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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

To say that I was fired up about writing this letter would be the understatement of the year, as I am never at a loss for words. Though, sometime between my fifth and sixth rewrite, the reality of the situation occurred to me. This block of copy is only a minor detail in the scheme of something so much more important. Regardless of what I have to say, it's clear that this issue speaks for itself, as Collage always has.

By being involved with this publication, I have learned that Collage is an assemblage of talent from all walks of life. This journal allows pieces from every aspect of MTSU's diverse student body to come together, forming one striking whole. From our fabulously talented submitters to our hard-working staff, Collage represents everything about MTSU that I am so proud to say I have been a part of. I am fortunate to have had the opportunity to work with so many friends and to forge new relationships along the way.

Thank you to the Fall 2012 staff and our advisor, Marsha Powers, for being so patient with my bold and unconventional disposition as I settled into this new role. It has been an experience worth so much more than I ever expected when I came on as Designer three semesters ago.

I hope all who delight in Collage are half as proud of this issue as I am. Thank you for your unwavering support.

Courtney Hunter Editor in Chief



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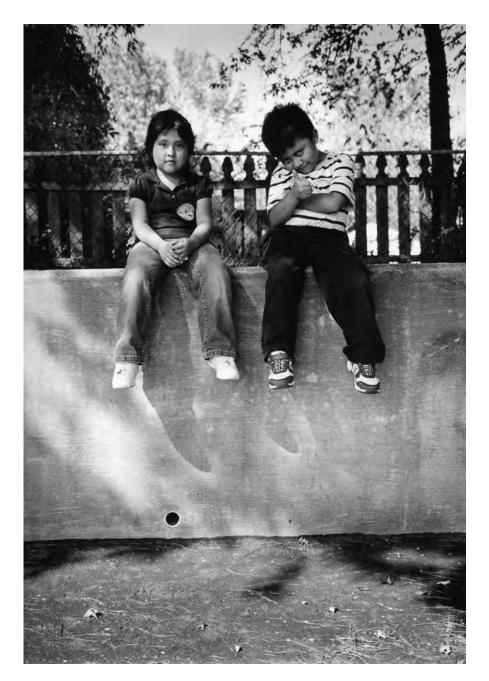
I fear you will have bad dreams of me,

And slowly drift away from the only reality that harbors the Truth I fear for the days where I don't cross your mind,

And the hurdles I jumped only lead me to second place I fear for the time when you're feeling lonely,

And all I can do is hold my breath until you breathe life back into me I fear for a future that you forget to paint me in, And the only canvas I inhabit is a still life,

Void of emotion and purpose I fear that the road you travel down will be a dead end, And that I will not be brave enough to pave more Road for you to travel upon I fear for the day that I lose all fear, And the flight I take into the beaming Light doesn't Manifest into your perfect form I fear all of this because being apart from you is terrifying, But this fear reminds me that my capacity for fear Is equal to my capacity for love And I'm the most frightened I've ever been in my entire life.







Arts Fly Alis har

Alison Ford handmade book with leather binding and watercolor illustrations



Welcome to Poetry Noodle Brifkani poetry

What if

Our books were basins

Our journals crafted from jade, chapters lined with china That only those with a rich imagination could afford

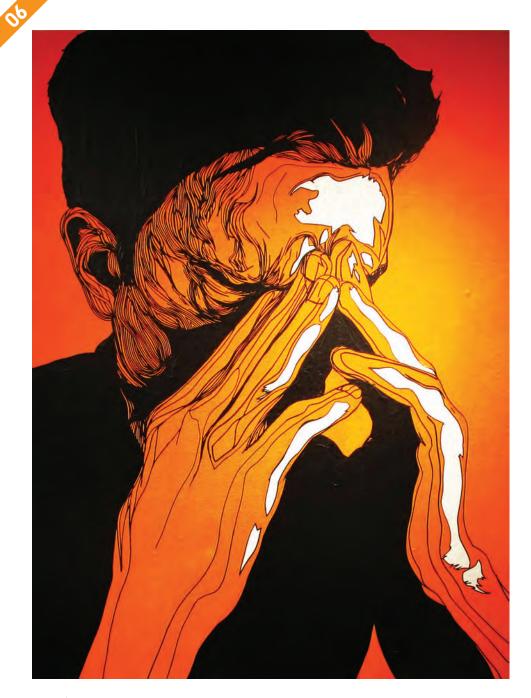
And what if

You could pour your heart into a notebook of poems Capture moments of true love and then let them Cascade onto blank pages I would Because love is a race too long for this old soul and crippled heart to run but If I could I'd drink the lines like water from a plastic cup and maybe this time I would win your heart What if You could prescribe happiness and gratitude Bottle it up and save it for later Drink a stanza as soon as you see the sun rise Don't forget to thank God And repeat once a day, every day

Imagine

Severed hearts stitched together with sonnets Every sew a beautiful simile You'd still be here with me At a time when I need the old you more than anyone Your heart longs for me like a dry crop longs for rain Imagine

The stories written on white clouds floating between blue rivers Each page a separate world Welcome to poetry.





Foundations and Cimientos Andrea Green poetry

Mi madre

My Mother tells me about my history. She tells me about my family. Who I am. Where I come from. She tells me, "Pun'kin, you were born on the 21st of December. You came in with the changin' of the seasons. You were torn from my body. No one else can lay claim to you. Not a one." She asks, "Pun'kin, do you understand who you are?"

My father

Mi Padre tells me about mi historia. He tells me about mi familia. Who I am. Where I come from. He tells me, "Mija, you were born on el veinte y uno de diciembre. You came with the changing of la temporadas. You were bread from my body. No one else can lay claim to you. Nadie." He asks, "Mija, entiendes quién eres?"

I tell them: Si! Yes! I am both. **Ambos!** Padre, mi cimientos están en ti! Mother, my foundations are in you!



Desperate Measures Samuel Johnson black paint on painted wall



I am standing in the mist, waiting.

It is just before sunrise, and the horizon is on fire. It burns the very edge of the ocean, and I wonder if it might not just consume the whole earth. Maybe that could take away the pain.

The sand is cold between my bare toes. I turn to gaze at the house perched on the dune in all its despondent glory. Sea grass, thin and pale, sways back and forth in front of the windows. Occasionally the wind will grab hold of the screen door on the porch and rip it open. It then slams shut with a resounding bang. In the middle of lonely nights, this sound is always a little too hopeful.

Still gazing at the house, I consider briefly the humiliation that would burn through me if my children should ever find me here. It is too early, and they would never be up at this hour. If they did see me, though, then what? I couldn't lie. No, they would see right through it, as children always do.

The sun is beginning to show his hateful, burning face, creeping up over the waves with a sly grin playing at his mouth. The long nightgown I am wearing flutters in the breeze. This breeze is starting to carry away the fog that has kept me wrapped in its embrace for the past hour. I squint into the sun, begging silently. He said once, "When I return, it will be with the sun. As the sun rises off the horizon, so will my ship. She will sail forward, towards home. So you must always be looking, each morning, until I return."

I observe my hands. They are old hands--bony and wrinkled. My hair, too, is old hair. It is as gray as the mist around me. Life has passed me by, but I have stayed in one place.

Each morning, waiting and looking, until he returns.

It has been twenty-seven years.







All the kings horses And all the kings men cannot put this soldier back together again. I fell from the perch on a sand-covered street Above a young man who was nothing but meat The rockets red glare the school children sing Filled up with pride, not the hurt that it brings While we fight depression at a decrepit old bar They'll show their support via sticker on car I toss and turn when they enter my dreams Going under the bed doesn't stop those high screams



Just me and myself and my other friend Death. What's that I hear? People clapping for me? Or just for the show that is on their TV? For the American Idol they gather and praise And hand iProducts out to the children they raise My problems? No. They are just not that fun. Is the peace I have longed for inside this gun? A 5 second story on news channel 2 "A terrible thing!" you say to your crew That story's over, it's time for the weather To see if the storm will really get better Foggy and soggy the forecast reveals There is no way to explain how thick this fog feels For my country, I'll say, I have given my all While most played inside, I answered the call I'll hold up my sign near the edge of the street And get cash for bourbon, that's all that I eat "GO GET A JOB!" They scream and they curse With timelines and schedules, it just makes it worse I'll lay here and die according to plan Just a statistic, not even a man Help is more than a ribbon on cars It's paying attention to this country's scars The broken and beaten are living in sorrow Perhaps the sunlight will come out tomorrow.



On a Subway to Hong Kong Clint Boyd photography





Transitory Rachel Jennie Schut oil on wood







Containment & Support Cathleen Murphy photography







I stand rooted in belief, unforgiving towards time. A clockwork that ticks away every passing hour, second--I watch the seasons, their beauty and despair. An ancient tree, I stand watch of the Earth-its creatures minute and large. I feed them with my fruit and give them shade and shelter. Yet, the world is unforgiving. Torrents of wind and storm--They threaten to splinter. I grew from seed, a husk, years upon years ago. My bitter roots have extracted the thick blood of battles from the soil. I stand watch a guardian, a savior, a common redeemer, but what has man to offer me except to gnaw at me with toothed blade and scar me with axe. I stand here wounded, gnarled and wise, whilst those who treat me so lose breath and tenacity to chop-chop, chop-me down. I stand unforgiving towards time, and even more so I stand watch-to watch them fall. Timber.





An infinite sweltering vastness inhabits what my eyes portray as absence The furies of my Heart

would cut through your doubts faster than the brisk winter winds

Leaving us both exposed



Forcing us to rebuild new walls around our convergent fragility

Protecting our newfound love from the Existential forces that burden our Souls, day-in and day-out.

Together, alone, we will be safe in the Catacombs of our past, present, and future With no skeleton too Dark to conquer;

With hands interlaced and fearlessness shaping the face

of the evening sky's nebulous Rapture

Let us become lost within what we have found...

I want to be formless with you.



It's kind of funny;

funny like that time you invited me to go on vacation, which was code for you're not invited but I'm always bad at getting social cues. Since How To Lie was never a class you offered in homeschooling, I missed the memo and showed up--7:30am saw me standing there excitedly with my sleeping bag and pillow and a packed suitcase, which is when you must have panicked and told me vacation was canceled, but that you'd generously drive me home.

The phone call from my sister whispering "nobody thought you'd actually show up" was the apology I never got. I heard later "you would have hated it anyway, it rained." and that made everything convenient for your conscience, I suppose. If I had just looked inside that rental car I would have seen you'd saved my seat for the grill.

I sat there after her voice trailed off with the phone in my rigid hand and wondered how you thought I'd ever use it on your number after that; wondered if your caller ID would take months or years to erase all traces of our relationship, the LCD screen blinking dispassionately while doing what you couldn't.

I think about how those rainy few days cost you something far greater than a rental car and an extra seat, and though you've probably forgotten this has happened altogether I find myself holding on to that last image of the grill and I hope you at least had the decency to strap it in.



Margaret's heart pounded as she descended the steps with disciplined grace to her father's parlor. She could feel the breeze from the door rustle her dress and caress her legs and breasts. A reminder at how exposed she was, exposed at her father's command. The men disgusted her as they sat amongst the haze of their smoke and booze. The stench of the alcohol turned her stomach, and her strict and seductive countenance slipped, only for a second, to the true grimace haunting her heart. The saxophone had a hold on her soul as it dipped, lulled, and cheered out its sentiments. Its mournful and electrifying wail was her only comfort in the dark depths of the chamber. It gave her the strength to bar the terror threatening to take hold of her and never let go.

"Deep breath," Margaret tried to tell herself. "The beat, think of the beat. Just move with—Don't touch me!" Her composure vanished at the grip of a plump moist hand on her waist. Suddenly, Margaret was facing a large, burly man with muscles of inflamed granite. She baked under his touch as heat radiated from his red, drenched face. Her heart sank at the realization that this was the man to claim her first. Dance, her father had told her to dance, to enchant the men with her delicate steps. But how could she? She was being strangled by the sticky fumes escaping the man's demanding mouth. Margaret struggled to find the music. She kept listening for the lull of the sax, listening, but it was gone. Gone. Margaret's heart seized with panic. She felt trapped by the men forcing her to dance. She wasn't human. She was a spectacle, a jewel to be coveted and marred for the gross intentions of the slopping men around her. Margaret turned circles as the monsters cheered, but her eyes searched the crowd desperately for the Negro who had abandoned his saxophone in the corner. She needed him to play. Without him, she was defenseless against the sinister smoke wisping around her, choking her, suffocating her.

Then, she found him hidden towards the back of the crowded parlor. As he snuck a drink and joined the men silently to enjoy the spectacle, Margaret's heart sank. She was alone, betrayed by the Negro who had abandoned his saxophone. The sickness and terror consumed her as her strength broke.

Her dance ended as she clumsily tore her way through the mass of men. She could feel their slimy hands grabbing her arms, demanding her to stay, but she couldn't. She had to escape. Her breath came in gasps, and her vision blurred at the edges. The stitches in her dress began to pop as she ran against the plump hands trying to hold her back. Finally, Margaret hit the stairs once more. The grace was gone as she raced, slipped, hit, and stumbled through her painful struggle up the stairs she had so gracefully descended. Tears streamed from her eyes.

Margaret desperately wished for the return of the father she had loved and admired as a little girl, before money had begun to cloud his vision. Before he turned his own daughter into a prize to be won by his clients. The car awaited her outside the door. "Mademoiselle," the driver whispered. He knew where she wanted him to take her. Home, to sit by the bay with her feet resting in the water's embrace.

"The saxophone had a hold on her soul as it dipped, lulled, and cheered out its sentiments."

Margaret slumped into the hard leather, continuously yearning for her father's return. She picked at the tear in her dress. Her hair, which had been sculpted perfectly as she descended the steps, was a halo of frazzled knots around her head. Her father was a businessman. She could see her family's new wealth, her mother's supposed happiness at her new jewels and fancy dresses, but the con man was not her father. The smuggler was not her father. Her father was a businessman, but he had been strangled by the man who took his place. Strangled by the prohibition and his own avarice. No more care to be bestowed on his darling girl. His only nurturing spirit devoted to his shining propositions.

"That girl!" Alistair raided. "No respect. One thing. I asked for one thing. Have a little fun. But no. I get complaints and threats from my most valuable clients. Does she want to be out on the streets again? I can put her there if that's what she wants!" Alistair's thoughts had become incoherent at the onset of his rage, and his sight was blurred from the empty scotch bottle on the table.

Scarlett, Alistair's primm wife, just listened and did nothing to come to her daughter's defense. He wouldn't listen anyway. "Margaret!" Alistair clumsily stomped down the sandy bank to where his daughter sat in the tides of the water. His massive figure was highlighted from the numerous lights streaming from the mansion. She didn't move.

"Father, please. I couldn't...I couldn't do it. They were touching me, and the music—" Margaret's pleas were broken by her scream.

Her father had curled his fist into her knotted hair, lifting her up, his vision red and his heart black.

"Look at me!"

A tear slipped from Margaret's eye. The tear was her only way to plead for her true father's return, but he just threw her back down to the sand. Her arms were too weak, her movements too slow. Margaret knew it was coming, but the searing pain came first as her cheek inflamed at the impact of her father's slap.

"Father, please," whispered Margaret to the retreating back of her father.

The door slammed behind Alistair. Margaret lay traumatized in a lump on the sand and the sea breeze rushed to heal her once more broken spirit.

The waves beat against the glow of the moon, and Margaret was able to find the strength to stand in the solace of the rhythm. She walked slowly into the deeper water then finally plunged herself against its pounding force. She swam without thought, without purpose. Only with the hope that there were better shores with smaller houses, warming lights, and music that took a life of its own. The father she had known and loved was gone, only to be found in the whispers of the wind.







Brainwashed Hamilton Masters photography









Dead Fish Alex Pietzsch india ink, Sharpie, Permapaque, H20 color



I flex my muscles and stretch my limbs Breathing in and out is too easy Testing my feet, I step forward I'm strong. I step again.

Soon, I am running. Gliding effortlessly across everything The best feeling I've ever had Screams of joy escape my throat

They are lost in the crowd's loud cheers I glance around me to see the best The best of the world I easily pass them all As the finish line comes into my sight I sense no one else around me I am winning I tear through the Olympic ribbon

The crowd erupts, and the announcer speaks excitedly I feel hands on my back, and my name being called "David! David! It's time to get up." My lids snap open, and I'm surrounded by sweat.

"Just a bad dream, honey," I'm being told The ladies in white reassure me But as I'm being lifted into my wheelchair There's no place I'd rather be than back in My hospital bed.





My Island (A poem for Luke) Ari Constantine poetry

The moon is a wolf at the harbor's edge; his howling summons soft crests of white waves to the ankles of those who kneel there. A mouth of salt and sand and sound surround, thin azure clouds drifting in the throat of mountains' cradle; hills so steep that only the flowers can live there, rocky folds and sheets of stone peak and disintegrate like the tide.

With eyes too eager & yet too small to absorb every detail at once, I study cracks on my window pane. I imagine the crunching of royal sandals against the dry pathway, bleached by a sun made of golden bone. Like a lizard I find my sanctuary in palaces of shade, sipping ancient blood from the altar of the sea. Alone in the bay, an island floats without trees. Cave teeth open, drinking in the salty history of a world beneath the cold waters. Red juice in the belly of my coconut beast, I swallow and all I taste are words.

There are currents out there too deep to breach: societies of sunken ideas, the swollen fruits of the sea. These, the plants which I could never deserve, will flourish in the green depths where nothing matters save inexhaustible sunlight, like the back of a lover's hand come to stroke the rippling surface of the ocean's brow. Pockets of rainbow & shadow dance in the dimples of the waves, verbal vegetation in the palms of the steep cliffs; I plant poetry there at the crown of the island (something to return to after I've gone) and once again my soles connect with living gravel, open wombs of culture and the smell of fish. I wish they could take our place on two feet; I would trade my skin for scales any moment.

I slide inside the cobblestone; I greet the keeper of the shore, silent, one-eyed beacon, always scanning for new secrets that might have drifted up from the dark blue. I wake up from a vision of gargantuan pearls & the sky is still inside me. Arms of breeze and dust and conversation examine every inch of my red skin, & I tremble at the hands of my invisible lover. I let my fingers wander through highways of bright blue veins crawling between earthen muscles into collarbone shade, stalks of brown reeds comfort me there, and the ear returns promises in waves of echo. I crawl like an oracle across the rolling fields of your spine, my nose pressed against the soft flesh of your chest, I drag it along until I am impeded by the arrogance of a hip, the sudden trip, the smooth dip, into the cool navel just beneath a ribcage of wood, my own special brand of solitude, you. You are the temple inside which I wish to pray; offering trinkets of coral & beads of knuckle-joints, I will these ruins seduce.

I am a wreck of the human body a pebble cast into a sea of burning tea, but am not the only ripple in the mysteries of the deep. Imagine an ocean deeper than space, & there at the bottom, I stare at the sunlight, waiting on the promised reflection of your face.





Brett Warren's Photography

With a penchant for southern iconography (think antebellum homes and Civil War battlefields) and eccentricity (think Alfred Hitchcock's thrillers and the story of the Ugly Duckling), Nashville photographer Brett Warren's art creates a unique worldview.

Juxtaposing the familiar with the unusual has become his brand.

"There are just (some) sort of things that I love," Warren says.

"I love cinematic references. I love Alfred Hitchcock. I love things that people don't necessarily perceive as beautiful and finding beauty in little things like that."

Warren grew up in McMinnville, a town of about 14,000 people. When he began tinkering with cameras in high school, Warren kept the hobby to himself.

"Coming from a small town, I didn't know how people would take it," he says. "I was just an art student in high school. I drew a whole, whole lot, but my pictures were something I kept to myself. My friends and I did videos together, but we kept those to ourselves, too."

Warren used a Nikon CoolPix, but upgraded to a Nikon D-40 for his first serious camera. As his interest grew, he began taking senior pictures and shooting weddings.

"I always had little jobs on the side like senior pictures, and they really shouldn't have trusted me with their senior pictures," Warren says. "But they let me, and that was cool. I also did a few weddings. I really hope they enjoy their pictures now because that was the early days. I had a lot of fun and was learning, which was the best part about it."

While he was attending school at Middle Tennessee State University, Warren studied graphic design but continued to work on his photography. "I minored in photography," Warren says. "I took a lot of black-and-white film classes. Getting in the dark room was so fun, and I always was able to use my photos in my graphic design projects."

During his years at MTSU, Warren slowly changed his focus to photography rather than graphic design. He was work was first published in Collage in the fall of 2007. He continued to send his work to the magazine and was published a total of seven times during his college career.

After graduation in 2009, he says, that an internship led him to make photography his primary career.

"I got an internship Annie Leibovitz in New York City and went there for three months," Warren says. "That is where I learned the meat of how a photo business should be run, what proper photo sets should be, what it means to conceptualize your work and follow through with everything."

After his internship, Warren returned to Middle Tennessee and began drawing up a business plan for what became Brett Warren's Photography Emporium.

"I am crazy about photography," Warren says, with his hipster demeanor and dark hair, sitting at a table in Fido's, which is one of his favorite places to get a cup of coffee.

"In order to do it the way I want to, I have to grow it. I just started working as a designer in town and started working in the spring 2010 of being real serious about as could as a business."

Warren works his day job in downtown Nashville among the stars at County Music Television as a graphic designer, occasionally helping on the photo side of the company.

"Every hour I am not there, I am doing photography," Warren says. "It seems like everyone in Nashville has two jobs. I am this, but I am that too." Warren takes on a variety of clients, ranging from Chinet, a manufacturer of paper plates to local musicians who need art for the EPs they produce. Sometimes, Warren enjoys being his own client and taking photos for himself.

"The most fun are my personal projects because you can let loose and do what you want to do," Warren says. "No one is looking over your shoulder, and so many random things happen between trudging through swamps or fighting off bugs and all those crazy things."

His art form expresses stories told in images. His Pinocchio series was told using an antebellum Civil War ax factory and a Civil War reinactor while The Ugly Duckling was told using swamps and models. Warren says he tries to find vintage items and tries to build his own sets.

Originally, his online presence was for portfolio purposes. Now, the portfolio has morphed into his expression of art.

"I knew I was capable but no one was going to ask me for the kind of art I was doing," Warren says. "It seems like things have shifted now, and now my end goal is to make art and share it with everybody."

Within the next few years, Warren wants to work solely on photography.

"I see my business being sort of like a culture," Warren says. "I want to create a lifestyle with a brand. I find all these vintage and cool things, and I want to offer these up as artifacts from shoots and let people see them in the emporium. If that means I get to work with magazines that would be cool. But if I keep doing my photography like this, it is worthwhile to me."







Moving or Firmly Planted Jennie Schut encaustic and mixed media



My Mother's Music Celia Gendron poetry

My mother taught me how to live Using the words of greats to guide my life. Her words of wisdom quietly whispered in secret mother-daughter moments Or loudly laughed with siblings 'round But always, either softly or loudly, privately or publicly The words Always Sung. She taught me how to live Using the lyrics of liars the songs of stoners the stories of stuck-in-the-sixties stars. She taught me what life means while the guitar of gods Clapton, Stevie Ray, Campbell, and the other greats Surrounded us with the sounds of emotion. Sweet Baby James sang me to sleep And Suite: Judy Blue Eyes taught me that life lives after love. And in a Tennessee winter I found religion with my mother While singing along with God, Springsteen sacrificing his life in front of me On stage, to save my own. My mother taught me life While singing sorrow and loss Dancing to happiness and jubilation While filling my head with songs. The truest words ever spoken My mother has always claimed And is yet to be proven wrong, "There is a song for everything."









A friendship. A flower. Blooming. Growing. Closer to you. A one - way street. To nowhere ? To everywhere? Uncertain how to speak. A glance. A blush. Meaningless? Meaningful? Daydreams ensue. Raging Desire. Across the room. Across Time. Across the miles between. A friendship. A folly. Blooming. Growing. Forever away from you.



Gabrielle Thompson





"I hope you are dead, friend."

Malachi Boyle ran a graveyard on the edge of town. Old Man Malachi, they called him. It was an old establishment, and many a resident had been laid to rest there by family members. He supposed so many wished to see their loved ones off in such a location for the same reason they chose to live in this small town; it reminded them of a simpler time.

Olde Boyle Cemetery had been the family business for generations. Holding with tradition, every grave had been dug by the hands of a Boyle, and each had been filled by the hands of a Boyle. It would always be that way at Malachi's cemetery. "What relief you must feel, gone from this world... You have been released from such torment. I pray that you linger no longer."

Malachi thrust his shovel into the dirt and allowed it to fall down onto the coffin below. Inside that coffin was a man whose graveside ceremony had been held a few hours earlier. As Malachi stood shoveling the earth over his remains, the sun had already fallen below the trees in the west. Being a small town, it did not take long for all its residents to learn the circumstances of this man's death. A suicide throws a town like this into a furious fit of whispers. He was already well aware of the news, of course; he always enjoyed when talk of his work reached his ears. They all spoke of how sad it was, how he had left behind a wife and child, and how he had all but abandoned them by the end. Whatever he had done in his life, he would be remembered for his increasingly selfish acts—his final one most of all.

Malachi cared naught for any of that, however. All he cared for at this stage was seeing to this man's proper burial, preparing him for his eternal rest. Malachi was very practiced in this sort of thing, and it always left him with a sense of fulfillment when it was done.

"Dead... Dead... Oh, I hope you are truly dead."



He paused as he shoveled off more dirt into the hole, listening. The dirt and rubble rained against the wooden lid with a dull rapid-fire impact. He could swear he had heard something else from below. Looking around, he saw that he was still alone. After watching the coffin for a few moments, he went back to shoveling dirt, satisfied that all was quiet. That was when he heard the unmistakable thud that came from inside the coffin. He froze where he stood; there was no doubt this time.

Though Malachi was an elderly man at this point in his life, he certainly did not lack for strength. The dirt had not yet overtaken the coffin's top, so Malachi promptly bent down, grabbed one end of the rickety wooden box, and hauled it-and its resident-out of the hole onto level ground. Sweat dripped from his forehead as he bent over the coffin, hesitating. Finally, he gathered his courage, reached down, and unlatched the box. In one quick motion, he raised the lid and stepped immediately back, brandishing his shovel before him in a defensive stance.

The man's corpse inside was still. It had been cleaned up, but the funeral had clearly been of the closed-casket variety. The gunshot wound had left the remainder of his head in an awful mess. Malachi did not move for several minutes. He stood there, simply staring at the body and allowing the body to stare back at him. A gentle evening breeze kicked up and rustled through the surrounding willow trees; it was allowed to run its course and slowly die back down before any further movement occurred in the cemetery.

Finally, he willed his legs to carry him forward once more. He got down on one knee over the body's resting place and cautiously raised his hand toward the man's neck, the shovel still gripped tightly in his other hand. As he did this, his eyes drifted up to the mess still held by that neck. It nearly could have passed for a small, squat, caved-in watermelon, were it not for the human facial features that remained. The thought drifted from Malachi's mind as his index and middle fingers pressed against cold flesh. No pulse. That didn't make sense, however. He knew what he had heard.

Carefully, Malachi dropped to both knees. His pulse pounded, and his knuckles turned white around the wooden shaft of the shovel. He eased in warily and rested his head against the dead man's chest. A heartbeat. It was unmistakable, and it confirmed his fears.

"No!" Malachi jumped to his feet and brought his shovel down into the corpse's neck, parting flesh without a moment's hesitation. "You're dead, you're dead, you're dead!" His face was red, his blood was boiling. He raised the shovel and thrust it back into the man's pale and lifeless flesh repeatedly, cleaving through muscle and biting into bone. When he was finished, the neck no longer held its prize that it insisted was a human head.

Gasping for air, Malachi checked his surroundings. There was still nobody to be seen, especially in such darkness. He could, however, make out a few rows of the surrounding headstones. His breathing began to calm, and a grin crept easily across his face. He took great pride in his work. The job was not without its risks, of course. He was often afraid that one of his released, his freed men, would not truly have left the torments of life behind. It would be less than desirable for one of these individuals to squander his gift, to cling desperately to the familiar constraints that came with the realm of the living. The bond between Malachi and his clients was a special one, and for them to share their secrets just would not do.

Malachi's gaze returned to the man's remains. Once he had caught his breath and his blood had sufficiently settled, he closed and latched the lid. He stood up, pressed his foot against the wooden frame, and shoved the box back into its hole. He returned to shoveling dirt into the grave with calm, steady strokes. "Oh, friend. You are gone from us now, I think."



Nhu Duona photography



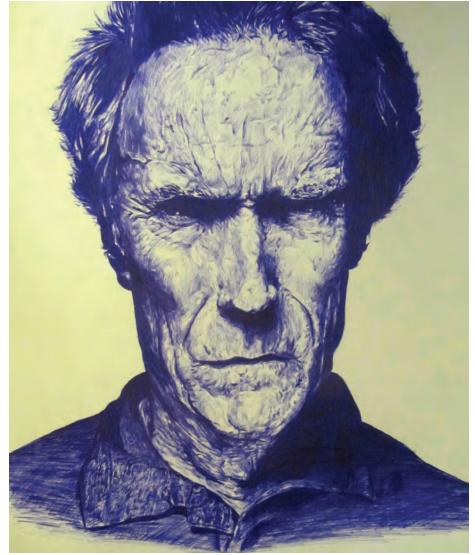






I am trying to tell the truth, But I can't. Despite the untold toils of our tongue's journey And arrival at what we call completion, I am still left, unable to fulfill expression. And a half truth, as honest the intention, Still a lie. Before it reaches your ears Before it touches the heart Before these words become partially articulate. They are perfect. They are exchanged deep inside in a language only God speaks. Just as the artist frustrates with a brush So do I, on the forward projecting side of the synapse. Connections fail between you and I And neither one knows. Those little scribbles won't do, Not even prose, with its bars and margins possess a truss To hang these thoughts. Even the playground of verse proves too confining. I know where the truth is, But you can't have it. Before any conclusions can form Before a tear can fall or the soul can break Before the hand goes to work or the jaw clocks in... I wish I could tell the truth, But all I know for sure is that I am a liar.











The Beautiful Interior Stephanie Smith poetry

The wind wails a tragic ballad
For the rock being pummeled by the rain
Each smarting drop chips away at the coarse exterior
The rock feels every absent grain
And weeps diamonds
Which are worthless against excruciating pain
But it is not in water's nature to refrain
From asserting control on its inferior
And beating out the beautiful from what appears to be plain

PROSE The Coca-Cola Clock Andrea Green Prose

Idell Slough looked intently at the cylinder of water on the stove. As she waited for the bubbles to introduce themselves, she began to absentmindedly shuffle from side to side, her tattered housecoat grazing the tops of her husband's old winter slippers. She had borrowed the slippers a few weeks ago because, for some odd reason, hers had gone missing. With her hair in green foam curlers, her massive figure billowing out of every available crevice of the flimsy green material, and the large brown slippers on her feet, she gave the impression of a giant moss tree swaying in the wind.

Idell glared at the immoveable liquid in the old copper pot and began to worry that just like yesterday, and the day before, Compson's breakfast would be late. Compson was her husband, and during the first few years of her marriage, she was sure his meals were on time. She knew what a wife was supposed to do. Besides, how many times had her momma told her, "Three a day, I'dale! You got to give a man three a day, and it's got to be on time. You hear me, child? On time!"

Idell pressed her eyes together so tight that soon several tiny white dots began to dance before her in the darkness. She stood like this for a while, watching the carnival of lights and hoping that today would be the day her momma would forget to call. But she knew that no matter how long she held her eyes closed, sooner or later, the phone would ring, and her momma's voice would be on the other line. She never understood why her momma took such an interest in her husband's oatmeal. Reluctantly, she returned her attention to the copper pot, all the while rolling her head back and forth so as to somehow jar loose the details of the whereabouts of her missing slippers. After she had definitively concluded that their old Labrador had probably taken them out into the yard and was using them as a chew toy, she glanced again at the water. It still wasn't boiling. She huffed in agitation and glanced at the large Coca-Cola clock that hung above the stove. A once vibrant red, the clock was now a dark, blurry maroon, covered by a thin layer of grease from twenty years of three a day meals. It was 5:45, and Compson had to be at work at 6:30. Idell thought back to when her husband had purchased her that clock.

They had been in the house a little over a year, and she had just gotten used to the O'Keefe and Merritt stove. It was her anniversary, and her momma had been over that day instructing her on how to make a rum cake. With her momma's help, she had prepared Compson a wonderful feast. She had even picked out the menu, which her momma had said would make her husband sick. But she knew that a dinner of liver with brown gravy and sautéed onions, baby lima beans, brussell sprouts, and cheddar biscuits would work wonders. She had intended to serve him the rum cake, but at the last minute, she realized that even with her momma's help, she had forgotten to add the rum. It hadn't mattered anyway. He had enjoyed the liver nonetheless.

Idell loved liver, and she thought everyone else did, too. After all, her husband had told her, "Idell honey, I think you're getting used to that new stove. Mmmhmm." The liver had been a bit on the burnt side, and her cheddar biscuits, she admitted, were a tiny bit dry. But he hadn't noticed. He had just smacked his lips, rubbed his stomach and given her his usual satisfied smile. He had been so content that when she lifted his empty plate to refill it, he had kindly said, "Oh no darling, I couldn't eat another bite. It was so good the first time; I don't want to ruin the memory by getting seconds!"

As she had cleared the table, he had patted her bottom and said matter-of-factly, "You need a clock in here. That's what you need. A clock." She had never needed a clock before. In fact, she had never even worn a watch. As soon as she was about to question his reasons for buying her a new clock (she would have preferred some Youth Dew perfume or a new hat), he said, "I think I'll stop by after work tomorrow and see what the hardware store has." And that was that. He had never told her exactly why she needed a clock. She had never asked for one. Was there a reason he had thought to buy it? She furled her eyebrows at the question.

Idell realized that she had never liked the clock. As a matter of fact, she had hated that clock since the day he had brought it home. The colors were all wrong. Who in the world would design something with a pea green border and a bright red center? She supposed that the Coca-Cola clock makers had tried to be artsy and make the clock look somewhat like a coke bottle. After all, the old bottles used to be green. And she supposed that the red had to be there too. Maybe the clock wasn't in such bad taste after all, but there was something about it she just didn't like. As she stared at the antique, she realized she had never taken the time to clean the thing. Why hadn't she thought of that before? Hadn't her mother told her a million times that a thin paste of baking soda and water along with a little elbow grease and a hard bristle toothbrush could work wonders? Idell knew she was a good cook, but she was even better at keeping a house clean. She had spent the last two weeks going through years of National Geographic magazines in the hall closet. Idell's gaze shifted from the maroon circle on the wall to the slim yellow door directly outside the kitchen. That closet could be used for something else. At the moment, she didn't have the faintest idea what that something was.

She didn't care what her husband claimed. Years ago he had purchased a subscription to those magazines for the pictures more than the stories. She knew he didn't care about Kenya's Poko Tribe or how the American West had changed. Other men his age had called off the charade long ago. The photos of dark skinned women with vibrant body paint and bra free breasts no longer satisfied men of his age. They needed to look at real women. Idell wondered if any of those men knew how silly they were if they thought the women in those new magazines were real. Bleach blonde bimbos who loved football, action movies, and cuddle-free sex weren't real women. No. Real women were like her--pair of ill-fitting blue jeans, an oversized sweat shirt, and a scarf in her hair. That was a real woman. You wouldn't see Miss November bending over in the hall cleaning out stack after stack of National Geographic.

She had been working on those magazines for weeks and hadn't made a dent. What in the hell was she going to do with all those magazines? She could have a garage sale. Might make a few extra



dollars. She scratched the bottom of her left shoe against the bottom of the stove. She could use a new pair of slippers. For some reason, hers kept disappearing. She had plenty of junk to put in a garage sale. The children's old toys, her husband's forgotten collection of jazz records, Christmas decorations, even a few so called antiques her mother-in-law had gifted her. And that clock.

Idell returned her attention to the wall. No. He'd know if she got rid of the clock. It'd been there too long. Just like that dusty stack of National Geographic magazines. Much too long to move without being noticed. If she couldn't sell the clock, she would definitely clean it. That's what she would do. She would spend the morning cleaning that clock. Just need a good toothbrush and some baking soda.

Idell wondered if she had any soda left in the fridge. She had scorched a loaf of bread the day before and had used the last bit up trying to make another. If she was going to clean the clock, she would need to make a trip to the market. That meant the magazines would have to wait. She would need a list: eggs, buttermilk, Vienna sausages, cream of tartar, lima beans, couple cans of spam, and a six-pack of cokes. Better make it two sixpacks. She liked coke, but she hated that clock.



It was always ticking away. Telling her what time it was and even what time it wasn't. She didn't need to know that four in the afternoon was still more than ten hours away. She didn't need to know it was five till six. She could tell the time. She could tell by the growl of her stomach and the ache in her back.

She could tell by the position of the sun and the sounds of TV Land reruns on what her husband affectionately called the "boob tube." Idell turned and looked toward the den, wishing she could see through the wall to the bright light of the television set. Her stories started at 12:30. She couldn't miss As the World Turns. There was a new guy on the show. Handsome man. A bit brawny for her taste, but she thought him good looking. She wondered if he liked oatmeal.

Idell returned her attention to the container of water on the stove. Not a bubble to be found. She shifted her weight and squatted down to peer at the pilot light. Nothing. She had forgotten to light it. As Idell reached for a box of matches, her husband shuffled into the room and sat down at the table, staring at his wife as she struggled to start the stove. "Need some help, honey?" She tried several more matches and finally set the eye alight. "No. I don't need any help. Breakfast is going to be a bit late this morning." Her husband nodded his head, opened his paper, and glanced accusingly at the old Coca-Cola clock on the wall.

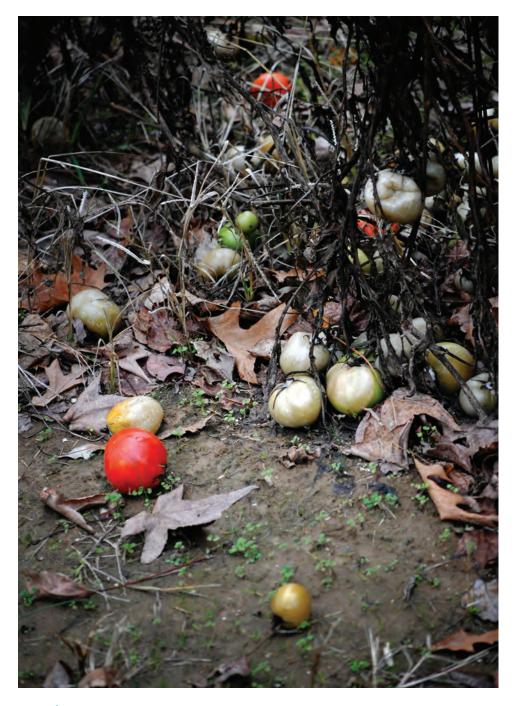


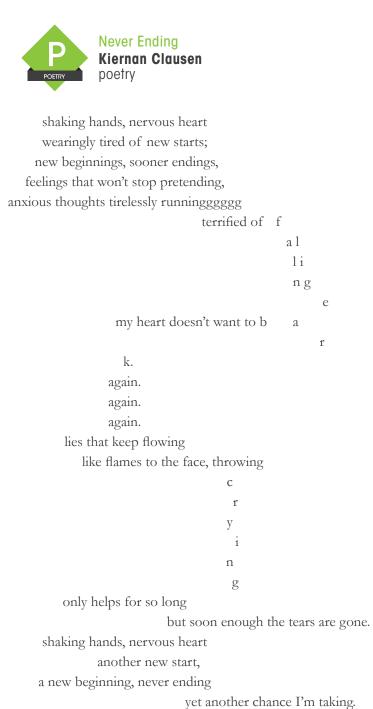


Waiting Gabrielle Thompson photography











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2)











Whit Davis

poetry

Broken

Shayna Strong

digital/mixed media

Insomnia in Summer I'm no intellectual, yet questions (so perpetual) still Beg me to untangle the quirks in the works. I don't need answers, really, but pounding the hounding questions Might help me sleep on a (sticky) summer night When the rumble-flash of the storm (and the buzz-twitch of the caffeine) Refuse restoring REM to my hopeful (open) eyes that chase the racing drops slipping down the window. So how come? is the hazy phrase On the tongue's tip (and the pen's point) tonight.

> Like how come June bugs have a month of May debut? (Jumping the gun.) Something I've always wondered, too, Is how come lady-bugs dress up all frilly when I've never seen a (decent) fella-bug in my life? (Looking for love in all the wrong places.) And how come lightning bugs know to switch off their glow When the sunshine sings melody at day-time, Accompanied by blue-sky soprano? (Well, whoever heard of enlightening light with a little more light?)

But for real, though—

How come I'm always rehearsing plans for that day a week away And not living here, in this second?

I sure don't jump the gun! (Do I?) And how come I get fixed up all fancy (and put on my pearls) so that one of those fellas will need me as their girl?

I'm sure not looking for love! (Am I?)

Yeah, how come my mind won't compute when it's time to clock in,

But it loves to reboot (and run ragged) all round the grimmest hours on the clock's countenance,

When the thunder cracks across the black,

Accompanied by rain-on-tin-roof tenor?

Well, whoever heard of sequestering questions with a couple more questions? (Oh.)



"What say you?" The magistrate's voice was cold and harsh.

"I am not guilty," Abigail whispered.

The Pricker watched her with his dark eyes. He enjoyed his work immensely and was practically salivating. "So you say, yet his mark is on your left arm."

She shivered. "I was born with this mark."

"You lie. He gave you that mark while in service for him," the Pricker spoke loud enough for everyone to hear.

"Confess, and it will go well for you," advised the magistrate.

"If I confess, it would be a false confession. I dare not lie." Abigail looked around the room as she spoke to the assembly. "I would not harm any of God's creatures."

The Pricker grabbed Abigail by the arm. "We know you milked Widow Bishop's cow, and now it lies dead."

"Why would I harm the poor animal? I would only be hurting myself. Save for Widow Bishop's charity, I have no means of support."

The widow sat with her head down and hands folded in her lap.

Whispers floated around the room.

"There is but one way to know for certain. Leave me to my work. If this woman is in league with the devil, she cannot hide it from me," boasted the Pricker. "Yes, let the Pricker examine her," someone in the crowd shouted.

Abigail jerked free from the Pricker's grasp and raised her bound hands to wipe the tears from her eyes.

"I am not a witch." She looked at Widow Bishop.

"These past two years have I ever harmed you or your animals?"

The widow refused to look up and remained silent. "Tell them. Please."

The buzz from the hushed conversations escalated. "Silence!" shouted the magistrate. "Abigail Jones, you stand accused of witchcraft, of having a familiar in the form of a black cat, and of consorting with the devil. What say you?"

"I am innocent."

"Everyone knows witches consort with familiars. Black cats are the devil's spawn," an elder woman called out.

"The cat wandered into the barn. She needed nourishment. I fed her some milk. I could not let her starve."

"Fetch the cat, and I will kill it," the Pricker said. His eyes gleamed at the prospect of watching the animal squirm under his administrations.

"If I confess, it would be a false confession. I dare not lie."

"Keep your filthy hands off her!" Abigail shouted. "Refrain from your hellish cries, or I will bind your mouth as well," the magistrate warned. "Our laws are clear. A witch shall not live. If you are innocent as you claim, there is no need to fear. You will submit to the Witch Pricker's examination."

It took a moment for Abigail to realize the milk curdling scream she heard came from her lips. The Pricker grabbed her arm and pulled her toward his examination room.

She dug in her heels and turned toward the magistrate. "You saw Hester when the Pricker finished with her. Do you not remember her broken and bruised body?"

"Hester was declared innocent," he answered. "Aye, she was innocent, but what did that get her but a pine box and a stone marker in the cemetery?" Several elder women gasped and fanned themselves. Suddenly, Widow Bishop stood and addressed the magistrate. "Tis true! Hester was bloody from head to toe." She pointed to the Pricker and shouted, "You killed her!"

The crowd sucked in a collective breath. No one dared question the Witch Pricker and his methods. It was common knowledge that witches could be pricked with sharp objects without feeling pain, and for the sake of the community, the Pricker had to be thorough.

"Silence!" the magistrate ordered. He stepped down from the bench and motioned for Widow Bishop to stand before him. When he looked at her, the hard lines around his mouth and eyes softened. Keeping his voice low, he asked, "Do you believe Abigail to be innocent?"

"Aye," she whispered.

"Why did you hold your tongue and not speak for her earlier?"

"I was afraid."

"Of what?"

"I did not wish to be accused of harboring a witch."

"Is Abigail a witch?"

"I do not say that she is."

The magistrate stepped away from the widow and addressed the crowd. "The widow Bishop speaks for Abigail. If there are others who wish to do the same, speak now."

Complete silence was the crowd's response, and a malevolent smile crossed the Pricker's face. He released Abigail and walked toward the widow.

"Widow Bishop, how would you know a witch if you saw one?" The Pricker asked.

She bowed her head and whispered, "I do not know." "Speak out so everyone can hear."

"I do not know," she said. Her voice rang loud and clear.

"Then how do you know Abigail is not a witch?" "She hath done no harm," answered the widow. "How did your cow die?" "I know not." "I do not know," she said. Her voice rang loud and clear.

"Then how do you know Abigail is not a witch?" "She hath done no harm," answered the widow. "How did your cow die?"

"I know not."

"Because she hath bewitched you!" He turned to address the assembly. "I alone have the ability to make evil show its true face. Widow Bishop hath not been trained to recognize practitioners of the black arts. Abigail must be examined."

"No!" shouted Abigail. "Let us examine you, Pricker."

"What nonsense is this?" demanded the magistrate.

"He accuses me of witchcraft, but the only proof he hath is a dead cow." She looked the Pricker in the eyes and said, "I accuse you of witchcraft!" The crowd, shocked and appalled, remained silent–

eager to see what would happen next.

"You cannot accuse me." He lifted his chin and stiffened his spine. "I am the authority on witchcraft here. You are but a lowly wench." "Just how is it you know so much about witches? Could it be because you are one?"

"Insolence!" He backhanded Abigail, and his ring cut her cheek. "I will teach you to hold your tongue, witch."

Abigail wiped the blood from her face. "So, you have determined I am a witch without examining me?"

He ran his fingers through his stringy black hair and took a deep breath to gather his composure. "Only a witch would dare question my authority." "You visited Widow Bishop three days ago. I was there when you offered to feed her cow," Abigail stated with an accusing tone. "Perhaps you bespelled

the beast and caused it to die."

"Enough! I am not on trial, Abigail. You are." The Pricker turned his red face toward the magistrate and pinched the bridge of his nose. "Magistrate, bid the witch to submit to the examination." He yanked Abigail's hair and dragged her across the room.

Pain shot through her skull, and for a brief moment she saw stars. She kicked and clawed at the Pricker until he released his hold. She backed away from him and turned to address the crowd. "He is clever, is he not? He pretends to hate witches even though he is one. Is there any better way to hide than in plain sight?"

The room erupted. Rich and poor, master and servant, male and female shouted their opinions and accusations. Abigail ran for the door, but the Pricker was faster. His arm snaked around her waist and held tight. The crowd surrounded them as Abigail kicked and screamed. During the chaos, Widow Bishop feigned

dizziness. She fell backward, and the magistrate caught her. While he gently lowered her to the floor, she reached into her apron pocket and grabbed a handful of crushed herbs. She blew the dust into his face. The magistrate's eyes glazed over. She put her lips close to his ear.





"Let us scrutinize both Abigail and the Pricker," she suggested. "I will be glad to perform the examinations." She snapped her fingers, and he blinked several times. "Magistrate! I bid you to end this madness."

When he realized pandemonium had swept through the courtroom, he shouted, "Hold! There will be order."

The room slowly quieted as the people waited for him to continue. "Pricker, release Abigail. Both of you come forward."

When they reached the front of the room, he continued. "There stand two accused of witchcraft this day."

"What? Only Abigail has been accused," the Pricker corrected.

"Silence! The next person who speaks will spend five days in the stocks."

Widow Bishop moved to stand next to Abigail and put her arm around the girl's shoulder.

"Widow Bishop is the victim of a witch's spell. Therefore, she will be the one to conduct the examinations of those accused."

"What authority does she have?" demanded the Pricker.

"She is the community healer, and I give her the authority," answered the magistrate. "Both of you will submit to the widow's examination." ****

Several days later, at the edge of town, Abigail and Widow Bishop stood side by side looking down at the fresh grave with its oversized stone marker. A purring black cat encircled their legs.

"Well done, Abigail. You are my best pupil yet," Widow Bishop praised.

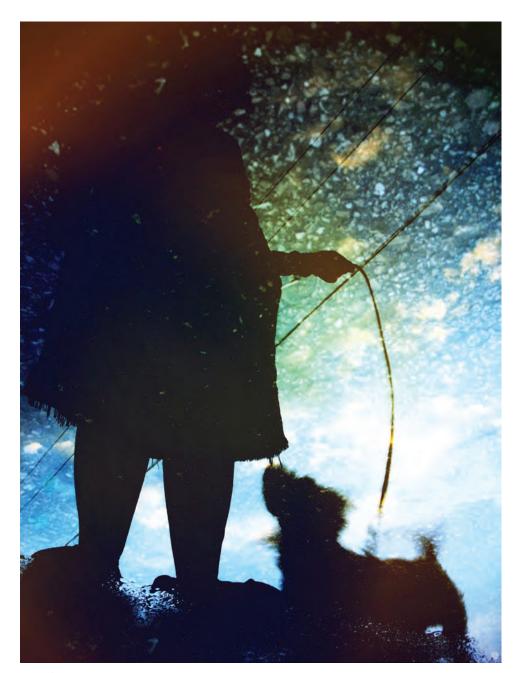
"Thank you." She sighed. "It grieves me that we could not save Hester." "She will always be with us," the widow said as she picked up the cat. "Right, sweetie?" She gently scratched the cat's head. A soft meow and a contented purr was the reply.

"Let us return home. The magistrate will be arriving soon to have tea with you," said Abigail.

Widow Bishop put the cat down and linked her arm through Abigail's. "Poor man. His memory is not what it used to be. He hath been quite ill since the trial."

The cat jumped onto the headstone. Her tail swayed gently as she licked her paws. Abigail looked over her shoulder. She smiled as she read the epitaph one last time. "Witches Beware. It is best to flee.

If you are discovered, you will lie next to me."





Leashed Puddle Rachel Nokes photography Puddle

A Journal of Creative Expession

Middle Tennessee State University MTSU Box 267 Murfreesboro, TN 37132

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ITC Avant Garde Gothic Garamond

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

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