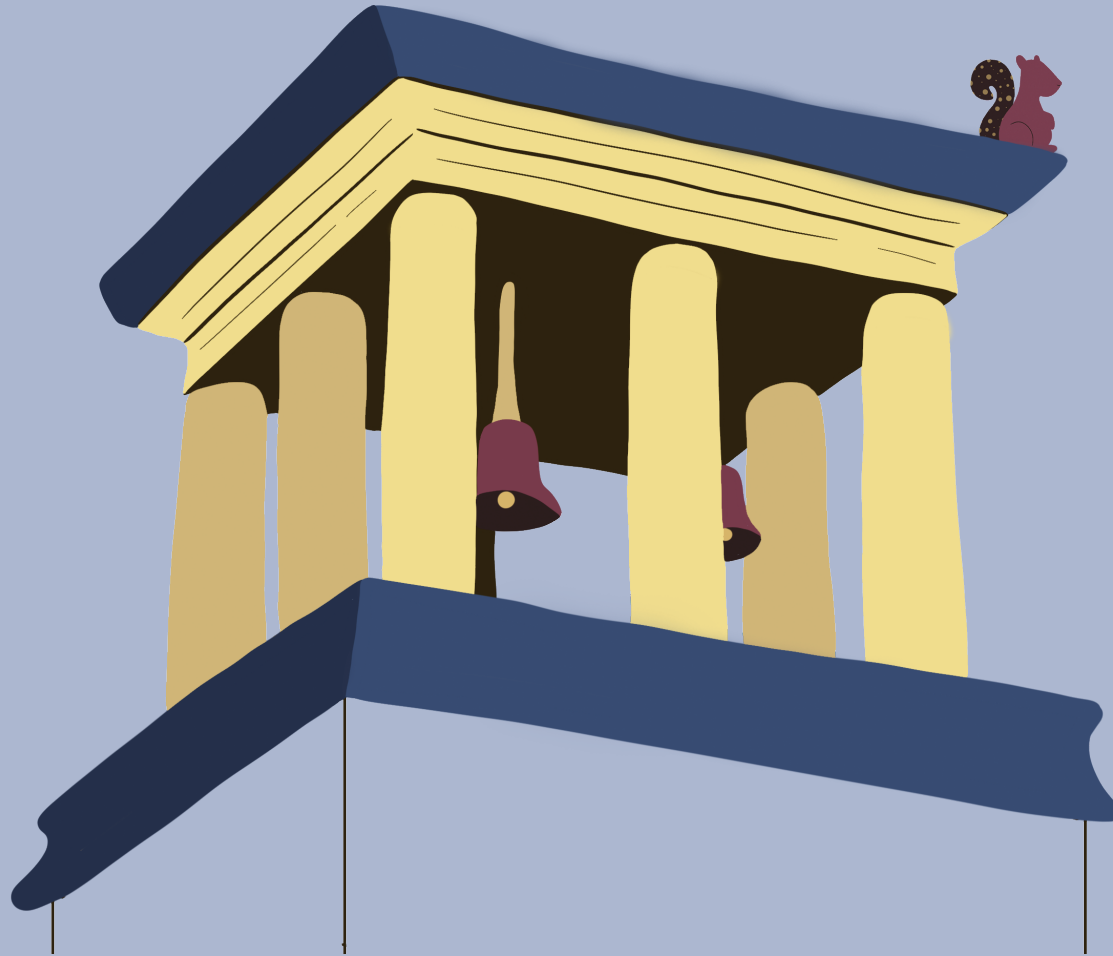


COLLAGE

A Journal of Creative Expression 🍁 *Fall 2022*





Published By

Middle Tennessee State University Honors College

This issue is dedicated to Marsha Powers, the cornerstone of *Collage*.

Letter From THE EDITOR

I began my college career in the Fall of 2020 amid great uncertainty and change. When I began at MTSU, it was a much different campus—emptier, quieter. Many of my peers felt out of place, as if we had strolled into the wrong room, or arrived at an event an hour early. In spite of the strangeness, I joined *Collage*.

It was at *Collage* that I first discovered that elusive sense, belonging. Here, I found the lengths to which art and passion could shine.

Collage would not be the beacon that it is without its staff, faculty, and alumni support. I often allude to *Collage* as a garden, with the pieces of creative expression we publish as seeds being planted—seeds of confidence within their writers, of inspiration to others, of art. The dedication by my fellow staff members is not an easy dedication, but the work they put into watering and nurturing these seeds is a beautiful declaration of the importance of art for art's sake. Without Marsha Powers' guidance and expertise, *Collage* would not be the streamlined, inspired, journal that it is today. Her absence this semester was initially disconcerting to me and those who have also been lucky to work alongside her. Yet in the face of this change, Tatum Hochstetler has supported *Collage* with tremendous optimism and commitment, and she has truly been an inspiring and crucial aspect of *Collage's* success this semester. I am beyond grateful for Tatum's support amidst this period of change within *Collage*.

Though much has changed since Fall 2020, *Collage* has remained steadfast in its mission to provide students and their art with a platform—a voice—and it will continue to do so as we delve into the uncertain future, which is a testament to the power of art's impact. I thank *Collage* for all that it has taught me as a staff member, and now editor. This experience would not have been what it is without Marsha Powers, Tatum Hochstetler, and my fellow staff members.

Micaela Anderson

STAFF

LITERATURE STAFF

Editor in Chief:

Micaela Anderson

Associate Editor:

Charlotte Daigle

Literature Editor:

Angela Benninghoff

Assistant Literature Editor:

Fatemeh Bakhtiari

Nonfiction Editors:

Hannah Antrican
Stephanie Hall

Fiction Editors:

Chelsey Brown
Brynlee Wolfe

Poetry Editors:

Sydney Robertson
Madalynn Whitten

Literature Reviews:

Courtney Anderson
Kera Reynolds
Elizabeth Polson
Souvipha Kaewbunyard
Joey Harris

Social Media Assistant:

Rachelle Laurel

VISUAL ARTS STAFF

Designer:

Alexandria Neef

Associate Designer:

Monika Overholt

Social Media & Photography:

Haley Roberts

Creative Director:

Emma Jones

Visual Arts Editor:

Rylee Campbell

Assistant Visual, Video, & Audio:

Timothy Wales

Art Editors:

Kaleigh Young
Zayne Long

Photography Editor:

Becky Carter

Photography, Audio, & Video:

Ella Richardson

Visual, Video, & Audio:

Annalise Dodson
Grace Holland



TABLE OF CONTENTS

☀ - Creative Expression Award Winners

ART

- 06 Critters - Biz Duff
- 07 Fox - Ox Zante
- 11 Calico - Ox Zante
- 12 Abuse - Elizabeth Kowalezyk
- 13 Self Scratch - G Haley
- 14 Chaos Sunset - Keiko Terry
- ☀ 15 Derealization - Jillian DeGrie
- 16 Dew Drop - Grace Pratt
- 16 Evolution - Biz Duff
- 17 Gibson Girl - Mo Overholt
- 21 Serenity - Camryn Anderson
- 23 The Name's Gwen-Gwen - McKenzie Anderson
- 24 Octopus - Jillian DeGrie
- 25 Moon Talisman - Allison Rethi
- 26 Self Portrait in a Hat - Jillian DeGrie
- 27 Merlin - Linden Parten
- 28 Type Iguana - Emma Jones
- 30 Shadow - Ox Zante
- 30 Lola and Luci(fer) - Elizabeth Long

SONG LYRICS

- 08 My Brother - William Bain
- ☀ 09 Gettysburg - Sofia Lynch
- 13 Teeth - Cassie Sistoso
- 14 Kissed by the Sun - Holden Carter

PHOTOGRAPHY

- 05 Bostonian Convergence - Mak Johnson
- 06 AZ Prairie Dog - Emma Jones
- 07 Summer 2022 - Jonathan Salazah
- 08 Cow Hug - Helen Grace Daniel
- 09 Cinema - Sarah St John
- 10 A Look Through the Mist - Ben Weaver
- 18 Eye of Winter - G Haley
- ☀ 20 Held at Bay - Becky Carter
- 21 Castle on the Hill - Helen Grace Daniel
- 22 The Gateway - Elizabeth Kowalezyk
- 22 Trastevere - Ross Sibley
- 23 Limelight - Darwin Alberto
- 29 The Room From My Dreams - Zoe Vecchio
- 30 Pandora's Fox - Dagan Billips
- 31 Forsyth Fountain - Mak Johnson
- 33 Dr. Troncarelli - Ross Sibley

VIDEO AND AUDIO

- 12 War and Smoke - Iolanthe Klika
- ☀ 16 The Livlic Tree - Sierra Hart
- 18 Second Best - Cassie Sistoso
- 23 Aging Process - Hunter Hoffman

PROSE

- 17 The Assignment - Cierra Kelso
- ☀ 24 Liege - Jai Wilson
- 32 The Paintings - Olivia Scott

POETRY

- 05 Did You Know - Colene Belmont
- 07 The Flower of Words - Sophie Buck
- 07 Mountain Language - Harley Mercadal
- 10 Appalachian Reckoning - Harley Mercadal
- 11 A Sanitary Place Meets a Swamp Friend - Grace Holland
- 12 Cravings - Rachel Booher
- 15 Academic Validation - Kera Reynolds
- 16 Me and the Lord Play Catch - Luke Cameron
- 18 23 - Cassie Sistoso
- 19 Death and Dying - Eryn Sorrells
- 19 Autumn Ashes - Ella Lancaster
- 20 Oizys - Colene Belmont
- 21 Ocean Tones - Desmond Arias
- 25 Waxing Crescent - Madalynn Whitten
- 26 Annabelle - Jai Wilson
- 27 Whispers on the Wind - Casey Epting
- 28 Strangers in the Snow Globe - Meena Swaminathan
- 29 When We Heal - Zoe Talbot
- ☀ 31 Psalm 121 - Cassie Sistoso

i watch the flower petals
 on your funeral bouquet
 wither
 decay
 fall to my apartment floor
 and i am reminded
 what you told me
 all those years ago
 as we packed away
 memories
 like clothes into suitcases
 you told me
 that we never have forever
 and i was so young
 to think you were invincible
 but as i reflect
 now older
 i wonder
 did you feel
 time falling away from you
 like sand
 into the bottom half
 of your ever-ticking
 hourglass
 you gave me
 a lifetime
 of memory
 in my twenty
 short years
 did you know
 time was falling away from you
 did you know
 that forever ended so soon
 did you know
 that i unpack that suitcase
 of memories
 when i think of you
 daily.



BOSTONIAN CONVERGENCE

Mak Johnson · Photography



CRITTERS

Biz Duff • Art



AZ PRARIE DOGS

Emma Jones • Photography



THE FLOWER OF WORDS

Sophie Buck • Poetry

A cutting, a stinging, a singeing stray word
Though spoken in jest, alas it is heard
And taken to heart, a cankerous blight
A flower struck down, a withered delight.

A word, like a seed, can flourish and grow
Into billowing blossoms of fragrance and show
Your words carry power to heal or destroy
The poison of asps, or encouragement, or joy.

Take heed of your words, the wind does not lie.
Uproot all the nettles and leave them to die.
A flower is fragile, its life but a day
So choke out the thistles and watch what you say.

MOUNTAIN LANGUAGE

Harley Mercadal • Poetry

Self-inflicted voice training started at eight—
cruel children and ruthless television taught me
many simple truths and more simple lies, but
namely: *that Southern accent means you're stupid.*

I began to speak differently: careful syllables,
proper English, smoothing my lispy lilts flat, and
ridding myself of a drawl so completely people
still ask me, *and where did you come from again?*

Desperation to hold onto the educated aura
isolated me in more ways than one; I got above
my raising in some eyes, and in others, I got too
good to speak mountain language, too far from home.

I leave the safety of the hills infrequently, reluctantly,
since flat places unsettle me, make my blood slow.
Home invigorates me, brings Appalachian back up to
identity, allows mountain folk language to surface anew.



SUMMER 2022

Jonathan Salazar • Photography

FOX

Ox Zante • Art



COW HUG

Helen Grace Daniel • Photography

MY BROTHER

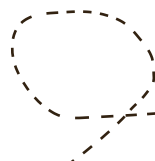
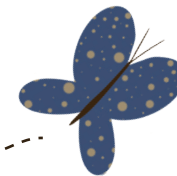
William Bain • Song Lyrics

Me and my brother, though from different mothers, we often were confused as twins
Though his hair was brown and mine trickled down to my shoulders black as my sin
In the same likeness, we got the same kindness from Daddy's soft affection
But a push from our mothers to separate brothers made our lives a competition
And I was determined to win

When you find yourself on the edge of darkness know that I will be a friend
If forgiveness finds you then don't look behind you accept me as child again
The lamb was slain the day you made the decision to pay for my sin
So if you hear that voice reassuring your choice then maybe it's time to begin
The kinship we're hiding within

The air was windy and ever so shifty, you grabbed my hand for our flight
Our spirits flew high as we sailed through the sky, a symbol of power in sight
Four long hours I held the fight
Deeper you plunged into the night
That courtyard was haunted and you knew it so
Yet willingly you paid the debt that I owe
Never have I seen a love so true
But brother you gave it as my love withdrew
The thought of it haunts me, the memory cold
But fortune never favors the bold

How could I amuse all this pride
When they ransacked your village a piece of me died
But up from the ashes I will rise again
Your legacy lives on through my pen
Forever my brother, forever my friend



GETTYSBURG

Sofia Lynch • Song Lyrics

VERSE 1

THAT OLD STEINWAY IN THE FOYER FELL APART AT AGE FIFTEEN
I REMEMBER WHEN YOU PLAYED IT; HANDS CONNECTED AT THE KEYS
I THOUGHT: HE MUST KNOW EVERYTHING
JUST A SCHOLAR, NOT AN ARTIST, CAUSE IT DOESN'T PAY THE BILLS
FRANK SINATRA, LOUIS ARMSTRONG, YOU LISTEN TO THEM STILL
GUESS I NEVER HAD A CHANCE TO CLIMB UP ANOTHER HILL

PRE-CHORUS

AND I THINK THAT IT'S ALRIGHT
THAT THE PIECES FELL EXACTLY HOW THEY'RE MEANT TO LAY
IT WASN'T LONG TO REALIZE
THAT I NEVER HAD A CHANCE TURNING OUT SOME OTHER WAY

CHORUS

EVERYTHING I DO, IS BECAUSE OF YOU, TAKING ALL YOUR CUES,
YOU'RE MY MENTOR AND MY MUSE
YOUNG AND UNAFRAID, ARMED WITH ONLY WORDS
STEPPING OFF THE TRAIN, TOO NAIVE TO HURT
AND I THANK GOD, YOU GOT OUT OF GETTYSBURG

VERSE 2

GATHER SWIFTLY, AS A FAMILY, IN THE HOUSE YOU USED TO OWN
AND MY MOTHER SWEARS IT'S HAUNTED, CAUSE IT SMELLS LIKE YOUR COLOGNE
PENNSYLVANIA ALWAYS FELT LIKE HOME
AND THE STEINWAY IN THE FOYER WAS CONVERTED TO A DESK
NOW IT SITS THERE IN THE SHADOWS, ONLY DUST WILL PLAY IT NEXT
YOU'D STILL CORRECT ITS FORM, CAUSE YOU KNOW BEST

BRIDGE

PUT YOUR LIFE ON A MAP, SEE WHERE IT LEADS
ALL PATHS GO BACK TO ME
WISHING I COULD GO BACK, WATCHING YOU LIKE A SCREEN
GOD WHY'D YOU HAVE TO LEAVE
NOW I'M OBSESSED, COMPLETE YOUR REGRETS, YOUR UNFINISHED MELODIES

CHORUS

EVERYTHING I DO, IS BECAUSE OF YOU, TAKING ALL YOUR CUES,
YOU'RE MY MENTOR AND MY MUSE
SEE YOU AS A KID, 1944, MUSIC IN YOUR VEINS, IGNITING IN YOUR SOUL
ALL BECAUSE, YOU GOT OUT OF GETTYSBURG



CINEMA

Sarah St. John • Photography



APPALACHIAN RECKONING

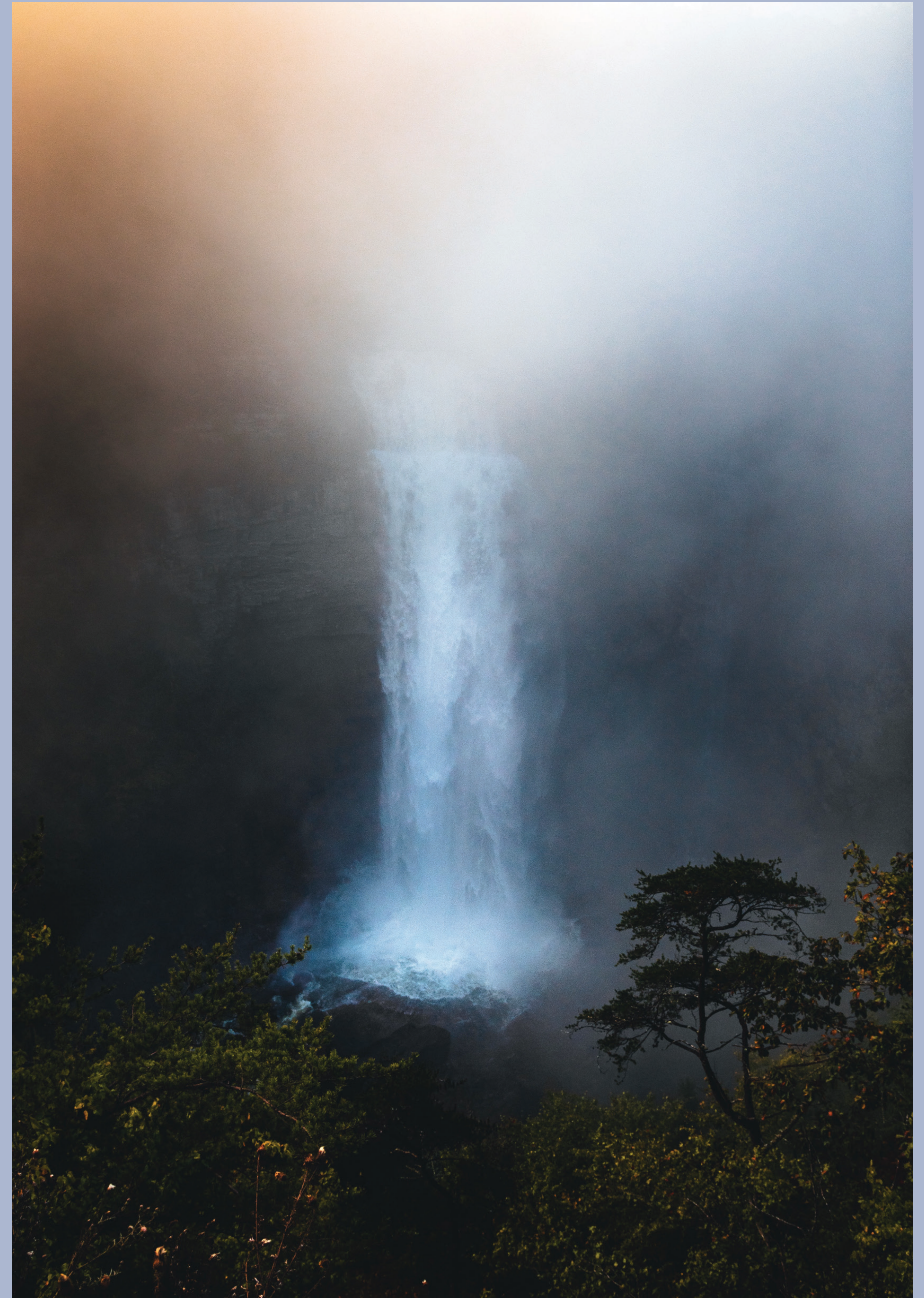
Harley Mercadal • Poetry

Bringing gallons of peach sweet tea from Pal's
used to be *that point in the semester, huh*, but
it instead became a habit I don't want to break.
Charissa asks me, *Are you okay? Really?*

I tell her, *I don't know*, but I guess I do.
Insomnia checks me in—checks me out—
another week passed, three classes taught,
five classes taken, *tick-tock, time's sweet chariot*.

Traffic backs up while I speak with Silas House,
air-conditioning streaming icy tears across our
faces, engaging in memory's darkest reflections.
We muse on growing up white trash and poor.

Memory sends us back to childhood poverty:
eating ketchup-crackers, butter-sandwiches,
playing with what we found and not much else.
We speak of dogs, partners, and novels, too:
McCarthy, Lee Smith, Appalachian Gothic,
deep poverty in Dorothy Allison's *Bastard*.
I've hated these mountains, this speech-lilt,
for so long that my rush of gratitude chokes me.



A LOOK THROUGH THE MIST

Ben Weaver • Photography





CALICO
Ox Zante · Art

A SANITARY PLACE MEETS A SWAMP FRIEND

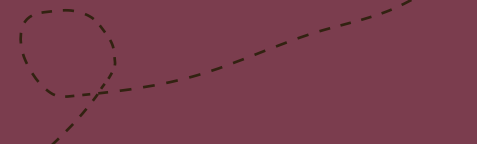
Grace Holland · Poetry

I was filled to the brim with warm water
Excitedly thinking it was time for someone to take a bath
Of course, I had no idea that the someone in question
would be so scaly and green

Oh yes, it's just me and Mr. Alligator in the small blue bathroom
I am not the one that decided
to put a creature of the swamps
in this much too clean bathtub,
but I pity him nonetheless
Watching him swim around in circles,
endlessly,
hoping for something more

I have nothing more to offer him.
I am only so large and only so deep
I like to think of us as friends,
but I know soon he will grow much too old
and too big
to find my depths interesting

I am sparkly and clean
and filled with the most inviting water humans will ever see
But for my alligator friend,
I am nothing more than a too small cage
I wish to set him free.



CRAVINGS

Rachel Booher · Poetry

My inhibition sickens me with the forces
of Newton's laws and draws
me sweetly in for a kiss.
Raspy lips cut into my tongue as the monster awakens and desire rages,
driving the hunger echoed in my belly.
Slamming fists and gnashing nails bite down into chalk,
flinging powder and grime onto the
cracked floors. The pain laced with euphoria
reminds me of a summer day without sunscreen,
scorched and blistered with smiling memories and white teeth.
I look into eyes reflecting my own longing and I realize
the end of this road is what we both desire.
The end is the beginning,
and for insatiable monsters like us, the worst type of craving comes
when the dragon stops biting its own tail.
Cries and groans later, smashed together with bruises and sore muscles,
I sit and ponder which one of us will devour the other first...
I glance at my partner,
scale the wall,
rub the dusty friction into my calluses,
and climb.
There's no telling how high we will reach until one of us lets go.

WAR AND SMOKE

Iolanthe Klika · Video



ABUSE

Elizabeth Kowalczyk · Art





SELF SCRATCH

G Haley · Art

TEETH

Cassie Sistoso · Song Lyrics

i'm growing sick of apartments
sick of sleeping in bed that's not ours
and i'm sick of the pretense
that change isn't knocking on our door

i'm not the life of the party
i'm not easy to love now that you can
now i'm yours and you're sorry
that i've given you all that i am

the world's pushing forward
leaving us just behind
it's like pulling out teeth
it's like losing your mind

there's a change in your absence
i try to fill it with time
it's like speaking with silence
it's like saying goodbye

i'm coming up empty
reach for you with the soft of my hands
jaded green with the envy
that you're oblivious to pain i withstand

i'll fill you up with my worries
then bleed you dry with the blade of my tongue
going hungry for mercy
i am afraid of what we have become

i would give you everything
even if you never asked

i would give you everything
even though you never

ask



KISSED BY THE SUN

Holden Carter • Song Lyrics

No rain in sight
No clouds to see
Who is that
Lying underneath the palm tree

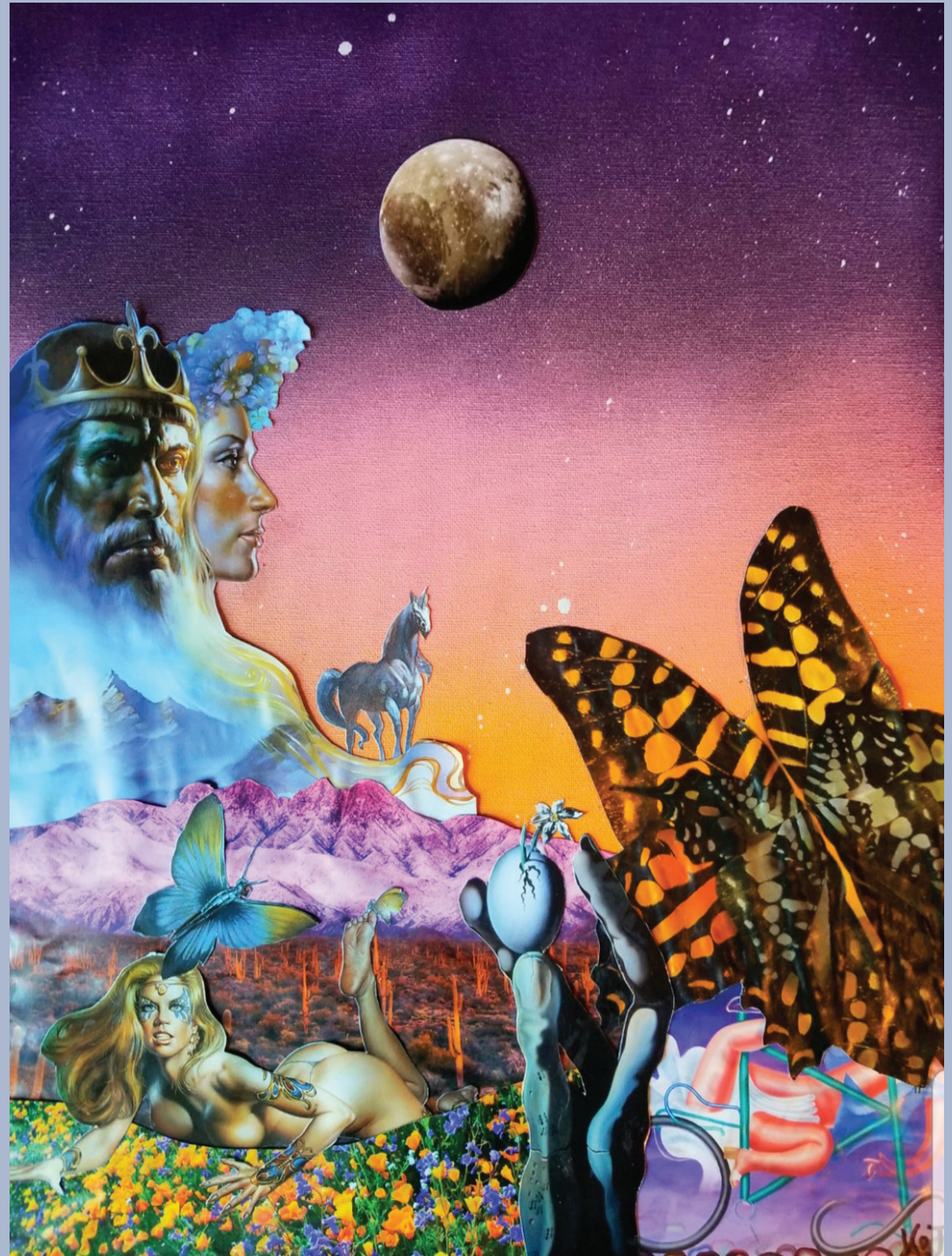
Basking in the summer rays
Can you tell me what you do for fun
Besides setting my heart ablaze
She's the one
Oh, she's the one
Who's been—
Kissed by the sun
Kissed by the sun

Laying there on the golden sand
Making me sweat
She's from a burning wonderland
With a fiery silhouette

She's been kissed by the sun
She's been kissed by the sun

Maybe I can't take the heat
There's a fire in my soul
I'm under her control
Want to make her all mine
She is the queen of the summertime

CHAOS SUNSET
Keiko Terry • Art



ACADEMIC VALIDATION

Kera Reynolds · Poetry

Strawberry scented stickers
and sparkly pens. Rubber stamps
carved with smiley faces,
ink pigmented in eggplant purple,
pressed on all my tests.
Pizza Hut certificates
covered the refrigerator door,
just for lying in bed with my tiny feet
in the air and a book on my belly.
Teachers praised me for
taming dragons, riding horses, and befriending a mouse.

Receiving the highest average
award in my classes, just for memorizing
the periodic table and scribbling the
quadratic formula like I write my name.
Sitting at the lunch table alone
with piles of assignments and study guides
smothered in useless facts and tears from stress
striving for perfection. Typing away
formulas and spending hours
balancing equations, just to get a perfect score
on every exam and praise from my teachers and peers.
Mascara smears on her cheek, brain on fire, and hair
in a high bun, held together with ten bobby pins
from staying up until three and waking up at seven.
Letters from college recruiters constantly sliding
under my bedroom door and spamming my inbox,
while mama holds back tears
from excitement.
Worked constantly for thirteen years
just to dress up like a walking grape
for one night. Covered with stoles, cords,
and a medallion carved with the number five.
3.98 GPA nearly perfect.

And here I am
living on scholarships but
still working to pay for tuition.
Transcript stamped with mostly "B's"
and occasionally a "C,"
getting by with minimum Honors requirements.
Portfolio titled "Half-Assed Effort."
Color guard, GPA plaques, and academic writing certificates
mock me as they stand on my dorm shelf,
collecting dust and waiting for more.



Jillian DeGrie · Art DEREALIZATION



ME AND THE LORD PLAY CATCH

Luke Cameron • Poetry

Me and the Lord play catch
On an autumn afternoon
The breeze is brisk
And I wonder if
I have stepped outside of time
His throws are on-point
Not a single one strays
Every toss finds its home
In the sweet spot of my glove
His hair flaps wildly in the wind
And the sun makes the gold-brown glint
Under his ball cap
He smiles and I smile
And we toss back and forth
We even work in some long toss
We laugh and I ask him how life is treating him
He says well
I get a feeling of peace
Throwing ball with him
I've hit some kind of lottery
Maybe

Or maybe it was meant to be
I know that I feel calm, though,
And well too
When my throws are long or short
As they will be
He does not shrug
When they are so
And he has to walk them down
I think he knows that I
Am not as good as he
And he accepts that about me
I am who I am
And he accepts me
Some of my throws are thoughts
Bad things I throw hard, so as to exorcise
Good things I pleasantly toss, to enjoy
He misses nothing that is close
So comfortable in his space
It's as though he has been where he has been the
whole time
To him it's simply a game of pitch and catch

THE LIVLIC TREE

Sierra Hart • Video



DEV DROP Grace Pratt • Art



EVOLUTION Biz Duff • Art





GIBSON GIRL

Monika Overholt · Art



THE ASSIGNMENT

Cierra Kelso · Prose

As soon as I walked through the glass doors of the building, I knew there was something wrong. All eyes were on me as my silver heels met with the ornate marble of the first floor. Whenever I got too close to my coworkers, they acted as if we were strangers. They would stop talking mid-sentence and let me pass. Their tones reduced to hushed whispers once I was out of range. I thought it was my imagination, but their odd behavior continued to get worse.

I scaled up the building in the elevator mostly alone. Whenever the metal doors opened before my stop on the ninth floor, an unorganized cluster would wander aimlessly inside just to robotically stop once they met my gaze. Some would funnel out immediately, while others would get off on the floor above. They would put on an act, verbalizing some kind of excuse that they had business there.

And every single time they did, I knew they were lying.

This continued on from floors two to five. News of my arrival traveled fast, considering no one even tried to buzz in on floors six through eight. After a long silence, a ding sounded above. The elevator doors opened to floor nine and revealed a massive horde. It was the typical group either waiting to go to another floor or for a friend coming in for their shift.

But again, as soon as they made eye contact with my brown and usually welcoming eyes, they parted like the Red Sea, almost as if they didn't want to be in my path.

I started to feel some sort of sadness rise up in my heart from such blatant alienation from my peers.

Had I done something wrong?

Did I insult someone important without realizing it yesterday?

Even though I had been here for a year, I still considered myself too minor to be known by name or appearance, let alone become the main topic of the gossip reel.

That's when it dawned on me. Joan. A pit formed in my stomach so fast I thought I was going to be sick. I scanned the crowd, looking over each face more than once. Joan, my closest friend, was nowhere to be seen. She was usually a regular in the horde by the elevator, waiting for me to arrive.

She was always the first one to start our conversations. It ranged from sensible to downright outrageous in just a matter of a couple sentences, which never bothered me in the slightest. I stood there, my eyes panicked, before I stopped and took in a breath.

She could have been caught up with work, sick, or simply just late to the office today. I tried not to worry too much and turned down the corridor to where our offices were side by side.

Maybe our manager had finally given her that assignment she had been begging for for the last few months. 



SECOND BEST

Cassie Sistoso · Audio



EYE OF WINTER

G Haley · Photography



23

Cassie Sistoso · Poetry

you are twenty-three and beautiful and don't know it
conventionally, yes, yes of course. walnut brown hair all short and
pulled back by a baseball cap

a real baseball cap, you'd say,

and joke about the boy you met that didn't know the logo was a team
but you never meant it meanly

i don't think that you're capable of that

tall and lanky like a cross country runner or a swimmer or like
a boy who always looked good in prom pictures

but never fit into the shoulders all the way

you are twenty-three and beautiful and i love you

not in all the ways you're thinking, though, unless you're thinking like the
way i wish we grew up together and the way it

sort of feels like we did

buying popsicles and skating on rocky asphalt in the summer
trading middle names and secrets and playlists and never saying

i love you in roundabout ways

like the way any song you liked is just automatically good or like
the way i want you at my graduation and my wedding and my funeral
and this is me asking you to stay

you are twenty-three and beautiful and i miss you

in all the non-conventional ways, i mean. not the walnut hair and shoulders but
like the softness of your hands though they always gripped so firmly as if to say

i am holding on, i mean it

like the way you weren't afraid to cry in front of me or tell me when it got bad
the way i called you before i called my mother when i got so sick i couldn't stand
and the way

you always came

the way it hurt to hurt you and the way i listed all the things to say to you at
midnight

and erased all of the letters when twenty two passed you by and the way
you have always been so beautiful to me



DEATH AND DYING

Eryn Sorrells • Poetry

I had a class by the same name
—Psychology 4630—
my senior year of college.

I learned, from not this class alone,
how tough a passing can be,
so

I prepare this poem,
in fear of a short life,
knowing all too well,
how short life can actually be.

Trinity,
Angie,
all the little stillborn babies
and elders of 100.

No matter how long life is,
it is still too short to someone.

Take the dog you grew up with,
or the kitten you raised,
their lifetime to them was a lifetime long
but to you,
it was mere years.

Take your great-grandmother and father,
their lifetime outlived wars.
But to you they didn't make it to your 20th birthday.
How could they?

Take the stillborn baby,
meant to greet its mother today.
Its nine months to her,
was a lifetime of nothing but love to it.
Now,

Death and Dying,
a class on how to prepare for my passing.
Not that I plan to go soon.

But like a safety net of love,
I wove this poem,
in case of the fall of my hand.

But if I am not there,
promise me this one,
you will always overcome.

I refuse to let you tumble down,
hitting your precious head
against the cold hard ground.

AUTUMN ASHES

Ella Lancaster • Poetry

The trees are finally tired and considering sleep.
The air itself seems to quiet. I, myself, am seeping
into sadness. The quiet has made known the
appearance of a hushed whispering: a long held
seasonal sound. It rouses in the coolness of a
setting sun, finds likeness in the rushing of leaves.

Unrest in this time of slumber.

I find I carry unease, discontentment, and
dissatisfaction. Most of all, I face tangled
frustration. Yet again, anger rises as red as
the changing colors, hot as the wanting sun. I
realized this is a familiar state that passes by each
autumn. A fire slowly stoked, held at bay until
the cold reveals its heat. It is powerful at first,
overwhelming, until all that's left is a yawning,
collapsing, breathing being. It sits in my belly: a
heavy weight of sorrowed ashes, let loose by the
goodbyes of a summer eve.






HELD AT BAY
 Becky Carter • Photography

OIZYS

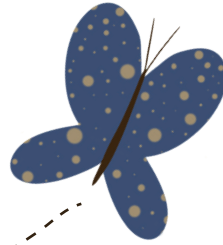
Colene Belmont • Poetry

i feel like Oizys
 deity of misery
 of misfortune
 these are my weeping years
 what use
 are my tears
 anymore
 grief sodden girl
 i feel like Oizys
 born of the night
 made painful
 and laid bare
 beneath the altar
 of my own grief
 weeping
 haunted
 by the weight
 of my own emotions
 yet a slave to them
 as they are but my second nature
 i was born
 shrouded in grief
 my bed made
 in the night
 of misery
 the frame wrought from misfortune
 for that is who i am
 i am miserable
 misfortunate
 and grieving
 i am Oizys



CASTLE ON THE HILL

Helen Grace Daniel · Photography



OCEAN TONES

Desmond Arias · Poetry

Fingers swim with keys gliding,
Brass heart; the ocean of souls
Imprints soft touch of pearls deep,
Echoes of melody abyssal dreams

Nights gaze upon golden foam,
Bell's ring; the eternal starlight
From sweet brine the churn distant,
Cries of submerged sunken songs

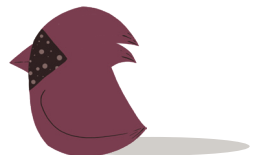
Waters breathe their soft murmur,
Harmonic currents; the endless thought
Felt by travelers through the depths,
Strokes of salt and rain and mind

Beaches cradle symphony,
Shells resonant; the old earth notes
Heard by drinkers of sea rich tone,
Sights of waves to soon be played

Divers search for life in dark,
Lyrical reef; the rainbow sound
Cradles chords hidden in blue,
Gifts of ebb sonorous in tune

SERENITY

Camryn Anderson · Art





THE GATEWAY

Elizabeth Kowalczyk · Photography

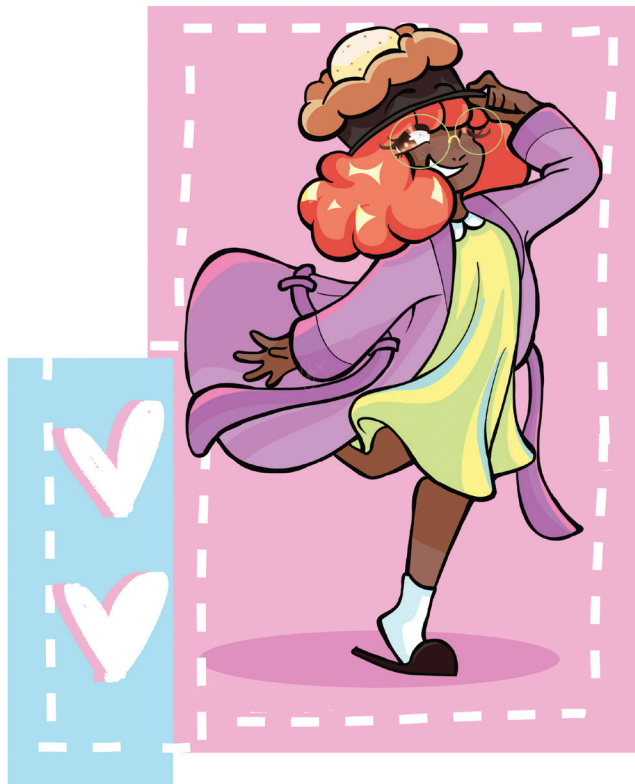


TRASTEVERE

Ross Sibley · Photography

THE NAME'S GWEN - GWEN

McKenzie Anderson · Art



AGING PROCESS

Hunter Hoffman · Video



LIMELIGHT

Darwin Alberto · Photography

OCTOPUS

Jillian DeGrie · Art



LIEGE

Jai Wilson · Prose

I sit upon a throne atop a ten story tower. I wear a crown of brilliant gold and studded jewels. My hall is grand and elegant. When I speak, my words boom and echo.

I sit upon a throne atop a ten story tower, and I am utterly alone. They call me king. They call me lord. They call me liege, but they don't visit anymore. I eat the finest foods and drink the finest wines and sing the finest songs to myself. When last did someone come to see me? I can't remember.

They call me liege, but they don't visit anymore, and I wonder if they can hear it when I scream. When I scream, my words boom and echo across my grand and elegant hall. I think myself mad, I scream myself madder.

Below, so far below, I see my people go about their lives. My soldiers guard, my minstrels coo, and my advisors run my country well. I wonder if they can hear it when I scream. I watch my crown as it frees itself from my hand—when did I remove it from my head?—and falls below, so far below, until its studded gold and brilliant jewels disappear from view.

I eat the finest foods and drink the finest wines and scream the finest songs to myself as I sit upon a throne, overlooking a world that I once believed was mine. I watch my hall as it frees itself from my body and falls upwards towards the sky, until its grandness disappears from view.

For a moment, I think I hear somebody scream. Then, I hear nothing at all. 🍃

You sat so still for me
that roaming eyes paid
deeds for my heart's debts
and winks for your mind's
quiet stares of
selfless musings, painting
innocent romance
as a spine lying flat
on a mattress
or a quaint confession
born under your breath.

Any touch will linger
longer on my skin
than reason should permit
for I know not what
spring truly tastes like
in the palm of another
nor what this itching stirring
in me is to wipe the juice
of the mango
that cries so mournfully
down your neck.

Only, you came to my room
to talk about the moon?



MOON TALISMAN

Allison Rethi · Art

SELF PORTRAIT IN A HAT

Jillian DeGrie · Art



ANNABELLE

Jai Wilson · Poetry

Annabelle,
Annabelle,
Oh, how you come to me
Each time I shut my eyes
And follow that soft songbird into dreams.
Oh again, how you come to me
Each time with enchanting words:
"Find me,
Find me,
And I will love you then,"
And each time with sweet kisses
And soft hands
And a warm shoulder should I need to cry.

Annabelle,
Annabelle,
If I could scour this Earth and the next for you,
If I could uncover every hiding place
And check beneath for you
I would.
You, who speaks softly,
Who speaks gently.
You, who dances along my dreams
As if they were clouds
And you an angel.
And if I could uncover every hiding place for you,
I would.

Annabelle,
Annabelle,
I wish that I had never dreamt you,
And I wish that I had dreamt you into being.
I wish that I had never loved you,
And I wish that I could have loved you enough
To make you real.
I wish that you would haunt elsewhere,
And leave my dreams alone,
And I wish that you would haunt my life,
That next time I went out
I would see you there by the riverfront:
My angel made real.
Oh, and how you sing the sweetest songs.



Whispers on the wind carry
words that bear the weight of worlds
and traversed turbulent times
to reach my heavy heart

Whispers on the wind carry
sirens' songs so sad and sweet
they lull me like loves long lost
and weigh my wilted wings

The wind, it whispers to me
of dreams drifting toward dusk
of rites that wrote me rifted
of Ionian eyes—

I feel the wind on my skin
pushing past petty pressures
whisking away the worries
nursing my nerves to life

Just like whispers on the wind
I am and then I am not
constant or in constant change
I flow free where I choose



I enter a dark, endless portal
filled with the everlasting promise of
friendship, camaraderie, warmth
people I once knew, once loved
have slipped out of my fingers and
turned into a snow globe
frozen in time.

I'm reminded of the souvenir shop in
Ruby Falls where I wanted to find
a keychain with my name on it or
something tangible to remember
what it's like to feel something real.

The snow globe on the corner shelf, alone
cast aside, solitary, beckoning for someone
to notice it, to appreciate it, to acknowledge
its presence with the way pieces of snow
fly in its compact structure, up down up down
without missing a beat, just like life, just like people

who learn the roadmap of your life, only for them to slip
away when you aren't who they remember you to be,
as if you're supposed to be a template through which
all your human connections and interactions take place
fraying at the seams like my dyed forest-green sweater.

I feel a sharp light coming through my peripheral
vision burning away at the memories I want to bury
deep within my consciousness of the people I once
saw so much promise in, the people I thought saw
so much promise in me dissipating into the air, becoming
one with the air particles, interactions being part of the universe.

I notice the smiling caricatures of the green-sweatered people
in the snow globe, the snow-capped mountains delicately placed
in the background, snow covering the bare ground, covering it with a
coating of lush translucent paint, a juxtaposition of being both
vulnerable and keeping something to yourself
without feeling the need to over explain
to overcompensate, to overshare, to overcare,
To overlove.



TYPE IGUANA

Emma Jones • Art



THE ROOM FROM MY DREAMS

Zoe Vecchio • Photography



WHEN WE HEAL

Zoe Talbot • Poetry

People are fragile, delicate things,
Held together by intangible strings.
We break so easily, each little part.
The voice. The bones. Especially the heart.

Yet even if brittle, seemingly meek,
People are anything, anything but weak.
We're complex and cruel, some of us at least,
Because we're made prey to our brain's very own beast.

We'll show you the things we know you want most;
We'll smile, maybe laugh, no longer a ghost.
But we'll trick you, fool you, to keep you in tow
Every day it's the same: just put on a show.

For some of us, you see, those strings have been snapped
And without them, broken, we're so easily trapped.
Caught by the webs our minds can create,
Fixating on every single thing that we hate.

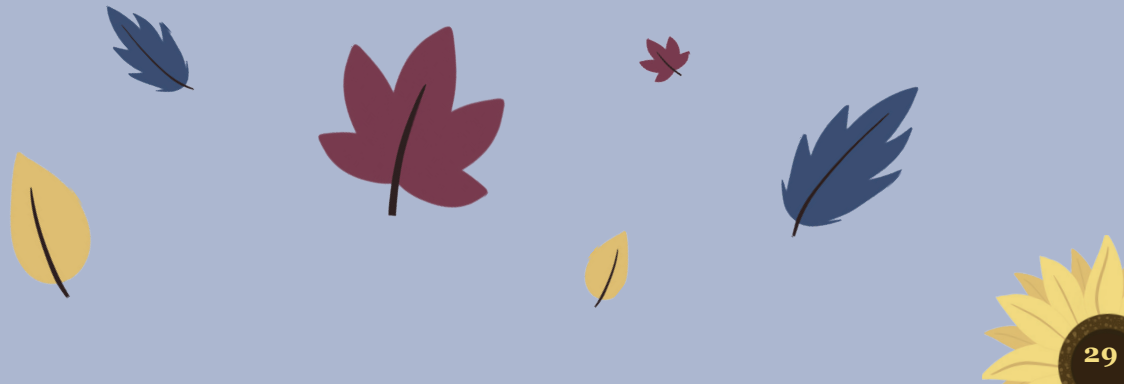
Whatever it is, it won't let us live;
Whether it's hers or it's his, it just won't give.
We run while we can, away from this thought,
Desperate, pleading, not to be caught.

It wants and it wants until nothing's left.
It haunts and it haunts till it's done with its theft.
Stealing our soul, our joy, our love,
With only one goal: to win from above.

Some of us really, really do try,
Try to yell out and scream, sometimes to cry.
We just need your patience, your time, your care,
While we try to escape that stifling air.

But when those parts rearrange, perfectly neat,
The same wavering voices can sound so sweet.
Like they say broken bones sometimes heal stronger,
And some shattered hearts can love for much longer.

When we heal, find that sought after cure,
We'll no longer be tainted, no longer impure.
For the fractured edges of broken glass may show
The most ethereal ways in which light can glow.



LOLA AND LUCIFER

Elizabeth Long · Art



SHADOW

Ox Zante · Art



PANDORA'S FOX

Dagan Billips · Photography





FORSYTH FOUNTAIN

Mak Johnson • Photography



PSALM 121

Cassie Sistoso • Poetry

as a child
when i'd wake in some terror with tears in my eyes
i'd watch the gold of the bathroom, light in the hall cast a
half triangle across my parents' bedspread as i opened their door

i'd press my cheek to my father's forearm
and my mother would murmur

psalm one hundred and twenty-one
(she kept every syllable intact)
(i sometimes wonder if this is how i grew to love poetry)

i always fell back to sleep before it ended
left to commit only the first eight lines to memory

i lift up my eyes to the hills,
where does my help come from?
(writes David)
(some days this sounds earnest, some days it sounds hopeless)

at nineteen
it is the first time in years we lay this way
my limbs look gangly in the bathroom light
and my nightmares have a clinical name

it is the first time i will show my parents
what lives inside of me
it is a darkness my father can't fit his arm around
a voice too loud for my mother to murmur over
so this time i listen for the end

the Lord will keep you from all harm
the Lord will watch over your life
(writes David)

but as i drift finally to sleep, i think not of the hand of God
(unless his arm is like my father's)
when i recite these words of safety, i think not of God's voice
(forgive me, mother, i only think of you)



THE PAINTINGS

Olivia Scott-Prose

I stepped cautiously through the open door, knocking once more on the dark stained cedar, "Hello? I'm here for the job application?"

I couldn't help but scan the room, telling myself that it wasn't snooping and that I was just checking to see if someone still lived here. The house did look lived in, and the foyer was meticulously decorated with delicate swirling designs and plush, comfortable looking furniture. Then again, anything was more comfortable than that bench at the train station in town. I gently massaged my still throbbing backside as I took a few steps onto the polished hardwood flooring. The house had a Victorian look, with the two large wooden staircases hugging the walls and a rich red carpet trailing them. My eyes were quickly drawn to the many portraits adorning the walls, framed paintings of stiff postured people with grim expressions interspersed with scone shaped wall fixtures that gave of a subtle golden glow.

The largest of the paintings sat directly across from the front door and was very clearly the centerpiece of the room. Surrounded by a delicate metalwork frame was the likeness of what must have been a beautiful woman. However, it is difficult to tell now- seeing as the painting has three large jagged horizontal tears across the main body of the work. Creeping further into the house, I reach my hand out towards the sagging fabric- hoping to push it back into place as to get a brief glimpse of what the artwork may have looked like.

"I would refrain from touching that, if I were you."

I snatch my hand back and pivot on my heel, eyes scanning the room for the speaker. My heart beats echo ever faster in my ears as I slowly uncurl from my defensive crouch, shuffling slowly towards the still open door.

"Hello? Am I in the right place?" I call out to the room once more, trying to hide the slight

tremble in my voice and hands, "Like I said before, I'm here for the, uh job?"

"Oh don't mind Thomas dear. He gets a bit finicky about people touching *her*. The interview room is up the left staircase and will be the third door on the right." A different voice answers, and this time it's coming from the left side of the room. Once again I look for a body to attach the voice to, but find nothing but the same paintings as before.

"Sarah, what did we say about talking to strangers?" Yet another voice scolded from the upper right staircase.

"Not to do it. But they're nice! And they look oh so lost. I couldn't help it!" Sarah pouted, letting out and indignant whine.

"You're such a child, Sarah."

"Well if I'm a child, then you're an old hag, Tommy-boy!"

"You know I hate it when people call me that!"

"Then maybe you shouldn't call me a child! I'm older than you!"

"Would you just SHUT UP!" I shouted, stomping my foot like a toddler during a tantrum. "Where even ARE you people?!"

Silence reigned for all of ten seconds before chaos erupted once more, this time what seemed like hundreds of voices joined the fray creating a cacophony of sound.

"How *dare* they-"

"See this is what you get when you talk to strangers-"

"Who do you think you are!"

"I swear, these younger generations have no manners-"

"I'm sure they're just stressed-"

"Why am I here?"

"What-?"

"How can they not see us, we're right here!"

Covering my ears did little to help quiet the noises and I almost ran out the door before something froze me in my tracks. The paintings- they were moving! The brushstrokes making up

their faces shifted and pulled as the paintings spoke, some even had their hands gesticulating wildly within the frames. My mouth dropped open as I watched one of the female portraits throw down their crown, only for it to fall past the frame and onto the head of the portrait below them. However, I was swiftly reminded of the discordant sonata about me with the chilling sound of metal on porcelain. Whimpers and grunts of discomfort echoed through the now significantly quieter room as the majority of the speakers directed accusing glares toward the source- an older heavysset man in a sunny yellow suit who just so happened to have been painted while enjoying a decadent assortment of fruits and desserts.

"Seems like *some people* are forgetting that talking paintings aren't exactly *normal*! I swear, it's as if none of you remember your first time in these halls. Thomas, I remember that you had an *especially* interesting reaction." Recognizing this voice as the one who scolded Sarah, I followed his gaze to another painting of a middle aged man who looked as if he could have been handsome, if he had tried. He had the high cheekbones of nobility and a defined chin, with thin, greasy strands of what must have at one time been a golden brown, but was now a washed out khaki color. The dark black mourning clothes clashed harshly with his deathly pale skin and his haunting dark gaze was nearly swallowed by the purple tones of his days-old eyebags. When his eyes meet yours, his slouched posture and melancholy aura shift to distant aloofness with a hint of barely concealed disgust.

"Now then," the man in the yellow suit began, drawing my attention away from the impromptu staring contest, "You best be on your way. Wouldn't want to be late, would you?"

With a quick glance at my watch, I confirmed that I was two minutes away from being late. Scrambling to pull myself together, I muttered a quick thank you towards Sarah and the yellow man before mounting the left set of stairs two at a time. As I counted the doors, I wondered what I had just signed up for. 🌸





DR. TRONCARELLI

Ross Sibley • Photography



CREATIVE EXPRESSION AWARDS

Each semester, six submissions receive Creative Expression Awards, one from each major category: art, photography, poetry, prose, video, and audio.
The winner from each category will receive \$75 awards.

ART

‘Derealization’ by Jillian DeGrie

PHOTOGRAPHY

‘Held At Bay’ by Becky Carter

POETRY

‘Psalm 121’ by Cassie Sistoso

PROSE

‘Liege’ by Jai Wilson

SONG LYRICS

‘Gettysburg’ by Sofia Lynch

VIDEO

‘The Livlic Tree’ by Sierra Hart

About *Collage*: A Journal of Creative Expression

Collage is a semiannual publication of the Middle Tennessee State University Honors College. All submissions were reviewed anonymously and selected by a student editorial staff. The materials published by *Collage* do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the *Collage* staff, Honors College, MTSU student body, staff, or administrators. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or utilized in any form without written permission from the editor or adviser of *Collage*. Inquiries should be addressed as follows:

Collage

Middle Tennessee State University
1301 East Main Street, Box 267,
Paul W. Martin Sr. Honors Building, Room 224
Murfreesboro, TN 37132

SUBMIT TO COLLAGE

Collage accepts submissions year-round. Online submissions may be made through our website, <https://www.mtsu.edu/collage/submit.php>. Creative work, such as art, photography, design, short stories, creative nonfiction, short plays, song lyrics, poetry, videos/films, and audios, may be submitted online or at the *Collage* office, Honors 224, between the hours of 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m.

POLICY STATEMENT

Collage: A Journal of Creative Expression is a creative magazine featuring submitted work chosen by a volunteer staff in a blind grading process. The staff attempts to choose the best work without regard for theme or authorship. Although *Collage* is sponsored by the University Honors College, staff members and submitters are not required to be Honors students. Staff members are selected each semester from a pool of applicants and must have at least a 3.0 GPA and two references. Go to <https://www.mtsu.edu/collage/staff.php> to complete an online staff application.

0922-1155/Middle Tennessee State University does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, ethnic or national origin, sex, disability, age, religion, veteran status, sexual orientation or gender identity, in its programs and activities. See full policy at www.mtsu.edu/titleix.

COLUMBIA SCHOLASTIC PRESS ASSOCIATION AWARDS

Gold Medalist Certificates: 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022
Silver Crown Awards: 2007, 2008, 2011, 2019, 2021 and 2022
Gold Crown Awards: 2012, 2013, and 2015

PRODUCTION

Technology
Adobe InDesign CC
Adobe Illustrator CC
Adobe Photoshop CC
Apple Macintosh Platform

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

Binding
Saddle Stitch

Typography
Autumn Leaves
Georgia
Saithik
Avenir

Printing
Allen Printing of Nashville,
Tennessee printed approximately
1,000 copies of *Collage*.
ISSN 2470-3451 (print)
ISSN 2470-3494 (online)



MIDDLE TENNESSEE

STATE UNIVERSITY®

