

# Collage

ISSUE 18

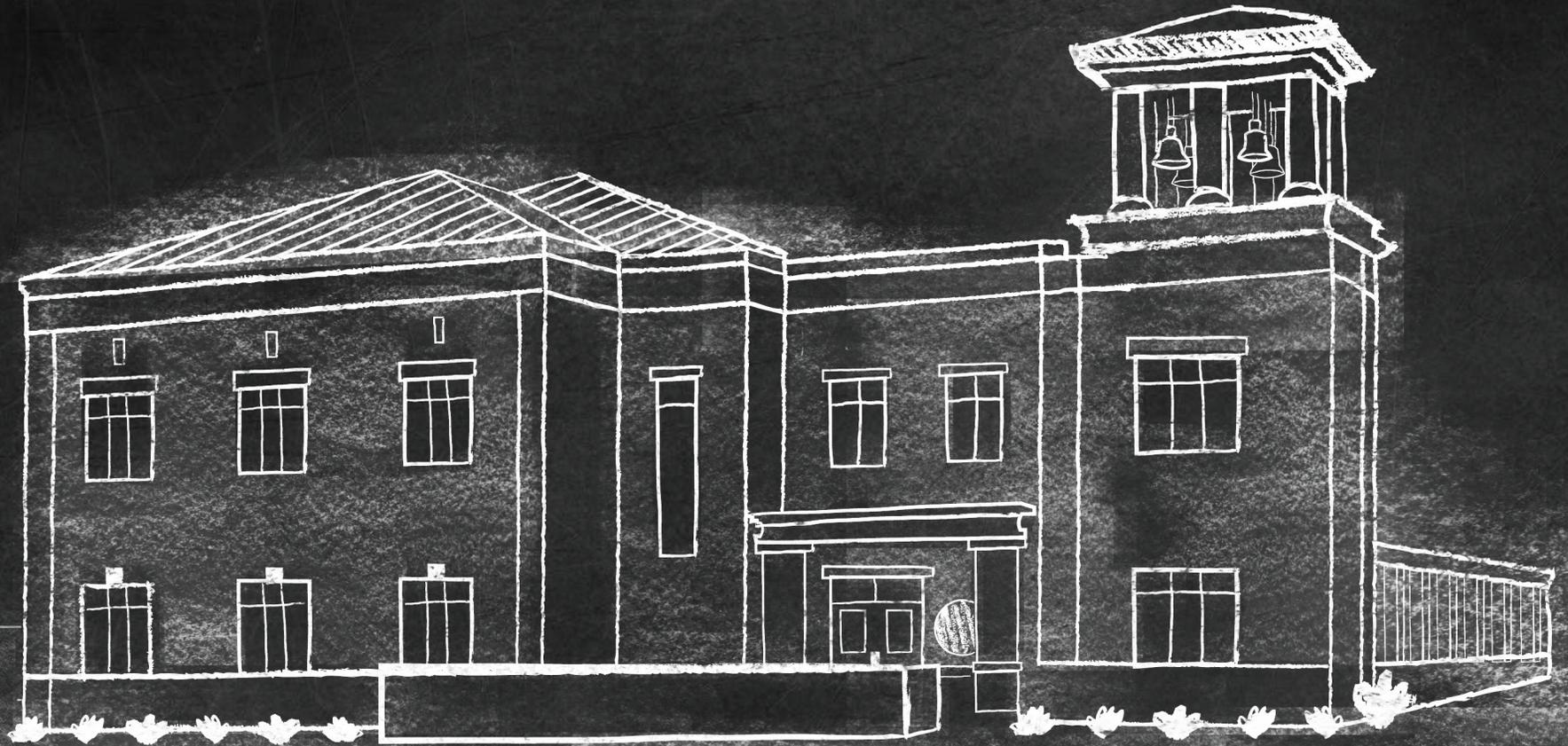
FALL 2013

A JOURNAL *of* CREATIVE EXPRESSION



*Amur*





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A JOURNAL *of* CREATIVE EXPRESSION

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# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

I was so excited to be given the opportunity to take on the role of Editor in Chief of *Collage* this fall. This is my third semester on staff, and the wealth of talent here at MTSU continuously amazes me. This fall we broke a record with the amount of submissions that we received. The pieces that were selected truly represent the tremendous talent of the students of MTSU. Students like you.

I would like to thank the Fall 2013 staff for all of the hard work they have put into this issue. I would also like to thank our advisor, Marsha Powers, for her patience with me as I've settled into this new role. Lastly, I could not go without thanking the students and alumni who submit their work each semester. Without you, our publication would not exist.

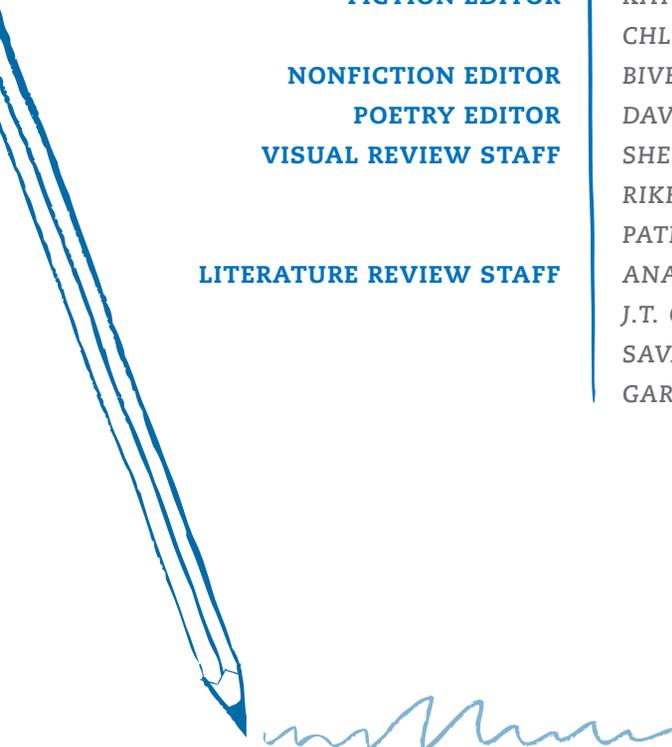
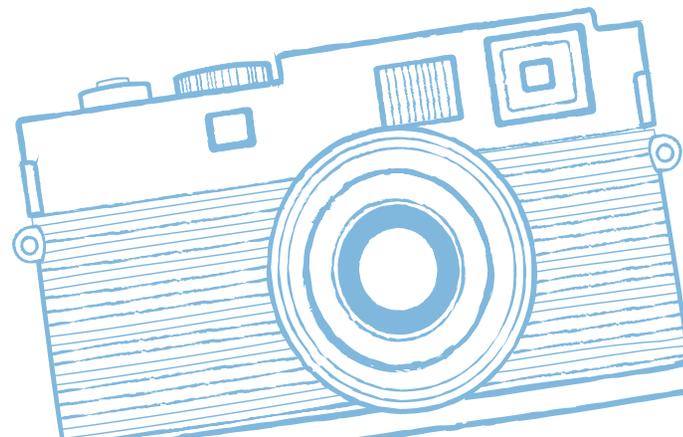
I am pleased to present to you our Fall 2013 issue.

I hope all of you are as proud of it as the rest of us at *Collage*.

*Caitlin Noonan*

**CAITLIN NOONAN**

*Editor in Chief*



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## MEGALOPHOBIA

MARY CATHERINE FREEMAN

*digital photography*

## MEMORIES LIKE BOOKS

EMILY VONCKX

*fiction*

To her, memories were like books, to be stored and kept away in an ancient treasure chest, not to be lined against a bookshelf of thought, gathering dust, turning yellow and molding as time wore on. Every whisper, every touch, every color was collected on thin Bible paper, bound by her senses, by sight and sounds, recorded in minuscule detail to be relived, the story being told a thousand times. She liked to think the twinkle in his eye was a holy verse, written backwards, so only she could read it. She imagined his face, reverent and descriptive, a demeanor worth categorizing in every genre of emotion. She pictured their love as eternal as that of Cathy and Heathcliff, borne against the ages like Romeo and Juliet, as passionate as Rhett and Scarlett. His touch was as sensational as erotica, as heavily guarded as the Rosetta Stone, its meaning wordless, speechless, conspiring of looks and thumbprints on her wrist, of low moans against her neck, a shiver of romance and excitement. Her memories were like papyrus, delicate and sacred, the lines written therein were enchanted and timeless. For her, yes, memories were like books, to be relished and opened all over again. ●

## HER YELLOW ROSE

ROBERT BRADFORD

*poetry*

She plants seeds in her garden.  
She hums a tune while doing so.  
She radiates peace and beauty.  
And he looks up to her with admiration.

She waters her yellow roses.  
She hums a tune while doing so.  
She gives love and nurture to her flowers.  
Like she does daily for him.

She picks yellow roses from her garden.  
She hums a tune while doing so.  
She handles the flowers with care.  
And he helps her the best he can.

She decorates the home with yellow roses.  
She hums a tune while doing so.  
Her hope is as bright as the petals.  
He is as content as a child should be.

Her yellow roses begin to wither with her.  
She hums a tune while doing so.  
Even now she radiates peace and beauty.  
And he loses her and yellow roses.



Years pass when he lay yellow roses by her name.  
He hums a tune while doing so.  
He recalls her love and her hope.  
He remembers her yellow rose.

He plants seeds in his garden.  
He hums a tune while doing so.  
He radiates in her memory, her peace, her love.  
And he looks up to him in admiration.

## FIRE AND ICE

JOSHUA PETTY

*acrylic and oil on canvas*



**WILLIAM**

**KELSI CARTER**

*digital photography*

## APARTMENT 2B

**CALEB DEMPSEY-RICHARDSON**

*poetry*

The quotidian queen,  
The obverse of obscene,  
Pretends every day is just like Halloween.  
But serene she is not  
Because someone forgot  
To let her know that she's special.

The moon marquee  
Above apartment 2B  
Shines more brightly  
Than anything you've ever seen.  
So now shield your eyes,  
And come up here inside  
To escape the oncoming weather.

Old Queen Adelaide wept  
As her washwoman swept  
The tears into a kerchief.  
Garnets and rubies which shine,  
Someone could never malign  
Their secrecy was well worth it.

An apartment surreal  
Never deigns to conceal  
The truth from copper-plated ears.  
In creaks and groans  
It slowly intones,  
"Your presence is purpose enough."



## GOLDMUND

**RACHEL BROOKS**

*poetry*

The world of books,  
They all look at me invitingly—beckoning me  
To flee this world emphatically  
into the mountains majestically  
It's a test, you see  
that I'll never strive to be  
the conqueror of, rather I'll define  
myself a wanderer of seas  
Heart strings rooted into footprints  
of what used to be,  
Forever attached to their gallantry  
Treasures found in a fold of the brain,  
pleasurably leaking the Seven Seas  
and I'll drink and I'll drink 'til I'm satisfied

To drifting I'd give my life  
rather than to anchor it and die.



## INFERNO

**AMBER LELLI**

*bronze and wax sculpture*

SPUN

CRAIG SANDERS  
*digital photography*

## CLOTHESLINE

JENNY YEARWOOD  
*poetry*

They are tilling the gardens across the way  
and behind the old oak tree.  
Seeds of beans and thyme are placed into the earth  
with hopes of new life.  
Warmth caresses and wraps her skin  
like the arms of a past lover,  
yet her soul is still damp;  
heavy from last season's rain.  
Her eyes stare over the yard toward Aunt Eleanor  
hanging a fresh load on the line.  
I am aware  
of her desperation—  
her longing to be hung on the wire  
next to her Aunt's blouses and socks.  
What would it feel like to toss in the breeze  
and be neatly folded and placed into the yellow chest?  
To be held lovingly.  
To be useful.  
To be stitched together with precision and purpose.  
Flower petals swirl from the dogwood,  
and she waits for her day  
to be wrung out.



## ON A GIRL I SAW THIS MORNING

LUKAS TALLENT  
*poetry*

Humbly I recall whom I do not know  
And think on the fragrance of fragile words,  
Spilt under coffee-stained Dullness's glow  
That fled amidst the songs of lonely birds.  
Let auburn hair that falls in steady line  
Lift up my pale eyes from their dusty book.  
Let cerulean shades bleed into mine  
And ruin the world with a look.  
But I did speak into that void!  
Where courage fails, and voices crack.  
Melodies caress despite the noise  
And without the fear of looking back.  
Still, drinks are served, never meant to last,  
And today's dreams are sickened with the past.

## COMPROMISE

RANDY SLOAN

*poetry*

If you've ever stood on an ocean shore,  
You know that nature is full of compromise.  
Faces of rocks shaped by the churning sea,  
The shifting tides, waves and undertow—  
It's all harmonious compromise, nature meeting nature.

If you've ever stood in a forest,  
You know that nature is full of compromise.  
Towering windblown and bent trees  
Housing the Eastern Bluebird's beautiful vibrato,  
Sometimes I think the tall trees so colossal in stature  
Made a deal with the clouds that they would only come so far.

If you've ever sat beside someone you love,  
You know that nature is full of compromise.  
When she smiles,  
It's as if someone opened the door to my lungs,  
Unchained my receding and advancing breath, and let it all out,  
Yet when she laughs, she puts it back in my chest just as she found it.  
When she looks at me,  
It makes me wonder how Newton wrote so much about the spectrum of colors  
In a prism but never wrote about eyes like hers.  
My mind abandons any idea of architectural integrity or structure, and I fall apart on the inside,  
And when she says my name, we pick up the pieces and put me back together.



**THE ARCTIC**  
**MORGAN BEATY**  
*film photography*



## FLOWERS OF LEBANON

**TAFFETA CHIME**

*creative non-fiction*

*This story is inspired by a video on World Food Programme's YouTube channel by videographer Marco Frattini, who tells the stories of some Syrian refugee women he had the privilege to know. I was touched by these stories and wanted to explore them through creativity. Though this story and the characters are inspired by real events, they are not based entirely on reality.*

Tira opened the flap of the tent and watched her children quickly run out, laughing and calling after each other. "Do not go too far! Stay where I can see you!" she called after them. She folded the sheet above the top of the small corner doorway they had made and stood for a moment, watching them play in the open area with the other refugee children. She saw how their rough soles matched the dirt they kicked up in the air behind them as they ran and laughed. Other mothers watched too, and she saw the same look on their faces that reflected the feelings in her own heart: how long would they be living like this?

She went inside to get the bowls from last night, and she took them with her to wash. She called her three children after her, and they followed close behind her as she made her way to a small river. The water was a murky brown, but she used her hands to wipe the bowls as clean as she could. The children dropped their feet in the water and laughed at the cool feeling between their toes. Tira paused to watch how they smiled.

They had been in Lebanon for about two months now, but seeing their smiles reminded her of when they would all harvest the grapes from their backyard vineyard in Syria. That was their business. They were expecting a plentiful harvest this year. But when her husband was killed as the violence ravaged their home, she had no choice but to take the children and run. She had known other people who had fled. She joined them in the refugee camp, but she was sad for the life she left behind. How could her children still smile?

To Tira, plants meant life; green showed verve, and flowers were natural beings of happiness. Fruit, nuts, and other gifts brought nutrition and energy. She thought it was a wonderful balance of life, to care for the plants and have them take care of you with their nourishing offspring. In Syria, she tended to a garden around their house, and she kept plants inside the house too. She loved when she and her husband tended to the vineyard together. She loved seeing the small green growths coming in on the vines, slowly becoming bigger and darker until they were ready to pick. The curly vines made fun, energetic swirls in their yard, and she thought that they represented her happiness, spiraling and hugging the posts that held them up.

She could still see her husband's smiling face silhouetted by the sunlight in the field.



## WINDOWS OF THE SOUL

**SUSAN TENNESSEN-OWENS**

*cyanotype*

It brought tears to Tira's eyes. She looked down at the pasty red-brown water that trickled through the fingers in front of her now as she scraped the grittiness against the dented metal of the bowl. What had happened? she wondered. Tira cried for her husband, for her children, for her family, for her home, for her vineyard, for her plants. All she saw now was brown, dirt, dust. There were no happy flowers, no curly vines, no fruit, no harvest. Now she begged for food, for mercy, for understanding, for answers.

She heard the children's playing stop, and Tira quickly wiped her tears. She did not want them to know how upset she was. She had to be strong for them, but recently, they had been stronger than her. She wondered again, how could they smile and play? They silently watched her and knew her pain.

They looked to each other and wondered what to do. Before they could act, Tira stood and took the bowls in her hands saying, “Let’s go.”

They walked back to their tent, and Tira saw foreigners walking through the camp. A man came to her and handed her some pieces of paper like tickets. “These are for food,” he said. “If you go to a store that will accept food vouchers, this will buy you one hundred Lebanese pounds’ worth of food for you and your family.” Tira took the vouchers gratefully. The man smiled and nodded, though a sad look filled his face. They both listened to children’s laughter as some little ones came rushing through the crowd to Tira’s children. Her little ones looked to her pleadingly, and she allowed them to go play. They ran off happily. “Isn’t it amazing?” the man said. “Children have such an ability to stay positive even in situations like—” He looked to Tira and found it hard to finish his sentence. “Well,” he continued slowly, “I just wish I had a heart like theirs sometimes.” Tira nodded and pulled her covering closer to her body. The man could tell she was a little uncomfortable, so he smiled and nodded again before saying, “I pray for you and your family,” before walking back to his group to hand out more vouchers.

“Thank you,” she said after him. He turned and nodded to her. His words stuck with Tira, and she rolled them over in her mind as she watched the children play. She was thankful to have money for food that would give them energy. She looked down at the vouchers and held them close.

“One hundred Lebanese pounds will buy a lot of food,” one of the other mothers said as she came to stand next to Tira. “Why don’t you go into the town to buy some while you can? I will watch the children and keep them safe.” Tira looked to the older woman and saw trust in her dark eyes. She thanked her, kissed her children, and left for the town.

She was amazed at the food that she was able to choose from. Even though the store was crowded with the people also coming to buy food with vouchers, there was still a large selection. She had fruit, vegetables, rice, and beans, yet still had money left over. It made her happy to see her basket full with many colors of good food. As she was standing in the line to check out, she saw small flowers for sale near the checkout. When she saw that she had enough money for it, Tira felt a conflict within her: should she save money to buy more food later, or could she treat herself to something that would bring her happy memories from her home? She leaned in close to smell the fragrance and was overwhelmed with emotion. She thought of her husband in the vineyard again and felt her eyes well with tears. She thought about the man’s words again: “Children have such an ability to stay positive.” She looked at the happy faces of the flowers and thought of her children smiling and playing in the refugee camp. They knew how to find happiness in hard times. Tira hesitantly put two bundles of flowers into her basket.

Though Tira didn’t hope to stay away from her home in Syria for much longer, having the flowers around her tent in Lebanon gave her some small joy. When she opened the flap of the tent and watched her children quickly run out, laughing and calling after each other, she understood now how they could still smile. She leaned down to smell her small flowers and smiled a small smile too. ●



**UNTITLED**  
KARI OWEN  
*encaustic*



He'd like to think that every time he passes  
that little store on Broad Street  
that it's 1957 and she's still peeking  
through the shop window with a silly smile on her face,  
waiting for the big blue plastic clock to tell her that  
it's 5:00, and that she's free to chase the bus  
that will carry her his way.

His favorite chair gives with a familiar squeak,  
and he smiles with his head bent, pressing  
his cold chin deeper into the collar of the crisp  
blue shirt she'd bought him for his birthday.

He remembers the last time he saw her—  
a warm Wednesday in June,  
the sunlight painting her white hair gold  
as she rocked peacefully on the porch  
of the little house they'd shared for fifty years.  
The whistle of the breeze sifting  
its way through the rowdy goldenrod  
he'd planted on Robbie's fifth birthday stirred her,  
briskly shaking the smile from her lips.  
He'd watched her big green eyes open for a moment more,  
the fading light caught in her wrinkles  
becoming a kaleidoscope as her entire life  
moved across her face.  
He'd leaned forward and clasped  
one small chilled hand in his gnarled brown ones,  
and she'd squeezed them then as lightly as she had  
that first night at the drive-in,  
and he felt again that nervous, desperate  
clutching deep inside his chest  
when he'd realized that he couldn't  
live without her.



## **VEXATIOUS VINTAGE**

**DARCY PAYNE**  
*color photography*

She'd sighed a little then, and closed  
her eyes with a soft smile; and as she left him  
he could only smile with her, hands clasped tightly in his,  
picturing her cheeky grin, her favorite yellow skirt twirling  
as she laughed and danced away.

He's sitting on the porch now,  
and as his eyes slide closed he almost thinks he feels  
her hand in his. It's such a gentle pressure  
that he almost misses it, but it's barely just a moment  
before he sees that yellow skirt. He chuckles slightly  
as he reaches for her hand and leaves the porch behind.

The goldenrod sways softly on in companionable  
and approving silence; his chair still rocking gently in the breeze.

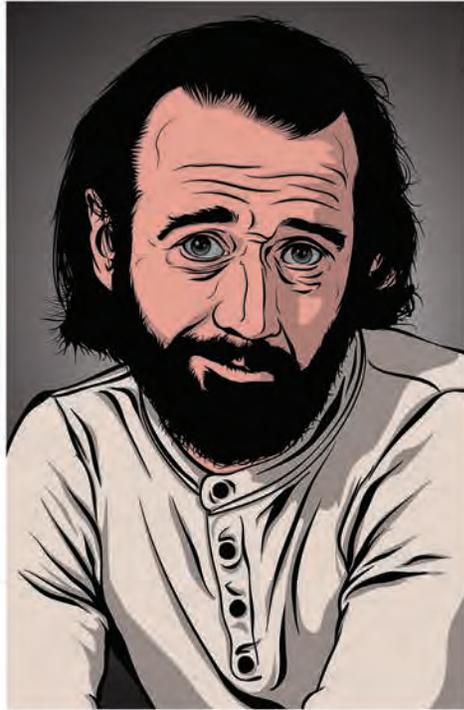


## THE 7 MILE CHALET AT HIGHLINE

CHAD LAWHORN  
*digital photography*

## CELE·BEARDS

CODY EVERETT  
digital illustration



## TO IZZY

SARAH SEAY  
fiction

Having a pen pal is a bittersweet relationship. Izzy has always been wonderful to me. She checks up on me weekly, sends me gifts on holidays (even if they are months late), and she is honest. Izzy is the kindest girl I have ever met. She knows me more than I know myself, but I suppose she has the advantage because she actually listens to me while I just blurt out whatever comes to mind without studying the words carefully. She is my best friend, the friend that I can always depend on, which I believe with each passing year is a rare gift.

But, despite the good qualities that she holds and the fun that we experience writing to each other, we do so at a distance.

When she calls me crying about her mother slipping up again, I cannot hold her; I cannot even look at her or hand her a tissue. My attempt at comforting words feel like a limp pat on the back at best. When she graduated college, I was unable to watch her proudly wear her cap and walk across the stage. I had to settle with pictures that she posted online. The warmth of her company is lost. She is in a world that is inches away from my fingertips, a world that teases me.

I heard my phone alarm go off during my birthday party.

**My mom died today.**

I didn't breathe; I just stared at the text. The family and friends around me vanished. It was me, my phone, and the words, those haunting words.

**What?**

My initial reaction.

**What happened?**

More sensitive.

**She overdosed on purpose.**

I looked over to my mom and around at my other family members.

"What happened?" someone asked.

"Izzy's mom passed away."

A shower of apologies fell upon me, but I wasn't the one who was caked with sadness from losing a family member. I looked back at the conversation with Izzy.

**My mom died today.**

I excused myself and went into the other room. I felt the energy I had left drain away. I sat in a chair and just stared at the rug beneath my feet to take in the moment. With one last soothing deep breath, I put in the password for my phone and then entered back into the conversation.

**I'm so sorry. Do you want to talk?**

I stare, waiting. It felt as though a year had passed before I got a response.

**No. I don't really have anything to say.**

**Just let me know, ok?**

**Ok.**

I decided to visit her less than a week later.

I did not land in Seattle until it was past midnight. I was drenched in fatigue; my whole body was submissive to gravity. I dragged my feet against the tiled floor of luggage claim until I saw her. Izzy's beaming face greeted me along with a large paper sign that was shaking violently in her hands.

**Seeking Long Lost Friend for a Week of Adventure!**

"Catherine!" she exclaimed and ran up to me, grabbing my arm and pulling me close for a tight one-armed embrace.

My heart jolted when hearing her voice. The ache of being on a plane all day had melted from my muscles, cleared away from my bones.

"Izzy!" I felt a pain in my eyes, "It's good to finally be here."

"I bet," she reached toward my bag, but I shook my head. "You had a long flight."

"I feel good though!"

"Good, me too. I'm really glad you are here."

"Me too, Izzy."

On the drive to her house, we talked, and laughed, smiled. Meeting face-to-face for the first time felt completely natural. The warmth swirled around me and left me sedated in my seat. I finally was able to be a friend, the friend that I should have been for eight years. I was seated next to her and she next to me. Even during a time of such grief, I had never felt so happy.

Izzy told me about how she planted some lilies. They were her mother's favorite. A few others had started to appear around them, as if her mother was leaving behind comforting messages for her past family.

And when Izzy's voice began to crack during the story, I was able to look at her.

I was able to touch her arm.

I was able to hold her.

Having a friend is a beautifully-sweet relationship. ●

## SORRY, WE'RE ALL OUT OF DONUTS TONIGHT

COURTNEY HUNTER  
silkscreen



# SHOT FROM THE HIP

PHOTOGRAPHS FROM TAIWAN WITH DAVION BAXTER

*Davion Baxter, a senior majoring in graphic design and photography, has served on the Collage staff for three semesters. Prior to serving on the staff, three of his photographs were published in Collage. Baxter has also had his work featured at student gallery shows on campus, the RAW Showcase in Nashville, and at the Murfreesboro Center for the Arts.*

A study abroad trip netted over 5,000 photographs depicting the people, culture, and scenery of Taiwan for MTSU student Davion Baxter. Along with 13 other MTSU Students, Baxter traveled to Taiwan in July to attend a summer business camp on knowledge and innovation management. He spent much of his time in the city of Chung-Li, but his stay included several trips into the Taiwanese capitol, Taipei.

“ THERE WERE SO MANY THINGS TO SEE AND TAKE PHOTOGRAPHS OF...SO MANY THINGS THAT WERE DIFFERENT.”

“I was just overwhelmed when I first got there,” said Baxter. “There were so many things to see and take photographs of...so many things that were different.”

The photographs Baxter took while in Taiwan can mostly be categorized as street photography.

Oftentimes, the subjects of street photography are unaware they are being photographed and many times the focus of a photograph may not be people, but rather their surroundings.

“I started by just walking up to people who were dressed fashionably and trying to convey that I wanted to take their picture, but after a few ‘no’s” and peace signs, I decided to go a different route.” said Baxter.

His typical routine would be to go out for the afternoon and take pictures until it was time to go back to his dorm. Once there, he would upload all of the photographs and sort them into two categories: those worthy of publication and those that weren’t.

Of all of the photos taken, two stuck out to Baxter as his favorites. In the first photograph, a young lady performing a cultural dance glances straight at the camera and blows a kiss. The second photograph was “shot from the hip” or without actually focusing the camera or examining it before a picture is taken.



DAVION BAXTER PHOTO COURTESY OF MORGAN BEATY

“After doing it for so long, you just get used to the different angles and it becomes much easier,” added Baxter. In the photograph, which was one of the first taken, a small man is sitting outside an anime store smoking a cigarette and is completely unaware that he is being photographed.

After graduating, Baxter hopes to start a career as a commercial art photographer. He does hope to return to Taiwan with a better grasp on the native language and more time to explore other aspects of their culture.

“This trip has exposed me to so many different settings,” says Baxter. “It really makes me want to get out there and see what else the world has to offer.”

● STORY WRITTEN BY Davis Thompson



**SKY WALK** A SHADOW WALKING INTO THE CITY OF TAIPEI.



**UNLIT** A MASSEUSE CALMLY REACHES FOR HIS LIGHTER AS HE IS ABOUT TO LIGHT A CIGARETTE.



**KISS** A PERFORMER BLOWING A KISS DURING A CULTURAL DANCE.



**COMIC SMOKE** A MAN SMOKES A CIGARETTE OUTSIDE OF AN ANIME SHOP.

## A CAT CRAWLS

**TREY FRENCH**  
*poetry*

A cat crawls with grace up the rear of  
An aged blue La Sabre  
Leaving prints like a spotted leopard hiking  
Up the side of Kilimanjaro to absorb  
The landscape, the paysage—the view.

Nearby

I'm heaving heavy hickory through  
The early winter winds—whistling—and  
Soaking in an oak smoke bath  
Blowing in from a fallen forest.

Sometimes my thoughts come in French,  
Fitting, of course, for an evening of coffee  
Steaming up a small room filled with old  
Dusty tan pages of publications still in print.

All semester I tortured my spirits and not a bit  
For that damn list for which the dean cares not.  
Yes I am soaking in this smoky bath and  
Yes I am clean Yes.

Yes I am fine yes—  
Only, of course, until I read Joyce  
Yes.

**CAT BRIGADE**  
**CHRIS DONAHUE**  
*color photography*



**THE CABIN**  
**EVAN HICKMAN**  
*color photography*



# DOWN IN THE GARDEN

**JONES**

*poetry*

Down in the garden,  
down by the church  
underneath the shade  
of that hollow birch,  
there lived a demon  
down in a hole,  
sleeping in the soil  
—stirring in the cold.

That little demon,  
that two-eyed man,  
he crawled up one morning  
& he took my hand.  
Sneaking through the garden,  
creeping to the bed,  
he plucked all my flowers  
to fill up his head.

My mother warned me,  
she said, “stay inside  
—don’t let no demons  
catch you by surprise.”  
But Lord, I adored him,  
that two-eyed man  
—that lonely demon  
who gripped my hand.

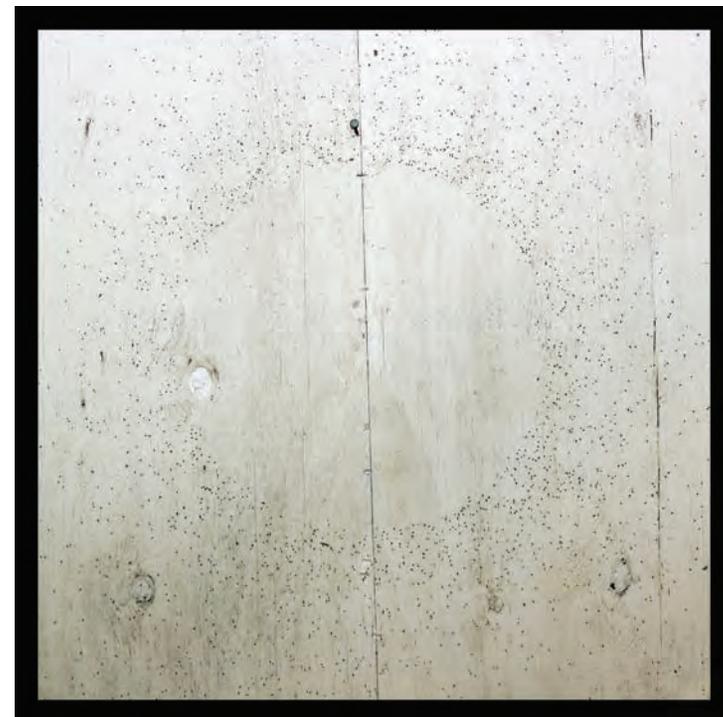
## **CIRCUIT** **BRIAN BAILEY** *painted board and hosiery*

I’d sneak out beside it  
—that shallow hole  
where that lonely demon  
carved out his home—  
& I fed the garden  
& I let it grow  
but my lovely demon,  
he never showed.

That hungry thunder,  
those thirsty rains,  
they drowned my demon  
in that shallow drain.  
So I tore the flowers  
because no one would  
—in my lonely garden  
I am alone for good.



## **DARTS** **HAMILTON** **MATTHEW MASTERS** *digital photography*



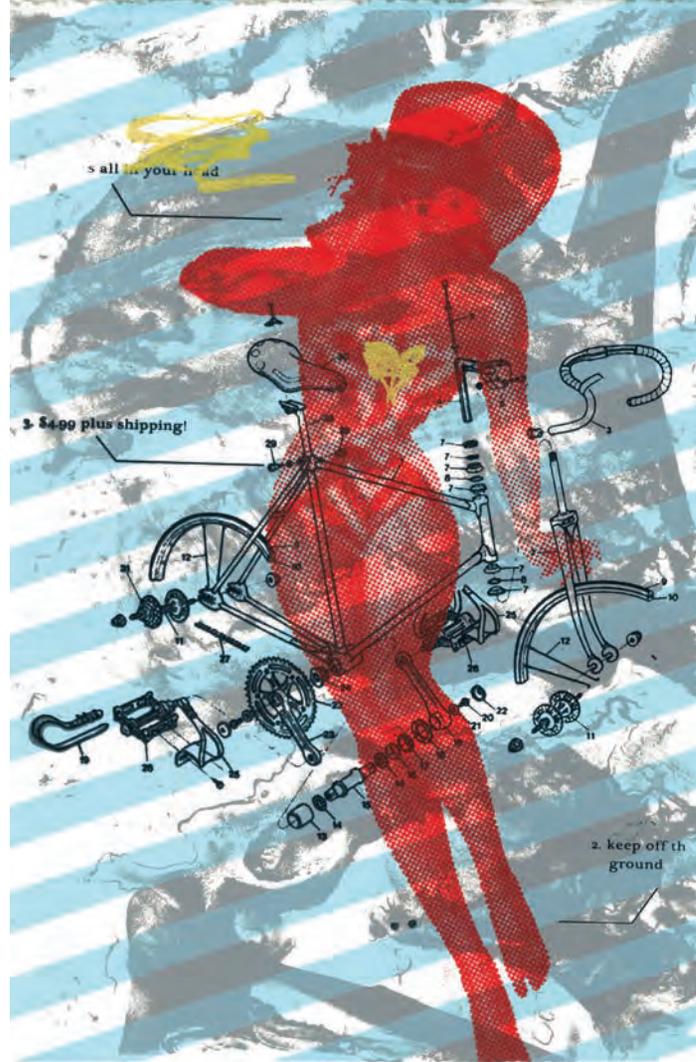
## COMMUTE

TAFFETA CHIME  
fiction

I have the best commute every day. My wife and I recently moved to a rural suburb of Beijing to care for her ailing mother. I call her Tang Ma. She calls me Bu Lai En, which is a Chinglish bastardization of my name that means cloth, pigweed, and sort of a graceful agreement in Mandarin. I've always tried to wrap my brain around what the words might mean together. Yes, let's wrap the pigweed in linen. That will be pleasing to my son-in-law. I don't even know what pigweed is.

“SO MANY TIMES LANGUAGE CAN BE ALIENATING AND FRUSTRATING. BUT EMOTIONS ARE FELT BY ALL IN THE SAME WAYS.”

I've been teaching English in China now for seven years. My wife Xiao Xue and I have been married for eight. We don't have any children, though my father-in-law begged desperately for one even to his deathbed. We've agreed to adopt instead, and I'm almost positive the word “adopt” itself could be a curse in Mandarin. A (oh) *da* (big) *pa* (fear) *te* (special). Adopting is a rare fear.



I teach freshman conversational English at a university in Beijing. I am well-acquainted with Chinglish, both from the Chinese side (“please take care of the lush grass while stomping on it”) and from the English side (the tones in *shui jiao* for *dumpling* and *shui jiao* for *sleep* get me every time). I ponder through a lot of Chinglish and, as someone who enjoys English grammar and language in general, find it really very fascinating and fun.

## INVENTION OF WOMEN

RUBY JAZZ  
silkscreen

I think through all of these things in my commute. When Xiao Xue and I lived in the heart of Beijing, I would ride the crowded bus for maybe ten minutes to get to the university. My commute was filled with stress, stinky armpits, and nausea. When we moved back to live with Tang Ma, though, I made the decision to buy an E-bike. Now, many would consider riding the bus to be much more convenient. But I had had my fill of bus-riding and, dagummit, when you live in China, you really just want some alone time. My E-bike commute takes about an hour, but I treasure every minute. It gives me time to laugh to myself about Chinglish, to shake my head at the notion that I was a graceful wrapping of pigweed, and to contemplate the rare fear of adoption.

I leave home very early in the morning. Xiao Xue and I wake up around four a.m. She prepares a bath for her mother, and I go to fix us all some *baozi* for breakfast and noodles for my lunch. (These are pre-cooked; I'm not that skilled at the art of cooking authentic Chinese food.) The three of us have a quiet breakfast together, stumbling over our language barriers, then I kiss my wife on the cheek and saddle up.

Because we live close to a river, it is often foggy on my ride in to the city. At least, I like to think it's fog. Sometimes at night, the sky has the amber glow of urine because of the light pollution from the city, and it's obvious this cloudiness is actually smog. The headlight on my E-bike makes this interesting splash of white-blue on the otherwise yellowish clouds ahead of me as I ride alongside the river. Sometimes, it feels appropriate to me to listen to the *Lord of the Rings* soundtracks as I ride to work.



I wonder what Chinese in the Shire would sound like? Bu yao, Fa rou dou! I don't want to cut meat and beans! This makes me laugh out loud, since no one is around to hear the pigweed.

Then one day, as I'm laughing to myself in the smog-fog, my phone rings. It's Xiao Xue. "Wei?"

"Sweetie, something's wrong with mother. I'm taking her to the hospital."

"I'm coming back, hold on." I push down my foot to pivot the bike around in the big, empty road and hear a car horn out of the smog. Two headlights blind me, and my body is suddenly flying over the pavement. My face meets concrete, burning. I hear Enya still singing to me from my E-bike's radio.

Tang Ma and I were both admitted to the hospital that morning. She had had a stroke.

**RESTING FIGURE**  
**NICOLE WOLOWICZ**  
*charcoal and chalk*

I had two broken ribs, a punctured lung, a broken leg, a massive gash on my scalp, and road burns almost all the way down the left side of my body. She died later that day. I was amazed I didn't. I felt so sorry for Xiao Xue, and I wanted to hold her and comfort her in the loss of her mother. She sobbed and wailed and spoke quick Mandarin. I held her hand from my hospital bed.

While I lay in bed and watched her cry, my mind thought of no Chinglish. It thought, instead, of universals—of the things we all experience. So many times, language can be alienating and frustrating. But emotions are felt by all in the same ways. We are all born. We all die. I would never hear her call me Bu Lai En again. It made me hurt. I would heal, both emotionally and physically. It seemed unfair yet completely equalizing and humbling.

We soon moved back to the city to be close again to the university and to city life altogether. The government was looking to tear down Xiao Xue's old home in order to start making moves toward building a new set of apartments and spreading the city line even further out that way. Part of my wife was happy about it, and part of her was, of course, sad. I knew I would miss my commute. I would miss riding my E-bike (though I hoped to get back on when my body healed). I would miss thinking of Chinglish for one hour there and one hour back, in the smog both ways. While in the hospital, though, we talked to the nurses in the NICU about how to go about adopting and conquering that one special fear. We would start a new life. ●



## THROUGH THE FAMILY LENS

KELSI CARTER

oil on canvas



## TRAFFIC

EVAN HICKMAN

*poetry*

Anyone who drives a 2013  
Champagne-colored Cadillac  
With Texas plates is  
Necessarily my enemy.

And there's always the overdressed  
Man in the silver Mercedes  
Going just a little faster—  
Passing everyone in the rain.

Slipping between two trucks,  
I consider the ease of a loud death.

Three 20-somethings  
In a scarlet Honda  
Undulate their breezy fingers  
And sing along to some  
Anonymously uplifting song.

A bland minivan houses a  
Nuclear family on fire  
On the side of the interstate,  
And all throughout the creeping  
Cars a mile behind the screams  
People are complaining about the traffic.

## UNTITLED

DANIELLE KIRK

*color negative scan*



## BUOYANT

JOSHUA PETTY

*oil on canvas*

# ANGEL

KAITLYN HAWKINS

*fiction*

There was a man, an ordinary man, who one day came across an angel. The angel complimented the man for being pure of heart and mind. Indeed because the man was so pure, the angel granted the man one wish.

“You can have money, love, long life—whatever you want. I wish to know what you truly desire.”

The man thought about the situation he found himself in. Surely he could wish for money, love, or long life but, being wise, the man knew none of these were the key to happiness—if one existed at all.

“I know what it is I desire,” the man finally told the angel. “I wish for you to walk beside me for the rest of my days. And when the end comes, I want it to be by your hands.”

Thinking this an extremely strange request, the angel asked why the man wished for this.

The man replied, “I want you to follow me as my companion, to serve as a constant reminder. Whenever I feel strained, stressed, or downtrodden, I want to be able to look towards you and remember how it is I should carry on.”

“But why should I be the source of your demise?” the angel asked.

“That is simple,” the man replied. “I wish to be as pure in death as you say I am in life.”

And so it was. The angel agreed to the man’s strange request and accompanied the man all of his days. When the man became discouraged, he looked to the angel and was reminded of the beauty and purity one can achieve in life. Likewise, the angel was able to look always upon the man and marvel at his unquestionable kindness and wisdom.

Eventually the day came when the man’s time on earth was up. The angel said this to the man, who had been expecting as much for some time.

“And you will hold true to our agreement?” the man asked.

“Of course,” the angel replied. “I have come too far to back out now.”

“Thank you,” the man said, “for the chance to live a pure life. Without you there, I surely would have stumbled on my path.”

“You are welcome,” the angel replied. “I shall make this as painless as possible.”



## TECHNOPHOBIA

MARY CATHERINE FREEMAN

*digital photography*

“No, don’t,” the man said, resting his head on the back of his chair.

Closing his eyes the man instructed, “Etch the pain into my soul as proof that I have lived.” ●

# THE CAPTAIN

ROBERT BRADFORD

*poetry*

The Horizon is on the line.  
Fire meets ice, and all is fine.  
Day collapses into night.  
And the captain slips from sight.

Years he's spent on constant waves.  
Close calls he's made, but Jesus saves.  
All the while, sailing the ocean blue.  
One will never know all that he has been through.

Splintered wood from the vessel.  
Catches the captain, quite unsettled.  
Whilst bleeding from a wounded palm  
His salty breath inhales; he's calm.

He remembers bright yellow suns.  
And splatters of pink when it is nearly done.  
Calm waters and a full crew.  
Now it seems like the ship carries few.

And though every man is responsible for his own.  
The ship is the responsibility of the captain, alone.  
For it's his duty, and he knows it, although it's too late.  
The ship is down, and so is the first mate.



And he remembers what it was like to see  
The ship sink from water and memory.  
There's no room for heroes and pirates to correlate  
In the same ship, let alone the same heart-sake.

So the Captain hums a simple tune.  
Alone he sails for something soon.  
And perhaps find something worthy of himself to be.  
Until then, the captain floats along, lost at sea.

**SURF AND SKY**  
**DARBY CAMPBELL**  
*digital photography*

# GOLDFISH STORY

**TINA REID**  
poetry

I have a goldfish story my very own  
I can smile now that I'm grown  
But forty years ago I was quite naïve

As I was only four you see

1968 under the California sun  
Sadly race riots were still going on  
Orange Yellow Black and White  
ALL are precious in God's sight

Down to the school fair we did go  
To watch the children's puppet show  
Lots to see lots to do  
My favorite the goldfish in the kiddie pool  
Spotted White Orange and Black ones too

While their swishing made me happy indeed  
My innocent eyes could not see  
The anger and hatred among the community

Which fish do you want little girl asked the man  
I watched them wiggle I giggled as they swam

Which should I choose?

I pondered a little while

Then I pointed and said with a smile

I want a black one just like you

Mother gasped

She looked around and wondered  
Had any other people of color  
Overheard my innocent blunder



## SWIFT CURRENT MOOSE

**CHAD LAWHORN**  
*digital photography*

The man knelt down his eyes met mine  
He gave me the fish and these words so kind  
Do you know why my skin is black and yours is white  
No I answered holding my bagged fish tight

When God baked us in Heaven's oven He said to me  
He left me inside a little longer you see  
He touched the tip of my nose a twinkle in his eye  
But He loves us just the same both you and I

In my little mind it made perfect sense  
Thank you mother whispered and we quickly departed thence  
She took me and my little black fish home  
Grateful she told me when I was grown  
For the gentle man's patient and kind heart  
And that another riot did not start



# MEN OF VIOLENCE

GERALD STANLEY

fiction

It was a hard fact to face. Pa was dead. Evan lay in bed thinking on the peculiarity of that fact, and no matter how hard he tried, he couldn't see Pa as anything but alive. Nonetheless, the two men Evan hadn't seen since suckling at his Ma's teat delivered the message with what seemed the greatest of ease.

At dusk, they had arrived, removing their gray wide-brimmed hats. One of them, the skinnier of the two, stood and waited for the other to speak, no emotion whatsoever. Finally, the other one, rubbing thumb and forefinger down the bushy trail of his whisky-stained mustache, spoke.

“Robert hanged in Franklin yesterday.”

**“ THAT SASH WAS MEANT TO ILLICIT RESPECT AND FEAR, BUT AS FAR AS EVAN COULD TELL, ALL IT BROUGHT WAS TROUBLE. ”**

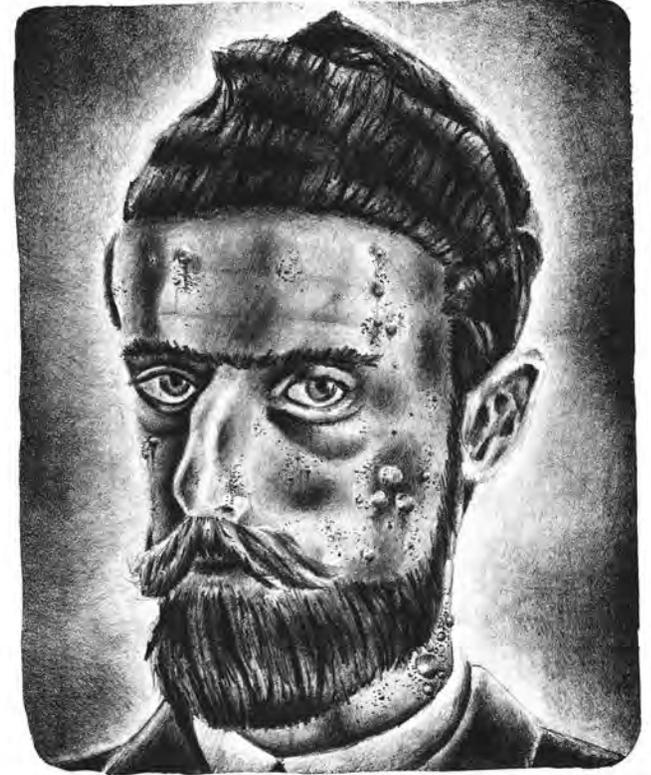
Ma, without a second's pass, turned away and headed for the kitchen. Her faint sobs carried through the small wooden house as Evan stood and stared at the men.

They looked old and violent, like his Pa. They both wore remnants of old military uniforms. The skinny one had a pair of leather boots with faded emblems on the golden spurs. The other wore a gray wool jacket with golden buttons. And each of them wore their hats, wide-brimmed with gold-colored trim, soon to be just as gray as the rest of them. The only thing that stood out amidst the two men's bleak appearance was the crimson red sash tucked into their waistbands right next to their Colts.

Evan knew what that sash meant; his Pa had one that he'd wear too, with or without his family around. He did it not because he didn't care for his wife and son, but because that part of him came before the two of them and most everything else. That sash was meant to illicit respect and fear, but as far as Evan could tell, all it brought was trouble. He knew that sash was what got him hanged, just as he knew that sash was what made him the way he was.

“Why don't you go on in there and comfort your mama, son. Me and Zachariah here'll just sit on out on this porch 'til she's ready to talk.” The man rested a hand on his holstered pistol. The other one, the silent one, stayed silent and put his hat back on.

Evan nodded without meeting either man's stare and headed back inside, past the small dinner table that Pa had built, and into the kitchen. It was just big enough to fit a stove, cabinets, and Ma, so Evan leaned up against the wall at its entrance.



**M.C. LEPER**  
MITCH HEAD  
lithography

She hadn't even noticed him, and so she kept on crying. She was doubled over on top of the stove, holding her stomach like she was sick. Her face was red, and her auburn hair hung loosely from the tied fabric on the back of her head.

“Ma,” Evan said quietly. She straightened quietly at the sound and smoothed her cotton dress. “The two men outside want to speak with you when you're ready.”

She swallowed hard before speaking, and when she did, it came out as a rasp. "Thank you, son. You ought to go on to bed now." She dared not turn and let him see her like she was.

"Ma, are those men ... I've seen them before. Did they run with Pa back before he met you?"

She turned this time with anger on her face. "Evan, I said to go to bed. Just 'cause your daddy ain't here don't mean you ain't got to listen to me. Now go!" She turned back to the stove, raising her hands to her face. Her whole body was shaking, and when she let out a faint, child-like whine, Evan left. He thought about going out on the porch and asking those men how they knew his Pa, but he didn't. Instead, he went to his room and climbed onto his bed.

He lay there on top of his wool blanket, shoes still on his feet, and tried to imagine Pa swinging from that thick hemp rope, but he couldn't. He saw him as he always did: living, breathing, drunk, and violent. He could easily imagine Pa walking through the front door and hearing Ma crying. He could see his eyes narrowing like they did before going at Ma and slapping her hard on her face. He'd say something like: "You stupid bitch, you'll believe anything won't you?" before backhanding her once more. He tried to get that image out of his head and replace it with reality. Then he heard voices. They were outside his window which looked out on the porch and the few acres of land his Pa had bought when Evan was born.

"Damn shame he had to go like that, no gun in his hand, no pride." It was the older one who spoke earlier. The other didn't give him any sort of reply before he went on. "No man should have to die like that."

The wooden groan of a rocking chair filled the silence, and then Evan heard a new voice. It was soft like his. "How many men he kill?" It must've been the other man, the skinny one, Zachariah.

"In Franklin? A couple. It's why they had him hanged. But that was years ago, 'fore he even bought this land."

"No, I mean total." The rocking ceased. There was a long pause. Evan could still hear his Ma crying in the kitchen.

"Well, I'd say that's a question for Robert."

Zachariah laughed at that. "If you had to guess."

"I'd say twenty, twenty-five. Though I'd wager Robert could give you a more definitive number than I."



**UNTITLED**  
**INHAE KIM**  
*photo collage*

"And just how am I supposed to get Robert to give me that number?" Evan thought that the skinny man's tone very much betrayed his somber appearance.

"Ask him." Evan again pictured his father coming through the house beating him and Ma with belt and fist.

"He's dead. He ain't answering no more questions for nobody." Evan's mind relaxed once more.

**CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE**

# INFRARED GHOST HOUSE

CHRISTOPHER HAMRICK

*large format, infrared photography*

**CONTINUED** “Yeah, but we’ll both be seeing Robert again. We’re men of violence. We all go the same damned place. If you don’t realize that, you’re just a damned fool.”

There was no response. “Dammit, Zachariah, we are a dying breed. The man of violence is what founded this country. Now, we got intellectuals and politicians and bankers, and they’re all working together to kill us off. An entire way of life, deemed unfit for the ‘American’ man. Why? Cause it’s too hard. It’s too hard to be your own man, live your own life. They call us outlaws and bandits. Shit, some of ‘em liken us to the savage, but we ain’t none of that. We’re just men, surviving on our own in what little ways we have left. World’s gone soft on us, and suddenly, we ain’t needed no more. Like that boy in there,” he tapped on Evan’s window. “He ain’t a thing like his daddy. He’s soft and shy. 14 years old, Zachariah. I’s his age and I’d just been told lawman killed my daddy, I’d be in town guttin’ the damn sheriff. But that ain’t what the world needs now, you see. It needs meek, little boys who’ll fall in line and do what they’re told.”



He paused for a moment, and the sound of the rocking chair started up again. “We’re lucky though. Me, you, Robert. We’re all lucky ‘cause after we’re gone and those politicians and bankers run this world, Hell will seem like a paradise.”

Evan sat up, his bed creaking as he did so. The two men outside took notice of the noise. The skinny one spoke first.

“You woke him.”

“Good,” he replied before leaning over to tap a finger on Evan’s window. “Come on out here, boy. I got something for you.”

Evan quickly hopped out of the bed and went out to the porch. Illuminated by a small lantern hanging by the front door, the porch was consumed by shadows in the night.

The moon was out now, and lent its own dim light to the two men as they sat waiting for Evan. As he approached the talker of the two, the man dug into his pocket.

“I got something for you here,” he said. “I was gonna give it to your Ma to give to you, but she obviously don’t want a thing to do with us.” He pulled from his pocket a familiar red sash, its ends all frayed and tattered. He handed it to Evan, who slowly took it in his own hand.

He stared at it for a minute, the sound of a single coyote the only thing to break the silence. Then, with all the intention in the world, he dropped it to the ground and walked back inside.

Zachariah stood first, adjusting his hat. “Let’s go, Eli. We ain’t got no business here.” Eli leaned forward and grabbed the dusty red fabric from the floor. He stood and tucked it back into his pocket.

“You’re right,” he said. And soon, with the sounds of hooves, they were gone.

Inside, Evan made his way to the kitchen where his Ma stood, still bent and heaving with sorrow, or fear, or joy, or perhaps all three. He walked towards her and wrapped his arms around her. She gave no protest, sinking quietly into her son’s comforting embrace.

“We’re gonna be fine,” he said to himself.

“We’re gonna be fine,” he said to his Ma. ●



## DISMAL ROAD

RUBY JAZZ  
silkscreen

## THE AUTUMN BLOSSOM

JOSEPH MOSQUEDA  
*poetry*

Live like the autumn blossom,  
As the world grows bleak  
And those about you crumble against the earth  
Be a pinnacle for the meek.

Fill in the void that once was despair  
And offer your beacon of beauty  
To those who seek repair,  
But be cautious of the winter air

Whose nature it is to drain  
The life and light from the world, estranged.

Hold tight to the things about you.  
The budlings and fading flowers  
Offer new hope and a long view  
To ground you as the swirling winds attempt to devour  
Your grace and make weary your delicate face.

I've seen the light within you though,  
Breathing new life into all you know,  
Allowing others to feel the flow  
Surge into every crevice of their soul.

You are an autumn blossom,  
Holding fast against adversities  
Swaying carefree in the breeze  
Your nature as steady as the trees.

# IN DEFENSE OF STORYTELLING

NATHAN ABELT

*poetry*

To those who use good stories to unwind—  
The sort that churn your heart and stir your mind;  
To those like me who wish to chase their dreams,  
Tell stories of their own, and who esteem  
The power of Imagination's Eye,  
And wish to grow their own ideas and try  
To educate, enchant, and entertain:

There are those who think our sacred art is vain.  
They fear we waste our time and our ambition  
And treat our work with doubting and suspicion.  
But lest you think that storytelling is  
All fluff and useless fun, I tell you this:

Think long and hard, dear reader. We have all  
Been blessed to sit and ponder, and recall  
That No One is a Failure Who Has Friends,  
And a Pot of Gold lies at the Rainbow's End.  
From Aesop, we learned that even lions need help.  
From Scrooge, we learned that money, power, and pelf  
Mean nothing if we have no love for Man.



And Dorothy's friends helped us to understand  
That loyalty, and being just and kind,  
Mean more than courage, hearts, or brilliant minds.  
And Forrest Gump, in all his innocence  
And simpleness of heart, helped us make sense  
Of a world where such good men seem underrated,  
And decency seems unappreciated.

Rocky showed us no challenge can resist  
Those folks who set their faces and persist.  
And Frodo, Luke Skywalker, Harry Potter,  
Batman, Neo, and Mrs. March's daughters—  
All these, and more, made sure we understood  
That evil is always overcome by good ...

So tell me now, are stories mere distractions?  
Or do they shape our feelings and our actions  
More, perhaps, than we would like to say?  
If that is true, I rest my case today.

**E 37 ST.**

**CODY EVERETT**

*pen and ink illustration*

# Collage

A JOURNAL of CREATIVE EXPRESSION

MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY  
MTSU BOX 267  
MURFREESBORO, TN 37132

## ABOUT COLLAGE

*Collage* is a biannual production 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 to *Collage*, Middle Tennessee State University, 1301 East Main Street, Box 267, Murfreesboro, TN 37132.

## SUBMIT TO COLLAGE

*Collage* accepts submissions year-round. Submission forms and guidelines are available at [capone.mtsu.edu/collage/](http://capone.mtsu.edu/collage/). Creative work, such as art, photography, short stories, essays, short plays, song lyrics, and poetry, may be submitted digitally from the website or may be turned in at the *Collage* office, Honors 224, along with a completed hard copy of the form between the hours of 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. Submissions are accepted from MTSU students and recent alumni.

## POLICY STATEMENT

*Collage: A Journal of Creative Expression* is an arts and literary magazine featuring top-scoring 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 a publication of 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 letters of recommendation.

## CREATIVE EXPRESSION AWARDS

Each semester the *Collage* Faculty Advisory Board selects four submissions to receive Creative Expression Awards, one from each major category: art, photography, poetry, and prose. Literature winners receive the Martha Hixon Creative Expression Award, and visual winners receive the Lon Nuell Creative Expression Award. Winners receive \$50 awards.



ART **KELSI CARTER**  
THROUGH THE FAMILY LENS



PHOTOGRAPHY **GRACE BOTO**  
RICH IN SPIRIT



POETRY **ANNA HOUSER**  
HER



PROSE **TAFFETA CHIME**  
FLOWERS OF LEBANNON

## COLUMBIA SCHOLASTIC PRESS ASSOCIATION AWARDS

SILVER CROWN AWARDS –  
2007, 2008 and 2011

GOLD CROWN AWARDS –  
2012, 2013

## TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

### TECHNOLOGY

Adobe InDesign CS6  
Adobe Illustrator CS6  
Adobe Photoshop CS6  
Apple Macintosh Platform  
Windows Platform

### TYPOGRAPHY

Caecilia Std., various weights  
Grand Canyon

### PAPER

100 lb. HannoArt Silk Cover  
80 lb. HannoArt Silk Text

### BINDING

Saddle Stitch

### PRINTING

Franklin Graphics of Nashville, Tennessee  
printed approximately 3,000 copies of *Collage*.