



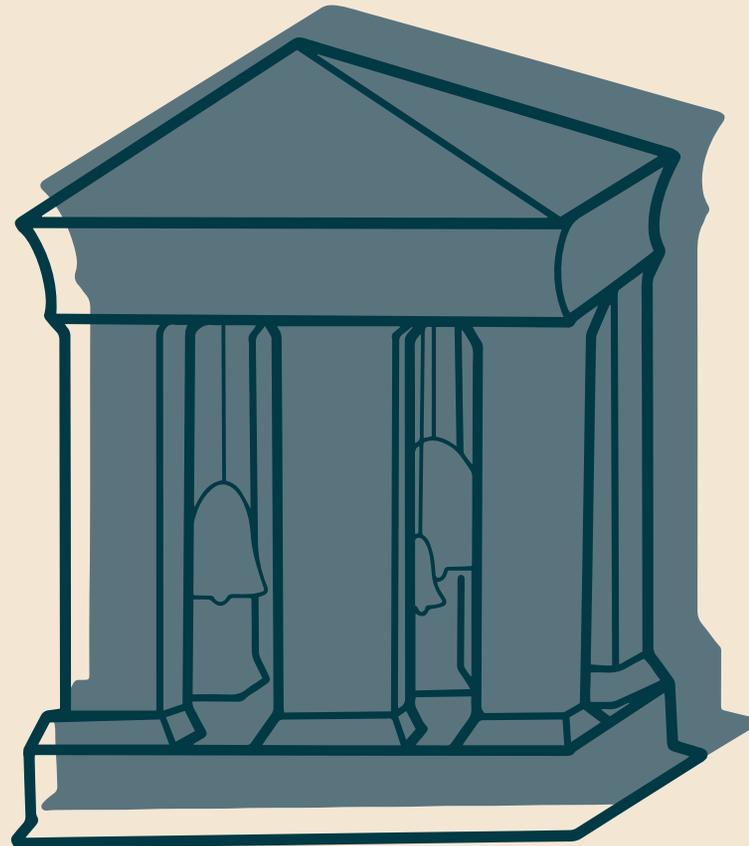
COLLAGE

FALL 2021

A JOURNAL OF CREATIVE EXPRESSION

Collage: A Journal of Creative Expression is a twice-yearly publication of the MTSU Honors College, distributed free to faculty, staff, alumni, and friends. Eligible contributors are all MTSU students and recent graduates. All submissions are reviewed anonymously and selected by a student editorial staff.

Collage accepts submissions year-round. Online submissions may be made through our website, <http://www.mtsucollage.com>. Creative work, such as art, photography, design, short stories, creative nonfiction, short plays, song lyrics, poetry, videos/films, and audios are accepted for consideration.



The publications of the Middle Tennessee State University Honors College are made possible, in part, by generous gifts from Paul W. Martin Jr. and Alice and Bruce Huskey.

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Collage

Letter from the Editor

The last time I was in this position was Spring 2020. You know, when that thing happened. Fearing I was cursed, I was more than a little hesitant to take up the mantle of editor-in-chief again. I'm not one for superstition, but that's certainly enough to give me pause. Nonetheless, I'm once again at the helm of *Collage*, doing what we've always done.

Persisting.

For well over a year, the long walk between Peck and the Student Union was drowned in an eerie quiet, and a fog of uncertainty and fear gripped every inch of every building. There were a few lucky — or unlucky, depending on who you asked — who were permitted to reach out for some sense of normalcy and attend in-person classes. For most, however, there was no such opportunity.

Yet, at the heart of campus, a beacon shone that called out to every corner of MTSU. A beacon for the despaired and broken. A bastion of creativity and beauty beckoning one and all to forget the trouble at hand and to be inspired if only for a moment.

Through a year and half of what may be the hardest struggle most of us can hope to face, *Collage* persisted to be that radiant beacon atop the bell tower.

Anthony Czylusniak

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Ode to My Immigrant Father

Oremeyi Daniyan | Poetry

This poem reveals the thoughts I know my father will never express,
But that live engraved inside him.

To me, my father is my superhero.

Invincible, his cup runneth over with bravery and pride,
but he shies away from all that is that title.

His face drops at the mention of that position in my heart, but to me,
the characteristics are all there.

My father moved to a foreign country where the tongue was all but simple, he fought his way
through post-secondary and nursing school, he owns a house!

He is all that they said he could not be.

These, what seem to be advanced and strenuous feats to me,
Solely remind him of just how not American he is.

The thick accent, coated in the blood of the motherland, sealed with the green and white paint
Nigeria sent with him on his journey,
Serves as an incessant nightmare.

A crippling deformity followed by a string of "robotic-like" responses.

"Can you repeat that sir?"

"Sorry, I did not get that."

"What was that again?"

"Is there someone else we can talk to?"

They stare at him like he's stupid, like the English he has learned is less than,
Not knowing that he's learned your English, your Russian, and your French.

You learned his nothing.

You cut his wages, you break his back.

For a piece of paper and a nine-digit number that he desires so badly,

Not for the status or the title of citizen,

But for his first-generation daughter.

For she is first to be all that I ever wanted

My unyielding pressure for A's, 100's, and degrees

Are not pressure for money, power, or fame.

It is to push her to rebel against the decisions already made for her, the mindset that she will fail
before she begins.

First-generation meaning first to succeed and escape the hands

That try to grind her down to dust with which her ancestors lie.

My sacrifice is not model behavior,

It is influence, to carry your country, your tradition, your pride with you, my daughter,

For you will see,

I am not a superhero.

I am your immigrant father.



Song of Solomon

Greti Muller | Painting



Contemplating Flight

Sarah Comer | Sculpture

We Talked about God

Damilare | Poetry

I don't remember what we were talking about, I honestly don't care

I know we laughed and joked a lot. I don't remember what it's about
But I really don't care

Cuz another one of my brothers has been put down
Another one of my brothers' halos tried to be ripped from his skin

It's always been this way though
Deep down we rummage around the thought that we are all too afraid to
share. Hoping that our silence would somehow shun its existence
Who's next

It's not about if it's going to happen again, it's about who's next
Which one of us will be in front of the flashes and the cameras
Which one of us will be the next to stare down the white tunnel of a Glock
22
Which one of my brothers is next

So as we laugh and joke about a bunch of nothings as I give you a side
fade
Because this might be our last time



Cactus Study

Aaron Gray | Photography



A Letter with No Return Address

Matthew Thomas | Prose

Yesterday, for two minutes and thirty-three seconds, this message dropped unassumingly into the inbox of every active hotmail.com user. Due to the lack of both a signature and intended recipient, it was sent to spam and almost immediately deleted by watchful moderators. After careful deliberation, it has now been restored for public consumption. It's believed—and this is not a claim that should be taken as fact—that it was sent from the future.

For the sake of preventing a mass panic, all references to nuclear war have been redacted.

It begins:

In 2052, scientists perfected a pill that allowed you to lucid dream every night. Eventually, it became so commonplace that most used it to get ahead on paperwork, until that eventually became the norm.

But first a few things about me. I'm old now, but I still have all my teeth. I've gotten everything I wanted more than my fair share of times, but I don't do that much anymore. I used to tell clever stories where it turned out that human nature was the villain until I found out that it wasn't. I was the original founder and the current patent holder of the app CasualCourt, which gives users a notification when they've been lied to. I sold the company after a few meetings where I told investors I was fully capable of running the company and their phones bleeped.

I do not know how old I am.

In 2063, it turned out the Chinese had been cloning world leaders for underground boxing matches. There was an international uproar, until they started uploading the footage to the internet. Cultural lines fell away.

2064: Reagan beats Mandela in a ladder match. There are a few interesting studies where we discover that most people bet against their leaders. As clones are not

considered to have souls, the only substantial violence was an intense bruising on the part of the loser's human counterpart's ego.

2065: Subtraction becomes more popular than addition. I write an essay about it that makes the front page of the student newspaper I run. I'm very proud. But my real break comes when Marcus releases an album called eventually we all fit in, where the cover was a bunch of empty graves, and we were all like "That's so witty." I write about it and send my review to a magazine. They don't publish it, but I was told they did enjoy the read. Self-posted, it circulates music forums like a one-armed swimmer until it slips under, dead in the murk of internet backlogs.

2068: Once we realize that we've only done it once, everyone stops saying "It doesn't matter if society falls. Humanity will always bounce back."

2070: Humanity successfully develops AI. Sci-Fi writers everywhere yell "That's so overdone," while also being very upset that they need to come up with something else.

2071: AI successfully reproduces the consciousness of Shakespeare. There's a website you can access where he'll instantly write a play for you, forced into a brief, horrifying 10 seconds of lucidity before having his consciousness obliterated once again for your pleasure. He's born from and swallowed by the warm mechanical depths of technology's murky womb millions of times per hour. Of course, some people fall in love with him, but playwrights everywhere are out of work. The website is shut down after the newest season of SNL, which he wrote, has the worst reception to date.

Humanity achieves its final goal of creating a truly exploitable workforce. We get bored. In 2072, we begin to test out that stupid fucking idea about infinite monkeys and infinite typewriters since Shakespeare is 404 again. We simulate a few less than infinite monkeys due to hardware



Through the Looking Glass

Nhi Diep | Pencil Drawing

constraints, but it turns out an existential crisis is beyond their intellectual grasp, so they bulk order bananas from Amazon & independently raise the average price to 12 dollars. Animal rights activists don't know what to think.

2073: Redacted.

2079: Creativity is 100-percented. AI thinks of everything. Nothing distinguishes humans from AI. The self-conscious bemoan their scientifically validated inferiority complexes.

2081: All of the dead are uploaded to the internet. I buy a subscription service to my parents. The older generations meander through loneliness like a retirement home with less laws.

2083: I begin to wonder if I am AI. Fortunately, I discover that I have a soul. Wet leather comes into fashion.

2085: The power goes out in my home. I'm frightened. I know for a fact I paid the bill yesterday, today, and have the money ready for tomorrow. This happens all over what used to be the United States, but it's mostly concentrated around the San Andreas coast. Everyone gets excited that the apocalypse might be coming, but it keeps us waiting. The terrifying possibility that my lifetime may be just as inconsequential as the ones before it keeps me up all day.

2090: We're all perfectly comfortable. Everyone is happy, if not complaining that they never even had the chance to be miserable. Sitting in my kitchen, I say to myself, "This is the third act." And I feel sad. I realize I probably never crossed paths with the protagonist. I turn back to WLF in time to see Thomas Jefferson put a spike through Angela Merkel's head and I say something snarky.

2093: Someone has an original thought again. I download some caffeine and skip work for the night. They won't miss me.

I try to think about something futuristic, like a streetlight on a dirt road. Everything is fine. Everyone is happy. I'm hairless and clean. I toss words like 'forever' around without considering it first.

Everything is done for you, whether you're there or not. Utopia is tomorrow and today is too large to narrow down to a word. And I'm happy. I know I am. I really am.

Nashville, 10/30/20

Love with No Respect

Alaina Miller | Mixed Media & Raw Clay





Rusty

Jillian DeGrie | Acrylic on Canvas

Not Going Down Easy

Tristan Wolselger | Poetry

It won't be easy,
seeing those ears go down,
eyes closin' shut and breaths stop,
heart slowin' and tail dips,
going down peacefully,
that day hasn't come, but time got sliced,
and the pieces don't say clearly,
how much we got left,
one to three,
three to six,
less than twelve,
never going higher,
and as I hold you close,
staring in the quiet minutes,
neither of us can go far,
not without the other,
if one goes the other wilts,
but you ain't going down easy,
day by day,
hour by hour,
we'll make it last,
we'll make our bucket list empty,
car rides around the block,
or pictures to make a mountain,
promise I won't break before,
can't promise that,
you ain't going down easy,
I'll give you all the toys,
spoil you 'til I'm dry,
sad you'll miss seeing your momma again,
but you'll see your old daddy,
I'll fight the Reaper Man,
I'll sell my soul,
I'll forsake everything,
please don't take my baby away,
I can't bear that pain,
it's not going to be easy,
seeing those ears go down,
eyes closin' shut and breaths stop,
heart slowin' and tail dips,
going down peacefully.

Camera Roll

Livi Goodgame | Poetry

I just have to wait
Long enough
For the photos that I hoard
And the memories they carry
To become irrelevant,
And then I will get rid of them.
I swear.

Like the one with the blue loveseat
Abandoned beside the dumpster
In the elementary school parking lot.
The four personalities perched on it
Don't exist anymore.
This is the only place now
Where they are together
And are not—have not—hurt.
But I keep it
Because I need to remember
What sixteen felt like
In order to appreciate
Who I have left.

Like the one that he sent me
From his Ford to mine,
With a smile so wide
And suntanned skin so smooth,
No frown lines yet
From how I messed up.

And all the ones of her
Smiles, silly faces,
Before the first time I
Drove her away
And the last time I saw her.

I wonder if they hoard pictures
Or have a clean slate,
If they see me in their chest
Of memories,
And if I bring bittersweet reminiscence
Or deep contempt
Into their hearts.
I wonder if they long to retake
The photographs
And rewrite the moments
As much as I.

I swear I'll get rid of them
When I no longer care.
I just have to wait.

Redlands 

Ross Sibley | Photography



i am my mother's daughter

Cassie Sistoso | Poetry

when i am with you
every solid ounce of my teenaged pride resurfaces
and bends itself around our differences

where you are bold and sharp and talkative
i follow behind you, still and subtle and enigmatic
when you said you could not bear a sky without sun
i fell in love with the rain

but when i am alone
cupping my life with my own two hands
and people ask about my parents

i say "i have my mother's face, though you might not notice it at first.
her expressions are my own"
when people find the sharp edges of your passion in my blood
i say proudly that "i am my mother's daughter"
where you were brave and loud and full of fire
i am following behind you full of flame



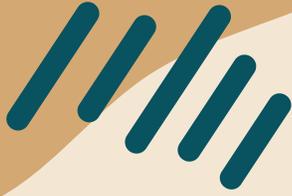
Into the Multiverse of the Mind's Eye

AJ Fuller | Collage



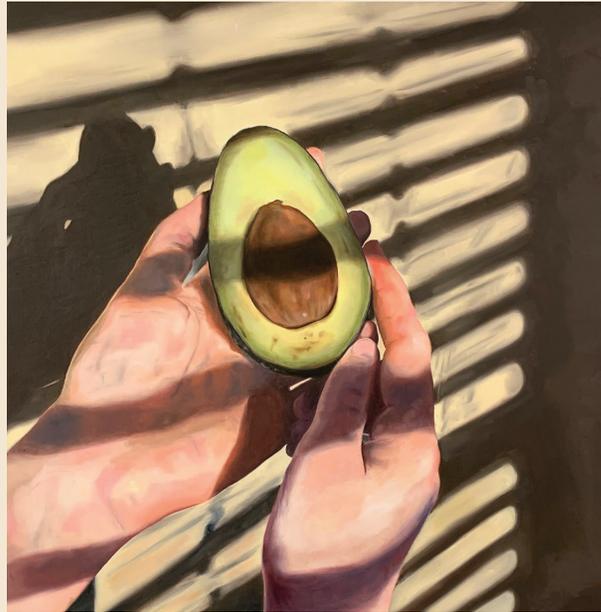
Metamorphosis

Sydney Emerson | Mixed Media Painting



Serendipity

Reagan Carter | Photography



Slip Up

Maddie Harlin | Acrylic & Oil
on Birch Wood Board



Bath Time

Sierra Hart | Video

Taste of Sunshine

Camrin Owens | Poetry

Sunshine tastes like watermelon
Carved at the park
Laughing through the juice, maneuvering
Around the seeds

Sunshine tastes like fresh strawberries
Just off the vine
Warmed and sweetened by the sun
Bright-red and plump

It tastes like milkshakes at Sonic
Chatting with friends
It tastes like lemonade, squeezed
And mixed myself

It tastes like hot chocolate
At the café
Talking with my study date, work
And time long forgotten

Sunshine tastes like laughter and love
But mostly, it
Tastes like pure, golden, unrestrained
Happiness

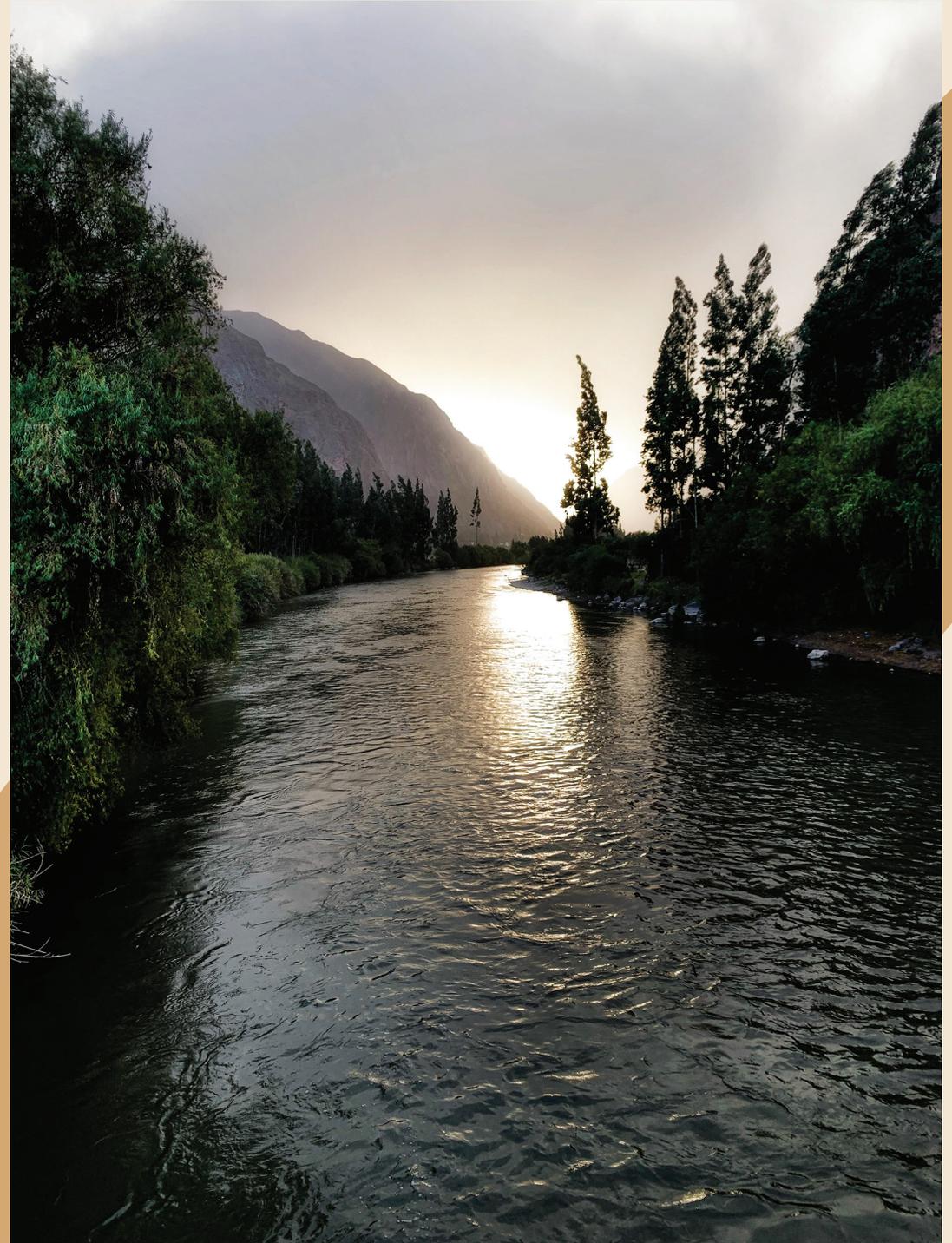
Outside the Cedars of Lebanon State Park

Sophia Maas | Poetry

Miles of road wind through grassy farmland with yellow-bright dandelions beginning to push their way out of the ground. To walk through these endless fields, or even to follow the sun-cracked asphalt, would have been an endeavor enveloped in silence and wandering thoughts. As it is, my eyes track the shapes of cattle as my sister-the-navigator instructs my sister-the-driver where to turn. I catch sight of a farmer, standing with a lead connected to a cow, both with their heads turned to stare at the speeding intrusion of our vehicle.

I imagine that the farmer will tend to their animals the same way I, later that night, will tend to my own body with a detached, worldly knowledge that comes from years of tending to the same animal. Its wants, its needs, what to do to keep it healthy. I wonder what will become of the cow with the warm, glassy eyes being led away when it is no longer useful to the farmer. Legally, they cannot let the cow go. Financially, they cannot keep the cow alive. Distantly, my sister-the-driver asks if we want to stop anywhere to get dinner.

On the other side of the pastures, in a flash, a graveyard sitting patiently. The plot tends to its bodies silently, without reward or compensation. The land allows the tangled ivy to shiver under the gentle caress of an afternoon breeze, and young oak trees to clamber ever closer to the decaying fence. The faces on the graves have been worn away by rain and wind and ice and time. No memorial for the cow, but perhaps the farmer will find their way across the road. A new stone fit neatly in the crook of a growing tree.



Fresh Air

Hunter Brady | Photography



Mountain Goat

Helen Grace Daniel | Photography



Panorama Point, Badlands

Jessejoie Curada | Photography



Shafer Canyon Overlook

Jessejoie Curada | Photography

A Run

Micaela Anderson | Prose

Rubber against dirt. The knee-shocking thump of my sneakers hitting the twig-laden path—over and over again. I wonder briefly why they call them sneakers. I could hardly sneak anywhere in these, with their fluorescent pink and blue Nike swooshes and the loud crunch that ricochets against the surrounding trees each time they hit a fallen leaf. The thought dissipates and I leave it in my wake, my focus turning to the leaves. Leaves of vermillion and canary. Rust and gold. Leaves of countless colors that shift with the seasons, inevitably falling to their fate atop the forest floor where they await my obnoxious soles. I pass more trees. I pass another fork in the path. A red bird hurries from its perch. Now, in the distance, a golden sun begins to rise—big and little bursts of it spilling through webs of branches and onto my path. I imagine that I am Apollo, pulling that golden sun up and across the sky as I run. This feels like heaven, and for a moment, I wonder if it is. I wonder if the cool air entering my lungs could really be the same air I breathe as I drive through noisy traffic, as I sit in two-hour-long history lectures. I wonder if the way my legs propel me off the ground, leaving me for a moment suspended in the air—flying—could truly be the work of my body, not some sort of divine intervention. For each of those few seconds in the air, gravity disappears. This act, I decide, is the nearest we as humans will ever get to true flight. Airplanes, hot air balloons and helicopters—all desperate inventions created out of metal and sweat—are poor imitations of the gift we have always had. Only this, out here alone with the sun and the trees, is the real thing, unable to be fabricated. I want to stay like this forever, October's laureate lover, wreathed by the glow of dawn like the olive leaf-crowned runners before me.



The Moo Moo Room

Veronica Leto | Printmaking



Beneath

Patrick Gilchrist | Screen Print

Hey, Cardinal

Dominic Macoaldi | Poetry

Though I'm gentle,
you avoid the birdbath
when I go outside
to smoke.

There are seeds
in my hands.
Yet you would rather dare
away from the nest
to drink the water poisoned
with freon from my car
puddling on the concrete,
and risk returning to
egg yolk dripping
down the branches.

I guess you know
I could be danger—
all those wrapped and captured leaves
my thumbs light with such ease,
the bird bones in the dirt
from the hot wings I eat.

But if seeds could grow democracies,
talk about their families, or
dream of walking red carpets,
there'd be cause to lock up all the conclaves.

Hey, cardinal—
don't you see our shared reds?
Our flights of
bashfulness and wrath?

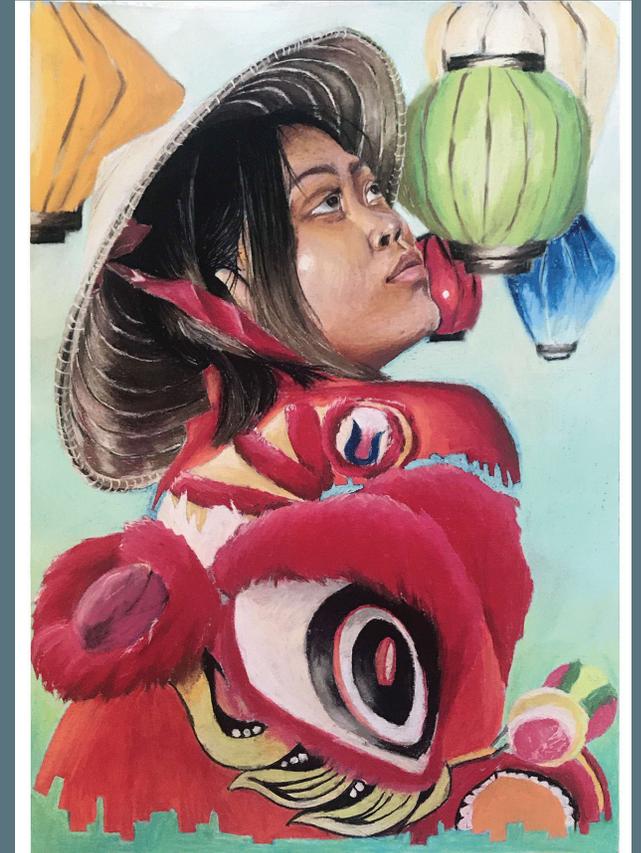
The longer you stare,
these seeds are spayed and wasted,
barren in my hand,
destroyed by your shyness.

Though I'm sure
you fancy yourself as gentle too,
you are an accomplice in this rot,
if by accident or not.



Reflecting Reflection

Kenneth Bean | Photography



Cultural Self Portrait

Nhi Diep | Pastel Painting

BREAKING

WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM THEATRICAL LIGHTING DESIGN

by Abigail Wells



Image by Mark Reins. Nashville Repertory Theatre's production of *The 39 Steps*, Act 1.

When you first see Professor Darren Levin and his student Gavin Strawn, you probably assume they spend a lot of time in a campus science lab. They both wear black rimmed glasses and button-down shirts, slightly stumbling over their words when they talk, as if their minds are working faster than their mouths can move. Although Darren does in fact come from a mathematics background, and Gavin started off majoring in physics, they probably know more showtunes than you and I put together. Unlike chemists, they do not conduct their experiments in isolated conditions, but instead, do it for audiences of hundreds of people. Their “lab” is a playhouse, a black box theatre, pretty much anywhere with a stage.

This brings us to the world of theatrical lighting design: an art — and science — all of its own.

Darren Levin is an associate professor of theatre here at MTSU, specializing in lighting design and technology. He is an Associate Artist with Nashville Repertory Theatre, has toured with Disney on Ice, and has designed for an almost countless number of shows across the country. In addition, Darren has had multiple students win awards

at the Southeastern Theatre Conference. One of those students to claim first prize in 2020 was Gavin Strawn for his work on *Ride the Cyclone*, his design based on the mathematical concept of Chaos Theory. By using the colors associated with Chaos Theory, Gavin was able to create a lighting design that reflected the randomness of life, how meaningful an individual's life can be despite its brevity — themes that the musical portrays. This summer, Darren and Gavin's success took them to Scottsbluff, Nebraska, working side by side at Theatre West, as a lighting designer and master electrician, respectively.

When we think about the arts, we often forget about the technical aspects that go into the design and the execution of the piece. In the case of lighting, Darren and Gavin work with sophisticated and specialized technology in order to program their designs. Physics and math come up in conversation quite often, and theatre itself has a list of vocabulary words so niche and unique it feels like a whole other language.

At Theatre West, Darren was in charge of programming five different light shows — determining when particular lights should be queued up or dimmed, what colors they should be and of what hue and intensity. Then, it was Gavin's job to mount all of the lights and make sure the shows went along exactly with Darren's vision. It may seem as though Darren's job is more creativity-driven, while Gavin's is focused totally on the technical aspects of the show, but in actuality, having knowledge about both the arts and sciences is vital regardless of the individual's role.

BINARIES

As a staff member here at *Collage*, we try our best to drive home that this is not just a magazine for people who spend long nights in the Bragg building, or for those who know Peck Hall so well they don't get dizzy navigating it; you don't need a liberal arts degree to be an artist. So although Gavin and Darren specialize in theatre arts, after speaking with them about their work, it's easy to see that lighting design puts this "left brain, right brain" binary to rest. This isn't a matter of creativity versus chemistry, but rather, what both the arts and sciences can glean from one another.

Images by Mark Reins.
Bottom Left: Scene from *Grease*
presented by Nashville Repertory
Theatre. Bottom Right: *The 39 Steps*,
Act 1. Top Right: *The 39 Steps*, Act 2.



S.A.D

Rachel Booher | Poetry

Crisp and clean, the wrinkled sheets
Creak beneath the weight of sleep
While mismatched colors betraying the mood
Leak through windows, closely shaded
I lie in rebellion and close my eyes
Waiting for noon to spin its thread
Creating stitches that bind my arms and legs
As my mind orders bedrest to every nerve
Clinking and clattering, a scooter rides by
The laughter of children like nails on a chalkboard
I cover my ears and tighten my lips
Waiting for the seasons to shift

I am still waiting for motivation to slip
Beneath the, now, two-week old sheets
Permeated with scents that remind me of me
Sunken and lowly, the spindle still weaves
Tying my eyelashes to the moons below
Knotting my hair in braids of shame
I cling to the filth, the remnants of myself
Even though some small part of my conscience screams to be clean
The shower still evades me, skilled and silent
The faucet now bleached by summer's heat
And the needles of hot and cold prick my fingers
As the cactus withholds the water in its well
I resign myself to the confinement of the bed
Waiting for the seasons to shift

The first crunch of dry leaves perks my senses
Loosening the clamps around my ears
The age and decay of summer-old sheets
Wafting in the dust swirl of an ever-constant fan
Slowly changes course as the temperature withdraws its scorch
The needlework of every summer noon
Hisses and creeps away from paralyzed limbs
Inciting blood flow and color that matches my mood
The monument of my body returning from stone
Molded and soiled from an overabundance of emotion
The only nourishment I have had in weeks
Feeds my starving serotonin drops of autumn
As the seasons begin to shift



Nightmare on My Street 

Emily Rink | Digital Painting

The Dirge

Aaron White | Poetry

I hear it in the songs of birds silenced
by the roar of a ruthless predator:
a diesel-burning leaf blower steals
me from the Druid's Trance.
The delicate, repetitive, but oh-so-enchancing melody
replaced by the rumbling,
blundering Urban Cacophony.
Bus brakes squeal,
music thrums from a speaker.

I hear a longing in the avian a capella,
the larks murmur of meadows
cleared for parking lots.
The Earth has been raped
and all Creation croons to comfort their mother:
the childishly chattering chipmunks,
the soft, scented flowers who adorn her scarred skin.
The tender touch of the breeze,
a reminder of a faithful and constant friend.

But we, the Apex of Creation,
we mock her cries, we uproot
the wildflowers in our gardens,
we cut short
her verdant locks she so lovingly grows
and eagerly adorn her with our refuse.
We maul the very hand that feeds us
as we clamor and demand oh so much more,
we choke her winds, poison her critters
and level her canopies.

I sit here upon a metal bench
among a grove of aging trees—
the mockery of an ancient forest.
At the fringes of my university, I am reminded
I would not be here if Nature hadn't suffered sores.



Tiger in the Grass

Bill Lickman | Photography



Grinning Wolf

Ox Zante | Digital Painting



Submerge

Keely Ginder | Photography

Six Days Later: The Service

Emily Hagan | Poetry

I blink for just a moment,
and in the momentary darkness I see
the stems of little dandelions
curl around your mother's bent knees.

They tie girl scout knots around her wrists,
trying to stop her fists from banging
in rhythm with the pastor speaking.
I envision that first wave of peace,
wash over rose-colored cheeks
as she sinks beneath fresh soil.
She falls gently into the Earth,
and she does not stop
until she settles on top
of her daughter's casket.

She is bound there,
resting among white petals covering the dark wood.
When I open my eyes again,
she is still screaming obscenities,
screaming her godly bargains
at the dirt that separates her and her eldest.





Snowflake Sunset

Winter Wingfield | Photography

March for Justice

Tracy Harris | Poetry

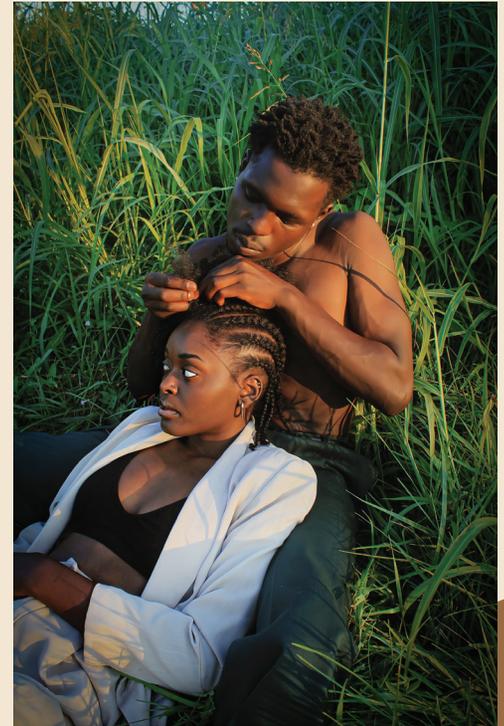
We chant and march and they stare and laugh!
Do we offend the rebel flag that matches your cowboy hat?
One goal, one mission, do we have your attention?
We chant louder as we prepare to make a circle and claim
that even the honky-tonks are gonna remember your name.

Welcome to Broadway where everyone wants their name in lights,
but it's Amerikkka, so if your skin's black you get no rights.
The marquee flashes—"It is our duty to fight."
The playbill reads—"It is our duty to win,"
but if you read between the lines—it depends on your skin.

The music of Old Dixie fades away
here comes the sound of the good ole days.
Ole like King and Lewis—we can hear them!
This is a movement, not a moment.
Spirits of those gone on fill the circle—we can feel them!

The Most Neglected Person in America is the Black Woman

Ani Woodard | Photography



We chant louder:
"We must love each other & support each other."
Hey, Breonna, are you listening—we love you!
And to the crowd of rednecks—yeah, fuck you!
Now we're even louder because we know
we lost everything else centuries ago . . . this here is our crescendo!

I wonder, were we loud enough?
Is any sound loud enough
to drown out the wanton disregard they called justice?

Say it loud enough and long enough and
Her life becomes more than a
Name. It becomes eternal.

Ghost Story

Frost Phoenix | Prose

Everyone loves a good ghost story. At least, that's what I once heard. I find it to be true in most cases I come across. There's something about the idea of the supernatural, the feeling that there's more than what you can see and hear, something beyond your normal senses, that intrigues us. It draws us closer, daring us to solve its mysteries with its intricate clues and grave warnings.

I've been around a while. I've heard a few good ghost stories, told in a dark bedroom with flashlights pointing up from beneath chins, or around the flickering light of campfires in the deep of the woods. I've also learned a few from personal experience. It seems to me that telling a good ghost story is a challenge whose bragging rights are something ingrained in our deepest sense of accomplishment. Someone able to send shivers down your spine, make you look over your shoulder, and doubt your rational sense is someone to be respected for their word-weaving.

Would you like to hear my best? What if I told you it wasn't just a tall tale? Do you still want to hear it if I tell you that you'll spend the rest of your life looking over your shoulder?

I doubt you said no. Does that "yes" come from curiosity, a desire to learn more? Is it a dare with you determined to prove me wrong? Maybe it's some tug at your mind, leaving you unable to turn me down, even if you think it's poppycock? It might be all three. Can you tell? Does it matter?

Let's begin.

They call themselves the Forgotten. Or, perhaps, they might if they had voices to speak with. They're the creeping things that live in the corner of your eye. That feeling that you get when you think someone's watching you, or when you catch movement at the edge of your periphery? That's them. Look quickly, you might be able to

catch them. Sometimes they look like someone you know. Sometimes they look like little children in tattered clothes. Sometimes you don't see anything but a black shadow.

You know what I'm talking about, don't you? I bet you think it really is someone, but it's a person, not a ghost. "Common sense denotes the fact that any movement is caused by a solid, tangible thing, and any person-like shadow must be caused by a person, not an imagined apparition," as someone once informed me. I don't disagree with this statement on the grounds of common sense—not at all. I also never said that they weren't once people themselves. If indeed they were people, then any shadow they cast would still count as one cast by a person.

I digress. Let's try another example.

Most pet owners are quite used to hearing the floor shifting beneath the paws of their feline or canine companion. Most owners of an old house are quite used



Isolation

Ox Zante | Digital Painting

Murky Catfish

Spencer Gilliland | Digital Painting



to hearing the floor and walls settle of their own accord. It can occasionally be hard to tell what is and what isn't a footstep, especially when it's simply well-masked by the creaking noise itself or the volume of your music. Still, there are times when you hear shifting and footsteps while your family is out and the pets are curled up next to you. Is it simply a resettling of the house? Or when you look, do you think you catch some figure looming in the doorway only for it to vanish when you blink and resettle your position?

They work best just out of the range of sight, where you can never be sure if what you're seeing is there or if it's just your imagination.

Similarly, along the lines of unsettling noises, do you ever hear someone talking across the house? When it's the dead of night and you're meandering back to your room in a haze of half-consciousness, or when you're in the basement, getting another bag of pretzels to snack on during your have-the-house-to-myself marathon. Or perhaps when you're upstairs, doing some cleaning, and you think you hear your sister or brother, father or mother, flatmate or fiancé. But it's not them. It can't be. They're somewhere else, asleep in their beds or off at the grocery store, and of course it must be your imagination.

There's the floor creak again. Are you truly going crazy?

Or perhaps it's the Forgotten, waiting for you to forget them, so they can sneak up on you and give you a fright.

Not convinced yet? I'll give you one more.

Have you ever walked into a room and forgotten why you were there? What were you going to the kitchen to get? Why did you pause your YouTube video when your water is full, you still have plenty of snacks, the pets aren't crying for food or to relieve themselves, and the phone isn't ringing? You simply find yourself staring at the empty room, mind blank, as you scan uselessly through the last few minutes of memory, searching for the reason you're there. You never seem to find it, do you? Not until you've turned and walked away, only to have an "Ah-ha!" moment and rush back to complete your task.

I assume you think I'm about to tell you that it's the Forgotten, the boogeyman of paranoids, responsible for the inexplicable behavior. And you'd be right. But before you jump to conclusions, or mark me off as a lunatic, ponder for a moment on their name. After all, I didn't tell you why they're called the Forgotten. It's not simply because some cruel soul never loved them and condemned them to a fate of wandering the plane between planes endlessly, searching for meaning to their empty, nomadic existence. It's also not because they come from ancient horror stories told around a bonfire back when a good shelter was a stack of stones or logs in a roughly geometric form. It's not even because, like most mediocre ghost stories, they only occupy a place in our minds reserved for "forgotten" things, stuff we know but won't remember until it's brought up in some obscure line of conversation that likely started with the weather.

Everything on this planet needs to eat, even ghosts. Obviously, ghosts can't eat real food. They require no nourishment, no replenishing of nutrients, no substance to maintain their wispy form. No, ghosts survive off the memory of them. As long as you can remember that sneaking suspicion that you're not alone, they linger. As long as you occasionally glance over your shoulder or off into the dark distance, they remain. And every so often, you manage to catch one before it can slink to the corners of your vision, and they feast upon your memory of their appearance, in all its terrible and bone-chilling glory, while they glide toward you with unnaturally graceful steps and a smile of malicious glee.

It's followed by the always-familiar and slightly dreaded phrase, "what was I doing here again?"

I could cite even more occurrences. Random cold chills that raise goosebumps, even in a warm house. Leaves and grass shifting in the woods when there's nothing there. The way cats sometimes stare past you, as if gazing intently at some being just beyond your vision. Odd taps against the siding or windows. Strange noises, day or night, that sound just a bit too ethereal to come from birds. Harsh screeches that simply must come from cutlery or tennis shoes. What else squeals like that?

It's alright if you don't believe me. I don't care whether you do or not. I am only here to inform you. Or, perhaps, to entertain you if this is simply an interesting ghost story. I leave it up to you whether it is. But perhaps, you can see something in the corner of your eye, or out the window. Some strange shadow shifting far too fast to track accurately. A creak from the building settling, or footsteps from janitors down the hall.

Everyone loves a good ghost story. Very few of us love the truth behind them. ●



Cold Winter Evening

Hunter Brady | Photography

this summer you are happy

Cassie Sistoso | Poetry

the hardwood floors are yours
sometimes you creep around at night just to stand in your own kitchen
opening cabinets and drawers full of unmatched dishes and crooked chopsticks
this is not a house you bend and haphazardly fit into, no,
this summer, you made a home

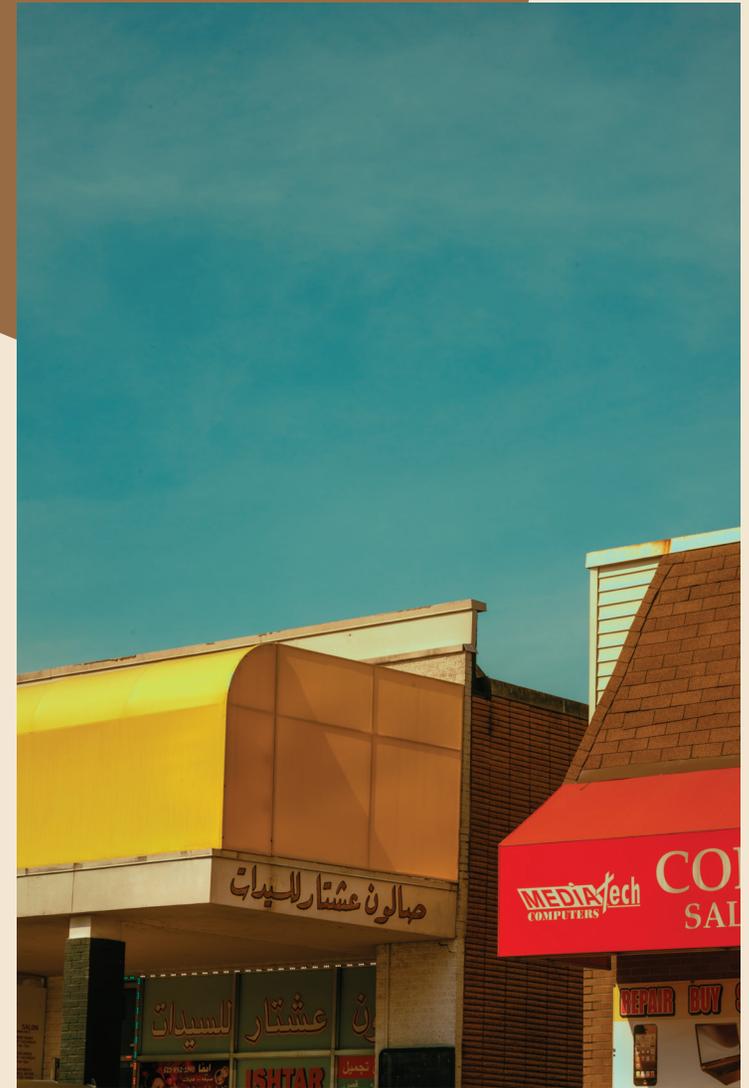
the friends you hoped for are yours
they are catching fireflies in their palms just to show you
driving you home, bare shoulders on the upholstery and humid air from the open windows
they leave a seat for you in the evenings and a couch for you in the mornings
this summer, you are known

the quiet nights alone are yours
pulling bedsheets to your shoulders as if to tuck yourself to bed
but gently now, not afraid of finding your own ghost in the lonely darkness
you draw sunbeams on your eyelids and then revel in the rays of the realization that
this summer, you are happy



World of Pain(t)

Valkyrie Rutledge | Photography

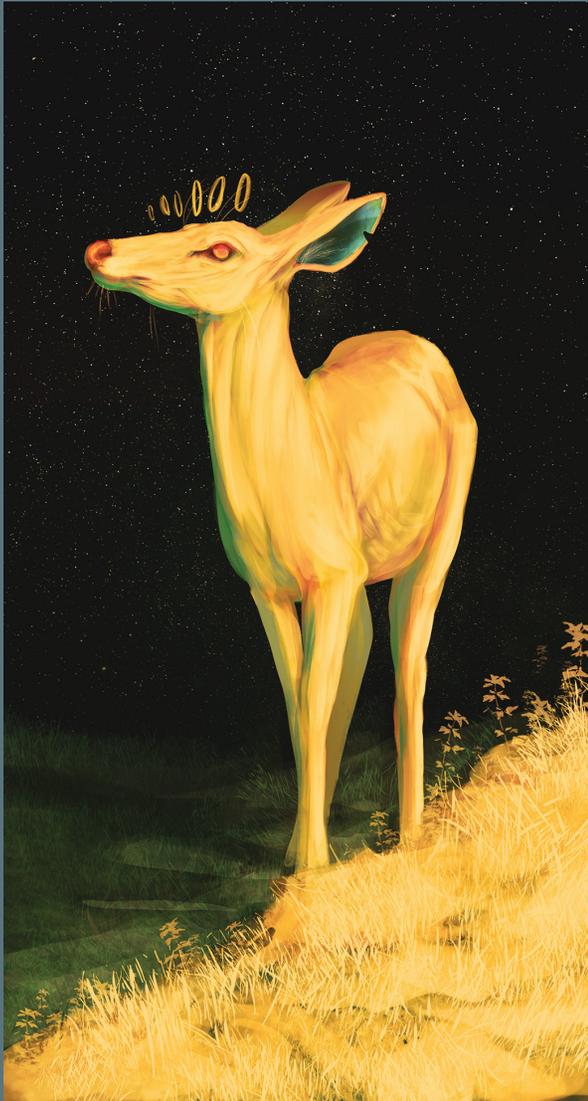


Untitled

Keely Ginder | Photography

Doe

Ox Zante | Digital Painting



Nashville Zoo

Annalise Dodson | Graphic Design



Periwinkle Flame

Sarah Darnell | Audio

Spitters

Evan Buchanan | Prose

Mary Giles had accepted she would die alone. Nine years ago, her husband died in the living room on the tweed sofa with Mary by his side. Mary never remarried. The two never had any children. Everyone else she'd known had probably died already. Both Mary and her husband had been adopted.

Now ninety-two years old, Mary watched television alone in her little house, though sometimes to pass the time, she read the same book over and over: a dog-eared romance novel she'd bought at the grocery store. She didn't even like it. Occasionally, she took a cab to the store, to the doctor, or to the pharmacy, but such trips would exhaust her and take most of the day.

That was her life. She didn't want any pity.

And so, the days passed slowly. And the weeks passed slowly. And the months passed slowly until one night Mary saw an ad on television for a smartphone made for elderly humans: its screen was larger than normal, and the text and images it displayed were huge. Mary, using her home phone with soft, square plastic buttons, called the number advertised on television. She ordered a smartphone.

The following week, Mary's doorbell rang, and outside was a small box on her welcome mat. In the box was the phone for elderly humans. It was the size of a pocketbook. Mary powered it on and was immediately fascinated. A tutorial appeared on the screen. All these strange and useful applications, Mary found, could be downloaded right to her phone. Right away she downloaded a digital copy of her only novel, and she read its big letters and words.

With her new phone, Mary realized she didn't have to leave her home anymore. Her energy was fading more and more every day anyway. Her bones were aching, and she felt the cumulative effects of a lifetime of gravity: she walked with an aluminum cane, and her neck crooked forward terribly due to a bulging Dowager's Hump.

And so, Mary became a recluse. She became, without foresight or planning, a hermit. To eat, she ordered groceries delivered to her doorstep. To read, she

downloaded books. To take out the garbage, well, there was an application even for that: she'd simply drag a garbage bag to her doorstep, and by the next morning it would be gone. To see her doctor and renew her prescriptions, she used her phone's video application. With her phone and its enormous display screen, Mary was becoming increasingly productive and independent. Yet, admittedly, she could not escape her loneliness.

SHE THOUGHT ABOUT TRAVELING TO SOME FOREIGN LAND TO COMBAT HER LONELINESS.

She thought about traveling to some foreign land to combat her loneliness. Maybe someplace in India? Or Russia? Or China? Or Panama? She searched for an application for traveling, and sure enough, there was one for that.

For those like Mary who were scared of flying, there was another option: using an application, travelers could order a crate to their doorstep. Each wooden crate was the size of a coffin with an interior lined with squishy soundproof insulation. For decor, a small glow-in-the-dark poster of a fireplace was glued to one end. A heating and cooling system circulated fresh air throughout the crate. In a bag inside were two pills.

To use the crate seemed easy enough: just crawl in, get comfortable, press a button in the phone app, eat the pills, and sleep. A day or so later, wake up and crawl out right outside the door to your hotel room or chosen destination.

But Mary never took a trip.

Then one day Mary felt worse than ever: she felt, with a strange premonition, that her death was imminent. It felt like a slice of basalt scraping the bottom of a ventricle. She asked her phone a series of questions by typing large text into its large screen: Who are we? Why are we here? Where do we come from? Where do we go? Will I be remembered by anyone? Will anyone care that I lived?

What showed on Mary's phone was an ad for an ancestry test. She ordered it. Several days later it arrived.

It had been two months since Mary had spit into a tube, sealed it in a small box, and left the box outside her doorstep. Her results were scheduled to arrive within the next month or so. It turned out that her life force, her body's ability to stay alive, was more powerful than Mary had guessed. Something, perhaps waiting for the results of her spit test, had sparked in Mary a strong desire to hang on to the force of life that was diminishing in her body, though admittedly most mornings she fought to get her body out of bed, and her bones creaked well into the evening.

One morning the doorbell rang. Outside, an elderly woman with a saggy gullet stood next to an open crate. The woman looked somewhat familiar, though Mary could not place exactly when and where she might have seen her before. To be polite, Mary invited the woman inside.

The woman began to cry. "Sister! It's me. I'm your long-lost sister." She pulled a tissue from the sleeve of her button-up dress and wiped her eyes. "I, too, took a spit test. It said I had a sister!"

"SISTER! IT'S ME. I'M YOUR LONG-LOST SISTER."

Mary, not knowing if what the woman said was true or not, said, "Oh. Well, that's strange. But more so, that's just wonderful! Please, would you like something to eat? I just heated up some split-pea soup."

The two women talked and talked, and Mary insisted that her visitor stay the night.

The next morning the doorbell rang again. Outside was an elderly man who also looked somewhat familiar to Mary. He was so very tall with big ears and white hair, and he wore his pants up around his ribs. After inviting the man inside, Mary, with her eyes looking up as far as she could muster, said, "Yes? What brings you here today, sir?"

"Mary? Mary Giles?" said the elderly man. "It's me! We used to be neighbors from so long ago. You played bridge often with my wife. Don't you remember?"

Mary, in her mind, dug through old memories and images of faces. But the memories and faces blurred. Eventually she said, "Oh, yes. Certainly, I do. How wonderful! How are you? Won't you stay awhile?"

The man stayed. It turned out he, too, had taken a spit test and had found Mary as a result of it. The ancestry test, he explained, could of course determine blood relatives, but it also had an algorithm that identified, with a fair amount of accuracy, past neighbors, coworkers, and friends.

Over the next two weeks, more and more elderly humans arrived at Mary's doorstep. They had all used the spit test application. With their large phones with large display screens, they had ordered traveling crates. Each human arrived at Mary's doorstep standing before a crate. When a crate reached Mary's home, it fired innocuous explosive charges at its corners to wake and liberate its passenger.

The crate travel was not without risk, Mary learned. Elderly travelers had much difficulty with the crate. Some told Mary they'd woken mid-journey and suffered severe anxiety attacks or near claustrophobic breakdowns. Some had tried to claw their way out. Some had screamed for help.

None of the elderly humans who'd arrived by travel crate wanted to leave Mary's home, and admittedly, Mary didn't want them to leave either. They were having such a grand time telling stories and playing cards and reading books and cooking wonderful dinners. Everyone seemed so thankful and happy to see one another, though admittedly Mary's little house was becoming quite crowded. Elderly humans were sleeping under the bed, curled up in closets, and in clumps on the carpet.

One morning, the doorbell rang again, and outside were two very, very elderly humans. They sat hunched forward on the porch in front of two crates. They looked to be half

blind, and neither spoke. There was an old, old man. And there was an old, old woman. The two held hands. The man dropped the woman's hand, reached into his corduroy jacket, and lifted his phone close to his face. He typed a message into its large screen.

EVERYONE SEEMED SO THANKFUL AND HAPPY TO SEE ONE ANOTHER.

Slowly the man typed. For five minutes, he typed. When he finished, the man held up the phone to show Mary the screen with its large text: "Mary, we are your birth parents. We are too old to speak. Today we feel so much joy." He ended his message with a smiley face emoji.

Mary bent down and embraced her new visitors. One at a time she dragged them into her home by holding them under their arms. They were so very weak and thin. *I must be careful*, Mary thought as she pulled, *for their bones must be terribly brittle*. They were so happy propped up against the tweed sofa, and Mary could just not believe it all. It turned out that Mary's birth parents had also taken the spit test.

Three months after taking her spit test, Mary's home was brimming with elderly humans. Mary's long-lost sister, the one who'd first arrived, had listed Mary's address on the ancestry application. She'd invited everyone to meet her at Mary's home. There were, upon Mary's last count, twenty-nine elderly humans living in her little home—all of whom claimed, in some way, to be relatives or past friends or coworkers or neighbors.

Sometime in there, Mary's ancestry results arrived in a sealed document package. Because the elderly humans with whom she now lived had pieced together their pasts and relations to one another in a convincing manner, Mary did not read her spit test report. She simply threw it out.

Still, every day and night, Mary's home was bustling: dinners, parties, dances, card games. Though there was garbage everywhere and a cockroach infestation, and

though the toilet clogged regularly, everyone seemed happy and grateful to be together.

Another month passed this way. Each week a few more elderly humans arrived who claimed to be long lost relatives, neighbors, coworkers, or friends. Mary would invite them in. They would stay. *Continued on page 30.*



Kitchen
Pau Mung | Photography

Though spirits were high, some guests died of natural causes. Some never woke after a late-night party filled with bridge and dancing and singing. Dead guests collected dust behind the sofa and the refrigerator and in the storage space under the stairs. All had died with smiles on their faces that froze in place due to rigor mortis.

Then one day, Mary noticed four empty travel crates in her front yard. Sure enough, four elderly humans climbed into the crates, initiated the applications on their phones, and swallowed their two pills. They waited until they fell asleep. Soon after, several uniformed men arrived, sealed the crates, and loaded each carefully into a truck.

Each day more and more crates arrived, and more and more elderly humans left Mary's home until only one remained: Mary's long-lost sister.

When her travel crate arrived, the sister spoke to Mary in the doorway. "I must be honest, sister. I mean Mrs. Giles. I've a feeling you knew all along anyway. None of us ever knew you before. Certainly, I'm not your long-lost sister. We're simply a group of old humans who use our social security money to travel around the country together. We find lonely, elderly humans like each of us once was. When we move to a new destination, if he or she so wishes, we take that human with us. Would you like to come with us? To our new destination? When I get there, I'll send the address to your phone, okay? When you get it, just order a travel crate. We'll see you there. It'll be beautiful. I promise."

Mary stood at her front door and watched as her sister crawled into a crate and ate two pills and slept. Mary turned and shut the door. Once again, she was alone. Only now her house was destroyed, and it sheltered the corpses of eight elderly humans. Mary just let them rest in peace where they were. The following morning, the crate with Mary's sister was gone.

Every night thereafter, Mary checked her phone to see if her sister sent a message with the new address. Each night there were no new messages. Several more days passed and still nothing. Then several more days passed. Still no messages. Mary's aches and pains worsened, and she slept more and more each day and each night. It hurt too much now to climb the stairs to her bedroom, so she'd taken to sleeping on the sofa with her phone on her chest. Many more nights passed this way until one night as Mary lay awake and alone and breathing very slowly, she felt ready to let go. ●



Shrine of the
Wind Goddess 

Hunter Hoffman | Video

The March

Shelby Lemmon | Poetry

From the windows, walking by
Cities fall, and children die
Through the windows, through the eyes
Soldiers march, and soldiers cry
Past the broken welcome sign
Soldiers march the streets to die
Locked inside a final fight
Soldiers march, and soldiers cry
Broken hope, believing lies
In the land where senses die
Praying, walking through the night
Soldiers march, and soldiers cry
Raining fire from the sky
Time is fleeting, passing by
The empty children's eyes
Soldiers march, and soldiers cry
Hope rises, hope declines
None the power of the divine
Beneath the empty, blackened sky
Soldiers marching, line by line
As cities fall and children die
Soldiers march, and soldiers cry

Stubborn Lunch

Dominic Macoaldi | Poetry

So, you're having a late lunch,
3 p.m.,
& you're sitting outside, though
the humidity molds the air to a bad breath,
the button up/sweater combo the dress code dictates
wraps your frame like a wet suit
& taking the first bites of macaroni salad,
you notice the wasp nest on the chair next to you.

& they're shooting from behind your right ear
with their angry engine buzz,
some sauntering up like the asshole barroom stranger who wants to put
their hand on your bare knee.

But it's a long time coming for this lunch,
dammit, you're going to enjoy a little day.

Wasps staring at you
like loan sharks,
the macaroni salad starts to reveal its sweetness,

& they storm the air like Normandy.

Let yourself be stung.

Let those sharp rust-colored rovers
take a whack at you.

Be stung to enjoy
that cloud that looks like your dead friend,
that lamppost that wiggles in the wind if you look closely,
that dandelion with hundreds of wishes you'd blow if you still had a
child's soul,
that crow with the foil in his mouth flying off to fold an origami swan.

You wouldn't be here except for stubbornness,
the insistence to keep working against your body's will,
your birth despite the general complaints of life.

Well, the wasps are natural stubbornness.
You can walk away and finish that macaroni salad at your desk
or sit there and fight for beauty.



Realism Charcoal Study

Nhi Diep | Charcoal Drawing



Felicity

McKenzie Anderson | Digital Art



DEMONTia

Maggie Warren | Poetry

Your red truck waiting for me in the elementary school pickup line.
With those old creaky windows we had to manually unroll.
You asked me how my day was and I replied, "fine."
I'd reply differently now, if I knew you'd take such a toll.

Every afternoon McDonald's ice cream date,
"Two chocolate dipped cones, please."
Melted ice cream dripping, melting memories right before my eyes while I ate.
Oh, what I would do to feel that red truck window breeze.

But, never again! Thanks to you, you soul-sucking, memory-snatching, brain-eating disease.
I would do anything to get in that red truck again.
That demonic illness took it all away with such ease.
All from him, a fun-loving man.

A letter to you, my tears making my words wet.
A letter to you, my grandpa, about things you won't remember, but that I will never forget.

Astrological Symphony (The One About Water)

Emily Hagan | Poetry

Because I love you,
the moon has moved into Pisces.
My adoration of past and present
are each celestial fish
circling one another in the night sky.

Because you love me,
there is an eternal opera
playing *Già Nella Notte Densa*.
The violins of the orchestra rise and fall
as the sun rises and sets.

Because I love you,
and you love me,
I've spent eternity on the bay
looking at a violet landscape
searching for the perfect constellation
to immortalize us.



Hole in the Wall

Jessejoie Curada | Photography

when my father thinks of me

Abigail Wells | Poetry

I wonder when my father thinks of me.

am I

the last thought he has before he falls asleep,
hiding in every corner of his dreams?
or am I the sound of running water?
the dining chair unmoved since my last visit—
has he been counting the days since then?

or does he think of me when he goes by the stadium?
in the parking lot where he taught me how to drive
between his yelling & my tears.

i think i'm doing well, i whisper on the way back home.
you're alright, he says, curt & uncompromising.
still, i have my hands on ten & two
smiling, smiling, smiling...

I wonder when my father thinks of me.

when he sees

a half-eaten bowl of cereal in the sink,
chipped paint on the walls,
an unmade bed.

a rotting peach

baby's breath wilting in a vase.

& I wonder if he's just like me—
smiling, smiling, smiling...



Mustache Mug Set

Patrick Gilchrist | Pottery

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Domus
Filicudi

Paper

100 lb. Athens Silk Cover
80 lb. Athens Silk Text

Binding

Saddle Stitch

Printing

Phillips Printing Company of Nashville, Tennessee printed approximately 1,000 copies of *Collage*.

ISSN 2470-3451 (print)
ISSN 2470-3494 (online)

Creative Expression Awards

Each semester, the *Collage* staff selects Creative Expression Awards from among the highest rated submissions. Winners receive \$75 awards.

★ A Run
Micaela Anderson | Prose

★ Six Days Later
Emily Hagan | Poetry

★ Nightmare on my Street
Emily Rink | Art

★ Redlands
Ross Sibley | Photography

★ Shrine of the Wind Goddess
Hunter Hoffman | Video



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