

VOICES

Fall
2024

ad toward

ll I see my reflection, the featu

moments as a film reel flashes before my

a moment to realize it's all the women that have come before me. I see a litt

of my features in all of the beautiful women dancing across the film. The music of the forest

throughout the crisp pine air. As I stare into her three eyes I

embrace. The lullaby of a bird's song sti

A LITERATURE &



WVC VOICES

ARTS MAGAZINE

Voices is a literary and arts magazine that showcases the diverse voices of West Valley College. It is published digitally in the fall and in print in the spring, and is produced by the members of the Voices staff and English 80 & 81. Current students, alumni, faculty, and staff of West Valley College are invited to submit their works of original fiction, creative non-fiction, poetry, and art for publication.

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Untitled

Nikolas Teddy



Always Forever
Khadija Ansari

I don't think about you,
but there are times.
That familiar tune reaches my ears
and I'm there.

Or rather,
you're here.
The forefront of my mind faced with you,
as it was many moons gone.

I don't think about you, but I do wonder now.
Have I crossed your mind?
At least, have the memories resurfaced,
the ones shared between you and I and no one else?

I don't think about you,
though some days you come by and tug a string
from my heart.
Then you're here and I know you again,
your face and smile by the edges of your teeth.
Your touch, and ultimately, your absence.



I don't think about you,
but there are times when you snatch up a brush and
become the painter of my thoughts.
There are times when you become the author of my life and
I drift along the realities you pen for us.

These fantasies are short,
because I do not think about you.
I no longer think about you (not on purpose).



Mystical Forest

Karly Souza

The fae giggle as they flutter through the branches, the butterflies flutter all around, the fireflies light our path. The three eyed doe whispers gently to drink the water that bathes in the sunlight, dropping to my knees my hands gently scoop the source in my palms sipping the sweet honey taste brightens my senses.

In the busy room I feel the male gaze blazing onto my exposed skin, I flee to the library my only escape is through the words, they blur, everything goes black. An herbal crisp aroma causes me to crack my watery hazel irises open and gaze at the willow swaying with every breath of wind.Warm summer rays heat my cheek, the deer with three eyes leads my bare feet trail towards the water that glows brighter with every step on forestry ground. The fae giggle as they flutter through the branches, the butterflies flutter all around, the fireflies light our path. The three eyed doe whispers gently to drink the water that bathes in the sunlight, dropping to my knees my hands gently scoop the source in my palms sipping the sweet honey taste brightens my senses. The sludge that crowded my throat from their worlds hands was washed away now I can finally breathe,the anxiety that continued to swirl in my belly ceases. The thick orange fog wraps around my being, my dimples peak my soul untamed wanting to speak. I whip my head towards the reflecting light to find a mirror In the bed of moss and green I see my reflection, the features I used to despise shine in my gaze. I stare for long moments as a film reel flashes before my eyes. It takes me a moment to realize it's all the women that have come before me. I see a little of my features in all of the beautiful women dancing across the film. The music of the forest starts strumming all around, I twirl dancing with the butterflies, I'm bound.The moon rises , it gleams in the midst of trillions of stars. She stops at the looming timber that stands tall. Tears brim as my legs carry me to her, the wisteria catches me as I collapse the branches that surround crinkle as it

wraps. I look down at the doe resting her head in my lap. A sweet serenity swirls throughout the crisp pine air. As I stare into her three eyes I grow sleepy as I melt into the earth's embrace. The lullaby of a bird's song stirs me from my slumber and I'm back in the library. The window is open letting a cool breeze through my long strands when I see my three eyed deer walk over to the window I hop out. When I'm in front of her she leaps into my soul. The part of me that was missing leaps back into place. A smile forms across my plump lips as a butterfly rests in my hair. In that moment I know the earth will always catch me when I fall.





Martian Pine-Sol Lady

Alegra Yepez

Meinu Genevieve

Carlos Zumarraga



Day and Night

Cristy Arreola

The sunset looks nice
It has a hint of spice
But midnight is here
What will I hear?

My walk is really nice
It's such a delight
When no one is here
I can hear you so clear

They try to distract me
I tell them,
Try and bring down the moon?

They sun will rise again
And so will I
I will grab the stars
I will bring them down

When hiding is a secret
Yet it is only a mischief
It is only sunset

The walk is delightful
I feel alright
No more distressing
I got the blessing
So grateful
I smile in plain sight





Space Propaganda

Chandler Roberts

at least there's
a tv in the break room

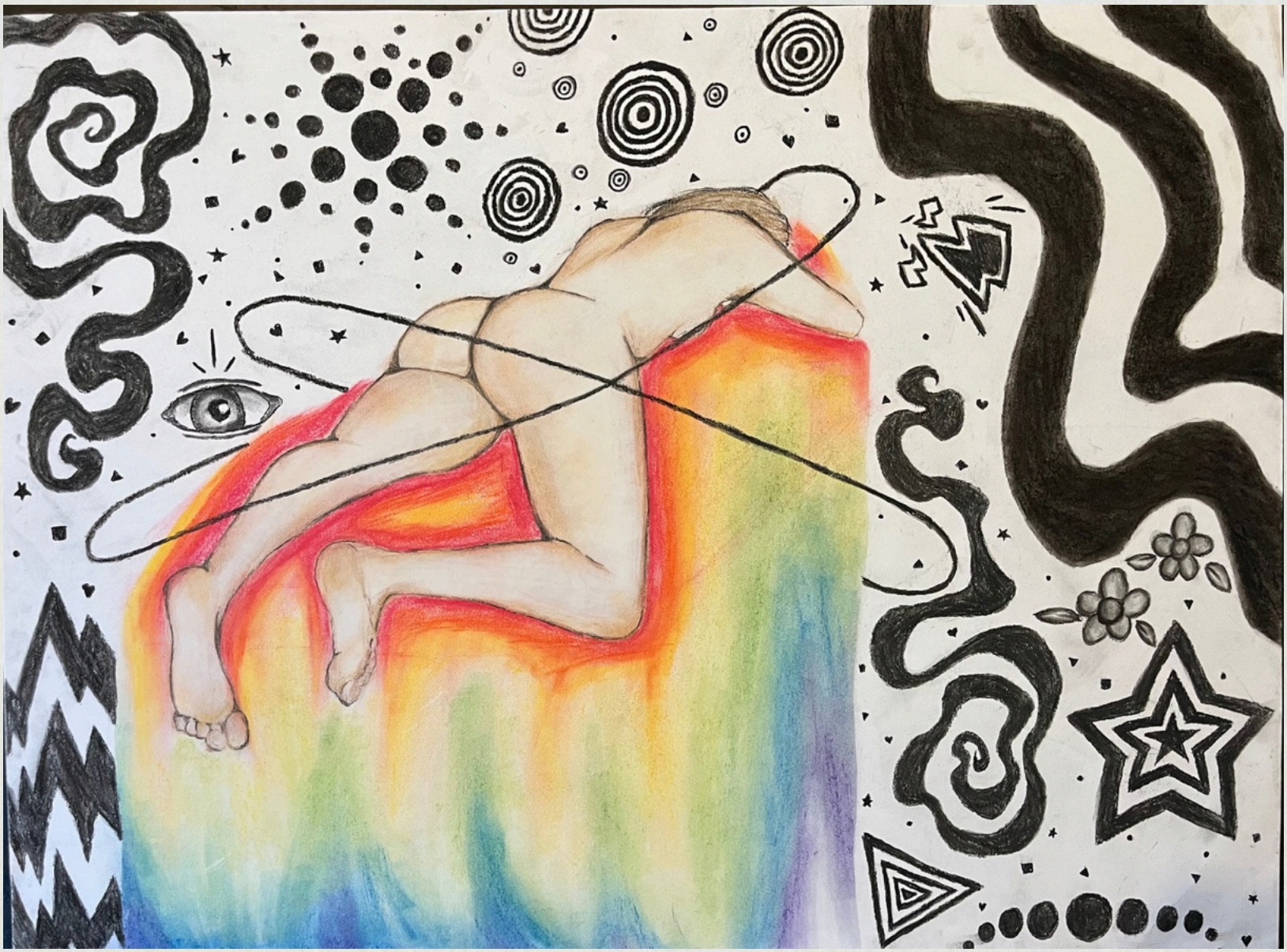
Joining us now is the CEO of
didn't get the raise
Touching down from his trip to
the store's profitable though
What was it like seeing
my buddy just got fired
It Really Changed My Perspective On
he has a family
I'm A Completely Different
all he did was ask for better conditions
I Will Use This Experience To

who is this for
this performative bullshit
who is this for

but at least there's
a tv in the break room

Delusion

Grace Loeper



Subtle Pride Pins

Lauren Wolf



Hues of Affection

Pearl Soni





Saudade

Aurelia Jarrett

Oh, how I've come to love the pasture of your dearest lamb. For I've forgotten how I'm the wolf, and how that love is a sham.

I dream of a river that's gentle and pretty, and wake to see how my turbulent stream has broken the dam.

And now, I'm the hound who chases the scent of nothing, all the way across the opposite end of the earth.

And when I get there, I see that the void I'm stuck chasing can never be mine, for I lacked it since birth.

Swallowing all the dirt that I wish to return to, until my mouth can't remember any other taste.

I feel so stagnant with a stomach full of soil, and with nowhere to go, I itch to make haste.

Silhouette

William Gauvin



Procession

William Gauvin





Bloody Sink

Gwyndolyn Szoboszlay

Eyes snap open, pupils dilating in the flickering dim. Darting between off-white tiles, a rusted basin, and red smeared shards. Lights buzzing. Head thrumming, as I lay crumpled against the floor. Damn. . . really hope those PSA's in high school weren't right.

"Three reminders Starshine." I recognize the nickname, dull light flickering through my eyelids. A crisp smile and denim jacket. Orla. Auntie O. Only a decade older than me. My mother's kid sis. A sort of "cool aunt".. The kind of aunt who is really more of an older sister, than a real authority figure. But sometimes, that's for the best. I think. "One drink. No hookups. Call or text if you need anything."

She worries too much.

But . . . then again, I'm definitely wasted.

Laying on my side, I feel the cold floor on my face. My nerves prickle with sensation. Senses fuzzy. Like river water in a midwinter. Biting cold, and half numb. Orla's voice fading to a steady dripping of water. Her auburn curls and hazel eyes, melting to amber blobs. Dancing on my eyelids, like last night's sunset.

* * *

"You're an ass Corri." I sort of laugh, sort of groan. Running cherry red nails through my tousled hair. Corralling the rust colored ringlets. Again. They only snicker in that way only they can. Half teeth, all annoyance.

"I do have quite the nice derriere." Corri spins on their heels with a concrete click. "I appreciate the compliment, Meadows."

Green vest, the same mossy tone as my irises, and poof of black hair. Stark against the orange dusk. They sling their sticker splattered guitar case over their shoulder. One for each place Thalia had been.

Nearly whacking her square in the face.

“Watch it!” Thalia’s head snaps back, sharp eyes bearing through her glasses at her accidental assailant. “Maybe Annie is right. Coriander.” They fain offense at their full name. As they tend to do, scoffing, hand pressed to their chest.

All for which, with her work boots, she kicks them in the shin.

I turn to my left, using my worn flannel to muffle the well of giggles and snorts escaping my crooked lips. “Don’t know why I hangout with y'all.” I smile back at the air fighting pair. Playing out a scene from an old action movie in Thalia’s collection. Named something stupid, like Master of the Fallen Sword III or Atutomoton Cop VII: Reloaded. The kind of movie my mom liked.

Something twists in my chest for a moment, as I swallow down a bitter thought. How a yea—

An arm wraps around my shoulder.

Her arm wraps around my shoulder.

Half bleached strands of dirty blonde, and nose broken by a rogue baseball in eighth grade. “Because.” Bea clicks her tongue. “You love us.” A thin warmth creeps over my freckles, blurring them more than my fading sunburn.

“Come on.” Thalia clicks her cellphone shut. “We’re gonna be late.”

Corri straightens their vest. “Fair enough.”

“Late for what?” I ask.

“It's a surprise,” Lacing her fingers into mine, Bea pulls me forward. “A little tradition.” The brickwalled street seems to come alive around her, as the rhythm of her breath melts with swelling music and whooping calls down the block.

A summer party.

"Better be killer"

* * *

My sense of taste wakes up. And so do I, a little. Fuck this one sucks. Maybe Auntie O was right. Big city drinking is clearly not for me.

A spoon? My tongue flinches at the metallic taste. Trying to spit out the metal object. Only to feel a half congealed liquid sticking to my teeth and tongue, dribbling out in globs. The fuck?

Where am I?

* * *

"Where are we?"

I'm surrounded by a blur of pastel as we enter a massive room. I can hardly hear myself over the bass, as another chord strikes. A mosaic of partygoers and punks. Bodies pressing aginst me. I feel like I'm going to be swept away, drowned in the cacophony. I catch a gaze from the balcony, black lips and a lilting laugh cutting through the noise.

Then Bea squeezes my hand. Steady, she pulls me closer. Fingers through my hair, gently, almost nervous, resting on my bare shoulder. My eyes widen. All I can see is her dimpled grin, irises gleaming blue in the neon haze.

"The start of something awesome." She leads me to a table away from the crowd. An angled yet clear view of the stage. The room grows quiet as the current band finishes their set. "Wait, and watch."

Corri and Thalia are on stage.

"Hello San Toros! Hope all of you sorry sods are having a wonderful evening." Corri shouts over the microphone, their guitar an electric yellow, resonating low. "They were good, I'll give them that. But I think it's time for some HIGH STAKES." Thalia mutters ba-dum-tss from behind the drumset. Circus striped bandana tying back her hair.

As Bea Baker, wearing a cannabis print shirt, jumps on stage, and flicks the keyboard on. LEDs alighting in bubblegum cascades. And within a single verse of her voice, I melt into the music. And am gone.

* * *

Eyes snap open, pupils dilating in the flickering dim. Darting between off-white tiles, a rusted basin, and red smeared shards. Lights buzzing. Head thrumming, as I lay crumpled against the floor. Damn. . . really hope those PSA's in high school weren't right. My mind racing between ruffies and drugs, effects half remembered, as my neurons clunker.

Everything still cold, my nerves raw, like the time I went skinny dipping for Bea's birthday, the week before she moved. This. Is worse. Putride scents burn my nose: Urine, feces, and what I hope to gods above and below, is not my own blood.

I can smell blood?

* * *

Blood dribbles from soft black lips. Breathing hitches. A thin stream of deep red. Leaking from a pulsating warmth, where my shoulder meets my neck. Staining my finger torn shirt, the red on white now unreadable. Fingers encircling through my hair and digging into my thigh.

I flinch.

I try to move away, but in the blur of stinging pain, pulling hair, fluttering numbness, I'm locked in place. She blurs around me, solid pits of teeth and watching ink, as I sink inward. Pale skin tearing. Molars crunching. Panic stifled as her sharp tongue laps the jagged wound. Pulse thrumming in my ears. The echo of music is long gone.

I try to scream. But no sound escapes me.

All I can see is the deep scarlet of my blood muddling with the rust of my hair. As something cracks, and everything . . .

The world.

Me.

My memories.

Mom.

Orla.

Corri

Thalia.

Bea.

Everything melts away.

Everything.

Except her teeth.

* * *

I have zero clue where I am. Well, except a public restroom. I quip unhelpfully. This is the last time we go out on a Friday night . . . or go somewhere "private" with a random girl. I groan. My mind lingers on the rose of her dark lips, and her sharp teeth at my neck. In a haze, I try to right myself. Joints stiff and sore. Strainighing as my pale fingers push off the dark splattered grout.

Crack.

Something tears. A muscle or ligament, something, in my arm screams. I gasp, only a squeak, as water trickles from pipes like iron beads. I lie, almost still, before gritting my teeth, as joints crack with every leaden movement. Slowly, I stumble to

the sink. I hardly notice my phone cracking underfoot. Collapsing against the sink as it bends and whines in protest. I whine louder. My hand presses to my chest, as I feel my heartbea— I don't feel anything.

* * *

I feel everything.

Blistering agony.

Bitter euphoria.

Every vein itches with hollowing hunger.

My stomach twists.

My heart spasms

A final jolt.

A misfiring synapse.

Adrenaline.

A death wail of a dying body.

A scream.

That goes on.

And on.

And on.

* * *

I’m not breathing. I suck in a frantic breath. “I’m not breathing!” A scream rasps my throat, as I stare into the grimy and cracked mirror. Teeth bare, crusted with ruddy black. A pair of lightless eyes, watching behind a mop of matted curls, and the thready remains of a red flannel and black skirt.

The face isn't mine. It's wrong.

Prickling at my neck as it stares from beyond the blurry glass. I don’t see the twenty one year old English major, the part time thrift store cashier, and short sighted flirt. I don't even see the transfer student, all but lost in a new city.

I see a corpse.

This is worse than dysphoria.

I feel sick.

“Annie Lee Meadows, happy birthday. Also—” A sudden twist in my stomach forces up a noxious torrent of pink vodka and half-dissolved birthday cake, burning my throat. Into the bloody sink. “We’re so fucked.”



honeydew #42

amrita gopal



i wish the words upon my tongue
were drops of dew
so that they might drip off of me
and make their way to you
but instead they're sticky like honey

i swirl them around my mouth
the sweetest forbidden nectar
these words
the three little ones
i wish to say most
in the world

but i am content
to admire from afar
trying to meet your gaze

and i want to tell you everything
my fantasies of domesticity
lazy sunday mornings in bed
you'd wake up to the the smell of freshly brewed coffee
and lilacs (i know they're your favorite)
we'd do the crossword

and i'd lay my head on your chest
and pretend the melody
of your heartbeat
is a love song you wrote for me
alas, i yearn to pour
the honey out
yet the wordswontspill
they're reduced to a crystalline crust around the rim

aand so spring becomes summer
and love turns to dust
coward that i am
these words may never
see the morning
may never
become its dew
but in the meantime
i'll just enjoy your light
i'll see you in every beautiful thing
you are the pink clouds of a sunset
thin rays of sun peaking through the branches of a majestic oak

you are the wordless epiphanies that come to
me in the dead of night
you are the salt beneath my fingers
and the life inside my bones



and so i'll whisper the words i could
never say
to strangers on the subway
curly black locks enshrining
emerald green eyes
tell myself pretty lies
(i'll pretend it's you)

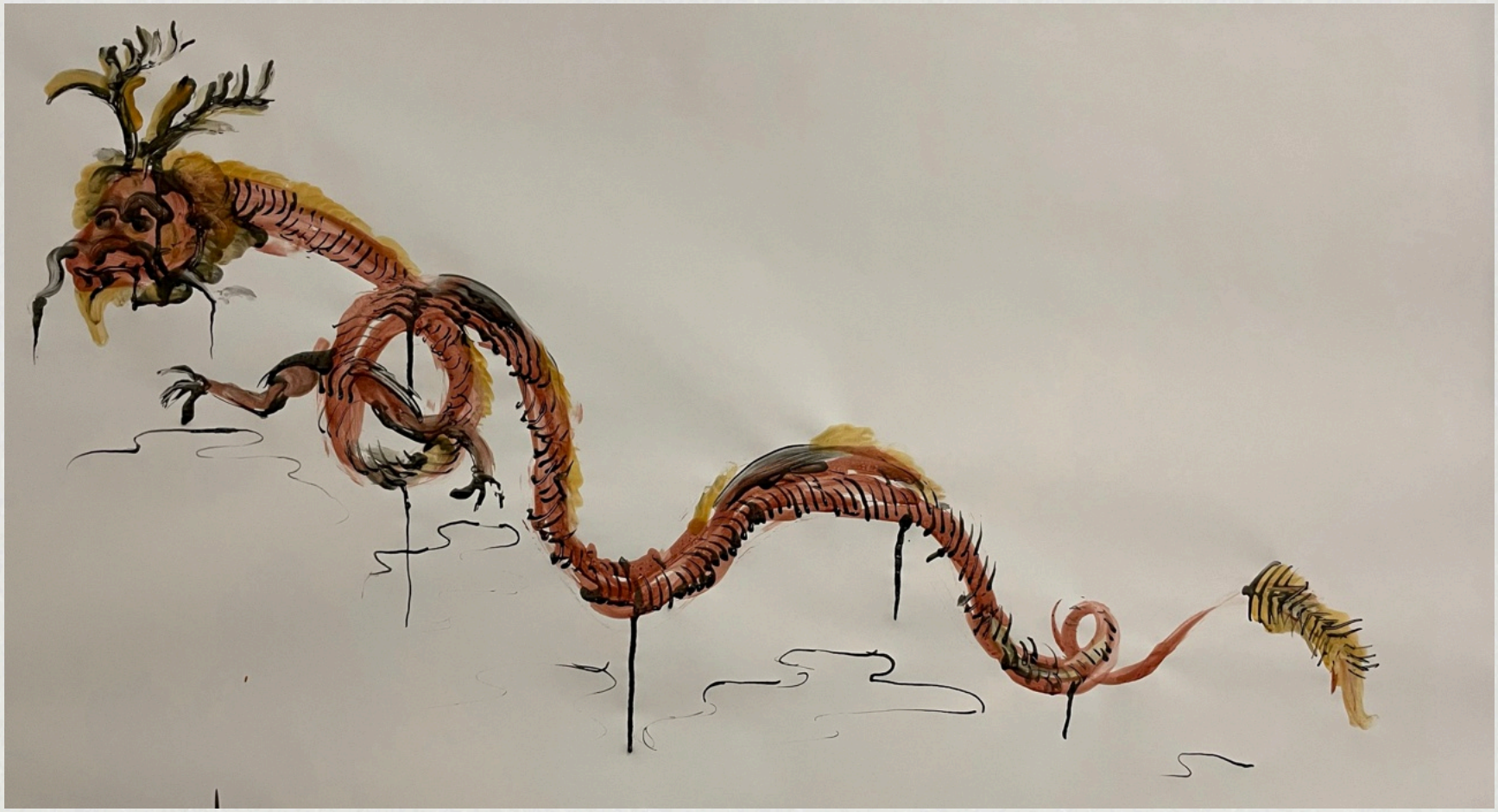
and i'll eventually learn
not to fall for the boy
with flowers on his shirt
and his heart on his sleeve

and i shall bear the curse
of loving you endlessly

Cup Noodles

Hanl Schumaker Jo





Dragon Cave Painting

Evan Summers



Octopus

Corinne Thelen

Hound

Nicole Furstenberg



Fiery Night

Evan Summers





Looking for

Sarah Gilmore

Something, lost
That has left a hole
We fill with things
Sometimes liquid
Or solid
Like cheese
Something, gone with wind
Leaving souls blowing in the breeze
Without direction or purpose
Looking for
A cheesy focaccia
Cracked all over



Time, Melting

Mahima Seshan

Time melting
into molasses.
Fissured rings
in tree trunk crevasses.

Floor splitting
beneath my feet.
Wishing for rain,
waiting for sleet.

Heartbeats forced
from a wilted rose.
Minutes spent
on rewriting prose.

The hours speed by,
and I'm left behind.
If only the moments
could be more kind.



Space Cowboy

Alegra Yepez

Youthful Beginnings

Pan Garcia Breceda





He Dreams As He Awakes

Christine Josey

As I continued to sit in my car in awe, something just dawned on me. I had a dream with a deer that ran across the road. However, all the other scenery did not take place in this dream I had last night.

"It was nice seeing you again Caine, I know it has been some time since we last saw each other."

"Yes! Agreed. Do not hesitate to come by my jeweler's shop sooner rather than later Sean. I'll hook you up on your next ice wear of choice on your next purchase. Until then safe travels."

Sean suddenly hears a sudden scream as he crosses the streetlight to head back inside his truck.

"Ahhhh, what the fuck!" In the young man's voice. As Sean looks outside the front window of his truck there, he sees a car swerved off the road straight into a ditch. From what seems to be a cause of a horrific deer accident. A deer ran across the street.

I somehow just missed it when this poor creature scares the hell out of the driver, in which due to an apparent sudden reaction he swerves to avoid hitting the creature, but to only end up off the road. Suddenly comes running, my buddy Caine and another one of his very own customers came to see if the driver was okay and if there was any way they could be of assistance in getting him out safely. After what seemed to be a ten to fifteen-minute struggle with trying to help the poor man out, someone from the distance yelled out they had called the emergency services already. Within minutes the firemen arrived.

"Hello everyone, please remove yourselves from the scene. Help us here, let us do our job, and thank you."

Police now arrive on the scene just as one of the firemen goes into the ditch to see how far

the young man is caught up. Just as the fireman seems to get a back door open the vehicle starts to catch flames. At this point, the rest of the firemen are rushing to retrieve the hose so they can put out the fire before it could escalate much more. As I continued to sit in my car in awe, something just dawned on me. I had a dream with a deer that ran across the road. However, all the other scenery did not take place in this dream I had last night.

Driving home now, afraid of what was to happen next. Fuck! Did not even know what to think next. Dear God, I hope the poor guy is safer at this point. Now opening the door to my townhome, which lies off the corner of a cul-de-sac. I have a couple of bushes in front of my home and near my front door entrance are two wide medium-sized windows. I love my privacy of course so from the inside I have blinds and curtains to cover right over them from top to bottom. As of now, it is just me and my cat Tiger here. I love my peace so no wife and kids here thankfully. Five days a week I normally work remotely on my very own newspaper business I have owned for quite some time now, very proud of it too. My great buddy Caine has been one of my few longest customers, this is how we met. He and I used to do BBQs all the time around summer, but life happens and so now we need to make up for ole' time's sake.

"Ring, ring, ring, ring! (My house phone is going off. Yep, no cell phones here, those drive me nuts.) Hello, this is Sean speaking with 'Kingsford newspaper' how can I assist you today?"

"Hey Sean, it is me, Caine."

"Oh hi, fella. I hope everything is okay! Before I left the site of your shop, I saw the horrible accident and how you tried to help the poor young man out. I am sure I will need to follow up on the matter in only a matter of time to make it into our local town's newspaper. How did everything turn out by the way?"

"I honestly cannot say too much after the fire scene took place the police stopped questioning and asked us to evacuate the area for emergency concerns. I was hoping you already had insight Sean to be honest."

"Sorry Caine, I have not even been home for two hours yet. I will contact our local news shortly. Please be careful there buddy. Are you home at all?"

"Yes, indeed. Although I had to close my shop early, I had online orders that were starting to back up to deal with, so I am currently dealing with them now. As always Sean, it is nice to hear from you later."

I now sat down on my front room couch to turn on my T.V. Tiger had jumped up to accompany me, just barely on my lap. I now turn on 'Kingsford News Now', hoping to see some coverage of some kind regarding the horrific accident from earlier today. However, so far nothing important. I flick the channel, but I start to doze off slowly but surely. Sleepier than I thought. I believe I overheard talk in the weeks coming weather because within five to ten minutes I am dead asleep here on my couch.

It is raining as well as thundering and lightning at the same time. An older Caucasian woman around sixty years old or so rocking back and forth in her rocking chair on her front porch kitty-cornered from her very own front door minding her business reading and then there's another thunder with a lightning streak.

Whoa! I yelled out, now wide awake, stretching with a loud yawn. I look down and notice Tiger has already taken off. As I call for Tiger my cat it is time for me to prep some food in his bowl. I am now thinking to myself what went on for such a weather change. It was just 80 degrees out before I came home, like what the hell. Suddenly I overheard a news brief coming on speaking to an older woman somewhere South of me here in Kingsford in the city of A Hooligan where she was struck by lightning while sitting on her outside front porch rocking chair. The news then stated she currently is in critical condition. I now go running to pick up my phone in excitement but then I freeze in thought. Well, who would I be calling and why? I am realizing that at this point I had a big dream here on my couch of this same older woman, not realizing that she was then indeed struck by lightning as the result of it, due to myself waking up before I could dive into any more of this adventure.

Meow, meow with rubbing against my left leg. Shit! Sorry, Tiger. I know you are hungry. While feeling overwhelmed, I go and grab a can of Tiger's favorite

wet food and push it out for her first then serve her a fresh bowl of water, check her kitty litter, and then go take out some much-needed trash, realizing I didn't think of what I was going to eat myself. But damn, how could I even stomach anything. Now flicking through my television to see if I can find any valuable news regarding the earlier incident I witnessed in person, but instead, there's only news regarding a college-aged student being interviewed because he just won our very own city of Kingsford's lottery jackpot from a liquor store just uptown away from me. Hmmm it does not look as if they identified the winner's name and blah blah, they want to know what his plans are with his winnings. Fuck! None of my business.

Click, click, click, click! Hmmm, no other news for now. Oh, I know, Charlie is the man to call. Good ole' nosey ass Charlie.

"Ring, ring, ring, ring. Ring, ring, well I guess… 'Hello, Charlie speaking. Who's there?"

"Hey Charlie, this is Sean of course just here finishing up on new articles for our city's local newspaper. Out of curiosity sir, have you heard any other details regarding the woman who was struck by lightning?"

"Oh, as of late Sean, it was stated she was still in critical care however she may need an important urgent surgery that her doctors are discussing currently, other than that nothing."

"I appreciate everything, Charlie. You should call me sometime. Take care now. Click."

I take notes at my desk in my upstairs office regarding the article I want to work on with the elderly woman who was recently struck by lightning. By the time I note everything necessary for the time being, I realize I am really over my head now from not eating.

Thump, thump, thump as I walk down my twenty steps to go into my kitchen so I can find myself something to eat. I realized I was sleepy too, so I grabbed some of my favorite wheat bread and made myself a tuna sandwich and a dill pickle served on the side. Hmmm, why not wash it down with a Stella? Gulp, gulp ah this is nice. I now take off my shoes and socks, go back to my front room couch and before I can make it to

my television remote, I am fast asleep. At least 45 minutes in my sleep…

Ahhhh! I am yelling as I wake up drenched in sweat. Really? It was another dream. I need a shrink apparently. I never dreamed so much in my life. This is literally freaking me the fuck out. I turn on my light to go into my kitchen to pour myself a glass of iced water.

Gulp, gulp. As I finished the last gulp I decided to go back into my office and work on my article more regarding the older woman. Not realizing I was only less than six hours from 8:00 AM this Sunday, I decided to refresh Tiger's food and then go speak with him for a few minutes. Now going back upstairs so I can shower. Drying off, I decided to wear my favorite comfy jogging pants and a dark green pullover to match it. Slide right into my favorite sneakers to walk and run in so I can now finally grab my keys to my truck, which were left downstairs on my couch. Then I head out to grab myself my favorite hot cup of Peet's coffee before going to my buddy Caine's shop. Finally I arrived at the shop which had not been open for too long. Here together we decided to watch the news on the counterfeit television he has here with him as he works. Just twenty minutes into the news and commercials our city's local Kingsford goes into a sudden breaking news regarding a young man who was gunned down just after midnight in his very own home. They had stated after interviewing neighbors that they had heard four loud gunshots. The body was later identified to be the young man who won the lottery early Saturday. My mouth drops in shock!

To be continued…





Papi's Eternal Youth

Pan Garcia Breceda

Untitled

Corinne Thelen



Pink Cotton Candy Angel

Jamie Siegler



oddly
The promises do nothing but linger
like the sugary taste she remembers
from her once fluffy cotton candy
Now flat and gray, rolled in mud
she smells the fake factory fibers of her ratted pink
wig
It scratches her head
while Hiding her soft sweet face
and Baby soft skin
Behind the brightness of her Taffy curls
Hides her Puffin eyes
purple and gray
her Wigg
a piece so false yet stunning,
even she stared at her murky reflection
in awe of her innocence
Beautiful as ever! he declares to her
she yearns to flap her iridescent wings
To glisten as the dove in the sun
That she once was

instead
her angelic light flickers out in his dim room
Walls are black
Curtains are closed
Amidst the cloud he blows
She tries to smile bigger than ever before
She needed herself at this time
while the fire came

she wished in the well
that one day
someone would see her bright pink wigg
or her scraped up wings
and pull her out
She cries: what's a Prince to an Angel that can fly?

Bare Feet

Dana Yule

Warm cement sidewalks
Front yards covered in pink and green
Buzzing blankets of bees
Those translucent wings
Singing to me

My bare feet
Bloody from the bumps in the road
Skin torn back
Bone exposed

My bare feet
Just 10 years old
So all alone
My bare feet bore it all.







Ocean Power

William Gauvin



Burning of the West

Evan Summers

Advice from Z to A

Billie James Bishop



Zip outside, on a sunny day,
(Then, go find a dog to pet).
Yell (softly) 3 times “I am A. o. k!”
(Then, dry up your tears & go team go!)

X-communicate negative thoughts,
(Then, smile kid, smile).
Write positive thoughts (in sand) with your non-dominant hand,
(Then, look at your work & laugh out loud).

Voice your concerns to every bird you hear,
(Then, thank them for listening and their songs).
Uplift others by smiling often & always,
(Then, keep a song in your heart).

Think positive thoughts every hour of every day,
(Then, thank your lucky stars you are YOU).

Stand in a field & close your eyes,
(Then, appreciate the deafening silence there).
Read poetry that doesn’t rhyme,
(Then, add 2 new lines of your own).

Question every ant who crosses your path,
(Then, ask ‘em “What’s up doc?”).
Play often,
(Then, know this: “If you're laughing, you’re learning.”)

Open your mind to all things big or small,
(Then, let the sunshine in).
Never give up,
(Then, always believe in yourself).

Mount up on eagle wings & fly above every trouble,
(Then, read...read...read) [Or write a line for fun]
Look at butterflies on flower tops,
(Then imagine the possibilities).

Keep on trying,
(Then, believe all things are possible).
Just wish upon a star,
(Then, take your first step to sure success).

Insist on finding the silver lining in all things.
(Then be the light that creates the silver in the lining)
Hear birds sing,
(Then, wonder what they're saying over there).

Give yourself the gift of forgiveness,
(Then, move on & never become discouraged).



Find a way to help others,
(Then, discover the positive side of everything).

Enjoy the “you” you’ve become,
(Then, laugh more often than not...but if you cry, it’s ok, too).
Daydream,
(Then, take the first steps to achieve your dreams).

Capture your creative talents,
(Then, put them to work for you and others).
Believe in yourself,
(Then, know you’re special).

Accept the fact that mistakes are proof you are trying,
(Then memorize the alphabet backwards)



Crystal Ball

Michael de Guzman

As you pose at the edge of the mountain's peak,
and I press the viewfinder against my eye,
a lightbulb materializes above my head.
This camera of yours, a birthday present from
your father who died last year,

I could throw it off the side of the cliff.
I could tear out the film and chew on it like gum.
I could drop it to the floor and pound it to dust under my heels,
and you would stomp towards me,
scream at the top of your lungs,
"Do you have any idea how much that meant to me?"
and grab me by the collar.

I would wrap my fingers around your wrists,
trying to wrench your hands off my shirt until,
eventually, I'd push you off, and your
screams–although they would fade while they
followed you down the cliff and into the river,
as if tied to your ankle with a rope–
would subtly imprint themselves onto
my eardrums forever; a you-flavored tinnitus.

Grateful for the premonition, I tighten my grip
on the camera, tell you to say cheese,
and click the shutter.

Phases

william Gauvin





Untitled

Nicole Furstenberg

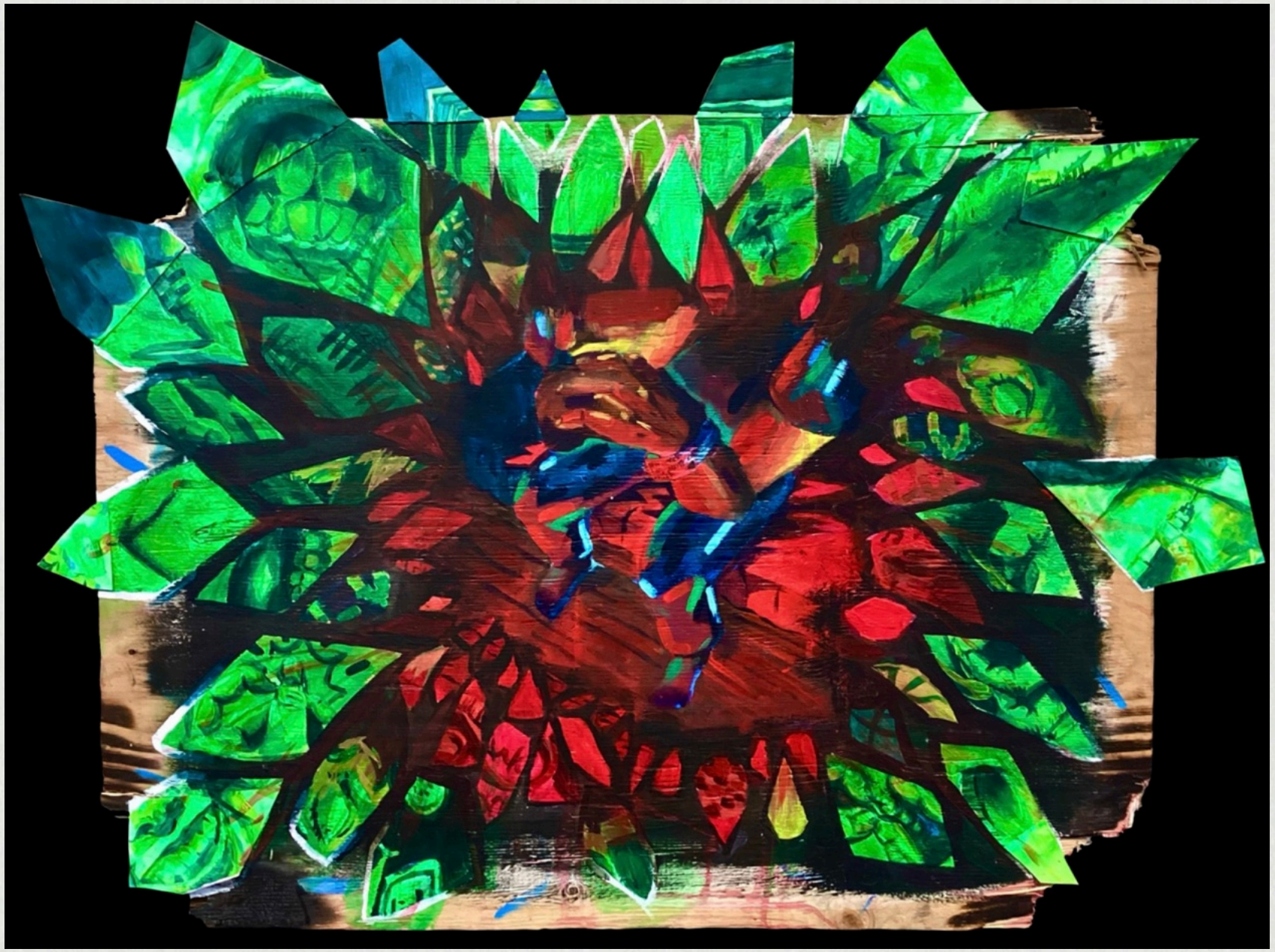
As Above, So Below

Elyas Cauchy

The tree outside the window
How she twists and climbs
Reaching ever upward
To pierce the sky itself
And the hummingbird's nest
That waits ever so patiently
In the understory of her foliage
Where the swaying branches
Make a song so serene
Like paradise

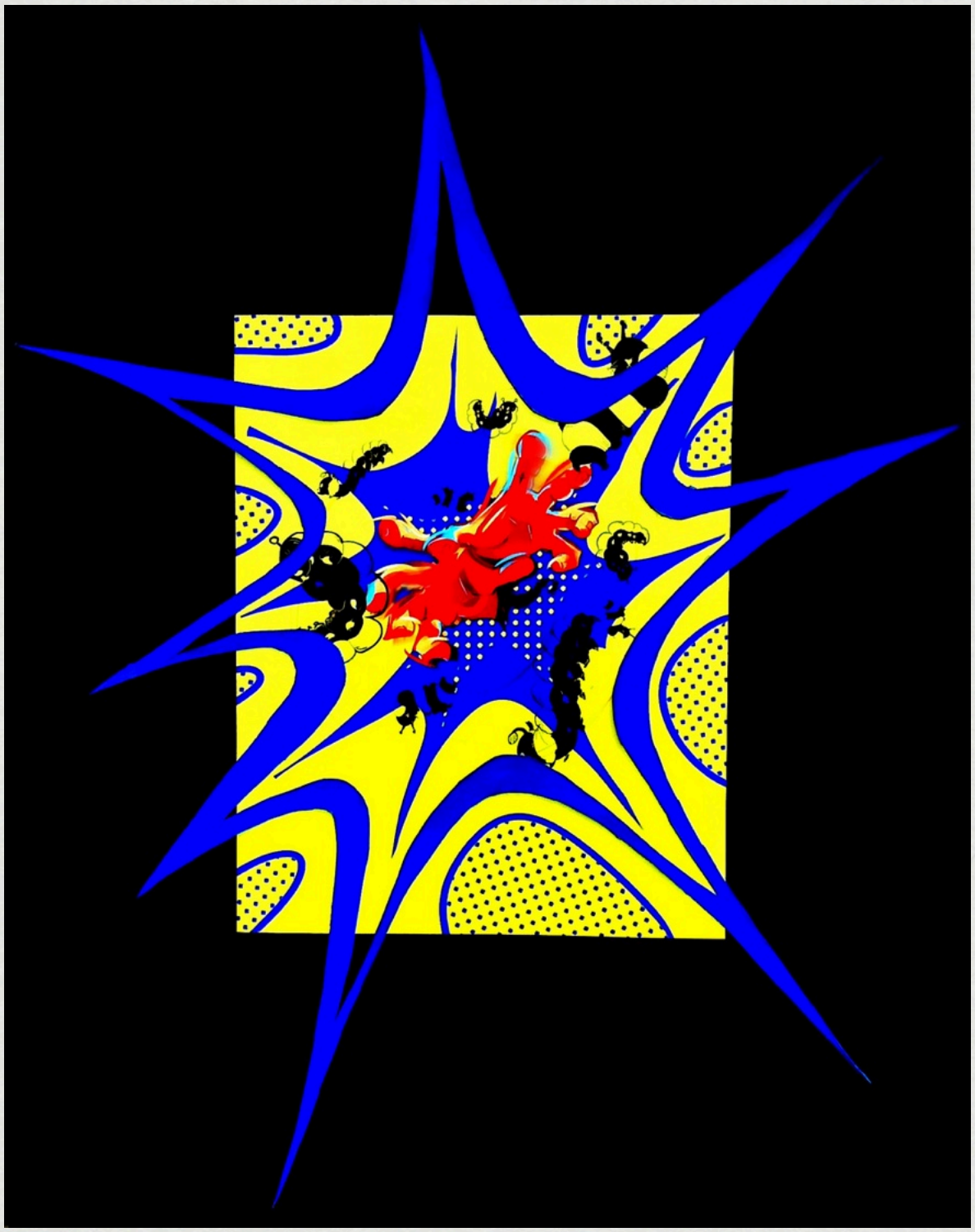


The roots beneath the soil
How they burrow and tangle
Creeping ever downward
An aimless reach for growth
In the company of worms
Who whisper songs and secrets
In the choking grasp of soil
Where they dream of salvation
From the cold and the dark
Like parasites



Abrupt Wreckage

Pan Garcia Breda



Abrupt Wreckage

Pan Garcia Brecda

11 Bantu
Billie James Bishop

An ancient Oak died.
A Bluejay planted an acorn.

My cousin is alone on his 89th birthday.
Alzheimer's stole his bride of 69 years.

Brother Phil has two metal knees.
His hard work betrayed him.

My passport is renewed.
A map is on the table.

The winter wind is howling.
My jacket is by the fireplace.

The country field is dusty & dry.
The smell of coming rain is sweet.

The mouse stepped outside.
The falcon licks her lips.

The whisky bottle is empty.
My parents are yelling.

My dog climbs out of the water.
The freezing creek flows quietly.

An abandoned cabin crashed down.
The rattlesnakes are content.

The viper flattened herself.
The boy stood quite still.





Blue Waters

Lauren Wolf



Flight

William Gauvin



castle on the beach

Sara Wiley

I am Confused

Yi Jiang

I surprised you on your birthday—you were ecstatic.
You picked the fanciest outfit for my sleek body
and covered my face with a crystal veil.

You trained me, and I bent to you.
I gave you my eyes to see the world.
You embraced my blue light with your retinas.

Your mother regrets her gift,
Yelling at you to straighten up and cast your eyes afar
She comes to me, trying to get our secret to break our bond.
Should I let her in? Should I ...?
You always pat me swiftly with your two thumbs, gentle
But she pokes me with one finger hard —
No, I shouldn't, and I can't

Now, you and your mother sit down to negotiate.
You've silenced me, but I want to scream—
Let's settle this, three of us.
I need an identity, like everyone else
Am I Prometheus's gift of fire?
Or Pandora's box?
You both are exhausted and confused.
Honestly... so am I.



Nature's Geometry

William Gauvin



Curiosity

william Gauvin



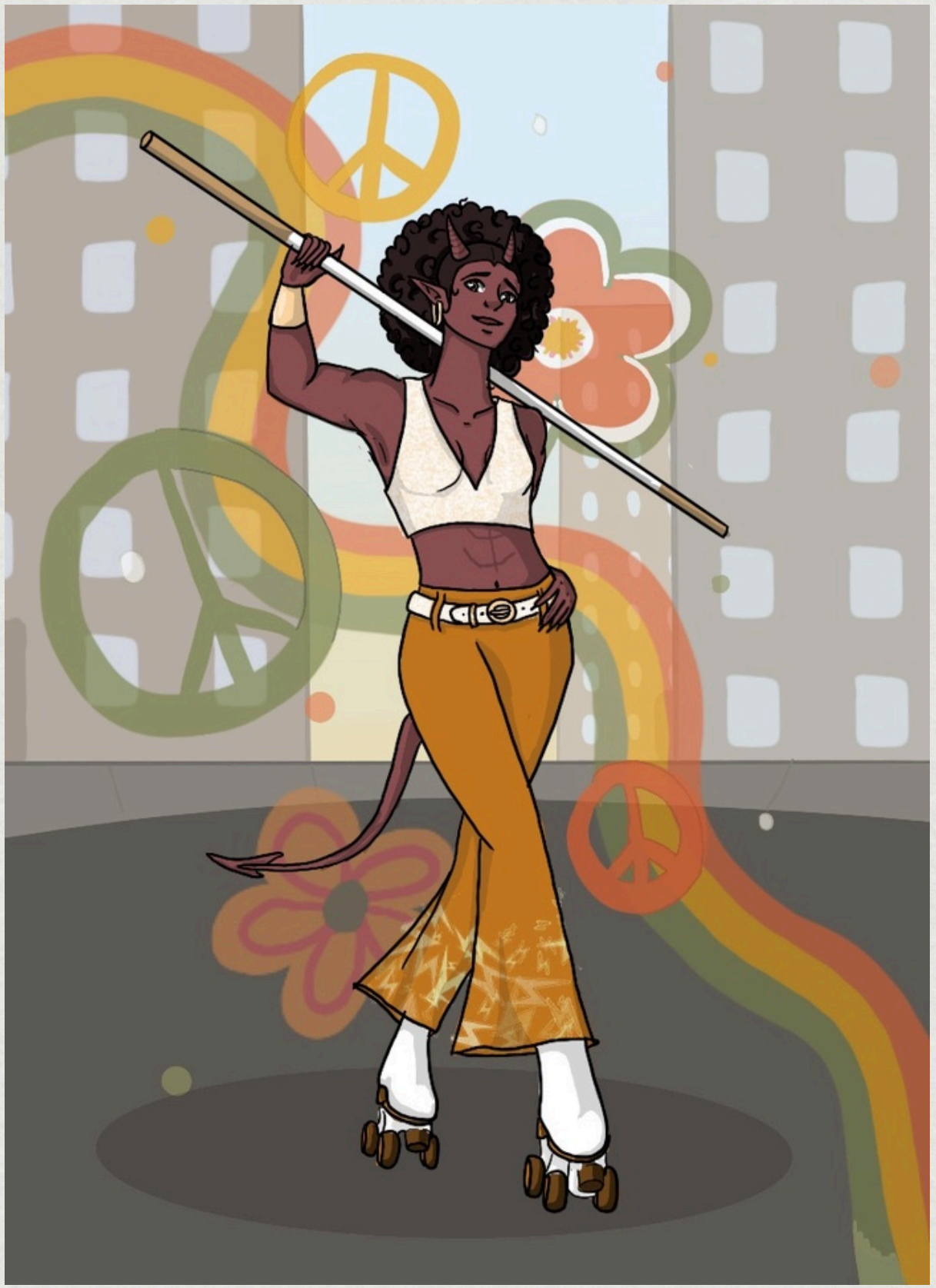


A Quick Death

Dylan Dann

The Fury and the Funk

Jay Watanabe



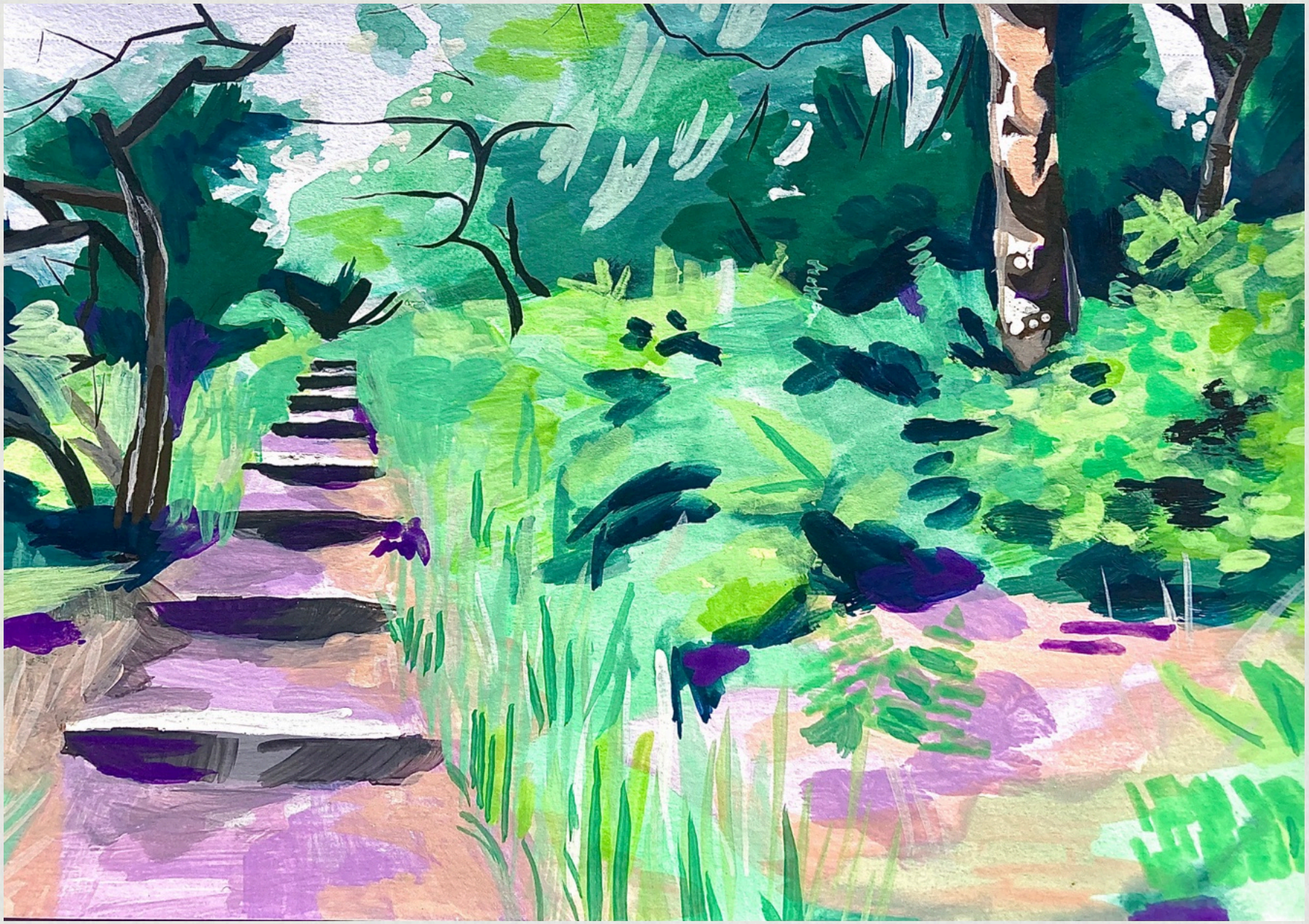
He Painted the Porch of his Pain Haint Blue

Sarah Gilmore



Herman looked in the mirror
And saw the dead
Looking at him from the trees
Rope around their necks
Swinging them like fruit
Bitter juice dripping from their bulging eyes
Onto the leaves
Strange fruit
Rotting in the southern heat

Herman looked in the mirror
When others saw glass
He saw ghosts
That whispered his own eulogy
So he ran like the wind
To the coast
Where they couldn't swim
And painted the porch of his pain haint blue
Holding the spirits at the door
While he sung their song
To his brood
A lesson to fear white faces
That will choke
and drown you



Through a
Painter's Eyes

Ruby Petty



Forbidden Fruit

Khadija Ansari

You remember how to crack a pomegranate.
I offer my heart for the same.
The fruit of my being is all yours.
Tear into the epicarp,
cascade out the seeds and let them stain crimson.
Make with it a mess of aril, peel, rind, and meat.

Meat.

Make with it a mess of flesh, skin, bone, and
that crimson liquid,
which has been forbidden to sup.

I promise I won't tell.



Brave Men Run In My Family

Lucas Temple

Ramona was guilt tripping me. I don't really agree with her if I'm being honest. War is awful, it is and always will be. People die and their lives are cut short. It isn't something to see as honor, or something to enjoy.

"You here? There's a war brewing all around the continent". My mother said as she picked at her plate.

"Yes, I did, dear". My father replied, after swallowing his food.

It was dinner time, and in our small house the candles all around us gave us light. The night sky was pitch dark behind us.

"The King said the kingdom would need every able bodied man in the kingdom to join the army. Recruiters are supposed to come in the next few days". I said, trying to add to the conversation

"Nicholas, you plan on going to war?" My father asked, looking me in the eyes. "I don't know father, I don't want to but I know I have too". I replied

He frowned at me. "Y'know, you don't have too. I faked an injury myself when I was your age when the kingdom was at war back then. Same for my father, and his father, and so on and so forth". He said. "Really, me and your mother…we wouldn't mind it, not one bit". Mother nodded her head in agreement.

"You're fine with me just…not going?"

"We don't want you too dear". Mother said. "I couldn't handle my son dying, and your Father is telling you not too…so" Her voice trailed on.

"Son, I can't have someone in my family dying at such a young age, not when everyone else before me have all lived such long lives". He paused for a moment. "You know what my brother did right?"

"Joined the army?"

"Exactly!" And you know what happened?"

"He died".

"Indeed he did. He was around your age too. He threw his life away just like that. He could've been at this table right now if he didn't". He wrapped his hand on the table.

"Father, I just don't know. I just feel it might be wrong to just, I don't know, run away".

"There's nothing wrong with running, I did it, my father did it, your great grandfather did it. We've always known what's best for us. Don't think about it now, I know you're just digesting it all. In a few days you'll know what's best for you".

"And what's best for me?" I asked. Though I already knew what he was going to say. "Running of course!" Both of them said.

I sighed. I finished my food and excused myself from the table, and went up to my room.

"He said that?!" Ramona yelled to me the next day. We were standing in the grass outside are houses in the outskirts of the kingdom

"Mhm". I replied "He kept telling me that there's no shame in it, everybody before us has done it. It's sort of like a family tradition I guess".

"Yeah, a family tradition of being a coward!" She said angrily. "If I weren't born a girl…I would've gone to war".

The kingdom never allowed women into their army. It was an incredibly old rule fixed upon our kingdom hundreds of years ago. If you weren't a woman born into nobility you couldn't serve, and that was that. And since we were both common townsfolk, Ramona was stuck. Unlike me, she came from a long line of patriotic soldiers, who every generation, served our kingdom with their lives. They never became renowned for their prowess, but they loved our kingdom. And that idea was passed down from generation to generation. Ramona was the only child, like me, of her parents. But she berated herself about being born a girl.

Ramona and her family have always been our neighbors, and we grew up together. We've always been friends, but it was always interesting how different our families were. She was raised thinking that being a soldier was an honor and a privilege, as every man in her family before her had always served the kingdom. While I came from a family of cowards. Her parents never admitted it, but I know they have a dislike for my father because of what he did to avoid the war. They always thought he was a coward through and through.

She picked at her dark hair, it was something she did when she was angry. "Y'know you're probably the only girl mad about not going to war". I said.

"I'd give my life for our people. And I'm stuck here doing useless shit". She kicked a pebble that was laying in the grass. It got launched into the air, soaring up in an arc, and dive bombed into the bushes. "Doesn't help that I know my father wishes I was born a man. I know he wanted a son".

Honestly I think my parents wish they had a daughter". I said. "Then I wouldn't even be in this mess". Ramona sat down on the grass, staring at the small stream that passed through. Her hands were wrapped around her dress. She smoothed and unsmoothed her hair.

"My family's tradition ends with me, and it's over something I can't control".I sat down beside her.

"Ramona, don't be so dramatic".

"I'm not. My family isn't like yours. We don't revel in escape. We always fight, we always do. My father, my grandfather, my great grandfather, everyone. We always fought for something, and it ends with a stupid rule barring me from entering. And you get to go, whether you like it or not, all because you're a man. And you might just bow out and leave".

Ramona was guilt tripping me. I don't really agree with her if I'm being honest. War is awful, it is and always will be. People die and their lives are cut short. It isn't something to see as honor, or something to enjoy.

"War isn't fun. I don't want to do either option". I said, looking at the small little water stream.

"Well you have to pick the one that's right. I'm not your family and I'm not you but at the end of the day, would you want to live your life always drifting away from your problems? Never stepping up to look at the thing that's looming right at you? Whatever it is?"

"I wouldn't go just because my father did, I would go for my own reasons too. Tradition is important but I want to go for what I think. This is something that matters, I would give myself up so that the people in my life won't have to see death and violence themselves. I don't want to be the problem. To run and do something that could get others hurt in the end just isn't something that'll sit right with me".

As Ramona kept speaking I just sat in silence. My arms crossed over my legs.

It isn't as simple as saying you're sick and staying home to get out of something you want to do. People more than just yourself play a part in this, and I don't know if your selfish father realizes that".

She stopped for a moment. "Sorry I got a little caught up, forgive me for saying that last part".

"No, you're alright". I finally said Your right, too. I thought.

Ramona sighed and looked out past the field our houses were on. She looked at it for a moment and stood up, brushing off her dress. "That's all I gotta say, it's your choice, whatever you want to do. You'll still be my friend either way".

"Thank you". I looked her in the eyes. We had sat out in this field between our houses for years, and this was just one more time out of the countless moments we've talked in the same spot.

She smiled a half smile. "You're all good".

That night I had a dream. My eyes lifted and I sat up. I was in a pool of water overlooking a forest. Trees shaded and surrounded almost everything, except for the overlook right in front of me. The sky was pitch black, the moon shone

illustriously in a crescent shape, Nothing obscured it. I put my hand to my chest. I was wearing armor. It was caked in wet mud. I realized I was freezing sitting in that pool of water. I quickly got up, the armor felt like a wet uncomfortable cage. It stuck to my skin, and it didn't let go. My wet hair clung to my forehead. I stepped out of the little pool and onto the ground. I stood there shivering, staring right into the clearing, right at the moon hanging perfect still in the sky.

What was I doing? People on both sides were telling me what I should do. How I should be. Should I do what we've always done? Lie about some fake disability I don't have and watch my friends all disappear? Or finally face something my family and everyone before me was too scared to do? I didn't know. I didn't like either side. I hated lying, especially for something that actually meant life or death, and I was scared of actually being in a war. Both options I didn't like, except I have to choose one.

My hand bumped my side, I felt something stuck to it. I gripped it. It was a sword. I unsheathed the longsword.

It gleamed spotlessly, like it had never been used before. I raised it up and did a playful loose swing. I had never held a sword before. It felt heavy in my hands all of a sudden. I tried to hold on but my hands gave way and I dropped it. It fell to the grass and vanished altogether, it sank right into the ground like nothing was there. My hand was shaking. I clasped my hands together to try and stop them. The shivering of my hands was the only movement around. Everything hung in motion. Nothing stirred. I tried to move to get out of the little forested area I was in but every inch of movement my skin would stick and rub against my armor, it stuck to me like it was a part of my body. I slowly hobbled over and down through the clearing, walking down a small little grassy decline to a pathway and a small stream going down in the middle. Past the little brook it led into a darkening forest, so dark that I could only see the way in, it seemed to completely swallow you if you walked through it. As I inched over closer and closer to the forest, a figure appeared. He was hanging around right in front of the entryway. He was about my age, and dressed in thin looking armor. He had a bloody hole on the breastplate, with fresh blood seeping out of it. It spurted out, more and more.

It never seemed to stop. He looked at me with a smile and waved. I didn't know what to make of it. I was about to hop over the stream until I felt something behind me. I turned around out of pure curiosity.

Many men were behind me, they were all older, some were almost decrepit with how aged they were, their hands almost bones themselves and the light gone from how many years their faces had seen. At the forefront of it all was my father looking right at me. Him, and all the others just stood there, their gazes all on me standing in the middle of it all. I turned my head to the young man on the other side, he still stood there, with a small half smile, his hand began to cover the hole in his chest. He opened his mouth and said,

"The choice is yours"

Then he swung his foot and turned, walked into the forest, and disappeared from view. The men were already gone when I turned my head to the other side. The sky was turning lighter and lighter, it went from inky blackness to a light pink shimmering through. Rays of light began to poke through

The sun finally rose over my window as I layed in my bed, the dream suddenly ended. I sat up and climbed out of my bed. I had decided on what I was going to do. From my window the sky was a light blue. The beams of light were just poking through. I got dressed and walked down the steps and I saw my family, I opened my mouth and announced my decision. Ramona would probably like what I was going to say, my parents probably not so much.



hope

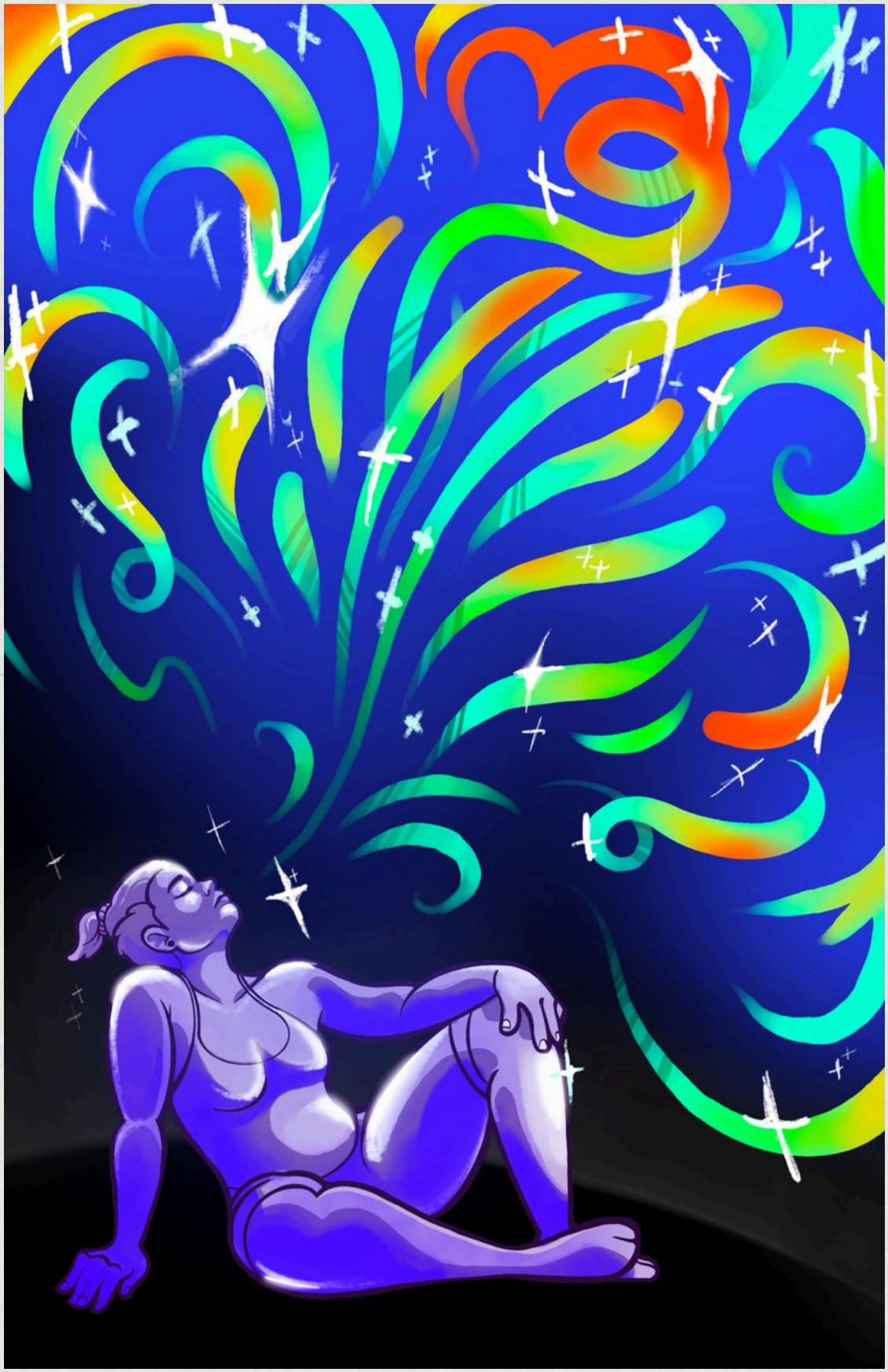
Wynona Guango

hope's a funny thing isn't it?
no matter how many times it lets you down
you always continue believing in it
just the simple act of ordering a package
is hope that we'll still be here in a week
from the morning fog to the streaks of the evening sky
whispered wishes on shooting stars or coins we throw into
wells

or the laughs of a child rolling down a meadow and the

watchful hawk soaring over the park
we all need hope to survive





A Test of Patience

Ruby Petty



Untitled #2

Corrine Thelen



Golden Joinery

Khadija Ansari

No one buys the old clay cup.
Day after day, the shopkeeper tells her,
“Kintsugi actually adds appeal to the cracks and chips--
someone’ll find value in your cracks and buy you soon.”

The clay cup gathers dust.
Articles of kintsugi are joined with gold, but
mine are mended with mud,
woven together once again by the very dirt I was born from.

Window Again

Hank Schumaker Jo





Big Boi, Big Sword

Madelyn Abatecola



Geese on Lake

Lauren Wolf

broken heart turned to art

Wynona Guango



you don't need to be a master in relationships
to be an expert in broken hearts
it doesn't matter whether your hands have ever been held
or if your lips have ever been kissed
no matter how many times someone has crushed your heart and
beaten it with a sledgehammer
shattered a million times over
you still put it out there
to see if others are interested in your wounded and
bleeding heart
you'll try every cure the lonely hearts club has
you'll look for love in every nook and cranny
in the tea leaves and coffee grounds
hoping you'll find love at the bottom of your cup
but the only things that can heal a heart broken a million
times over is love
when you will eventually find love
it will elate you and elevate you
to the highest of clouds
until you come crashing down
but what's another crack in your heart
when you already have a million?



False Indigo

Sarah Gilmore

The weight on my shoulders,
Are heavy as lifting stones
And they pull my body down
Into the land of linen
That slowly covers the field of my body
Like false indigo
And what grows from me is
Fatalism and morbidness
Because death, cruel as she is
Follows behind me
Just to remind me she's there.
So I prop myself up
On the cliff of my bed
And pray for a better day
That never seems to come.
"Tomorrow" I think



Divine Putrefaction

Harlow Esch



Something
Beyond Me

Fabian Diaz

A lost cat's mysterious 2-month, 900-mile journey home to California

rowan biesemeyer



Little one, you have so far to run
hold out hope,
for you know the way just from the air
blindly, southwest
keep on, keep on
heat rising, mewing out for home
wait: those who love you will

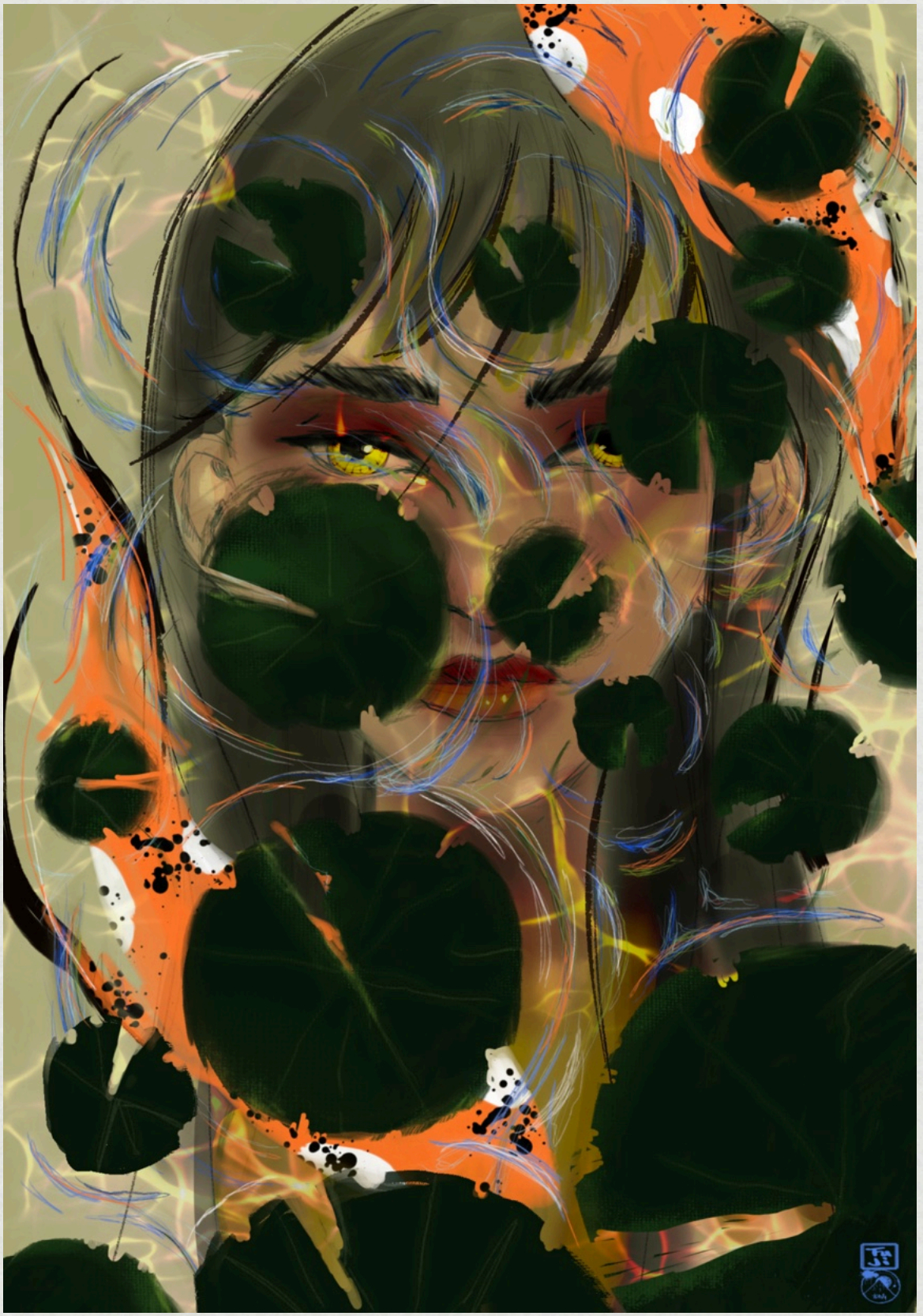
Sleepless nights. pressure rises as do
the geysers that your little heart so fears
cross state-lines, keep your might even as time tries to steal it
june-july-august. those who love you
do not know what to do— but just hope
that Mother Earth would be forgiving on your little paws

Let the sky do your bidding,
those who love you cry out at a double rainbow.
the colors smear a desert sky, a sign
"he's going to be okay"

And so, the little thing held out hope too
eight hundred miles bares its claws deep
still,
little Rayne Beau
did find his way home— despite it all.

Beneath

Fuji Harmon





Kaal Ratri: Pandemic Nights

Viswanath Poosala

Day. **Not a bright day of summer. Lockdown days fused into lockdown nights. Day after day, week after week, rolling into months. Who is keeping count?**

Do you hear it?

Silence. Not the silence of a meadow. The eternal silence of graveyards. Silence so crushingly lonesome, you welcome the howling of the coyotes roaming in the dark.

Dark. Not the peaceful emptiness of sleep. The darkness of a hurriedly abandoned mine. Thick coal vapors slipping through every pore. Coughing through the day.

Day. Not a bright day of summer. Lockdown days fused into lockdown nights. Day after day, week after week, rolling into months. Who is keeping count?

Count. 1-2-4-8.Counting deaths, exponential logs, ICU stays, all those old people, leaving behind all these young children.

Children. Alone in their beds, alone in their heads, friends fading away from their minds. Stay masked, kids. The air is full of invisible monsters wearing crowns. No more bedtime stories from your parents.

Parents. Chained to their desks, WFH day after day. Hugging their children over Zoom. Short on ideas, short on toilet rolls, only things in abundance are fears.

Fears. Same fears swirl a millionth time inside your head. Like a cuckoo clock going off forever, the same maddening beat to it. Stop, please don't make this night feel any longer, let me sleep!

Sleep. Not the kind that used to end a hard day. The sleep of eyes forcibly shut. Sleep with no promise of when the night will end.

End. Even an end must have an ending. A new beginning must be around. Do you hear it?



Flight

Ollie Maddox





The Squawk

Megan Jones



If Only

Billie James Bishop

If only...

The fog of war could melt away:

All sharp metal mines & bombs & guns & dissolve all rivets off all ships & tanks.
If only…

The fog of war could:

Cover the people everywhere with soft, blankets of peace, & love & cooperation & fellowship.
If only….

The fog of war would:

Do these things so soldiers don't have to rest in peace under cold carved stone monuments far away.

unforeseeable future

rowan biesemeyer

cover me in delusion
i'll be a pretty rose
to do the bidding,
would be such a
heavenly thing

wish i could pray,
set forth a god to make me feel okay
something to rely on,
is there a way out?

to bless above
carry out the burden of this life
unforeseeable future,
will there even be a next july?
november comes a-creeping
i can no longer hold back my weeping
tell me,
tell me a good lie—sweet lie
that i can wrap my head around

suffocate me in illusion
picturing my picket fence
i know
to forget
would be so
ignorant
but sometimes
the truth is worse

instead,
i guess i'll up my dosage
dope it out until i'm comfortable
until my heart doesn't
pitter-patter, pitter-patter don't want
our light to go out
i am scared.





Candy

Maddie Whitney

Still Life

Liya Wu



ancestors

rowan biesemeyer



i live on,
through those who could not
repression is a beast i will conquer
for you,
and all those before me
my effervescent love is proof that
it does get better.

ancestor, do you loathe me?
or can i be,
a beacon of remembrance
can i
represent your unrecognized truth?
can my body
be a collection of queerness
that once was vilified,
now commemorated?

your tears, wedding bands
without meaning
translate my being, and make me whole
i am you.
i am free thanks to you

Listen Little Lady

Dana Yule

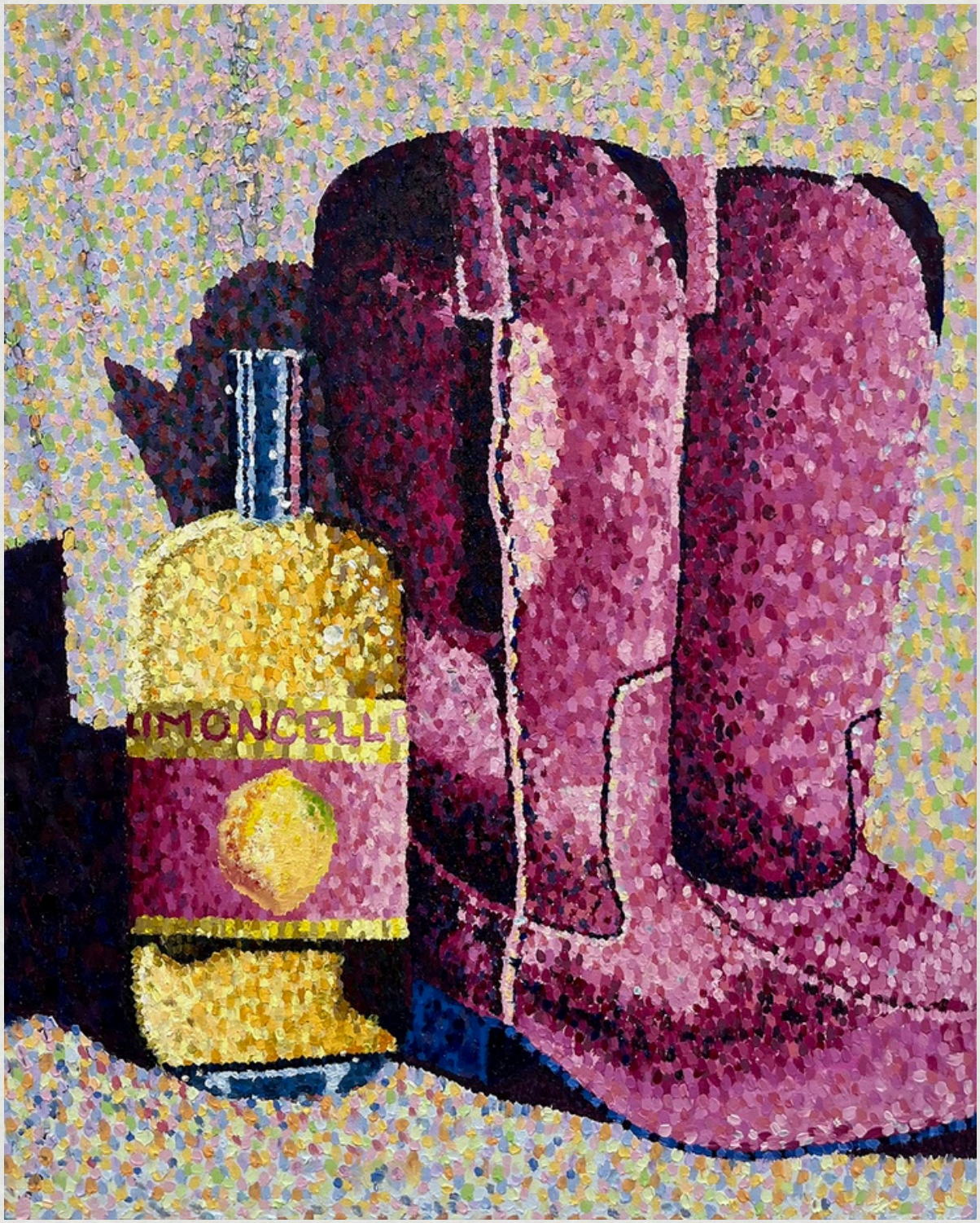


You don't have to stop living because she did, Little lady
You don't have to stay in that old house anymore

Putting puzzles together on your own
A ghost
A see-through version of who you are
A paper doll
Torn and tattered now

Come with me
There's so much to see
We can go together
There's so much to do and think
Leave the broken bits here
You don't need those anymore

Listen to me, Little lady
I was you and you are me



Italian Cowgirl

Tyler Lawhead

Someone's Shoes

Megan Jones





Detestation and Devotion

Khadija Ansari

There are times when I hate you;
my heart, full of contradictions and bitterness,
hates that you are away from me, how our thoughts do not walk along the same line.

In essence, the hate that washes over me so
only beckons me to plunge us both deep into muddled waters
to blur the lines between you and I, so the extensiveness of how far we've mixed
will prevent any separation.

There are times when I want you to hate me;
my heart, full of contradictions and bitterness,
desires that you separate yourself from me and my sickness entirely.

In essence, the desire that washes over me so
only beckons me to remain below you for eternity more,
so the grief and misery that will wash over you will eventually trickle down to me;
thus when you're all dry and basked in glee, I can keep your suffering for myself.

All mine,
let this sustained sorrow stain me--
I will only find supreme joy that some part of you is with me,
and so it will be:
my heart, full of contradictions, bitterness, and you.



BUTTS

Ruby Petty

It Comes and It Goes

Mahima Seshan



It comes and it goes,
the powder snow on your nose.
The swish of white scarves
around frozen throats.
The flurry of coats
gone where nobody knows,
if only to get out
of the bitter cold.

It comes and it goes,
the swarms of gray crows.
The crooning, the cackling
atop utility poles.
Awaiting the mockery,
the wintering woe,
that nips at the heels
of each wintertime snow.

It comes and it goes,
December's sorrows.
So drag the airport luggage
and the heavy cargo.
Miserable plane-goers
all lined up in rows,
facing the faces
in unhappy homes.

It comes and it goes,
when midnight moves slow:
lit from within,
sipping cocoa.
With wistful goodbyes
and heartfelt hellos.
Hearths decked in color,
the fireplace aglow.

Nothing lasts forever–
it comes and it goes.



Bread

Yi Jiang

Deep gold orange glows on bleached linen,
Egg and honey brushed over twelve domes, melting down.
Six by two, they rise—an array of soft dinner rolls,
Buttery yeast whispers sweetly through the air.

Snowy flour dusts a light-brown knoll,
Cracked like ancient oak bark.
Heatwaves advance, wheat's warm breath
Crisping the sourdough’s skin

Beneath each crust, within every loaf,
A world of holes—
Small and large, all quietly stretching wider,
Linked by thin webs of delicacy

Candle flickers, bread’s aroma drifts
Mouth half-open, hands suspended midair.
Holes or air, emptiness or nothingness—
All are needed, all serve their purpose well



Turquoise Crystal

Liza Wu



Mars Castle

Ruby Petty

Sun, Moon and Star

Makaria Rufanov



Four Graces

Lauren Wolf



Missing Home

Sarah Tonick



The home I have
Has an Heavy Iron door
Smells of incense, sandalwood, and candles
Plays country music in the morning
Has a room of elephant statuettes.
And is colder than ever before.
The home I miss
Has golden eyes,
The most beautiful I have ever seen.
Smells like rain and happiness.
Travels with prince Arthur of Camelot
Searching for the holy grail,
judges alongside Tyra and Mrs. Jay.
Sings with Sinatra and the Backstreet Boys .
The home I miss
Sleeps next to the wall at night,
My home
Loved my sparkly black dress and scrubs.
Had the softest hair and the brightest smile.
My home
Had the most comforting hugs,
A hug that said I'm here
My home is gone,
That is the home I miss.



De tes traîtres yeux
Chandler Roberts

i look into your hazelnut eyes
their sweet embrace
warms me
without your admittance
campfire iris, roast me
i need some more
i am yours until
my seas hit the shore
as in your dark i can
be your light. bright skies
less cloudy then before
milk chocolate glare
my oceanic faire
please let me be the sugar
in your coffee

Almaden Lake
at Sunset

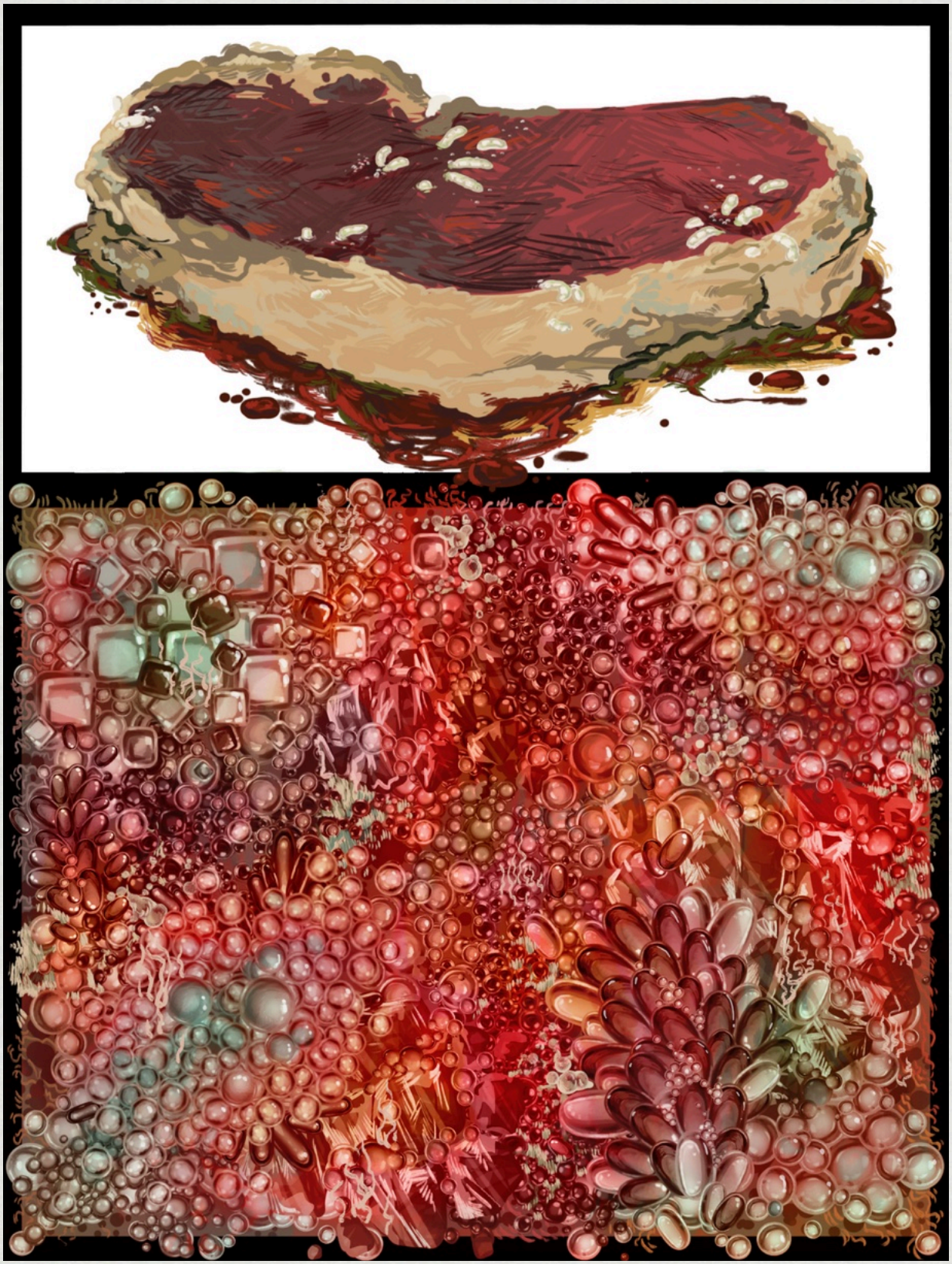
Lauren Wolf



expressive color still
white life

Dianna Masciarelli





Beauty in the Rot

Makaria Rufanova

Casey

Billie James Bishop



Casey,
Confident guy,
With experience too,
Came to the bat at a
Critical time & had the
Years of experience to send that
Ball into the next county & was so
Confident of that fact that he didn't even
try to hit the first two pitches, nor did he blink an
eye nor move a finger. All his adoring fans were as
Confident as he was. The pitcher & catcher & umpire were
Mere props to be toyed with in this silly game of pitch
& catch. The amazing part of the game was not that
The pennant was about to be lost for his team & town
But the amazing thing is that I recall, sitting there on the
Couch and suddenly realized that for the first time ever
My entire family was there at my side at the same time
Glued to the T.V. watching a Walt Disney cartoon guy
Focused forward. Not arguing. Not off somewhere
Drinking...nor drifting about with
Individual agendas, but sitting,
Right there together & we all
Focused in one direction:
Watching an over-confident
Batter & experienced player
Who shattered his town's
hopes by not hitting a
Silly baseball for Mudville.
They Lost. We
Won.



American Baseball

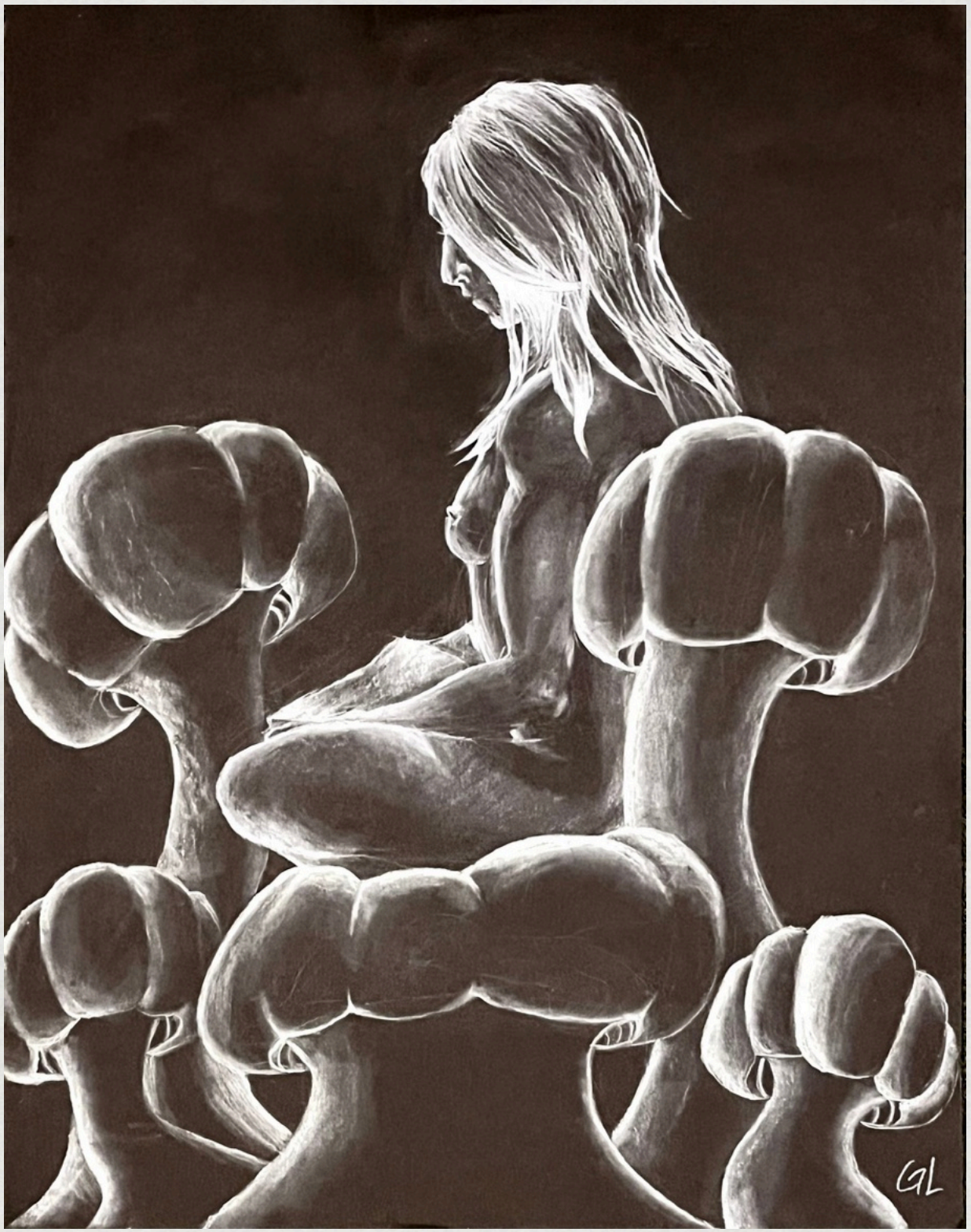
Kyle Thompson

change is my favorite pastime.
As it happens while I pass time,
with no effort on my part.
Everything I hold dear,
it gives a start.
Everything I loathe,
it tears apart.
Although it gives me loss,
I find I gain,
an appreciation that leaves me
never the same.



Witch

Ruby Petty



Growth

Grace Loeper

Time

Laurelle Kelly



Frozen in time
Frozen in space
The world turns but I stay in the same place
Static
Stagnant
The buzzing of old thoughts fills my ears
Old patterns
Old actions
I wish I could leave it behind
Cast it aside
But it's ingrained inside my mind

I hadn't planned on living this long
But here I am
And continue to be
Future unfolding in front of me
Completely unforeseen
I'm anxious
Antsy
Impatient
Side effects of borrowed time
Can't shake the urgency
The now or never tendencies
Driven by desperation
Frozen anticipation
Waiting for the pin to drop

Fear lingers
Echoes across my brain
Bouncing around my skull
But not as strong as before
I have more peace
More clarity
And it will get better with time
I have more time.

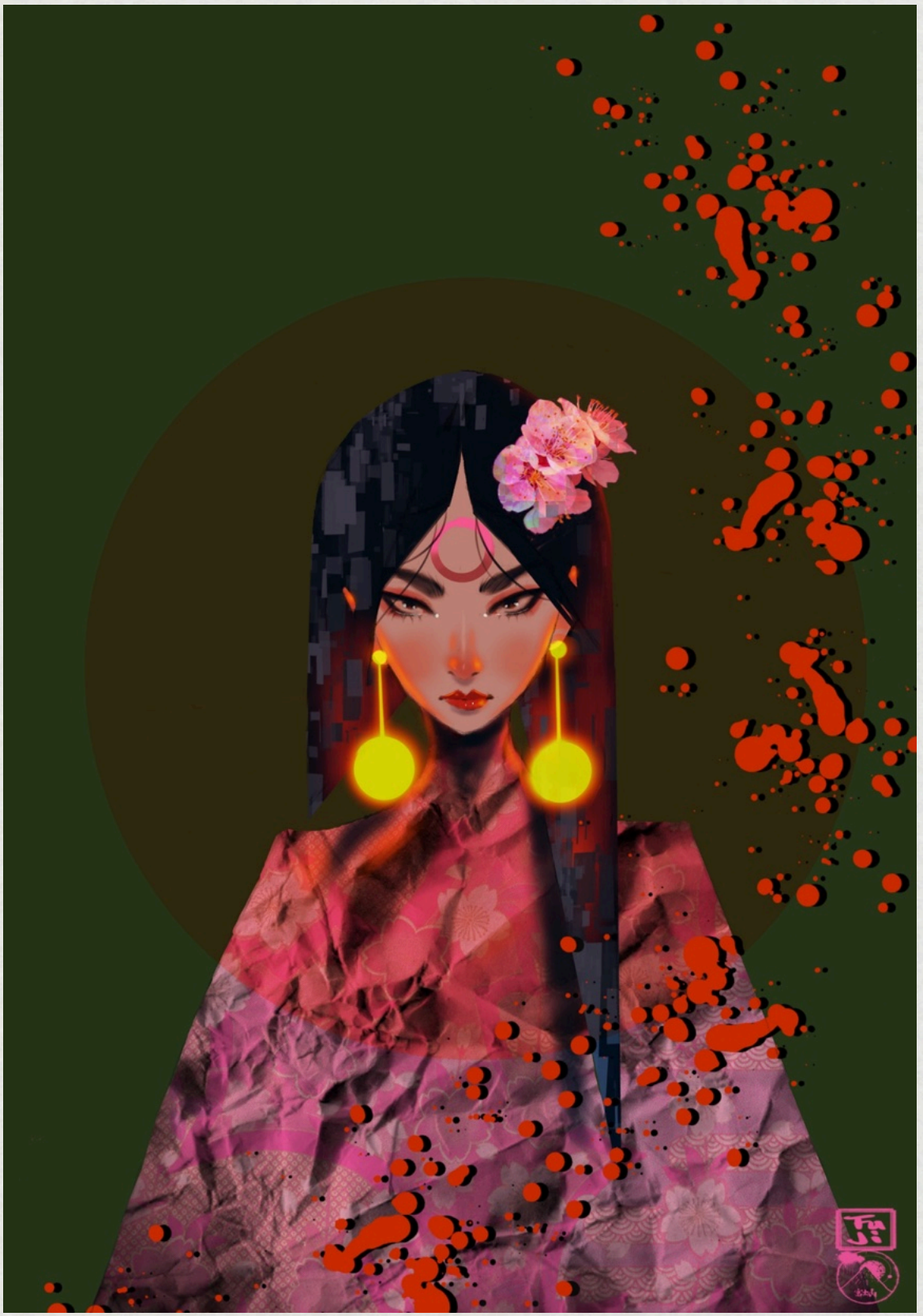
Swimming With the Fam

Makaria Rufanov



Blossom

Fuji Harmon





Broadcast, Reciever

Hank Schumaker Jo



Fade

Khadija Ansari

Slowly pulling off a bandaid,
unsticking strong glue from skin.

(Pulling my eyes from yours)
In the crowd I turn away, from
where you're surrounded by smiling visages,
laughing.

Because this is how we started,
And this is how I'd like it to end.
No, how I'd like to end it.

Apart from the crowd I turn away, from
the unknown faces and scattered visages,
content.

My state is to be alone, and I pray
you'll not notice me. I pray
you'll let me fade.

I rip off the bandaid.

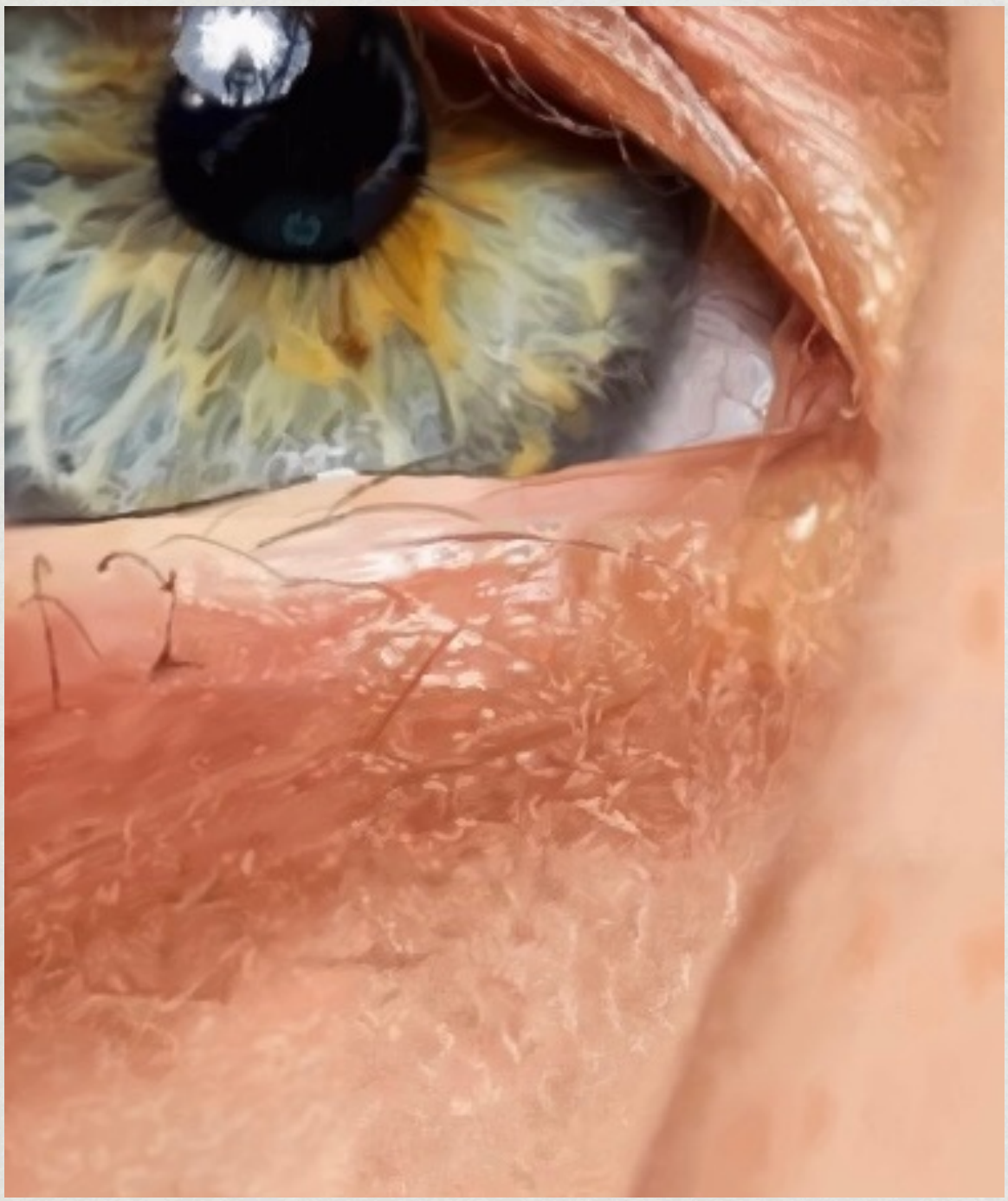
Quetzacoatlus
Northopi Enjoying
The Rain

Makaria Rufanova



Iris

Nicole Furstenberg





A Test of Patience

Ruby Petty

Eternal Now

Yi Jiang

Clocks melt,
draping from withered bough
dangling at the brink of a chunky chest
curved on a dead, unknown creature
really, Time Bends
In the distance
Mountain, sea, and sky,
divided by the pale yellow radiance
neither dawn nor dusk
like a Planetary Ring
A colossal shadow cast in the foreground.
All Ignore the rule of chiaroscuro.
Multiple light sources?
Could it be, like in the sci-fi movie
The Three-Body Problem
Ants and flies crawl, the remnants of life,
murmuring a forgotten civilization,
where now is its eternal,
and, Eternity should be Now.





Ache of the Lake's Waves

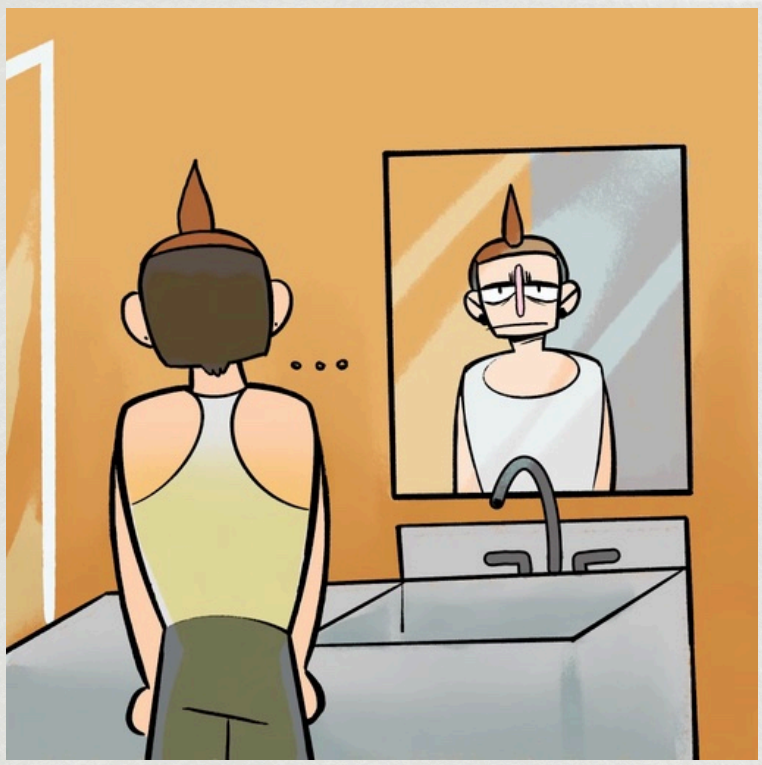
Emily Pearce

My red, swollen eyes glare at me
Like sharp points, taunting me
I sniffle and whimper, but still I let myself cry
My vision clouds
Like mist when it settles itself upon a quiet lake
If my eyes were a lake in the early hours of daylight
They'd be calm, collected, eager to take in what my days have to offer
The lake is calm, as am I, on the surface,
Yet, beneath it, an aching heart pulses fiercely
Like the sporadic waves that occasionally say "hello again"
Then they pass, without a murmur or "see you soon"
I dread the next time I will feel that ache of the lake's waves.









Migration

Ruby Petty

The Nerve

Kyle Thompson



"I wish the nervous system
were a calm one"
she loudly thought.
Her leg thrumming inline
with the frequency
of her anxieties.
The feeling
of the stares creeping
into the back of her head -
burrowing into every pore.
She resolves,
"There is no spotlight!"
but although thoughts may win a battle
emotions oft win the war.
It was not for invisibility
that she wished,
but to be anywhere
but here.
Where "here."
was any place at all



Alone

Fuji Harmon





I Think I'm
Tired of This

Hank Schumaker Jo