



(PWA-TEM)

An anthology of literature and art



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(pwa-tem)

1 A fictitious French province created by James Branch Cabell that serves as the setting of several of his fantasy novels.

2 Virginia Commonwealth University's anthology of literature and art.

Masthead

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Everything in this book was created with the blood, sweat, and tears of VCU students and faculty, and funded by student fees. We accept submissions all year round from VCU students only. All styles are welcome.

Submit your literature and art to pwatem.submittable.com.

Send us thoughts, questions, or concerns at pwatem@gmail.com.

Editor's Note

(PWA-TEM) IS MY HOME AND FAMILY. I stumbled upon (PWA-TEM) my freshman year and was immediately mesmerized by the many voices, talent, and innovation that happened every Friday at the Student Media Center. Each week we came together to create a publication that not only made our selves proud, but also made our contributor's smiles. Along the way, I learned about the publishing world, how to critically look at both literature and art, and made life-long friends.

My path to Editor-in-Chief was very unexpected. When I first joined I never imagined I was capable as I am dyslexic and not an English Major. As a double major in Art Education and Kinetic Imaging, I focused my efforts on being Art Director and Co Art Director for two years. But through the supportive family that is (PWA-TEM) I found that my artistic vision is one of my strengths. (PWA-TEM) has always, and will continue to be, a professional platform that showcases the many talents, voices, and creative minds here at VCU. We are committed to bringing high-quality publications that represent our community's interests, values, and the great color, sound, and style that is Richmond VA. My goal as Editor-in-Chief was to open us up to new forms of literature and artwork. And to challenge us to reach beyond what we had previously done. This year we hosted our first film festival as well as challenged our audience and contributors with an unusual Rabble theme of: &?. I am proud to say our contributors, and staff members have reached new heights and have pushed our potential ever onward.

Of course, (PWA-TEM) is not possible without the continued efforts of our amazing, and dedicated staff as well as our patient and helpful advisors at the SMC. Each publication of (PWA-TEM) is unique and I take great inspiration from previous publications and Editors-in-Chief. I would like to thank my predecessor Emily Furlich for setting the bar so high. I would like to thank my Assistant Editor Luke Campbell for being so flexible and being my strength in guiding our editors. I would also like to thank our Art Directors Maddy and Bobby for their ambition and creative leadership. To Gray and Michael thank you for keeping our online presence alive and thriving. And as always thank you to our dedicated Student Media Leaders, Mark Jefferies, Allison Bennett Dyche, and Owen Martin for their support and guidance.

Finally, I would like to thank my chief secretary and successor Marlon Mckay. Your endless dedication is inspiring and you have helped me grow as a person and as Editor-in-Chief. I am confident that (PWA-TEM) will continue its growth and journey under your thoughtful guidance and will reach levels never thought possible. Reach for the stars!

I could never list how much I have learned from being a part of this family but one thing for certain is I learned how to run. I learned how to run to my dreams and its fire, to not hide from it. I learned that with the right people by your side anything is possible. I am saddened to leave (PWA-TEM) but I am excited about the future and will always look back on this time with a smile. Thank you (PWA-TEM)

Ava Blakeslee-Carter

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Fucking Pigeons

MARGARET SUE

Smack! Scared half to death
The white outline of a bird,
memory on glass

Is it dust reflects the vane?
Who of us were more frightened?

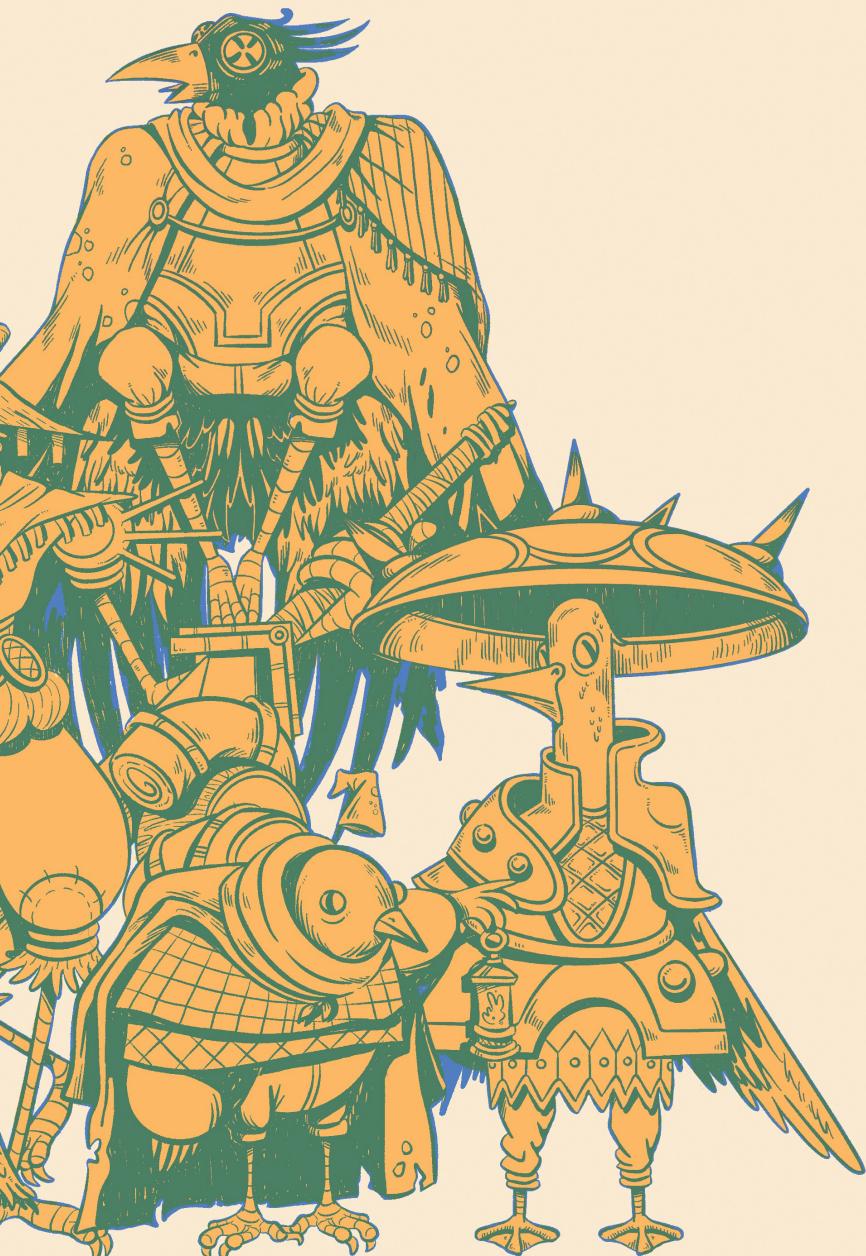


Our Future Under Fire

MARGARET SUE

A dreamcatcher hangs
on wires above the street
where I found a gun.

Type of dream: unspecified
perhaps a premonition



Bird Gods
Karly Andersen

Sublime

LUKE CAMPBELL

I: Afternoon, Summer

I pull the car off the two-lane cutting through Missouri,
spindly puddles of wildflowers drip
into gravel ditches. Beyond, flatland
tumbles up toward mountain clouds.

II: Evening, Spring

Thundering, the waves of the James bloody themselves against
rocks worn smooth.

I sit cross-legged, frothing spray
on my cheeks, my rock overlooking the rapids.
Hollywood Cemetery crowns the opposite bank,
rose-tangerine rays glow the headstones.

III: Night, Winter

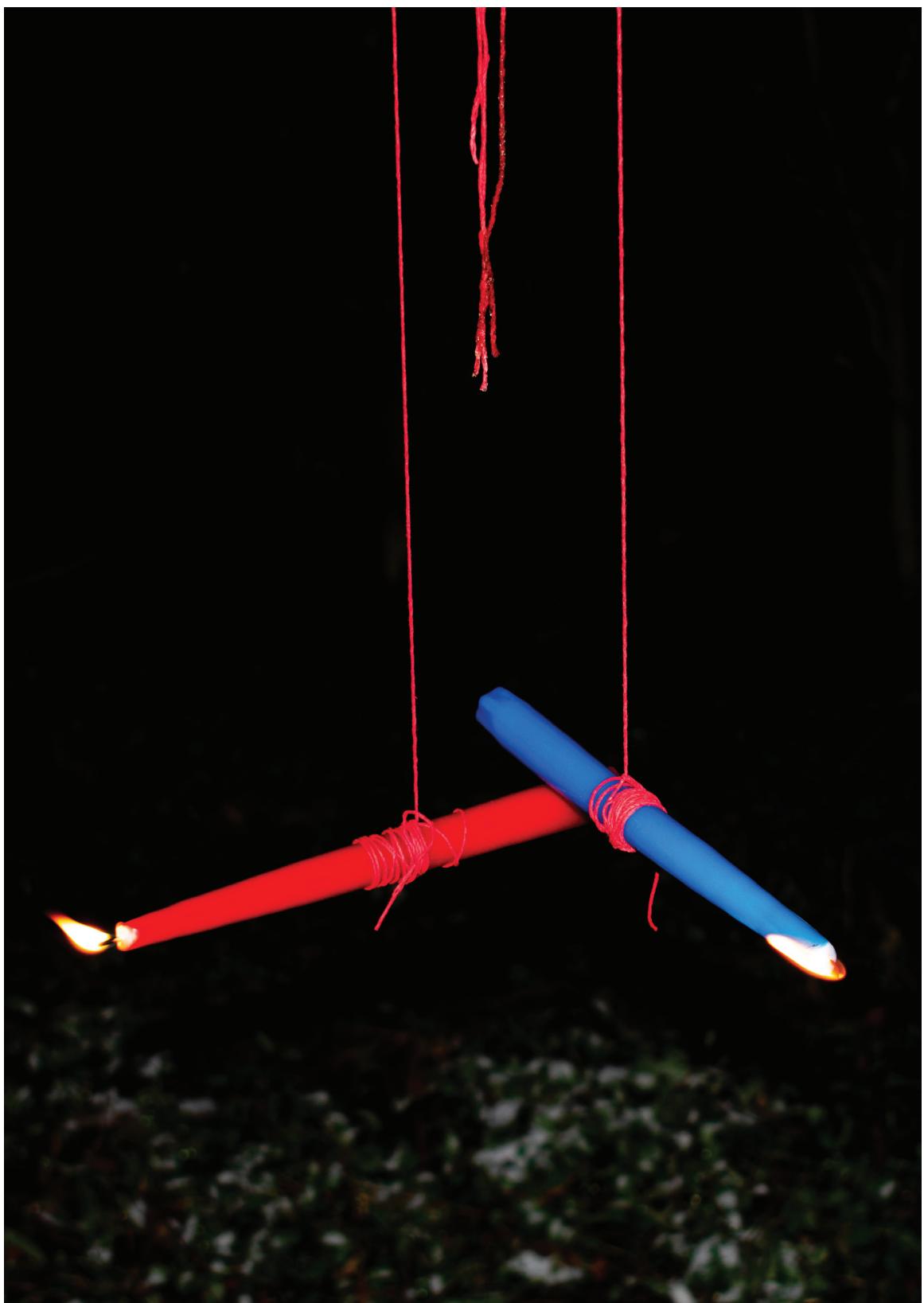
In the silky-wet, milk-warm belly of a cave in Blacksburg I
scramble through night-canals
 into a crevice carved like a throne;
 turn off my headlamp. Stalactites drip.
 Bats flutter past. Darkness drowns me
 in a humid ocean and I forgot my body.

IV: Morning, Fall

Fucking stumbling at dawn, drunk as a bat, down Laurel, past
mildewed couches
 sitting in puddles of wildflowers. Shattered 40's, Juul
 pods.
I pull the car off -- no, I'm walking
through Hollywood cemetery, I watch mountain clouds
frothing
thunder in the silky, milky cave in Missouri.
Gravel ditches tumble onto my cheeks,
spindly headstones forget to drown in the two-lane
highway, the rapids bloody me
with the beat of an analog clock
and I'm so damned numb.
Stalactites drip from autumn leaves, wet in a puddle
outside my house. I creak up the steps,
push open the door and nestle into sleep
on my couch, dreaming in night-canals.

Watch Over Thy Child
Andrew Caress





Forms

TRISTEN JUDSON

We have been an 18th century gentleman,
dressed to high standards, tied up
in an ascot and coattails.
We courted an audience
with our self-assurance.

We have been Don Quixote and Odette—
became the naive, insidious,
joyfully tragic
attitudes of forms.

We have been a rat, shot
dead. The loud bang
then backwards rolling.

We have been a butterfly, too.
Once a woman, then unrequited
love and her body metamorphosed
into one sheer wing
she'd listlessly drag.

Some forms are more aligned
with ourselves than others.
Many we hate from the nearby
distance of compassion.
The space between the ground
and the pit depends
on where we are.
There is always center to straddle,
regardless.

We have been a little boy,
tugged by his ear for five
swift spankings.
We have been his sister
enraptured with laughter.

We have been a farmer virgin clown
mother fairy fanatic patriot
witch bluebird flower
condemned woman too—
We have been a dragon's ass
and the ruler of kingdoms.

Each time was never
permanent, and each movement
was built upon circles.
Which could have been
to say finality arrived
where we began.

the yellow light blinks
slower at home, doesn't it?
Maryska Stanczak

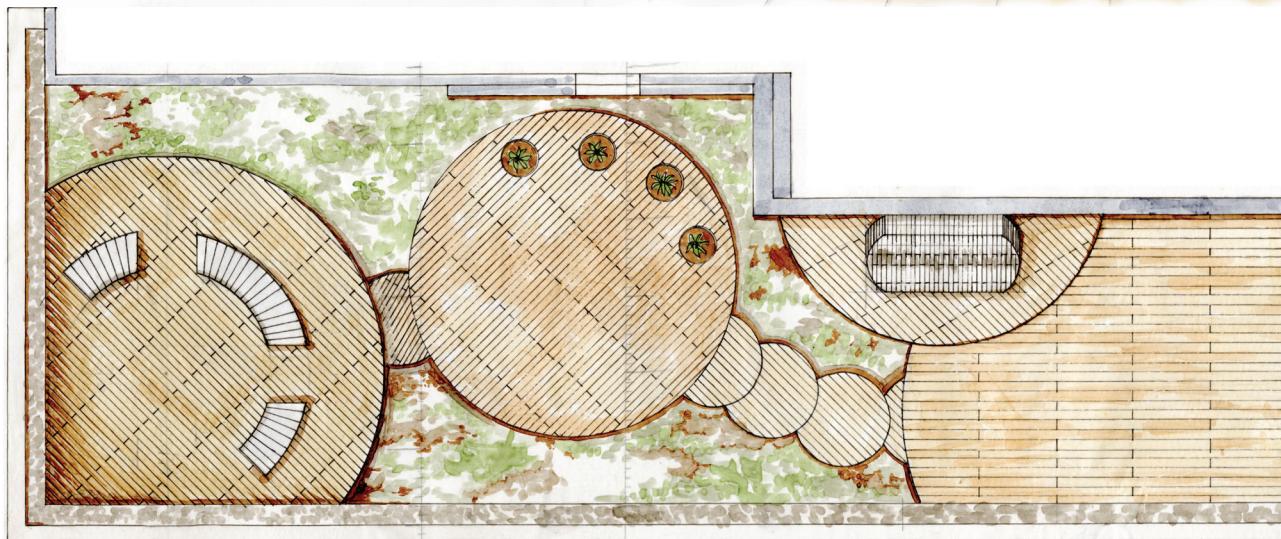
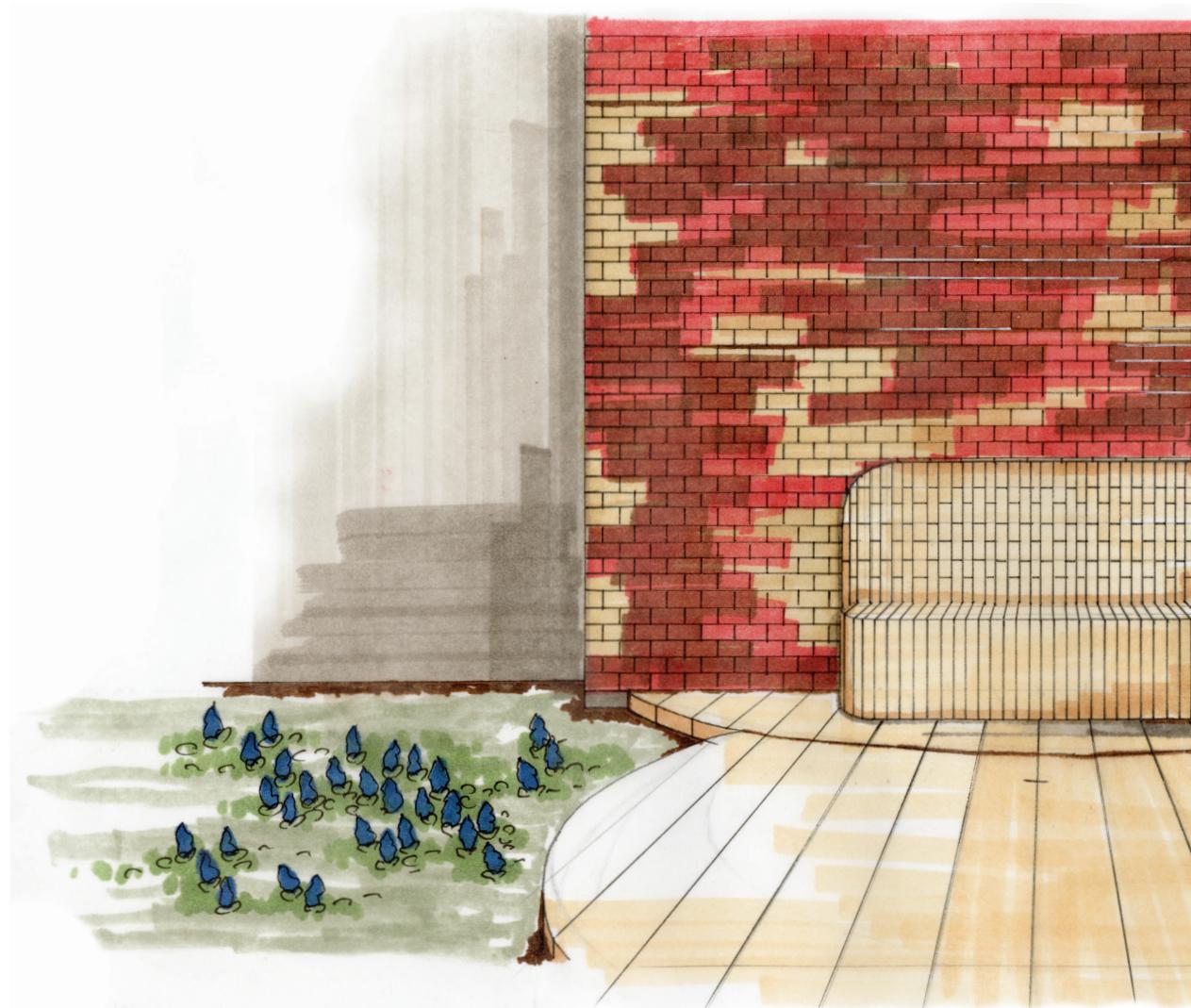


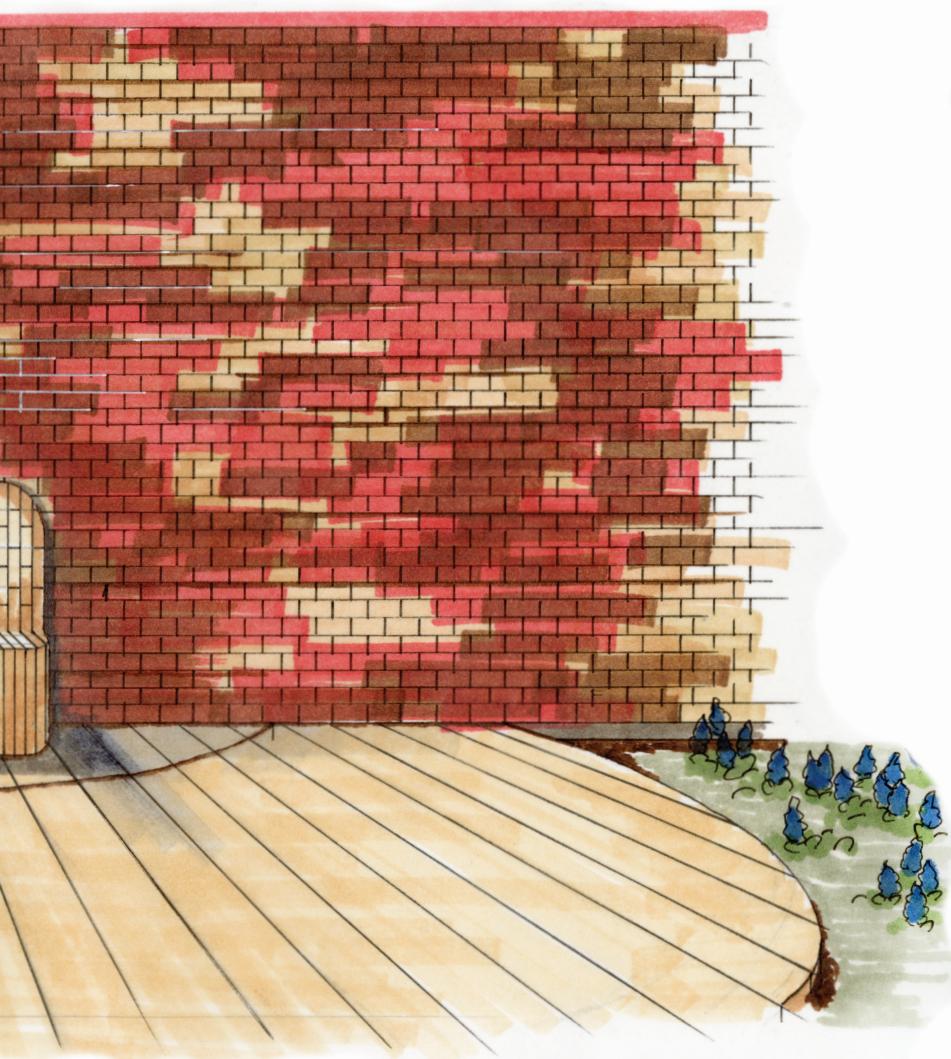


Xīnnián of Borodin

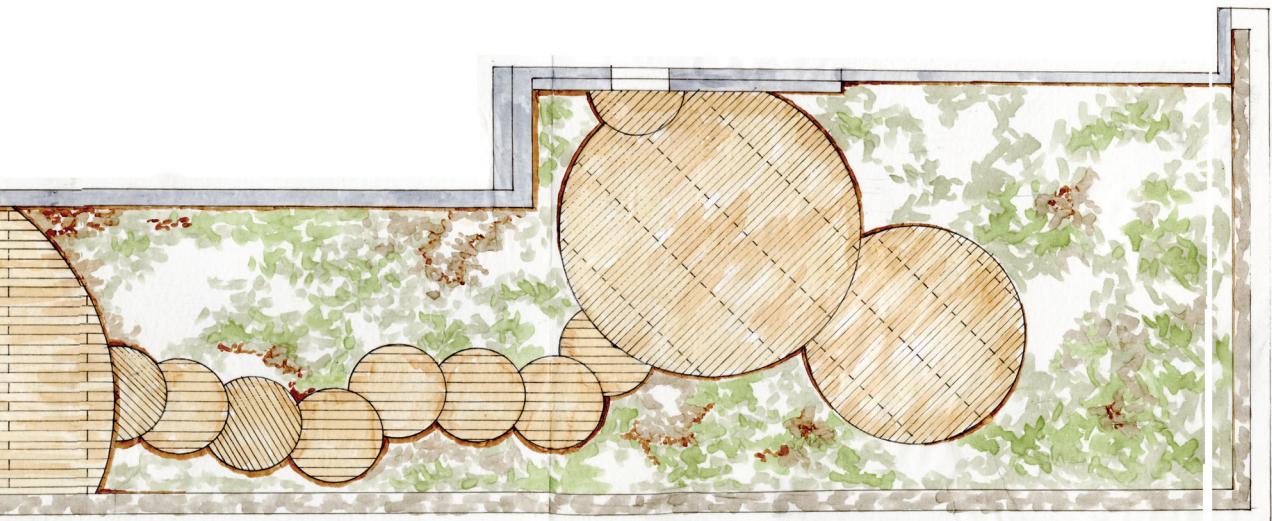
ANGIE ZHAO

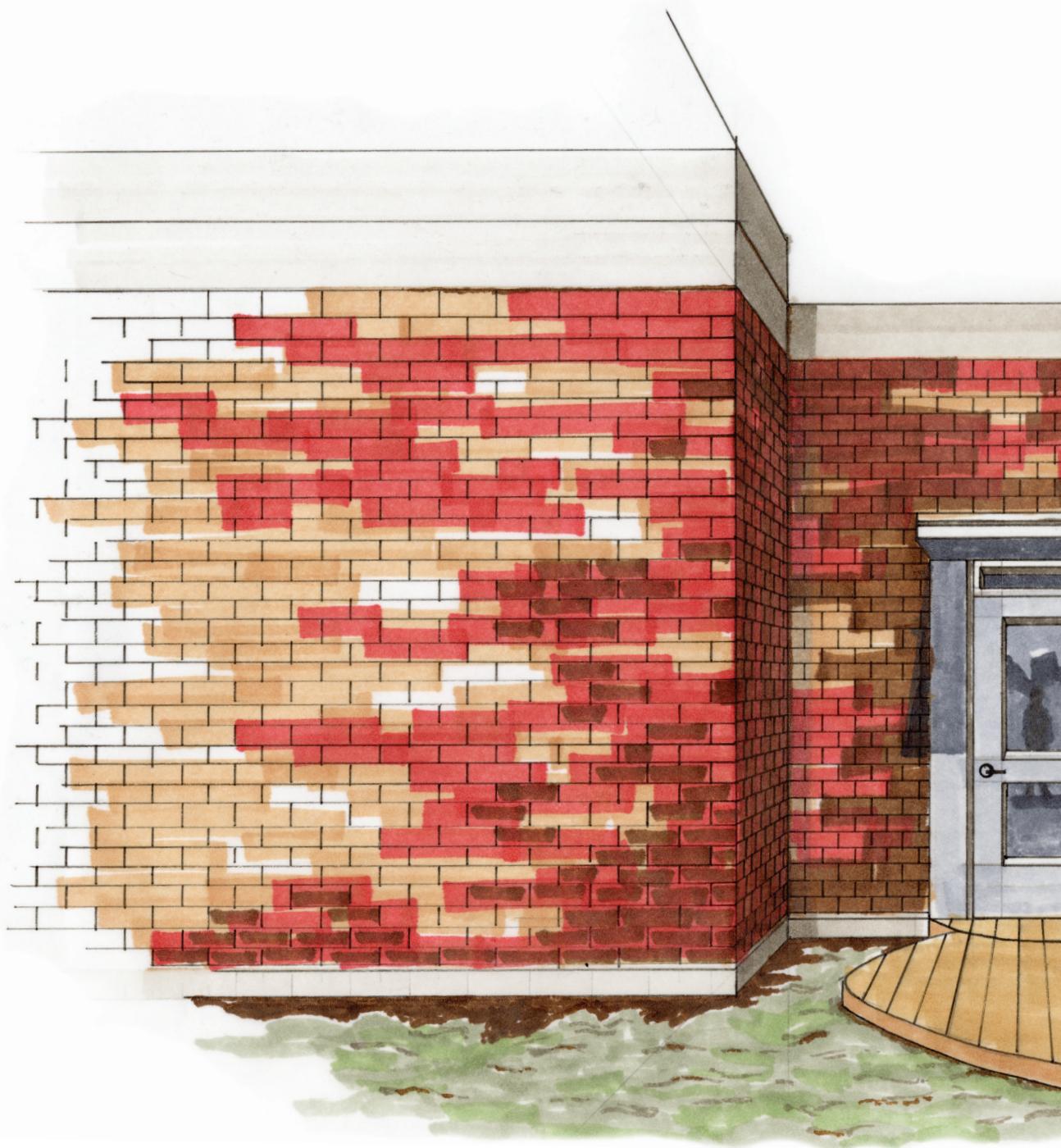
On the fourth Steppe of Central Asia stands
A girl browned by snow beams,
Small head kept an obsidian
serpent coiled taut
in a mother's dry palm
The year is a new embroidered dress
With saddle stitch seams
And yolk moons frozen
in chrysanthemum paste
Petaled with locrian birdsong
She buries her knuckles in the
cold soil of a cliff's edge
Merges nailbeds with
sedimentary strata
Holds the underbelly of
dawn in place with a tight fist
The year inclines when trekked upon, when
carved into. Somewhere, next to clouds
Its median disappears
Like latitudinal crescendo with the soft lift of mist
White lips crack
against the wind and whisper some words aloud—
All noise sucked into the sloping summit
As they leave her mouth





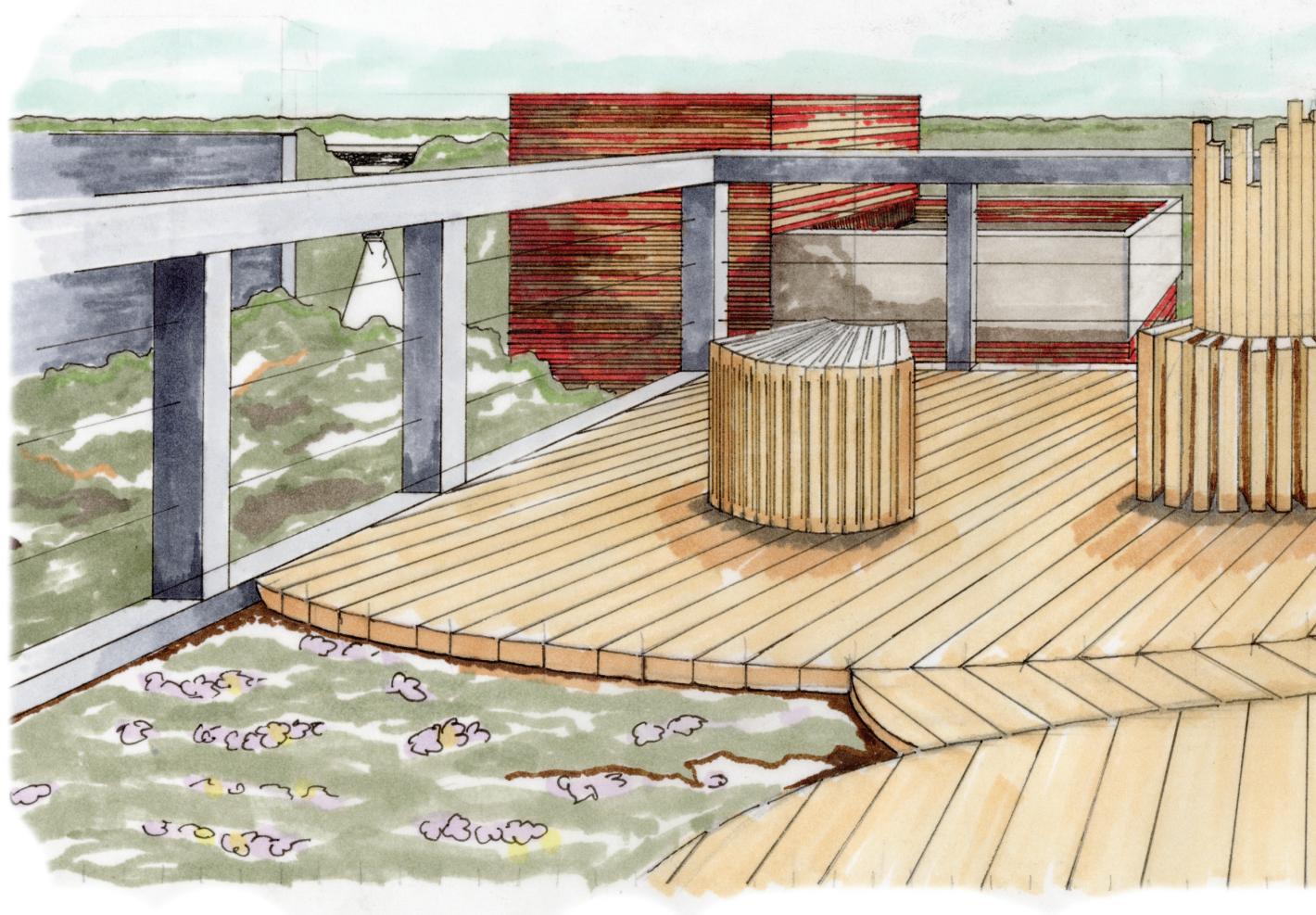
Rooftop Garden Design
Riley Lowe

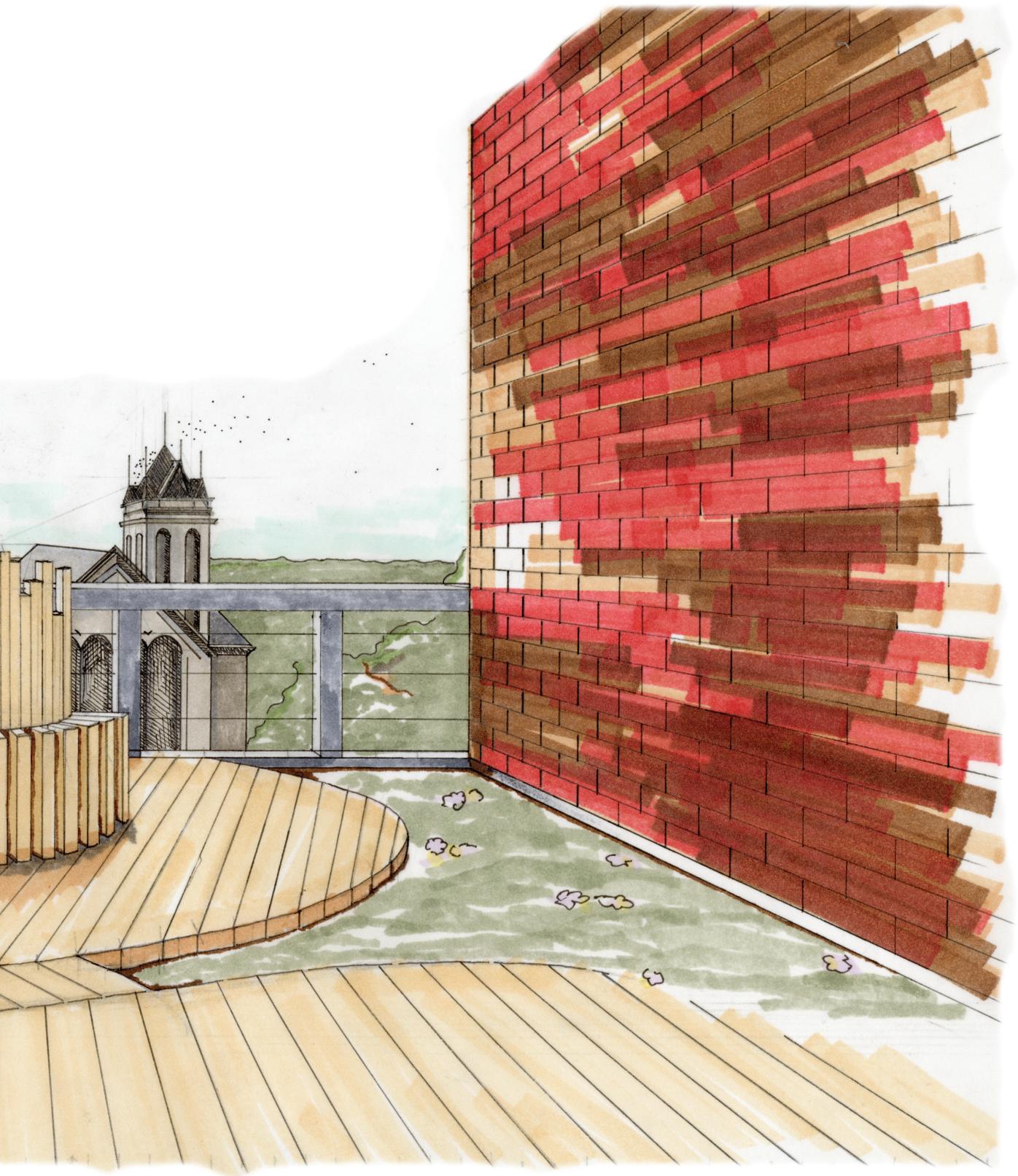






Rooftop Garden Design
Riley Lowe





Rooftop Garden Design
Riley Lowe

1,000

RACHEL CARLSON

meeting you in this world like rain meeting a flower. do you remember what this was like when my shoulders weren't shaking? when my hands were steady? a glimpse of a red feather, a scar like an eye on the back of your head, folded hands, braided legs in sheets in a washed out presence.

how would you know me in the light?

do you remember? i think it was here. i've never known you anywhere else but here.

i'm telling you a 1,000 word secret. this is something heard through a stranger's window, this was a song i rewrote the lyrics to, this was a broken promise, a shadow of a declaration.

i still don't know what a persimmon looks like. i've looked it up before, so many times, but i keep imagining something between a tomato and a pomegranate. juice like roses, sweetness like summer nights with the window open. i can't remember what the inside looks like, something in between flesh and your fingertips, can't quite place the taste.

sometimes i think it's hard to be in the same place. not like together, not like a celebration. but i see you and you see me, but where do we exist together? sometimes, it's like jumping on purpose. falling but with certainty. there's the way you touch me and the way i see you. like something unspoken, like a promise that feels like a silk ribbon, like an apology that stretches across groggy mornings and sleepless nights. i take it and i run. i take it and i braid it into a poem 1,000 miles long. i fly with it into the sun, burst like a cherry blossom in spring, like an overripe fruit against sharpened nails.

in maleficent, they said the scene where her wings get cut off was supposed to reference an assault, a violation. what would you do if someone cut off your hair in the night? if you woke up next to scissors? if you inhaled strands, if they fell to the floor while you dreamed of something sweeter. in the end of the movie, she gets her wings back. he had kept them in a box, talked to them, but is it worse that time is the only remedy to a shaved scalp? she woke up and screamed. you wake up and try to sew your hair back to your head and i tell you i've never known you anywhere else but here.

you said there's a flower that smells like death. a flower that

smells like death and is as big as a grown person, and it blooms once every 10 years, and it's beautiful, and when it blooms people come from places far away to see it bloom, to smell something like the unknown, to see something like a veil into the future.

are you asleep?

your hands as romance. my tongue as acceptance. something like a dull ache, you've said it before. i'm not angry and you're not exactly here anyway.

do you remember how it started? it started with you falling asleep, you're talking to me but i know you're asleep, words repeating and repeating and it's sweet i know you were trying to keep listening but something pulled you down under.

it's harder now, in the distance. you try to hold my hands but they've turned to bamboo and it grows and grows, spreads and spreads and I tell you it's natural. i tell you they tried to dig them up before, but the roots have intertwined with my bones, symbiosis like tired evolution.

jade in the grass like a souvenir from somewhere you've never been. if i didn't tell you where i'd been how would you know that i'm here?

how does a flower grow untouched? hands of cultivation. wind blowing so hard it's raining through the window. did you ever do the science experiment where you tried to see if plants would grow better listening to certain music? they told me an orchid would grow 1,000 feet long if i read it this poem, they told me a phoenix would turn to dust and you would grow its wings and i wouldn't shoot the messenger.

they told me he huffed and he puffed and he blew the house down.

they told me the house was my body.

they told me the house only spoke chinese. they told me it washed away when i opened my mouth and english poured out.

they told me the house tried to speak to me through creaks in the floor, in the squeaks of the doors opening and closing, mouths

like hungry koi fish, did it wake you in the night?

you heard ice cracking under the weight. i heard something in and of itself. two swans and a song we both know the words to, but have never heard before. our hands interlock and form a heartbeat.

i tell you i wear red to feel closer to something i never knew. you tell me the only difference between the living and the dead are the flies. in a white bathtub i said i never had stories. in an apartment on the outskirts of town all i saw was myself, reciting a book of prayers every night. a story is a story until it's your god.

you sleep, and i write in the dark because it's the only way i know how to tell you i feel pleasure without raising my voice.

you see me how i need you to. wings are a gift, flight is a promise. whistling in your ears like a public service announcement. i'm embarrassed to tell you i missed the train and you say it's okay as i cry on the phone and it cuts out because i'm dreaming too deep. suddenly soapy tides and salty smiling. i sleep and you put sunscreen on my body and i still burn but with thanks. i burn but with pleasure. satisfaction like a dream and happiness like when the sun is too bright but i'm still trying to look you in the eyes.

how did you love me from 1,000 miles away? can you feel your body? can you feel my voice? moonlight pouring through the window onto our bodies like a blessing.

you sleep as peaceful as a thousand jade birds, i could never wake you.

Rural Pond in Virginia, Circa September 2017

KAYLA ALDRICH

In the silence of the night
when even the cicadas and bullfrogs have gone to sleep
I float.

I am an astronaut untethered
pinwheeling through the black vacuum of memory
reliving a sight described second-hand.

I am cradled by cattails and algae
and water lilies form a halo overhead
the crown jewels of nowhere.

I surrender a chunk of my ear
to the flesh-hungry creatures I cannot see.

I have grown too cold to bleed
and cannot remember the way home
and I know I'll never see the butter-yellow
of my parent's room nor bask in the experience of
being safe in my grandfather's arms
as his crumpled pack of that day's
cigarettes wedge close to my heart.

I'll be found when the dew has settled
and the wildgrass has come alive under the
dutiful ministrations of the breaking dawn.





Enter The Light
Michelle Dominado





Abstract and Distorted
Ashley Fimbel

On Sickness

ARDA ATHMAN

This summer I googled “foot drop symptoms and causes”
23 separate times

Foot drop is a term for difficulty lifting the front part of the foot.
It is most commonly caused by injury or compression to
the peroneal nerve,
which wraps around the back part of your knee and controls
function in the foot.

The typical ways in which you can hurt it are:
sports injuries,
wearing a leg cast for too long,
sitting too often in cross legged positions,
and complications with diabetes.

When my dad could no longer lift his foot off the
ground this summer,
he thought that it was a brain disorder,
a la MS, ALS, or a stroke.
The latter of which was what my mom thought
or at least that was what she had told me when my dad was out
in the other room,
planning a trip to the doctors.

While waiting for the results of the MRI from our
general practitioner,
I felt a proximity to sickness that I hadn't before.
People in my family haven't really gotten sick yet or if they did,
they never felt close or very tangible to me.
Sickness was always just in the ether,
invisible yet all around.

Three out of four of my grandparents died before I was born.
Since I was a kid I've often thought about my dad's reaction to
hearing that his father had died half a world away from him.

On death: muslims are of the consensus that “it is a facet of
god's will when we die”
and you have to bury your dead as soon as possible.
(which I've always thought was a sanitation thing but my father
likes to paint it as we shouldn't dwell on things that we don't
have control over, but also famously used “it's god's will when
I die” as an excuse to keep smoking cigarettes for three more
years so color me resentful.)

I've recently come to terms and agree with the ethos of my
family's thoughts on death
but when I was very sad about things or people dying as a kid,
my dad would make me feel in certain airs like I was
being dramatic.
(which was honestly a fair play, Hussein, because I often was a
very dramatic child)

But I feel as if the problem with having older parents
is that the rough approximation of time
That I have left with them in my mind, is always in flux.
It makes me think of having children.
almost for their sake or behalf.
because if I ever did have children,
I would want them to know my parents in some way
or for some period of time.

It makes me want to learn Somali
because of the song my mom sang to me when she
bounced me on her lap
or for the many weird esoteric expressions
my dad told me as a kid that always seemed to be
concerned with camels.

Like trying to understand those somali metaphors,
my whole life I've not been able to figure out my father's "deal"
He often stays up all night,
and sleeps during the day.
When he is not out for work,
He reads the news online,
watches foreign procedural cop dramas,
walks around the house for exercise,
and puts three spoonfuls of sugar in his coffee despite being a
type one diabetic.

I'm pretty sure he is depressed
but he always is quick to comment that "depression is a
product of people not having god"
(when he does this spell, it feels very pointed towards white
people but not always overtly.)

My dad was 43 when I was born and until a few years ago, I didn't know more than a handful of details about the life he led before getting married and having children.

My freshman year of college, I would chain smoked outside my dorm because it reminded me of him.

In the end when we learned the cause of his foot drop was him not taking care of himself and his newly diagnosed diabetes, I decided to take small action:

I put less sugar in his coffee,
I asked him both in the morning and evening if he
 took his medicine,
or if he knew what his blood sugar level was,
I put his new cane next to the front door so he would remember
 to take it before he left
and misplaced the flip flops he loves to wear around the house
because he kept tripping in them from shuffling his left foot
because he couldn't pick it up anymore.

My dad often jokes that love is conditional
mostly when he wants me to do something for him.
This past summer I watched his black dog wear on him,
and I felt that there was nothing I could do to drive it away.

Over the past two years, my dad has lost close to 30 pounds.
When you have an insufficient amount of insulin,
the body starts burning fat and muscle for energy.
I always joke to him that he is wasting away.
It feels vitriolic every time I say it but I don't know how to
 tell him "please take care of yourself" without getting
 emotional yet.

When we are on the phone together
my mom tells me not to despair
especially if I don't have a line of immediate action to
 change a situation.

I almost got hit by a bus the other day
and thought about how that the last conversation I had
 with my mom
was her asking me if I needed sweaters
and the last time I saw my dad, we sat eating sandwiches with
 nothing to say to each other

I think more and more everyday that i'm like my father despite
him feeling half a world away,
half of the time

but I think as a family that we practice our love for
each other distantly.

It is hard to see him sometimes because there are parts of
myself that if he knew about,
I don't think he would be able to accept them fully.
but mostly because I have all this love for him and I don't know
what to do with it.

This summer when I checked my search history, I saw that I had
googled "foot drop symptoms and causes" 23 separate times.





Knight
Abby Giuseppe

Moscow Metro, 2000s

LIZA HAZELWOOD

Новые черёмушки

We were there for years –
twenty minute trek from my mama’s mama’s apartment
Familiar, with a shopping mall outside
A bit of everything stuck together –
Suits from the bank reading their papers
Бабки sitting guard around their groceries
My mama and I
ears plugged against the ache and groan of Stalin’s
tunnels, where the cars shook us off their backs
Mama kept track of the stops
while I read my English book
The *бабки* stared when I had no accent

New blossoms

Щёлковская

Only one summer, but sweet
Far from the station, we ran every morning
through the small shops, stopped to buy film, ran
again to the station
A woman’s voice, the end of the line, the train went no further
Got up, got out, got through the turnstile
Finally above ground to see
the cars and buildings and people running
My mama and I
ran once in the scorching rain, almost at the end
I slipped through a lake of mud, all white tarnished
I’ve not worn all white since that day

Of silk

Сокол

Ballooning arches swallowed the trains
when they entered their tunnels
Everyone ate well as the trains inhaled
us and my uncle fried potatoes and *лисички*
that he bought off the side of the motorway, careening
to the far right with his rubles in hand
There were no seconds to go around but certainly
to spare on the train, with a new set of cars shuttling away
every minute and a half
My mama and I
stood on the escalator, on the right –
as I craned my head up I could not see the top

Falcon

Московский метрополитен

Paper tickets we bought at the касса swish
through the machine, we go together as one
and wait on a bench amongst throngs
Warm amber tiles glaze at us as
a scuffed up monument to our iconography
My mama used to call it
People's Palace

Apron's Adieu

ABBY WOLPERT

Peppered in espresso grounds,
drizzled in béchamel, touring the nation
on the garbage route.
Once joined at the hip,
this day, miles apart; my contents,
strewn carelessly about:
empty ballpoint pens, wilted receipts
marked *Le Gamin*, phone numbers—
for you—left at the bar,
crumbs of croque madame, rancid
Gruyère and ham, and guest checks that read
au revoir.

**Untitled #1 (watchers in my
bedroom window)**
Ruth Clements



Pennies

SOLEDAD
DAGMAR GREEN

Good luck to you, I don't say
goodbye, because it lingers long
and drowns out song.

I give out good luck like pennies,
even when you do me wrong.
A true farewell is worth a dime,
but I'm cheap and I waste my time
as it shrugs and rolls along. When I get tired
of talk, silence sounds like song.
A word is worth a petty thing, and can't compare
to silence that rings, or sirens that whine
and somehow sing.

If I bow down, you are my king,
and songs are sung for no less
than the fairest of them all,
and he is hung.

Give me a call, make my ears ring.
I won't pick up if I'm sleeping.
Daytime noise is silly, so my blinds
stay shut. My brain stays blind.
Sing your song the whole night long,
blow my mind and bang your gong.
Your luck will die when
you get the words wrong.
Your eyes are dry, and you don't care.
The song is sung beyond repair.
I can't watch, so
I let you fall. Silence is king,
the ringtone sings, I'd toss you a bone,
but you never call.

I count my coins, I shut my eyes.
The sun comes up, I sing alone.

**Untitled #2 (watchers in my
bedroom window)**
Ruth Clements



Box 72

GABBY LEPORATI

is loaded, an empty pistol
and an aged note.
It hasn't been opened since 1970.
That's when everyone forgot about dear old Janet.
She preferred to be called Jan.
It reminded her of January
and how she always wanted to be a Capricorn.
Instead, while Apollo 13 shot into space,
Jan's last moments were eaten by moths.
Her grandchildren passed around her college ring,
playing pretend that Nickie or June-bug
were getting married on the back porch.
People left white lillies at her grave
and visited for a time.
The world spun, and the petals fell,
while her caretakers went home to
their hearths and played one last Beatles
record, before admitting it was the end.

**Untitled #3 (watchers in my
bedroom window)**
Ruth Clements







Hwang-Uyang's wife
deserved a vacation
Malia Bates





Alley Off Floyd Avenue
Marianna Smith



FROM AN IMMIGRANT MOTHER

MARY KAMARA

To my daughters:
Know that I will always be with you,
but I can no longer be with this land.
Once your lives have become your own,
I'm returning to Sierra Leone.

I can't call America home.
I can't call this land of white hands still dripping with
black blood home -
especially if the white hands don't even see what's still dripping.
Don't even notice the bodies swinging from the same flagpoles
where their freedom waves.
Don't even hear the percussion of foreign heartbeats
underscoring their precious anthem.

Girls,
I can't claim this country.
One that scavenges on the fruits of poplar trees.
That guzzles from alligator bellies and revels in minstrelsy.
That beats and batters a black girl's walk into a
black woman's run.

No,
I can't claim this soil.
A soil our bloodline hadn't touch since long before shots
ricocheted against black bodies fighting in the
name of economy.
A soil poisoned by the roots of cotton plants intertwined
with the bones of cousins who dared to die while picking.
A soil they will teach you to tread lightly on
for they fear your footprints will remind the pavement
of past revolutions.

God,
I can't figure out what to call this feeling yet.
This wrath birthed from bullet wounds piercing the breasts
of my homeland.
This anguish, once drowned in the Atlantic, but resurfaced on
the shores of Jamestown.
This longing for a land I can set my feet on without it ripping
at the seams.

No,
I can't call America home,
not if it means turning my back on Sierra Leone.
Not if it means forgetting all the fruit she bore for me.
Forgetting the maringa I danced to as a child.
Forgetting the anthem I can still hear
when the winds blow in from the West.
Forgetting the friends and family still feeding
from the land leftover from disagreements.

Even if I could call America home,
there's no telling what America would call me.
How she would unearth the slurs of her forefathers
and use them as ammo to urge me back.
How she would take the dreams I have and strip them
like she does with everything else that touches this land.
How she would make my freedom into nothing more
than a Freetown I once saw in a dream.
How no matter what I do or what I say or who I become,
none of it will matter.

You see,
I can't call America home
simply because she let me in.
Not while I can still hear everyone else
who looks like me banging on the other side.

Girls,
I can't claim this freedom,
but I can gift it to you.
I can hope that the price you pay
won't be as hefty as mine.
I can give you strength to power
through whatever they do throw at you.
I can love you all of the time,
but especially on the days
when this country reminds you
that they will not.

Girls,
I can never call America home,
but I am more than happy
to give you the choice to.

citrusmother

ELSA DEITZ

*content warning:
abuse*

I tried to hold your warmth through the sheets,
grabbing aimlessly, thoughtlessly
(you were there, I was sure)
but all that cold water came rushing out

rococo cherubs from the carnage rose
gasping for breath

a salt gift, a wealthy man,
enough mattress to breed one million citruses
but the peel wept acid into my eyes,
and accidentally, I was blind







Autonomy
Andrew Caress



Catch a Sparrow

MADELINE
DE MICHELE

Honey lemon light
and dirty tile

1 Yuengling
and a magazine
pile- too far from the toilet to be convenient

I mean, way too far to reach
A person would have to have 6 foot arms
to reach those damn magazines

and even if their arms, or my arms,
could stretch to those
soft, glossy pages, warped and brittled
by humidity, I don't think i'd have the attention span
for

The CHRONICLE of the HORSE
America's most trusted source for horse news and equestrian
lifestyle
since 1937

Since 1937!
but the house was built in the 1800s

That's what my grandpa said
after he chopped down the tree in our front yard
and counted the rings

1

You can see the stump from the window

2

You can see the stump from the window through,
the bird sized holes in the screen.

3

You can see the stump from the window through the,
bird holes that birds made
in the screen on the window

--do you smell that?

Feet on cold floor
Piss in the can
Toothpaste drying
Horse shit
no

Smells like dead mouse
And suave shampoo.

God, I hope I don't have to catch another sparrow.



BEST ART

Reclamation
Andrew Caress

RACE
TRAITOR

I AM
PROUD

BEST ART

Reclamation
Andrew Caress

WHITE
WASHED



NGƯỜI
QUÊN GÓC

TRÔNG

Z

A

WATCH OVER

CHIẾU

D

him unsoph

Deloris

SID ESTELLE

Out in that meadow,
that meadow sprinkled
with the most vigilant crows,
you would not know
that deer have box springs
in their throats.
That men with arrows
sneak in the bush,
concealed behind
sunburnt trees.
You would not know
that when November winds
tie back a conqueror's
forest, the desperate
rattles and caws from
birds are unveiled.
A warning song as heart wrenching
as the crack of a tree falling
with nothing to catch it
but a mossy grave.
a warning cry that
arrives late
far more often
than on time.

BEST ART

Reclamation
Andrew Caress





Seoul M8s
Cydney Goodin

Castle
Bobby Miller



I Broke Bread With My Demons

TAYA BOYLES

I set the table
With a timeless centerpiece
Of thorns and dead leaves
Classical cascaded
From the grand piano
I swayed to the muse
Dressed to the nines
The room overlooked by candlelight
I set the placements abiding
By the strict arrangement
By white wine
Sweet red or absinthe
The clock struck; the guests poured in
I sat them with steadied breath
I began to lose the time
Overwhelmed by the turnout
I offered a joke
To lessen the poignant tension
A light chuckle escaped
Without many conversations; the feast became devoured
By Insatiability
I toasted to Pushover, who steered it towards Gluttony
The bubbled champagne didn't last long in this company
Self-pity noticing the shift,
Scooped up the shards
Of the chandelier
Shattered in an argument
Between Stubborn and Wrath
And sliced through the center
Bumping pitiful Anxiety to the ground
Who spewed out apologies
As for the rest of the night
He didn't dare speak again
Depression had brought tons
Resting upon his back
Which he unloaded upon the table
Magnetizing the audience,
Pulling Misery to his side
Suddenly I found my voice
Hardly cutting through.

Should Oceans Rise

ERIC ECKHART

I was just as alone as a woodland hick as I am a nightlife urbanite living in a network of hives and nests and boroughs Where people walk with glassy eyes through the skyscraper trees along the leaf-ridden black asphalt neon starlight reflecting back Where hallow tree stumps play loud music and draw colonies of sordid creatures out of the dirt and the muck to indulge in modern sin Where branches sprout on every concrete block connecting limbs of bodies in garish displays of callous indifference and all are one but none simultaneously Where empty cabins stand between old-growth apartment complexes and high-rise forestry waiting for the day the ivy will reclaim and dump them onto some abandoned dusty windshield Where thick smog floats through the canopy of scaffolding and glass to cover everything with a layer of smut fills the bellowing lungs of a well-oiled machine with slag and drowns youthful life where it takes root Where fell winds move bodies of water and blow through skeletal gnarls of driftwood and the Individual like grains of sand stuck to the hand of a greater being

It blindly clutches for purchase

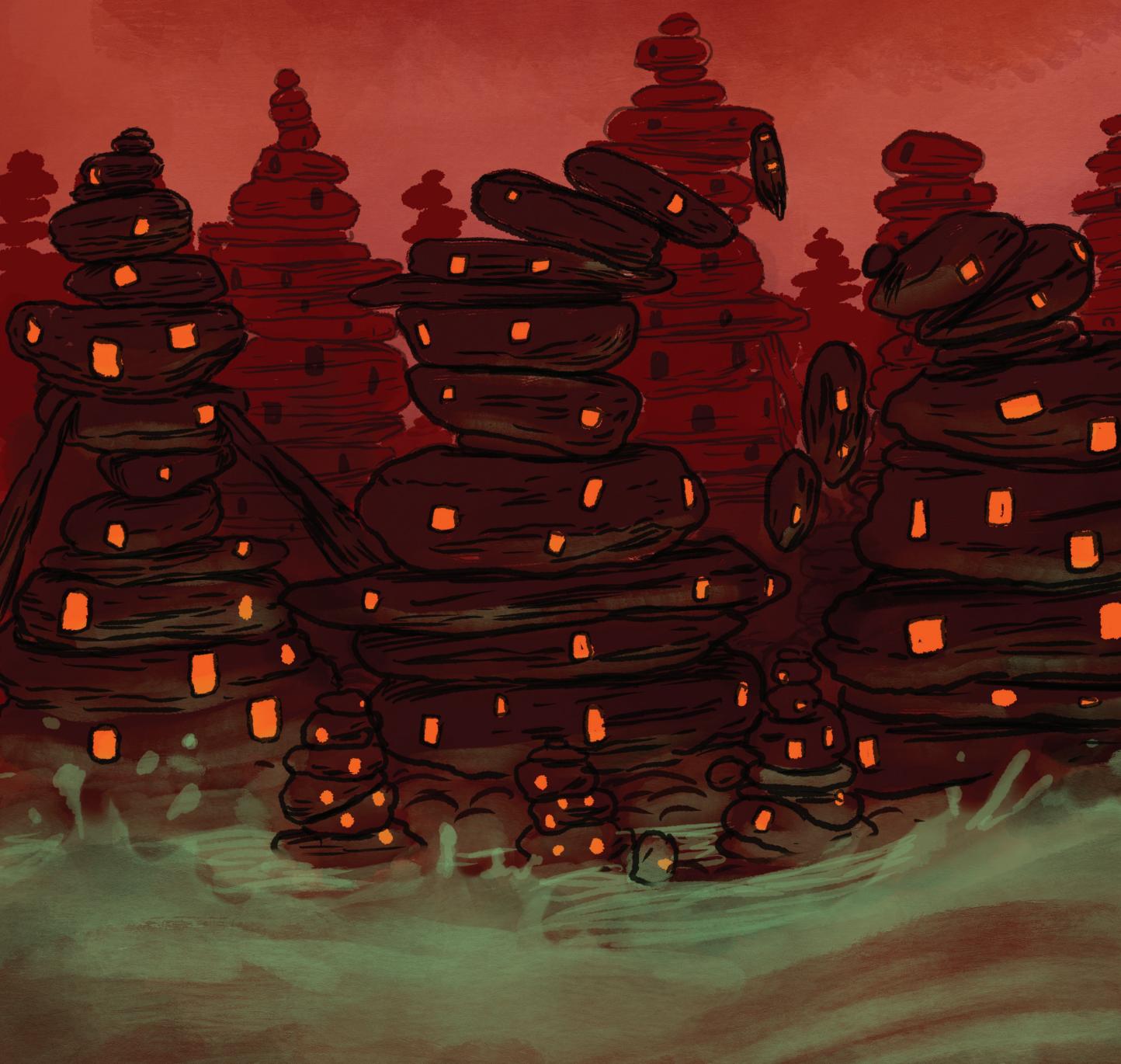
The faithful cry

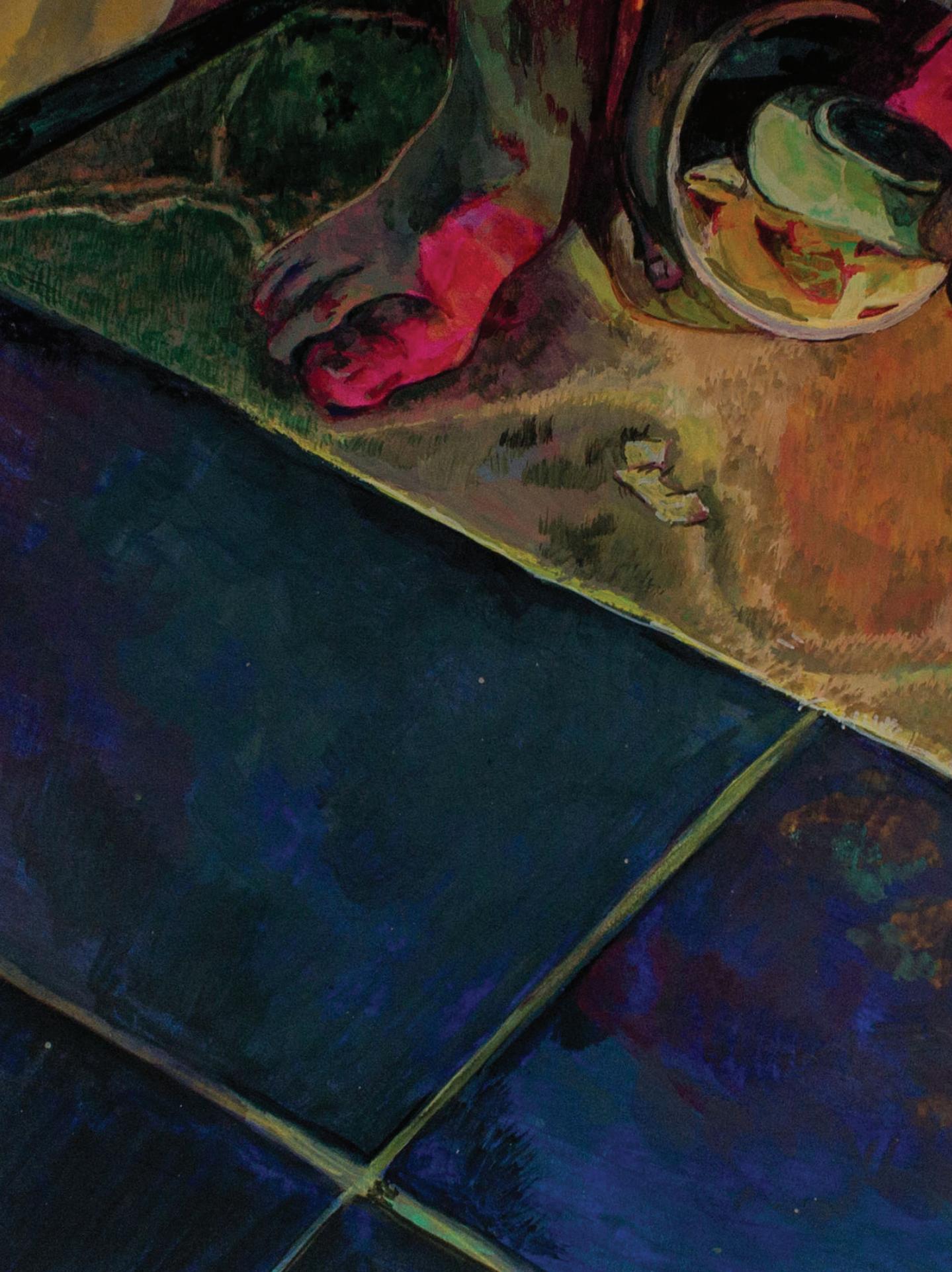
There is hope, should oceans rise and mountains fall

but the oceans have already risen and the mountains are tumbling down like rocks stacked precariously on a river shore and they still wait for the hope

They will find there is strange isolation and intense solidarity in living on a dying planet

Should Oceans Rise
Illustrated by Gray Gibson





UNSOBER

NADIA LEIBY

*Content Warning:
Alcoholism*

my broken body is drunk,
hunched over a trash can in
the dimly lit apartment.
I cough up clumps of blood
and gluten-free bagel
while the ceiling spins
like the party lights on Plum Street.

I don't have the energy to reminisce
on my last blackout --
vodka sipped from store-brand water bottles
in Rachel's basement until
I couldn't stand,
compensating for some kind of film-school-dropout
void inside.

It was more erosive than the liquor that
numbed my face,
that failure and anger,
so I drank until I woke up with bruises
blasted across my body and
vomit stain on my clothes
that would never wash out.

The party on Plum Street was different.
My best friend dragged me home,
legs stumbling under the weight of
jungle juice and jell-o shots,
a busted party shooting life into
this busted body
until the vitality
ejected itself like rose-colored Kool-Aid
onto my bedroom floor.

alcohol stopped being exciting a long time ago,
when empty wine boxes stacked themselves like building
blocks
behind the master bedroom door
when groceries were tonic water and Aristocrat vodka
when my mom would not remember that I
told her goodnight, so

this light I feel
stumbling away from Plum Street
fingers interlocked with someone safe
is a new kind of BAC

and when the red turns clear
the dizziness behind my eyes tucks me in
and says goodnight.

ItsDifficulttoFinish
WhatYouveAlreadyFinished
Dylan Krinberg





Beastly

MOIRA SNYDER

I feed myself poison.
Hazardous and severe.
It burns as it snakes its way down my throat, and writhes in my
stomach.
Why?
Why can't I stop?
Overeating and over thinking.
I hide behind a facade of body positivity and self confidence.
I feed myself a bowl of bullshit and lies - hourly.
Then I push it to the back of my mind because school comes
first. No, family. No, social life.
Fuck. all. that.
How can any of that come first when I'm too busy thinking
about when my next meal is going to be?
But wait. I'm not hungry. Not always.
No, the meds keep the hunger away.
The meds don't tell me when to eat next.
The meds keep me weak, because that's what anxiety wants.
Anxiety wants me to feel small.
Wants me to feel frail.
Anxiety has won.
"You've lost so much weight!"
"You look slimmer!"
I can't handle the lies.
I cower from the scale that sits on the cold tiles.
I dread each visit to the doctor, trying not to look at the climbing
numbers because it's just too hard to confront the reality of
the fact.
The fact is: I can't control myself.
I can't control when to eat and when not to eat.
I can't.
Why?
How?
People say that the best way to lose weight is to go to bed hun-
gry and to not eat after nine.
Well, no matter the time and no matter my effort or lack of, I'm
still hungry.



I go to bed and my stomach aches.
It makes those noises that little kids get scared of - where they think there's a monster in their closet or under their bed.
Or when you're in tight spaces with strangers and it just makes gurgling sounds that echo throughout the chamber.
Every. Night.
Right now, it aches.
Why the fuck does it ache?
Nearly every night I try to suppress the urge to succumb to the overwhelming need to cry.
Granted, there's usually more to it than the relentless battle with my bipolar stomach but the urge to let the dam break for once in what feels like an eternity is overpowering.
How long will this last?
How long will this gnawing and insatiable being inside of me continue to rule over me?
Because sometimes, I don't know how much more I can take coexisting with this stranger.



Death by 1000 cuts
Dylan Krinberg

Anxious Body

ZEKEYA HURLEY

six a.m. shower

— Use twice daily

before the sun has stuttered a single word —
the day starts now, or not at all.

: but not out of necessity

the nerves just respond
to the presence of stimuli ~

doesn't your skin ever get dry?

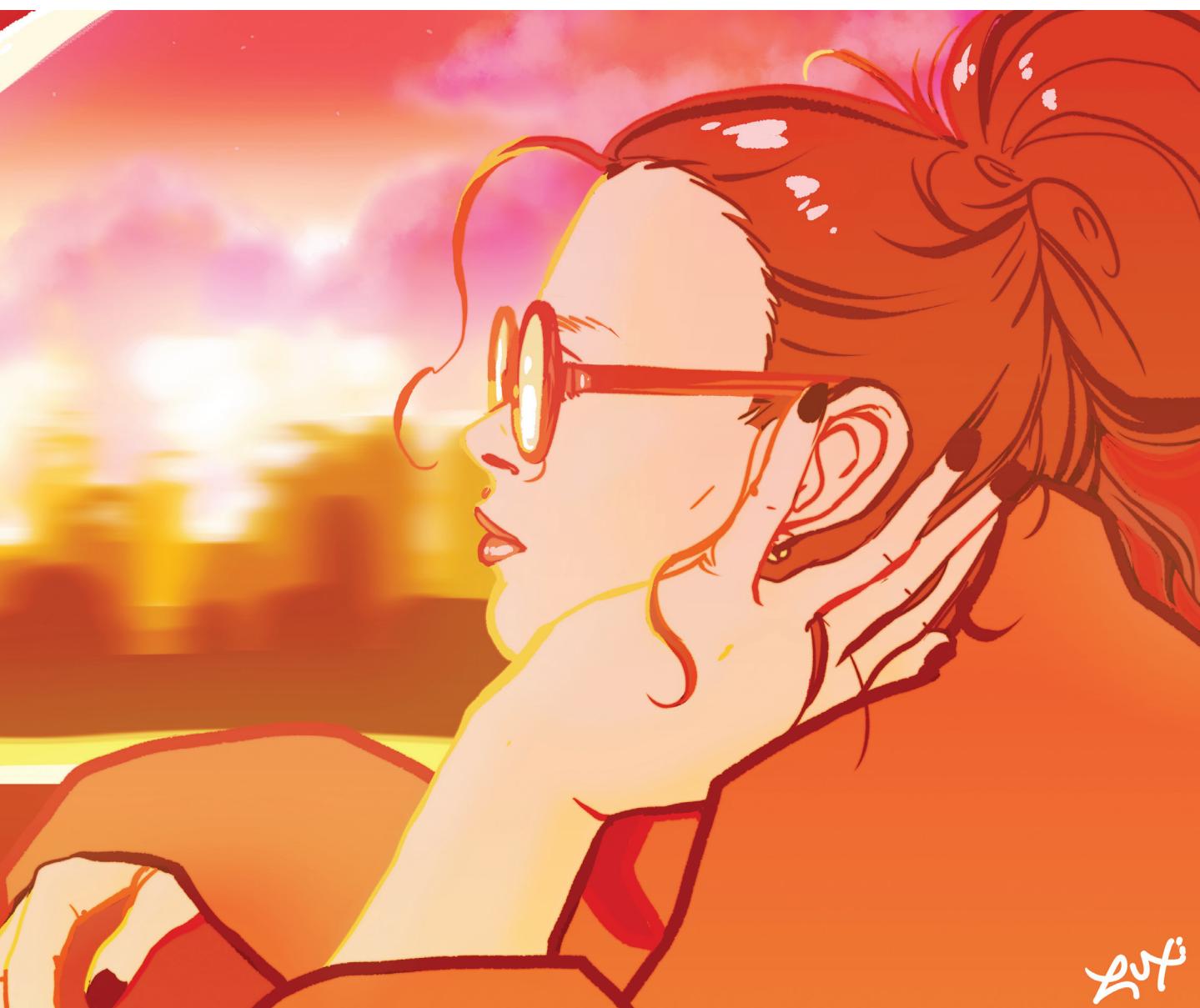
time crosses his legs, sits
at the foot of my bed
the calendar screams, panics
swears the days have ill intentions

my brain // a light switch
I am either awake or breathing
 a clenched jaw

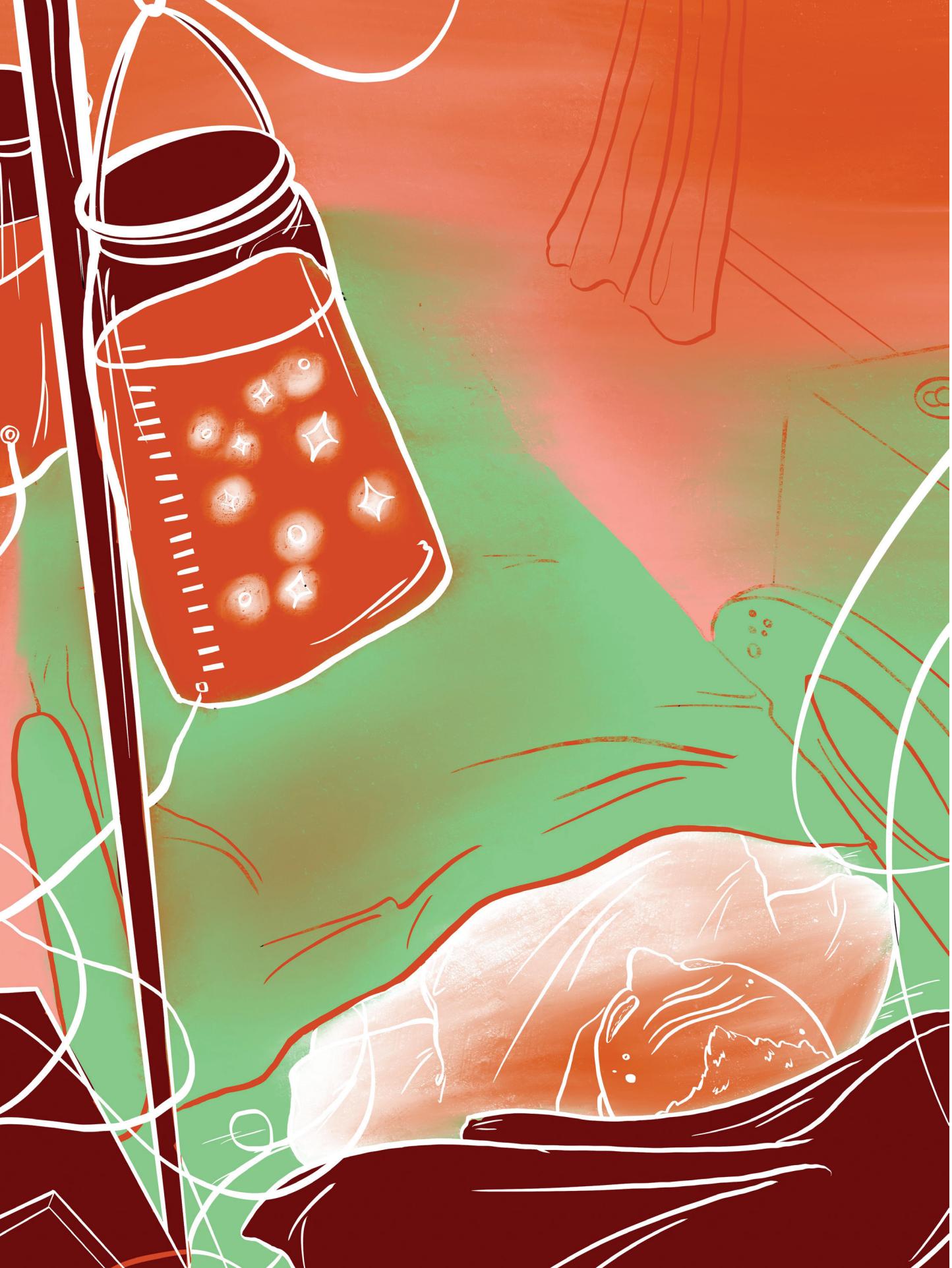
but I am no longer a person
 ; just a collection of habits
!

an alarm clock for a heartbeat
 a picked scab)

still making this look easy,
 all cracked knuckles and
a smile.



Burn Out
Odette Strider



Untitled (Recollection of Pop)

RUTH CLEMENTS

Cybernetic man, afloat in his bed.
He lay with a pot boiling over
in his lungs,
long oxygen tethers hooked into his nose.
Knitted blankets and day-old linens drifted far below him,
And when he reached for me,
those weary, rice paper hands
were the hands of God.

And he commanded titans too,
his sons and daughter who all stood three heads higher than he,
who knew to fear and love him
a little extra
when I cowered from his cabled face
behind the dinner table.

Battery heart wrapped in wire,
Charged with lightning
sparked in his eyes by a crooked smile
flaking mischief.
He faked blindness when I hid,
laughed, and bargained for my safe return with the heavens
that let him rot slow,
above the day-old linens and knitted blankets
in his bed.

Drawing the Fool Over the River

ERIC KALATA

And so I drew the Fool—
the beginning, the naive
soul, enthused
and engaged with
the world around him,

the world still new,
a child

wrapped up
in the sensation
of the new, nearing
a state of raw insatiability—

And so I drew the Fool,
over the river, mid-
way through the journey,
my position

as it stands now.

It reads circular,
a recursive
return that is
wholly inevitable—

That is, I've drawn
the Fool before.

Vulnerability
Michelle Dominado





A Chronology of Fire

JENNIFER BUI

Oh, my dear,
I have watched you reach out,
tiny hands to time-worn face,
when the earth cradled you to his chest and
kissed you with a single whisper of, "Mine."
I have watched you cry
as he welcomed other children home,
dying or dead for a golden zephyr dream,
his sandy arms around you like a bay of safety
for a child first seeing fire,
unbridled madness, destruction incarnate.

Oh, little gem,
I know you fear me—
memories of fallen camellias your guide,
tanks in the streets, burial pits
and blood-scented gunpowder,
death and celebration married with barbed wire rings.
But earth bore magma, too—
silent fury and damaged pride,
clenched fists and poisoned fangs,
adrenaline rush and broken bones—
and you learned how to be wildfire,
untamed rage, survival and devastation.

Sweet child,
I held your heart that day, felt
how it stuttered when you saw her—
braided threads of crimson, vermillion
eternity, ocher blooms and forbidden fruit.
And like your heart did I feel
how your soul shattered—
vulture-taloned greed, trampled
peach blossoms, no longer human;
you wept like the sun, helplessly watching his world suffer,
clinging to my tiger lily dress in despair
with your torn throat heaving rust-specked amber
roses in your father's arms.

Cecropia Silk Moth
KT Nowak

Darling opal,

Playing with fate is to gamble a legacy—
fickle celestial royals in an hourglass kingdom,
fortunes for curses, the future your
queen of hearts—yet you chose to drown
in star-slaying iron, burning in altruism's name.

Your birthday came with viridian tourmaline—
a wish of summer night hopes and firefly rivers,
sword to pen, gore-drunk ruin to wisteria vines—
and you turned from man to god, verses
of spring farewells and autumn heartbreaks,
a garden of melodic notes and crane feather lyrics.

Passion became my name to you,
a poet's forge, blood of ambition, core of the soul.

Dearest sweetheart,

Marriage came with emerald aspirations
in a sky of white lilies and pink carnations—
vows of golden bands, 14 years
of courtship, love poems for letters,
gifts of guitar songs and devotion—a love
of see-you-agains and reunions.

You left home for a new life,
knowing that it may be farewell—
from nest to flight, parting for the nothingness
called beginning—holding back groundwater tears,
father earth sent you off, praying your safe arrival.

With your back to home, you departed for
love and rebirth, pyre of suffering, phoenix rising.

Beloved sapphire,

I have warned you of fated grief—
waning gibbous and scissors of a seamstress,
double miscarriage and metastasis—
claws of riptides and sanguine lungs,
guardrails of silver crosses, graves for the nameless.

But there is no such thing as hardship in vain,
and noon came your white star—
bright with miracles and plum blossom blooms,
crimson starlight and camellia heart.

And like the earth so long ago, you cradled her to your chest,
tears in your eyes, and a whisper of, “Mine.”

IN AN ALTERNATE UNIVERSE MY NAME IS...

MARY KAMARA

a thump to the chest
& a glorious war cry.

Gwendolyn.

a sucker punch to Columbus' face
& an explanation of how I'm the captain now.

a bonfire of broken chains
& a wave to carry them home.

a song shrouded in darkness
& the rhythm of feet to freedom.

a blunt rolled from Jefferson's weed,
& the bullet that kills Reagan.

a harmonized anthem
& the first brick at Cheyney.

a robin's song, a shuffle along,
& America too.

cool,
real muthafuckin' cool.

the blackest thing imaginable,
& Lorraine.

a promise kept, a cycle broken,
& nine steps forward.

a butterfly's wing, a bee's sting,
& an "all my life I had to fight".

but knowing we gon' be alright,
yea/knowing we gon' be alright.

Staff Bios

AVA BLAKESLEE-CARTER is Editor-in-Chief of (PWA-TEM). She is graduating with a bachelor's degree in Art Education and Kinetic Imaging. She is a board game enthusiast, a to-do list creator, and a spicy food lover.

LUKE CAMPBELL is the Assistant Editor-in-chief of (PWA-TEM). He's graduating with a bachelor's in English and minors in creative writing and Italian. Lover of vegan food, the mountains, and poetry.

MARLON MCKAY is the current secretary of (PWA-TEM). He's been writing stories since he was a little kid. He loves to play pokémon and to watch Disney.

MADELINE DE MICHELE is a Co-Art Director of (PWA-TEM). She is a painter, illustrator, and comic creator with a proclivity for tactile art and object making. She is working towards a BFA in Communication Arts and a BS in Psychology.

BOBBY MILLER has been Co-Art Director and Illustrator for (PWA-TEM) since 2018. He's graduating this spring with a BFA in Communication Arts. Bobby looks to continue his career in graphic design and commercial illustration after college.

GRAY GIBSON is a junior majoring in VCU's communication arts program. This is his 2nd year on staff for (PWA-TEM)

MICHAEL PRICE is a sculpture major and the unofficial DJ for all (PWA-TEM) meetings.

HALDEN FRALEY loves writing and drawing, and he has an unhealthy obsession with comic books. He loves spicy foods and wishes he could have a pet octopus.

HOWMAN is a Sophomore at VCU studying Political Science and History. He enjoys being a part of (PWA-TEM) for the chance to read student literature and meet new people.

YOGITA SURYAWANSHI is a general staff who is going into graphic design. She has a great interest for idols and is passionate about helping kids.

ANYA SCZERZENIE has been a member of (PWA-TEM)'s editorial staff for almost three years. She has always loved writing and also works for other VCU student media organizations. She loves podcasts and flowers, and her favorite color is green.

RAY WALTON is an English major at VCU. They have been dabbling in creative writing since they were in 8th grade. They are a huge fan of Stephen King books and the The Twilight Zone.

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Devany Solanki is an illustrator for (PWA-TEM). She is a sophomore in Communication Arts with a minor in Creative Writing. She enjoys old movies, bookbinding, and listening to a plethora of music.

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