

COLLAGE

a journal of creative expression

VOLUME VI

FALL 2007



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A PUBLICATION OF THE MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY HONORS COLLEGE

LETTER *from the Editor*

I believe that people are complex, beautiful works of art. Every one of us is unique; we all have qualities that cannot be found in anyone else. Some of us have obvious talents and some of us have subtle talents, but the fact that each one of us contributes to the whole of humanity in a different way makes these diversities not only interesting, but essential to the composition of our society.

The importance of diversity brings me to this edition of *Collage*. Since every work of art is as unique as the person who created it, they all come together, not despite their differences but because of their differences, to make one album – snapshots displaying the talent and variety of interests of MTSU's students. In the same way that people's differences contribute to the composition of our society, each piece of work brings a different element to *Collage* to make it complete.

But being unique – truly being an individual – requires courage in a world that seems so often to value conformity more than creativity. As you read *Collage*, I hope you will keep in mind that the creative work it holds required not only talent, but conscientious application of that talent, time commitment, and passion as well. And if anything you see or read here inspires you or helps you grow, keep in

mind that you, too, have talents that may inspire someone the way you've been inspired – if you use them.

So, I present this edition of *Collage* with hope that it will promote appreciation for diversity and creativity and with confidence that it will motivate its readers, who will in turn continue the cycle of inspiring others. It only takes one individual to instigate positive change.

Thanks to those of you who put your heart, time, and talent into *Collage* this semester. Your efforts have truly inspired.

Elizbeth Tucker
Elizbeth Tucker

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DISCOUNT FIREWORKS

Brandon Faulk

Remember when we made out
In the parking lot of the movie theater,
And people saw us, but we didn't care,
And we kissed anyway?

We sat at Waffle House
While a dirty old OSU professor
Told us unnecessary things
About his Russian girlfriend.
We were quiet for a whole minute
After he left.
Then we laughed for a whole minute
After that.

I still tell stories about us,
Even though we've stopped talking.
And even though it hurts,
I smile anyway
To keep the tears at bay.

Our love was like discount fireworks –
A few sparks
And a loud boom
Every once in a while,
When we were lucky,
Before it fizzled out.

ALIVE

Brett Warren

PLASTIC HEROES

Alex Grant

there's something you should know
about the plastic bomber planes
hanging on the wall:

you know the ones
(the pink and yellow one and
the yellow and pink one),
they both have twine tangles
around their propellers
(no combat for a while)
and seven swastikas apiece
taped to the fuselage

i never turn off the hall light
at night i hear them daydreaming

sometimes
in the quiet
you can sneak up on them
spitting mouth noises,
imagining gunfire
the cathedral fills with smoke
so much, they have to shut down

they still talk about 1989
the year the mold was broken
and their brothers,
their brothers died in that war

the one with wax ball politics
and camouflage to match the curtains,
firebombs leaping from the furnace
burning holes in the linoleum desert

they were thrown from a third story balcony
they hid in the yard for hours
before the Dogs came to execute them

they don't mention their brothers dying,
just the year

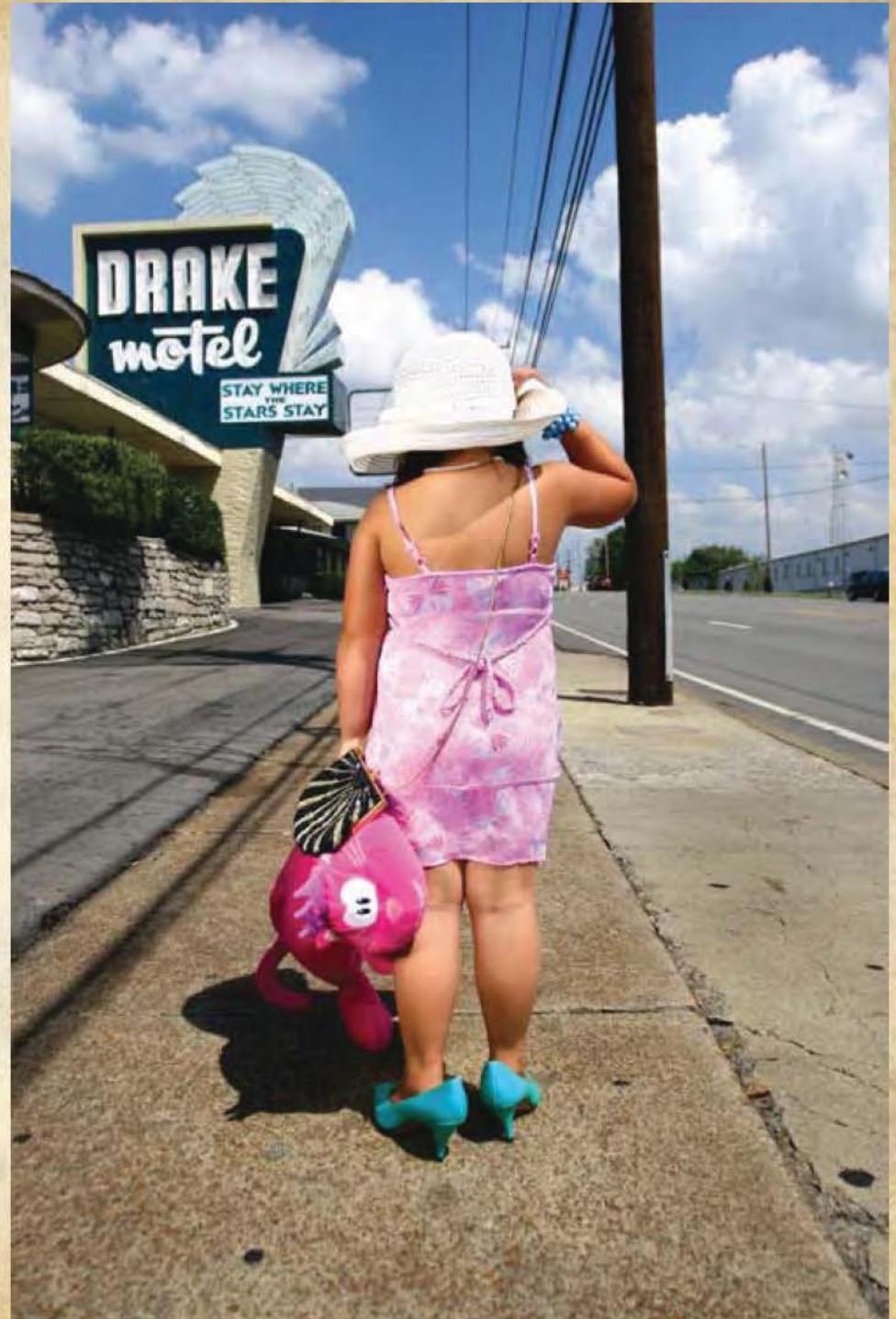
i'm sorry
i got sidetracked

mostly i wanted you to know that
they are still where you left them



DRAKE DREAMS

Justin Keonink





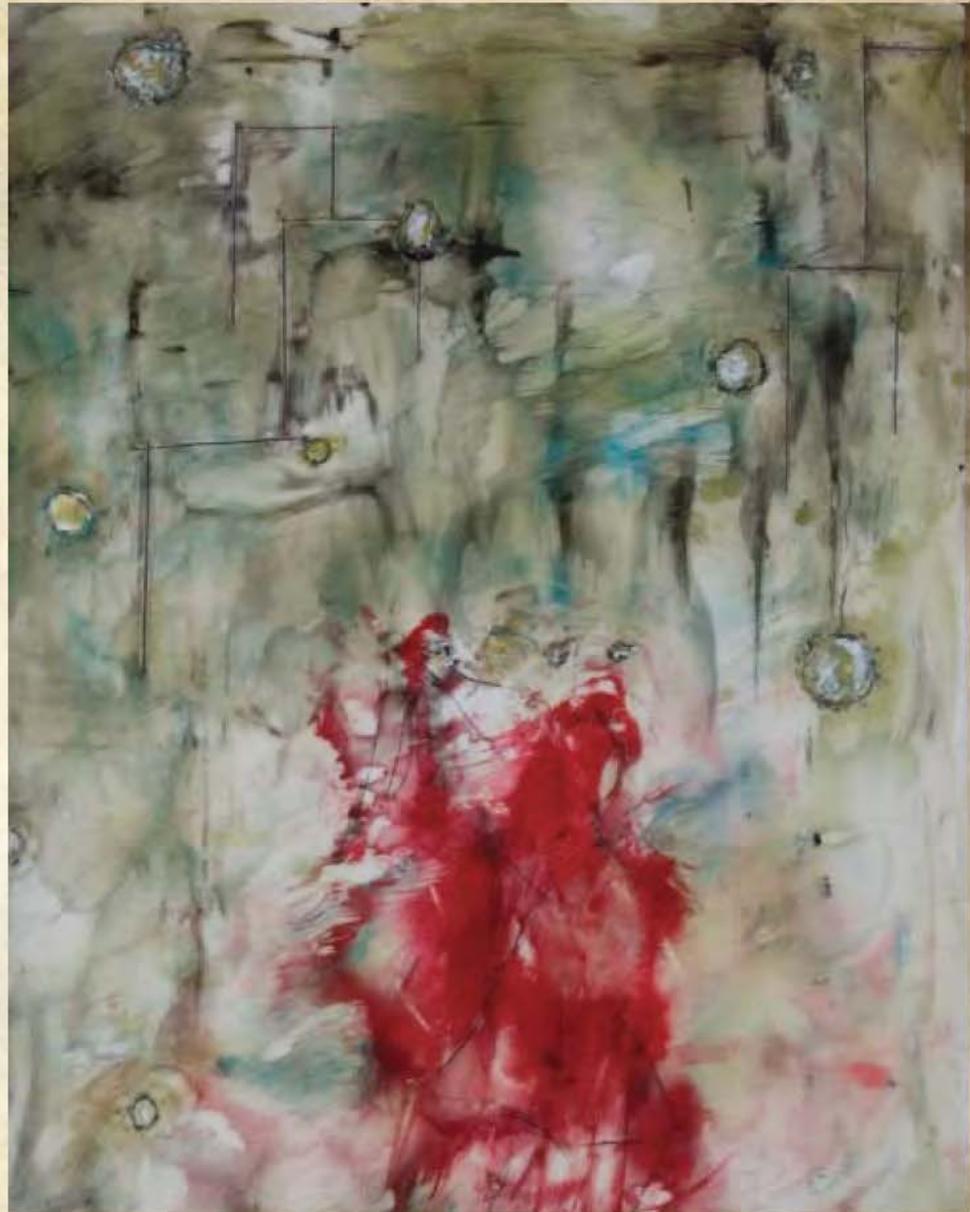
[acrylic on masonite cubes]

UNTITLED
Sarah Sullivan

THE DECOY
September 11

Pam. Manley Davis

In the man-made pond, a wood duck –
partially draped in the morning mist –
floats with darting bugs.
Lulled by the warming sun,
it bobs into view,
its bill poking from beneath the draping haze.
Unruffled as its greenish-blue wings,
it rides the easy current with
white lilies and green pads.
Not random plops of bass –
or even my nearness –
unsettle its complacency.
And so I tell you.
But look, you say,
the wood duck's eyes, though open,
cannot see what might startle.
And its plastic body, though winged,
is anchored to a filtering line in the shifting water.
Shrugging at my citified gaffe, I relish instead
the tranquility that smoothed creases from my forehead –
grateful today for even an impression of peace.



[encaustic, ink and pastel on luan board]

FADE AWAY

Karina Finch.



A DAY OF PUNCHING BUTTONS

Stephanie Weaver

Working at the only grocery store in town meant that I got to see all of Gordonsville's inhabitants going about their daily lives. Working at the only grocery store in town, which was also owned and operated by my grandmother, meant that I wasn't on the payroll and had to work any time someone didn't show up. This happened a lot more often than I would have liked.

After passing the previous evening by stewing in thoughts of my own mortality while making a list of all the people who had ever let me down, spending the day at the store interacting with the citizens of Gordonsville was the last thing I felt like doing. My Saturday was usually devoted to devouring a book. This week's pick was Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*, something that most kids would read for school, but things at GHS were a little lax. However, that plan changed with a fateful 8 a.m. phone call from Grandmama who was in her usual state of panic. Angela, the girl who worked on Saturdays, was sick and couldn't work. Grandmama could manage for a while, but could I come in?

Of course, I said yes. That's always easiest; it gets her off the phone the quickest. The only quicker way to get her off the phone is to find a spot where you don't get cell phone service and just wait for it to cut out. I've done that a time or two. So has my mom.

I stood at the check-out counter with a coke and a bad attitude. There was some homework spread out on the counter, pre-cal that was getting on my nerves. I watched the level of my drink through the clear glass bottle, and I wondered if anyone had ever taken it personally when they were given a clear cup for water at a restaurant with a do-it-yourself soda fountain. I wondered if anyone had taken it as an insult to their personal character.

"How dare you!" they might say. "Do you think I'm going to try to steal a coke? I'll have you know that I'm a deacon in my church, a member of the NRA, and in elementary school I was a hall monitor! The nerve!"

Maybe I should get offended sometime. Just to see what happens.

The bell on the door jingled as a customer came in. The

Little Naked Man had come for his bologna sandwich and cold drink. I said hello. He waved. He was a man of few words. And even fewer articles of clothing.

The Little Naked Man was the harbinger of the changing seasons. From April until the end of September or so, he wore only flip-flops and a pair of shorts. But not just any shorts, because not just any pair would do; his shorts were so short and so tight that they had to have cut off his circulation. He even ignored the "No Shirt, No Shoes, No Service" sign on the door. Of course, Grandmama ignored it too; not once had he been denied service.

As the weather got chillier, you might see him in shorts and a t-shirt. In January, you would catch the rare sight of pants and long sleeves. But never a coat. The most was a sweatshirt, even if there was an unusual sprinkling of snow. He made the philosophy of minimal coverage popular before car insurance companies even thought of it.

He was a short guy, kind of hunched over, and he had skin like red clay. He looked like he had been baked in the sun. I liked to think he was a golem, constructed by a lonely fashion designer who made Little Naked Man to model for his latest clothing line. Little Naked Man choked the fashion designer with a hideous pair of suspenders and buried him on a farm somewhere. He has disdained clothing ever since.

I stared heedlessly out the window. Several cars and trucks passed before Little Naked Man made his way up to the front and set his sandwich and cold drink on the counter. "They got you workin' hard?" he asked.

"Too hard." I was expected to jokingly complain about my easy labor.

"You need to start tellin' ol' grandma you need a day off."

"I would, but every time I try, she threatens to beat me."

He laughed. I liked Little Naked Man in a general, vague sort of way. I think it was the fact that he didn't feel compelled to clothe himself in a proper manner. And oddly enough, because he refused to bend himself around

society, society bent itself around him. I never heard anyone say a single mean word about his nakedness. He was an inspiration to all of us.

"You graduated yet?" he asked as I put his purchases in a plain brown bag.

"This is my last year," I said.

"Goin' to college?" he asked. I nodded.

"Decided where yet?"

"Anywhere that will take me."

He laughed again and told me to have a good one. I said, "Thanks. Come again," and he left.

In the notebook lying open on the counter, there were several half-finished college applications. Most of them were out of state: University of North Carolina, University of Southern California, DePaul University, New York University. I knew I was dreaming. I knew that even if I did get accepted, even if I managed to get some superb scholarships, I would be scared and wouldn't go. Knowing that was more frustrating than anything else.

So I had satisfied myself with this idea: I would go to an in-state school for a couple of years, then transfer. I could do this and save face since I would still be seventeen for most of my first year of college. Parents can be wonderful excuses for not doing the things that you really don't want to do.

Admiral walked in, signaling the beginning of the lunch rush. Admiral was an old man with a beautiful white mustache. For some reason, every time I try to picture Mark Twain in my head, I see Admiral. I don't know what his name is, much like Little Naked Man, but I do know that folks call him Admiral because he did a stint in the Navy. When my grandfather was alive, Admiral would come in and stand in the back at the meat department and talk to Granddaddy for hours sometimes.

I think Admiral is the only person that buys Prince Albert cigars. I've never seen anyone else even look at

them, but Grandmama keeps ordering them, just for him.

Often I am torn between two ideas. The harsh, logical part of me says, "Quit ordering those cigars. Only one person buys them and he could get them somewhere else. You're just losing money." But the sentimental, idealistic part of me says, "Well, not much money is being lost, and it keeps Admiral coming back. He's been coming around here for years. He was Granddaddy's friend." It's a constant, never-ending battle, and I can never make up my mind.

I go through the same thing when I think about this town. One side says:

This town is completely illogical. The people can't read or write complete sentences. The gossip is horrible. How many people have been stabbed in the back? And remember how your grandmother talks about Asians and African-Americans. Everyone around here seems to think like that. Oh, and remember how they're screwing up your education for a stupid football game? You have to get out of here and never, ever return.

The other side says:

Well, no one here is perfect - that's true. But look at the farmers. You would like to live on a farm, wouldn't you? And think about all the people who really do help others. Think about that guy who considered it his job to help the widows and orphans after he retired. You really would be sad if Little Naked Man or Admiral died.

Usually the side that hates Gordonsville wins.

I think that part of the problem might be that I often like things in theory better than I like them in real life. I like socialism in theory. I think it could be a good idea if people didn't get mixed in there. People screw things up. Maybe it's the same thing with a small town; it's a good idea in theory. It would work well if people were perfect. Of course, practically every social institution would work well if people were perfect.

As more and more men came in for their sandwiches and cold drinks, face after familiar face flashed before me. They would ask about my parents and my grandmother.

“ I think that part of the problem might be that I often like things in theory better than I like them in real life. ”

They would ask about college. They would ask about boyfriends. And I kept asking myself, *why? I don't really care about their families.*

Do they really care about mine?

But I did care about them, these men who had spent the morning selling cattle or picking tobacco or doing some other necessary chore. And I would miss each and every one of them, the way they smelled just barely of manure, the way their skin look liked earth. They were creatures of the earth who had never known anything but earth. I wanted to be one of them. I wanted a beard to scratch and a field to water. I wanted to rise at dawn and work all day. I wanted that skin.

But it was probably just another theory. I get so infatuated with theories.

TUSCAN DREAMS
AND LITERARY FANTASIES

Anna Parker

My life goes about
In a roundabout way
How to describe it
I can't even say

The similarities and comparisons
Float like dust in the wind
It's poetic almost
Like Peter and Paul
With Mary thrown in

My metaphorical existence
Floats casually along
As the Mississippi guides me
Huck and Jim join the throng

Fantastical images lurk in the dark
As I play cards with Smaug
Bilbo fiddles with his ring
And Harry plays with his dog

The Heart Queen quickly offends
And storms from the place
Because losing is not her thing
She doesn't do it with much grace

Little Red Cap and I
Are good friends, you know
We have tea with a girl on Tuesday
Her hair's long and yellow



POSE de ITALIA

Chet Overall

Emily makes me sad
Her words are so depressing
But they rhyme really well
To all her work you can sing

What name, says the bard,
Is so sweet to tell
But to him I'd rather quote
The immortal, "Oh well"

Harps and lyres
Strings and cants
Forest Friars
Illegal chants
These things don't make sense
To someone not armed
With hints from my psyche
Oh, don't be alarmed

To have a linear plotline, you see,
Would never really do
My life is asymmetrical
And rather curvy, too

So I keep adding people, places and things
To this existence of mine
To relax quite nicely
And so I live quite fine



SOLEDAD
James Curtis



BUNDLE OF BUBBLES
Megan McSwain

ALICE

Andrew Naber

“Meow?” The gray and black speckled cat looked up at the family expectantly.

“I’m sorry kitty, no food. Heh, heh . . .” The father forced a chuckle.

“Meow,” the cat answered, curling around his leg with a flick of his tail. The mother’s foot scooted in between and slid the cat away from him, its paws sliding across the teal and blue linoleum.

“Don’t play with that, Dear. God knows what it’s been into in this place.” She passed by them both with her little girl firmly in her grip.

“Yes, Dear.” The father scuffled after his wife’s clicking footsteps.

“Meow?” Alice looked back at the cat and waved as her mother dragged her away. She wore a neat little blue dress with black, buckled shoes. It looked a bit outdated, but Alice liked it. It was the same soft blue as the floor and walls.

Through sliding doors and over freshly cleaned linoleum, past waiting rooms and lemon scented hallways, a hundred patients sat and stared or laughed and raved. Mr. Liddell poked his head into every room they passed, his long nose pointing upward to see over the windows.

“Are you sure this is the best place for our little girl? These are mostly adults, and they seem,” he paused, “well, dangerous.” “She needs *help*, Dear. Don’t you think you’re being a bit

squeamish when your daughter’s needs are at stake?” Mrs. Liddell halted and spun around to the receptionist. “Ms. Duchess?” Mr. Liddell gripped his daughter’s other hand to make sure that she didn’t wander off. She had a habit of doing that, but Alice just looked around, two little, blue eyes peeping out from under lightly curled bangs.

The receptionist looked over mounds of manila files and smiled down at the little girl. She flipped a few files over and ran her finger down the schedule.

“*Ms. Duchess*, we have an appointment.” Mrs. Liddell pulled a small clipboard from her purse. “It’s already two o’clock.”

“Mr. and Mrs. Liddell, is it?” the receptionist asked. Mrs. Liddell just cocked her head. “Ah. The doctor is straight through that door.” The receptionist pointed.

“Thank you,” Mrs. Liddell about-faced and gave Alice a gentle tug toward the office door. “Where do you think you’re going little lady?” Alice looked up at her mother, and her mother glared at Mr. Liddell.

“Maybe I should wait out here with her, Dear. Just to make sure she doesn’t wander off.” Mr. Liddell said.

“Nonsense! There’s Ms. Duchess right over there – you wouldn’t mind watching our little girl would you?” The young receptionist stapled a file and set it on a pile. “Ms. Duchess!”

“Oh. Yes, Mrs. Liddell?”

“A blood curdling scream,
pierced
through the office door.”

“See? She’s fine with it.” Mrs. Liddell stepped into the office.

Mr. Liddell got down on one knee and looked at his daughter. “Alice, sure you’ll be okay out here by yourself?” Alice nodded, and Mr. Liddell smiled back at her. “It’s just boring stuff in there anyway, but I wouldn’t want you to be scared out here by your lonesome.” Alice shook her head. The same gray and black speckled cat circled between his leg and the chair’s. “Well, I guess you’re not alone anyway; he liked you enough to follow.”

Mr. Liddell got up and tousled his little girl’s hair. “Coming, Dear,” he said and stepped into the office.

Mrs. Liddell was already scribbling notes onto her clipboard.

“We met your very affectionate cat, Doctor,” Mr. Liddell said as he sat down. Dr. Dodgson got up to close the door to his office and offered his hand for Mr. Liddell to shake before slipping back behind his desk.

“That is another question. I wonder about the cleanliness of a hospital that allows cats.” Mrs. Liddell glared at the doctor.

“Our treatment here is based on an integrative program of traditional talk therapy, behavioral reinforcement, medication and, as you saw, some more experimental techniques of contact and proximity comfort with animals.”

“But honestly, can it even be safe? For patients or for the cat? I mean, just wandering about like that!”

"I can assure you that the cat is quite safe on this floor. And he's been shown to have a very healthy effect on many of the patients."

"He seems to have taken to Alice quite well," Mr. Liddell offered.

"And I mean this in the most heartfelt way, Mrs. Liddell, but with symptoms as severe as your daughter's, a cat is the least of your worries. Speaking of which, I have her chart right here –" Dr. Dodgson leaned across his desk and opened a folder. "How have her symptoms been? The hallucinations are only auditory, is that correc—"

"What kinds of medications are used for juvenile schizophrenia, Doctor? Can they be taken at home?" Mrs. Liddell looked up from her clipboard. Mr. Liddell fidgeted.

"I, uh, why do you ask?" Dr. Dodgson shifted and leaned closer to the parents.

"Well, we hardly want our daughter staying in here for an extended period of time."

"Dear, this is the best facility we've seen," Mr. Liddell whispered.

"Mrs. Liddell, juvenile schizophrenia is," Dr. Dodgson hesitated, "a *bit* of an outdated diagnosis. Cases nowadays are more accurately described, and treated, as any number of different forms of autism, even possibly attention deficit with some other underlying emotional abnorm—"

"Well, she's clearly hallucinating, so I don't see how it's *not* schizophrenia, Doctor," she interrupted. She elbowed her husband and whispered to him, "I bet he agrees with me that it's thanks to all those picture books you read her."

Dr. Dodgson sighed and leaned forward. "I understand that this can be difficult, but really, we're confident that your daughter is in a safe treatment environment—"

A blood curdling scream pierced through the office door.

"Carol?" Dr. Dodgson said as he swung open his office



[encaustic, ink and pastel on luan board]

SILHOUETTE

Carina Finch.

door and rushed out.

The Liddells stood up. "Oh my God," they heard from outside the office.

Mr. Liddell looked out and saw the receptionist staring toward him with her hand clamped over her mouth. She was breathing in and out with deep, gasping sobs. Mr. Liddell stepped out of the office searching for an explanation and slipped on a small pool of blood. He looked down to see a kitchen knife, sticky with blood, lying

in the pool. Then he looked up and saw his daughter.

Alice smiled and held up the cat by its head, her fingers pulling its mouth apart into a wide, bloodied, Cheshire Cat grin.

"See, Daddy? He's real!" she said. "See? I told you!"

ROOT BEER

Alex Grant

i decided
that i am once again
able to afford
bottled root beer.

i drove to the store,
picked up a six pack.

i tossed the clerk the money,
admired the brown bottles
all the way home.

i put them in the fridge,
sat down at the kitchen table,
took out my pocket watch
and waited.

i licked my lips,
already tasting it.

smooth and creamy,
bubbling and burning,
holding it in my mouth then
letting it slide
down the back of my throat,
nestling down for a while
in my soft belly.



i drummed my fingers,
looked down at my watch:
two minutes.

i lunged for the refrigerator door
and jerked it open,
whipped the bottle out of the pack
and ripped the top off the bottle,
poured it down my throat,
forcing it into my gut.

it brought a fire with it,
burning all the way down,
dancing like some demon
in my innocent belly.



i bent over
holding my stomach,
trying to settle down,
trying not to vomit.

i set the bottle down
and laid my head on the table.

and it was better than anything.

SELF PORTRAIT

Brett Warren



DESATURATED LIFE

Blake Arnold

LITTLE MOORLAND LASS

James Curtis

Little moorland lass,
will tha' sing thy song?

Will thy melody echo
through th' whole year long?

Little moorland lass,
for whom does tha' sing?

"For th' birds and heather,
an' th' sweet moor things."

Little moorland lass,
how they come to thee –

Th' fox and robin,
and th' moorland bee!

Such a sight tha' canna'
hope to find on earth

Than a moorland lass
singin' songs o' mirth.

So my moorland lass,
go and sing thy song

Let thy melody echo
through th' whole yearlong!

MY GRANDFATHER'S NUMBERS

Meghan Davis

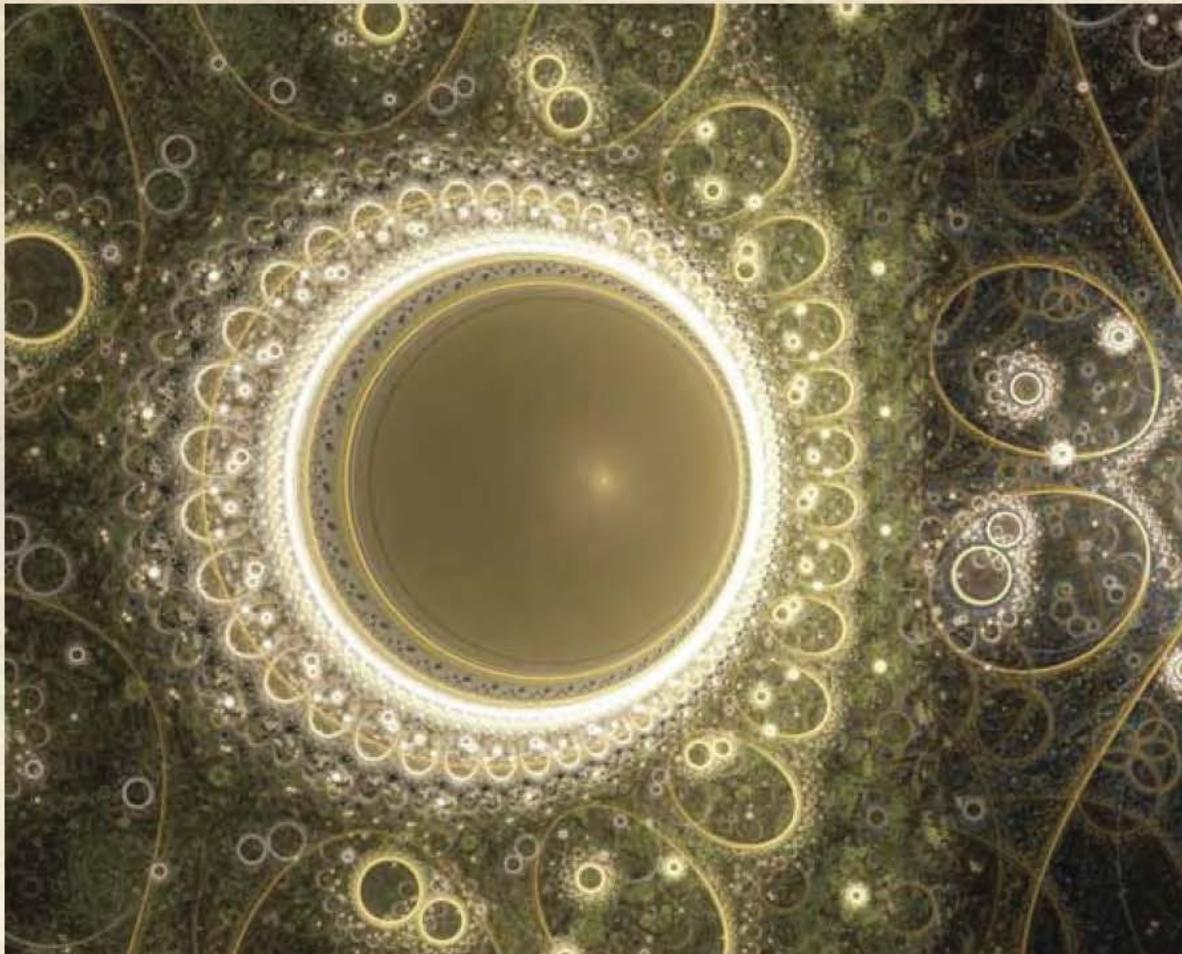
At 12:46 PM, I got the call.
It was 1/14/07. "Your grandfather passed away this morning."
He was 74, almost 75, because he was born on 2/11/32.
On the bus, on the way home from a field trip,
I was given comfort in the arms of friends for 1.5 hours.
For 3 days I was numb: Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday.
I started wearing my cross again.
There are 12 emeralds in it.
On Wednesday, I boarded flight number 2054.
I arrived in Pearl River to 18 other relatives at the house.
It cost \$107 each way for the plane trip.
He had 5 children: Tommie, Jeff, Susan, Buddy and John.
There are 12 grandchildren.
10 showed up.
On the flight down, I listened to 9 by Damien Rice.
5 memory books were set out at the wake and the funeral.
1 new patriarch was wordlessly named. My father, Jeff Davis.
At the funeral, 2 Marines folded a flag with
50 stars and
13 stripes
in honor of Hollis Davis.
As I boarded flight 158 home, the Saints were down 14 to 36.
I'm not sad. I was, yes, but no longer.
Because now I can feel it.
My grandfather and I can now know each other
without limitations like space or time or
NUMBERS.



[charcoal]

CLARITY

Heather Moulder.



[fractal]

GRACEFUL GEM

Wendy Ruan

MILITARY STARE

Jamie Stevenson

He stands before her
stern,

solid,

stoic,

like the trained Lieutenant
she knows so much about.

No words, no sounds
escape his lips
as his head stays at attention,
ready for a command.

She stands before him
unsure,

uneasy,

unknowing,

like the confused woman
she knows too well.

No laughter, no smile
spreads across her mouth
as her head tilts
in a questioning manner.

Their eyes meet,
lock and fasten
like a gun, cocked and loaded
as cold hazel battles warm blue.

Empty, emotionless,
silent, shielded,
dull, disinterested,
rigid, reserved.

These bullets of pain
penetrate her tender heart
as he leaves her dying
of wounds and rejection.

MUSING OVER POLLS

Renee Davis

In the Previous Issue of Collage . . .

After Ishkabible, a purple stuffed dragon, became one of the greatest muses in the Fictitious world, she experienced the worst nightmare any muse could ever imagine: muser's block. Once her career came under harsh evaluation by the Fictitious Monitoring Department, she was replaced by Snizerfritzl, a younger, fresher muse, and was forced to take a less prestigious position as a muse for a school's creative writing club. Now, she sits on her shelf next to a sombrero. What's she up to? Keep reading to find out . . .

Wright had finally settled over the classroom. Ishkabible sat silently in the teacher's chair musing over the work the students had finished earlier that day. Since starting her new position in the fictitious community, she had turned out more stories, plays, and poems than any of her colleagues had in years. This, of course, could have been because of the number of writers that she had acquired, but she was never one for details.

As she pulled out her copy of *Musing Times*, the front page story glared menacingly at her. It was that little rookie that she had vanquished from her mind months - no, years before. Snizerfritzl had taken her precious writer and turned him into a romance novelist. What was the world of fiction coming to? Grudges aside, there he sat unbeknownst to his assigned author, his little, stuffed black and white features grinning as usual. After a long stare at the picture, Ishkabible found her critical eye on the headline:

Is he losing his musing touch? Polls show what the world of fiction says.

She couldn't believe this! The little brat was going to be ousted! She quickly scanned for the polls that would reveal everything. The little pie chart at the bottom of the page indicated that 57 percent of the stuffed dragon community thought that Snizerfritzl had lost his touch. The other 40 percent were said to have given either no response to the situation or thought that his writing technique was acceptable.

Ishkabible stopped reading. She quickly added up the numbers in her mind, counting each of her stuffed fingers in increments of ten. How could this be possible? Only

97 percent of one hundred was accounted for in the chart. Maybe the other three were in the article. Grudgingly, she turned her attention back to the text:

It has now come to the attention of all fictitious creatures everywhere that the replacement of our beloved Ishkabible has fallen on hard musings. Since Snizerfritzl's debut a few months back, his writer (who shall remain anonymous for legal purposes) has gone from the fiction genre of our world to the romance genre.

"This is unacceptable," announced the Senior Member of the Fictitious Monitoring Department. He further commented that there would be a full investigation of the matter.

Ishkabible skipped the next few lines, still trying to discover the meaning behind the pie graph. There was no account of the selection process, no indication of whom was picked for the questionnaire - nothing. Beyond that, the chart was a yes or a no and did not indicate whether or not the yes's were more or less than the maybe's. She became frustrated and discarded the article into a pile of trash. There was only one solution: she would have to visit her enemy, Snizerfritzl. But first, she had to apply for leave.

The blue request form was followed by the pink temporary form. Next was the red form, then the orange one that had no particular relevance to her time off but needed to be filed for records purposes. There was no time. Questions had to be answered right away; she would just have to explain that to the Fictitious Authorities later.

The most used transportation was the postal service, but because of the possibility of getting lost and the rising postage prices, Ishkabible decided to fly. She had never

flown before, which was quite ironic because she was, in fact, a dragon. She had never gone anywhere without at least three weeks notice; after all, it is very difficult to explain how a stuffed dragon goes missing overnight.

Walking out of the door and through the hallway to the entrance took what seemed like decades, but she was prone to exaggeration. She decided that she would never walk on her stubby little feet ever again; she would go electric and get one of those spiffy chairs. That would work. Upon exiting the building, Ishkabible climbed to the tallest point that she could reach: the picnic table. Taking a large breath, she leapt into the air. Flying was surprisingly difficult, but after a few close calls with trees and power lines, she found herself at the door of the fiction-turned-romance novelist. The lights were off. This would make things easier. If a missing stuffed dragon was hard to explain, a stuffed dragon breaking into a residence would be much more so.

Entering was the hard part, but after the initial leap through the window she knew where to go. The writing room was the second door on her left. This was where she had made it big. Pushing the door open, she immediately picked out the orange form of her dragon adversary. Before she could prepare her "I told you so" speech, she noticed something that astonished her: Snizerfritzl was crying. Large crocodile tears slipped down his face as his small stuffed body shivered on the shelf. Her self-righteous attitude quickly left her small, purple head, and her original purpose came back to mind. She cleared her throat loudly. He looked around in surprise, and Ishkabible moved away from the safety of the door to make herself known.

"Come to gloat, have you?"

"No," Ishkabible half lied. It had been playing in her mind on the long flight over, but after seeing the state of the poor stuffed creature, she could not put her heart into it. "Kick them while they're down" was never her motto.

"Suppose you've been reading the papers," he said to his little, orange feet. His legs played back and forth in midair, making the items on the desk wiggle about.

"Yeah," Ishkabible replied as she climbed onto the shelf to sit next to him. She had never imagined that she would see her most sacred perch again. "So what happened?"

Snizerfritzl looked at her quizzically. In their society, questions were not asked; everything was taken at face value. "I tried to muse as best as I could," he responded after the initial shock. "I don't know what happened. One day I'm musing gnomes and trolls, and the next he's writing this awful love story. Muse as I might, the story just kept coming out. He made it big in romance. What am I going to do?" By the end of his spiel he was almost howling. How it hurt her to see a fellow dragon in this state.

"When is your evaluation?" she kindly asked.

"Tomorrow," he responded miserably.

"Then it is settled," Ishkabible announced. "You will come muse with me." The look of shock on his stuffed face was worth the offer, but how was she going to get the Fictitious Monitoring Department to agree? So much paperwork; why couldn't life be more spontaneous?

"I need to be here tomorrow for my evaluation, and my writer, and . . ." he trailed off, losing steam as he went.

"There are a lot of writers in the school where I muse,"

*“Well, it seems to me
that they only fill our heads
with misinformation, anyways.
They can't even
count to one hundred!”*

Ishkabible said proudly. "You will have plenty to muse about. Besides, romance is not our genre; something else will come to muse over our writer. He'll be okay for a few days without anyone."

"And the evaluation?"

"We can take care of the paperwork later; besides, all you need is the green form anyway. The rest of it is all a formality."

"The *Musing Times* will have a field day with this," he said as they climbed down the desk onto the carpet.

"Well, it seems to me that they only fill our heads with misinformation anyways. They can't even count to one hundred!" Ishkabible smirked.

Before she knew it, the two were back in the classroom next to the sombrero. Snizerfritzl seemed worried, but Ishkabible told him that he would see what it was like to muse again. He would see.

LIKE WE ARE

Rachel La Forte

Like east and west
they are seamless and it is
debatable where one ends and another
begins: we are.

Like night and day
they depend on each other through
a constant

push and pull: we are.

Like blinding love and blinding rage,
forever connected by an emotional
presence: we are.

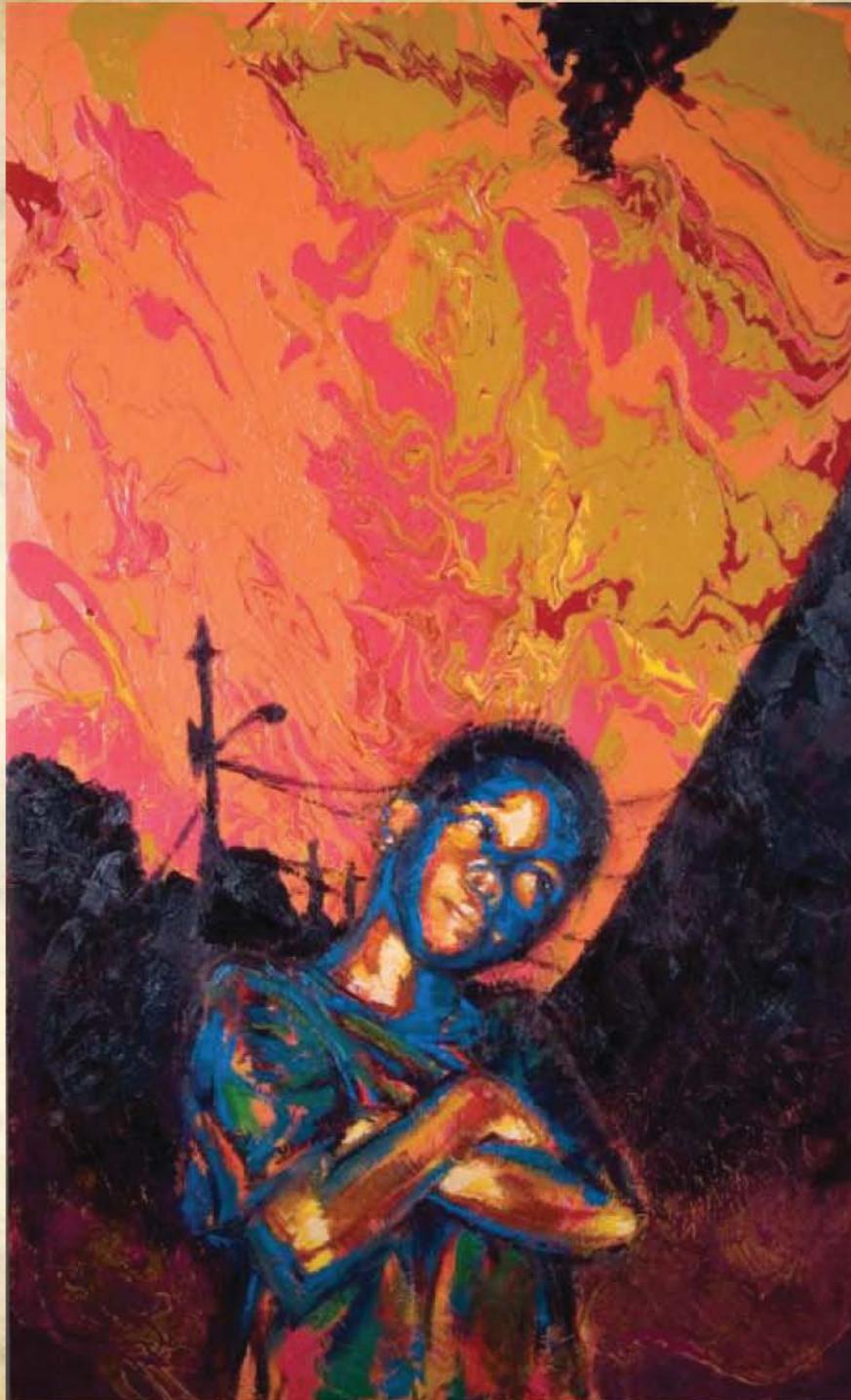
We are everything:
necessity and hope,
hate and desire,
seamlessly matched by an intangible
emotional force that forever draws us.

Like east and west
too easily separated but always
connected: we are.



NATURE

Martina Michalova



[oil and enamel on wood]

MAN AMONGST MEN

Antonio Marble

THE DINER

Jamie Stevenson

“Good afternoon, Sir, would you like something to drink?”

Looking up from the newspaper I was reading, my eyes met with the waitress's. Wearing her typical gray-blue uniform with an apron around her waist, she seemed to have all the time in the world. Her hair was tied up in a ponytail today, but I liked it better when she let it fall around her face. It gave her an angelic sort of look – innocent and soft.

“Um,” I began. “Not right now, maybe later.”

With a nod of her head, she accepted my usual reply and left me alone with my newspaper. Looking down at the bold headline “Three die in car accident,” I realized I didn't want to read any further. Every day it was the same old thing: “Teenager killed from gang shootings;” “Newborn murdered by mother;” “Wife stabbed in own home;” etc. Shaking my head in disgust, I shoved the newspaper into my briefcase and looked around the diner.

Shiny, red plastic booths lined the right side of the old building, and matching bar stools and a counter occupied the left. Busy waiters and waitresses scampered from table to table like synchronized swimmers, never missing a beat. Darting here or stopping there, they seemed to act as one mind. Grilled hamburgers and greasy French-fries

scented the place as the lunch hour specials were rapidly being dished out.

Turning my eyes toward the entrance, I noticed a couple walking in. They were young and deeply infatuated with one another. His protective, guiding hand never left her back as they found an empty booth not far from mine. They seemed happy, but I wondered how long it had taken them to find each other. Were they childhood sweethearts or did they meet online, the more common thing to do nowadays? After seeing the way the girl blushed at the slightest affectionate touch of his hand, I decided they had probably just met.

“Sir, have you decided on something to drink?”

A little startled, I looked to my left to find the waitress waiting patiently for my order. Although she looked like she was only in her late twenties, her intonation indicated maturity and wisdom. I liked this about her.

“Yes, thank you. I would like a cup of coffee please,” I said, surprising myself.

“Regular or decaf,” was her next question.

“Regular.”

“*Life can be cold, cruel and unkind. But when loneliness becomes too close of a friend, we need to remember to refill our lives with the warmth of others.*”

As she walked around the counter to get my coffee, I noticed a father and his teenage daughter sitting on the bar stools. They were eating quietly, and there seemed to be a tense and uncomfortable silence between them. I could tell the father was trying to converse with his daughter, but she would barely answer him. At least he was making an effort to know his daughter better; I remember the feeling of father and daughter “bonding time” all too well. At least they both had someone, unlike me.

“Here you are, Sir,” came the waitress's voice.

Smiling, I watched her walk to another table, noticing her new tennis shoes while I sipped the bitter liquid. As its warmth filled my body, I gave a heavy sigh and closed my eyes. Being there, right that second, was exactly what I needed. Being alone and invisible was how I wanted to live the rest of my life. No more errands to run, no more soccer games to go to, no more debate competitions to attend and no more grocery lists to follow. All I wanted was to be alone: isolated, single, by myself. I opened my eyes, nodded my head in agreement with myself, and took another sip of my coffee. The once warm liquid was now cold and unpleasant. The comfort it had given me vanished like steam rising into the air, gone forever.

I looked up and saw that my waitress was standing by my

table. Coffee pot in one hand and an empty cup in the other, she sat down across from me. A little surprised, I watched her fill the empty cup full of steaming, hot coffee. But instead of drinking it herself, she replaced my cold, stale drink with the fresh one.

“Would you like to talk about it?” she asked.

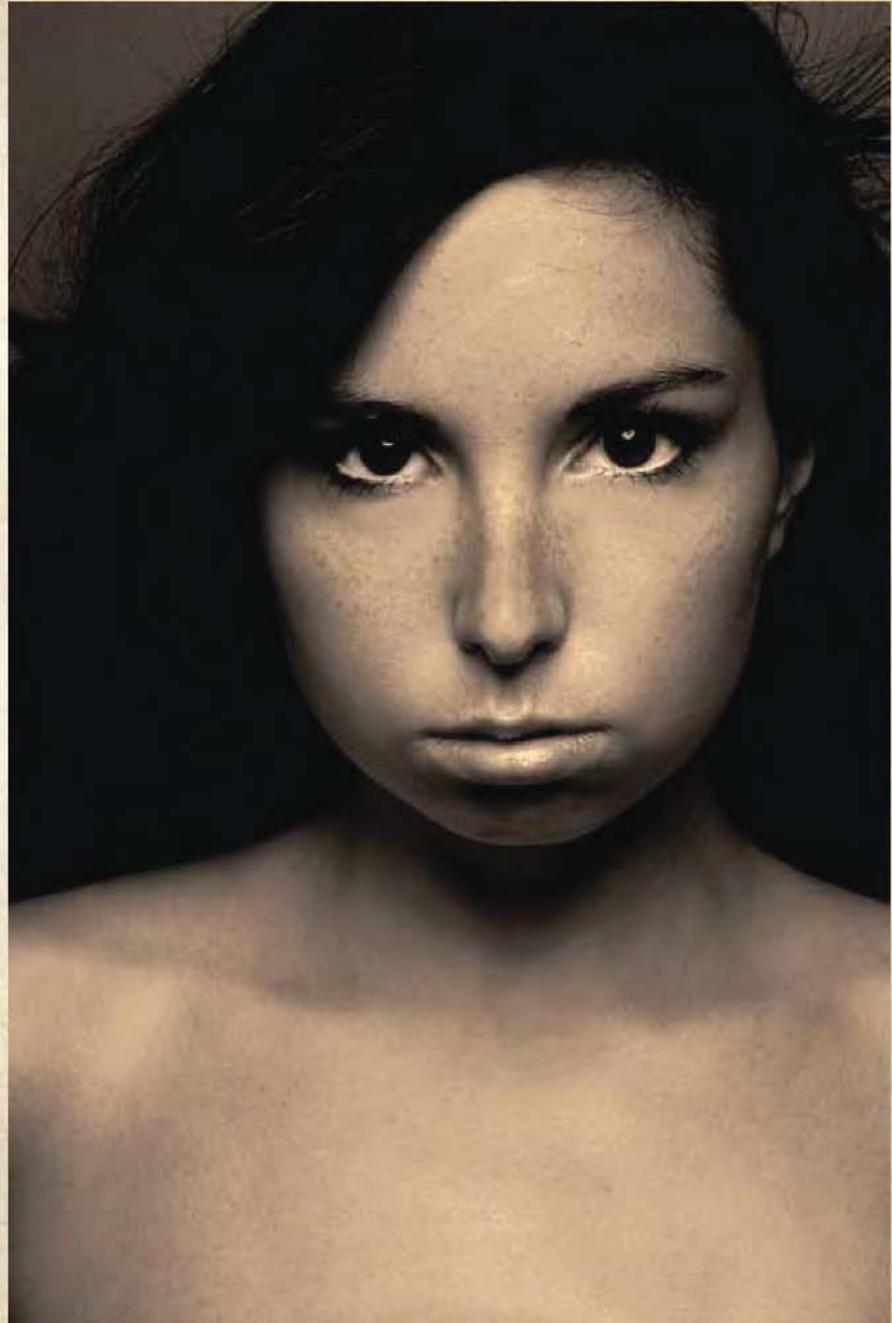
I was stunned. “Talk about what?”

Looking into my eyes, she said gently, “The death of your family.”

Shock and anger consumed me as I tried to spit out a rude remark about her forwardness. Before I could say anything, she took my hands, positioned them around the warm cup of coffee and stated, “Life can be cold, cruel and unkind. But when loneliness becomes too close of a friend, we need to remember to refill our lives with the warmth of others.”

Looking down into the steaming liquid, I understood. With a deep breath and a sip of my new coffee, I began.

“It happened on the night of October the twenty-first . . .”





DELUX BEING PART DEUX
Justin Keoninh



FREE
Chris Kennedy



JEALOUSY

Christina Roth

THE PARAKEET

Eric Benick

There is a parakeet loose in my head:
A chastising blemish, a disruption
To typists and tenants.
It flies a kamikaze route
With skull versus skull warfare,
Trying desperately to breach these impermeable walls
That restrain for a reason.

It started as a notion,
Then I gave it wings.
I articulated more,
And the creature spawned some feathers,
I finally added that proverbial period,
Closing all room for suggestions,
And now its life has grown
Supernatural and full of spirit.

It is causing me visions of lurid depictions.
It whispers ideas in unflagging crescendos,
Beating my ears senseless with erratic innuendos.

My life has been ruined by this repetitive haiku,
Which I sound through a vindictive throat
To articulate rancor (as if it cares),
Like:
"Get out of my head
You verbose little demon.
You are complete now."

Alas, my warning tongue is to no avail.
It shall remain concrete.
It has crumbled my tenements
And ravaged my trains,
And all other ideas
Are but ashes to its flame.
I have birthed a colossus
And become the gum on its shoe.

TOY SOLDIERS

Joseph Quarles

When I was young and foolish, I made a rash decision that affected my life profoundly: I got married to my eighteen-year-old girlfriend. Suffice it to say, the only salvageable part of that doomed union was my son. The incredibly stressful divorce lasted over a year, and during that period my father passed away suddenly, I lost my home, and my soon-to-be ex-wife made it her mission in life to keep my four-year-old son away from me as much as possible. I moved in with my mother and slipped into depression.

After I had been living with my mom for a few months, some new neighbors moved in next door. The new family was comprised of an older woman with an infant, her biker husband, and her brother. The woman, Diane, had several visible tattoos and smoked constantly; she was a good mother though, and was always fretting over her daughter, Jewel. I only saw her husband a couple of times; he was scrawny and short with long, dirty hair and an unkempt beard. The brother, Michael, looked like a typical construction worker but was actually a very quiet and soft spoken man.

Michael was extremely resourceful and patient. He showed me how to do basic car repairs without proper tools and could make almost anything that was broken work for awhile. He never seemed to be bitter or to question life the way I did. He just took whatever came at him and moved on. I, on the other hand, was getting more and more angry with life and saw no future for myself.

We soon became friends, and I learned that his situation was not unlike mine. He had a daughter and a son who was about the same age as mine, and he was going through a difficult divorce. His estranged wife was a heavy drinker and had let her short-tempered boyfriend move into their trailer with his kids, which worried him, and since he didn't have a steady income or a home of his own, he rarely got to visit his children.

Michael's children eventually came to see him, and I got to meet them. Jamie, his tow-headed little boy, had hair that stood up like a thatched roof on his head and a constant runny nose. I missed my son terribly, and playing with Jamie gave me an opportunity to play the role of a nurturer; Jamie and I really bonded.

Around Christmas, Jamie and his sister came to stay with Michael for a few days, and Michael invited me to spend the day with them. By this time the kids were calling me Uncle Joe. I bought the kids some toys before their visit, including a bag of plastic soldiers; I really got a kick out of watching Jamie play on the floor with the soldiers. I still remember him looking out the back of Michael's pickup truck as the kids left at the end of their stay, smiling and waving at me.

A few weeks later I came home from work and saw Diane sitting on the porch of my house, crying. Between sobs, she managed to tell me the heart-breaking news: Jamie was dead. His mother's boyfriend had beaten him to death with a cast iron skillet. Jamie's mother and the

*“ I know that the world
is a heartless place
with its fair share
of hatred and cruelty,
but I also understand now
that there cannot be light
without darkness. ”*

boyfriend were in jail, and his sister had been placed in foster care. Michael had left to try to get custody of his daughter, but Diane hadn't heard from him yet. She went back to her house, and I couldn't do anything but stand there.

Then I exploded. I went in the house and screamed and shoved over a bookcase. I smashed a lamp and tore up couch cushions. I raged against God and cursed Him and every institution I could think of. I wanted to tear my eyes out, to destroy everything around me, to get the vision of Jamie's last wave goodbye out of my mind. I finally collapsed on the floor and wept inconsolably until I passed out.

I saw Michael a few days later. He looked exhausted, and although I tried to talk to him, he had very little to say. He told me that in order to get his daughter back he was going to have to leave and find another job, and he thanked me for the kindness my mother and I had shown him and his children. Then he left. But this would not be the end of Michael's bad luck.

A month later I came home to see the police and an ambulance next door. My mother came out of the house and told me that Diane had died from a massive stroke while sitting in a chair in front of the television and smoking a cigarette. Jewel's crying woke up her father, who found Diane in the chair, staring straight ahead, the still lit cigarette burned down to her fingers. By this point I was pretty numb, so I just shook my head and went in the house.

A few months later, one more horrid event reared its ugly head. Jewel's worthless, biker father, in a drunken stupor, raped her. He was arrested, and as far as I know he is still in the penitentiary. Jewel miraculously survived. I have no idea where she is or who took custody of her after the incident.

I saw Michael again a few years later. He had moved back into town and had a young, pregnant wife and his now grown daughter with him. He seemed like the same old Michael, a bit worse for the wear that had been inflicted on him by life, but happy. We talked for a little while, and then they left. After I saw him I spent some time thinking about his struggles, and they made mine seem petty and insignificant. I still had my son and was now very close to him. I know that the world is a heartless place with its fair share of hatred and cruelty, but I also understand now that there cannot be light without darkness. If there is evil in the world - true evil - then there must be good as well, and I saw a lot of good in Michael. His very existence taught me how to live and helped drain the poison of self-hatred out of my life. I cannot even begin to understand the suffering that he went through, yet there he was that day, smiling and trying again.

Recently, some new neighbors moved in: a single mother and her little boy. The little boy is about three and has blonde hair and blue eyes. The other day, as I was walking down the sidewalk in front of my house, I looked up and saw them just as they were about to get into their car. The boy smiled and waved at me from the safety of his mother's arms. At that moment, I saw another little boy, from years before, waving at me and smiling. I wonder if he can see me now.



[mixed media]

CONQUEST
(of the 4th Dimension)
Antonio Marble



[house paint and acrylic on masonite]

SQUID

Jason Barnett



[acrylic on canvas]

STANDOUT

Celeste Ellison

PERSPECTIVE

Pam. Manley Davis

An open umbrella of mottled blue and white
describes the heavenly arc in daytime grandeur.

It is how the spattered blue pottery bowl
on the top glass shelf in my bookcase might look –
if upended – to a spider swinging from silver scaffolding
on the shelf beneath.

Like a watercolor inside half of the shell
from which the universe sprang,
it stretches up high and out of reach,
a masterpiece in the making,
incomplete though perfect in every brushstroke
of the Artist's practiced hand.

Canada Geese elbow southward
and preying hawks trace circles toward the earth
like bath water spiraling down a drain.

Changeling clouds meander in the expanse,
embracing and letting go,
their cherubic faces blushing at the bowing sun.

And at night sundry stars shine
as though sun-pecked holes through that cosmic shell,
seeming as diamonds on a cloth of black
or a reflection of the tiny phosphorescent waves
that those shuttling to the moon might enjoy.



[latex paint and resin on board]

MS STUDY #2

Jamie Allen



[oil paint, polyurethane, and wood on canvas]

TASTY
Calvin Morton

LIFE AND WRITING

Taffeta Chime

Shoved by everything
From the air to the sea,
The waves pull the air from my lungs,
 O unmerciful claw!
Swallowed in ice, deafened by cold,
But I hear the laughing
 As I sink.

Down deeper darker deadlier,
 Am I still here?
 Have I stopped? Died?
 Because I've become nothing.

I climb tug push at the thickness,
Getting lighter and it's easier to run.
Above, I guess, is where I'm going,
My lungs are slowly dying,
I don't think I can make it,
But the darkness is letting go,
Cold is getting warmer,
Surface is getting closer
 closer
 closer still.

I can't help but inhale biting water
My hands – I see them now –
Are groping to the sky
Reaching for that one gasp
 And there it is!

Pencil and paper float and

Breathe me back

Into the air.



[acrylic on canvas]

MOUNTAIN TOP EXPERIENCE

Jason Barnett

ASHLEY'S *Story*

A note from the Editor:

The interconnection of human life is amazing; everything we do has an impact on the lives of others, whether we are aware of it or not. We all, therefore, have a responsibility to take our actions seriously, but we can be sure that in so doing we may be a blessing in the lives of others.

*Last spring, we started a tradition in which the students published in *Collage* were invited to come with their loved ones to a reception honoring their achievements. Everyone was pleased with the talent displayed, but no one had any idea how important the event would become to one artist, Ashley Krulikowski. When we heard Ashley's story, we realized that our event made a greater impact on one particular life than we could have known. We are grateful to have impacted Ashley's life in a positive way and want to share with you the story that she shared with us.*

Over a year ago my family moved away from our home in Florida. My father had trouble coping with the change, and that, combined with little sleep from coaching two basketball teams and teaching a subject in which he was not properly trained, caused him to become depressed. Although I knew he wasn't well, I could never have imagined what was going to happen: one typical Friday in May, I came home from a doctor's appointment to find that my father had taken his life.

Being a "daddy's girl," I had always dreamed of having my father walk me down the aisle at my wedding, and I expected him to be there for all of the important moments that my future would bring. I can no longer have that dream.

Depression and suicide are nothing to joke about, although they are often taken lightly. People you would

never expect to be suicidal may have thoughts that would surprise you; the detective who was on the scene the day of my father's death told me that at least once a week the police have to visit MTSU because of a suicide attempt or death. Suicide is something that we don't often hear about, as though it is something shameful, but I'm not ashamed of what happened to my dad because I know that his illness turned him into a different person. He was no longer the father who raised me; the father who raised me was the best father anyone could ask for. My dad taught school for over 20 years, was a devoted husband, raised two kids, and was a faithful Christian.

A week before my dad passed away I had the opportunity to attend the *Collage* reception that was held for the students published in the fall 2006 and spring 2007 issues. My dad was my date to that reception, and for a few hours that night, I felt like I had my dad back. I will cherish that memory forever.

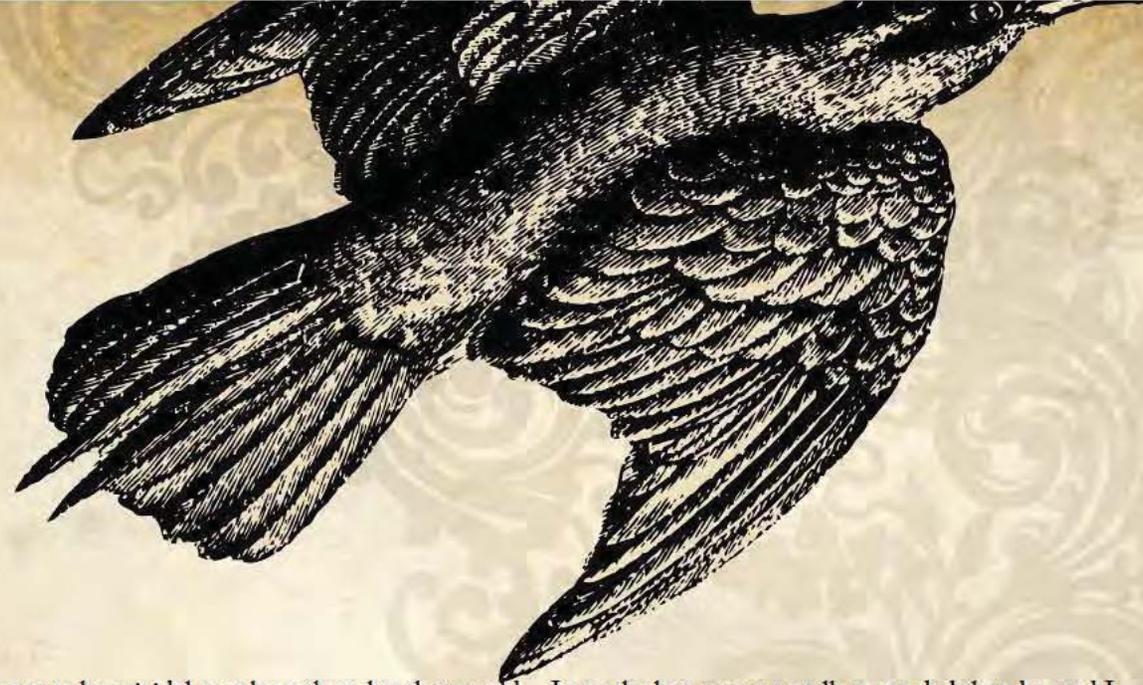
I want to share a couple of lessons that I have taken away from what I have experienced. First, suicide should be taken seriously. If you have thoughts of harming yourself, get help immediately. Second, never go a day without telling those you love just how much you love them; they can be gone before you know it.

I was the last person to talk to my dad that day, and I never hung up the phone without telling him, "I love you."

Ashley Krulikowski | Deuteronomy 32:4



Ashley and her dad with her pastel drawing, "The Sunshine State"



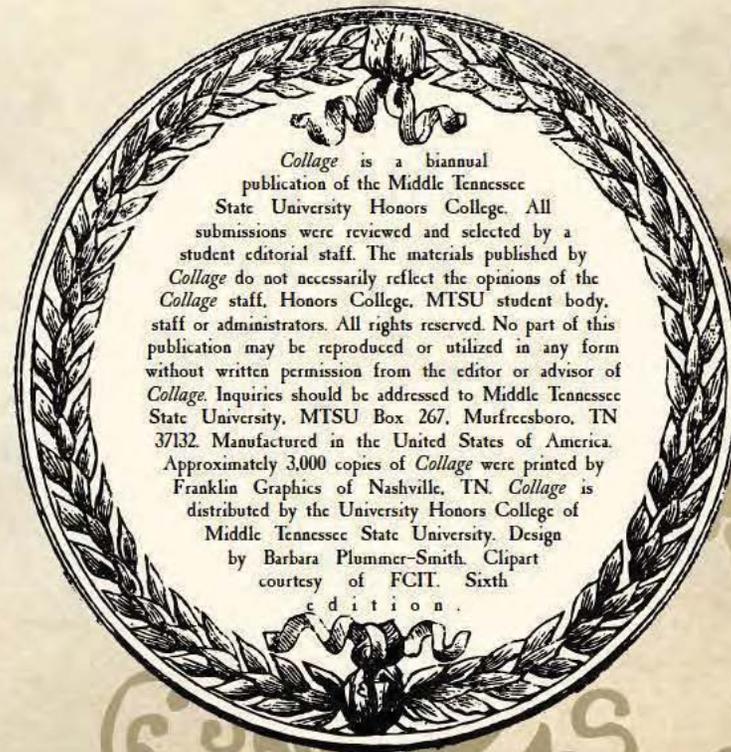
To submit to Collage:

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.

Martha Hixon Creative Expression Award

Each semester one student's work will be awarded the Martha Hixon Creative Expression Award. The \$100 prize, which will be presented at Collage's annual spring recognition program in April, 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.

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The logo for Middle Tennessee State University, featuring the words "MIDDLE TENNESSEE" in a bold, serif font, with a horizontal line underneath, and "STATE UNIVERSITY" in a smaller, sans-serif font below that.

**MIDDLE
TENNESSEE**
STATE UNIVERSITY