadequate
And I cannot explain
What you mean to me.
All creatures call to you
You are love.



papa jess who?
gwen williams

First, we noticed confusion:
Wrong dates for birthdays, repeated stories.
Then, he called to say he must retire,
Stop serving, giving, stripped of who he was.

Moved him close, paid his bills,
He moved silently through days,
Wandered around Kroger aimlessly
With a smile and never tears.

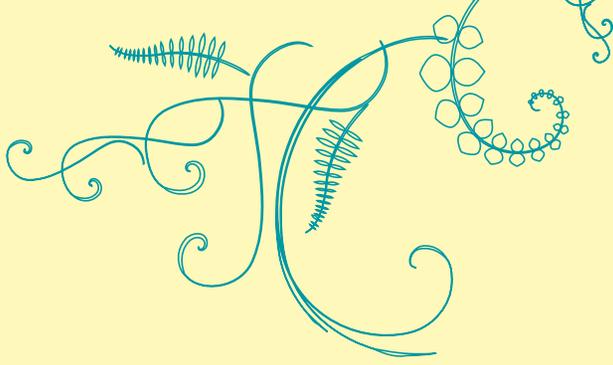
Couldn't remember if he ate, so he ate more,
Empty Krystal boxes strewn everywhere.
Enduring the pain of lost memories,
Looking for friends who weren't there.

We called and he did not answer,
Knocked and he did not come,
Found him on the bathroom floor,
Blue and hardened from a heart attack.

Taken suddenly . . .
before he couldn't remember where he was.



patsy
ali smithson



rising phoenix
pam manley davis

1
Dynamite and bulldozer
assault the middle landscape—
muscling trees, pounding grass,
evicting squirrels, breaking eggs.
A massive hunk of clawed rock remains,
facing the myth of the heroic quest
while asphalt leads to the future.

2
Brushed off the shoulder
of a blustering wind,
a promise lingers in the air
before it dips into a stony grave—
discarded, but not alone.
The weeping sky coaxes
angel-fine roots to search out
nourishment, so the cedar,
stretching upward, feels
sunshine fingers
caressing its lengthening form.



3
Time passes. A traveler,
spying the bearded stone
with mossy cheeks, marvels
at a cedar sprung from the rock.
Slanted piney branches, featherlike
against the sun's wavering rays,
rise from ashes
on the altar of progress.

4
After violence—regeneration,
for the All-knowing Time-keeper
carves a monument whose name is
Resilience.

scale
marcus laxton





planet mtsu
patrick m. casey

freckles
taffeta chime

I found a freckle on my finest friend's forefinger,
And no sooner said I, "See such a spot!" than surely should this singer
Put it past me, "Poor, pitiful pal! Peer not upon this putrid place,
For freckles frolic freely upon your fair, flushed face!"

when do i get to be the buffalo?
marcus laxton

Where is the difference in a furry, hoofed &
Horned animal and a skinny, pale human?
Well, maybe it is as simple as a state of mind.
A buffalo knows his place, and he knows his surroundings.
He has some grass and a herd and wants no more.
A human has a wife, a kid, a car, a company softball team,
A gift card to Costco in his wallet and an hour paid lunch.
What does the buffalo want?
A patch of grass and a place to defecate.
What does Tim the office manager want?
A vacation, a breast enlargement (for the wife),
A child on the honor roll and a boat.
Poor Tim only got a boat and a child with a B average.
The buffalo? He got a sunny day and
A patch of sweet onions that made his
Feces smell funny and took it all in stride.
Tim? He's in therapy.

So I need to go eat grass and
Defecate on flowers?

No . . . but please, feel free.

pollution #3
courtney kendrick
[plastic, house paint and tar on masonite]



plastic
sarah sullivan
[oil and acrylic on canvas]

3 a.m. fiction grace langeland



Life becomes a tunnel when you travel it at one hundred and fourteen miles an hour. Add the darkness that only comes with the stroke of two, the witching hour, and you've got the blurriest, darkest tunnel in the world, an infinite length stretching out before you with your headlights giving only a small hint of what's about to come. No matter how many times you blink, you can't catch that one clear frame as it flies by you. I had plenty of time to test that theory; she just kept driving and driving.

I hated her explosions. She'd call me, talking about how she just had to get out of the house and could I please come with her? The 'rents were getting her down, she'd say. Before I could remind her that I went to bed at eleven and had been asleep for a few hours, she'd tell me she was on her way over. And this time it transpired the same as always.

I couldn't bring myself to be angry. I knew, deep in the recesses of my mind, that someone had to go with her. Someone had to make sure she didn't hurt herself. She was breathing heavily next to me, but it was even, steady. I wasn't too worried. More irritated at being dragged out of my bed for the third time this week. I looked over to her, checking to see if she was ready to say anything, but her mouth was set in a firm, straight line, the sign that I was to sit and wait until she felt like talking. I sighed and looked back out the window, wondering how long we could go before a cop stopped us. She had impeccable luck when it came to this. Never once had we been pulled over. Not even the warning flicker of a light or siren. She was an unstoppable force. If she heard my exasperation, she didn't acknowledge it. She just kept driving.

Eventually she would turn to me, eyes focused right on mine. "Watch the road," I'd beg, but she wouldn't. She'd look at me for a good long time, the car staying on the road by some miracle, and then she'd return

her gaze to the pavement. What she said next varied from night to night, but there was always that reoccurring theme. "Joey," she'd say, "you don't know how good you have it." Every night, she said that at some point: "You don't know how good you have it." I'd be silent for awhile before saying the same thing I said every night: "Neither do you."

She always laughed.

But once she laughed, it was over. She was ready to return me to my bed and go back to her home, safe for another night. She always said she slept better after we'd been driving. Helped relax her muscles, she'd say with a grin. That always seemed a little odd, and I was constantly praying that her muscles would last us until we got home. Once she laughed, we were home free. But I knew the drill. Don't speak until spoken to.

"You know what, Joey?" I looked over, ready to feign a surprised look. "I love you, man." No faking needed. "I mean, I really do, y'know? You've always been there, waiting by the phone, ready to take a drive with me for hours. You really care. I like that." I tried a little half smile, a tentative smile. "But you know what bugs me, man?" I was tempted to remind her that I hated when she added "man" to the ends of all her sentences. "The way you sigh all the time." I felt my brow crease against my will as I struggled to control my rising frustration.

"No, man, have you ever listened to yourself? You're always, like, uuuuugggh. I'm Joouoey and I love everyone. Let me sigh a little to show how inconvenienced I am."

"Are you high?"

"High on life, man! I don't need any of that crap polluting me. I got enough of my own bad energies going on from that house."

"La—"

"No! Don't even! You're not there, are you? You're at home in your perfect little two story brick with the cute, white fence." For some reason, I didn't feel the slightest need to remind her that I lived in a light blue house with siding and

a chain link fence. For the first time in my memory, I felt her car slow down before we got back to town. It came to a stop with a slight jerk, and we were just sitting there, waiting. This was a new scene, and I didn't have the script. I didn't know whether to sit silently or pour out my heart or beg her to pour out hers. I chose what I was most familiar with. Silence.

"You know what bothers me the most about that . . . that box?" Without waiting for a response, she charged ahead. "When it rains. It clicks on the roof. When it's a soft rain . . . it's beautiful, but when it pours it becomes this horrible noise. I can feel myself drowning in it. No matter how many pillows I cover my ears with, I can still hear it. I hear it at night when I try to sleep, even when there's not a cloud in the sky." I could think of nothing to say in response. It was so honest and, at the same time, so irrelevant. I had never come across anything that had fallen into both those categories. She was my best friend, but I was learning that I knew nothing about her.

"But, y'know, it's whatever, man." She let out a rough noise that resembled a laugh. I could only look at her. As the clouds drifted away from the moon, she hit the gas, jerking me back against my seat. The moonlight revealed her pale white neck between the folds of her bright red scarf. I shuddered a little; it gave me the impression of a blood-splattered corpse. The car slowed as we neared the bright lights of the city, and I felt a sense of relief. She pulled up in front of my house, and I reached for the handle.

"Joey?"

"Yes?"

"You need a girlfriend."

"Thanks." I opened the door, but couldn't bring myself to get out. "Hey, be careful, okay?"

"I'm always very careful, Joey."

"I know. Just . . . don't do anything stupid."

“Never, Joey.” She paused. “Joey?”

“Yeah?”

“What I said earlier. Don’t read too much into it. People will only disappoint you.”

“You couldn’t disappoint me.”

“Oh, I very much doubt that.”

“You won’t.”

“We’ll see how you feel later.” She waved me out with her hand, and I got out, nearly sighing, but catching myself at the last moment. “G’night, Joey.”

“Sleep well.”

“Oh, I intend on it.” With her final words out, I shut the car door and walked around to the backdoor, fumbling for my key. Looking up, I noticed there were too many lights on. I’d only left on one.

I pulled the door open slowly to find my parents sitting at the kitchen table, my father looking serious and my mother with tears streaming down her cheeks. I could hear the twins whimpering in the other room.

“Where have you been?” My father sounded angry, but his face showed only fear.

“I’m sorry, I was just . . . she called. She needed me to go riding with her.”

“Joey.” In one word my father conveyed so many emotions: fear, frustration, anger, worry. My mother said nothing, but her sobs became fiercer.

“She needed me to go with her! I had to make sure she didn’t hurt herself!”

“Joey! Wake up!” My father grabbed me by the shoulders. “She’s dead! Laurel is dead. We cannot keep doing this!”



untitled
randy purcell
[house paint
on hardboard]

I looked at him as though he spoke an alien language. My Laurel? I had just ridden around with her. She had driven. We had flown.

We were invincible.

“Stop that!” My father shook me so hard I felt my insides rattling.

We were invincible.

Outside of my mind, I saw the scene as a fly on the wall: a tall man, a skinny frightened boy and a graying woman seated at the table, crying and shushing the two little girls in the next room.

We were invincible.

A flash. A car coming in the opposite direction. We swerved. The rain on the road made traction impossible. Her car flew through the aluminum lining

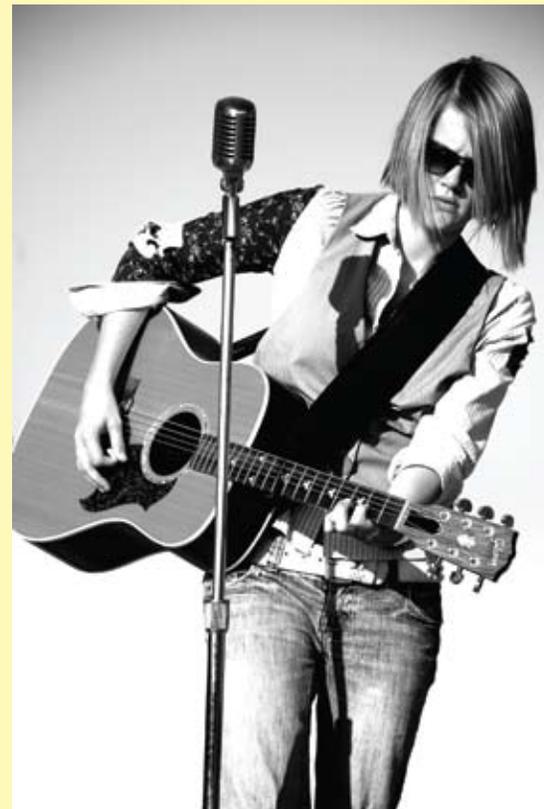
the edge of the road. We were airborne. We were invincible.

I opened my eyes, a horrible pounding in my head. I looked to the driver’s seat. Laurel’s white scarf was taking on a sickly red color. I raised a hand to my forehead, and it came away with something warm and sticky, the same sickly color as Laurel’s scarf.

A flash. I was back in the kitchen. I looked at my father with the eyes of an innocent child.

“I’d really like to go to bed. I have to get up in the morning. Laurel may call.” My father let go and sank into his chair. My parents were both crying, but I don’t know why. I just walked upstairs and sank in my bed, my eyes drooping as the sounds of rain on the roof lulled me to sleep.

leslie dudney, the original
john dunahoo



i want to make love without making love
victoria l. scott

I want him to stimulate my cerebral processes
Penetrate in and out, in and out of my soul
With an intangible moisture that will never touch my skin
Undress my spirit and in between the moans and groans of my heart
I want to sit still
To enjoy the symphonic music of our mental friction
And the diction
Ooh, the diction
Not too complex, yet still intriguing, still intimate
Not having to rewrite my thoughts for his comprehension
He listens
And I sit and admire
His essence and it's a blessing to be in his presence
He rejuvenates my being

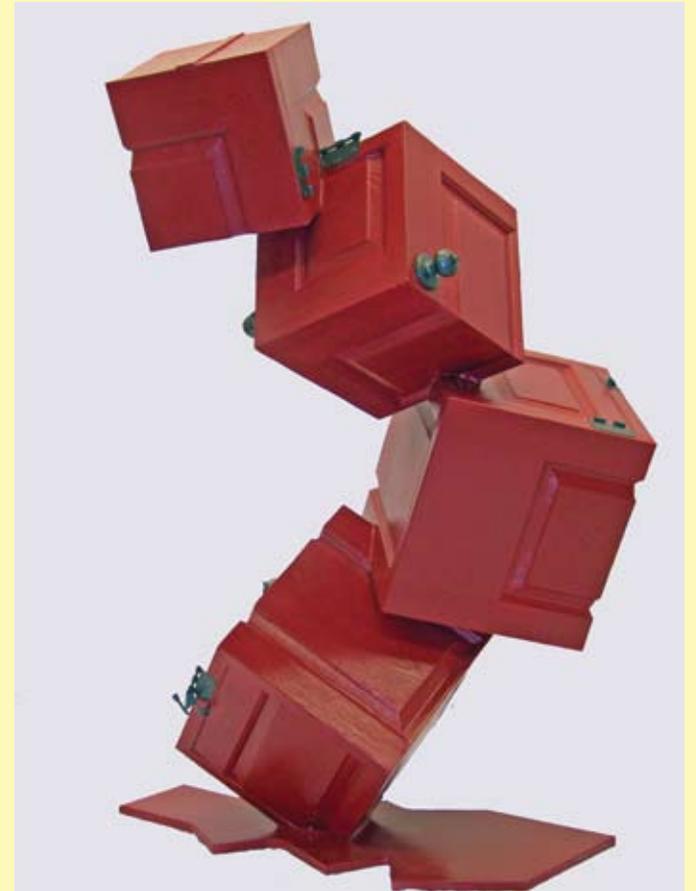
He makes love to me without making love
And for him being the beautiful man that God created,
I'll let him have, get and tap it,
My mind that is,
In any and all the ways that he can imagine
Because he takes me around the world in a couple of hours through his conversation
Sweet aura that he possesses, confidently I step into it
I'm captivated.
Taken back through him

This experience is
So sacred
So safe
So fulfilling
So beautiful
That we don't even use protection
This limitless affection
Adoration for him

This lover is so compassionate, so considerate
He waits on me to reach my peak and I rise to the
Occasion like soprano pitches,
The collaborative artistry that we birth is amazing
As we both reach this climatic experience
Through conversation

We wind down
To enjoy the essence of one another
He made love to me without a touch
And it was
So good
So ethereal
So beautiful
So surreal

He made love to me without making love
And still my mind is exhausted



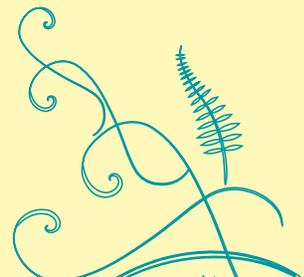
protected
randy purcell
[mixed media]



festivá
chet overall

dying embers jen hays

There are so many analogies
for the way women use men.
Men are compared to tissues and socks
. . . but I prefer cigarettes.
At first the ember burns so brightly,
like the passion fire of a relationship.
Over time it begins to fade
and life is breathed back into it
. . . one hit after another.
It grows stronger,
like the bitter nicotine taste
that burns your lungs.
It is good sometimes,
calming and soothing,
but other times it hurts.
And even though I know it's bad,
I take another hit . . .
but the ember loses its fire
and is snubbed out, smeared across asphalt
just like a heart when broken.
It's a nasty habit . . .
I need to quit,
but I find myself saying
'just one more hit.'
So I use them,
burn them,
waste them . . .
just like my lit cigarette.
And I can never stop myself
. . . I take another hit
and stare in fascination
as I smear the ash across the ground,
mesmerized by the dying ember,
before I snub it out with my boot heel
. . . broken hearts,
all because of me
. . . I need to quit
but I always find my hands
groping in the darkness
for my lighter.



autobiography
after frank o'hara's "autobiographia literaria"
tiffany clark

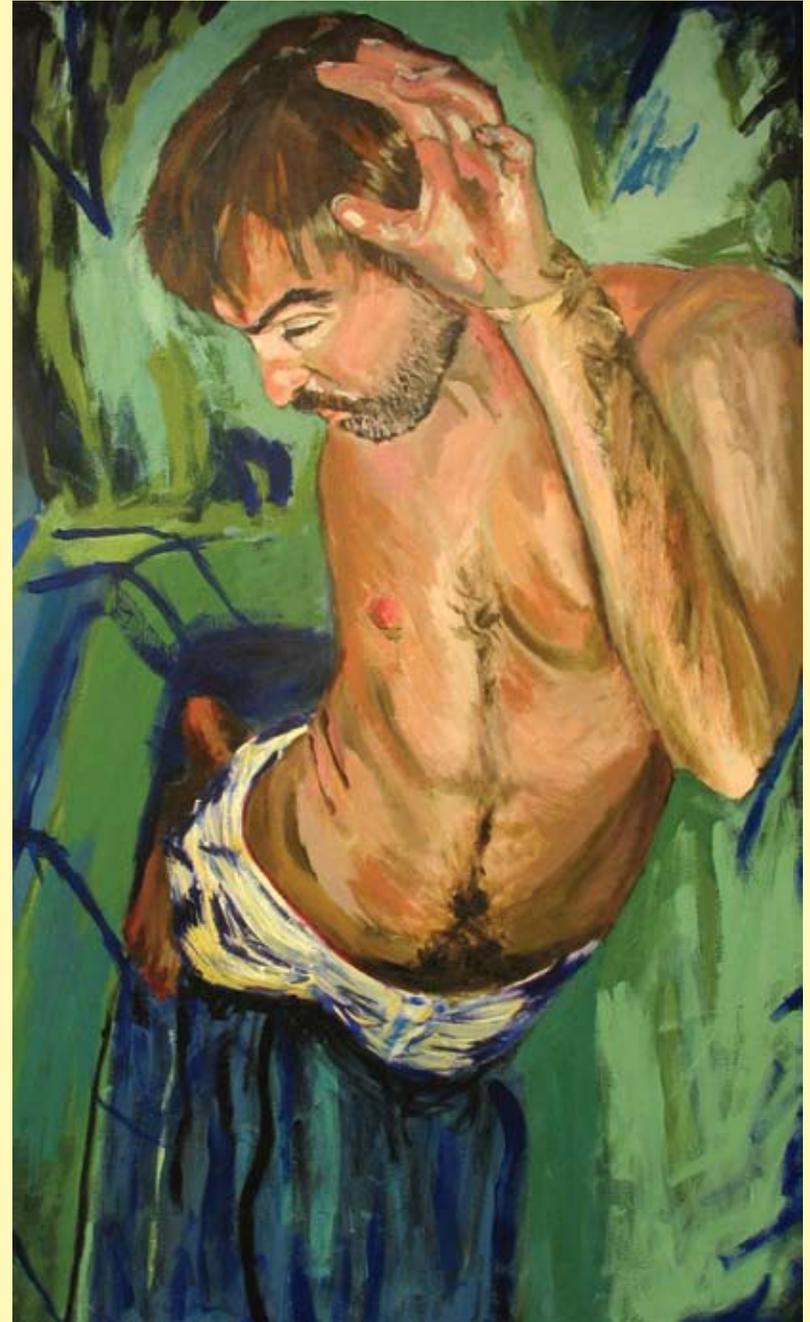
when i was a child i was
blood dripping down the back of my legs
the smell of el camino leather (82)
and the carbonation of cokes.

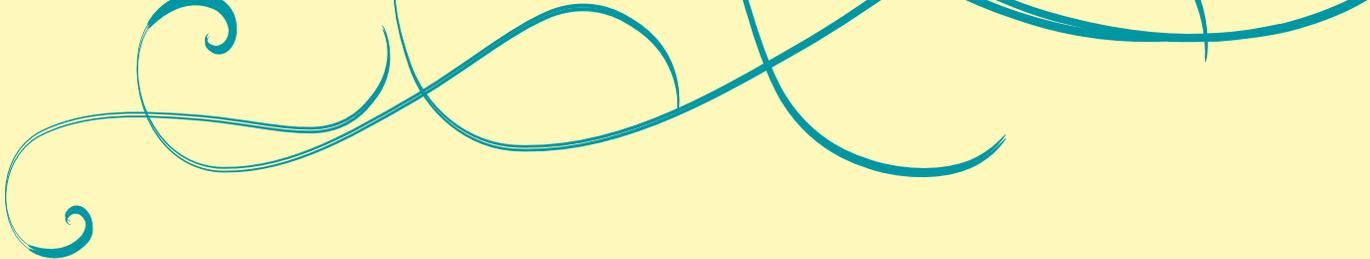
i spent an entire day
blind in my closet
banging on the walls
searching for narnia.

i found a boy to love/like
and pretended to eat him alive
with wolves' teeth.
i pretended to be wild and four-legged.

and here i am
green bruises and yellow skin, doe-eyed,
anxiously filing down my fangs.
wretched!

me
taylor hardaway
[acrylic on canvas]





daddy's hands joseph quarles

As a child, many things about my father fascinated me. Of my childhood memories, my most treasured ones are of playing in the big woodshop behind his house while he worked. I can still remember the smell of sawdust, oil and the glint of the woodshop tools under the shop lights. The scent of Old Spice and the clink of his key rings as he walked have also stuck with me. One of the things that most intrigued me about him was his hands. Sometimes, they reminded me of leather gloves. They were worn and spotted. A few knuckles were knotted with arthritis, and the backs of them had spidery seams of scars, showing white in odd places, the blue-collar mark of years of hard labor. In my later years, they, like him, seemed so resilient, until one day, I woke up abruptly and discovered otherwise.

I awakened with a start. It was hot in the house, and I was sweating off my alcohol induced sleep, having overslept. I knew my father would be upset with me. I had promised to come out to his big log cabin out in the country and help him scrape and recoat the logs. I was going through a nasty divorce and had nearly lost everything. My father had been trying to get me to go out more and to do things for myself again. He was concerned that I was slipping into a depression and was attempting to pull me out of it. I hurriedly dressed, and as I was pulling on my left work boot, the phone rang. It was my stepmother, and I could barely understand a word she was trying to say. She kept repeating, "You need to come to the house now! Right now!"

I ran with one boot on and the other in my hand and threw it in my old Buick GS as I jumped in. Shifting gears with a shaky hand, I rocketed to my father's home. I kept thinking he had fallen off the ladder and broken a bone and that it would be my fault for not being there.

I pulled into the driveway, and my stepmother came running out. She told me dad was gone. "Gone," I said, "What the hell are you talking about?!"

He's gone, he's dead!"

I just stood there. I stood there with one boot on, trapped in a moment of absurdity, experiencing the universe's dark sense of humor, watching my stepmother cry and feeling a sense of finality begin to overwhelm me. I spent a brief period calming down my stepmother, and she explained what had happened. Dad had waited around for me, then finally got tired and went on into town. When he arrived at the paint store, he parked near the entrance. The manager pulled up and waved at my father as he unlocked the front door and went in. My father waved back. The manager went to the back office of the paint store, turned on the lights and registers, then counted out the cash drawer. He walked out to the front window and waved at my father to come on in. He said my father was just sitting there, slightly hunched forward. The manager waved at him again. Worried, he went outside and tapped on the driver's side window of my dad's truck. My father did not move. Concerned, the manager opened the door of the truck, and my father fell out onto the ground.

The doctor later said that my father had suffered a massive heart attack and died in less than a minute. He actually had a piece of peppermint candy, partially unwrapped, clutched in his fist. It was the last thing those hands, those tough old hands that had gently guided me through life, ever handled.

I went into the kitchen, the kitchen he had built. I looked at the cabinets of cherry wood, the table he had made and the chairs I had helped him make in the

shop. Then I saw the manila envelope sitting on the counter. The envelope contained the things that were in my father's possession when he passed away. I felt absolutely crushed. Seeing the giant of a man who was my father reduced to a set of keys, change, wallet and a pocketknife was absolutely heartbreaking to me. I went from oversleeping and a hangover to having to pick out clothes to bury my father in. I had to go pick up his truck and drive it back, weeping so hard I could hardly see to drive. For a long time after, I thought that if I had been there, if I had not been trying to slowly kill myself with alcohol, maybe I could have saved my father's life. I realize now it would have just traumatized me even more, and there was no way I could have saved him.

The next and the last time I saw those tough old hands, they were clasped together. They were no longer brown from the sun but a sickly yellow, with papery skin and stiffened fingers. To me, they were no longer the hands that had picked me up from the ground when I was a child. They were no longer the hands that had taught me how to work on a car, helped build the Alaskan Pipeline, worked on the refineries in the Middle East and swum in the Caribbean. They were decaying lumps of meat, just sitting there. Other hands came to me, spectral hands, closing around my heart and filling me with dread for the future.

The service was a blur of somber faces, whispers and muttered condolences. When we buried him, the sound of the dirt hitting the coffin, that initial hollow pattering noise, made the spectral hands close even tighter around my heart. Steadily, the sound became thumps and then progressed to a soft whispering sound, as the dirt slowly separated my father from me, forever. I felt a smothered scream hitch up in my chest. I forced the cry back down.



I kept thinking, “ What will I do? How can I possibly deal with this?” He was the voice of reason in the wilderness of my life. I had witnessed many horrid things when I was young—deaths, murder, destruction in other countries—but my father was always my strength. When he said everything was going to be okay, I believed it. In the shadowy days after his passing, I had a moment of painful lucidity. Within that lucidity, an epiphany came to me. I remembered a conversation my father and I had had about a year before his death.

We had been working in the woods behind his house. Lightning had split and killed a large black walnut tree, and we had been cutting up and salvaging the wood. We had taken a break for lunch and were just talking. Somehow, we had gotten on the subject of his mother, and I had asked him a question about her. He had gotten upset, refusing to talk about it. Later, as I drug wood to the bed of the truck, I had noticed his eyes tearing up. It occurred to me that he never got over the death of his parents. He carried them with him until the day he died.

My epiphany drove home another realization. I knew immediately that I was going to carry him with me. It was the beginning of my journey, and many more would join my father. He was, and still is, with me. I can see him in my mind’s eye and hear his voice. I know that I will never get over it. I have simply learned to live with it. I have a lot of family and friends now who walk with me in my mind. My father, family and friends are all there. They will be with me until it is my time to go. Now, I look down at my hands, and I see long slender fingers, tanned and freckled. Scars stitch up my knuckles, and my right thumb has arthritis. When my son was a toddler, I would hold his hands and marvel at how small and perfect they looked, so tiny, next to mine.



nate
ryan debooy

that girl
victoria ogle

Looking out the window,
In my line of view,
A girl waiting for the boy to notice her,
Bored expression,
Bated breath and beating heart.
How typical, how pathetic, to be that girl.
Yet I latch onto the giddiness,
The rising effervescent feeling of a crush,
For a little while,
A few hours, ticking minutes,
Before crashing doubt crushes me.
“But . . .”
There’s always a but,
Butt of a gun, butt of a joke,
Lost treasures of normality.
Touch and be touched,
Compliments from the beautiful.
Wishing for a quiet mind,
A better coping method than scars.
Constancy, certainty . . .
Fickle heart.
And there’s the boy,
Close the book,
Laugh at impatience.
Threads of talking memory
Make me smile,
Think of you.
Then the remembrance,
“Close, but not close enough,”
Horseshoes, the reversal, no cigar.
Dearest drape of hair, roll of shoulder,
Dreams of the bubbling psyche.
Wishing well, Jack and Jill,
You be the boy,
I’ll be the book,
Closed, forgotten, pages turned,
Cold pressed paper,
Only kiss the cut . . .
Caress the spine, fall open.
Forgive my weightless wondering,
I want to be that girl.

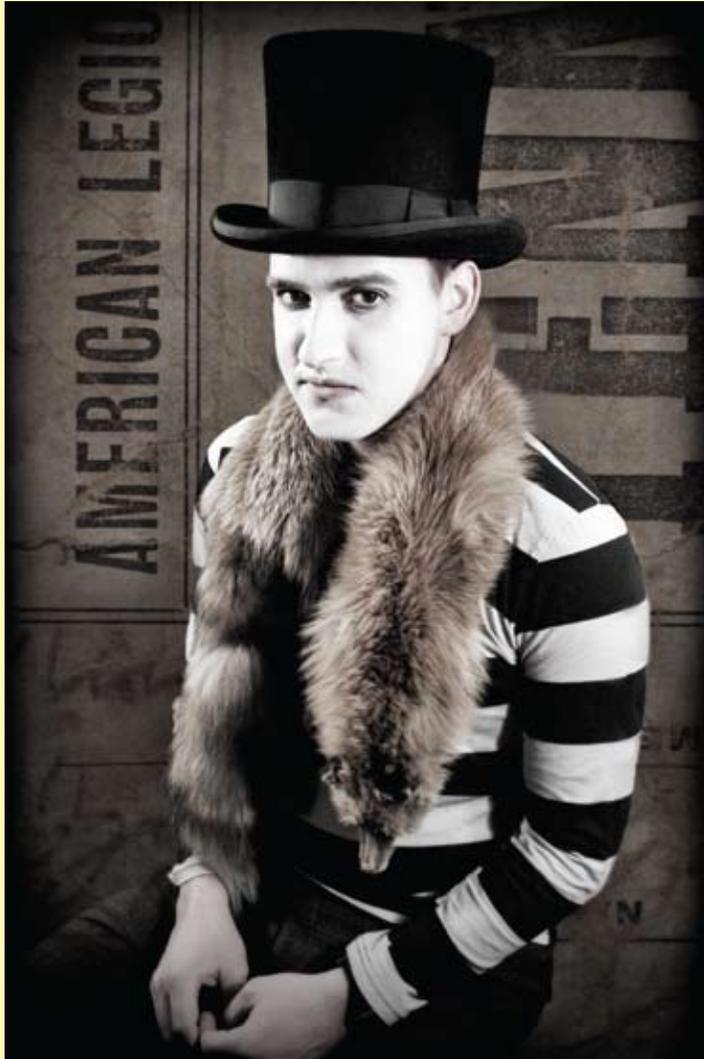


martha hixon
creative expression award
winner

self control
miki sato
[digital illustration]



one for the show
lauren wood



morelli
lauren wood



this ought not be so
victoria i. scott

We allow this miniscule
Piece of flesh to dilute
Our intellect towards
Wreck-age
“We Crash.”

This ought not be so . . .

Into an abyss of
Loneliness and disrespect we
Inflict within ourselves
And succumb to societies
Heterogeneous mix of sunflowers
Laced with hemlock that
Flows from the lips of men
Who speak with forked tongues . . .
Tongues . . .
Tongues . . .

Our vernacular tradition has
Caused a curse
Upon the seeds that have
Been sown
Planted
Corruption grows in the grown
Through the satanic entity . . .
Serpents in disguise underneath the
Guise of speaking a word of encouragement.
They say actions speak louder than words—
But a wise man once told me that the tongue
Is a sword.

This ought not be so . . .

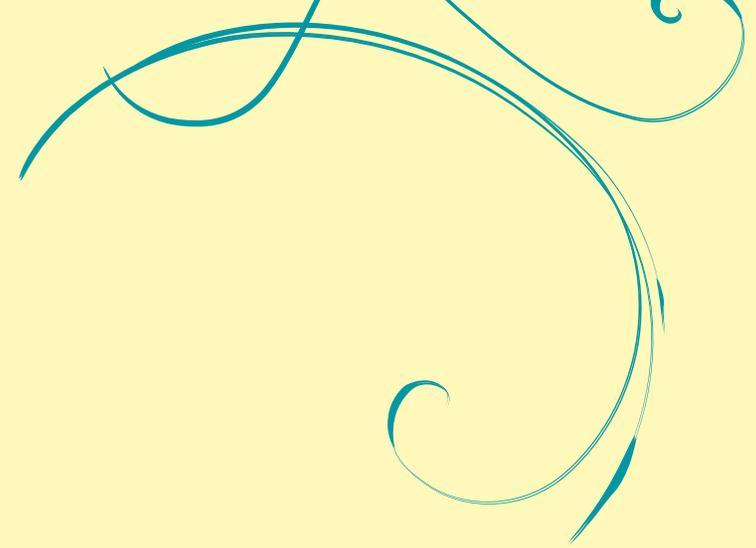
As I
We
Search for definitions . . .
We find
That
Through the minimization of
Our mistakes
We induce our downfall

Through speech
Through deceit
Through hypocrisy
Consonance, Assonance, Synonyms, Antonyms
Homonyms—too often we
Speak in Homonyms.
Trying to sail to sea
In an unseen cell that
We won’t allow ourselves
To see, as death
Serenades us we fall
Deaf, letting life sell us dreams.
This ought not be so . . .
So . . .

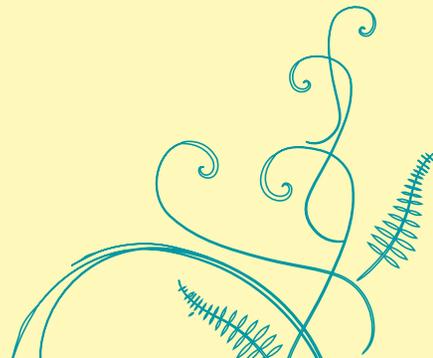
Can fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring?
It’s a shame when you have to speak through
Clenched teeth,
Afraid of whether the parries and thrusts of a
Tongue you’re supposed to trust
Will cut you to ribbons.
With our tongues we
Gargle sin instead of
Accommodating Him,
Trying to gain admission
Into Earthly Pleasure, instead
Of Club Kingdom.
This ought not be so . . .

So . . . There should not be salt in
Your fresh water spring
Or olives on your fig
Tree.
Isn’t the tongue one entity???

This ought not be so . . .



can't you see i'm eating
patrick m. casey

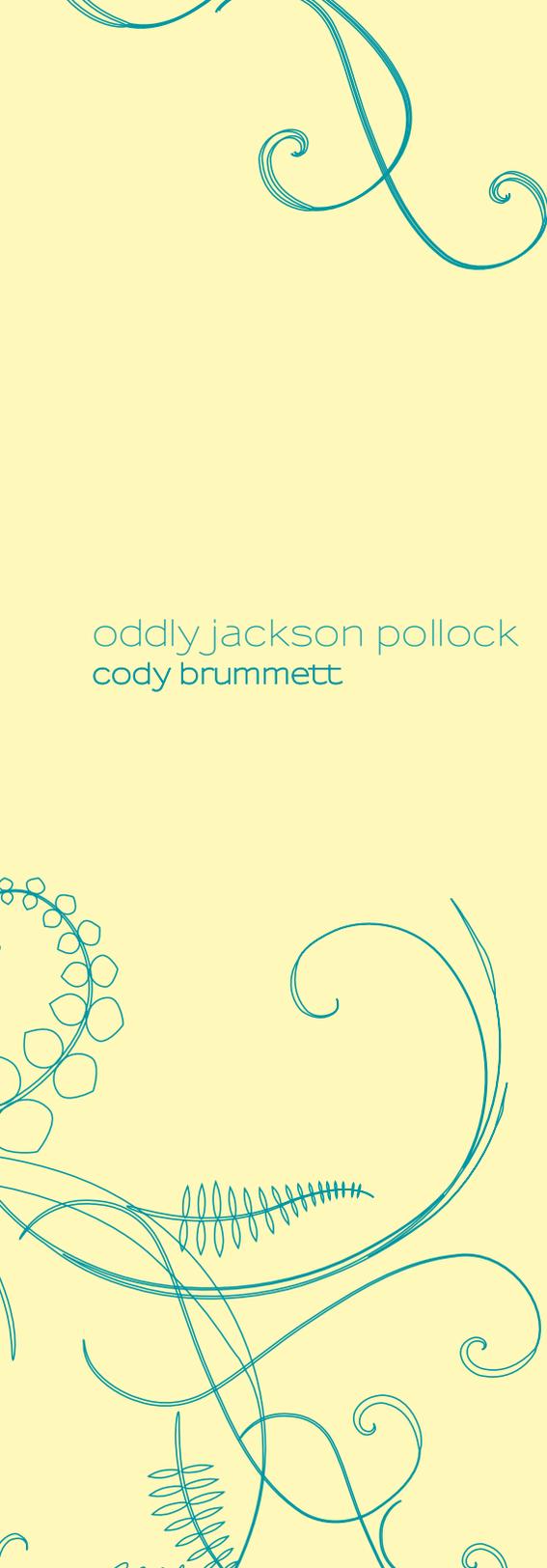


gulf
dean andrews

There's a gulf between us,
a living breathing sea of space.
Expanding, contracting, not waiting
for a moment. I taste its briny texture
as I wade in the shallows of the shore,
waving off seagulls pecking at the
crumbs inside my pockets.
I squint at the sun, and it looks back:
wide-eyed, red-hot.
What I am not is expectant, but all I've got is time,
ever dwindling, always slipping out my hands like sardines.
Boardwalk revelers snicker as they pass,
singing their nothings with spirited feeling.
They think I'm oblivious, but I'm just
meditative, thinking of the way back home.
Since no path, road or street'll lead me,
I'll have to pack my bags and roam.
My skin prunes as the journeys play
out in my mind. Alleys and boulevards erecting
themselves in a shimmery gleam . . .
rockets and bugles yelling, announcing
my arrival as I walk with parades through
tombs and crypts of memories.
This ocean
keeps getting deeper, but the dreams only ripen
with age. As the pages turn, I'd like to think
I've learned to let go and try to move and
grow. But as I look out at this gulf,
I sometimes wonder if that's true or only something
that I think I know.



anomaly
megan mcswain



oddly jackson pollock
cody brummett

The ringing was so loud and so abrupt that for a moment he thought his head might explode. The resonating irritation in his brain felt like a buzz saw on the skull. The cell phone. He must have fallen asleep watching television. *Full Metal Jacket*. Apparently, he had become immune to the vulgar violence that had disturbed him the first few times he witnessed it. His high school English teacher once had the class write an essay that would answer the question, "If you could only choose one movie to watch for the remainder of your life, which one would you choose and why?" He chose *Full Metal Jacket*. Stanley Kubric seemed to be Van Gogh in a room full of third-graders trying to recreate their own tennis shoes on a piece of paper.

His eyes fell captive to the television in the corner of the room. The blue glow caused by the player's idling provided a tranquil canvas for the band of horses galloping in his head. His heart raced in order to keep pace. He wasn't sure what he had dreamt, but an appropriate ending would have been a large man throwing him into a cold river. He wondered when she would call. He slowly forced himself off of the couch. The carpeted flooring felt cold and somewhat soggy beneath his feet. Making his way to the kitchen, he anticipated the disappointment that his near-empty refrigerator would bring. He had almost decided on stale chips and salsa when he heard the cat pawing at the screen door. What a stupid cat. He was of the notion that dogs were the only domesticated animals that begged to go outside. This cat wasn't his idea. He loathed this cat. After scanning the contents of his pantry, he settled for a glass of lemonade and a stick of beef jerky. The lemonade was cool on his dry throat but stung his chapped lips. He hated how beef got stuck in his teeth.

While passing through the dining room, he determined that the cat was two scratches on the door away from being a stray. He was bluffing, and he knew it. He didn't want to have to deal with the repercussions that this particular decision would surely bring. The cool linoleum of the bathroom floor only added to the damp feeling on the bottom of his feet. Old people always talked about poor circulation being the ill to end all ills. He should be on the news, a young man with poor circulation who owns a cat that acts like a dog.

A century ago, if someone had claimed that jabbing your fingertip into your eye socket each day would improve your vision and ease your life, they would have been stoned, and not Robert Zimmerman-stoned, "The Lottery" stoned. But alas, each morning and night, he placed and removed a contact shield into each eye that allotted him twenty-twenty vision. Modern technology at its finest. Maybe advancing in the civilized world wasn't as evil as everyone had made it out to be. Nuclear and biological warfare would be terrible, sure, but who could complain about electric shavers and microwavable pizzas? He had once heard a quote by someone too important to remember that went, "I'm not sure what weapons will be used in World War III, but World War IV will be fought with sticks and stones."

He had never cared enough about his teeth to brush them more than once a day. Maybe a brush in the morning and a rinse at night would be enough to appease the dental hygiene gods. His slow pace down the near pitch-black hallway reminded him that he still wasn't very far removed from sleep. The foggy veil of dream still inhibited his thoughts. Crossing the threshold into his bedroom, he watched the soft glow of his stereo lights illuminate the room with a light shade of pink and red that caused him to question whether it reminded him more of a porno flick or a cheap Chinese restaurant. Track number three of Bob Marley's "Burnin'" played at a level that was almost inaudible, but years of subconscious recording and the unmistakable ambient rhythm made the tune recognizable. He decided to place the track on repeat. Staring at the alternating pink and red of the LCD display, he decided to participate in a bit of recreation.

Uncovering the white shoebox at the base of his closet, he surveyed a number of medicinal items that could alter his current state of reality. If he could be accused of having a taste for anything, it would certainly be middle-of-the-road drugs. He decided on a generic brand sleep aid. The back of the box read "Ages 13 and Up take 2 caplets immediately before bed. Do not exceed 4 caplets in 24 hours." He decided that the magic number was six.



After dry-popping the capsules, he sat on the edge of his bed, closed his eyes and tried to convince his brain that the drugs were already working. Oddly enough, his initial reaction was the scene in *Full Metal Jacket* where the soldiers hold the slow kid to the bed with a sheet and proceed to smack him in the torso with socks filled with bars of soap. He had always sympathized with the attackers in that scene. The pain in their eyes was more real to him than the pain in the poor loser's eyes. He envied their vulnerability.

Reaching underneath his bed he pulled out a fireproof lock box that ironically had the key stuck in the keyhole. So much for keeping anyone out. Lifting the lid, he refreshed his memory as to what the box contained. He saw the handgun that he didn't even know the name for. He was never much of a gun fanatic but liked to go to the indoor shooting range a couple of times of year to reassure himself that he was a man. He hated the feeling of cold metal in his hand. It reminded him of something that he had never experienced but knew the details of all the same. He discarded the gun on the floor and resumed his perusal of the box. In the left corner, he found what he was looking for: two grams of mushroom. "Sweet bread of the gods," he whispered. It was not much of a delicacy, but the flavor doesn't make the trip. He was more than happy to finish off the plant. He would have nothing to hide until another craving forced him to buy more. He hated the vulnerability.

He noticed a folded letter in the corner of the box. A sudden coldness filled the room. It seemed as though someone had pulled up all the carpet and revealed nothing but ice underneath. He didn't have to open the letter to know what it said. He didn't want to read it anyway. He had found it on his pillow the morning she left. He put the lid on the box, slid it back under his bed and placed himself one layer of mattress above it. Then, it hit him.

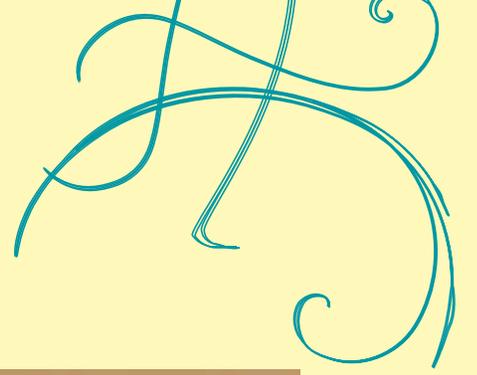
The overdose of sleep aids were pushing him off the edge of a cliff while the hallucinogenic mushroom gave him a rock pick to grasp to the last remaining waking thoughts that he would experience. Soon however, the rock pick would turn into a dancing midget-bandit who would most likely pull out a handgun. He studied the bookshelf across the room. The books molded into a mouth that told him how much smarter it was than him. "You will never know what I know," it said. The images in the pictures on his desk began to exit the frames that encompassed them and argue amongst themselves about who the greatest Prime Minister of Britain was. He liked Edward Heath. For a moment, he closed his eyes in an attempt to gather his thoughts. Something had curbed his trip. The fact that he had not received a call tonight worried him somewhat. For six weeks in a row, he had spent ten minutes or so hearing about the South American experience and clinging to each word because they were so few and far between. Abruptly, his sound system remote stood on its bottom end and changed the color of his wall from dark blue to orange. The orange projected a screaming shade that obscenely clashed with the pink and red that sprayed it.

The possibility for civil thought had expired. He was now at the mercy of the psilocin that fueled the mushroom. He closed his eyes and opened the door to the waking dream that was sure to follow. The cat in the other room had apparently transformed into a carpenter who was putting the final nails in a coffee table. The knocking in his ears was almost unbearable, and the sudden fear of making a mistake gripped his throat. He lay in his bed, or in his dream, and had the sudden urge to take a shower. If only he could wash himself of the sand from the other world and return to the passive pool. The banging finally stopped. Lunch break for the carpenter. Feeling like it had been left home while the family went to the carnival, the sense of smell finally came out to play. What an astounding and familiar fragrance. His heart was the heart of the women on the news who welcomed home their long lost loved ones. His nose was the grand marshal of the homecoming parade. He felt an ecstasy that he did not know possible,

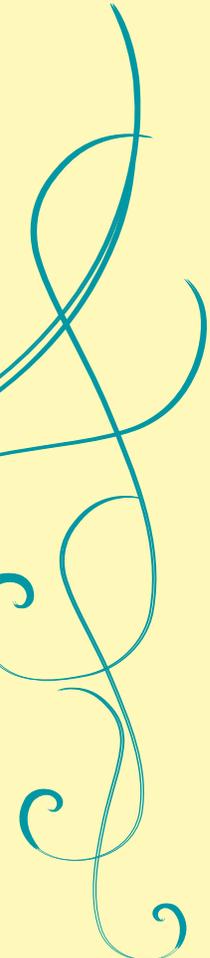
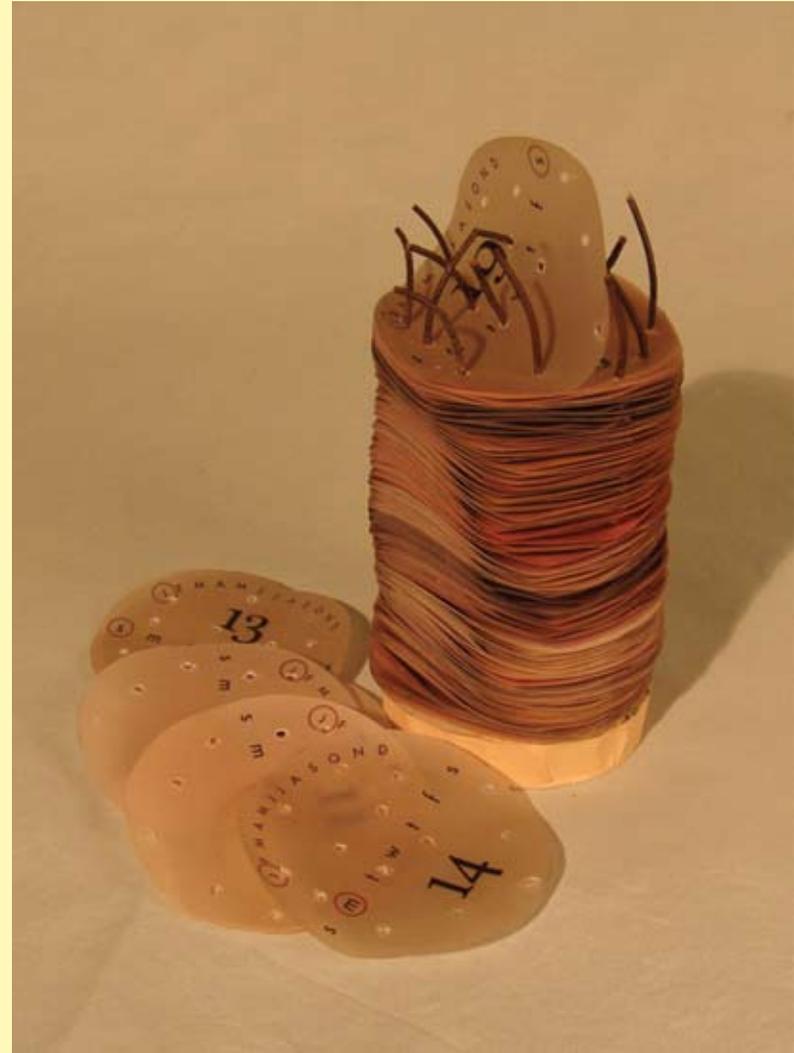
all from an aroma in the air. His room was filled with an infinite number of candles, all burning the scent of pure joy. Suddenly, the smell was gone.

The skies grew cloudy, and the rain molested his parade. The cat-turned-carpenter was standing in his doorway. The sudden realization of something more real than quarreling spring break pictures ripped him from his bliss. He fought to tear away from the disturbance and bring back the smell. He yearned for it. The gall of the carpenter. He had always known that the cat would be the bane of his existence. He could feel the anger swelling up inside of him. He felt the surge of hatred for the feline rising up like a raging storm. For the first time in his life, the cool metal felt welcome in his hand. As the carpenter began a slow approach towards the bed, he realized the gun was his avenue back to the elation that he had encountered only moments earlier. He raised the gun toward the 120-pound cat. A panic-stricken face stood across the room from him. Too late now, the carpenter had to go. Action. What was once contained in a fair-skinned, perfectly symmetrical face was now grotesque décor for the wall behind her. As he listened to a very real female frame hit a very real floor, he surfed upon a wave of questions to which he already knew the answers.

Sitting up in his bed, he felt the tremors of a past life shake him. He examined the new décor on the wall opposite him. The portrayal of expired life reminded him of a Jackson Pollock painting he had once studied. "What an oddly sickening arrangement you have here," Edward Heath said. "Oddly Jackson Pollock," he replied. A sickening army of emotions crossed his mind, and a crop of spoiled reckoning arose in his stomach. His eroded consciousness told him that she had come home early. South American missions were over. In every corner of the room, Bob Marley still sang "Reflexes had got the better of me, and what is to be must be." Recognizing the cool metal on his forefinger, he closed his fantasy-clouded eyes and hoped very hard that he was still dreaming.



hair calendar
miki sato
[mixed media]



new year's party
alex grant

The shots ring out
through the broken streets
and the first few
sound like murder

I sneak up to the window
cautiously split the shade
and look across the road
at my neighbor's yard

I count four figures
shadowed on the porch
slowly bringing dark bottles
up to their lips

There are two in the yard
stacking firecrackers
on a rotted stump.
Building up the Big Bang.

After several minutes
I watch the two sprint back
to the four on the porch,
a spark tracing across the yard

I shut the slit
and step back from the window
as the black powder pops and crackles,
strobing a silhouette on my shade

My neighbors and their friends
shout and laugh at their meager spectacle
and raise their bottles to each other,
a great huddle, swaying together in the yard

Boldly facing the new year.
Celebrating strangeness.
Comforting one another.
Concealing the terror.

I saunter to the refrigerator
grab a bottle of cranberry apple juice
then find that little half box
of cracker snaps left over from the 4th of July

I sit there and sip my juice
and pop those cracker snaps
one by one
against my living room wall

and I listen
to their dread celebration
and my own
as we wait for time to turn over again.





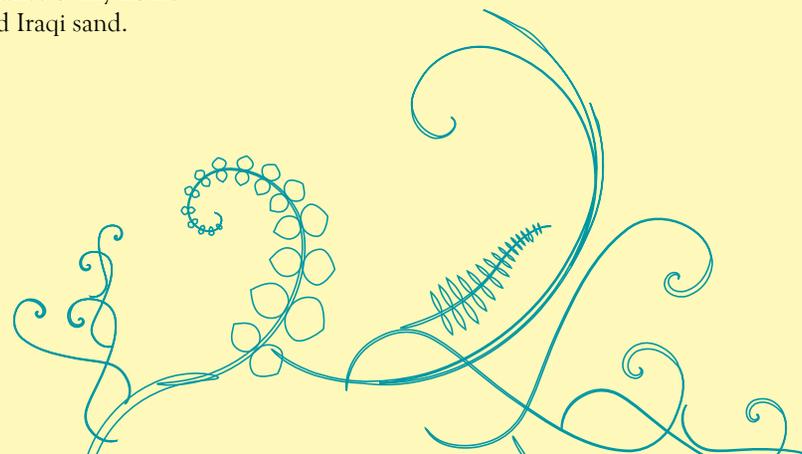
idle
jason barnett
[acrylic on masonite]

my baby
gwen williams

The softness of her skin is soothing,
Innocence is felt when she is touched,
Her plump curves I am caressing,
The suckling begins once she has nudged.
Eyes meet in recognition,
Hearts beat in familiar refrain,
Cuddling closer, rocking rhythm,
Nurturing is a slow, gentle train.
Quietly relaxing her eyes close,
Sleep is coming soon,
My soul sighs as I doze,
Mom and baby cocoon.
Abby so sweet
I am complete.

march 2003
james hamby

Do the Knoxville dogwoods bloom
as they have since time began?
I see no semblance of my home
in this damned Iraqi sand.



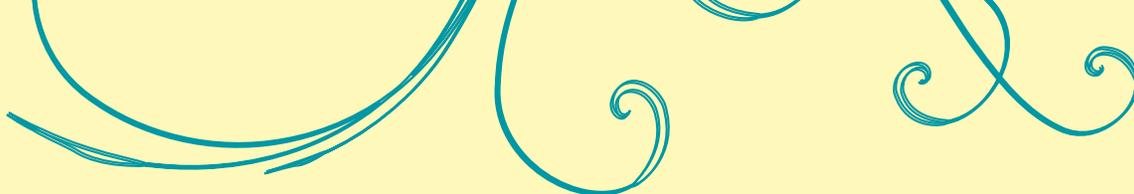
motivation for world lit
jen hays

A liberal arts education
will buy you
a one-way ticket
to bum town.
You can
eat out of garbage cans
while you recite
Plato over the
trash can fire,
for surely
“knowledge is the
food of the soul.”
You will be
the most educated mind
of your time
while you
beg on the street corner
for quarters
to buy books
written by
a bunch of
dead white guys.
Swear by the
Hemingway philosophy

“every man’s life
ends the same way.
It is only the details
of how he lived
and how he died
that distinguish one man
from another.”
Incorporate
your classic learning
into your everyday tasks:
“wouldst thou carest
for pomme frites
with that?”
To be a scholar today
means working at
Boot Country
while studying Shakespeare.
You can become
“a wretched soul,
bruised with adversity.”
Because as they say,
what can you do
with a liberal arts degree
anyway?

jake
jennifer rozell
[oil on canvas]





author of his own story cody brummett

He held firm to the notion that the maiden squeeze of a fresh tube of toothpaste was magical. On those special mornings, following the nights he retired the veteran tube, whose service had been served and contents expired, great care had to be taken to fulfill the potential of virgin Rembrandt. This morning, however, had not been one of those particular mornings. He had forgotten that a crippled tube now rested in his wastebasket, celebrating a life of honor, commitment and whiteness. He had forgotten the paste's newness and had not taken special care to behold its sacred nature.

From that point, the god of good moods and the angels of inspiration had fled. And now, at the solstice of the morning, sitting in class, he was ready to give in to the inevitable hands of fate and be off with his own head. The morbid documentary that he was being forced to endure was not elevating his current desire to exist. Brain damage from a wood chipper? A near-death experience in a barn? Did the cruel humor of fate not understand that he was already a bit edgy? He was dealing with his inner demons, and they were covering the spread in the bottom of the ninth. He was asking Life to throw him a buoy and Life was hurling an anvil at him. "This is the best I can do," Life mocked.

It was painfully obvious that he was not the author of his own story. Too much was possible. Any number of events could transpire: a mangled portrait of metal on the side of a highway, an empty apartment guarded by yellow police tape. It, the reaper of a past life, could return and, once again, rip out his heart and feed him a heaping bowl of pseudo-life. At any particular moment he could leave a him-shaped hole in the universe. His life was a balloon that someone had forgotten to tie, on purpose.

And then, the film was over. The class was over. The day was over. He left the room and entered the hallway en route to the parking lot. Reaching into his coat pocket, he found his MP3 player. Plugging the buds into his ears, he anticipated Explosions in the Sky. Waiting, still, he heard nothing. The battery was dead. How fitting. He ripped the battery out, slammed it on the ground and stuffed the device back into his pocket. Dodging people who were apparently blinded by text messages, he finally arrived at the exit. As he pushed through the door, his world

suddenly aligned on its axis. The sunlight burned his eyes, and the frozen air stabbed at his face like a mob of enraged pushpins. In an instant, the angels of inspiration flew in and the god of good moods triumphantly returned. In an instant, the home team gained momentum. In an instant, he knew—with a certainty that comes only from a whitened smile—that he was the author of his own story. In an instant, he realized that he was, indeed, very much alive. In an instant, he realized he was late for work.



bird's nest
josh milliken



the innocent murdered
teri patton

The Blackbird is taken over the feeders
The Blackbird is not inclined to share

RID the yard of that selfish Blackbird
GET

RID
OF

HIM

I SAID!

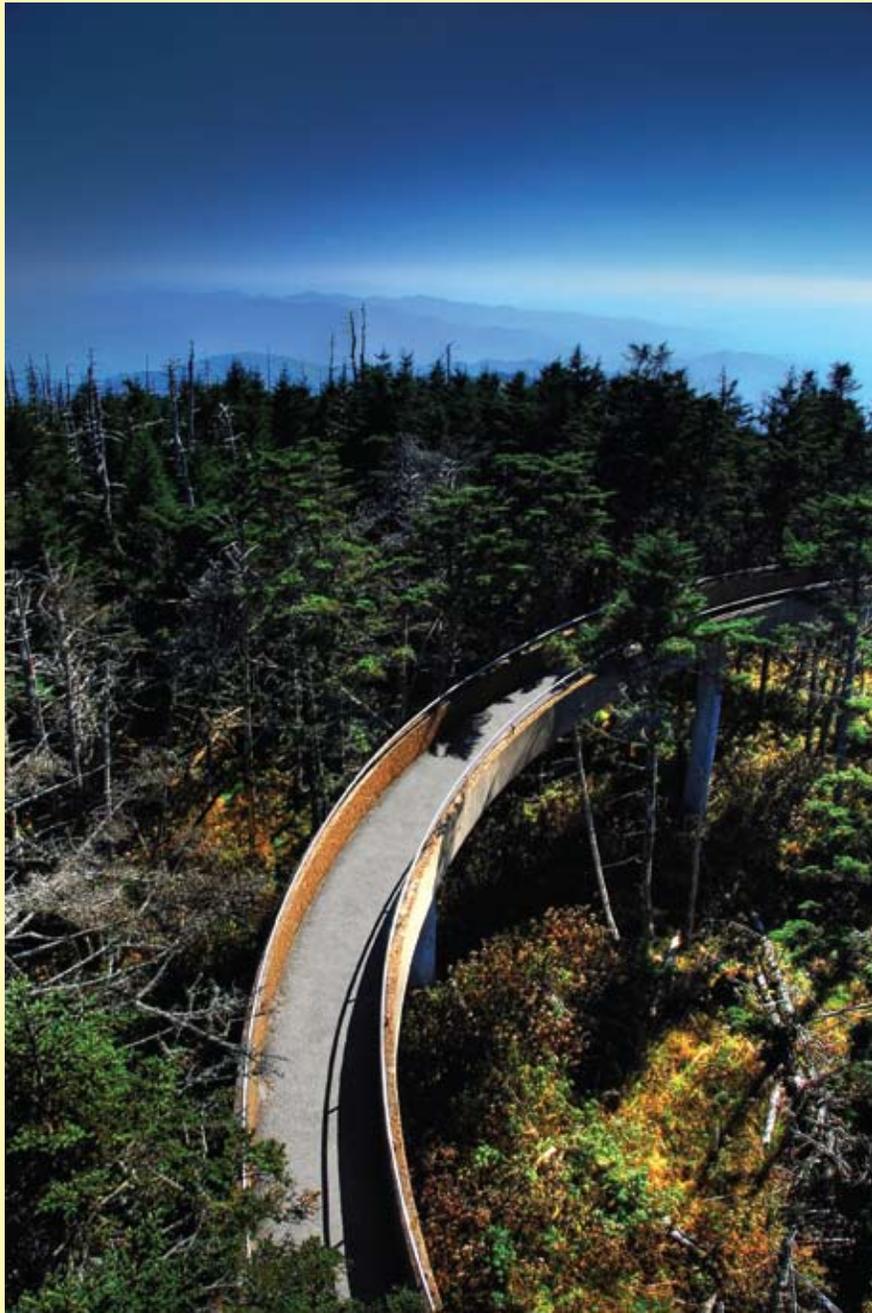
In protection of the seeds
Intended for all the birds

The boy held his gun . . .

Shots Fired!
Screams Heard!

HIT . . .

was the wrong Bird!



kuwahi is clingman's
john dunahoo

there she stands
nathaniel phillips

There she stands at the foot of the stairs. I did not expect to see her there, not now. The evening wanes, and I cannot not fathom anyone stirring at such an unforgiving hour. Certainly not me, but especially not her. I had merely wanted to make sure things were in order before I subjected myself to another restless night. Now I have been caught off my guard, because there she stands.

Her gaze sickens me, not because I could bring myself to be disgusted with her now, but because she blames me, and it makes me ill. I feel it deep in the pit of my stomach, as though some thorny-legged creature were climbing up my throat to free itself from its prison. I cannot let her know the paralyzing terror that I am feeling. I will not betray my feelings by letting my arm waver in front of me. I will hold my candle steady, thrust forth in defiance into the abyss of black that should envelop her but instead turns bright. But I know in my heart that she has done no wrong.

I try to look her directly in the eyes. Alas, it is hopeless. I can only hold her gaze for mere seconds, her cold eyes slowly turning me to stone. No matter what, I will not fear her. But it is difficult. I can see the candlelight from the hallway below reflecting on her eyes. Nothing. The glow in her eyes—in her face—has departed.

The first time she saw my family's plot was shortly after we were wed. We spent the better part of the morning touring the grounds and enjoying one another's company. I could not take my eyes off of her. We sat beneath the mighty oak in front of the manor for hours, merely contemplating the rest of our lives together with glee. I remember those perfect eyes, the pale blue globes passing into infinity. In those eyes I knew that the years to come would hold prosperity and happiness. On this land we would raise a family. We would have many children. We lay beneath the tree in each other's arms until the sun set.

There she stands, unwilling to break the horrid silence. It terrifies me. It gnaws at me like a primitive beast trying to satisfy its ravenous appetite. I know exactly what to say but not how to say it. She says nothing, and understandably so. Why would she say anything? Her mere presence is enough. I can see her lips, and I can see that they are not going to move. The silence is enough to drive one mad.

As some have told me, I am outgoing and personable. She was never like that. Indeed, she had been quite reserved, but it had appealed to me. It was the long silence that I could not handle, the silence that made me hear nothing but the ringing turned screams resonating in my ears. I know I am to blame, and this lifeless stairwell tells me so. I want nothing more than to end it by letting a few simple words escape my lips: "I am sorry." I dare not. She would surely scoff.

I remember that the doctor had already left as we sat in the master bedroom by ourselves. And who else could sit with us? There was no one. So much promise lay in the bedroom, and in that same room, our dreams were shattered. We had learned what we had both guessed but could never say. We could not let anyone know, but they all knew. "But you have been married for nearly two years! Won't you be having children soon?" Our lives would have been complete. Their questions cut me like a searing knife straight from the smithy. We could not look at each other now but only at the friendly wooden floor. How it enticed the eyes! But the anger . . .

The anger possessed me like an agent of Satan. I could not help myself, and in all of my rage, I struck her beautiful face. After all, it was her fault, wasn't it? She took the blow and did not make a sound; it was unreal. She stood but did not look at me, only diverting her eyes downward toward the wood panels. She was expressionless, but I knew her surprise all too well. As she strode briskly out of the room and left the door ajar, I could not believe what had just happened. First the news of infertility, and now . . . now I had struck the person toward whom I had never even had a resenting thought. I am a gentleman, and gentlemen do not do such things. I sat back down on the bed and wept. I had not cried for many years until that moment. In fact, I was certain that I had forgotten how.

When I finally gathered myself, I left the bedroom to find her. She was knitting by the fireplace in the parlor. I could see the bruise on her cheek in the glow of the blaze. I opened my mouth to speak but could do no more. She knew I was there but would not acknowledge my presence, and as the seconds quietly passed, I could

feel the silence beginning to nip at my extremities. It was an unfortunate situation that I had to force myself to understand, to embrace. We went for days without a single word. We spoke after that, but only when absolutely necessary. I could have died from the pain.

There she stands, and I wish that I could not focus on her. I see the candle in my hand in front of me. Beads of wax are slowly marching toward my fingers, but I am not fazed. She is but thirty feet and an eternity from me. Still, her figure intrigues me. Her posture is something that I do not see frequently. Rarely would she stand so rigid, so stern, hands stiff by her sides like a mannequin. I know that I can never hold those hands, that I will never caress or kiss them again. Her pearl skin, which once pleased me, now has a worn look about it, almost pale. But then she has been secluded for some months now, so it is no surprise.

I remember that it was the early evening just before my dinner. We had grown accustomed to eating at different times so that we could minimize our interactions. She spent most of her days knitting in the master bedroom. She needed something to keep her mind occupied and away from the way our lives had unfolded. I had moved my clothes and necessities to a guest room a few weeks before. On occasion I could catch a glimpse of her in the kitchen late at night. These treats were only possible if I feigned going to bed but instead snuck back out to sit in the dimmed parlor. She never once knew I was there, watching her. I would wait for hours just to have the opportunity to observe her for a single moment. I felt like the nervous bachelor that I had been when we first met, the anxiety welling-up inside of me until I could talk to her for but five minutes of my day.

I could tolerate it no longer and decided that I would confront her. I would grovel and beg. I would lower myself to her like I had lowered myself to no other human being. I would apologize. We both knew that I was at fault. I had not said anything because I could not muster the courage. But how could she have known that? She probably thought me to be too proud. I climbed the stairs more slowly than usual, my knees

feeling forty years older than the rest of my body, and my mind wandering in an unhealthy fashion. But I persevered. I tried to keep my thoughts focused so that I could say just the right thing. When I reached her door, I lifted my hand to rap gently. Her door? After all, it was my house and my forefathers' before that. I quickly knocked and entered without awaiting her consent.

I do not know how long I stood in the doorway. I was shocked, but my face surely did not express it. I was not as surprised at what I saw before me as at how different things could have been. Had I been but a day earlier . . . no, I refuse to trek into such a forbidding wilderness of thought. It was then I realized that she had thought me neither too proud to apologize, nor a coward. She had thought herself to blame. I took a few steps into the room. The bed had been made very precisely without a wrinkle to be seen. The floor had been swept and the windows left open. How she enjoyed the fresh air. I looked to the far table and saw the remnants of her knitting. It had been unraveled in its entirety. For what reason, I know not.

The ceremony had been brief and private. Few were in attendance, but that is how it had to be. The priests said that it was a mortal sin and there was no hope for her, so it would be best not to make public these skeletons. I agreed. She was placed in the family crypt not far from the manor house. There she could rest with my relatives from days long forgotten. If the Savior could not forgive her, then maybe they could.

There she stands with her eyes dark and her skin pale. She will not speak to me. If only I could say something, the one something that I have been yearning to tell her . . . but it is too late. She is here for but one reason: to remind me of my grave mistakes and to make them weigh heavy on my conscience. I love her dearly, but now I can only fear her. And what more can I do? After all, there she stands.



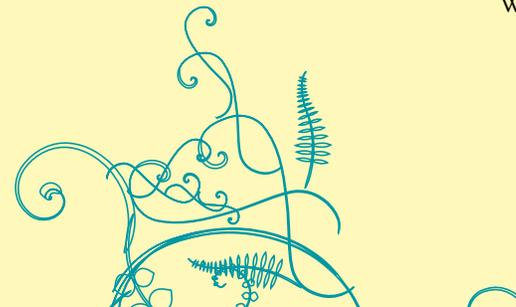
memory distortion
jennifer rozell
[marker on glass]



home
meghan davis

Writhing on the ground.
Writhing with guilt.
Gnashing of teeth.
Grimace so wide, my lips were split.
Blood on my tongue.
Apologies whimpered from a broken soul.
Broken into a thousand bloodied pieces.
Tears all over a red face.
Head pounding, eyes gushing.
Writhing, writhing.
Hands grasping for proverbial straws.
Apologies!
I'm sorry!
Weeping.
Wailing.
Gnashing of teeth.
Splitting of lips.

A gasp.
Glasses back on.
Tears wiped from the eyes,
Shining on the hands.
Calm, calm.
Love. Acceptance. Light.
Laugh! Laugh!
"Welcome to Christianity."



to submit to *collage*:

Collage accepts submissions year-round. Each submission must be accompanied by a completed submission form, which is available at www.mtsu.edu/~collage. On this website you will also find submission guidelines, the deadlines for each publication, and the latest *Collage* information. Submissions may be turned in at the *Collage* office, Paul W. Martin, Sr. Honors Building, Rm. 224 between the hours of 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. or by mail. Submissions will not be accepted via e-mail, and you must be an MTSU student to submit.

the martha hixon creative expression award

Each semester one or two student's work(s) will be awarded the Martha Hixon Creative Expression Award. The \$100 prize, which will be presented at *Collage's* annual spring recognition program, will be awarded for an outstanding student work chosen by the *Collage* faculty advisory board. The award was established in honor of Dr. Martha Hixon, chair of the 2004 *Collage* Ad Hoc Committee and member of the *Collage* Advisory Board from 2005 to 2008.

colophon

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