COLLAGE

fall 2018

A Journal of Creative Expression
50th anniversary edition
Collage changed my life. cheesy as it sounds, it’s true. If I am being honest, I initially joined the staff more to correct people’s grammar than to fulfill any deep-seated editing passions. That changed after my first meeting. I was surprised at the level of motivation and intense discussion, and I left the meeting with a strong feeling of commitment that has not yet wavered. To this day, what impresses me about Collage is that the entire staff works together in order to showcase our students’ diverse talents in a beautiful magazine.

This semester, for the second part of our fiftieth anniversary edition, we opened our arms to MTSU faculty and staff, Collage staff, and less-recent alumni. With a record number of submissions, our community’s response was overwhelming. I would like to thank everyone for supporting us and entrusting us with your creativity. This magazine would not be possible without you. I am also proud to announce that our most recent magazines, the fall 2017 and spring 2018 issues, won national crown awards from the Columbia Scholastic Press Association.

In its long and colorful history, Collage has undergone critical developments, but it has changed significantly in just the last four years as well. We have created a stronger online presence by publishing every issue of Collage online, launching a website, and adding digital media to our list of acceptable submissions. Our audio and video submissions would not have been conceivable in 1968, when Collage was founded, but by creating new traditions, we can be inclusive and adapt to the modern world.

Collage has become such an important part of my growth and self identity, that I contemplated putting off graduation for another semester. Rest assured, I won’t, but I did think about it. When I was worried, I looked to my previous editors in chief, Caitlin Noonan, Chloe Madigan, Luke Judkins, and Kimi Conro, for guidance—they worked incredibly hard and acted as strong role models. I learned leadership skills from each of them that I will use for the rest of my life. If the previous editors in chief can venture off into the unknown, I will do my best as well. I can also say that, after four and a half years of working on Collage, I will still correct anyone who uses a two-way modifier in an essay, but, if one asks nicely, I can now give constructive feedback as well. Thank you for allowing me to be a part of Collage.

Rebecca Clippard
Editor in Chief
I wish for you in black-mooned nights.
I wish for you with bare bones and brass eyes in the threading light reflecting off the empty pool.
I wish for more stars.
I wish for your open chest, moonlight spilling out between each rib until the rot’s all but gone from the cavity around your heart.
I wish for more pennies lying heads-up.
I wish for you, loose-knuckled and sure, in my room where you will turn around three times before lying down.
I wish for teeth to no longer remind us of tombstones.
I wish for the cemeteries in our heads to empty, the packed graves overturned by miracles and the noises we never let out of our mouths.
I wish for more wishes.
I wish we didn’t need them.

You ask me if I want to go to Greece with you, “It depends on how my plans go,” which has always been our family code for saying “no.”
Not that you remember that. You ask me if I want to go to Washington, D.C., “I have a special class to attend that week,” another way of having plans.
Mom eluded Grandmother this way one hundred thousand times; I never expected to use it with you.
I missed you so much when you went to Basic, I pulled your hair out of the drain to make a locket.
I cried when you joked, dear sister, about the bombs whistling above when you were in the sands overseas. I would have gladly agreed then.
You returned same as ever, my older constant sister hero.

Children put toys and heroes into boxes when they start to grow up, and arguments and disagreements grow into infectious cysts between sisters.
You moved five states away, even if you hadn’t, I still would have plans.
I am 16, beginning to drive. Being allowed a taste of sweet freedom, a rite of passage.

I take the same path to a friend’s, the corner market, a first boyfriend’s.

I drive along the winding road, away from home, past the old church.

Then, the old man with the produce stand. I’ve never met him before, but that is okay because he is there in front of his house, a hand-painted sign reads, “wife called says bring home tomatoes.”

His stand sits on a patch of grass, worn by years of constant attention, held together by warped wood and wire.

In the summer, he sits with crates of fresh fruit, dirt clinging to unearthed vegetables.

Later, gourds, pumpkins, hearty reminders of the changing season. He returns in spring with blooms. A reminder of the sweeter and kinder things on my path to my young destinations.

Then, I grow up. I go, move, and give way to the clichés of young adulthood.

The sweet freedom is often a swift, rotten burden. Still, in my seasons pass, I acknowledge time in new ways.

But life is passing for others, tumbling and spinning through time. Time untitled in lives I did not realize affected mine.

Until I return, travel back to the home, the path that I once took.

Time has not stood still, and perhaps I am the worse for it. Because on a crisp September day, the produce stand that should have been is nothing but a dead, brown patch of grass along a road.
Evening, we walk a garden of amethyst marvels—structures and steel, pylons and progress, bare blossoms of light. Between skyscrapers, we gather close our coats as steam swoops from the underground, nearly the scent of coffee and yeast almost enough to temper our course.

Earlier, I took your hand for the first time, inked on your palm an address. This is where we went to go, that word, hanging like the full moon in tonight’s dark blue note of sky. Now, blocks away, siren. A woman pillars a tranchet for dinner. A man dead-walks into stopped traffic, palms high. As if it will ease the desperation, you reach for my hand. Or do I reach for yours? We are new and believe we need an excuse to touch.

Above us, rows and rows of windows, like diamonds in a jeweler’s case, flash with a thousand shiny promises. Flash like a fevered undoing of buttons and cuffs.

At an open door, we find our belonging—a woman in jazz club shadow-smoke, her mouth at the mic a bloom of orchid, her voice a plume of pleasure and truth.

She sings our fortune.

Later, the streets all but empty, we walk and walk and my shoes rub blisters, but we’re hand in hand—what’s a little pain? Beside us the impal river glints.

We’re Young and This Is the Beginning
Kory Wells
poetry

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the walnut floorboards shrank in the cold, dry air, cracking with every step we took. We counted the long nights by the number of books we devoured, burned orange peels and cinnamon sticks in the woodstove, and made hot chocolate instead. We built small fires under the utilizado floorboards, our hands wrapped around steaming cups of hot chocolate, each sip making us more cozy, more vibrations. At night, we sat at the window, our breath steaming against the glass, as we watched the snow steadily accumulate outside. By the time the days were short and the nights long, we were used to the cold, and the world outside was a tranquil, serene landscape of white.

The logistics of the tour—planning, preparing, and packing—were a lot of work, but it was worth it. We drove from city to city, from coast to coast, and even to Mexico. We slept in small beds, on the floor, in the back of our van. We ate fast food from the drive-thru and slow food from the best restaurants. We listened to music and talked about books. We practiced being at home within myself by making small things: collections of places and memories sparked by meaningful objects...
returning from WWII. There were two bedrooms, 11’x11’, a single bathroom with the original cast-iron tub, white enamel ringed in aqua from decades of mineral-laden water, a kitchen that was too small for both a modern stove and refrigerator, and charred floorboards in the dining room where the stove had been placed. The original knob-and-tube wiring had been partially replaced. The massive cast-iron waste pipe in the unfinished basement hung from the floor joints of the living space above. You could feel the house beginning to fold into itself, to tumble down the slope in the backyard to the creek hidden in the tangle of brack and detritus in the ravine. The two tiny bedrooms faced east, looking toward that vast, lush, green jungle. The front rooms of the house faced west toward the quiet street. We faced forward, full of dreams.

The original oak floors have been exposed and refinished. The toilet has been replaced. The blinds have been removed, and late autumn sunlight trickles in. The newly-plastered walls have been painted Benjamin Moore’s “titanium,” a quiet, pale gray that echoes the golden-green grass, the steel-blue skies, and the violet thunderstorms. A pot of water simmers on the stove, wafting the scent of oranges and cinnamon through the air. Bread rises on the counter. The mockingbirds and mourning doves converse in the yard. A million little things nestle into bright corners, and the wolf howls happily from the windowsill over the sink.
think of the earth symbol
as the dirt you were scraped out from,
the first pagan breath you drew
as your insides shuffled with that struggle
to be born.
be new
as your mother wept over you,
lost in a haze of prozac in her white gauze gown.
think of the air sign
as the deep in your grandfather’s office,
lying peaceful in your carrier
while she was on suicide watch,
your tiny lungs rasping.
think of the water sign
as when you knew you needed jesus
though you didn’t know who or what he was,
but your little legs kicked in the baptismal pool
ready to send you boiling to hell
at five, your most tender age,
your father said the consecration
plunged your head under the surface,
the first of many times.
think of the fire sign as the will within you
tearing through another womb,
ready to be born a monster,
no longer a maid,
a raging animal with ambition
and the strength to see it through.
you will claw your way out of the day-darkness
into the peace of a full night’s sleep;
you will shed this cursed skin for a better
your own element will stamp out their flames.
When I was young, I wanted to go to the Moon, but I’ve only made it to Milwaukee, which is to say I have learned about adjusting expectations. When I was young, I planned to move to the big city, any big city, but my hometown grew and grew in a labyrinth of commerce around me, which is to say only certain bodies at rest tend to stay at rest, not to mention good urban planning is a must. When I was young, I was going to drive a Porsche 944 flat on the floor, but I’ve been all four-door sedans and minivans, which is to say I had kids and I was not planning with a husband, the latter of whom came into my life wearing plaid pants, which I was definitely not planning. To say that love is the unbalanced force unnamed in Newton’s first law, and I learned early on: one, to accept people as they are, even if they have no fashion sense, and two, planning will only take you so far, but love—

love will take you everywhere, even to Milwaukee in winter, which is to say although I reserve the right to complain, I do what we have to do. Older now, I take uncommon pleasure simply anticipating an afternoon cappuccino from a powdered mix, which is to say life is improbable, and if you look, you’ll find a galaxy in your cup, perfect and round and spinning.

I’ve met your muse, I. Perry
the one you penned those words about, those words that won them over, the crowds, the critics, but I don’t buy into that. When her eyes met with me, the world did not fade out, the birds sang steady-volumed, my heart kept beating. Her hair was yellow, plain, thoroughly ordinary. The excess of her skin was not a gentle curve about the hip—it did not dare me to trace its outline with those small, soft brushes. No honey slipped out when she spoke, her inhale didn’t suck me in, my mind had no trouble leaving the lips right there on her face. Unlike you, no part of me burned with the hope of her full legs wrapped around my waist. I saw her light was fading. I knew she’d grow old and stop smelling like lavender fields. Still, I see the way you look at her, and you’re right.
unless you believe in psychic mediums, it would be difficult to speak with the author of any work in Dr. Joan McRae’s Foreign Literature in Translation course, considering most are dead. However, for our final projects, we had the chance to read novels written within the last decade. We were pretty jazzed—no offense to Alain Chartier and his cohort. We read a work recently translated into English and used our course skills to create a Wikipedia page for it, and, if needed, a page for the author as well.

Katrina Scott and I read *The 6:41 to Paris*, originally *06h41*, by Jean-Philippe Blondel. At first, creating the pages felt like cooking for Gordon Ramsey: concocting something knowing that the likelihood of disapproval is high. But the difficult part was not pleasing the Wikipedia gods, it was finding information on our author, Mr. Blondel.

One day during another unfruitful research session, I joked to Katrina that we should find him on Facebook and message him. Like many of my jokes, Katrina took me seriously, so in a moment of emboldened youth and desperation, we sent a message to Jean-Philippe Blondel.

Having prepared ourselves for rejection or worse—being blocked by a French stranger on Facebook—we were surprised to see a response from him later that evening. “Hi Katrina! My god, I’m flattered,” it began.

There is no eloquent way to say that we “geeked.” We were flattered that he, a successful author, would take time to respond to a couple of random students from Tennessee and to discuss a novel that means a great deal to us. We asked him several questions about him as a person, which he quickly averred, noting he’d like to keep the focus on his novel.

**The 6:41 to Paris**, which recounts a failed relationship from twenty-six years prior, is a short but impactful novel that validates the lasting impression some people leave on a life. One thing that made it resonate was the realistic nature of the characters. We asked Blondel a great deal about them and his reasons for choosing to communicate the plot through rambling thoughts makes it beautifully relatable.

Without spoiling the ending for any potential readers, he told us about the indecision he faced in finalizing the ending, even disclosing what he believes happens after the text ends. We never expected that, but we welcomed his refreshing candidness. Blondel was also surprised by his novel’s success. In fact, he didn’t want to submit it to his publisher because he was certain it would be rejected. Translated into ten languages so far, he was cleared wrong, and he sees it as a testimony to the universality of the novel’s themes: choice and aging. It’s brought him opportunities he never thought he’d have, such as traveling to Estonia in May 2018 to speak about the novel.

Although *The 6:41 to Paris* is Blondel’s only work translated to English as of now, he says he has one titled *Exposed* expected to be published next year. Until then, we recommend you dive into the world of *The 6:41 to Paris*, and even though we hear there’s a pretty well-done Wikipedia page on it, we recommend you find a copy.

Katrina and I are tremendously grateful to Jean-Philippe Blondel for speaking with us and to Dr. McRae for encouraging the process. If nothing else, let this serve as a reminder that powerful writing is being created all across the world, and, in an increasingly global society, its authors are more accessible than ever.
I left the gate of my garden open, but he never showed again. He left one rain-soaked April afternoon, bags packed, boots laced tight. "Baby, I love you, but nothing here's right." He rolled with the thunder, and I was left.

I watched from my porch, gate swinging in the breeze. My flowers grew high and large that year. Irises bundled heavy and purple. Hydrangeas balled into white fists. Azaleas blossomed pushed and shoved every single branch. Roses blushed so flushed a red, neighbors rumored I killed him, buried him deep within the flower beds.

Summer came and swept my flowers up. Replaced with squash, tomatoes, peppers, and lettuce. My garden gate open, heavy with harvest. Many dropped in and called. Henry, Hector, Eric, and John. I sent them all out with something, told 'em, "Be sure to leave that gate open." Only John clung like a bur to my clothes. I tried to pick him off, too, he wouldn't go.

John helped prune the weeds, prep for autumn. We rolled in that garden dirt plucking pumpkin, carrots, potatoes, and yams. He watched me, I watched the garden wither to winter and the snow fill the land.

John asked on the coldest winner’s day, "When will you close that damn garden gate?" I never said a thing. I left it wide open, waiting for April’s returning rains.
Dear Lover,

Valkyrie Rutledge

poetry

Our bare shoulders rest against each other comfortably
Unshaken by the cold
A honeyed-light illuminates the sloping bank of alpine snow
As I climb up your leafy spine
I crane my neck in search of an astral hive
You hold the sunrise in your cheeks
Like a crowded mouthful of peaches and cream
Spilling over your tongue and through our gates of gritted teeth
One day we’ll bathe in creeks beneath willow trees
And chase sweeter air for our calloused lungs to breathe
So if the answer to my prayer lies among the stars
I’ll throw myself toward the sun
And beg for a freckled heart

Rainbow Trout, aptly named, shining brilliant,
bites onto the shimmer of a lure.
Quick struggle, dragged ashore, beneath the graffitied bridge, “Peace and Love.”

Dash its head against the rock.
Again. Again. It spins in misery.
Melancholy knife into its gills—blood.
Still flapping. Sever the head.
Good, clean cut, like her butter—blood.

Headless fish curried to camp,
didn’t think you’d actually catch anything.
Run the blade against the scales,
pull the rainbow from the trout.
Slice the belly, peel apart, oral flash,
yellow-black guts, run it through the water.

Break the rite, be methodical, watch your fingers.
When no one is looking, apologize.
You are not a killer. You are a hunter.
Your father told you well to take and not
give back. You are not your father.
Let the mangled body slip back into the stream.
When you left, I locked everything away. I put my eyes in a delicate, satin-lined box, angry that they had failed me. Bitter over the fact that they had turned red flags into gently-waving banners.

I stripped away my skin and hung it in the back of the wardrobe, no longer able to wear something you had touched so gently, lovingly.

I snapped the fourteen bones of my hands and threw them in the trash, having no need of them now. Knowing they would never again touch anything with the same warmth as your cheek.

I clipped away the cartilage of my ears, deposited them in an old Tupperware, and placed them in the back of the pantry. What else would be worth hearing if it were not you saying you love me?

Finally, exhausted, I carefully slid my heart from my chest. Placed it on the windowsill, lay in my bed, and watched it beat.

beat
beat
beat
beat

and I wait.
Venus
Jessica Carlan
poetry

I was carved out of marble like a goddess;
the world softened me into this limp thing
with soft, stretched skin,
weak eyes,
clumsy limbs.
I was a force,
crashing into cliffs and breaking them down
into the sands of the wastelands.
I was beholden to no one,
but grief has removed my agency,
and now there is nothing I control.

Sometimes, when I cannot sleep,
I dream about the palaces
and the aqueducts, the bathing pools
where shy women went about their business,
trying to ignore the shapes of one another.
Sometimes I imagine I am one of them,
white cloth clinging to my warm skin
in the steaming water,
and I am still young.
Whatever came before,
I can wash off in the perfect, pure water,
rise and go,
unabashed and clean.

Untitled 2
Chloë Madigan
poetry

What bothers me most, he says,
is that this will cause you more pain
than it will cause me
I look at him, confused,
marvel in the brain’s knee-jerk reaction
to put up walls—defense mechanism
a small smile, sadness, laces my lips

What bothers me most, he whispers,
reaching after me as I walk out the door,
is that this will cause you more pain
than it will cause me
but he rests his hand across the
cold side of the bed at night
and feels my body, a hot fire that wakes
him from fitful dreams, clutching at air

What bothers me most, he sighs,
unaware that I am already driving
down dark highways, far away,
is that this will cause you more pain
than it will cause me
but when he takes the next girl to the museum on the corner of 10th,
he sees the ghost of my face in every portrait,
and when she reaches for his hand,
hollow bones,
he flinches
looks in her eyes and says the same words he said to me,
“I cannot love you.”

What bothers me most, he sobs,
crawling across the floor after me,
is that this will cause you more pain
than it will cause me
but when he takes the next girl to the museum on the corner of 10th,
he sees the ghost of my face in every portrait,
and when she reaches for his hand,
hollow bones,
he flinches
looks in her eyes and says the same words he said to me,
“I cannot love you.”

What bothers me most, he vows
out loud to the empty house,
is that this will cause you more pain
than it will cause me
and he realizes
that sometimes fear blinds us from seeing the depth, the vastness
of another human life
and that when they are gone,
their absence may open into a
black hole
do not fool yourself, my love,
into believing you hold that kind of power over someone who had the
strength to walk away.

What hurts the most is that
this will cause you more pain
than it will cause me.
"Coronet of bronze draped over the crags, twinkling and spread thin along the rocks, a great, gleaming thing. This place was called The Crown. From their sleep."

"And up there, a-ba?" The boy pointed a stubby finger at the wiry nests perched on the cliffs, the tangle of flotsam against the sky first in the reflection, dressed all in white. His eyes had been bluer, his nostrils curling at the stench. The sea didn't seem to breathe, to breathe. There was no mist. The sea was no mist, it was the sky.

"Who?" The fisherman traced the boy's greasy face. "A-ba, what are they—"

"Yes. Ones for the sky and ones for the sea. Each with a purpose.

"Yes. Ones for the sky and ones for the sea. Each with a purpose."

"And when do the water-birds in the sea sleep, a-ba?"

"The nets flew in one swift motion, a mazework of hands. Their minnow-stuffed nets fell in a fresh herd. Their minnow-stuffed nets fell in."

"And up there, a-ba?"

"The boy balked at the sight of the snotty mess in the corner, the海岸。 When he had reached knee-height, he jotted a fin into the chum and grabbed a mouthful of the stuff, swirling it in the air. He gingerly dropped the needle, the shudder in the base of his back."

"The nets flew in one smooth motion, a mazework of hands, with their exoticness, so unfamiliar to this place, the cragged, broken shore, the Figure of Men crouched beside the water, picking at his minnows against the tawny of the setting sun, the water in a spray-cloud of mist, cloaking their hands, pinching the binds, blessing the birds with their high nests and twine bamboo strips around the crags, grazing the waters with open beaks. Fish slivered into the fisherman's hand, fish broke into their bellies. It was the fishermen who would call the birds back and harvest the reap: the sea.
Letting Go
Bryson Light
poetry

The moon is hung so carefully in the pale blue sky—the canvas is the art
Put down the brush, God
Don't paint hands
Don't show me eyes
You see my face
You've read this chapter
Close the book
I don't want to interpret mystic purples
Or orange blossoms
I don't want to know
Open the windows
Let those caged birds sing free
Let them drop the olive branch in my unknowing hands
We'll push moss off the river rocks and send it floating downstream
—throw it behind us so it hits our ankles
We'll pluck leaves from tree limbs dipping their toes in the water
—let them kiss our slow bodies
I'll hold a stone between my hands
Not sharing the easiness of the movement
I'll throw it up in the air—it's your chance
We'll see the golden hour just for the second gravity doesn't want it
Watch how it hits the water
Splashing your hips
See it asking
Why—
It was given the chance to dry

The Crow’s Bouquet
Heaven Morrow
poetry

My middle-aged widow sat staring out her window,
but all of her bright birds had bolted.
The yard was yearning for yield these days,
but no berries or blooms would burst from the beds,
so my once-married Mary just stared at that muck February
and imagined her little birds were there.
I asked around at all the pretty birds in town,
“Will you please go visit my wife?”
But the blue jay was busy
and the plover was too pretentious
and the egret had an excuse
and the cardinal was too conceited.
But the Crow, this colorless corvid,
held pity on my poor, passionate soul.
“I’ve wondered something my whole life,
answer my question, and I’ll visit your wife.
Why do humans wear rings on their wings?”
A taker, finally! So I answered him kindly,
“We give each other rings, set with shiny stones and things,
to wear when we are in love.”
The Crow nodded and cawed, “That’s what I thought,”
and flew to find my sweet wife.
I come down to check on her now and again,
and the kind Crow did keep his word.
The brighter birds would not be back, and the Crow knew he was all black,
so every day, the Crow to her brings a bouquet of bright and beautiful things.
Untitled
Brian Frank
poetry
The pulse of winter
pumps sludge onto roads
like a slobbering monster.
In the frenzied pace
of spinning tires
and shopping carts,
I find you snuggled among
rattle of ribbon and
wrapping paper.

The Westbury Elegies #10
James Hamby
poetry
These hanging walls, the streets of The City of Grief,
A capitalist paradise where all the statues fall,
Flags in faces—and coursing underneath
Is all that once again begins, is all
My grandfather saw and sensed. And in my sleep
I hear it, too: Prometheus’s groans,
Hecate’s torch, gray shadows of the deep—
And all my children scattered in the storm.
What is it, then, this thing in you and me,
These riddles in the dark, and how will it end?
We choke on air that once the dryads breathed,
Bereft of all the manna that was sent.
The fading of the stars, Fenrir set free—
The endlessly dead, the blooming dogwood tree.

Pressed Lavender
Ryan Light
poetry
Glowing embers surround the great porcelain bowl
In the middle of the dark blue table
—It is not the sea herself
it is where she speaks so softly—against outreached arms
With slightly wet
Longing lips
Kissing lightly in between her tired speeches
She curves the cry of a banshee in the mist—my grieving mother—hissing behind great ancient
curtains that tremble like her fingers
She is found
Her burlap-thick covering thrown open by an unfamiliar gray fog—
Thor hisses against biological inclinations
And tempts her with two prongs
And lays eggs in her old tattered nightgown
And instead of slithering away
Disperses in screams of vibrant colors

A Fading Sincerity
Jake Yandle
oil painting on canvas

Portrait with Flowers
Madison Pitts
oil painting

Gentlemen and Their Bikes
Wayne Corley
1895–1905 glass negative,
scanned and digitalized

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There is no coffee this morning.

So I spill onto the floor and slosh around uselessly for hours, hoping someone might slip and fall and accidentally embrace me.

She wore black on the first day, and they asked her, “Are you goth?”

The second day she wore a dress, pink, silky, frilly cloth.

The third day was pin-striped pants and heels. The rest on her house was gray.

The fourth was happy clothes and boxes. They asked her, “Are you gay?”

The fifth day she wore thick leather and steel-toed Harley boots.

The sixth, she wore a turtle-neck sweater with hair bows and perfume.

The seventh day she rested at home, naked and undone.

Why feed an expectation when you are everything at once?
The Sum of Light
Della Wheeler
poetry

It was the light, I guess, the way it painted your face, met you at every moment, and highlighted an untouched view or the way I admired it in all its forms. Under the shadows of foggy forest trees, or inside a cavern beneath the mist of a waterfall, it could have been the fire that lit up mountains beneath sunset, or the white walls at sleepy sunrise, tapestry starlights, or even the light that found me now and then between tired, heavy blinks. I didn't want to miss a moment because I knew the same flicker that had been painting my insides gold for quite some time was the same light that had been painting yours, and the most beautiful of all was the sum of both.

Good Times
Jacob Jones
photography

O desert storm with honeycomb eyes
Rage and pulse with rhythmic cries
O gentle machine, unravel your seams
Spill your potion to torture, scheme, thicken my screams, and smother beneath
Regard this proposal delicately
O ancient one, withhold my death
Embellish my soul with immortal breath
O murderous instrument, macabre as it seems
Infect my blood with parasitic disease
We’ll perish like thieves and be hanged by the eaves
With your heart in my throat and mine on my sleeve
O sacred garden, I am blinded by hatred
This turncoat approaches you bloody and naked
O masterful deity, render me helpless
My skeletal aura, your expendable compass
To usurp, eclipse, govern, and kiss
The most beautiful romance to ever exist
O wicked lagoon that harbors this flame
With ominous rhythm lay siege to my name
O merciless venom, flood down with the rain
Flush barren this gulch of unchartered terrain
Pathological liars, we’ll scheme and conspire
Inexorable bloodlust conceived within fine
Walking on Snow
Anonymous
poetry

The ancient Earth gives up the secrets of her age in the dead of winter. Hungry for sun, barren of foliage, all her frailties exposed and laid open, Caressed only by the cold of the north wind. Day after day, the gray sky meets the edge of the horizon with no joy, No proof of life nor nurture. The flowers of spring, new life of children, the beauty of the harvest, Dim memories if they existed at all. How do we wait? Calm our fears? Is the desolation before our eyes Final proof of our abandonment? Where do we go when our Mother Earth cradles us no more? What comfort is there when the gray and black of reflected cold blots out the sun? How will we breathe? How will we hope?... When the desperation of winter grasps us, Bending us beyond breaking, Something happens. A gift? A promise? A joy? We hope... The night sky fills with the Water Moon Air Dead calm, not disturbing Stars obscured As clouds unseen then Lit gray-white from reflections on the street-lamp-millions Silencing even the stillness of the dark Leaving us wrapped in portend of unease of the unknown coming.

Then
It starts
Silent, cold, frozen
Almost unnoticed
Snow
Not the snow of slapdash and dirty cars
Not the boots and wet hair snow
Not a load red snow
The snow of the innocent comes to call Straight down, sky falling in silent Comfort
Beholding silence, Its purity covering naked nature’s harshness Laying in its winter’s death So there we stand, Breath the only sound Fog from our mouth the only rising thing All else running down covering scarred Earth with a virgin’s blanket Promising her fertility with the close.
The unblemished path Beckons the treading Innocence of her untouched beauty exploited By laughter of snowballs, skis, and Angels made facing the sky Leaving their noisy moments marked for tomorrow’s Sun.
Yet we are relieved.

Like the covered Earth, Its flaws just hidden, We know that we too will Survive our flaws
Beauty will come To Mother Earth from the nourishing Snow Will we not have a blanket of love to cover us? Will our arms not renew us when we are worn down Seared Barred Despaired
Earth’s snow is our embrace Covered, renewed. Changed by the union, Exploited, possessed, Innocence lost, Yet strengthened together To go on To breathe To chance once again Knowing that even in the winter of Disappointed hearts One love makes it possible to live again You...
White Picket Fences
Haydin Oechsle
poetry

Back then
The beaten cobblestone path would roll beneath my feet
As I rounded the corner.
The yard
Covered and painted with overgrown greens
And all the toys she loved.
The knob
On that crackled and crickety red door would give way
To her welcoming giggle.
I set
My belongings on that well-loved chair
And she would run to me.

My eyes
Dark-circled and heavy, smiled
Just for her.
And now
You look at me behind these familiar, rusty bars and
I hope you know.
There’s nothing
Nothing, that I wouldn’t trade for those
crooked white picket fences.

Gone Are Their Sons
Jared Frazier
poetry

Overtaken by swelling waters
Violent rains overfill narrow brooks and streams
Celestial tears slide off glistening leaves
And muddy the great barrows
Of Ancient men
Lonely souls await the dance of
Inquisitive torchlight on their earthen prison
Though it is not the sons of their sons who delve
Into the mounds of forgotten wisdom
But vagabonds—thieves who hold their beacons high
For to reveal their wicked faces to bleached bones
Would spell their doom
As those who lie secluded from the rainy world
Would impress upon their hollow eyes
The vestiges of avarice
And silently the wights would suffer
Knowing only this:
gone are their sons

Route TN-240, from Murfreesboro
Sara Snoddy
poetry

From the middle earth,
hills, valleys, and mountains
With no peak, steering home
to a house in the trees
Where the corner, flicked
Over, leaves left behind,
Rain, sunlight like shadows;
to a mill, to a town born
From carbon that seeps into
Cracks in the foundation
When the house wars
From the cold—

This route, a way home
Like a curving fastball,
Headlights daring, skin clean,
Sleep from the bone,
The shadow of a woman
In sunshine cutting
A sharp line, yellow lines,
two, one, and then none.
Falling to the side, blinding
Beneath the Tennessee sun.

Memories of Saigon
Zachery Wright
composite imaging

From the middle earth,
between valleys
And tumbling hills, mountains
With no peak, steering home
to a house in the trees
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Donald Oswald Alexander was his name but his coworkers just called him by his initials. Every morning he rode the bus to work, sat in his tiny cubicle silent except for the reluctant restaurant clients he called to sell Styrofoam to-go boxes alone except when people would walk—no, dart past to snatch a Tootsie Roll from the basket he kept beside his regularly-shined nameplate. Every evening he drove straight home to his tiny apartment, ate a frozen dinner was eventually lulled to sleep by a movie, still holding a warm bag of popcorn.

He really was a good person but no one bothered to notice just left him alone.

One day he decided to walk to work for a change for fresh air to see other people walking. He saw a little boy too crossing the street he fell. Donald ran to help he stopped to pick the boy up the bus didn’t.

An ambulance came—eventually the boy was fine.

When Donald Oswald Alexander was finally wheeled into the hospital he was still just D. O. A.
I am the constant drip of ink
into a dim pool of ideas.
Pour me over the landscape sweetly.
Let me soak in the sundry warren.
Formlessly, gently, slowly,
I dip into valleys and climb hills.
Each crevice gives me passing grace,
which I swallow and ponder for years.
Watch me as I grow wise and tall,
as I let caution evaporate
like the sweet memory of fear.
Resolve courses through malleable
veins. The ones that bled in despair.
My journey has only just begun,
and I am merely at the start.

This is a tale to
The girl who didn’t know
How to defend herself
And shouldn’t have had to.

To the girl who felt like
There could never be any light
Left in her eyes.

To the girl who cried
Her own broken pieces
Because she was never taught
That someone else could carry the weight.

To the girl who didn’t think
That she would see
The other side of 18.

To that girl who was losing faith:
We put the light back.
We put the pieces back.
We leave 18 behind our back.

And We Live.

We get the light back.
We put the pieces back.
We leave 18 behind our back
And We Live.
March 20, 2018: A man’s body was found around 5:55 a.m. between Bell Road and Brittany Park Drive in the South Metro Nashville area.

Your body on Tuesday was just a bloodstain on Thursday. A russet patch against the sidewalk where you were shot in glittering early hours.

There wasn’t much to see. A low black barricade. A pile of clothes. Dark hair peeking out, not quite covered. Sunshine filtered through pines. Crime tape roped through woods, blue and white and blue and white, all clumped close looking over your body.

I drove slow. We all drove slow, bumper to bumper. We wanted to see you. Wanted to know you. Not your breathing days—no, we strained our lucky rubber necks to know why your blood splashed hot that morning.

Reports say you were 25. A young man, living between Smyrna and Nashville, but the details remain vague. No suspects, just you and fatal wounds.

There wasn’t much to see, but I saw you on Tuesday, and your bloodstain on Thursday looked like dirt against the sidewalk. No one drove slow to see it.
Collage is a biannual publication of the Middle Tennessee State University Honors College. All submissions are 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 advisor of Collage. Inquiries should be addressed to Collage, Middle Tennessee State University, 1301 East Main Street, Box 267, Murfreesboro, TN, 37132.

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