



COLLAGE

A Journal of creative expression

Spring 2024, Issue 39
Cover Art by Sofie Clark

Letter From the Editor

"Take on the world with your creative expression." - Kera Reynolds

Dear Readers, Staff, and Fans of **Collage**,

I remember living at home during my freshmen year and taking online courses due to the pandemic. It was difficult to feel a sense of belonging on campus because I was not involved with campus life and did not know many people who were going to MTSU. However, I remember encountering **Collage** due to my love for literacy and art. My honors advisor suggested looking into it after I told her I have a passion for creating digital art and writing poems and want to join an organization that pushes for this creativity. I spent hours looking at the archives of the different issues and being so fascinated with how talented everyone was. I ended up submitting a few pieces of art as well as poems. Unfortunately, my work was rejected in my first semester of submission. However, I still decided to join the staff during the spring semester of my sophomore year because I wanted to be part of the creation of this beautiful magazine.

When I first joined **Collage** in the Spring of 2022 as the poetry editor, I instantly felt like I belonged. I felt like I had a place where I could share my passion and enthusiasm for creativity. Everyone on the staff has been incredibly kind and supportive, not just of my interests in poetry and art but of all my endeavors throughout my undergraduate journey. I also enjoy staying up late at Starbucks grading works, meeting some lifelong friends, creating and putting together the yard signs for the campus, and debating over colons vs em dashes. So many fun memories! **Collage** will always have a special place in my heart, and I am very grateful for my experience at **Collage**.

I have now officially been part of **Collage** for five semesters. And it has been a true honor to step up and serve as the Editor-in-Chief this semester. We did encounter a few minor challenges such as having a smaller staff than usual and a week-long snow break that made us start our semester of **Collage** late. But we were able to pull through. I truly cannot express how grateful I am for all the incredible people I have worked with over the past five years of **Collage**. And I cannot begin to thank everyone who joined the staff this semester. I loved getting to know you all and all the incredible things you do to make this campus such an incredible place to be! I just know you are all going to change the world one day!

Also, I cannot thank enough those members of **Collage** who continued to encourage me to submit my work after getting rejected. I ended up having a couple of poems and art pieces published in **Collage** throughout my experience. To everyone who has ever submitted, regardless of whether you were published or not, I am thoroughly impressed with everyone's submissions. If you did not make it, please keep submitting work! Rejection can be hard. Trust me, been there! Your creativity is a gift! Please, use this gift to make a difference! Take on the world with your creative expression.

To the staff, alumni, faculty members, and longtime fans of **Collage**, I cannot thank you enough for all the support you have given us over the years! To all my seniors graduating soon, congratulations! I cannot wait to see where life takes you! To all members of **Collage** this semester, I cannot thank you all enough for the hard work, dedication, and fun we have had on the staff together this semester! Robin, I cannot thank you enough for being such an incredible advisor! Thank you for always keeping us stocked up on snacks, checking in on us, encouraging all of us to keep being the best, and helping all of us grow as leaders!

I wish you all the best of luck next semester! This is Kera signing off!

Warm Regards,
Kera Reynolds
@keralouise01

Kera Reynolds
Editor-In-Chief
Brynlee Wolfe
Associate Editor
Hannah Antrican
Literature Editor
Angelina
Bofenkamp
Assistant Literature Editor
Lena Eccles
Visual Editor
Breanna Cornell
Assistant Visual Editor
Erika Barbosa
Lead Designer
Amarii Stratton
Assistant Designer
Sarah Whitley
Kaleia Branch
Literature Reviewers
Tyler Fitts
Visual Reviewer
Hannah Antrican
PR/Social Media Mgr.

Robin E. Lee
Advisor

Table of Contents

! denotes Creative Expression Award Winner

ART

4

No Home - Sara Leuthen
Untitled - Maili Davis
Gentle Hands - Sara Leuthen
Untitled - Maili Davis

5

A Thousand Wishes - Rachel Booher !
True Self - Patrick Egeruoh

6

Gone to Count Sheep - McKenzie Anderson

8

New and Old - Chloe Hunt
Grim Lynn Lines - Lynn Solomon

9

Grimm Lynn Lines - Lynn Solomon
Grimm Lynn Lines - Lynn Solomon
A Church in the Distance - Isaac Robichau

10

De La Soul - Isaac Robichau
DJO Illustration - Jillian DeGrie

11

The Crows Have Eyes III:
The Crowning Illustration - Jillian DeGrie

12

Grim Lynn Lines - Lynn Solomon
No Title - Maili Davis
Black Poverty - Zaynab Alnassari

PHOTOGRAPHY

5

This Mortal Beauty - Darwin Alberto
No Title - Sofie Clark

6

Lights of the Night - Zoe Noelle Vecchio
Dust - Becky Carter

8

Friends - Zoe Noelle Vecchio

10

Shattered Reflection - Sofie Clark !

PROSE

4

Heavy Hearted Strangers - Kia Downen

8

Sidelined - Abigail Wells !

11

The Fall of the Oblique Blade - Angela Benninghoff

12

Grandpa's Eyes - Kaleia Branch

AUDIO

6

Metropolitan Day Trip - Landon Bowling !

POETRY

4

Close Enough - Sydney Robertson
When the Nurse Doesn't Care For You - Sydney Robertson
Bury Us Shallow We'll Be Back - Brynlee Wolfe
Wild Currants - Emiliya Mailyan

5

I Never Asked Anyone to Feed (Love) Me - Brynlee Wolfe
Security - Rachel Booher !

6

Bluegrass Blood - Sydney Robertson

8

Childhood of Summers - Sydney Robertson

9

It's Not About the Mug - Brynlee Wolfe
Trickster - Catelyn Wood
Iscairiot - Colene Belmont

10

The Creek, or Water - Elijah Crouch
Short - Rachel Booher
22 per day - Joshua Swartz

12

1414 N. Rutherford Blvd. - Abigail Wells !
The Cure for Nervousness is FiveDollars at Target - Brynlee Wolfe

We want to get back to our lives but we don't.

For once nothing is expected of us. Except
you're begging me to figure out a way to get to you.
Wanting to reconnect with our childhoods through
snow angels and snowballs.

Yours forced you to grow up too fast.
Mine was constantly overshadowed by eternal damnation.
So we end up trekking through the snow,
drawing hearts and stars and ignoring our runny noses,
talk of childhoods on the cold bench in the dark.
My roommate calls us crazy.

But right now we're snowed in
and the world doesn't care what we do under
the blankets keeping us warm in this
flashbang Tennessee winter.
I know we'll last like the evergreens we'll see one day,
in all that traveling we talk about. Sometimes
my head gets really, really loud,
but the voices telling me we can't last forever
submit to the snow's silencing presence.

Untitled

Maili Davis



When the Nurse Doesn't Care for You

Poetry
Sydney Robertson

My mother saved a life tonight. Red, red blood on her light blue scrubs, ribs cracking under the heels of her palms, chaos erupting in the 300 square foot room were nurses wrestle a stranger's spirit back to earth.

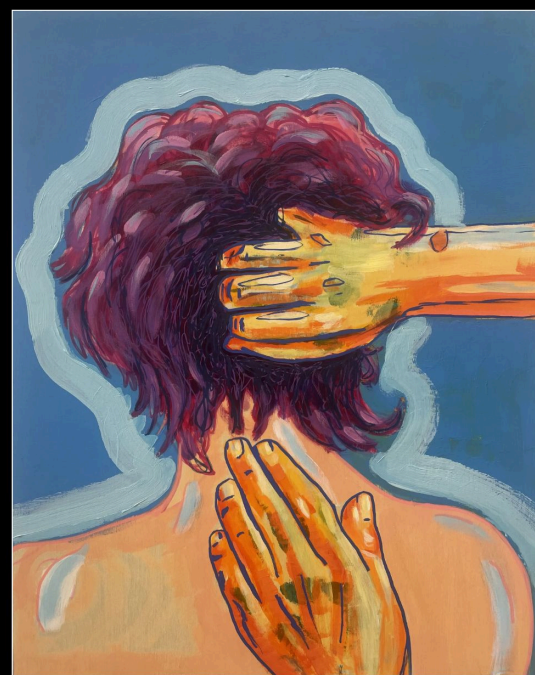
By the time she gets home, dawn sunlight peeking through the blinds, all her compassion has gone into her patients, and all she has for her daughter is leftovers of the humanity she lost faith in.

She's not a bad mother. She taught me first aid; how to take care of the people around me; how to stay calm and take charge under pressure; but never how to love myself. Never how to heal emotional wounds. Never how to recharge from all the giving of myself I'd do.

I come home needing an IV; she doesn't listen when I ask for morphine. The alarm doesn't go off when I code in the middle of the night, bleeding blood she pays no mind to.

She treats my surface injuries, but not the internal bleeding. Her steady, calloused hands wipe away my tears, but when I stop crying she thinks I'm perfectly fine.

So she goes back to work and pours herself into her patients while her daughter sits at home cauterizing her own wounds.



Gentle Hands

Sara Leuthen
@smashing_sarahh

Room 4012—I enter with cautious steps,

careful not to wake my loved one lying limply on her bed.

Breathing, but barely, each breath a painful gasp only half filling her lungs' desire.

I take a clammy, wrinkled hand, holding it gently, firmly, never wanting to release it.

Suddenly, time froze.

The

heart

monitor

stalls

and sounds of rushed fury were heard amidst the buzz of fluorescent lights.

Doctors yelled at fretful nurses, ordering utensils and equipment to be brought, yet I,

still holding that chilled hand, I knew I was only in their way.

But what did it matter? I knew I had been too late, and so had they.

Her skin paled, her glazing eyes opened one last time and she smiled...a dead smile.

The time announced,

people slowly trickled from the room,

leaving silence and sorrow,

but not mine.

I was not sad.

I walked from that room

with new joy and determination,

tears stinging my dry eyes,

the salty taste sweet on my lips.

Please wait for me there, inside his golden gates,

and I will live as you had never lived before.

My steps echo

down this forlorn hall,

and I hear a cry,

struggling,

grasping

for life

as my

trembling lips

and

heartbeats

synchronize.

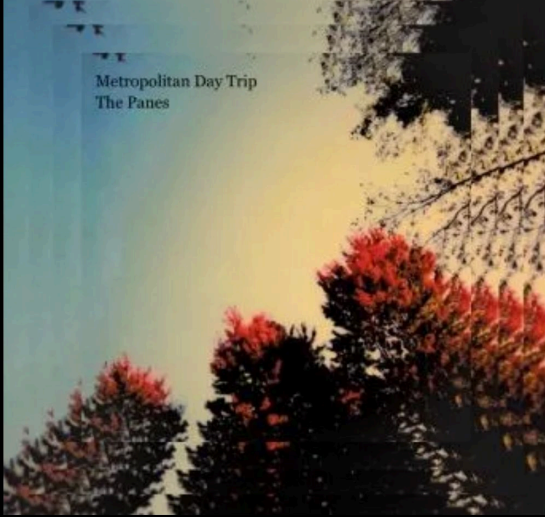


This Mortal Beauty

Digital Photography
Darwin Alberto

Metropolitan Day Trip

Landon Bowling
AUDIO WINNER
@panes_the



dust

Digital Photography
Becky Carter
@yeehawbandit
<https://rjc4y5.wixsite.com/beckycarter>

Bluegrass Blood

Poetry
Sydney Robertson

Acclimated to air conditioning and pop music,
steeped in academia and big city dreams;
proponent of public transportation and
all kinds of cuisines.

Until wrinkled, wisened fingertips
delicately pluck the strings of a banjo.
And I'm on the front porch swing,
listening to the stories of those who have lived.
I've got a shotgun on my shoulder:
the trouble guns bring to cities
doesn't matter so much out here.

A man silent and smileless
tickles the strings of the upright bass.
No one cares that he doesn't have much to say

The bow of the fiddle rips itself to pieces,
broken strings tying around hearts and tugging.
Placing me amongst some of America's oldest mountains,
looking out at that blue smokiness,
kudzu crawling across the landscape.
There's dirt under my fingernails,
and my clothes smell of campfire smoke.

When I worry my roots have been chopped off,
the music reminds me how deep they really go,
back to sweet tea summers and
creek water in my hair
crawdads in the bucket
and playing cards on the shore.

My heart pumps Tennessee bluegrass.

The Bones of a Good Story

By Angelina Bofenkamp

Everybody who writes at some point wishes they wrote like someone else. I remember staring enviously at J.R.R. Tolkien's beautiful sentences and wondering why I couldn't describe things that way, or I would wonder why my characters weren't as vibrant as Anne Rice's. We want to write like these people because maybe we would also have great books and stories if we wrote stories like them. An interview in 2024 with the playwright and professor at MTSU, Claudia Barnett, tells us something different. She tells us how the story reflects who we are, not who we want to be.

A good story begins with an idea, but where does this idea come from? It comes from passion and curiosity about something. Sometimes, we worry that our topic will not be interesting or good enough. In the end, though, that doesn't matter. An authors' passion for a topic bleeds through the words and into the heart of the reader, no matter the topic. What matters is how to tell that story. I was curious why Barnett chose playwriting rather than a different writing style. When asked, she explained to me how "I would say my brain thinks in plays... the way that I write is that my characters speak and do things... I don't really consider their interiority like you would in fiction. I don't think in words." I had never thought about it that way, but it makes sense: how we think is how we write. Barnett doesn't think about descriptions or the thought process behind actions; instead, she sees their actions in her head and transfers that onto paper. It's like she sees the play before it's a play.

Every person has a unique way of writing and viewing the world, and this uniqueness is your strength as a writer. Trying to change that does nothing but hamper your ability to tell a story. By trying to sound like someone else and adding descriptions that

When we've been hit with inspiration we have to write the story our way. Not someone else's way.

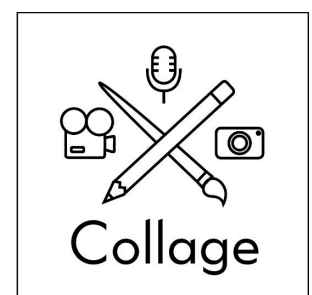
don't resonate with you, you're only making the writing process harder than it already is. See the story and write how you see it. Don't force things into the story that don't belong. Embrace your unique perspective and let it reflect through your storytelling.

We would all love for writing to be easy, where we write words on a page and look at an extraordinary story that will be on the New York Times Bestseller list. That is, unfortunately, not how that works. Writing takes research. Sometimes, you have an idea but don't know a lot about the topic. Or, you could have the opposite problem; you know a lot about a topic but are unsure what to include. This is one of Barnett's many challenges for her new series of short plays about historical women who are scientists. Just like in a short story, you can't do a whole life in a short play. Barnett is faced with the challenge of which moment in a person's life she wants to show. When asked about this process, she said: "I really didn't want them to be the ten most important minutes in her life because I figured those would be the famous minutes." I couldn't help but agree with her. Why should anyone talk about the famous parts of someone's life, the parts that everyone already knows? Besides, most of those snippets have been exaggerated anyway; we don't know anymore what's true or not, and it doesn't give us an idea of who the person was. The point is, we have to know the topic like we know ourselves or even better; otherwise, it doesn't feel like a story, does it? As Barnett so eloquently puts it: "To be able to get inside of somebody else's head or mind, or body even,

and figure that person out, because we, especially now, live in a society where people are just so much into their own mindsets. Playwriting lets you be the opposite. So I'd hate to think it's just write what you know." What we know, in the grand scheme of things, is not a lot. So we should be exploring the topics and people who interest us so we can tell our story better. Yet, no matter how much we write about other people, our personalities will still be reflected in our stories.

One of the hardest things to do is to create unique characters. "They need to be interesting, and they need to be different. I don't want them to be generic. I want them to have their own way of speaking and their own way of thinking and their own things that they would do." That is, as I pointed out, what everyone wants. They want to be unique and different, but how do we do that in a world with millions of books filled with different characters? How could we possibly make them different? Part of how writers do it is by infusing their characters with either their personalities or the personalities of those around them, giving them the character traits and little mannerisms of friends and families. By doing this, the author creates new and unique human characters for anyone who doesn't know them.

A story is many things, but what it is not is someone else's story. When we've been inspired, we have to write that story our way. Every story has a piece of the author that they give to their audience, which makes the story so good. Don't be afraid to be who you are, and don't be afraid to put yourself into the story because that's half the fun. It's liberating and exhilarating to infuse your story with your own unique experiences.



breaths. I wanted her to be alive.

It's funny how things happen out of order.

When we needed the money for surgery, for medical bills, for intensive care, for food, it was like a dry well in the hottest season of summer: no one in town has any to spare, and friends and family didn't seem to have the time or resources to come help out.

But here, I sit at home, staring at my hands, remembering how she fit so perfectly in them, while the table in our foyer is littered with sympathy cards, offering money and condolences like a cheap whore whispers she can love you for a night. But these cards and currencies are feeble and transparent attempts to whitewash their guilt.

Even now, I leave them undisturbed. I open them when my sister brings in the mail and then abandon them.

What was I supposed to spend that money on?

She's gone now.

I was supposed to buy her little socks, dresses, diapers.

I was supposed to buy her candy when she said please at the grocery store, to buy her new shoes for church, lessons for sports or dance, or whatever it was that held her fancy.

I was supposed to buy her birthday cakes, and clothes to match her growth. I was supposed to hear how tall she's gotten, and how clever she acts.

I'm supposed to take her by the hand when she can walk, and teach her to check both sides and listen and look for cars and cyclists before she crosses the street.

Like an ongoing death rattle, each day I move, eat, sleep, but I do not pause to think.

If I do, she's all that I think about. She'll fill my mind so quickly, and every bit of love I invested will start burning me again from the inside out, like a vat of acid was toppled over amid my chest's inner workings.

A touch. My wife. I look at her, the woman I loved, who loved me, who loved her. We lost her equally. I know I am not the only one who grieves, but it feels like if I share in hers, I will crumble apart. I should be strong, but now I am as fragile as a 100-year-old man. My arms shake, my memory seems to resemble shambles.

She too is falling apart, I can see.

Like an old couple, dying together of dementia.

She seems like a stranger to me. I know she is my wife, and there is such throbbing guilt for not recognizing the broken woman before me as she who I wed 3 years ago. Still though, her touch is light, so as not to break me, so as not to shatter herself.

There is no more warmth in her presence than an empty bed.

Even so, I clasp her hand on my shoulder gently, and do not speak, for still, there is nothing to say.

We are both strangers now, I realize. Neither of us are the person we married. Neither of us ever will be again. But we share this grief. We have lived and loved and laughed together in our short marriage. We have cried and fought a little. And now we've died. We've died together, half our hearts each, with our little girl. For now, that is enough. To know that, it keeps us together. It keeps us just barely sane.

Childhood of Summers

Poetry

Sydney Robertson

Blaring chorus of cicadas in the leaves,
Bradford pear trees make me sneeze.
The dark green of my front door,
sliding on blankets across the floor.
Red and purple popsicles making fingers
sticky,
aggregate driveway making knees gritty.
Gourmet pies made of mud,
waterslide in the yard creating a flood.
No shoes on my feet,
mosquito bite on my cheek,
splashing along in the creek,
we run till we sleep.
Times inside on screens I forget,
but forever remembered are times on the
playset.
My grandmother started my love for the pool,
my parents showed me how not to be cruel.
I don't think about my childhood enough,
especially when times get particularly rough.
It was so easy and simple back then,
unlike now when I pick up my pen.



**Grim Lynn
Lines**

Mixed Media
Lynn Solomon

Sidelined

We are sitting and watching the trucks dump trash out into a big pile. He is kicking his legs—they're dangling off the edge of the bench. His shoes are so small, even my balled up fist can't fit inside

He does it again and again. Everything is so exciting. He asks me what letter comes after H, and I answer. Then he goes back to laughing and pointing and kicking and tugging on me. I am not a person, but rather, a



the mug is collected and brought home.
Another day, and the craft paper packaging is removed, the box thrown away, and the mug placed in the cabinet. You can't stand to look at it because every time you make a mistake, you think the only solution is to be put down like a sick dog.

So, it sits there, pushed inch by inch to the back of the shelf as the other glasses are grabbed, used, washed, and put back.

Only when a relative, nosy as ever, scours the cabinet for a coffee cup is it found; and grabbed and used.

And you can't stand to look at it, in its warped and distorted form, so you throw it in the dishwasher. It emerges with a chip in its glaze. You wait to be brought out to a field and shot like a lame horse.

It's Not About the Mug

Poetry
Brynlee Wolfe

Trickster

Poetry
Catelyn Woody

Wistful for a feeling

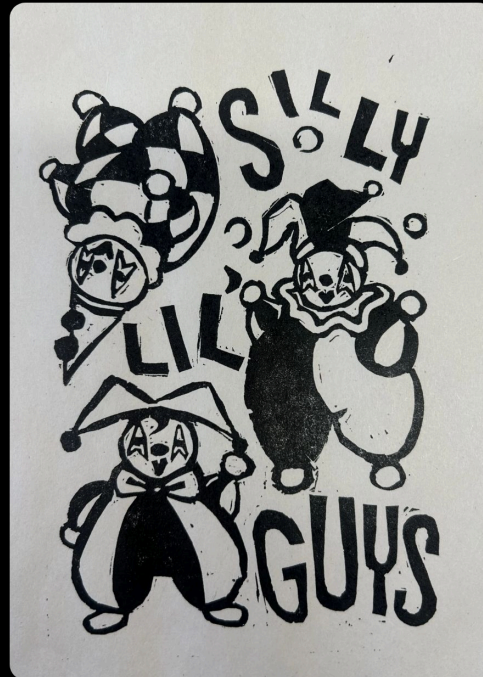
Did it ever really exist?
Or is it trapped in photos
only living in memories

I can only seem to catch it
by the tail or a limb
Back to running up and down
the neurons in my head

Come to the meadow with me
It's passed through here before
I saw it in a photo of us
The one we both adore

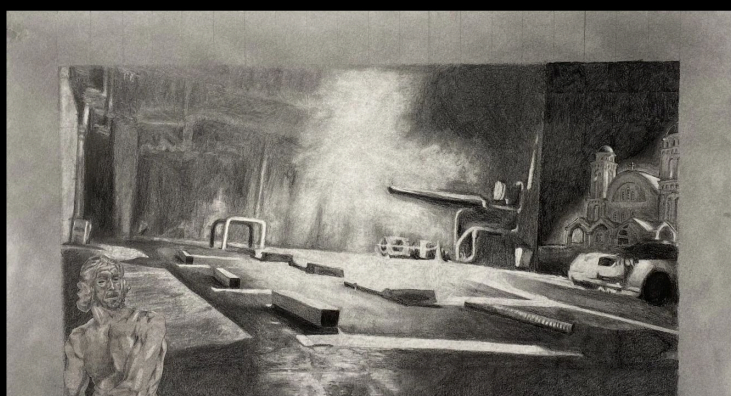
Take your camera with
We're going hunting in the park
Catch it but don't kill it
I don't wanna miss this part

Wait and wait and wait
although it never seems to come
But when we print the photos
I see it dancing by my thumb



Grim Lynn Lines

Lynn Solomon



Forget what I knew
about judas iscariot
god created me too
and I knew not what
I had to do
I sat
and begged for forgiveness
from you
and I realized
in your eyes
my grief and honesty

which it is bound
to follow

there are bounds
and no bounds

following
the course it slowly sets
the course
which was set beforehand

The Creek, or Water

Poetry

Elijah Crouch



De La Soul

Medium

Isaac Robichau
@isaacrobachau.art

Short

Poetry

Rachel Booher

rei_che_ru31

A corn chips and pencil shavings
nestle among the lead filtered light,
showered in dusky snow fluff and
creeping into panes of ice.
Gently, kindly, crinkle by crack
the aluminum tins clang and clack—
an echo of school bells and ring-a-ling clinks
as the chalkboard dust settles.
The calendar sighs...waiting...extending.
Glimmers of orange in a red-apple sunset
carve out the memories and messages left on my desk.
Hearts and arrows,
a 90s smile unwavering
despite the tiny dead pencils.
Whittling away at the last shadows of twilight,
my cellophane vision stretches and distorts.
I taste an afterglow of lead and rubber,
wipe the eraser bits from my mouth,
and remember—

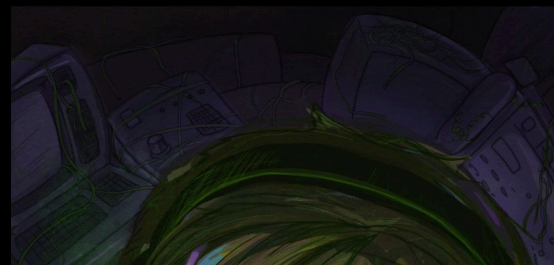
DJO Illustration

Digital Art

Jillian DeGrie

@jillian_degrie_illustration

<https://jilliandegrieillustration.square.site/portfolio>



Revolution had come at the fall of an oblique blade. Pacific explorations and revolutionary wars, a house of cards teetering in a foreshock—swaying and falling into another century of conquering emperors and greedy politicians, monarchs nibbling cake and peasants coughing red and black—fevered and infected, left untreated, swelling and blistering in scabbed bulbs of blood blisters, our opened sores festered and oozed. My husband had slouched on his throne, his boyish features folding into the fat beneath his chin, the Aegean and gold fur of his robe clutched in-between his fingers, the words crackling around him: King George III and the Colonists. I had padded my pouffe, my fingernails catching in the grey ringlets.

In our amputation, they set the world on fire: storming and seizing churches and fortresses, tearing down monarchical statues—the marble epitome of Louis's father in the square, his stone body in the pieces they used to pelt the palace. To stifle an outpacing population, taxes and overspending shifted to advisers and financial reforms. The millions gushing overseas turned to the people, the money straining against inflation, its radical support helpless to sink into the dirt and sprout in wheat and vegetables. Too much and too little, a whisper rising above the riots, the contentious taste of Robespierre, I heard the people salivating, their tongues flitting across chapped lips, almost gluttonous: a world without a monarchy so close, so beautifully close.

"Madame, the tumbriel has arrived."

The opened cart enveloped in a mob of red and black pushing against the pale stone of Conciergerie—I thought about Marie, her onyx locks cascading down her barren features, her dark eyes unmoving, the once delicate stretch of her neck severed. She had played with me in the hamlet. A lily pad in a lake, the sheen of emerald and white wrapping around the eastern bank in a crescent, the rustic cottages—a windmill, a barn, and a dairy in faded hues of white and brown—the smell of livestock and turnips overcoming the water—she taught my children and gathered guests, when the court pulled me from my retreat. An epilogue to Louis's slaughter, they mounted her tender features on a spike and paraded her around the city, hoisting her up and down—simply because of me. I watched from my window. In an epilogue to Louis's slaughter, another princess at the scaffold, another royal head had rolled.

Louis. I buried my sobs in the sack of the pillow, my fingers fisting into the thin fabric, muffling and suffocating me. The son of Louis XV and the daughter of Francis I, Holy Roman Emperor, in an arranged marriage of France and Austria—we were supposed to be a symbol of unity and tradition, but all we did was fight. Over affairs and money, extravagances and gossip, public appearances and children—oh gods, did we fight about the children—I blamed him, and he blamed me. He wanted a more active queen, someone who didn't indulge herself so extravagantly, and I wanted a more active husband, someone who would love me—who would wed and bed me, who would match me.

We didn't consummate the marriage for eight years. Much to the horror of the court.

He said it was because I didn't please him, that I was



The Crows Have Eyes III: The Crowning Illustration

Digital Art

Jillian DeGrie

@jillian_degrie_illustration

I thought about our final moment, the tightening in my chest with what could have been. I had straightened his collar, my fingers lingering on the exposed flesh of his neck longer than necessary—tingling and feeling, studying the gentle lines in the folds. The pad of my thumb came to the corner of his lips, touching the plush flesh, almost hesitantly. He didn't kiss my palm, as I breathed, unwilling to let the tears fall: there will not be a king as remembered as you.

He had seemed so surprised, when they led him away. I don't think he understood, truly believed they would kill him, no matter how bad things became, but I watched him leave.

Charles-Henri Sanson was his executioner. His son would be mine.

10: 22 A.M. I heard the fall of the oblique blade.

They called him 'Sire', urging him to bind his hands for an easier death. They said it caught his jaw, slicing in-between his lips, the blade cutting just above the tongue he had used on me, the fat of his neck unharmed. They said the people had rushed forward with handkerchiefs to catch his blood, the fountain pouring from his spine, and I wondered if they would do that for me. "I know." I tilted my eyes from the window, the morning sun a shadow against my spine, and nodded to my executioner, his white hair tucked in a navy tricorn.

"I must cut your hair, Madame." He stepped forward, silver sheers in his fist against his uniform, the blues and browns of the new armies. White and grey villus curling in tightly wound buns and braids beneath my powdered wig, the protruding tips catching and chafing between the wig and flesh, each turn of my head burning, almost blistering in scarlet spots—I reached a hand to the nape of my neck and ripped the wig, pulling and flattening until it completely detached. It was the same wig I had worn when Louis was led away, the tips beneath my padding fingers the final part of me he touched, his nervous palms trembling against my cheeks and neck pulling me into him. A heavy breath, the kind with tentacles gripping into your chest and threatening to suffocate you—sharp pain in the corners of my breasts, a swelling tightness and tension in my sternum—I tossed the

The sound of sheers opening and closing, the steady rhythm of cutting.

"It used to be a strawberry color, not quite red or blonde."

His voice caught, an oblique blade stuck in its smooth and swift motion. "Is what they said about you true?"

I folded my hands in my lap and watched my thinning ringlets fall like ash. "Do you think it is true, everything they have made me—a bitch, a deficit, and a child molester?"

"I don't believe you raped your son."

The sheers met the table, clacking in metal meeting wood, and a pale bonnet was pulled over my mangled remains, the choppy white tips poking from beneath the material. I threaded my chemise in-between my fingers, the fabric almost transparent, so pale and so plain it might as well have been the rolls of fat set in the curves of my corset, the pouch of childbearing still bouncing in the loose skin against my stomach, the flesh flopping and folding in layers like stretched dough.

I was going to stride through the iron gates and climb into the tumbriel, the clocking of the horse's hooves echoing against the stones, the cursing and spitting of the crowds, my name in the sting of their festering sores: Bitch and Widow Capet, stripped of my title in the stripping of the monarchy. The wood scratching and splintering, the still wet paint clinging in gooey blobs of scarlet between my toes, nudging deeper into the folds and crevices with each bare step onto the stage, the riotous crowd in a sea of screeching profanity and murder, nearly foaming—they would push against the beams until they groaned and lurched, and I would hope I would fall. The gathering storm would swallow the Parisian square, the near-final queen of France in a thousand-year-old monarchy, and the scent of rotten orange rimes would overcome the stench of decay, something sweet in something rotting. My wrists bound at the bottom of my spine and my head bowed in almost impassive surrender, my fingers threading the back of my chemise—I could feel my body leaning forward, pressing against the bench and positioning my head in the device's yoke, the wood scratching the chafing along the nape of my neck.

Louis. I would think I could smell his blood—no, I would surely smell his blood.

And I would wait expectantly and patiently for the fall of the oblique blade.

A harpy to the constitution, they had offered me a priest. I denied him.

Death had already swept through the kingdom. A predator preying upon the weak, he only hunted my children—my sweet Louis Joseph and Sophie, claiming each before their years ticked into double digits—and then my husband, and my friends. My blood was all that remained. I couldn't imagine Marie and Louis Charles surviving this either, and my chest ached, the kind that twisted into your lungs and your stomach nearly in palpitations like a heart attack. Death's coiled body pushing through skin and fat, his black scales catching in the folds of torn flesh in chunks of blood and body, his jaw splitting open and reaching between ribs and arteries to the beating apple—I wondered if the guillotine would feel like his familiar touch.

a better version of myself—

and I think about what would happen

if this building burnt to the ground.

if Dylan or Andre got caught

stoned on the clock.

if they stopped handing out free locos tacos coupons.

Out in the parking lot

I doomscroll,

throw my head back like a baby bird

inhaling crunchwrap supreme.

Each sip of baja blast a shot of electricity—

of liquid serotonin—

each fiesta potato a promise.

The polar bears are starving,

the Hoover Dam is dry, and Arizona is nothing

but sandstorms.

But 1414 N. Rutherford is still here—

and somehow — so am I.

I remember this address better than my own apartment's.

I write it on a slip of fabric, sew it into my jacket.



Untitled

Mali Davis

The Cure for Nervousness is Five Dollars at Target

Poetry

Brynlee Wolfe

She tells me to point to the hurt.

We both know the answer.

My fingertips dig and knead
into the soft skin of my tummy.

An exasperated sigh. A single tablet
is pressed to my palm, powdery and pink.
She's sick of hearing it, I'm sure.
I want to tell her that I'm sick of it, too—
that her damn antacids have never helped.

When I'm angry, though, I don't notice
the unease sitting in the pit of my stomach
or the way it twists the flesh into knots.
I only taste the chalk on my tongue.

In the cracked frame above the vintage television resides a torn picture, sewn back together with tape. The man's wide, veiny eyes stare in the camera and into my own, his expression stoic. He watches over the young, Black Panther-esque woman beside him. She now sits beside me, her determined face now sagging downwards from old age. Springy, short curls in place of a teased out Afro. He watches over the exuberant young girl in front of my grandmother, my auntie, now restricted to the copious meds that help her see the world as it really is. My grandmother and my aunt's faces both look off into the distance, my grandfather staring straight ahead. I don't feel his eyes on me as my grandmother recounts stories of her golden years; her cheerleading triumphs, her

Grandpa's Eyes

Prose

Kaleia Branch

@kaleianb

About Collage

Who, What, Where

Collage is a semi-annual 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,

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 mtsu.edu/collage/staff.php to complete a 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 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,
2022 and 2024

Silver Crown Awards:

2007, 2008, 2011, 2019,
2021 and 2022

Gold Crown Awards: 2012,
2013, and 2015

Production

Technology:

Foleon
Adobe Photoshop CC
Spotify

Typography:

Avenir LT
Anton
Old Standard TT
Oswald

Follow Us On Social Media

@mtsucollage

