

COLLAGE

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Letter From The Editor

From the moment I was selected editor in chief of Collage, I wanted to find out who the first editor in chief was. A short time later, I found myself face to face with a copy of the 1969 MTSU yearbook and a black and white photograph of Collage's first editor in chief, Bill Peters. He wore a blazer, left hand tucked in his pocket, and he possessed the look of a self-assured and free-spirited individual.

Collage began as a part of Sidelines, MTSU's newspaper and separated from the newspaper, becoming an independent student publication in 1969. After reading Peters' first editor's letter, I was inspired by how fearless he was in voicing his thoughts. He believed that while Collage is a platform meant to entertain and showcase the works of students and faculty, it should also provide helpful information for the

whole student body. Peters saw Collage as more than a creative journal; he also saw it as a place where students and faculty could have a direct dialogue with each other and the rest of the campus population.

Fast forward to today when fake news and lies dominate the media and speaking up and telling the truth is becoming more and more a necessity. Speaking up is more than audible speech; it is doing whatever you can to make sure your voice is heard. We speak up when we refuse to allow injustice to happen; we speak up when we write; we speak up when we create art and take photographs; and we speak up when we walk away from toxic people and situations.

In this issue of Collage, I challenge you to look at its contents differently. Look past the surface. Read between the lines of stories and poems and

dig deeper through the artworks and photography. Unravel the hidden messages that the artists deliver. Each contributor speaks up in his own way. It takes great courage for contributors to submit the works they have poured their hearts and souls into to a publication where their work may be freely criticized.

I am grateful to the Fall 2019 staff and to the contributors. This journey has been full of fun and surprises, and I wouldn't trade this experience for anything in the world.

To the reader holding this copy, this is for you. I hope you enjoy what you see and read.

Signing off,

Beatriz Marie R. Dedicataria
Editor in Chief, Fall 2019

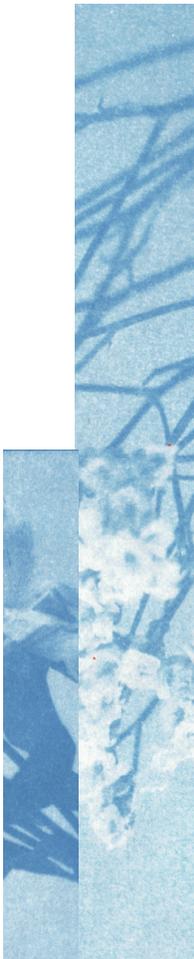




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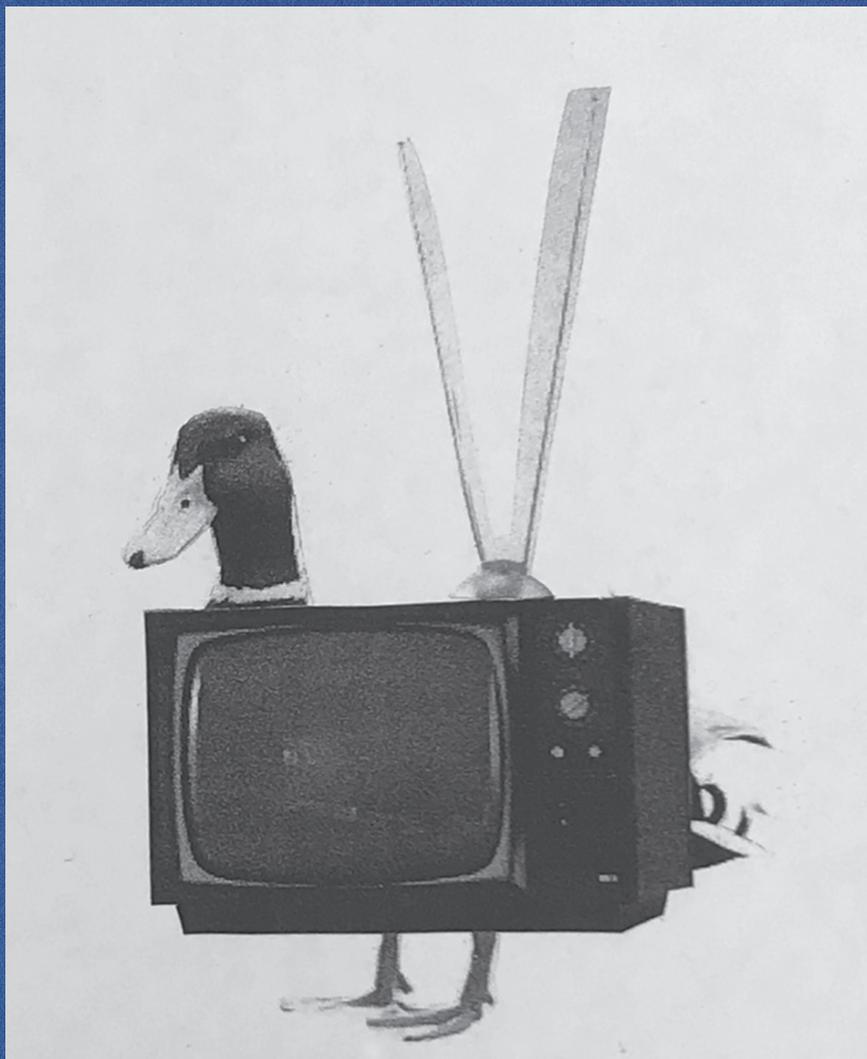
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the emporium of eternal bargains

Kate Carter | *Poetry*

everything is 100% off today
Forgiveness not included
and the next and the next and the next
and every unthreaded soul
would stand in black friday lines
to unearth sales and tangled meaning
from Shelves they don't know
with no need nor desire
of such unwonted barter
before you would even think
about the Store



TV Duck

Tiffany Brady | *Digital Photography*



Soup Duck

Tiffany Brady | *Digital Photography*

Coded Confessions

Pel Doski | *Poetry*

Let me be coward
And say something I need to say,
But don't expect to understand it,
Because it's only through coded

Means unexposed to everyone I know
That I am able to be what I authentically am.
There are some
Words that I can speak to you

That might just make you leave and
I've never done well with rejection so
Let's just keep it to poetry
Like this. So I wanted to say

So many things and maybe
One day I will but only after I
Have gotten over the fact that
I've never known what it was to love.

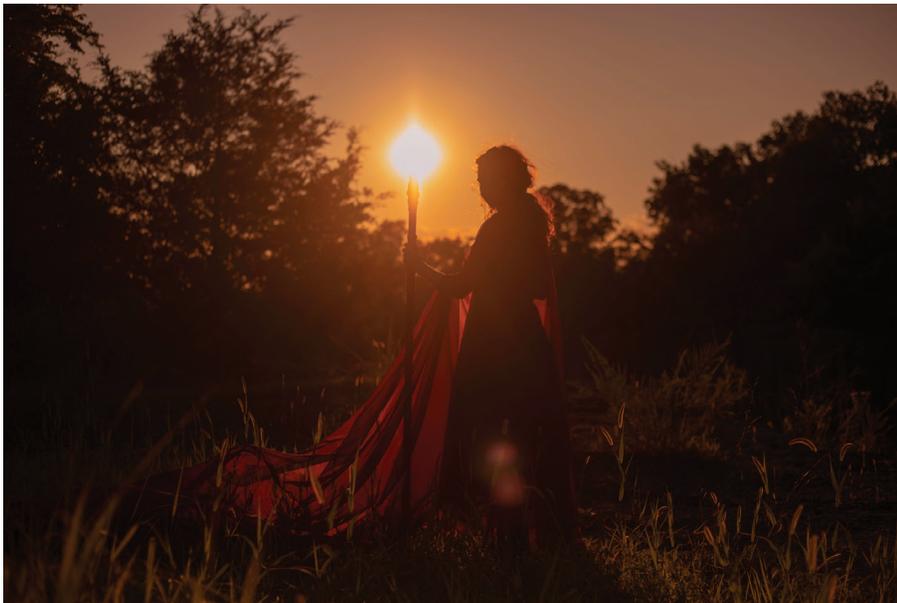
I still firmly believe it doesn't
Exist and I don't intend on changing.
These days I don't find joy in living
And maybe I never will,

So let me expose these secrets
Only with you because
I've never felt safe before
But I feel it with you.



Tread Lightly

Adriana Klika | *Digital Photography*



The Gift

Valkyrie Rutledge | *Digital Photography*



Tanah Lot

Destiny Seaton | *Digital Photography*



Regan

Darwin Alberto | *Digital Photography*



Made to Steep

Mia Kuhnie | *Poetry*

Our affections are resinous
By the grindstone, made
Confections.

Our patience tasteful impressions
By words, sweet turpeny made
Ever-growing since.

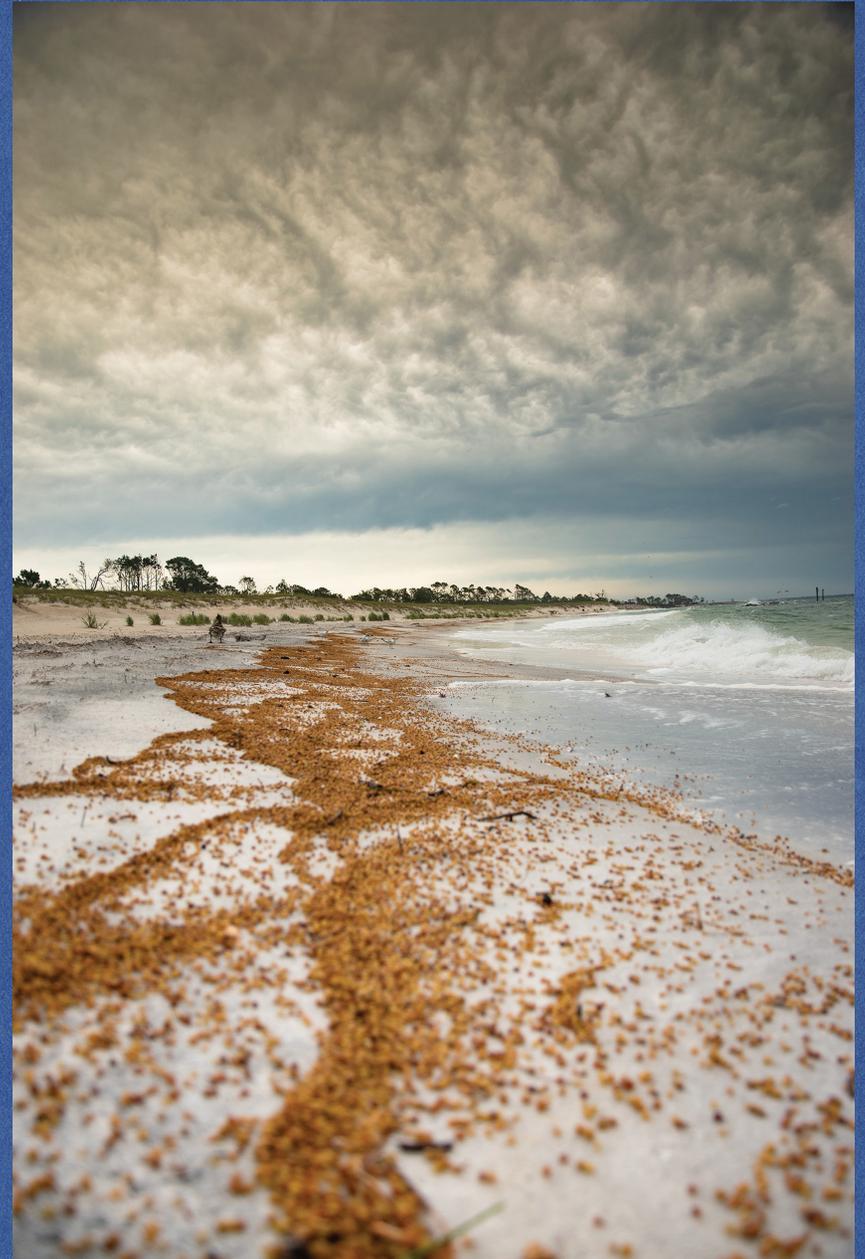
Our laughter like camphor
Sowed by thyme, made
Love, after.

Your love is unwashed
Grown and ground, made to steep
Cherry beans, grown in their burgundy glove.



Sprouts From a Tilled Garden

Maryann Robinson | *Marker on Board*



Mood

Luke Oakley | *Digital Photography*

Restore

Clark Wilson | *poetry*

Clank clank up on those steps, as that man *clank clanks* his hammer to save some aging door, a testament to beautiful restores and halls and corridors.

Or as some would call it, a painting slying out as a coincidental building that shakes the fragile man to the core—just too grand for those practicals to withstand.

I see them scoff: terra cotta and stucco skinned, insulated bones bearing as off-white columns—stretching and contorting and testing the tissue's will, just a balcony resting—somehow—on two little legs.

Yet here it prospers. The men still walk and the trees still grow. Yet here it stays. Men go out of their ways just to save this home—

And we are the audience to this house daring one's heart to beat inside art. So *clank clank*. That door can stand for a few more.



Charcoal Figures

Mathew Parris | *Fiction*

Charcoal Figures

Mathew Parris | Fiction

Hardly anyone rides the bus this late at night. The ones who do look like they're barely there at all. They sit slumped in their chairs, half-dead, with translucent skin and discolored patches of flesh hanging lazily under their eyes, staring blankly at their phones, or the ground, or nothing at all. No one ever talks to each other. Sometimes, two people will walk inside the bus together. They don't talk either. One will look outside the window, the other in some other direction. Sometimes, I feel tempted to smash my head into the window until it looks like an abstract mosaic of broken glass and blood, just to see if they'll notice. Instead, I settle for drawing them. They never notice. They never mind.

Right now, I'm drawing a man who sits across from me, several seats to the left. He wears a baggy brown coat covered in grease stains, underneath is a t-shirt faded with years of hard toil. His hands are large, calloused, with dirt underneath his short ragged nails—he bites them, probably—and right now, those hands guard a plastic bag from a hardware store on his lap as if it were some great treasure. His head is tilted back against the window, but his eyes, I can see, are wide open, bloodshot. There's a slight ridge of purple skin that runs along his nose, like a carpet that's been bunched up. It's a



scar, one that never quite healed right. I try to imagine how he got such a scar. Maybe it's from a fight over something or the other: a girl, his honor, nothing at all. Maybe he served in the military, and a piece of shrapnel just barely missed his brain. Maybe he was born with it, and it's some sick mark assigned to him by a cruel roll of the cosmic dice.

More likely, it's some construction accident. That's probably why his fingernails are dirty, his hands calloused, carrying a hardware store bag. I'll never know for sure,

though. I'll never ask. This is the closest I'll get to knowing him, or anybody on this godforsaken bus. The only things I know about them are the things I ascribe, the details I pencil in.



“They never notice. They never mind.”

I finish shading him with my charcoal pencil as I hear the door open and the bus creak as someone else steps on. I hear, but

I don't look. I'm too involved in the sketch, adding the rich details to the man's figure. I see a shadow loom over my work as the person nears. I wait for the shadow to pass over, for the person to walk to the back of the bus, to one of the empty seats, and sit down. But the shadow stays. I look up at the source, indignantly. It's a woman, tall and thin, wearing jeans and a black hoodie a little too large for her. Her hair is cut short, practically the side of her face. The strangest thing about her, however, is that she's looking directly at me.

"That's very good," she says, gesturing towards my notepad with some asinine smile. "Thanks," I grunt halfheartedly, and look back towards my work, expecting her to leave. But she doesn't, oh no. Nothing like that. Nothing a normal person would do. She plops down in the seat right next to me, and now I can feel her eyes heating up the paper. My hands start to shake. People don't usually make eye contact with me, much less sit near me. I'm an ugly man, with a square head and thin, bleached blond hair that hangs over my bugged out, red eyes. Some of it is intentional. It's why I wear dingy clothes and don't shave. I take great care to ensure that I look like the kind of guy you wouldn't want to look at twice, and yet this girl has the audacity to ignore all that. I realize, with a sinking feeling, that she's going to try and make conversation with me.

"I'm Jenna," she says, smiling brightly still and reaching her hand towards me. I raise mine slightly, showing her that it's oh-so-inconveniently covered in charcoal dust.



Muses of Destruction

Madison Pitts | Woodblock Relief Printmaking



She shakes her head and says, “I don’t care.” Defeated, I reach out my hand and shake hers. “What’s your name?” she asks.

“Brian,” I say, lying. I’m not quite sure why. Sometimes I just can’t help myself.

Her face lights up. “That’s my brother’s name,” she says. “He’s an artist, too. In school and everything.”

I can tell she’s waiting for me to ask about him, her brother. What medium he works with, how old he is, that kind of stuff. I don’t. If I wanted, I could tell her about the time I went to art school. I could talk about my experiences there, the people I met, the things I did. I could even tell her why I was kicked out. I don’t do that either, just sit there silently. Finally, she frowns. “I’m not bothering you, am I?”

“No,” I say. Lying again. Why do I do that? She sighs with relief. “Cool,” she says dully. “So, where are you off to?” “Excuse me?”

She chuckles at herself. “Sorry, I don’t mean to pry. I just . . . I don’t know, I like talking to people. It’s so boring riding the bus alone, you know? Sometimes I look around at all these people and I just . . . it depresses

me. It makes me feel alone.”

I put my pencil down for the first time. “I know what you mean,” I say, truthfully this time. “I’m going home.”

“Right,” she says. “I guess most people are, this late. Do you mind if I ask where you’re coming from?”

It’s a good question. I almost wish I had an answer for her. This is what I do, most nights. I ride the bus, going nowhere in particular. I go in a giant loop around the city, draw people that I’ll never see again, and at the end of it all, step out exactly where I got in. I almost consider telling her that.



**“It’s a good question.
I almost wish I had an
answer for her.”**

“Nowhere in particular.”

She nods. “I get that,” she says, and I begin to wonder now if she’s lying when she continues, “Sometimes I’m just desperate

to get out of my apartment. Even if I don’t know where else to go. I’m new to the city, and I don’t really know anyone. Even my roommates are kind of a mystery. I found them on Craigslist and, if I’m being honest, I’m struggling to connect with them. Sometimes it all just gets a little . . .” She trails off.

“Overwhelming?”

“Yes,” she says softly, looking over at me. For the first time, I notice that her eyes are blue: a rich, deep blue, like there’s an entire ocean behind them. I almost want to draw them, and I don’t usually draw pretty people. They’re boring, clean, safe. It’s the ugly ones, the ones with warts and scars and calloused hands, who limp and hunch over, that strike me. But there’s something about her eyes, the way they look into mine like she knows me. Maybe she does. *Why does she know me?* Why does she know me? I realize my hand is shaking again and wonder if she notices when I feel the bus slow to a halt.

“This is my stop,” I blurt out.

“Oh,” she says. She frowns for a bit, then smiles, and gestures towards my notepad again. “Can you hand me a little bit of paper?”





Mermaid

Robert Clary | *Digital Photography*



Just a piece will do.” I tear off a small piece and give it to her, and watch as she pulls a pen out of her pocket and quickly scribbles something in exquisite characters. Folding

it, she hands it to me. “Here,” she says. “You should call me sometime, we could meet-up or something. Maybe it’ll all be a little less overwhelming with someone else, if that makes sense?”

I look at her one last time and nod politely. “It makes sense.”

I pinch the slip of paper with my pointer and middle finger and walk down the aisle towards the door. As I get to the front, the bus driver looks at me with a cocked eyebrow. “Leaving a little early,” he points out, cleverly.



“She didn’t want to be alone, like she said. She just wanted someone—anyone—to talk to.”

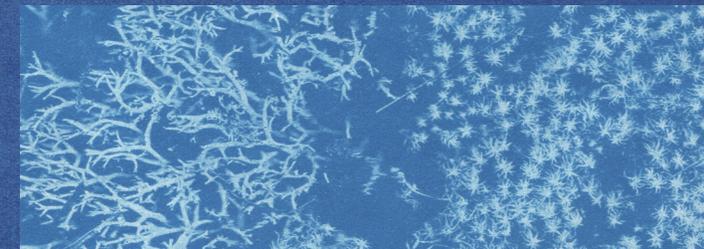
“I could use the walk,” I respond, and step into the brisk night air. As I begin to trudge through the snow, the bus starts again, and as I look over I see Jenny waving at me through the window. I give her a quick wave with my black, charcoal-covered hand and shove it back in my pocket. As I walk, I realize that, out here, in the empty air, it’s

even quieter than the bus, quiet enough to hear my own thoughts. And I begin to think about those eyes. Those ocean eyes. Those kind eyes.

All-seeing eyes.

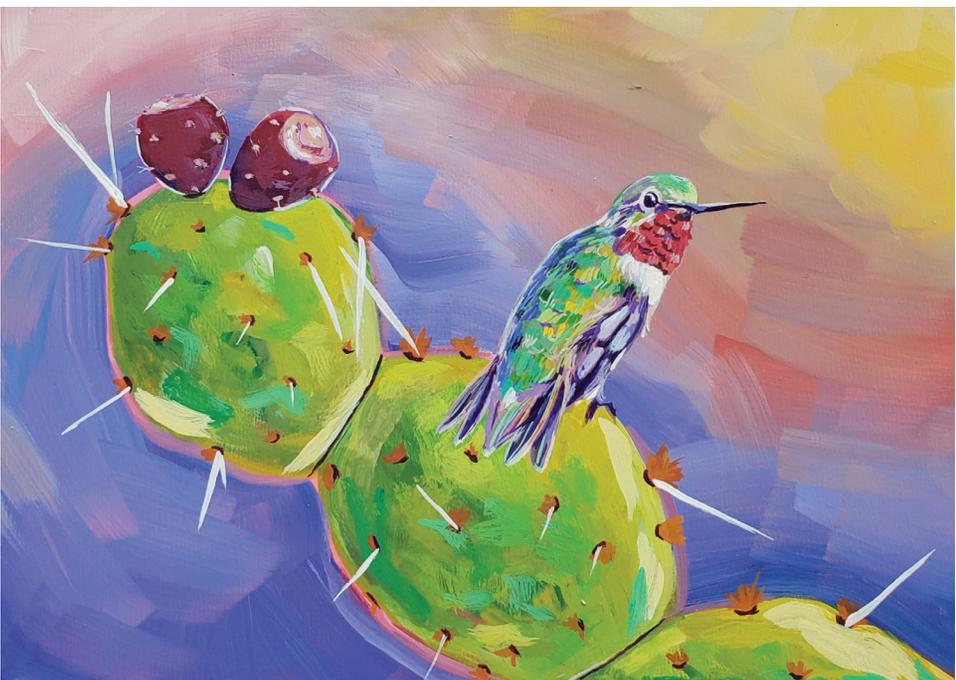
I pull the slip of paper out of my pocket and let it fall gently to the ground. I don’t pick it up. I don’t even turn back; I just keep walking. She didn’t want to be alone, like she said. She just wanted someone—anyone—to talk to. If not me, it would’ve been someone else. I didn’t mean anything to her any more than the man with the scar on his nose meant to me. That’s all I was to her: a charcoal figure.

I pull my hood up and keep walking to nowhere in particular, as the neon lights on the buildings around me project their crude likeness onto the snow-covered cobblestone beneath my feet. •



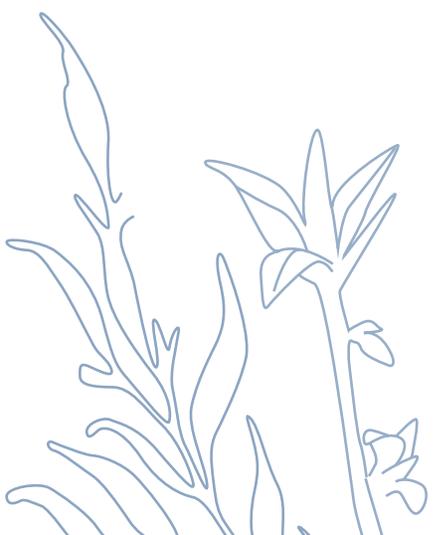
A Glimpse Into the Wild

Steven Quinn | *Digital Photography*



Maggie Strahle | *Acrylic Painting*

Felicity



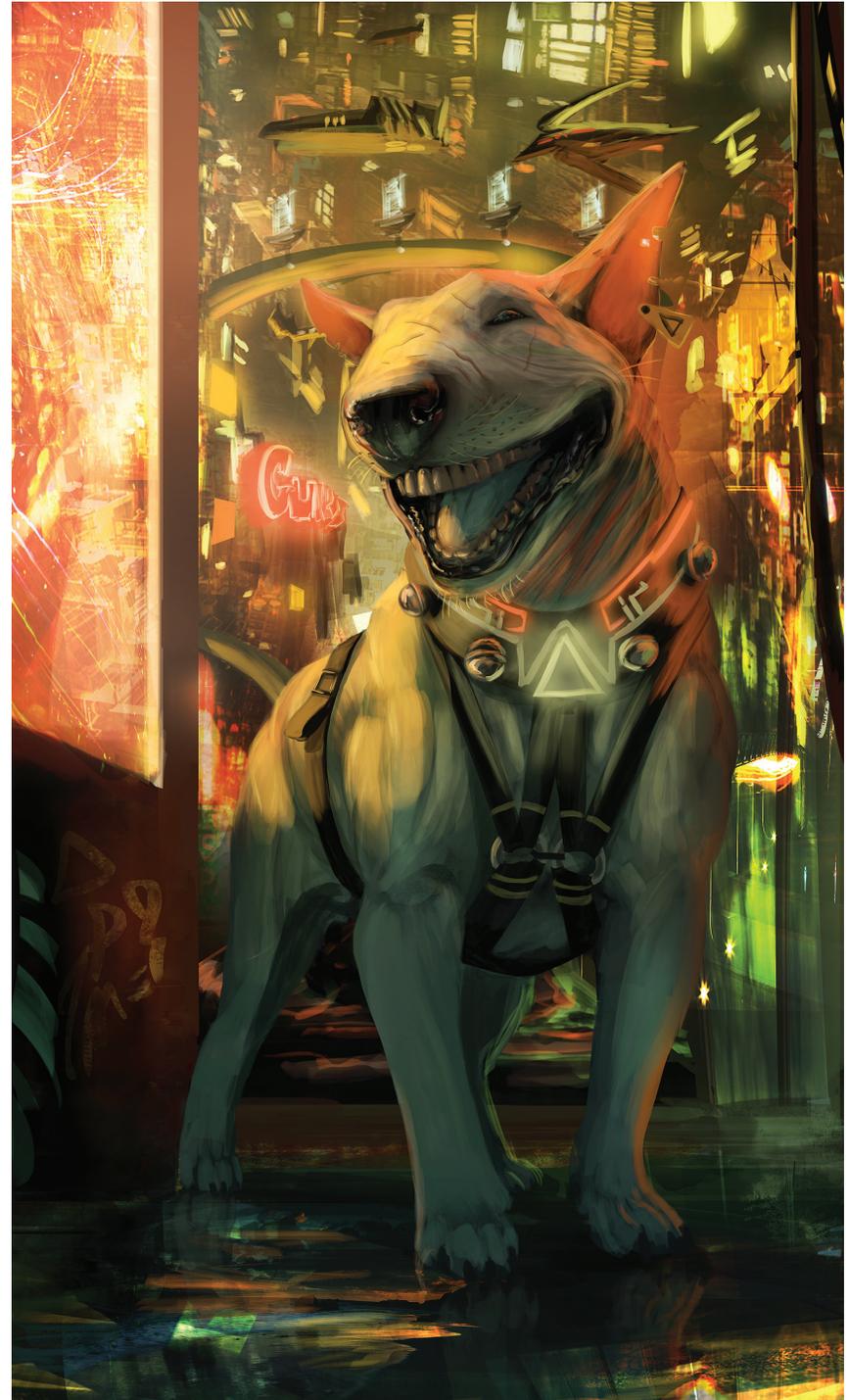
I think
That if I were to really look back
And retrace my steps
I don't think
That it would lead me back
To you

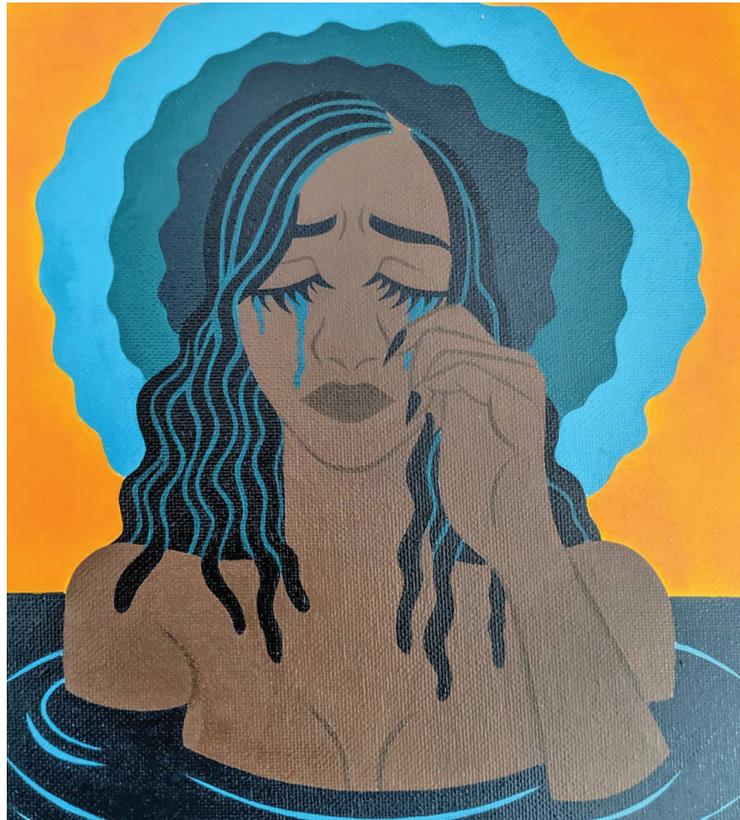
Why
Am I only saying this now
You ask
Better late than never
I replied
Not thinking too much about it

You got up and left
Silent as the sun gives way to the moon
Lips pressed thin and fists curled tight
Not knowing
About the reasons
I don't plan to look back

I only said it
To get it off my chest
But also as a farewell
To what used to be
Not just for me
But also for you

Do you remember now
That one summer night
A promise between two brothers
Was all you said
But he never woke up
and you never looked back





Astray

Robert Clary | *Digital Photography*

Perhaps the glimmer of your ring in the sunlight caught her eye
Or maybe she saw you diligently writing in the corner
And observed the way you wiped a tear off your cheek without missing a beat
Her tail flicked, rustling the leaves as she fixated on your furrowed brow
She caught your attention too, but for fear of scaring her away
You pretend that you don't see those pale eyes
Observing you from behind the leaves
She is stunning.

After a time, you glance and make eye contact
She is still 'cept for her eyes frantically scanning you
But after a time, she begins to circle you, flicking her tail cautiously
She has lived and it shows
Her eyes crave a companion
But her feet are restless
Taking her time
She inches closer
Meowing now she falls to the ground
Exposing her stomach in the sunlight.

But you know if you move too fast
She'll run away never to trust you again
So you sit on the cold concrete shivering
And wait
You can tell she appreciates it.

She is skinny. Not starving by any means
Certainly self-sufficient
But never gluttonous
You consider giving her food
But then she would depend on you
And you can never provide for her like she can

As if she can read your mind
Or is it possible that she saw the glint of sadness cross your eyes?

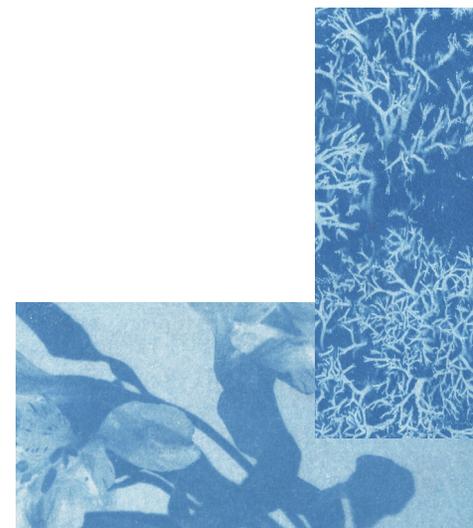
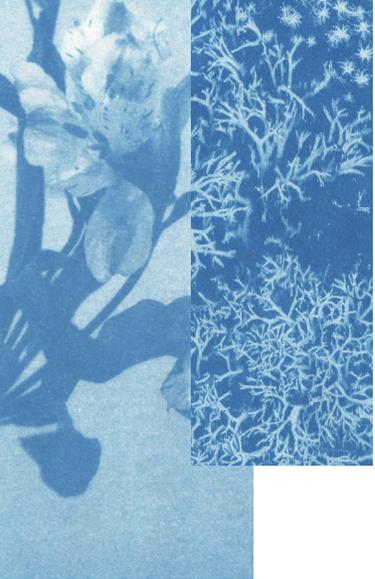
Your time is up. She knows it
And so do you
She stands up without acknowledging you
returning to the hole in the fence.

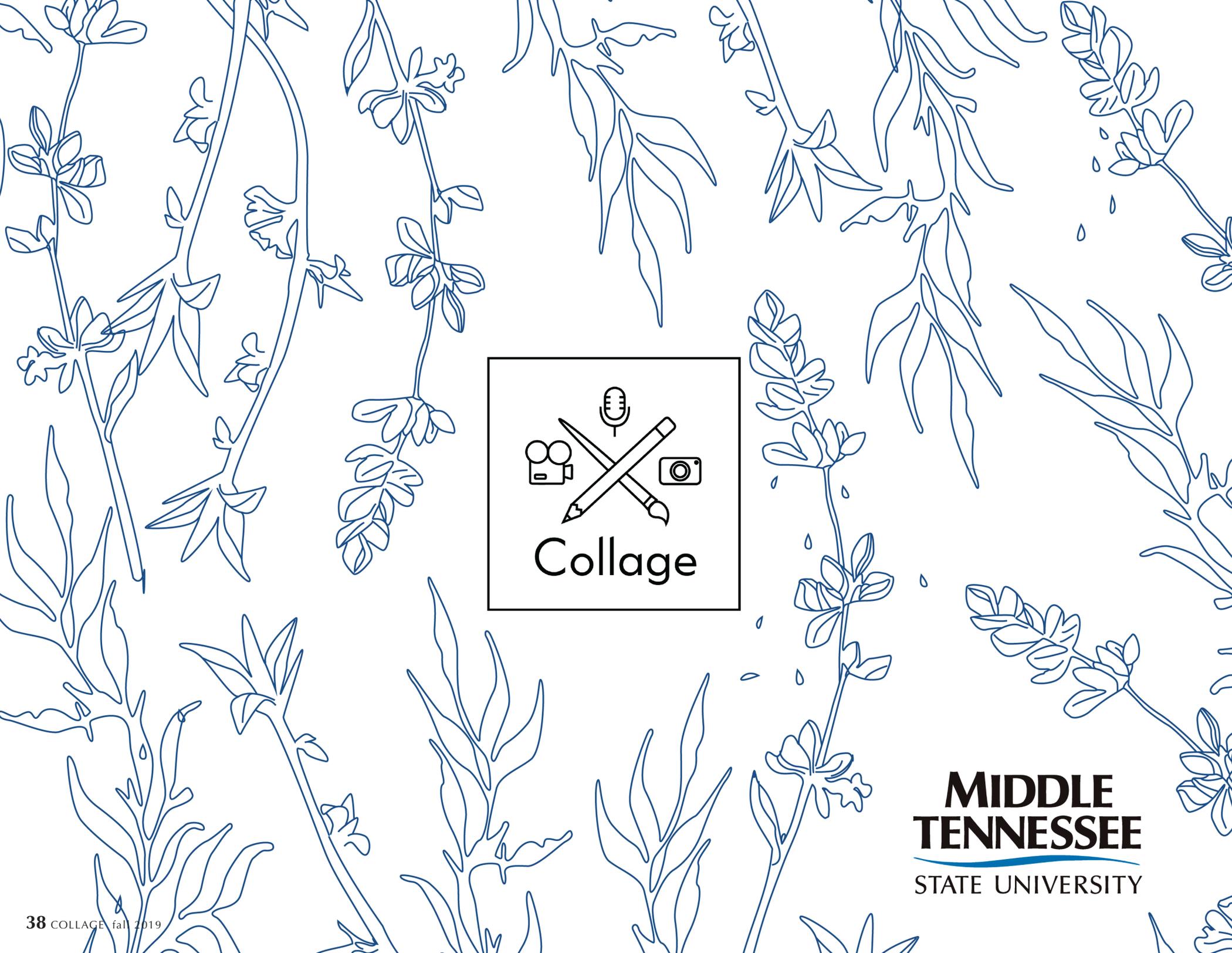
You hope that she will look back
Another look at her knowing eyes
To give you closure
One last glance at her mesmerizing gaze
But she is gone
And it is for the best.

If she returns, it will be her own decision
And it will be only for a time
But she has surviving to do
Your help would've only been a hindrance
She is free.

Her tenderness is a strength in her hard world
And a blessing in yours
She is not and never was yours to hold.

She is hers
And will continue to be.





**MIDDLE
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STATE UNIVERSITY