

COLLAGE

A JOURNAL OF CREATIVE EXPRESSION

VOLUME
TEN

FALL
2009

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COLLAGE
A JOURNAL
of CREATIVE
EXPRESSION

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VOLUME
TEN

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LETTER FROM *the* EDITOR

For some, the words hope and change have become clichéd terms. They are plastered on billboards, used in commercials, and painted on t-shirts. But, there are times when the words authentically and accurately express a significant season in our lives. The collegiate years are one season incredibly influenced by the prospects of hope and change.

MTSU students were inspired by hope when we decided to make the leap from high school to college. Putting doubts and fears aside, we chose to embrace change, to use higher education as an opportunity to learn and grow. The *Collage* publication reflects the hope our students and alumni have that their creativity and hard-work will, at least, make others question preconceived ideas, and at most, change mindsets and behaviors in some positive way.

This semester's magazine also reflects changes in how *Collage* is created.

A revamped website and a new online submission system have made it much easier for students and alumni to submit their work. Those interested no longer have to rearrange their schedules in order to submit; they can simply go to mtsu.edu/~collage. With over 300 submissions this semester, hopes for this year's fall edition have been realized, and these technological changes have allowed *Collage* to reach more students than ever.

As I present this issue of *Collage*, I want to thank all of the editors, staff members, advisors, and submitters who decided to participate in the creation of this semester's magazine. I feel incredibly blessed to have viewed so many moving, thought-provoking pieces of work and honored to have led such a dedicated team.

Jasmine "Jaz" Gray

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COLORADO TRUCK

JENNA WINSTEAD



CREATIVE
EXPRESSION
AWARD WINNER

PLEASE THROW THE BALL JUST ONE MORE TIME

WANDA PRIEST

You are my source for nourishment
Of bowel, of heart, of mind
I'll lick your cheek and do that trick
Please throw the ball just one more time.
Then when you look at me
Our language melds like
Nothing comes between us,
And my ears perk, tail wags, mouth parts,
Smiling so you can see
Your words have my affections.
Yes, I notice you're a little blue, and yes,
I am a little, too
And please throw the ball just one more time.
We are here together,

Sidekicks, pals, protectors, playmates.
For a decade I won't leave you,
Yet, there may be no tomorrow.
And I love to be here with you,
Don't you see in my expression
I'm your faithful spoiled companion.
Won't you scratch a little lower,
And please throw the ball just one more time.
The routine is so familiar
That I'll meet you in the bedroom
When I hear the lock go click
And I am waiting at your pillow
As you slip those tasty shoes off
Then you raise the smelly cover
Where you didn't see me pee
In the designs of purple flowers.
As I inch toward your backside
Where I curl to lick my own

Before you start that insane snoring,
Coughing, talking with your eyes closed
Just to let me know you're with me,
In between the peaceful dream
Of you throwing the ball just one more time.
And soon I'll be awakened
To the sound of tinkling kibble
As I race around the corner,
Running faster than I should have,
Hearing the old familiar whistle
As you open up the back door
So I can make a doody. Now
Knowing that I've gone
A little further than I should have
'Cause you're yelling, screaming, big-eyed as
I am getting flattened beneath the wheel
Of a passing shiny red truck.

LAST RESPECTS

JACK W. BUTLER

No thanks. I don't believe I could eat more.
The ham hors d'oeuvres were just heaven. And the
Cheese snacks melt like butter on your pallet.
I know it is a shame. I heard the boy
Died right there on the scene. The truck came out
Of the quarry fully loaded with rock.
It was not the boy's fault; the brakes went out.
Can you believe the boy's mother hasn't
Spoken since the police gave her the news?
Yes please, I would love to have more coffee.
Five cubes if you don't mind. It seems I have

A mean sweet tooth, with half and half if you
Have some. Oh yes, I heard someone saying
That just last month their daughter overdosed.
Parents should not have to bury children.
It just doesn't seem right. I blame the world
That we live in today, you know, all the
Problems we face. Life was so much simpler
In the old days. I remember when we...
What's that? Oh yes, it seems that most of the
Crème deserts have already been eaten.
I'm afraid there isn't too much left now.
No, I didn't make the ceremony.
Didn't the Priest or Rabbi say something?
Oh look. The caterer has brought more food.

I know I shouldn't, but I don't want to
Appear like I am being rude, you know?
I heard even that wild cousin came down
From the city. Someone called her Lucky.
Where? Oh yes, I think that is the father.
It seems like it could be. I did see him
Crying a while ago. Did you attend
Classes with the deceased? You seem about
His age and you wear that dress very well.
If I could have your phone number I might
Help you with your grief and all, if you like.
Who me? No, I didn't know them per se,
I just stopped to pay my last respects.



GASP

JESS CAVENDER

THE TOOLS MY FATHER LEFT ME *(nonfiction)*

JOSEPH M. QUARLES

When I was a young boy, I was fascinated by my father's tool shop. I loved the smell of sawdust, the shriek of the saws and dull reports of the tools in action. I was entranced by the glimmering of the shop lights on the toolboxes and equipment and the tanned and worn countenance of my father peering intently at a project as he carefully fitted the pieces together.

Oftentimes the days in his shop would pass quickly, in an almost idyllic fashion, like a peaceful dream, and in the evenings, as the sun would set, we would retire to the house for a drink. We would then meander out onto the porch of his big log cabin where we would sit in rocking chairs we had made in the shop years before and drink iced tea with lemon, watching the sun set with faces flushed by the heat of the day and sawdust in the folds of our clothes. I can still remember the smell of our sweat, the cloying scent of the mown grass, and the clink of the ice cubes in the glasses as we drank from them. He would then talk with me, not the orderly instruction of the shop, but tales from his youth, stories about places he had been and the strange things he had seen.

Those stories often turned into life lessons he had learned the hard way. He warned about crime, how some people could not be trusted, and about many other practical and sundry things from his long, difficult life. One evening while looking at him as the sun set, turning the landscape from a glowing deep russet to the saturated grays of the gloaming of the evening, I noticed his glasses reflecting the light of the fleeing sun for a moment, then darkening as though

a veil had passed across eyes and face. I had a chill thinking that someday he would be gone, and then one day, he was. All I had left of the giant man in my life, the man I thought would last forever, were some of the tools in the shop and the life tools he had left me.

I used the tools to fix cars and make tables and shelves; I used the life tools in attempts to fix my unraveling life. Unfortunately, although my father had faced considerable adversity in his youth, the tools he left me for those moments were nowhere near adequate for the modern problems I had begun to face. One in particular nearly destroyed me.

The women in my life were out of their minds and drove me to distraction and, often times, to the brink of emotional and financial ruin. My friends used to joke that I had a magnet in my head that attracted psychosis. In fact, one time it did and her name was Monique. She was the best and the worst, and in many ways, like a horrid automobile accident that seemed to go on for years. She was a beautiful young woman with raven tresses and deep green eyes, and I discovered much later, a psychotic depressive. We met, fell in love quickly, and moved in together in a hormonal and passionate rush. I loved her deeply and finally opened myself up completely, thinking I had found my soul mate. I thought I would finally have the dream I had chased after fruitlessly: to have a home, a partner and maybe someday more children. I had been married years before and it had gone down in flames, leaving me emotionally broken, estranged from my son, and incredibly lonely. At first we were okay, very much like honeymooners, but then the fights started: the arguing, jealousy, and eventually horrific battles of will and

rapidly growing frustration with each other. I began to get depressed; the tools my father left for this job were simply not enough. I found a new and effective tool—alcohol. We drank ourselves into stupors and hated each other as much as we loved each other.

We were at the point of completely breaking when I got a bill in the mail, that seemingly innocuous piece of paper, an emotional bomb with guilt as shrapnel ready to explode in my mind. I was concerned about our mounting bills and Monique only had a part time job. She very rarely contributed anything anymore and drank even more than I did. I scanned the bill and noticed a huge charge, \$690.00 for a medical procedure in Nashville. I looked again. I did not understand for a moment. There was another charge that same day, a few hours later, at a liquor store. I walked in puzzled and asked her,

“Mo, what the hell is this on the credit card?”

“Huh,” she answered, flipping through the channels, surfing with the remote.

I stared intently at her pallid oval face; I seemed to notice for the first time that her once beautiful hair was now ropery and dirty from not washing. I then noticed her grungy, baggy sweatshirt and how dirty her jeans were. She took a drink from a large plastic cup with box wine and ginger ale mixed within it. We both had really let ourselves go, and our inner issues were now becoming manifest in our looks and demeanor.

I said, “What the hell is this?! This damn charge for six hundred bucks?”

“I dunno.”

“You don’t know? Waddaya mean you don’t know?! How the HELL COULD YOU NOT KNOW?!!!” YOU TOOK MY CARD!!!”

She had become used to my temper tantrums about money, but this time I felt something really bad was about to happen. Her face was blank, but her eyes had shifted a bit; she was looking in a sidelong glance at me. Her face scrunched up for a moment, she burped and said,

“Oh yea, I found out I was preggers, an’ I got a abortion.”

I thought I was going to pass out right where I stood. The impact of the moment, the sudden hot rush of blood to my face, and the incredible sting of that statement was like a falling cinder block on my face. If my soul was made of wood, it would have split down the middle to be thrown into the sawdust bucket of my sorry, miserable excuse of a life’s shop. I had no tools for this repair. I had no answer to what she had just said. I stood in a dumbfounded stupor, unable to respond. The voice of my father did not even come to me; all I got was static on the brain.

She sat there, as though waiting for me to say something, anything, and my answer was a streak of tears. She called me gutless and told me to get out of her face saying that if I had been a real man she would have kept it. I think that if it were not for the incredible conditioning of my father to protect women and children, I would have beaten her into a bloody pulp because I could not drink myself to death fast enough to absolve the sudden, monstrous guilt I was feeling. I was not even a man, not even a person, and my child, the one thing I was supposed to protect and nourish, was a bloody splat in a dumpster somewhere.

I wanted to run and scream in circles, to pull out my hair, to break things, to destroy my shop, to take a hammer to my teeth, to get the horrid image of her

legs spread and the suction tube out of my mind. Did she not feel anything? How could she do this? How? How? Did my opinion not matter? Was I that bad? Was I that horrible of a person that I deserved this punishment?

The screaming fight we had after that was monumental. I said things to her that to this day I am ashamed of, and my father would have been deeply disappointed in me. When I left, she was sobbing on the couch, in a ball with the reek of wine on her once alabaster skin and breath, her hair in sweaty streaks, her clothes sodden and clinging to her still swollen breasts. I think she really did feel bad. I think she did it in a fit and justified it. She had the right; it was her body, although I wondered about my rights too. When I looked back at her, in the glow of the flickering television, I felt nothing but ashes and bitter disappointment in myself. I knew that this was not going to work. I had failed and the relationship was destroyed. The wood had burned up completely and the tools had melted. My father’s shop had burned down in my mind.

I made a new shop. I forged it of iron and brick; it built up around my heart, soul, and mind. I welded together new tools, large and modern, calibrated to keep me sane and functioning. I cut my heart out and replaced it with metal. I am in contact with my son now, although I am alone in many other ways with nothing, but the comfort of academics to keep me company. Now I tell my son stories about my early youth, my rash decisions, bad luck, and brushes with disaster. He listens in rapt attention, thinking these stories are interesting and cool. I try to give him advice, and he is a good boy, but I worry. I would save him the pain I went through—I would throw myself in front of life for him if I could—and yet all I have to give him are the tools in my shop and the ones on life I am brave enough to share with him. ●



THEM BOOTS *(oil on wood panel)*
JOSEPH BRISCO



**FRUIT MARKET,
BARCELONA**
DANIEL HENRY

THE LOBSTER BOIL

MARGARET HOFFMAN

Nowhere can one witness a dissociative mob
better
than at a lobster boil.

I am sitting in the old dock house,
listening to the click-
hum
of the air conditioner
when I hear the footsteps heaving in.
Joe,
dragging the chattering shells of the day's
15 prisoners of war,
garbed in their steel moccasins.

And he's hungry.
No joke.

He flips the gas up,
fills the pots,
and twirls the salt in

to make some little wannabe ocean
in the oblong baby's bath.
Gives the little poltergeist protozoa
a placebo effect, he says.
Makes Death seem a bit more like home.
An average baptism in murder.

He dips in the first
alive.
And I watch my hero go,
head first,
like a pirate to the plank,
for 13 whole minutes,
as the captain lustfully stares
at the fiery red sequencing up each shell.

You start with a simmer,
he says,
and slowly crank the heat up for the next hour.
This is supposed to let it die painlessly.
Or something like that.

I have never seen someone so calm about murder as Joe.

Finally,
the supporters arrive,
garbed in fumbly clothes,
yappy talk,
and serrated teeth.
And suddenly,
it's the crustacean Holocaust
with bibs and butter
and millions of ravenous grins,
all digging and dancing in 15 graveyards
shrouded with lettuce and lemon.

With lips basted in blood-butter guilt,
they smile as they leave their brushed
plates of citrus rinds, hollowed shells,
and empty caskets.
And I am there,
with a weeping faucet to clean,
as the bone collector
of a murder no one noticed.



LAVA LANTHE (encaustic wax and pigments
with Xerox transfer on masonite)
KRISTEN HUBBARD



RATTUS-RATTUS (mixed media)
DANIELLE WILBERT



NATURE'S VEINS
HOLLAND GLOVER

SEEN AND UNSEEN (fiction)

JONATHAN SILER

Once there was a wind. It was not a mischievous wind, but like all winds she blew unseen, uninvited, hardly welcomed, and lonely. Ever in search of a friendly air, she sped throughout the land and came upon a certain town. After gracefully slipping through the gate, she found herself in the midst of a grand market, full of cloths of all colors and gems that shimmered in the noonday sun. Voices were heard in every corner bartering, praising, shouting, demanding.

Here now, the wind thought, the air is welcoming, for no one is turned away in this place. Surely they will see me in my splendor and wonder at my mirth!

Twirling through the market, she gathered herself among valuable fabrics; she tried on the most colorful clothes and small, fine jewels, and she tossed them about in her joy. Always an honest wind, she laid down her most treasured wisps in payment for her goods. "A nuisance," stated a fat shopkeeper, attempting to pin down his wares with his arms. "Most unfortunate," muttered a jeweler as he quickly scoured the ground for his fallen items. One after another the breaths of curses flowed against the wind until the marketplace became too foul an air for the wind to endure.

The mirth is gone, and I cannot dwell here, the wind thought sorrowfully, I will go to another place where the air is sweet, that my mirth can be treasured.

Twisting about the streets of the city and sure to avoid every object that could blow away in her wake, she finally arrived at a large courtyard. The laughter and dance of a festival appeared all about her as the sweet taste of the air flowed against her dress of breezes. Children playfully

wove in and out between the legs of their parents; couples danced to and fro, arm in arm; young athletes raced about the square and older folks sat drinking and sharing childhood stories.

As musicians played fanciful rhythms upon their instruments, the wind gleefully used each musical note as a stepping stone to the middle of the courtyard. Unable to contain her joy at the sights and sounds, she let out a gust of mirth and flung herself among the dancers. She twirled with the girls and stomped with the men; she flowed along each stringed instrument, playing her favorite melodies; she whisked about the tables and cradled every word of the old men's stories. In a moment of exhaustion, she turned back to take in the joy of the festival.

Her gust of delight had violently blown down more than one child in surprise. Hats went missing and women held their dresses in modesty. Dancers had taken nasty falls as rebellious hair fluttered in their eyes. The musicians held on to their instruments tightly as strings broke and handles snapped. One older man had been shocked out of his chair in mid-story. "Wind stole the show," he cursed under his breath. Others agreed and hoped it would not happen twice.

The unwanted wind became sorrowful and let their breaths settle around her before she silently wove through the crowd and away from the city. *I will go to the countryside, she stated, where the air is fresh, and I may roll over the hills and be warmed by the sun, and there be of nuisance to no one.*

The town behind her and the country ahead, the wind flew amongst the clouds and pushed them into her favorite shapes. She rolled over each hill in laughter and hastily returned to the top only to fall once more. She petted the wild horse's mane and carried leaves off to new worlds. She

groomed the pastures free of thistles and delivered fallen seeds to their new home, yet as she tried to soar to the next grove, she felt the air grow foul once more.

Farmers from the countryside burst from their homes and gazed in distress at their farms. Windblown thistles choked their delicate crops; unwanted seeds had been planted beyond count; their cornstalks were blown over or torn apart; fences had been swiped aside, and horses and cattle roamed beyond their boundaries. As farmers attempted to repair their damaged livelihoods, they cursed the day the wind was created.

The wind turned away from the country, homeless, and wondered if anything in the world was as sad as she. Over hill and forest, mountain and pasture, the wind gazed upon the joy of the land, unwilling to share her mirth in fear of rejection. At last she came upon a cliff and set her gaze upon a golden kingdom that she had never before seen.

How beautiful it is! she thought to herself in wonder. The splendid kingdom stretched to the horizon, its outer walls glimmering yellow hues of a fresh daylight. Though the sun was rising beyond, the heavens seemed only a reflection of the oranges and reds that glowed from the city lights. Had any one of its structures been seen in another city, they would be deemed an architectural masterpiece. However, as all the structures stood together, the wind could not distinguish their splendor as more beautiful or lovelier than another; the minute she valued one, another stole her gaze. In a fit of joyous frustration she simply deemed them all as ‘unlike’ one another in their own special magnificence.

The wind nearly burst into joy at the sight, yet she remembered her previous misadventures and glanced about to see if anything would be too disturbed by her sudden joy. Surprisingly, she had not noticed that a young girl sat a small way off, gazing upon the same city and weeping softly.

Oh what a poor girl! thought the wind. *Here now, she*

is already weeping. What more can I do to grieve her? I will go and see what can be done.

Amidst her quiet sobs and sniffs the young girl felt a gentle breeze wipe the tears away from her cheeks. Small drafts of air brushed the hair from her eyes. As a stronger breeze flew overhead she heard the spring trees rustle about her softly in such various crunches and crackles that they seemed to her like syllables: *Girl, why do you stain my breeze with your cries? the leaves swayed into words.*

The girl jumped up with a start and glanced to the trees for the source of the sound. The wind could not tell, but it seemed to her that the girl’s teary eyes stared directly at her. Her eyes! How beautiful they glistened as the last tear fell from them. Their pale blue spheres seemed filled with an enchantment that the wind could only marvel upon. It was as if everything blue that she had ever seen first originated from those eyes. “Are you the wind?” the girl asked and the trees shivered at her words as if to savor her captivating voice.

The wind fell before the girl in a gust and spoke through the trees: *Do not be afraid. My limbs are the air and the breeze is my gown. My train is the gusts that flow among the trees. The wisps are my gems and the air that flows across your face, my curls. I have no home and I know not where I go. If you must give me a name, I am Alina. What is your name, little one?*

“I’m Neena,” said the girl softly, “and I’m weeping for my friend Cecil who can’t see that wonderful kingdom. Oh, it’s so beautiful, isn’t it?” Neena sighed in wonder. “Cecil has eyes, but he still can’t see the things I see. His eyes seem so dull. I don’t think he ever *really* uses them.” The wind still thought that Neena’s eyes pierced through her spirit.

Can you see me? the wind asked curiously.

“Well of course I can!” the girl replied as if insulted, “You are a fairy of winds! How could I not recognize you? The sound of your air makes me think of the

sweetness of songs and your hair the scent of fresh grass. When you touched my cheek it reminded me of my mother, and when I heard your voice I saw the leaves dance.”

Alina the Wind let forth a cry of delight and flowed about Neena in a whirlwind of laughter. *Little Neena, it is you who can know my mirth, for I am at home in your sight!* she cried. *And the trees, what do you think of them?* she asked eagerly.

“Well,” said the girl looking at the giant oak nearby. “I always see them as old guardians, filled with stories unable to be told.”

Or unwilling! the wind added, ushering a laugh from Neena. *And the stars?*

Neena’s eyes twinkled. “Diamonds glittering in a space of unknown treasure.”

“The wind fell before the girl in a gust and spoke through the trees...”

You are most treasured among mortals! the wind exclaimed. *For someone with such sight, I have the power to grant a request. Ask what you will, and I will see it done.*

Neena stood gazing upon the brilliant kingdom that still shone beyond the cliffs. The warm tones of red and yellow shone on her face like water reflecting sunlight. “I wish Cecil could see with the same enchantment,” she said at length.

Alas! The power of your eyes cannot be duplicated.

“I ask then that Cecil be granted my own eyes,” the girl said at length.

Alina the Wind was sorry for Neena, for she loved the

girl's eyes very much, yet she could not take back her offer. *Very well*, she spoke remorsefully, and twirling about Neena she whispered soft spells, entrancing the girl to close her magnificent eyes for the last time. To Neena, all became a painless but perpetual blackness.

Now blind, the girl clumsily felt her way to the spot where the wind had first noticed her. "This is our favorite spot," said Neena, not a bit worried at the loss of her sight, "soon he will come running to see me! I cannot wait to hear him speak about the wondrous things he sees!"

Surely he will be changed, Alina spoke assuredly.

Not long after, a small boy appeared darting around the corner. The wind welcomed him with delightful gusts that whisked through his hair. This was Cecil! She could see Neena's brilliant eyes within him, staring straight ahead. They shone milky blue, lively and yet unused. Soon he came to a halt just short of the blind girl.

"Sorry I'm late. Nasty wind we've got, Neena!" he said abruptly, straightening his jacket. "I wish it would go somewhere else!" The wind's delight vanished.

"Cecil" Neena jumped up. "Oh Cecil! Are you different? What do you see?"

Cecil stared at her strangely, "Am I different? What do you mean? And why are your eyes closed?"

"Nevermind!" she shouted and she pushed him towards the cliff edge where she knew the most wondrous kingdom stretched towards the horizon. "Tell me what you see! Do you see it?" Cecil looked beyond the cliff seeing only a great plain. "I see nothing" he sighed.



FAR TOO TRUSTING...

JOSEPH C. LAMPLEY (graphite pencil and India Ink)

Neena stopped her pushing and stood in shock. "You mean you still do not see it?" She begged him to look again and again. Each time, though squinting and straining, he admitted he could not see any city. She pointed towards the trees she knew stood tall. Cecil saw only wood that needed to be chopped for the fire. She pointed to the heavens she knew still shone with faint stars. Cecil saw a faint void, an emptiness upon which the world floated aimlessly. She found and held up one of her valuable stones she always kept nearby. He called it a rock. What she called the tears of the earth, he called dew. "Are you quite done?" he asked and took one more glance towards the invisible kingdom. "Neena, you are so earnest about this kingdom that I never feel homesick until I am with you." He looked back to Neena who was snuffling. "I long to have the eyes you have, but I came to call you to dinner, not to play pretend and wish fancies. And

what is wrong with your eyes anyway?"

Neena turned away. "I...I am just blinded by the sunrise!" she wailed and darted off into the forest. Alina the Wind, who had sorrowfully looked on, followed the girl into the trees, leaving a very troubled Cecil alone upon the cliffs. Alina found the poor girl deep within the woods, crouching beneath a great tree and sniffing uncontrollably. Small puffs of air twirled the girl's long curls gently.

"He still did not see anything," she mumbled softly. "What else could I do but give him my eyes?"

It is my fault! the wind replied in anguish. *It was never your eyes that held the enchantment. Now I am again homeless and you are sightless evermore! Wherever I offer my mirth, I bring only grief. I will banish myself to the farthest corner of the world.*

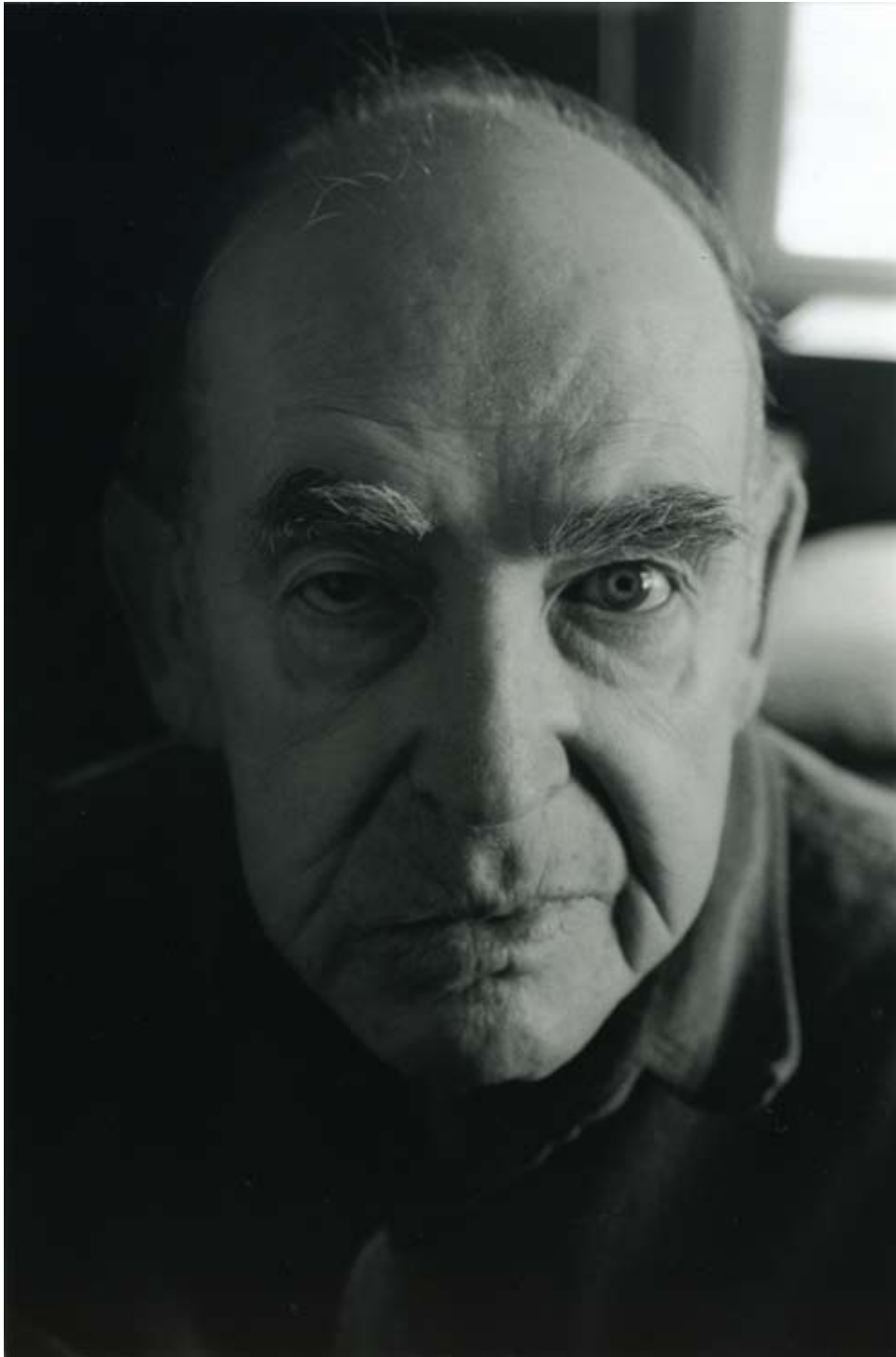
"Stay with me and do not leave!" the girl pleaded, "There's nothing for me here. All I want is to find a way to that wonderful kingdom, and without you I have no one to guide me."

You will not be able to see it, the wind replied sorrowfully.

Neena sniffed. "It wasn't just the sight of it that made me want to be there," she replied.

Then I will stay with you, the wind promised, *and grieve for both of us until we arrive.*

So Neena ever follows Alina the Wind about the cliffs, searching for a way to the brilliant kingdom. Some travelers have caught sight of the girl weeping about the cliff edge and speaking to her invisible companion, yet no one has ever spoken to them. They never stay still, for the wind has no home, and no tears can be found, for the girl has no eyes. ●



WILL THEY KNOW?

JOHN BUTWELL

Will they know I was a road warrior
Hauling cargo down the super slab
An owner-operator
In a shiny Kenworth cab
When they wheel me down the hallway in my chair?

Will they know I mothered hundreds
Of unwanted foster children
Just like Eve after the apple
Tried mothering the world
When they coax and wheedle with me
To try eating just a little?

Will they know I ran the sewage plant
For a town the size of London
And I kept the work hands hopping
When they see me in my old age
And they come to change my bedpan?

Will they? No.
Will they? No.
Will they? No.

PAPA

HEATHER MOULDER



SHOWER PORTRAIT (oil on canvas)
MARIE OLDHAM

SOMETHING IGNORANT (fiction)

ELIZABETH K. BURTON

There she was. Feet swaying in the air. Hair messily pinned up. Eyes fixed and intense. Reading someone else's philosophical writings, as usual. This was her daily escape—a voluntary withdrawal from this painful world in which she continually drifted but seldom participated. She abhorred the façade that was day-to-day human interaction. Rather, she preferred being alone with other people's raw, unconcealed thoughts. She liked the invasion, the exploration, the discovery, but what she liked most of all was the freedom to question without fear of persecution.

Engrossed in this world, she'd forgotten herself. When she heard the loud, screeching sound, it startled her momentarily. Without much effort, she slipped back into her world, never really allowing the shrill noise to fully register in her consciousness.

Alex ran noisily and clumsily to the bedroom door, knocked lightly and inquired, "Eli, did you hear all that commotion outside?" Once again, her thought processes had been jarred by the disruptions of the material world. She was beginning to believe it impossible to escape uninterrupted into her fabricated world. She decided it wasn't worth debating, not right this second, at least.

She remembered vaguely the sound she'd heard only moments before. "Yeah...um, I thought I heard something. Why? Is something the matter?"

"Someone's hurt...badly, I think." His brow furrowed with concern and confusion as he spoke the words. Eli's apathetic façade softened a bit in response to Alex's emotional state. She never liked to see him upset—no matter the cause. But, she also remembered his tendency to exaggerate situations, so she wasn't inclined to take his appearance too seriously.

Hesitantly, she replied, "Oh. Well, how do you know?" "There's a crowd of people right down the street at the end of the cul-de-sac. It's...getting bigger."

Perplexed by Eli's oddly indifferent line of questioning, Alex returned to the large window in the front room where he'd previously been watching the chaos unfold and intensify.

Eli followed reflexively.

Peering through the cracks in the closed blinds, she saw a shiny, red sedan parked on the edge of the pavement. The driver's side door of the car remained open—an intruder in the middle of the suburban street—where, in haste, someone had neglected to close it. From the look of things, an open door was the least of the driver's problems. Eli's eyes roamed back to the sidewalk now where the crowd of frantic people had gathered to either assess the situation or to grieve for what was still unknown to Eli. The crowd was one impossibly loud, throbbing, pulsing scream. It moved like a single entity—like a heartbeat. The screams were like a thousand air horns reverberating over and over in Eli's ears. They wouldn't subside. One scream was all it took to fuel the next. The space behind her eyes began to throb and ache. She attempted to locate the direct origin of the piercing cry, as if she could suppress the multitude by extinguishing the source.

In the midst of the crowd stooped a large black woman with her arms lifted toward the sky. Reaching. Reaching. The woman couldn't function in her hysterical state. She could only gaze questioningly into the piercing light of the midday sun—a light so piercing it rivaled her screams. The woman did not seem to find her answers in the sun and became even more distraught as this realization sank in. Eli thirsted to know more.

Rubbing her small hand across the woman's back, a young girl of about ten years crouched by the woman, also seeking answers, but knowing there were none to uncover. A man emerged from the little yellow house nearest the sidewalk, holding a cordless phone up to his ear. His lips moved so quickly, they appeared not to be moving at all. Once he hung up the phone, he began what would undoubtedly be the tedious and strenuous task of pulling the sorrowful woman up off

the concrete and away from the source of her pain. As he successfully lifted her, the crowd followed, finally revealing the reason for this theatrical display.

There, on the gray-brown sidewalk, lay the fragile body of a young boy no more than seven years old. He was beautiful. Strikingly so. His flowing blood somehow seemed to accentuate this beauty.

Alex gasped and his fingers slipped from the blinds. Eli was shocked. Paralyzed was more like it. Paralyzed with fear—and with fascination. Looking at the boy’s mangled form gave her chills and some other unidentifiable emotion. As she watched blood dripping gently from his forehead into his eyelashes, soaking his once clean, white t-shirt and creating a large crimson puddle beneath him, she knew that this is what it felt like. This *must* be what it felt like—to watch someone die. She was watching *life* slip from this boy’s body. With every moment, he became less than he was before. She could feel her life fading as well. Her knees were weakened by the stress of merely observing the scene. Her face flushed, and she had to grasp the windowsill for support. Nothing she’d ever read in philosophy books could adequately console her now. She wanted to run to the boy. To run screaming and out of breath until she reached him. To lie beside him as her breath regained its regularity, as his breath stopped altogether.

“Hey, Eli, are you okay?” Alex’s soft, familiar voice cut through the silence and momentarily derailed her from her downward spiral.

“Um, yeah. Sure.” was all she could manage to say. Although it wasn’t a very convincing answer, she didn’t care.

All she wanted to do was watch the child. Body limp. Blood pooling. Breath slowing.

She felt perverted—warped—as she began to analyze her desires. “Why would I *want* to witness this? Why would I want to *live* this?” Eli thought. She didn’t know, but she wasn’t alone.

As she looked away from Alex and back out the window toward the dying boy, something else caught her eye. She noticed two curious sets of eyes attached to two heads, attached to two bodies, firmly attached to the doorframe of a gray-blue house across the way. These *people*—Eli applied this word generously to the two creatures she observed—a middle-aged couple, leaning onto their porch and glaring at the tragedy as if it were a circus act. A magnificent showing! Entertainment at its best!

The sight of them disgusted Eli. How *dare* they find this *entertaining*? Had they no common decency? No *respect*?

Though that was not the extent of her disgust, she was more disgusted by the mirror image they created of her own fascination. She *was* them. No better than a common gawker. She reluctantly forced her eyes to close and her body to turn from the window. As she leaned her back against the glass, she saw the boy—just as before—under her eyelids. This was *even worse*. The image would not leave. She shook her head repeatedly, trying to expel the boy’s haunting figure from her all-too-clear memory.

Then she heard the sirens. *At last*—A shrill, deafening sound with a purpose behind it. Expecting to see the traditional red and white ambulance, she glanced toward the curb again. Surprise crossed her pale face as she saw two police officers arrive on motorcycles. What good would *they* be to the boy? That is to say, if anything *could* be done at this point. Thankfully, moments later, the ambulance arrived.

“Finally,” Eli thought, “Finally.”

She was grateful. That’s for sure. But what for? For the possibility of saving the boy’s life? Or for the preservation of her own life with the impending removal of his? She couldn’t be sure about this. “Probably a little of both,” she thought.

As the EMTs hurriedly emerged from the vehicle and grabbed the gurney from the back of the ambulance, Eli began to once again search the faces of the crowd. This time she saw a teenage boy slowly riding his bike

past the scene. Slowly. Slowly. Being sure not to miss a moment of the gruesome incident. He’d be sure to tell everyone at school the next day what he’d witnessed that evening. Then there was a woman—a jogger in a tight workout suit—slowing, pretending to catch her breath from the run and to rehydrate herself. As the careful jogger sipped her electrolyte-enriched drink, an older man in a black sports car cruised by the scene, rolled down his darkly-tinted window, peered out, shrugged his shoulders, and flicked his cigarette butt onto the pavement as he sped off. Gawkers. All Gawkers. Heartless villains.

Had they no *sympathy*? Eli certainly had. Her heart nearly exploded with sympathy for the young boy. For his family. For their loss. For *his* loss. His *loss of life*! *Life*, for Heaven’s sakes! *Life*! Didn’t anyone care the way she did?

Had they no *shame*? Eli had. She was so full of shame she wanted to go hide in her closet and never see another human face again. No more sunlight. No more rainclouds. No more pain. *Never again*, she promised. Besides, what was the use of other people, when she could never really *see* them? All she could see was the boy. He’d never go away. *That* she was sure of.

Wasn’t death supposed to change things? To change *people*? Eli thought so. But none of these people seemed changed by death. It had not affected them one bit.

Eli *was* changed. She couldn’t deny that. The dead boy was changed. He was so changed that he was *transported*. He wasn’t even *there* anymore.

Then, there were the people. Yes, the *people*. Eli realized that they were changed too. Not for themselves, but for Eli. They had changed for *her*. She now saw them for what they were. They were no longer people. Not a teenager or a jogger or a banker or a neighbor or a husband or a mother. *They were monsters*. But what was Eli? ●



UNTITLED
ERIN O'LEARY

SYMBOLIC JEANS *(nonfiction)*

CLARA RASMUSSEN

In the fifth grade, I remember sitting in class while the teacher was talking about America. Listening so carefully about the big cities and beautiful monuments, I could picture the people from so many countries living there, like brothers and sisters, and how your dreams could come true. Everything is possible if you really want to do it. At home, I remember telling my dad about America and how interesting and important it was to know about this country.

America occupied my mind. Every time the word was mentioned, I listened like it was a part of me, calling me.

Years went by and the only thing about freedom that I knew was in America. Suffocating under the weight of communism for many years, I never felt the freedom of speech or knew about people's rights. After the revolution, communism fell, and for the first time I thought that Romania might follow America's example and let the people be free and have rights. I was wrong. Many people lost their jobs, including my mother, so the young people started emigrating to different countries.

I did not understand why Romania could not be like America. Life became hard, and I did not want to stay home to watch while my parents and brothers suffered through, so I decided to immigrate to Greece.

I was twenty-two when someone told me how I could get out of the country and into Greece in five days. Not thinking twice, I agreed to leave Romania. My parents disagreed with my plans, but I did not let that stop me. Making up my mind not to live in poverty anymore, I decided to escape, and my family's tears could not prevent me from leaving. I loved them, but I wanted to make a difference, so I had to find out about this other country. I would work and send money home for food, medicine, and clothes. As hard as it was to leave my family and friends behind, I had a very good reason.

To get ready for the trip, I had to buy a new pair of jeans so the police in Greece would not notice me. If they found out that I was an illegal immigrant, they would send me back to Romania. The jeans I chose were the first expensive piece of clothing I had ever bought because I liked them. They were black, fit well, and flared out at the ankles. A friend gave me a bag so I could take the jeans, a clean top, underwear, a pair of extra shoes, toothpaste, and a hairbrush. Ready for the trip, I did not know where I was going, but I had a lot of faith and hope for a better life for my family and me.

My friend and I decided to go through the Soviet Union in order to get to Greece. Getting out of Romania, I left behind the smell of my home, the beautiful eyes of my little brother and the touch of my parents. I started to cry, looking back from the train that was getting ready to take me away. Holding my head in my hands, I could see my little brother's hand trying to reach me when I got on the train. I had to stay strong, but somehow the guilt was following me. Was this the right decision?

Two hours later, the train stopped quickly, and soldiers from the Soviet army made us get out of the train. I did not know what was going on. I put my bag on my shoulders, and I got off the train. The soldiers made us stay in a line, and I was scared.

They were searching through everyone's things, and in a couple of minutes, it would be my turn. With a cold look in their eyes, they asked us for our passports. They were so scary and big. My friend told me to put some money in the passport so he would let us go. Looking at them, one of the soldiers picked up my pair of jeans and smiled, saying something to his comrades. They fit me perfectly and were expensive. I thought, "Please don't take them away. They are my favorite."

I paid some money, and they told us to get back on the train. Leaving, I looked back, saw a couple of people left with the soldiers, and pondered their fate.

Arriving in Belgrade, the city looked rough from a civil war, and the buildings were crumbling. The trains traveled with their lights off so that the airplanes would not see and bomb them. It was scary, and I saw the people's faces looking sad, depressed, and tired of life.

We got off the train and started walking through the woods where we found more Romanian people, and together we started walking towards Greece. We got lost in the woods and slept on the ground with no food or water. I was afraid the army would find us, and I would be a failure in my family's eyes.

Cold and hungry, I remember praying to God for help. Everything I believed I could do started to fail me, and I felt my faith leaving. But, God was still there, for I had gotten this far. Falling asleep, I awakened later and started over.

We found our way out of the woods and finally snuck out of Macedonia into Albania, and from there over to Greece. The boat we took arrived at an island named Crete. The moment I had waited for had arrived. In the ladies room, I put on my new pair of jeans for the first time. I felt so good in them. I told myself that we had finally made it.

There I met people from France, Poland, Italy, and America. I talked to them and listened to their stories about their home countries and especially about how America was.


As of today I have been in America for nine years, and I feel the freedom that I had heard about in fifth grade. I see people from other countries talking and understanding each other, speaking together in one language—English.

On the twenty-ninth of September, I became an American. I wore the jeans that followed me on this long trip to the swearing-in ceremony. It was the biggest day in my life, and if I had to go through the same thing again to get here, I would do it without thinking twice. ●



THE TWINS
DANIEL HENRY

Probably the closest things
to *perfection* are the huge
absolutely empty holes that
astronomers have recently
discovered in space.



If there's nothing there,
How can anything go wrong?



Richard Brautigan

THE SEARCH FOR PERFECT (*letterpress print*)
GRAEME MORRIS

21st MAGNUM OPUS

ANTHONY ADEWUMI

Vicious with the verses—
So why would I push for a fight?
When the words that I speak illuminate
enough to push night
Because to darkness I am heartless
For I am not an artist but more of an arctic
Cold blooded on these bars—
Moses couldn't part this
But maybe you should ark this
Or maybe you should trace
Or maybe I should grace—
You with my heart so you can make pace
And catch on to my mental monopoly
For I acknowledge the need for more anthropology
And aspire to add more ambition to my anthology
So send the publishers my apologies,
For I no longer care about my rating
Because the world is going bananas—
And I ain't with all the Bathing
I'm not a follower of the fashions or latest trends,
I've grown from a boy II man—
And realize that road just leads to the end
Sing my praises to the Alpha and Omega—
And I'm not talkin' Greek,
I'm talkin' about steppin' with the Lord on that water walkin' creek
I Psi Phi (Sci-fi) . . . meaning I am not mundane
I'll die to arise in a world that's not humane
Besides
Those who are great don't abide this life that long
So just in case I don't live to see age 42—
I inscribe my rhymes twice as strong
And seduce this stanza that I've grown fond
To produce a portrait that has never been drawn
Dead or alive my fluorescence will still bleed through this blueprint
For the steps to splendor are eternal movements . . .

COLLECTION OF TUMBLERS *(ceramics)*
SARA BIELACZYC

SIMILE OF A SMILE
TAFFETA CHIME

The metaphor is meant for reality.

It is what
It is and
That's all that
It is, but

The simile is like/as the smile.

like you're saying, "Mephistopheles."
like you brushed your teeth well.
as though you're transparent.
as if you're not a caught fish.
like you haven't been crying.
like you're not the only one.
as if your lips won't crack.
as though you don't worry.
like I didn't have to tell you.
like you really, truly mean it.
as if you've got it all figured out.
as though life has been good to you.

The inverted frown is true in another reality.

It is, but
It's not.



STAND OFF: DEAD SPIDEY *(reconstructed furniture)*
RANDY L PURCELL



ROBERT (*oil on canvas*)
CHELSEA SCOTT



ROBERT III (*lithograph*)
CHELSEA SCOTT

JOB AUCTION

MARGARET HOFFMAN

“Job Interview: Floor 5, Room 87, with the CEO Holding a Martini Glass and Cigar”

Yes,
I'd like to buy the prospect.
Oh.
Well, the one you have for sale,
hammered in the yard by tooth and nail.

Yes,
I am here to apply for rule
and bored
at a price I can very well afford
and I hope you find it worth your time
from 9-5 and 9-5
(prior to your happy-hour traffic drive)
for that 5.15 to help me stay alive
for all I'm worth, and all I've got,
because the IRS haunts me to the parking lot,
through the lobby and down the stairs,
but not that you should really care.

Yes,
I've got all the skills required.
Well, yes,
my dress may seem retired,
but I've simply got the brain, you see;
I have a full-time Bachelor's degree,
and I truly know that this path is straight
and I swear to never come in late.
I enjoy being overworked and underpaid.
I'll shine your shoes,
be your maid,
join your cubicle masquerade.

And, yes,
I can start this Tuesday.

D.O.F. (DEATH OF FRESH)

ANTHONY ADEWUMI



CREATIVE
EXPRESSION
AWARD WINNER

See what my insight does to me?

So far ahead of my time I've been tempted to write my own eulogy

Killed my ego with that line, this is life after death

Hungry for salvation like a man after wealth

A lost soul (sole) like a shoe out of steps

Have no choice but to go right, I've ran out of lefts

I better run fast before the vision loses its contrast

This is reverse racism-

Black words beating down on a white page,

But the poetry brings peace between this rhythmic rage

A gifted Negro lad to many

But ain't I a man?

Such a joiner to truth, I'm hard to understand,

Hard to believe in but easy to agree with

For my ambitions are aimed so high, you believe they're deceiving

But why would I lie?

See, behind these baby brown eyes-

Is a man

A man tired of running but ready to fly

Out of this fuckin' place we call society

A society where a king dies from the media-

And a titan is murdered out of his dynasty

Is that true success?

And are you about to be upset?

Because I hear you claim to be fresh to death

Well if that's the case then I'm cool to cremation

Swallow sin through my Adam's apple as if I'm in loom with creation

Lord knows I'm sick and tired of being sick and tired-

Of being wrong

But today being wrong is being fresh and being right is stale-

So I guess I've been sitting out for too long

Or maybe I'm just too cool and too deep of a thinker

So postpone my meeting with the grim reaper

Because I've yet to live my dreams-

I'm wide awake

And far from a REM sleeper

Flat lines run best through flat minds

Because that's when you realize you've ran out of time

Have I ran out of mines or have I ran out mind?

Or maybe I've just ran out of pages to bind

So I should do less writing and more living through my rhymes

This is the death of the fresh

And the birth of the blessed

R.I.P. to those who never had a chance to confess



FORM

JESS CAVENDER

TEACHING MY SON TO FLOSS

JAMES HAMBY

It's the kind of work that makes you feel
decayed on the inside, like a tooth spreading rot
to others surrounding it.

No use telling them I'm a grad student
with Dickens, Dostoevsky, or Nietzsche in my
mind,
they just want their drinks food checks faster.
After work—bars parties drinks cigarettes
numb me to memories of the dying day.

When I walk through the apartment door I'm
"Daddy"
and the whole world is just two years old.
His smile stings behind my eyes.
Is it bourgeois to worry
he doesn't have a yard
to learn the tickle of grass under feet,

the smell of rain on leaves,
or how to eat honeysuckle?

He wants to play, but it's bedtime,
the only time I'll spend with him today.
I think he actually likes brushing his teeth
as long as I do it with him.
Standing on the counter he's as tall as I am—
he'll grow to be like me.

He spits, rinses, thinks he's done
but there's something else.
He watches with wonder as I take out floss
and demonstrate. He's eager to try.
We floss together,
watching each other in the mirror.
He's the reason I don't drink too much
(at least when I'm with him),

why I have two jobs and school,
why I started flossing again.

After he's asleep I lie down next to his mother—
things won't last much longer between us.

In the morning I find him
in front of the cold glow of TV.
I put warm socks on his feet,
kiss him, and leave him for work.



GET LUCKY (mixed media)

ADAM GASKILL

Photo by Julia Korn



WIZARD TOWER (copper/magic on steel)

ZACH DUENSING



PEBBLES
BRANDON WOODS

METAL RAT
DANIELLE WILBERT



**CREATIVE
EXPRESSION
AWARD WINNER**



SUNFLOWERS AT NIGHT

JOEL HEBERT

MOON CALLING

JONATHAN SCHULTZ

I was so close to the only object to steal my gaze
Sitting on the grass, I decided I would draw it closer to me
I began tappin' on my hand drum
The moon casts its glance but retreats further away from me

Sliding my hand across the skin
Striking with the balls of my fingers
I'm doing everything I can to call this moon to me

It wanes, bounces, moves to its own rhythm
Humble though I may be, I'm killing this drum with both hands
While the moon's not even listening to me

Ignorant of the eager sky
Oblivious to the infant hues slinking their way up the horizon
It's almost comical how I can't even see how rapidly the moon grows dimmer

My back grew stiff and sore
Sweat on my palms, and dripping from my forehead
But I dismissed the pain, replacing it with the hope that it is all worth it

Because I know rhythm is not native to this land
Within the rhythm, I'm making my own land, one with a new moon
A moon that doesn't leave me for a sunrise



SCARECROW

BRETT WARREN

CHARACTERS

STORYTELLER A man.

MARGARET A rather youngish woman.

LESLIE Margaret's older, but not that much older, sister.

DEAN About Margaret's age.

DAD A ghost.

FACE CARDS

SETTING An apartment. The present, give or take.

(Lights up on MARGARET, sitting at a table in the center of a room, a laptop open in front of her STORYTELLER enters.)

STORYTELLER Once upon a little while ago, there was a young woman named Margaret. Just a normal kind of woman. Nothing fancy. Her cabinets were full of store-brand products. She was sitting in her apartment, pretty much alone, playing a game on her computer. FreeCell, if you must know.

MARGARET The thinking man's solitaire!

STORYTELLER Shut up. Sorry. She is pretty rude sometimes. Anyway, there she was, just glued to her desk, playing her cards, not really worried about anything at all, when some things happened.

(Enter LESLIE.)

LESLIE Margie. I um . . .

MARGARET Whaddup, Lez?

LESLIE I just got off the phone. A guy. From the hospital. Dad was in an accident.

MARGARET Is he . . . is he OK? Is he going to be alright?

LESLIE He's dead.

MARGARET Oh.

(Pause.)

LESLIE I have to go to the hospital. Take care of things

there. You can come. Or . . .

(Pause.)

I'll be back. In a while.

(Pause.)

I'll be back.

(Exit LESLIE. MARGARET returns to her FreeCell, and the lights dim over the coming lines as the sun goes down. It's nighttime.)

STORYTELLER Sad. But he was pretty old. Not a lot of time left anyway. Margaret returned to her FreeCell. At some point she realized it was dark outside, and she'd lost track of the number of games she'd won in a row. She knew it was a lot, and she was surprised at the satisfaction this gave her. But she could win more. File, new game, eight fresh columns of cards. Again and again, through the night . . .

(Lights come back up.)

And into the next day.

(DEAN enters like he owns the place. MARGARET hardly notices.)

DEAN Margaret? I let myself in. How are things?

MARGARET Huh? Oh. Hello. My dad's dead.

DEAN That's what Leslie said. It's a real bummer. Real bummer. Still, I guess he had a good life, right? Two daughters, respectable longevity. . . . Anyway, you look OK.

MARGARET I'm playing FreeCell.

DEAN Good. That's good. Listen, I need to tell you something.

MARGARET Where's Leslie?

DEAN In the hospital or something. I don't know. She tried to call you. But listen. Something's come up, and I have to skip town. I can't say why, and I don't know when I'll see you again. Maybe never. Probably never. Just know this: I used to love you, Margaret. Goodbye.

(DEAN leaves.)

MARGARET *(absently)* I love you too, Dean.

(Lights dimming again.)

STORYTELLER Like a puppy. Yipping and yapping, its little tail wagging. Not an inkling of the dark secrets that the other puppies hide. Would it not be an egregious breach of our special relationship, I would give her a pat on the shoulder.

(DAD enters, hidden beneath a white sheet, and glides in a depressing fashion towards MARGARET.)

Ah well, she has her FreeCell, and perhaps—

(Noticing DAD for the first time.)

But what is this? Could it be? Why, I think it's—

DAD It's me, kiddo. Your father. Arlen Thompkins.

MARGARET That's odd.

DAD Yes.

MARGARET You're dead.

DAD Yes.

MARGARET I don't understand.

DAD It's pretty straightforward.

(Pause.)

Margaret? Margaret?

MARGARET Oh! Sorry. I'm on a roll here.

DAD That's wonderful.

MARGARET Kind of a good one too. Maybe a few days? It gets dark sometimes . . . then light. . . .

DAD I'm very proud.

MARGARET Aw.

DAD You were a pretty good daughter.

MARGARET Thanks.

(Pause.)

Is that all, or . . . ?

DAD There's something else. Unfinished business. I'm afraid I lied to you, Margaret, back when I was living.

MARGARET Oh.

DAD Yes. When your mother left, I told you it was because she and I didn't love each other anymore. I told you it wasn't your fault. But that was a lie. It was your fault.

MARGARET Mine and Leslie's?

DAD No. Just yours. She liked Leslie fine. Anyway, that's been weighing on me. Wondering if I did the right thing. . . .

MARGARET I think you did.

DAD The right thing. . . .

MARGARET I think you did.

DAD Great. Well . . . be good.

(DAD glides away in a depressing fashion. MARGARET hurls headlong back into her FreeCell as night turns into day.)

STORYTELLER Touching stuff. I wish I'd known my father better. I wish Mom hadn't chased him away. I wish he had said something before going, but never mind. Dawn approaches. The past is past, and the future might be nicer. That is one possibility. And look, a visitor.

(LESLIE is back.)

“The past is past, & the future might be nicer.”

LESLIE What the hell, Margaret!

(Pause.)

Hello?

MARGARET Oh, hi, Leslie.

LESLIE Hi? What's the matter with you? I've been calling for days! I've been sick! I was in the hospital!

MARGARET Oh, yeah . . . I think Dean mentioned . . .

LESLIE Look, I don't care. I just thought I'd check in and see if you were still alive. I suppose you couldn't be bothered to do the same for me, but whatever. I'll see you at the funeral.

MARGARET You're better?

LESLIE What?

MARGARET Better. Not sick?

LESLIE Um. No, actually. I'm out for the funeral, then

it's back for more tests. So far they know it's not ague.

MARGARET I don't know what that is.

LESLIE Nevermind. See you later.

(LESLIE departs, and the lights begin to dim.)

STORYTELLER But she didn't. Not at the funeral. While her father's body was laid in the ground, Margaret communed with the cards, and her winning-streak continued. Anyway, goodbyes are overrated. Speaking of, if I'm not mistaken, a certain someone thought long gone now approaches.

(Why, it is DEAN.)

DEAN Hey. I'm back.

MARGARET Were you gone?

DEAN Shut up. The plan didn't work out. I need somewhere safe, and since I never told anyone about the two of us. . . . Something has happened to me, Margaret. Something awful.

MARGARET Sounds bad.

DEAN A few hours after leaving here I was leaving Susan's, right? This other girl I've been seeing. On my way out of town, like I said. But it was dark, and there was this guy, and—

MARGARET And you came back. Because you love me.

DEAN What? No. That's not it at all. There was this guy, real creepy, you know? Just something off about him. So I try to give him a wide berth, but—

(LESLIE joins them.)

LESLIE Margaret? What are—oh. Hi, Dean.

DEAN Hi, Leslie.

LESLIE Margaret. I just . . . I just came from the hospital—

DEAN I was kind of in the middle of something. . . .

LESLIE —and the tests are done. They know what's wrong with me.

(DAD glides into the increasingly overcrowded room.)

DAD Hi, Margaret. Leslie. Dean. It's your father again. Not yours, Dean. Good funeral earlier.

DEAN I'm trying to tell you, this guy, he attacked me—

LESLIE Dad. You should hear this too. The doctors. They found what's wrong.

MARGARET Ague.

LESLIE No, Margaret. It's not ague. It's cancer.

DAD Oh, that's lovely. I could use the company.

DEAN He bit me! He bit me, and now—AAAGGH!

STORYTELLER Oh dear. It seems Dean is no longer human. He's . . .

(DEAN has put on a pair of costume cat ears.)

some sort of kitty cat.

DEAN Werewolf. I'm a werewolf.

STORYTELLER If you say so, buddy.

DEAN Who are you?

DAD I was just going to ask . . .

STORYTELLER Very well. I too have a shocking revelation. I am not a third-person omniscient narrator at all. I am a third-person limited omniscient stalker who has been living clandestinely in this apartment for the past several weeks. And I have a knife.

(Produces knife.)

LESLIE Dean! Do something! You're a werewolf!

DAD Oh, just sit still and be murdered. Think of the fun we'll have.

(Something is happening to MARGARET. She is focusing more intently on her FreeCell than ever, as highlighted by the spotlight now shining on her.)

STORYTELLER What's going on?

(FACE CARDS march into the fray. Preferably there are four, though one could do the job, if he had a sword. All wear crowns, and maybe a white shirt with a block letter, in red or black, indicating their title. They step between MARGARET and the others and force them inexorably from the stage. MARGARET is alone, the spotlight fades, and she plays FreeCell peacefully in the evening dimness. Then the dimness swells, and all is black.) ●



THE FUTURE
BRETT WARREN



**CREATIVE
EXPRESSION
AWARD WINNER**



IT HURTS HERE (*encaustic and photo-transfer on board*)
BECKY DICKOVITCH

CASING

STEPHANIE WEAVER

My brother's Glock is too large for my hands,
And I have wrapped the second knuckle
Of my right middle finger in tape
To protect it from the impact of the gun kicking.
I take aim, taking comfort in the fact that I am behind the barrel,
Breathing in and out slowly as I focus on the paper target
That jerks in each gust of bitter wind.
When I fire, the brass casing exits the chamber at the top of the gun
And hits me right between the eyes.

I think of you, how you tucked my cold feet
into your warm crotch, wrapping your thighs
around my toes, how you searched for me
under the blankets when I hid, shy in my own
skin, stifling in the body heat trapped in the
covers. I think of the sound of you breathing
in the dark, how sometimes you stopped and
I held my breath too, until I felt your chest
expand and press into my back. I think of
knowing that *we* would be over soon, I could
hear the clock ticking, after all we had said
all along that one day we would stop being
lovers and start being friends—I think
of how startled I was when you
actually called it quits.

I blink.
I feel no pain, only a twitch, a kind of tingle
Where the casing hit.
I can't stop rubbing the spot,
Surprised, even though this has happened before.

THREE SONGS FOR MALERIE

DAMON SIERRA

Stepping stones
Like cold white bones
Against the beaten path
And there she stands
Lover of man
Wrapped in silver clothes
Face is beautiful as it is bright
Gleams a thunderhead of golden light
Her hair is dark and soft
She walks into a lover's pool
And drowns in ecstasy
Drifting deep in lover's dreams
The world is cool and white
We splashed our feet in melting snow
And stuck our tongues to ice
We walked hand-in-hand atop the sun
And burned our bodies into glass
Waking hard upon the bed
And a fall of crumpled sheets
Lover's dreams still in our heads
And warmth where bodies meet
Your arms wrapped hard around my neck
A lover's knot in sleep
Your eyes
They speak of questions answered
And hands
They move like grasping things
Skin so soft
Like buttermilk
With legs
Like strangling vines



COLOR BALLET

ERIC RACHAPHOUMY



MADONNA DELL SEDIA (oil, ink, collage, and spray paint)

JOHN COLE NEUHOFF

Photo by Julia Korn

MY LOVER

LANI HENNING

My lover
Is the stray cat that cries at my front door—
I lead him to the side
And quench his anguished hunger—
He furtively wanders off when satisfied,
But promptly returns—
When he needs a little more.

EGGS, VIRGIN & OTHERWISE

JOHN BUTWELL

Thumping I go skipping down the highway of the heart
Like an Easter bunny, honey, practiced at the art.
I dye my eggs and drink the dregs of nature's nectar cup
The eggs concealed to be revealed and raise
some savior up.

They swim, untaught, in tadpole pools
Abandoned by the tide
And in the womb made by the tomb, they patiently abide.
They ride on rhythms, swim in seizures
Unborn, within their shells
Borne on by instinct, nature's nurture
and the lure of unchurched belles.

You may think it odd, unfair to God,
To let my thoughts go skipping so.
In the cruelest month I have a hunch:
A warning sign of vertigo
In dizzy spells sent straight from Hell the wind
Whips down the daffodil.
Sanctuary—on Easter Island:
You don't know the half you will.

RISHIKESH FOR THE WIN *(nonfiction)*

ERIN WILLIAMSON

The call to prayer rang through the windows, shattering the night. Footsteps from the room above woke me to yet another day of my semester abroad in New Delhi. At five a.m., the cool February air permeated the stone walls. It was Friday and finally time for an adventure. My friends and I were heading out for the weekend to explore Mother India.

Our destination was a holy city in Northern India called Haridwar and a nearby town Rishikesh. Early in the morning, Jasi (our favorite taxi driver) took Laiah, Shanta, Lindsay, and me to the train station and wished us a “berry goot” trip. We settled into our seat in our section of “AC Chair Car” (exactly what it sounds like: a train car with chairs and fans). Like on an airplane, we were fed questionable pre-made food and given newspapers. The four of us were split up throughout the train car, and after the man sitting next to me left, the steward snuck up on me holding out his hand asking for a tip. I could tell that I was being singled out because I was a tourist and there were no Indians around to tell him to go away. I felt the sting of being conned but cracked under pressure and handed over ten rupees. Though it was only the equivalent of 20 cents, I felt as if I had lost a game. Score: girls– zip, India– one.

Four hours later we arrived at the Haridwar train station. It appeared desolate and abandoned. Five lonely auto-rickshaws were parked in the dirt, yet there seemed to be a million drivers asking us if we needed a ride. We settled on the cheapest one and drove into town towards the temples. The streets of Haridwar were narrower than Delhi and, if possible,

more crowded. Busy market stalls stood side by side creating narrow alleyways packed with people, cows, dogs, bikes, and rickshaws. The foothills of the Himalayas peeked through the ever-present smog. Shouts of “Hello, ma’am, come inside!” from vendors sitting at the entry to their shops rose above the honking. Flies buzzed through the air and cows snatched food from roadside stands. We got tickets for the cable cars up to two temples, as both temples were in the mountains. As we walked towards the entrance, tour guides insisted we needed an offering which conveniently enough they happened to be selling. We desperately tried to explain that we weren’t making an offering and therefore didn’t need to purchase the overpriced bags they held up. The vendors insisted we must purchase one to enter the temple. Against our better judgment, we gave in and bought a coconut offering complete with ribbon and rice puffs. Score: girls– zero, India– two.

When we got to the cable cars, the chipped pastel paint with happy looking advertisements reminded me of the Ferris Wheels at carnivals. As we climbed higher up the mountain, the city emerged from behind the tree line with the mighty Ganges winding through the tangle of roads and markets below. The sun caught the water and glistened through the haze. Monkeys danced in the trees below us and women carrying baskets of sticks glanced up at us as they walked along a dirt path.

At the top, we entered Mansa-devi temple. We had no idea what to do with our coconut offering and watched the people in front of us as we approached the first statue. A man sitting by the god chanted and

blessed us, painting a bindi on each of our foreheads. We graciously nodded and began to walk away when he explained that the gods accept cash donations. Fearful of offending and unaware of proper custom, we each set down more rupees. Score: girls– none, India– three. We turned around and repeated the same encounter at the next god statue. Girls– nada, India– four. Our wallets were thinning and our pride fading. We eventually realized we could simply walk by and politely bow or smile and keep our rupees intact. Back down the mountain, we took a bus and then another cable car to the second temple, Chandi-devi. The view from the top was even more striking across the Ganges at Chandi-devi. There were no crowds and the air was quieter.

Once we had made our way back into Haridwar, we headed over to a nightly ceremony called Aati. Hundreds of people gathered along the river to bathe in the holy water and wait for sunset. As the colors of the sky changed, people lined up to place a boat made of leaves and filled with flowers into the water. Priests escorted the four of us to the water to help us with our blessings. After a prayer, the priest would explain a blessing and then urge a donation. The guilt was laid on thick. “This prayer is for the long lives of your mother and father, anything will be accepted, now how much will you give? No, no, that’s not enough for their lives!” I glanced at the other girls, each of us secluded by our individual priest. I mumbled some gibberish to sound like I was repeating the prayers and my priest took it as consent to give more and more money. By the end of the prayer, the man expected about one hundred dollars from me, none of which



MOTHER INDIA
ERIN WILLIAMSON

I had agreed to. I refused. He insisted. I stood firm. He glanced over his shoulder at the other priests and then stepped closer repeating his demand. Frustrated, I handed over 100 rupees (about two bucks) and took my leaf boat from his hand. He sighed and lit a candle to place into the boat as it sailed in the murky cold water. I watched as it floated away, flower petals drifting behind and thought of my 100 rupees. Girls—still zero, India— five.

Sunday morning, we awoke at our hotel in Rishikesh ready for a relaxing day. Rishikesh is about an hour north of Haridwar and the yoga capital of the world.

International hippies lingered in the quiet town after last week's World Yoga Festival. Indian men with long beards and bright orange robes tied yellow scarves over their dreadlocks. Cows napped in the streets while motorbikes zipped around them. Our hotel offered yoga classes in the morning and it was quite a way to start the day. After yoga we meandered through the streets, relishing the serene atmosphere. We walked past the hanging bridge to a temple towering over the river, yet dwarfed by the foothills. Stairs led down to an alcove along the river where we sat and watched the water. Bells from the temple

sang soft notes that joined with distant chanting. The Ganges lay still before us, and the disarray of the streets and markets seemed so far away. For the first time, I didn't notice the smog. I could breathe and think and soak in the beauty of the moment. Game point: Girls— at peace, India— perfect.

Back in Delhi, I look at the prayer beads on my wrist and remember the warm clean air, the bells, the flower petals, the men with dreadlocks, and the mountains . . . and I breathe again. ●



TO SUBMIT TO COLLAGE

Collage accepts submissions year-round. Each submission must be accompanied by a completed submission form, which is available at www.mtsu.edu/~collage. On this website you will also find submission guidelines, the deadlines for each publication and the latest *Collage* information. Submissions may be turned in at the *Collage* office, Paul W. Martin, Sr. Honors Building, Rm. 224 between the hours of 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. or by mail. Submissions will be accepted via e-mail, and you must be an MTSU student or alumni to submit.

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Each semester five Creative Expression Awards will be awarded from among the highest scoring submissions to the magazine. Members of the *Collage* Faculty Advisory Board will choose one top-rated submission from each major category: poetry, prose, art, photography and alumni. Winners will each receive a gift card.



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CONTACT

(615) 898-5789
collage@mtsu.edu
www.mtsu.edu/~collage

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