

PEGASUS



2023

Pegasus 2023

Lydia McCamant, editor-in-chief.

Rose Majeed, art editor.

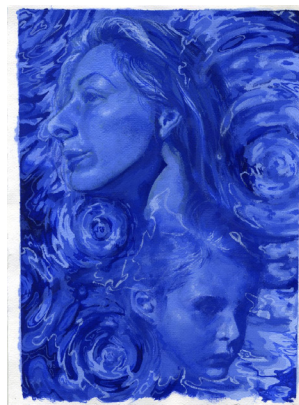
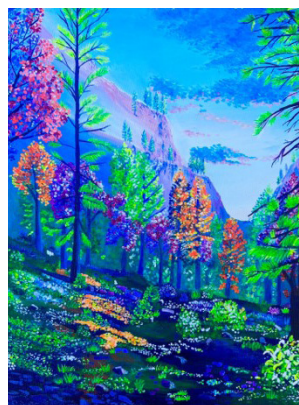
Shuwen Ding, poetry editor.

Brian Regan and Brian Shafer, advisors.

Club Members:	Writing Contributors:	Art Contributors:
Frankie Bellone Caroline Bauer Anna Borrelli Grace Bylund Shuwen Ding Maddy Friedman Leeah Herbert Devorah Hewitt Antonia Levstik Arev Lima-Boudakian Nora McCamant Saskia Owen Kendall Pellegrino Evan Peterson (Asst. Editor) Zen Sanders Faris Soliman Deven Spencer (Keeper of Files)	Caroline Bauer Frankie Bellone Anna Borrelli Grace Bylund Shamil Canbolat Shuwen Ding Arev Lima-Boudakian Lydia McCamant Mara Pastirk Kendall Pellegrino Erin Smith Deven Spencer Harper Wallace Luca Wormsley	Anna Borrelli Leeah Herbert Semra Guney Tillie Hall Rose Majeed Maria Niculescu Saskia Owen Lia Petrilli Amelia Samuelson Allison Windisch Erika Xue

Front Cover: Landscape by Erika Xue

Back Cover: Blue Woman by Amelia Samuelson



From the Editor-in-Chief:

There is truly no greater feeling than writing exactly what you mean to say. Sometimes, we write lines that stick with us for days, and play with words like clay in our hands, writing the wings that take us to the clouds and the words that blend us into the walls of our home. Creating a world incredibly separate from Earth, while still so deeply connected to the humans on it, is a gift unique to writers and artists. A gift that allows us to be incredibly funny, upsetting, vibrant, and bold. And so, we celebrate it!

In the pages of *Pegasus* are some of the most wonderful works I have ever seen: Art that makes me feel emotions I have never felt before, stories that make me see stars, and poems that fill my head with questions. My first thank-you is for the artists and the authors, for filling the pages of *Pegasus* with work that flips me over every time I see it. You were an incredible inspiration this year, and this magazine would quite literally be nothing without you.

My next thank you is a big one, and is to Mr. Regan and Mr. Shafer, our advisors. They have helped me every single week, especially at the end of the year, and have made the magazine possible. Thank you for your dedication to the magazine and the care you put into its pages.

Thank you to Rose Majeed, our incredible art editor, for gathering up art like wildflowers for us to sprinkle over our magazine. Thank you to my other editors, Shuwen Ding and Evan Peterson, and our content manager, Deven Spencer, for always keeping me organized and driving us forward. Your help was invaluable and I know that Rose and I are leaving *Pegasus* in great hands. I am so excited to see what art and literature you create next year and in the years following!

Thank you to my sister, Elise McCamant, for introducing me to *Pegasus* in 2019. You were a great editor, and showed me the real magic that the club holds. I will forever be in your debt for all that *Pegasus* has given me during my time at Sutherland.

As I leave Pittsford this year, I am left with an overwhelming excitement for what I was able to leave behind. This magazine is a snapshot of Sutherland in 2023, and I am so glad I could be a part of it.

Read our work, and, in the great words of Debby Ryan in *Radio Rebel*:

"Check it out. Vibe it. Really really dig on it. And then, remember that feeling."

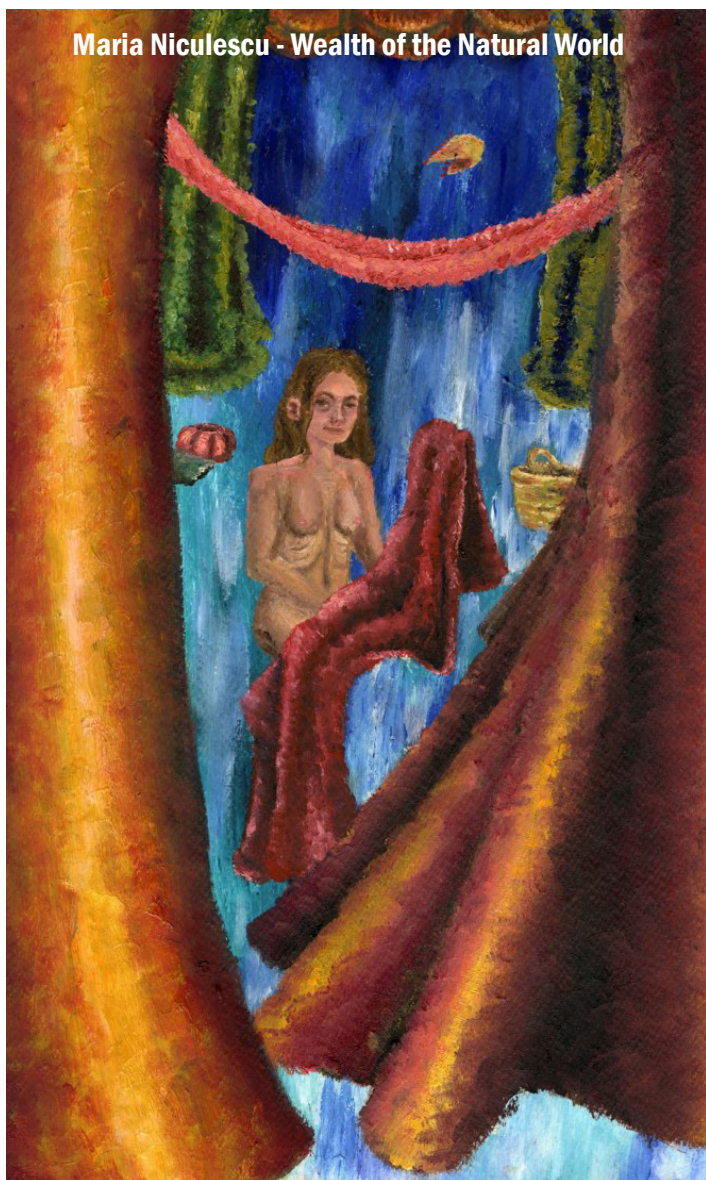
Your Editor in Chief,

Lydia H. McCamant

When You Change the Way You Look at Things

Grace Bylund

When you change the way you look at things
The things you look at change
Fathom the phantoms
You can't see
So
They aren't real
Still, you know
The fear is real
Yes
You see
Shades a shade away
You don't see



Maria Niculescu - Wealth of the Natural World



Tilly Hall - One Way

Heroes and Warriors fight on
The light's on
Now there's something new
Developing
Darkness
Enveloping
You
When you change the way you look at things
The things you look at change
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The things you look at change
When you change the way you look at things

I Long, I Live, I Die

(An Encounter Between Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson)

Kendall Pellegrino

Death has a way of mocking you. When the carriage took me past the school and into eternity, I felt as though I could finally rest from all my past anxieties, go, from the comfort of my four sacred walls to the empty bliss of nothing.

But as I'm learning, Death will wait for you, but he will not listen. He will not hear.

I say, "If I may Sir, I wish for rest now, I wish a reprieve in the carefully carved wood my people have prepared for me."

He says, "Ms. our past fears are what tethers us to this world. You may lay, but you will not rest."

I sit in silence till my destination arrives.

Death shoves me out of the carriage without care. A train platform sits in front of me, and the pitter-patter of shoes hitting pavement hits my ears. A blanket of woe winds itself tight around my mind, and I slowly back to where the carriage left me. But the further I back up, the more I'm burdened by empty space. My body sinks my full weight to the tips of my toes, and my heavy steps forward begin.

I was stranded.

My feet continue to carry me forward, and my eyes wander aimlessly from person to person milling about the station.

Furrowed brows and downturned lips.

Smiling faces and skipping feet.

Hurried steps and senseless muttering.

No one ever seems to slow down, no one seems to see outside themselves.

It's peculiar, I decide, that even though we all share the same DNA, we are so disconnected from those who surround us. And it's exactly this that makes me long for my walls once again.

One man however invades the corner of my eye before I can try and escape to solitary. He sits quietly on the end of a bench, eyes buried in a book, eyes ricocheting up to the people walking around him.

I lift my once burdened foot to begin my journey over, but amazingly it lifts with ease. I am light.

The bench is wooden and slightly damp, but I sit across from him anyways. Tall trees stand among us, morning dew filling the air. Quiet rings and barely their buzzes suggest the presence of bees, and the white noise is enough to distract my mind from the constant thundering presence of all these people.

Still, I stay curious, I inch closer to this man on the bench, thinking maybe I can start to understand why he sits, and he sits, and he sits.

I'm right next to him now, the smell of poorly made cologne invades my nostrils, but I push on. Eyes trained forward, but without my permission they dart to his book.

A poem.

He's writing a poem:

"I know I am deathless,

I know this orbit of mine cannot be swept by a carpenter's compass.

I know I shall not pass like a curlicue cut with a burnt,

stick at night.

*I know I am august,
I do not trouble my spirit to vindicate itself or to be understood,
I see that the elementary laws never apologize.
I exist as I am, that is enough,
If no other in the world be aware I sit content,
I am the poet of the Body, and I am the poet of the Soul,
The pleasures of Heaven are with me
And the pains of Hell are with me
The first I graft and increase upon myself,
The latter I translate into new tongue.
I too am not a bit tamed, I too am untransformable,
I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world.”*

The words make a home in my heart. They feel like warmth, even as they express something melancholy. The buzzing continues, and I feel the bees weave a blanket to lay across my mind, and I start to think that maybe this is why the man sits, why he watches. To feel the dew on his skin, and the buzzing of bees quieting his mind. My body moves to kneel in front of the gentleman, and a single finger of mine reaches out.

It passes through.

He cannot feel me.

He cannot hear me.

This time two of my hands come to rest beside his cheeks. His eyes dart up, and for a split second it's as though we see each other perfectly.

But then I hear a creak, and his book has closed.

He's getting on his train.

I try to follow.

My arm reaches, but the door closes, and I am alone.

The crowd still bustles around me, but I am alone. My four sacred walls held only me and my words. When I got off the carriage, I had an ache deep in my rib for them.

But now I only long for the man on the bench.

The man who could enjoy the endless symphony of noises around him and still create something beautiful.

I long to understand.

I long for more time.

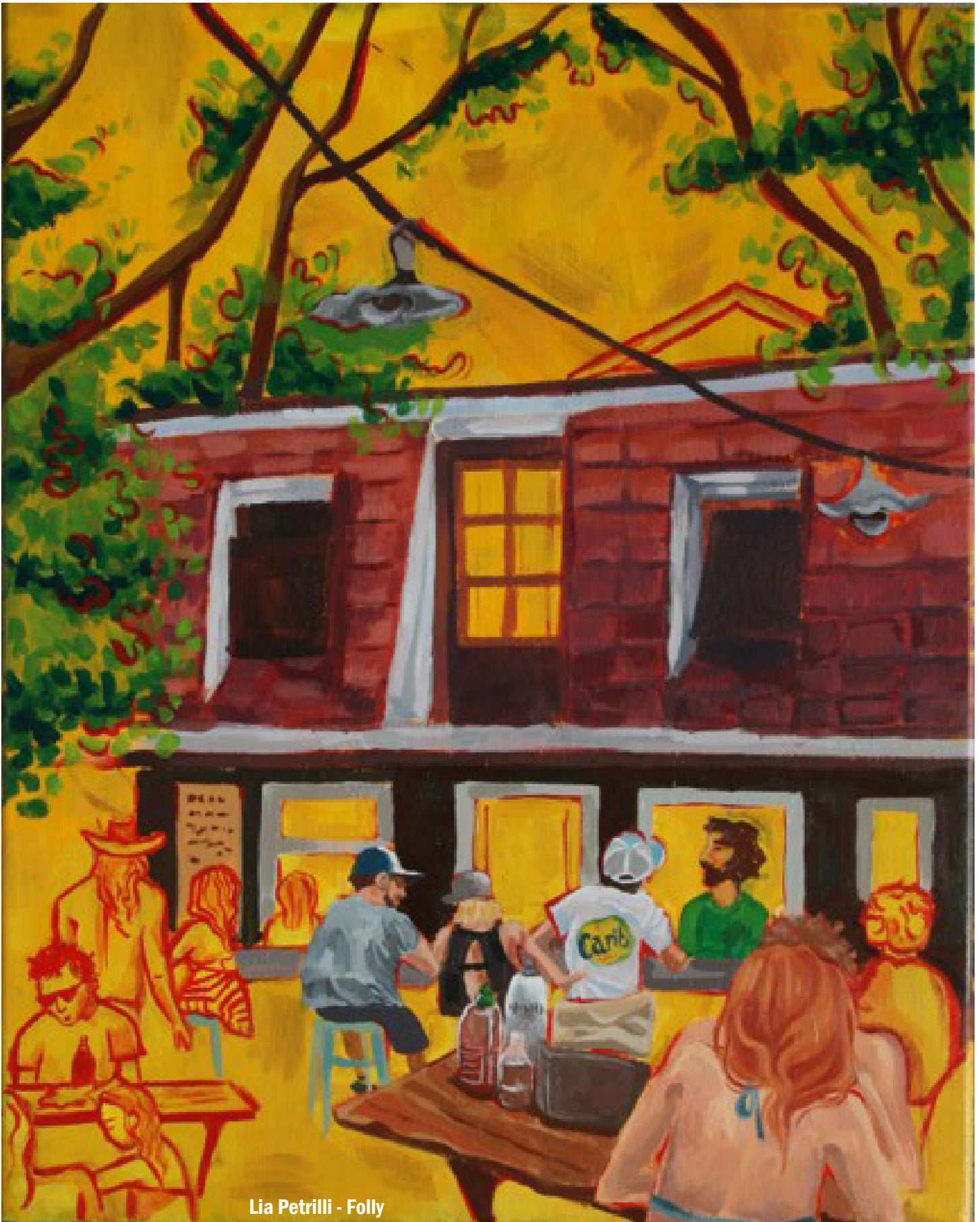
A new noise emerges. A creak, a clash, and another creak. The carriage appears in front of me once again.

He pulls me in, and obediently I sit.

Death has not waited for me this time; Death has taken me.

“But Sir, I have lived for only a minute, I have understood for only a second, you have showed me a drop and now I long for a lifetime.”

“You are a poet of the body; you are a poet of the soul. It is but a gift the minutes with him I



Lia Petrilli - Folly

spared. You lived as you are, and that must be enough."



Now That's a Halloween Movie!

Caroline Bauer

Two girls are sitting on a couch watching a movie. It is Halloween eve. The TV is blaring a generic horror movie. They are sharing a bowl of popcorn. A grotesque noise comes from the tv. One girl jumps off the couch with a scream.

Chrissie: That's it! I'm done watching your stupid horror movie!

Kendra: What do you mean? *Insidious* isn't even that scary!

Chrissie: You always say that and I always believe you! Remember last weekend when we went on the hayride?

Kendra: What about it?

Chrissie: You said, and I quote, she modulates her voice "It's not that scary". THEY HAD AXES WITH ODDLY REALISTIC LOOKING BLOOD AND BUG ANIMATRONICS. I HATE BUGS!

Kendra *Almost whiningly:* C'mon Chrissie, you know the blood and the axes were fake.

Chrissie: Yeah? When one of them scraped the axe on the ground while chasing us, there was a giant line in the grass that was definitely made by a sharp axe!

Kendra: The grass was probably torn up beforehand and it's fake or something. It's all makeup and special effects tools.

Chrissie: The only special thing about that was I didn't throw up from fright!

Kendra's face softens

Chrissie: And the bugs! I swear I saw someone eat a giant spider. AND IT WAS MOVING!

Chrissie gags

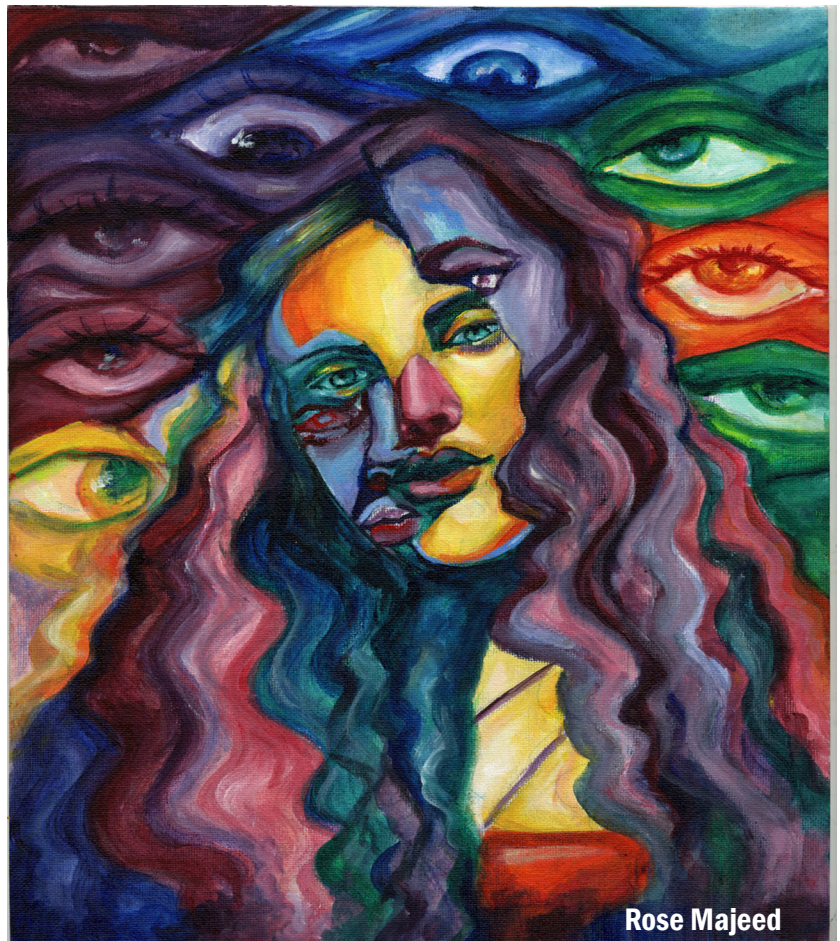
Kendra: I'm sure it was just some sort of visual trick. You know technology is getting advanced nowadays.

Chrissie: Snorts Ok, boomer.

They both start giggling. That ends the fight.

Chrissie: Let's watch *Mean Girls*. Now that's a Halloween movie.

They sit back down on the couch and turn on Mean Girls. The dulcet sounds of Lindsay Lohan fill the stage as the lights go off.



Rose Majeed

Jasmine

Shuwen Ding

nights like these,
fishtails glimmer especially
bright

displaced then
gutted.

the ocean
rocks for her children:

his eyes are foggy. his mouth
is agape. his tongue is no longer
his own.

he is a product,
the exchanged, and

she stirs
but does not cry.

tears never changed anyone's
fate
anyways.

nights like these,
he dreams of a thin string,
of a perilous dance.

the flesh of his back twitches
while the flock
returns east,

their shadows twirling on
his face.

his own silhouette
scuffles
with coiled rope and

eager
messengers
of white fury,
clawing for his soul.
chipped nails
and
dirty tongues;

gods are forsaken so easily here.

nights like these,
the magnolias
wail and the stars goad him on.

tears wink down his
cheeks and
heads of fire, of ash bubbling
towards the sky, bellow behind him.

her hushing
sounds melodic when
you can see the
horizon,

a siren's song.
she leads him to the edge of the pier.

his toes hang off the edge and he
sways and-

nights like these,
the fishtails glimmer
especially bright,

cooked then garnished.

sitting at a table of
two tongues,
i, product of the exchanged, kiss his
forehead.

the kettle whistles and
he pours me
a cup of tea, his
back to the rocking ocean.

Brown Leather Bag

Luca Wormsley

Before he disappeared, my grandfather left me a brown leather bag. It was a crossbody bag; the thick, heavy kind, with two handles: a shorter one, which was barely independent from the bag itself and bound with double cap rivets, and a longer one, which, when sat on the shoulders, was long enough to leave the bag at the lower hips, or for me, at my feet. The cowhide leather from which it was made belonged two roads west of Carp Town, but its metal rivets and decorations were gifts from the witch who lived at east, for as little as anyone actually saw her, it's said she was a very practical lady. The saddle stitch used to assemble the bag was pulled so finely through the leather that you practically had to pull the whole bag apart to see it, and even then, the string was thin and light brown, chosen as such to disguise it even further. It was a solely empirical vessel, but assembled with too much care to ignore.

When my grandfather still lived with me, he would use the brown leather bag to transport textiles, carefully stacking the fabrics, ribbons, and threads inside of it until their blooming colors flooded the reflection of the smooth bag's outer hide. He took the northeast road to and from Carp Town for so many days that when he finally stopped walking it, I could barely notice he disappeared. The only thing that told me he was gone was the leather bag that stopped walking the road with him.

These days, I refuse to let the bag sit by the door. I keep it on my lap while I sit at his desk, or awkwardly string it around my body to prevent it from dragging on the ground. I take it to the fields, to Carp Town, to the pasture, to Brown Boy; anywhere to keep it moving. Inside of it, I carry yellow envelopes.

Today I had already passed by the witch's broom, which stands eternally perched against a cobbled stone wall to ward off the taxidermists from Carp Town. Apparently, they like to haggle her for exotic animals, little aware of the fact that the witch is a very practical lady. As usual, I took a small share of red string and tied a yellow envelope to her broom, which as usual, stood out as sorely as a fisherman in the woods. But today, I didn't linger on that. Normally, by the time I reach the first intersection in the northeast road, Brown Boy is there to pull at my coat and spend my time. But I had long passed that intersection, and both my coat and journey lay undisturbed. The absence was just barely welcomed.

Brown Boy is strange. He's forthright, yet shy as a rabbit. Brash, with skin as fair as porcelain. I call him Brown Boy because of his thick brown hair, but the mud he's always covered in seems more fitting to the alias. Every day, he treks a different path through the country, refusing to walk the dirt road until he spots me. He paws at my bag of yellow envelopes and asks when the day will come where he receives his. Yet, on the occasion I take up his request and present him with one, he responds with an airy chuckle and swift turn, saying something or another about how he already has his own, chiding me as if it were common sense. I never understand it.

Though Brown Boy is a typical kid menace, the days where he does not walk the road with

me carry a soft loneliness. I miss the image of his beautiful hands sifting through my bag, pulling out the nameless envelopes and carefully examining them under the sun. I miss how he pulls at the hem of my coat, his eyebrows taut and his expression earnest as we both stumble closer to the tall grass. Mostly though, I miss how he parades my attention and tires my feet, so that by the time I arrive at Carp Town, the fatigue keeps me from continuing any further. It's always then that he vanishes without a word, something I once found disorienting, but now simply accept as a part of our shared travels.

I looked up from my thoughts, making a few quick turns before realizing I was halfway past the sheep pasture. It's the longest stretch of grass along the northeast road, planting itself just a couple miles from Carp Town. That being said, the aged wood fence that flanks the field's sides does little to actually enclose the sheep within it, leaving the job to the black-and-white border collie who lives alongside them. As usual, I pulled a yellow envelope from my bag and used a thread of red string to tie it to a lone fence post, and as usual, the border collie paid me no mind, choosing instead to stalk the field and its inhabitants in lone vigil.

I sighed, dragging my feet to a stop against the flaky, dry dirt of the northeast road. I reached into the brown leather bag, swirling my hand through the raspy thick of yellow envelopes until my fingers fastened onto one. Pulling it out, I tilted my head back and raised it so that it sat neatly beneath the sun's golden silhouette. For a moment I held my breath, watching it shake slightly in the open air. Then, I began to slowly rotate it, feeling the wind nestle up against the movement and watching the sunlight spill back and forth through the cheap yellow film. I can't remember how long I stood there for, but when I finally lowered my head to put the envelope away, I saw the gate to Carp Town standing in front of me.

Carp Town is an ornate port settlement cozied into the bend of a river, one day's trip from the sea. It squirms with the vigor of its fishermen and merchants, who bring bountiful profit to the port town with each passing day. However, Carp Town was built on the back of a family of taxidermists. They came here from far away, seeking to reap the natural bounty of the river and hang it on their walls. When my grandfather was still around, he told me he had seen the day they washed up on shore, how they greedily snatched up the river's carp, pulling their heads, tails, and skins from their body and replacing it with the foam molds they stored on their boat. Carp Town is beautiful and lively, its goods rich and its people unique. But when I stand at its gate, I can't help but think uneasily of the mounted carp who can only watch longingly from their decorative wood mantles.

When I visit Carp Town, I am scarce to leave them yellow envelopes. The people there are happy, wrapped in imported furs and stuffed with decadent seafood dishes. The only envelope I've given to Carp Town belongs to Brown Boy. Though Brown Boy denies my yellow envelopes, the days where he does not deliver them with me carry a soft loneliness. Those are the days where I stray off the dirt road, just as it ends at Carp Town, and sit in the tall grass, clutching the brown leather bag between my folded knees and my chest.

Orange Flower Tiles

Mara Pastirk

The fifth floor with the little orange flowers

A sea of potholes unfixed lead up to a small gravel lot behind an old apartment complex. Park your car. Walk through the 4 large pine trees up to the buzzer. "28-key-5557" repeat it in your mind so you don't forget or else you are stuck outside with only the gravel to cushion your forgetful bum. Click. Enter. Two staircases, one down, one up. The one leading down is unsettling, don't go down. Go up. One floor. Two floors. Three floors. Are we done yet? I'm tired. No, the fourth floor said. The lawn chair sitting by the windowpane between the fourth floor and fifth floor staircase was calling the elderly's legs. Don't sit in it. Fifth Floor. You made it.

Добродошао, волим те

Welcome, I love you. A sign plastered on a door. A small tag with the last name "Pastirk" is nailed to the door. The door opens. Enter that door. Say hello and take off your muddy shoes. Look around. You have a hallway, narrow, leading to a small bedroom, to the left is a living room with a TV. It mumbled a few news reports and went on to singing juice commercials. It will feel surreal, so take it in.

Take in the kitchen the size of a pear to the right, with the loud laundry machine between the oven and sink. The grape sized table had a well-made cloth of pink covering it, with tiny details perfected for the loving receiver. She responded. Grandmothers usually do when you speak politely, so have manners. Hug her, it'll last a while and knock your breath out so take a deep breath before you do. Set your bags down and talk even if it won't sound right. Talk for hours. Observe more. Write it down. The floor in the hallway was a wood pattern with a narrow red rug with more little details. Lots of little details in the apartment on the fifth floor. Go to the kitchen and get everyone a drink, our throats need it from all the conversations sucking away our saliva. Notice the calendars of other people's families, the pictures of your father and your sister and eventually, you. Grab the glasses kept low enough for her to reach and fill them with water from the gallon pump. Don't spill, it's rude to waste water. Stop talking. Start listening to the smiles and the stories that come with them. Smile even if you don't understand and frown when she frowns. Go with the flow.

Observe more. See the poetry books and the porcelain woman alone behind the TV. Finally, sit by the window in the kitchen for dinner. Drink chicken broth from the old mug with a bird on it, your sister got one with flowers and your dad got one with your face on it. It was a little chipped. Eat the food and listen to her and nod and shake your head and smile. Keep smiling. Look at the wall. So much hanging on for dear life on the driest of drywall. Look above the stove-laundry machine-sink setup. Tiles. Beautiful tiles. All white. No little details. Look again and again and see the little orange flowers. A few tiles, orange flowers with even little-r details of velvet green leaves.

Enjoy the little details, because you know the little details make this a home. A home makes a narrowed hallway, and the slender hallway turns into the unsettling staircases leading to more homes filled with little details too. Those unsettling staircases make the apartment, and the apartments full of the little details make the complex. The road leads to the complex and the potholes try breaking your already tired tires so you can't leave, even though you don't want to. Stay, she says. You want to but you can't, so you leave. You survive the sea of potholes and the endless gravel and the goodbyes, which were the hardest to survive. You close your damp eyes and think of the details. You think of the wooden floors and the tired walls and the pretty pink cloth, but what you remember the most is the tiles. The orange flower tiles.



Anna Borrelli - Still Life

BEGIN TRANSLATION

Jack Fox

Admiral Sanna's Journal, Date: 23rd of Jugust, 1048 FAD

Well, it's finally over. 1048 years after accepting us, the Collective destroyed us. The stated mission of the Collective was to preserve and support the diverse cultures of the universe. Humanity took this as an invitation to learn and innovate from other species. The other species were disgusted. We were seen as scum, cockroaches and parasites too lazy to further their own technology. We were purged. It took just one year for Homeland to fall, and after 48 years, the rest of humanity joined it. The final battle took place on Adrenal-X, a water world colonized by humanity to deal with its overflowing population in 589 FAD. I was there for that battle, and now I'm leading an Ark of humanity's few members. We barely escaped the atmosphere before the Collective's fusion weaponry glassed the planet. Our navigation systems are shot, leaving us adrift in space, hoping to find sanctuary somewhere. The ship's AI will take control soon, and I'll go into stasis.

I fully expect to never wake up again.



END TRANSLATION

Recovered in 3487 FAD or 10981 FFD on planet X19-398-Y. A site containing an abundance of human remains was also discovered on the planet's surface.

Flesh Eating Ants

Shamil Canbolat

Today is my shift at the laboratory. Yesterday's results were intriguing but inconclusive. Thirteen dogs, six cats, and a full deer that we tranquilized and kidnapped from Lusk Forest and Recreation Center. One may think, "that is not *nearly* enough animals for testing," and I would completely agree. Our line of work is extremely time-consuming and excruciating, but it is necessary for scientific understanding. I take a glance at our most recent results:

Time to General Consumption		Animal Ants? Eaten?		
consume	Scatterplot			
(min)	. .	dog	yes	yes
			
	. . .	dog	yes	yes
		dog	yes	yes
# of flesh eating ants		+635

Images of mountains fill my head. Mountains of paper. Mountains of hard work going to waste. It stains my mind. I slash out the pages with the red pen connected to my ear seconds ago. How are we supposed to know whether flesh eating ants will eat flesh when presented with flesh with data like this? You can never jump to conclusions in science. Everybody knows you need replication in a study. Just because flesh eating ants ate dog flesh and cat flesh and deer flesh and horse flesh and cow flesh when presented with dog flesh or cat flesh or deer flesh or horse flesh or cow flesh does not necessarily mean that they would do it during a second trial. Science is very multifaceted in that sense. Often times there are confounding variables that one needs to assign control groups for. Unfortunately, this probably means we need to funnel additional funding from the Center for Global Cooperation into extorting freshmen senators in D.C. I would do the math in my head for how much money we have to spend on the fire ant control group and the parasitic ant control group and the cockroach control group but I am currently driving my vehicle through the undeveloped countryside. Perhaps that is why I was thinking of mountains.

Most people do not value replicability and peer review as much as I do. You cannot just use personal

experience to make *a priori* conclusions in science. This line of thinking is not only unscientific, but it is also seditious and dangerous. Somebody could end up thinking they are right, and that we are wrong. They love to bring up the time we were caught lying about the termites in the white house, even though we were not lying,



and if we were lying then it was for the good of the public. Or the time we were wrong about the death rates from Rhinoceros Pox in Namibistan, even though we were not wrong, and if we did turn out to be wrong then that means we simply did not replicate the study enough. Oh, I am getting angry just thinking about it. The International Policy Institute was a big help in writing the bill to make spreading termite propaganda an exile-able offence. Not to boast, but I did draft forty-six out of the seven hundred pages. The length makes sure only smart people can read it, just like a good scientific publication. Just as I was calming down, I remembered my mother. I think about how mothers are not very scientific either. They do not give you a reason for why you must make your bed if you are just going to sleep in it again. They say “because I said so” without providing a single source to back up their claims. Oh, I am trembling just thinking about it!

Speaking with simpletons about any current event or scientific issue is exhausting. They really think they can just state an unsubstantiated claim about Rhinoceros Pox or the White House Termite Incident or the Invasion of Omoritus without presenting a peer reviewed study published by a credible journal. Moving to Boston for my undergraduate studies was the best decision I ever made. Leaving behind my parents and their unscientific demands

to prepare breakfast, I interned for researchers at the University of Lexington and did *real* work like preparing their breakfast. After I test out a couple many multiple thousand more animals for my postgraduate, I can finally present my findings to Prof. Dr. Johannesburg PhD, M.D. Then we can move on to more important issues, like whether flesh eating piranhas will eat fish flesh when presented with fish flesh. Palpable. My years of studying Prof. Dr. Johannesburg’s (PhD, M.D.) thesis “Dorylus And Flesh: Determining Optimal And Hypothetical

Models For Inquiry On The Status And Ethical Considerations With Regards To Animal Rights, Ecosystems, And the Environment On The Status of Flesh-Eating Ants And Their Ability To Eat Flesh When Presented With Flesh” will finally be utilized for – would you look at that; he missed a capital letter in the title. How avant-garde. I should try that next time. I remember we needed a new shipment of ants just now. Perhaps I could get some on the way. I check our budget for this week:

starting stipend: \$3.402.533

EXPENSES:

> legal fees for animal disappearance - \$789.300

//lobby to repeal FOIA on tuesday, protestors know about the 2009 New York State Zoo scandal and are demanding the death threat transcripts

>2/12/2020 flesh eating ants - \$70.000

>2/13/2020 flesh eating ants - \$70.000

>2/15/2020 flesh eating ants - \$70.000

>2/17/2020 flesh eating ants [BOGO] - \$90.000

>2/19/2020 flesh eating ants; lim Edit. FIRE ANTZ EXTREME™ - \$150.000

>1/04/2020 animal shelter - \$456.150

> lab equipment - \$15.734

> personal expenses - \$937.828 ¢42

//treasurer comment: need itemized list for personal expenses ASAP!

I thought long. Maybe we should spend less on lab equipment. Well, in any case we can request more funding from the Department of Science again. Preposterous – this imbecile secretary did not capitalize a single letter! How unprofessional. I decide to forget it as my mind wanders. Pondering on how much taxpayer money we could siphon out of various executive departments by staging another national emergency, I suddenly become nostalgic of my time as a civil servant. Through my own hard work, I was assigned a senior position at the Department of Information Direction through a personal connection with the director. This was in 2006. What a productive year. That was when we began the focus groups for the completely spontaneous and unplanned 2007 invasion of Omoritus. I was the one who suggested rewording “war” to “Operation for Local Interests™.” Prof. Dr. Johannesburg’s (PhD, M.D.) colleague at the Humanitarian Initiative Council (or was it the Council

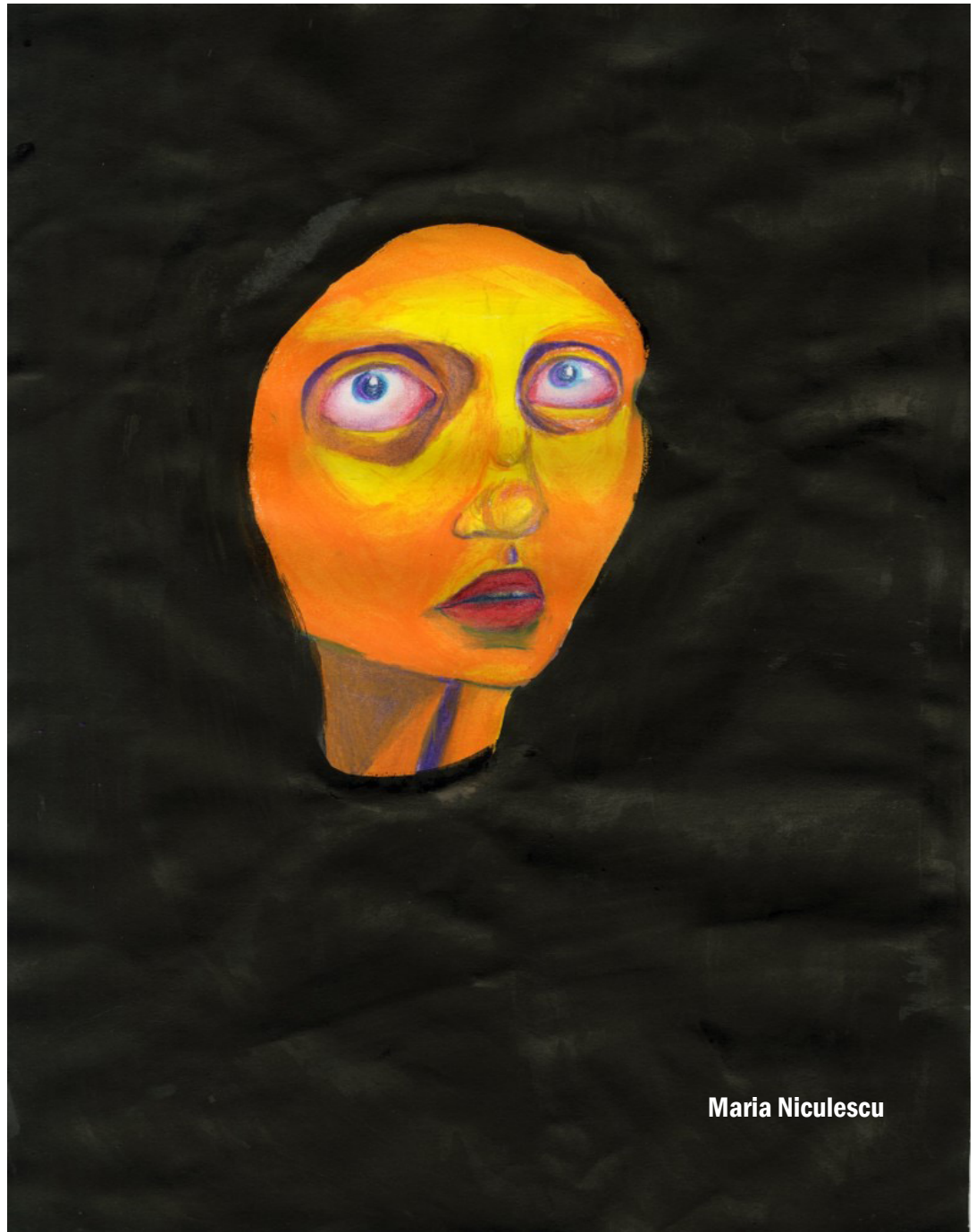
for Humanitarian Initiatives?) had the brilliant idea of promoting American values like cookie-cutter housing and debt slavery to the Omiritian population through a network of NGO's. It is a wonder how they survived so long as a civilization without concepts like public schooling and quinquennial economic recessions. They can complain and protest and riot and beg for humanitarian aid and be put down and protest again, but we have already planned the occupation for the next two presidential administrations, so for now they will have to enjoy the economic prosperity we provide. The good thing about GDP per capita is that it increases as the population decreases, *ceteris paribus* (a negative correlation! I shiver with excitement).

My nostalgic trip came to a halt almost as abruptly as my Subaru Highlander, which had collided with a deer. Like reflex, I had my hand on the door and the thought on my mind that this was the perfect opportunity for a free test subject. I wait for a second, taking in the silence, disturbed only by the hissing of the deflating airbag. Where is my pen? It is not on my ear. I could check later, I thought, and then exited the vehicle. There on the ground lay the stag. Instead of dying, it chose to wail and moan, which irritates me — it being alive

Lia Petrilli



makes my job considerably harder. I have about a minute to observe it before its heart stops beating. The antlers are a natural white and seem as if they would be smooth to rub. I would not like to rub its eyes. There are no pupils, but I feel as if it is looking at me. I begin to think that maybe it is angry at me, or defeated, or perhaps ashamed, and I almost feel bad for it. I remember that this is just speculation, and that if I want to prove it is sad, I need to replicate the experiment by running over a large sample size of diverse deer to eliminate bias.



My ear feels wet.

I rub it — blood. That is the only thing we have in common right now. We are both bleeding, and we are both mammals. But it would be unscientific to suggest we have anything in common. Deer blood has a higher iron content than human blood. Ah, it is still staring at me! Its limbs are beginning to move less often, and the glistening of its eyes is fading into hide. I turn around and walk back to the car. For some reason, I want the minute to last longer. We need more test subjects to determine whether flesh eating ants will eat flesh when presented with flesh, so maybe what I feel is an urge to capitalize on this opportunity. This cannot be so, I think, because I also want to leave it there. I turn around again and observe. The fur matches the color of the surrounding fields

which have darkened as the sun has just set. It seems as if I rubbed it once, I would want to rub it again. My attention is drawn back to the eyes. All that has changed is that they are closer to being shut, but I feel as if the creature has given up, or maybe it is keeping them open because it is hopeful. This is just speculation. I try not to care for the animal and check the statistics:

Sample Size: 5306 *Odocoileus Virginianus*

Proportion of Sample Eaten by Flesh Eating Ants When Presented with Flesh Eating Ants: 100%

Standard Error: 0.06

Notes: has yet to be replicated with 5306 more specimens

I was almost convinced to leave it there after thinking the data may be conclusive when I realized that all 5306 deer may only have been eaten by flesh eating ants when presented with flesh eating ants due to margin of error. I cannot spread misinformation. The Department would not like that. I reach for the pen on my ear but am instead jolted by the cold of the blood I forgot about. I jerk my hand back and observe it as if it were a sample of ants. Maybe it is because of the increasingly horrifying sounds produced by the deer, or the alien red on my hand, but I do not know what I am looking at. Everything is out of place, and I am late to the laboratory. The deer lets out its last wail. I wipe more blood onto my fingers and cross off the data on the sheet with a messy X. Deer are very heavy, I think, as I lift it by its front limbs and begin dragging the corpse towards my trunk. Maybe we will need an extra test subject. Maybe the data will never be conclusive. I stop to rest after a couple seconds of dragging and drop to the ground panting. That fur did not feel good to touch at all. Once this experiment is over, I hope never to handle deer again. Its eyes are closed now, but I open them manually to take a look; they are still staring at me. Taunting me, forcing me to pity it. Oh, everything is a mess, and nothing is where it is supposed to be. I am so angry!...

I am driving my vehicle again. Throughout the trip, I catch myself looking at the glancing at the rear-view mirror many times, forgetting that it has already died. Just in case, I will take this one to the lab too. Then we can publish our study.

Winner of the 2023 Sokol High School Literary Awards Contest - 1st Place Award for Prose

Guilt, Loss, and the Air Lock

Lydia McCamant

Five years had passed.

And Marco was now fifty-three.

He'd last stopped for gas when he was forty-seven. It was the Herdmen and Gerrard Station, with twelve docks, three bars, a store for parts, and a store for supplies. Marco locked in on Dock Seven. He'd paid for the gas and for his windshield to be sprayed clean. Then he'd left the ship. He went to the supply store and bought four crates of vacuum-packed protein. The salesman boasted about it being farmed on a real planet. It was a good deal. Then he went to the part store and traded a handful of bolts for a piece of pipe. The man was wearing a gray coat that was pulled up over his head, shielding his face. It only took a second for him to cram Marco's bolts into his

pocket and dash away. Then Marco used the bathroom, got a drink from the bar, and returned to the *Obsidian*.

The *Obsidian* was a lonely ship. Painted all black, except for the wide orange scrape down its starboard side, it disappeared into the darkness between stars. It was a ship without a purpose. Some could go fast, and some could shoot weapons, but the *Obsidian* could do neither and none. It was a quiet place, except for the rumble of the engine and the crackle of old pipes. All it did was carry Marco.

Except it didn't just carry Marco.

It carried Marco and Anne May and Corvin.

And Anne May was the one who traded bolts for the pipe. And Corvin was the one who got a drink from the bar.

And it wasn't just Marco that got back on the *Obsidian*. It was Marco and Anne May and Corvin.

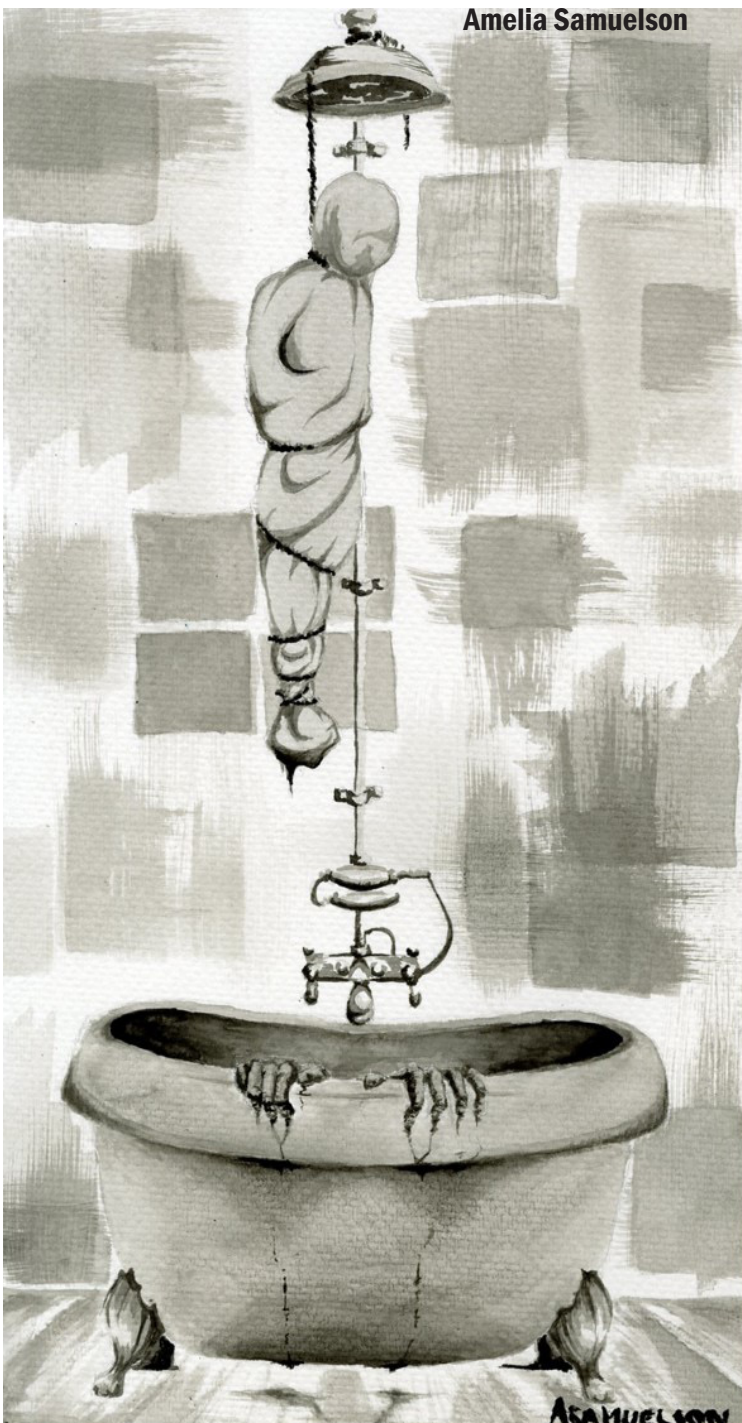
But that was the last time they got on the ship.

Because eight months later, the day after Anne May's forty-fifth birthday, the air lock failed.

Marco was in the cockpit, leaned back in a chair eating a bag of protein. Corvin was in the hold, setting up chess.

Anne May was telling Marco about nothing. It was an old story. It didn't matter.

Corvin called her into the hold.



She went. At the door she looked over her shoulder at Marco.

“Oh, and thank you. Thank you for this, Marco.”

He nodded.

And the automatic doors between the cockpit and the hold clicked and slid shut. Like a moment from a dream, there was a clunking noise from the far side of the hold. The air lock switch was jammed. After that, there was no other noise. As fast as a flash of light, everything got sucked out. The palettes and the space suits and the boxes of scrap metal and the rolls of wire. The pipe that Marco never had time to replace. The chess board. Anne May and Corvin.

And that was it.

But Marco was lucky. Because he'd been alone when the air lock failed. And there never was anyone named Anne May or Corvin.

Except that wasn't the truth either.



And Anne May never said thank you. She just kept walking.

Marco was now fifty-three.

It was something of a miracle that the crates of protein had been in the lower hold. The crates of protein, one roll of red wire, a can of oil, a gear from some other ship, and a bag of paper birthday napkins. The water machine in the cockpit still worked. Only cold water. The hot water had shut off a long time ago. Now an empty shell, the *Obsidian* coasted. They'd run out of gas. There was no way to steer. Marco and the *Obsidian* would eventually be sucked in by gravity, pulled towards a solar system with a small red sun and some slow planets.

Boarded into the cockpit, Marco merely existed. There was a hole in the floor from where he'd pulled the sheet metal apart to break into the lower hold. One of the seats had been torn apart

and its cushions shredded into a pile of leather scrap, which became his bed in the corner of the cockpit. The temperature controls had shut down, and the face of the control box had been pried off. There was nothing he could do to repair the heating, but he didn't have a way to reattach the box. Around the walls, there were square holes where he had pulled metal from the walls years ago, trying to make a connection to the air lock. It never worked.

He was a tiny man in a cave of scrap metal. Bolts and wires and screws and grates lay scattered across the floor of the cockpit, hurting Marco's knees as he crawled over them.

He'd put a piece of electrical tape over the switch of the cockpit doors on the control board.

Every day there was a choice. A choice on whether or not to remove the tape and finally let go.

It came in waves.

The overwhelming feeling.

He only had to tie his hands together with wire twice. When his heart started beating fast and his hands began twitching and his shoulders slumped in. When his knees were too shaky to stand so he knelt on the metal floor of the cockpit, gripping the edge of the control board and staring at the taped-over switch.

All it would take was one movement. To reach out his hand and tear off the tape and open the doors and finally let go. Let himself be sucked out of the *Obsidian* like Anne May and Corvin. Let himself die a silent, meaningless death.

But twice he'd crawled down into the lower hold and tied his hands to the roll of wire and cried until it all went quiet.

Marco's head was a thousand movies playing at once. Movies where Anne May never found him at Delorne's Station. Movies where Corvin convinced him to leave her there. Movies where Anne May stayed in the cockpit for an extra ten seconds and the cockpit doors stayed open and the air lock failed and dragged everyone out. Movies where the air lock worked for another thirty minutes, and everyone was in the cockpit together with the doors closed. Movies where everyone died. Movies where they didn't.

And they were all better than what had happened. Because if those cockpit doors hadn't closed, Marco would have died five years ago. The *Obsidian* would be floating alone. And everything would be quiet.

When Marco was forty-three, he'd stopped at Delorne's Station. It was a quiet place with not many people. He'd bought gas and gotten drunk and punched a guy in a bar.

But Corvin was the one who got drunk. Corvin punched someone.

And Anne May was the reason Corvin got drunk. She'd come up to Marco when he and Corvin had left the *Obsidian* and she'd asked for a hitch to somewhere far. And Corvin had complained and Marco had agreed and Corvin went to the bar and got drunk and punched a man in a blue shirt. And Anne May helped Marco drag Corvin back to the ship and close the doors of the *Obsidian*.

Corvin grew to like Anne May. Not that it mattered.

Sometimes Marco could convince himself that there had never been an Anne May or a Corvin. That he'd visited Herdmen and Gerrard Station by himself, traded bolts for a pipe and gotten a drink from the bar. That it had been a miracle nobody died when the airlock failed, because he just happened to be in the cockpit with the doors closed when it happened. That he was lucky.

His heart had grown weak in the years of turmoil. Each day was a fight with himself. A fight against that switch, against acceptance, against grief.

"You're lucky, Marco." He'd started to lose track of the voices. Which ones were his head and which his mouth.

"So damn lucky."

But he wasn't. Because nobody knew about Anne May or Corvin except for Marco. And nobody knew about Marco except for nobody. And nobody was coming. And nobody cared. And Marco had run out of gas. And Marco had died five years ago.

He was sitting on the floor of the cockpit.

Not dead, but dead.

When lights shone through the windshield.

Green-yellow light struck the cockpit doors for the first time in ever. A rumbling noise got louder and louder. Like the *Obsidian's* noise five years ago, before it ran out of gas.

Marco sat on the floor, dead. There was the loud sound of metal hitting metal, and then he heaved on the control board, pulling himself to his knees.

"You're lucky, Marco."

It was a ship. A junk ship that picked up scrap. Its metal arm had already extended, magnet affixed to the *Obsidian's* side.

He was saved.

Someone was here.

But it was too late.

Because Corvin and Anne May were dead. And so was Marco.

He could not breathe. He could not live. He could not leave.

His hand,

disconnected from his body and his brain and his heart,

crept across the control board,

And slowly pulled off the electrical tape.

His index finger quivered on the switch.

Then went still.

And made its last motion.

The cockpit doors opened.

And Marco was dead.

Except Marco was lucky.

Because the switch didn't click.

And the doors jammed shut.

And Anne May never said thank you.

And Marco would never forget.

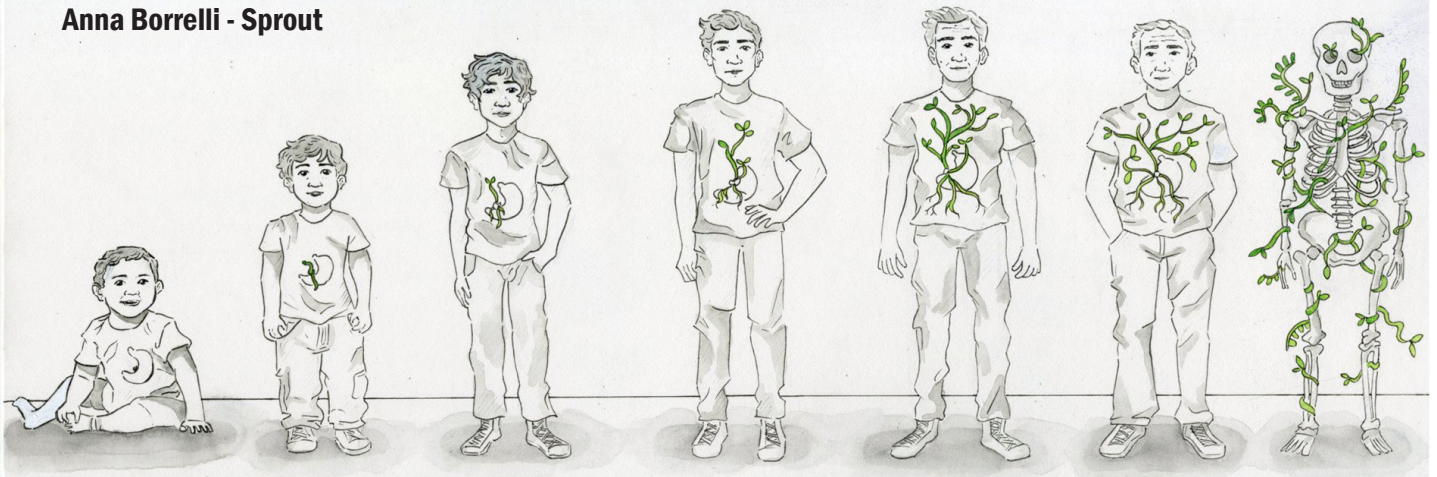
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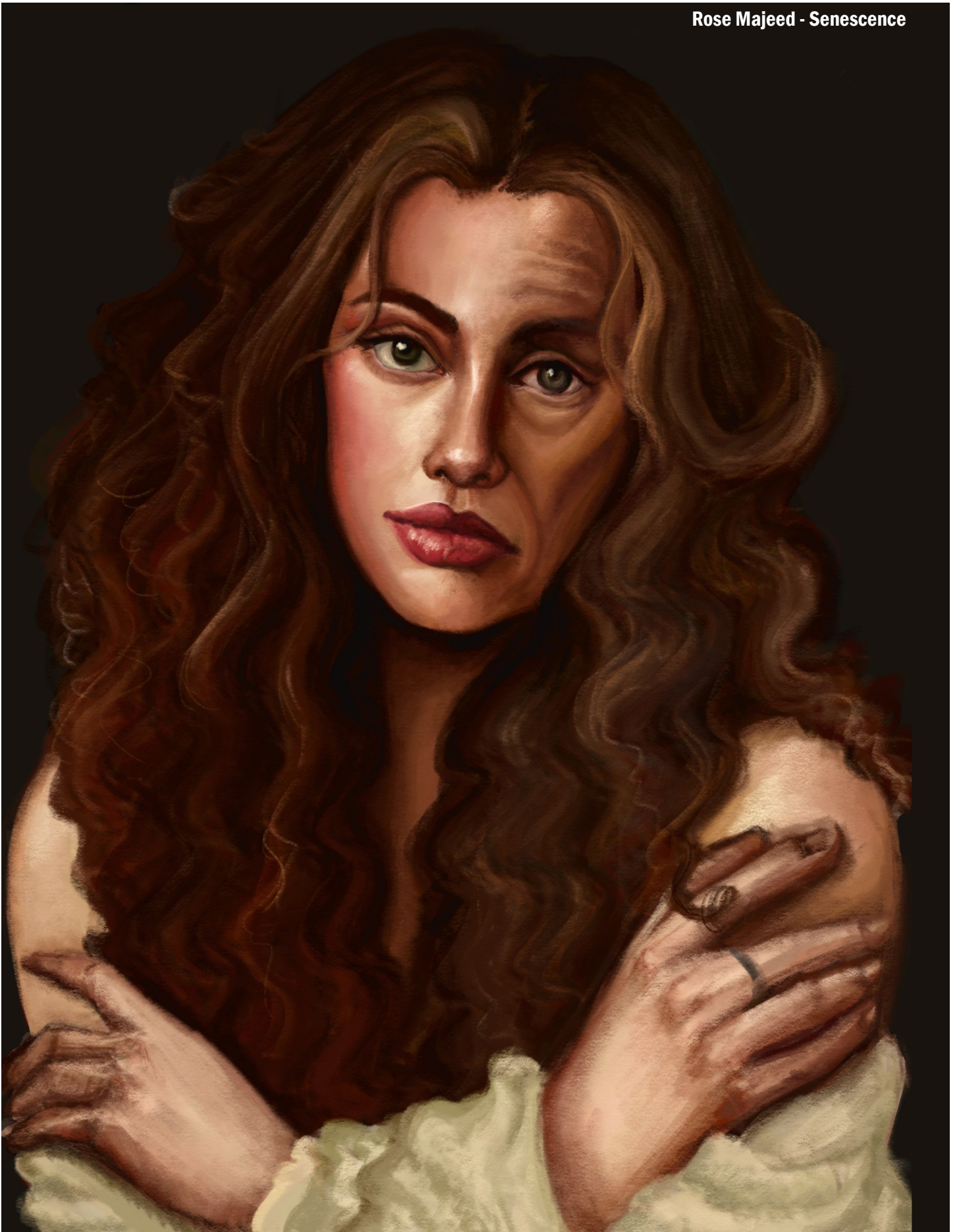
Shuwen Ding

forgetting how
to smile was the first
symptom.
went from happiness
to dredging up
two twin slabs of dead
weight from the
gunk of the swamp.
it was
oil,
fatty, viscous, and
glib,
dripping from
brittle nails to chafed wrists,
my fingers
slipping at the corners
of my mouth,
my face slipping
at the corner of the stage.
it was unforgiving
rhythms,
stiff memories,
and that
unrelenting heat
of a thousand blinking suns
watching from the box seats.
truth: crossroads
at midnight
don't lie. chipped horns, hollow
hurt

then the
whole of it,
my soul
for its weight in
leopard carpets
and gold
caskets
until i woke underneath
satin sheets,
darkly glistening, muscles
twitching.
splitting my lips
apart with a scalpel,
perched upon
my bed, a limbed
mess, the bitter stars had murmured
*your souls are buffers
to that inborn blight.
what do you think your messiah
died for?*
wet wax hissing
on my knees,
digging through the
muck once more
but that time,
the last time,
my hand came back
red.

Anna Borrelli - Sprout





The Curiosity Dealer

Deven Spencer

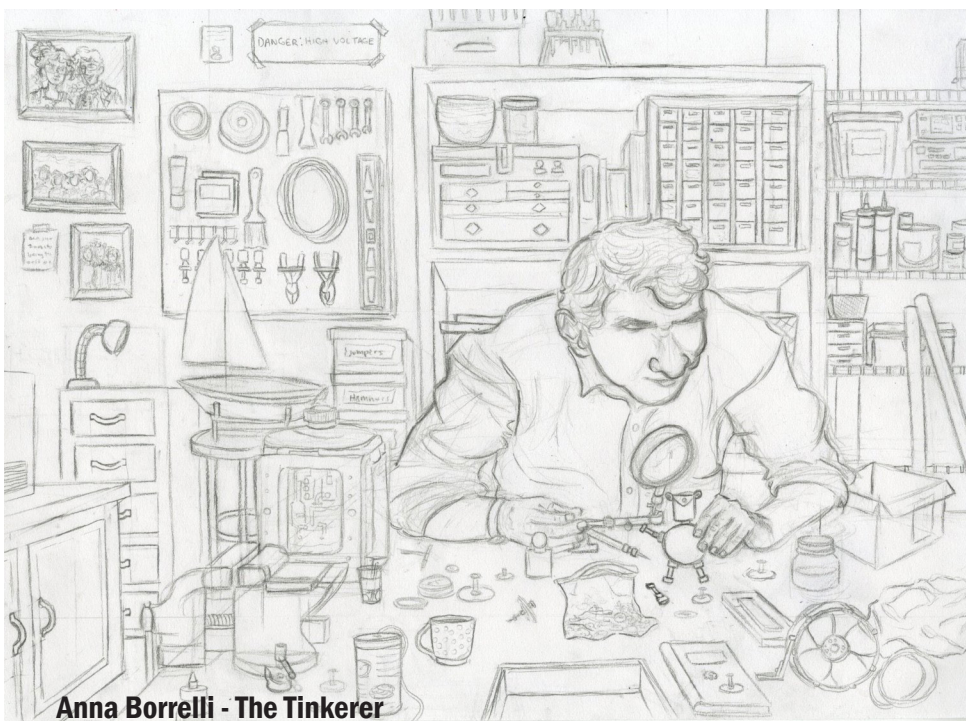
The shop door opens with a creak, casting a line of sunlight into the dimly lit interior. It's a quaint little shop, well-loved and cared for. I get the sense that not much business comes through here; some of the items on these shelves look like they've been there for a long time. Each customer that walks through this door is a special occasion, almost as special as the items in this shop.

For this shop deals in those items that have special meaning. Seemingly random, useless refuse, each one of the many trinkets lining these shelves is, or was, special. And all of them, each one, will be special again. They are simply waiting, waiting for that special someone to walk through the door and claim them. And some of them, a select few, scattered amongst the rest, are **extra** special. This is what I am here for.

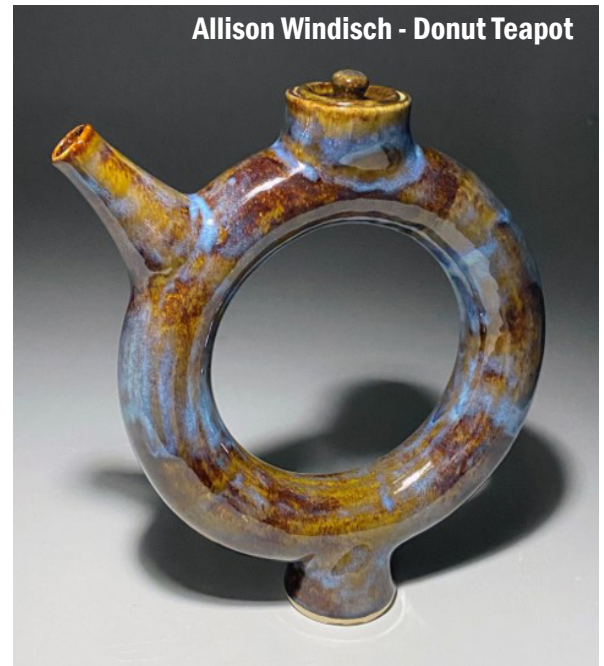
The front counter is unattended as I walk in, so I begin to browse the shelves. I have time, so I wander. It feels almost crowded, but not quite. Each trinket has its own place on its shelf, its own little kingdom to rule over, surrounded by dozens of just-as-unique curiosities in their own little kingdoms, guarding its story as it waits to be found, to become that special thing to that special someone.

Oh, the stories they could tell, I muse to myself as I wander. There must be hundreds of years of history on these shelves. Nothing important to the historians, but very important to one such as myself, or the shopkeeper. Snapshots of the lives of people long forgotten, from times long past. The only things left of them are memories, carried forever in the things they left behind. Some of them carry so much with them that I can feel it, so much history and love and memory and power that I can **see** it. I could spend years here...

I am jolted back to the present by the shopkeeper returning from a room in the back. My mind returns to the task at hand, to the item I seek, and I go to make my purchase.



Anna Borrelli - The Tinkerer



Allison Windisch - Donut Teapot

I wrap my package tightly and tuck the bundle into one of the many pockets of my coat as I leave. As I contemplate what comes next, I cast one last look behind me, to the shelves stacked with trinkets and the man that cares for them. My task is a daunting one, and it would be much easier with the things he has in there at my side. But the purveyor of curiosities operates on his own terms, and he is not one to lend aid on a whim, no matter who is backing me.

I am on my own.

We've Been Here

Grace Bylund

Moth is quiet.
The same orange sweatshirt
The same baggy sleeves
Hood up
Eyes down
Hiding in a cocoon of sorrows.
But sometimes,
The flame finds the moth.
Sometimes, the hood slips off
A spark in their eyes
Wings spread freely.
Sometimes, they find light in the night.
I only wish
I could see them in a place
Where it doesn't have to be sometimes.

Uva is fierce.
Short hair
Sharp eyes
Long strides
Their compass set
To a distinct destination
They know their purpose
They know their passion
And they've drawn a map to get there.
Tough and striking and never apologizing
Friendly and funny and always knitting something
I don't want to lose them
I only wish
They could be happy
Where they are right now.

Rika is awkward.
Nervous laughter
An apology after
Every sentence
Fidgeting
Flushing
Fighting for each word
Fighting the invaders in her
mind
Arms crossed
Hugging herself.
Eyes closed
Forgetting herself.
A soft smile

Coming to herself.
The power that she has
The hope that she shares
I only wish
That she knew
How strong she is.

Sil is random.
She's got five Rubik's cubes in her bag
And a universe of potatoes in her head.
Every mistake is a smile
Every answer is sarcastic
She laughs
To escape
To avoid
Eyes void
She laughs
To distract
To pretend
Make it end
Funny, how she meanders around the deep questions
Funny, how she can never stick to a choice
Funny, how it isn't
I only wish
That she could laugh
Because she wanted to.

And I'm Jane
Plain and simple
Quiet and calm
I've tried to listen

And I've tried to understand
Because
We've been here
And we've been together
For years now
Years where we've hidden
Simply lied
Silently cried
I want someone to hear what I can't
And I want someone to know what
I don't
Because
We've been here
And we've been together
And I only wish
We hadn't struggled alone.



Amelia Samuelson

The Winds of Walworth

Anna Borrelli

My great aunt lived in the town of Walworth, where rows of corn lined the wandering roads, and spanned between deteriorating, rural houses. Her husband of fifty years had passed away from a heart attack, and her only son lived on his own. Ever since her husband died, she secluded herself from the town, planting trees and hedgerows around her property, ensuring that the outside stayed out. Twenty acres of land separated her and the neighboring high school, which had recently shut down due to lack of enrollment.

The town decided that the high school needed to be repurposed, and before long, it was converted into a correctional facility. This made my great aunt quite uneasy, but in her old age, she was too weary to move. She reasoned that the chances of anything happening were very low, and wagered she was safe in her sheltered home.

The night of October 28th began as a regular night. My great aunt sat on her chintz sofa and turned on the TV, with the volume cranked up. Despite all the windows and doors having been sealed shut, the incessant sound of rain fought to drown out the game show host's voice. She was just settling down, and easing into the couch, when a news commentator's face appeared on the screen.

The wind pounded on her walls as she heard the voice on the television exclaim, "We interrupt this program to alert all residents of Walworth that there has been a breakout from the local correctional facility." She tensed on the couch and turned the volume louder still. The voice continued, "The criminal in question is highly dangerous, and if spotted should not be approached." An image flashed across the screen. "If he is seen, authorities should be called immediately. Experts advise that you stay within your homes for your safety." The emergency broadcast ended abruptly.

My great aunt sat paralyzed on the couch, as a corny laugh track from the game show reverberated throughout the room. She felt her heart thumping in her chest as she contemplated the severity of the situation. And then she scrambled to her feet, determined to take immediate action.

She checked all the windows and doors, ensuring that they were tightly closed and locked. She pulled the dark curtains closed. And lastly, she rummaged around for the baseball bat hidden behind her bed. She steadied herself with a deep, calming breath. *If anything were to happen, I am ready*, she thought to herself. At that exact moment, the power went out.

The wind shrieked in the sky, and the rain pummeled the earth with an intensity never heard before. My great aunt crept cautiously into the darkness, attempting to find her emergency supplies. Her hands inched along the wall as she approached where they were stored, when a knock on the door echoed through the house. She froze in fear. Her heart was the only sound

rising above the deluge of rain. She didn't dare move. The pounding on the door continued, and soon, a man's yelling voice joined it. My great aunt gripped the baseball bat tightly in her hands and edged towards the door.

"Let me in!" The man hollered, before muttering in an almost crazed voice, "It's been forever since I stepped foot out here, and this is the welcome I get?" The wind howled and drowned out his deranged screaming for a short second, before it emerged with a greater intensity. "Let me in!" More pounding on the door. More wind screaming in the sky. The poor woman tried to steady her heart. And then, she looked on in terror, as she saw the lock slowly turning. The door swung open.

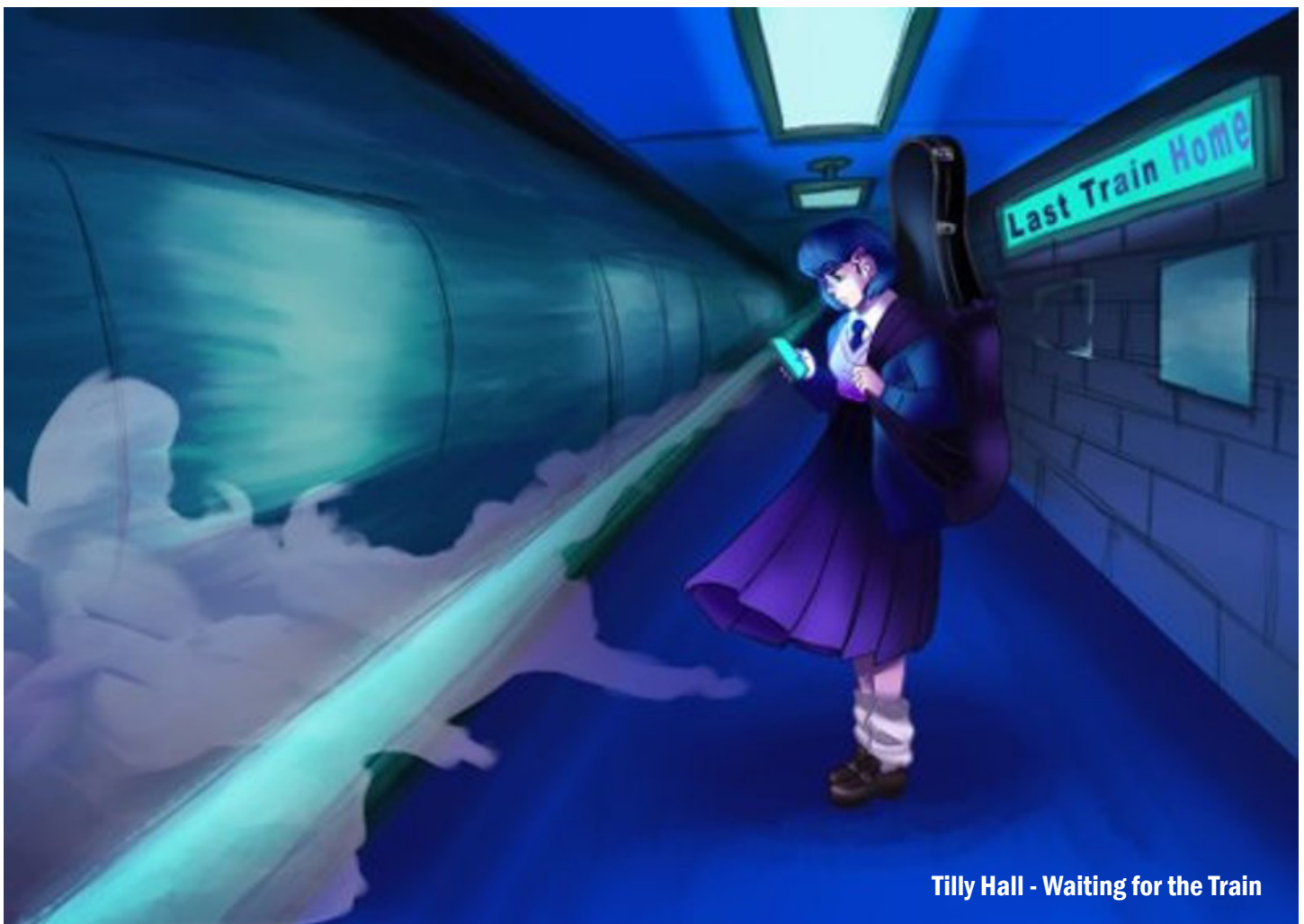
In front of her stood a tall man, dripping in her door frame. He lunged into her house, and she prepared to swing the bat.

"Thank God, I got in," The man said in a familiar voice. In her son's voice.

"Randel? But what are you doing here?" she asked, still trying to comprehend the situation.

"I heard about the breakout. I came to make sure you were alright," he replied hesitantly.

"Oh, honey. Come in!" she cried and closed the door behind him. She had ushered him inside and was just about to get him a change of clothes, when she heard the doorknob rattle.



Tilly Hall - Waiting for the Train

Gravity

Lydia McCamant

Let's turn gravity off.
The blankets will float off the mattress,
Then the mattress will soar off the frame.
The papers will fly off the desk
And dance with the pens around our room.

The welcome mat will leave to find a new home.
Our hair will stick up off our heads and
The weight will come off our shoulders.
My chapstick will fly out of my hand and twirl in front of your face.
We'll laugh and laugh
And laugh.

The tears will float from your eyes in bubble-drops,
Our legs will go over our heads and we'll push ourselves out the
window.
Out the window to a world turned over,
A world filled with flying leaves and confused birds,
Welcome mats and pens and papers and
You and me.
(Mostly you and me.)



Saskia Owen - Staircase

Est Devisible

Frankie Bellone

Sitting on my bed, darkness seeping throughout every corner, clouds obscure the stars, while the moon went dark several hours ago. The only illumination comes from streetlights. I decided looking out my window was futile, so I closed the curtains again. I cannot sleep, so I sit and I think, thoughts swarming around my head. I cannot possibly keep track of them anymore. My alarm clock sits on my nightstand on the right of me, faced away. The bright red light from my alarm clock illuminating the wall taunts me. I give in, I look, "3:00 AM". An endless cycle of tiredness, sleeplessness and thoughts you are unwilling to think, but too exhausted to shove away. So, you acknowledge them.

My head throbs, my exhaustion severe, darkness is all encompassing. The house is unbearably silent, but I still cannot sleep.

My mind is unbearably chaotic. If the Christian god is real, he would save me from this eternity. I hear rustling from a farm corner of my room. Jagged breaths of a monster, clear and loud. A chill goes down my spine. Something is standing in the corner and observing me. A malevolent being watches me. I turn my head. I expected nothing, I thought I was being paranoid, I felt I was dreaming. I expected I was hallucinating because I was so tired. I turn my head to the empty corner. There was nothing, nothing but darkness, a void.

I blinked and a tall creature stood in the corner. I face this monster, seven feet tall at least. Four horns on its head, curving upwards.

Its eyes seemed to be hollow, and I am transfixed onto its eyes. They glow an orangish crimson. The beast snarls, baring its fangs as menacing as possible. The glowing eyes are like lava, glowing and intense. Its fangs are long, wide and sharp enough to effortlessly murder. The body is unnatural, the pure black body looks like it is melting into the background of the darkness. This creature weirdly

resembles a human from the chest down. It has uncanny energy at its core.

Its chest moves up and down, in choppy and jagged motions. When my eyes adjust to the darkness finally, it walks to me. Its body appears as a silhouette, its breath smells rancid, and it is unsettlingly warm. The moisture from the breath is sticky. Now in my face, this unsettling demon speaks. If the Christian god were real, he would stop the never-ending cycle of this demon appearing and reappearing, again and again. This never-ending cycle of pain and illness, pain and illness not existing physically, or physiologically.

You want this, it says to me. I don't. I want to heal, I want to get better. But deep down I do, I do want what this demon is alluding to. Goosebumps form on both my arms, the hair on the back of my neck sticks up and my body tenses. Frightened, in a cold sweat, I suddenly jolt awake, adrenaline spiking. *I knew we would meet again, my darling*, I tilt my

head down, avoiding eye contact.

It sweetly pushes my face up from my chin with its fingers, dry, lumpy and sharp, as if we were lovers. Sweetly, it smiles before it chuckles menacingly, its rancid breath is the only thing I can smell. The stench was so strong I almost tasted it. The hot scent of rotten corpses, feces and urine fester in its mouth and down its throat. Its shoulders move up and down, in a jerking motion, as it chuckles, in a chilling way. It looked as if it were a pos-

sessed doll trying to recreate the movements of a human being. It closely resembles the movements of a human, but not enough where it is obviously not. This creature fits perfectly in the uncanny valley. Very human appearing, but clearly not but human still. It could almost trick you into thinking it was human if it tried hard enough, but at its core, you can *feel* that it is not human.

Saskia Owen - Purgatory



An ocean of black tar abundant in my chest, emotions I thought I buried deep enough to avoid, a reconciliation with life, but clearly not with the demon back.

"The ocean is overflowing. We both know that. At some point, you need to let the pain go", the creature spoke vaguely, again. But, context is only shared between us. Context it knew, I knew. Mouth glowing, face looked as if it were made out of black rocks. It starts crying. A substance, black, only visible from the illumination of the lava in its head illuminating through its seemingly hollow, yet functional eyes.

Non est Devitable (it is not to be deviated) it said. Voice raspy. It smiled at me.

I sat, apprehensive. "*Est devitable*," (it is to be deviated) I finally respond to the demon. Through the vague alluding, I still exactly know what it is telling me. Shackles I did not comprehend were there, wrapped around my wrists, the demon decided to start pulling as painfully as possible. I scream in pure agony. The shackles burn my wrists.

The Ocean in my chest, of agony, hurt, and fury starts to boil. The ocean I once kept control of so effectively, pushed down so far I could almost forget about, only if I did not need to actively keep it under control, boils, and my chest feels like it will rupture.

You want to feel the hurt, the demon whispers into my ear, sensually. Shackles disappear suddenly, my wrists do not burn, and are not even hot.

My spinning head pounds as I look at him straight in the eyes. *Ego nolo* (I wish not to), I say, fighting back finally. Because no, I don't. But, deep down I do. If the Christian god were real, he would stop this never-ending cycle of mental illness, never-ending cycle of relapse

His eyes shrink, his lips thin into a scowl. *Cupis* (you want to), he growls, face in my face. I whimper, his fangs are much larger, sharper and more deadly than I originally thought. His face is much more distressing up close.

He grabs me by the wrists, pulls me up, up off the ground. *You want this. You need this.* He yells, lusting for power.

"No, no I do not." I respond, tears forming. I try to hold them in, but it doesn't work. "Fighting is futile", I think. It's hopeless, if the Christian god were real, in the form of an all knowing, all powerful and all loving being, he would've saved me already. The demon chuckles as I come to this realization. I sit on the floor, weak, powerless, sobbing and shaking. I finally give in. He overpowers me.



Amelia Samuelson - Crucifixion

- Wild Ice -

Wallace

[a found poem, from *Girl in Translation* by Jean Kwok]

She finally cracked the door open ⁵
Most of the windowpanes were missing or cracked ⁶
Each step warped, slanting sharply downward to the banister ⁵
The roaches were impossible to exterminate ¹⁷
Ice was something I had known only in the form of small pieces in red bean drinks ³
The apartment had grown steadily colder every day ²²³
[Our bodies] were the only sources of warmth in that dead building ⁵⁶
Ma and I huddled together on her mattress for warmth the whole night ²²¹
We did everything we could next to the oven ⁵⁵
Cold, hungry and lonely ⁵¹
My predominant memory of that phase of my life is of the cold ⁴⁶
I woke up with parts of my body numb and frozen ⁴⁶
The cold crept in over the floor, freezing the water in the toilet ²²¹
The apartment was in even worse shape than it had been in when we moved ²⁵⁸
Sunk into that porous wall, bits of us that will never escape ¹²³



Leeah Herbert - Reflections

Gadakhch

Arev Lima-Boudakian

Long ago, the world was ruled by fear, for the gods that were worshiped had turned spiteful because they felt as if they were not loved enough. However, even as people attempted to become even more devoted to these gods, they still speared the earth with their anger making it a dangerous place to live. Nevertheless, there was one town that seemed to be slightly less impacted by the gods than all the others. Now don't be mistaken, the town of Doon was still miserable, but they had a lovely elder, Gadakhch, who was as benevolent as the gods were sinful.

This elder also had a cat, Deraz, who was loved by all. The entire town would play with it, would feed it, would make sure it was comfortable, and the cat bestowed them with the greatest honor of all, love from a cat.

Gadakhch wanted for the reign of the gods to end, and so, she began to wonder, *'what does a god fear other than loss of power? And what can make a god lose their power other than another god? Nothing!'* It was then that she began to ponder other deities, and realized her cat was likely a deity. It had lived so much longer than any cat before, and loved the people of the town, something that she had never seen a cat do before. Gadakhch decided that her cat must be worshiped, but only by the choice of others. So, she began by building an altar and a throne for her cat. She brought it all to the center of town, put her cat on the throne and began to pile the altar high with offerings. Then she began to pray. Others saw what was happening, but thought little of it as they knew just how much Gadakhch loved her cat.

But a small child, afraid of almost nothing, approached her and asked, "Why do you worship a cat as we once worshipped the gods that are now harming us? Do you not worry that your cat will one day harm us?"

Gadakhch replied, "I have lived many lifetimes with this cat, and my cat has lived for many lifetimes more than any cat. Therefore, I have no choice but to believe that this cat is a god living among us. In that time, the people of this town have been nothing but kind to this cat and she knows that she must be a benevolent god. However, in order for any deity to have power, people must believe in their divinity. And so, in order for this cat to have powers, and the wrathful gods who are so full of anger and jealousy to have none, we must all know and worship this cat's divinity. Do you, dear child, believe in her divinity?"

The small child gazed in amazement at the cat before them, unable to believe that they had lived among a god, fed a god, even played with a god. They finally responded, "Yes Elder Gadakhch, I do believe, and I will help make everyone believe, for I do not want to forever live in a world where I must fear those I am to worship or fear these highest powers. I want to live in a world of joy where people can worship without fear."

With these words, the child ran to tell their friends what they had just heard. They lived with a god who could help save them from the ungodly ones. The small army of children began to tell the entire town about the cat god among them. Slowly but surely, the entire town began to worship the cat. Shrines were built in every building and festivities were thrown in honor of the cat. Within a fortnight, the cat was the most powerful god and the irate gods were nearly gone. But with his last bit of power, Vaht, the former god king, threw down his spear.

At the same instant, Gadakhch fell down, a sharp stick piercing her heart. The one who had saved everyone was the only one who could not be saved.



Leeah Herbert - Harvest



Leeah Herbert - Decomposed

Returning

Lydia McCamant

Winner of the 2023 Sokol
High School Literary Awards
Contest - 2nd Place Award
for Poetry.

Do you ever walk across bridges?
Worn wood and moss and lichen,
Ragged corners and rusty nails and rotting logs,
Bushes creeping on each side,
Their branches so overgrown that the bridge almost
Disappears.

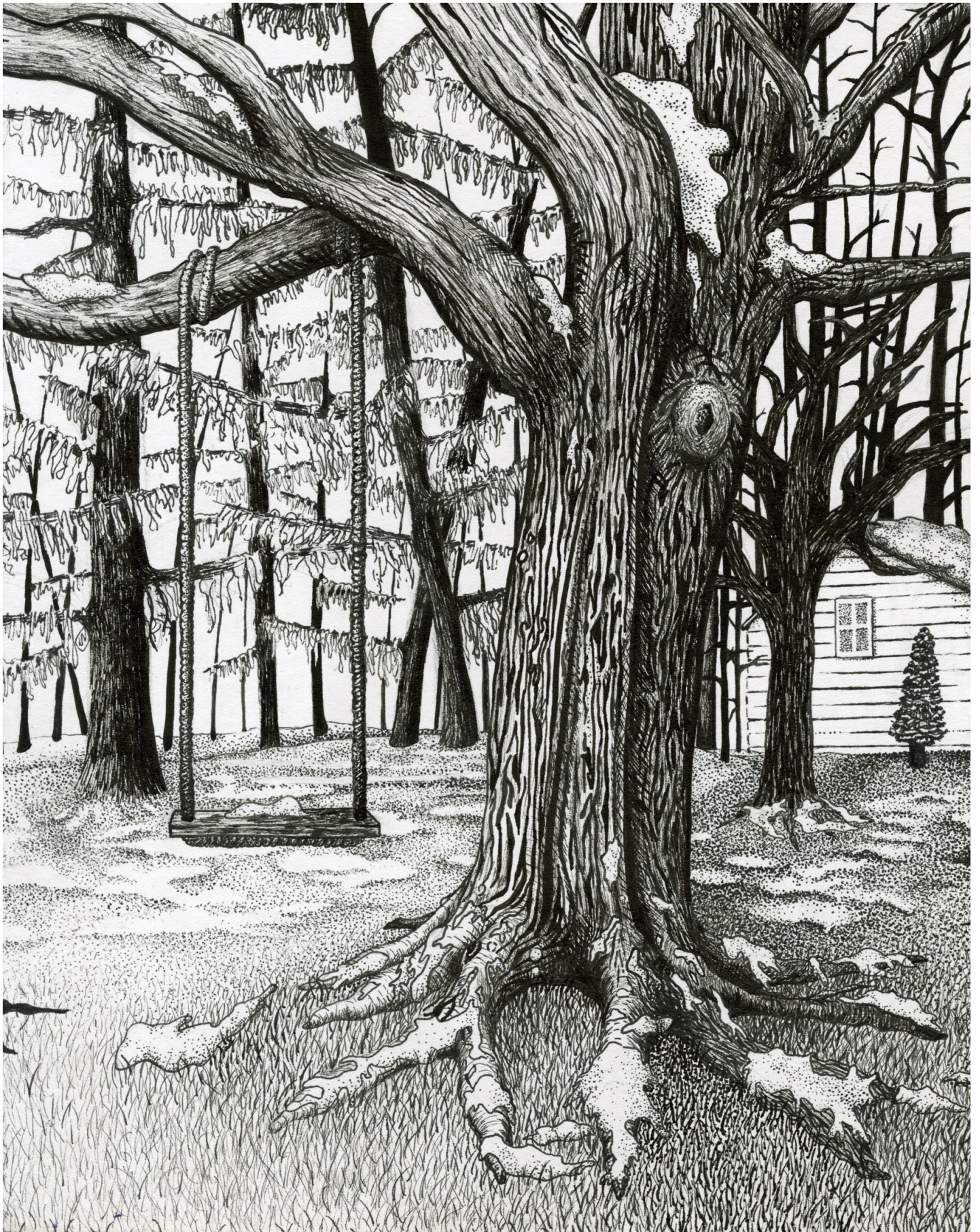
The sun comes down in spots,
Like freckles on the wood.
Do you remember
Do you remember when they came and put those planks down?
Did they know what the bridge would become?

I wonder sometimes
If you are exiled.
I've decided instead that you're
Returning.

I'll cross with you.
But you can't come back.
No, you can't come back.



Anna Borrelli - Seasons



Leeah Herbert

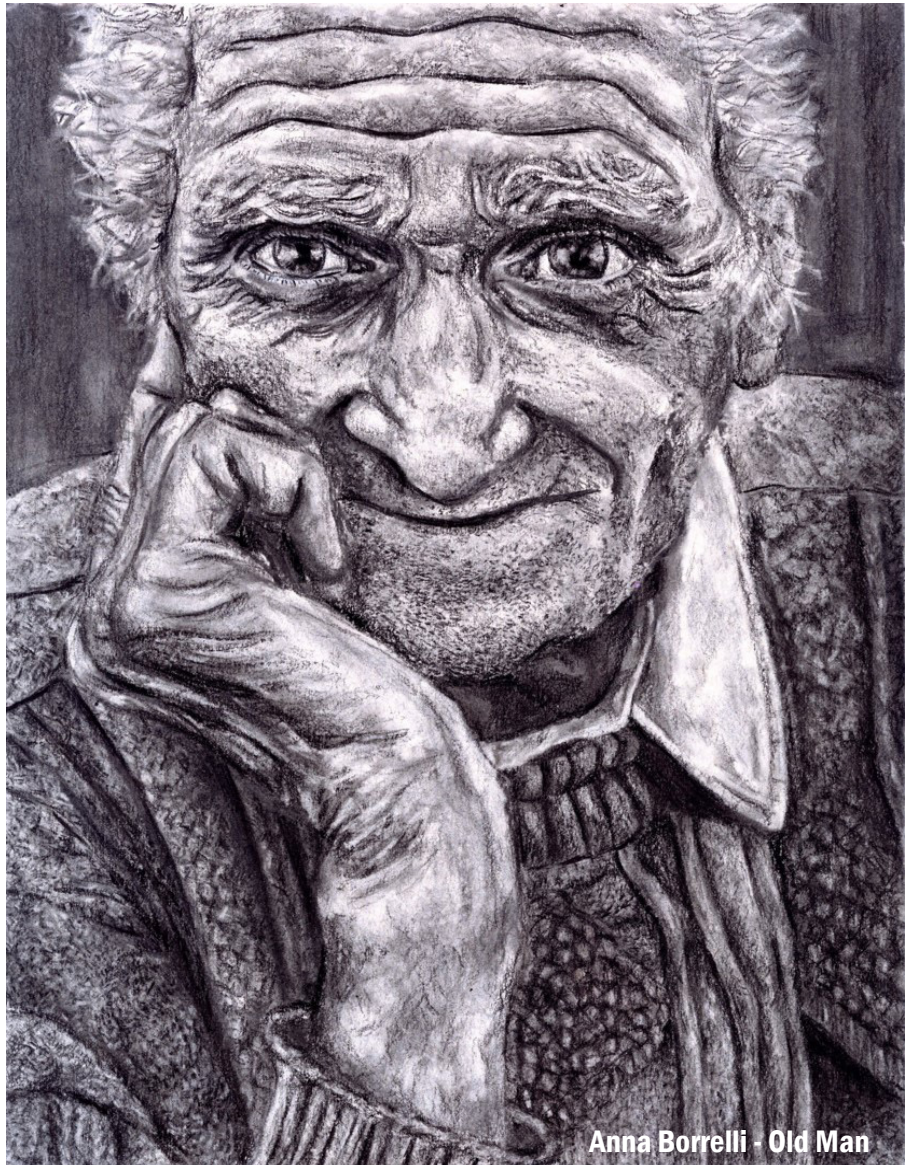
Books in My Life

Erin Smith

There is a bookstore on Jefferson Road. It's tucked away in a corner, so no one really notices it. Oscar Black, who runs it, is eighty-seven, and doesn't like it when you say "have a good day." Instead, he says "Life is too short, don't have a good day. Have a good life." A couple months ago I went to Bookends. I got a little carried away. I bought eleven well-loved paperbacks. Sometimes you hit the jackpot and find the scratchings of literature lovers smushed in the narrow margins. I bought a copy of Dante's *Inferno*. There were a few copies there, but I picked this one because of the aged yellowing pages. When I got home, I flipped through the books I had bought. *The Inferno* had a big advertisement in the back. The advert stated that *by the year 2000, 2 out of 3 Americans will be illiterate. Volunteer against illiteracy. The only degree you need is a degree of caring.* I laughed to myself at their dramatic exaggeration. But what were they defining as literacy? The ability to read and write? Or did they mean that most Americans will not grow up with the love for reading and learning? This scenario does seem feasible.

My friends say reading is "inefficient" and that they "can find the same experiences in a summary or movie." That's simply not true. Books have made me kinder and more grounded, without them I would have lost hope a long time ago. When we finish a good book, it does not simply leave our brain, it leaves our brains branded with ideas. Putting down a book is not just a physical action, but a mental one too. Reading teaches you empathy. When you are reading, you are transported into another world, one that you most likely disagreed with before you started turning the pages. The experience of reading cannot be replicated.

Last week I was Meredith Dardenne walking around Dellecher's Shakespeare Conservatory. Today I am Camilla Macaulay from Donna Tartt's *The Secret History*, flawed and stronger for it, beautiful throughout the trauma. When I look out my window, I see the little rain droplets arrange themselves into the leading women of Romantic novels. I create my own world.



Anna Borrelli - Old Man

The Pond Girl

Lydia McCamant

Opal

Two months ago, May's family moved into a house down the road. It's a big brown house, with white trim on the windows and a roof with moss and dirt and leaves. The first time I noticed them was when I was going down the road after my dog that had wiggled under the gate. Down at the brown house, there was a man standing near the road, knocking fence posts into the dirt. When I went home and told my dad about it, he muttered about how stupid that man must have been to put up a wire fence around a house.



"That's the kind for cattle. Not children."

On the first day of school that year, I met May. And May told me about Opal.

When May first met Opal, there were five lines of a wire fence between them.

May was playing pretend with her brother near the back porch. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw a girl standing at the edge of the yard. May got up and went down the yard, going slow as to not scare the girl.

May went up to the fence, close enough so that she could have touched it with her fingers had she reached her hand out.

The girl's hair was dark, and she wore a brown coat with a fur lined hood. It was funny to wear a coat in the summer.

"Who are you?" May had asked the girl.

"I'm Opal. Who are you?"

And May had said, "May."

Just then, May's mom pushed the screen door open with her hip, cupped her hands to her mouth, and shouted, "DINNER!"

So May left the fence and joined her brother and they retreated indoors to eat chicken and potatoes and green beans with butter on them.

Well, at least that's what May told me. But I'm a year older than her and I know that Opal isn't real. Because there have been other times. Other times that just don't make sense.

Once we were walking home from school together. May was telling me that Opal had come over before dinner last night and they had pretended to be cowboys and run up and

down the big hill, galloping their wild cowponies and lassoing cattle. I told her that I wanted to meet Opal. She said that Opal didn't like me because I was scary. So I told her how that didn't make any sense because I wasn't scary at all. Finally, she agreed to bring Opal with her when she came to my house before dinner.

And I waited on my front step for her, soccer ball pressed between my palms and thighs.

A while went by, and then she came. My yard is long and it's a little hard to see to the mailbox. I squinted as I saw her come down the road, all alone.

Halfway across the yard, she stopped and turned to her side. She shook her hands as if she was arguing, and I could hear her saying something. Then, she turned back towards me and started walking again, glancing once over her shoulder as if there were someone behind her.

May came up to the step and faced me.

"I thought you were bringing Opal."

"She doesn't like to play soccer. She got scared and left."

"Why would soccer make someone scared?"

"I don't know."

"Well, I don't know either," I huffed as I stood up.

There's not many people in our neighborhood. That was what my mom told me before we went to dinner. My brothers were complaining. She said that we had to be friendly to the neighbors because there were so few.

So we walked down the street to the brown house with white trim on the windows. My dad muttered something to my mom as we walked up the driveway, and then we were on the porch and knocking on the door. May's mom opened the door. Inside, it was warm. This house's windows were all closed, even though my mom had made us open all of ours because the day was so nice.

We ate dinner in the dining room. The lights there were brighter than the rest of the house. Dinner was chicken and potatoes and green beans with butter on them. The green beans were a little cold, so the butter didn't melt and sat in a mushy square. I ate everything, but my brothers didn't eat the green beans and my mom glared at them.

After dinner, May took me upstairs and down the hall to her room. In my room, there are toys and pictures and fun things. In May's room, there isn't anything fun. She has a dresser that is taller than her. She has a bed, not a kid's bed, but the sort of bed for parents. There's a rug that's sort of rough and very brown. And on the wall there is just one thing: a painting of a family that doesn't really look like May or May's family.

"Who's that?" I asked her.

"That?" She turned to look at the painting and pointed. "I don't know."

"Why is it in your room?"

"I don't know. But it's fine. I like them there."

I didn't like them so much. But I knew better than to say that.

"Opal likes them too. She says they look like royalty."

I just nodded. They looked like farmers to me.

She showed me some other things and we went back downstairs.

Our parents were in the parlor. My mom and my dad were sitting on a sofa, across from May's mom and dad in armchairs. When they saw me coming down the stairs, my parents stood up.

"We'd oughta get going now," my dad told them, patting his hands on his jeans.

"The boys will never get to bed if we stay any later," my mom explained.

After thank yous and you're welcomes and come over agains, we were on the porch and then going down the gravel driveway.

My dad was leaned over a little, talking quietly to my mom.

"Moving back here after his parents die, but he's not gonna farm? What's a guy like that doing? I don't get it."

My mom just shrugged and then shouted at my brothers for pinching each other.

Some time after that I was at her house again. We sat on her back porch, our bare feet swinging off the edge, over the dirt beds where flowers were meant to be. May's feet were paler than mine.

"Opal said she was going to be a doctor when she grew up."

"A doctor?" I repeated, twisting a piece of grass between my fingers. "How's she gonna do that out here? You have to go to the city to be a doctor."

"She said she was gonna take the train to a city to learn to be a doctor."

"How's she gonna do all that if she can't even play soccer?"

"Don't be mean, May!"

"I'm not being mean. I'm just telling the truth."

May scowled, staring out across the lawn.

"If I'm telling the truth, I'll say that I don't think Opal is real. I think you have an imaginary friend."

May shook her head. "No, I don't!"

"You're such a liar!"

She pushed herself up from the edge of the porch



Saskia Owen - Jesus

and stood over me. “Why are you so mean to Opal? What did she ever do to you?”

“I’ve never even met her!” I exclaimed, shaking my hands. “You said she was scared of me!”

May whipped her head back to look at me and her lip quivered. Slapping both hands over her face, she ran back inside, pushing the screen door open with her elbow.

I walked back home, stomping my bare feet with each step. May was crazy.

Then it was winter. May and I were going ice skating on the frozen pond, but we didn’t have any ice skates, so we just slipped around in our boots. The ice was thin in certain parts, which made it a bit risky, but since I’m a year older than May, I wasn’t scared at all.

We slipped around the pond. Our feet made long tracks in the snow that covered the ice, like we were skiing through fields of powder. The tracks crisscrossed and scrambled into a spider’s web of jumbled up mess. May almost fell over as she slipped around, and I laughed at her. She scowled and then lost her footing, falling on her butt.

After a moment, May pushed herself up, her boots sliding around on the ice. The second she was standing, she pushed both her hands out, shoving my chest. I fell to the ground and slid across the pond, coming to rest with a crack. Snow went up the back of my coat as I came to a stop. Slowly, I rolled over, with an even louder crack. In the area where I’d landed, the snow had been brushed away by my jacket, leaving the bare ice. On my stomach, I planted my hands on the ice to push myself up and as my face lifted from the ice, I saw —

Her.

A girl, beneath the ice.

Her face was tinted blue and her hair was dark as night. She had her hands pressed to the ice beneath mine. The hood of her coat had slipped off her head and bobbed around her shoulders, rimming her face in a loop of white fur.

I gasped and pushed away from her hands, scrambling away from the spot where I had landed, ignoring the ice cracks beneath my knees and elbows as I crawled. A few feet back, I stumbled to my feet and ran, slipping with each step and screaming.

Farther from the edge of the pond was May, collapsed to her knees on the ice. Her head was slumped forwards. Dark hair was everywhere, swirling in the wind and wiggling like fingers around her ears.

I ran towards her, my steps uneven.

“May!”

Her shoulders shook and she struggled to her feet.

“There’s someone in the ice! We need to go, May!”

When she looked up at me, her eyes were blank white.

“Go?” she said, her voice a bit deeper than usual.

I slid to a stop. “May?”

“I thought you wanted to meet Opal. I thought you wanted to play with us.”

“What?”

“Don’t you want to meet Opal?”

Two Voices

Frankie Bellone

Did I drive you away?
My heart weeps,
A yearn for you.
Why didn't you stay?
You made me keep
You.

*The spirit haunts,
Follow in shadows,
Shows up in songs and memory,
For the spirit haunts.
My heart wallows,
The spirit won't let go of the memory.*

The spirit won't let go of the memory,
My heart won't let go of the memory.
For the spirit haunts,
Travels within songs,
Travels without a font.
My wallowing heart longs.

The spirit follows silently,
Shows up in words and color combinations.
For the spirit haunts *and my heart wants,*
To part silently.
The spirit shows up in combinations,
Combinations of words that I want.

Combinations of words that I want,
(*No, not want*) I need to have meaning again.
For the spirit must haunt.
The spirit makes my heart feign,
Feign happiness; *and wants,*
For the spirit must haunt.

Your haunting spirit,
Traveling through shadows,
That shows up in songs and memories,
I always hear it.
Despite traveling silent through shadows,
I hear your haunting spirit through memories.



Rose Majeed - Imposter Syndrome



Amelia Samuelson

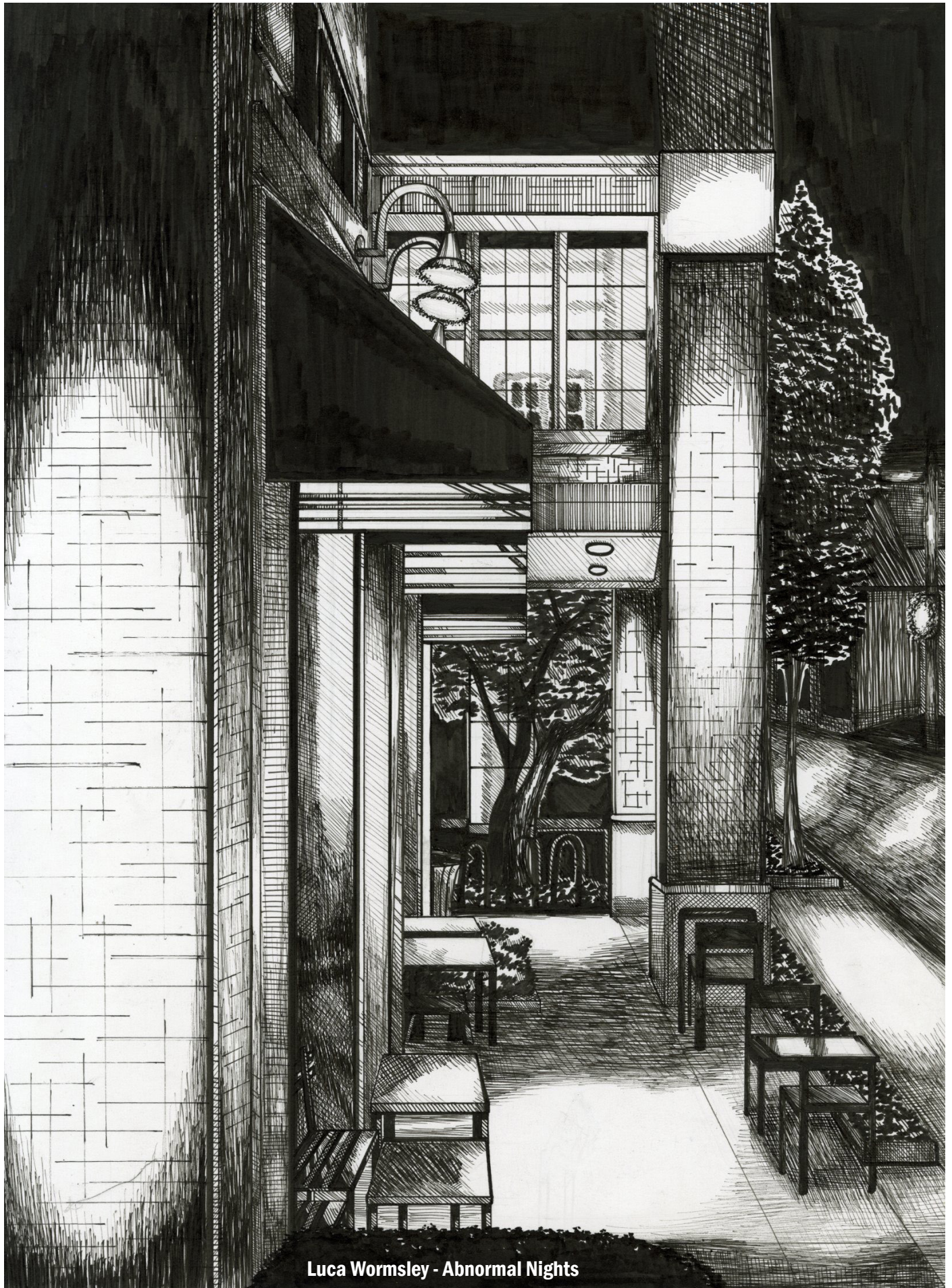


Fortune

Luca Wormsley

Thick, warm cloth spills from my arms
Folding with my elbows
And flowing off my back.
Beads and buttons straggled along the dip in my sides
Tiny chimes trickling cold along my jaw
And little jewels glowering molten against my skin
Loose stone feigns against the weight of my feet
Draped with thick socks and wood shoes
Arms anchored towards the greater cliffside
Chin tipping towards the edge
And eyes caught in the veil
Which when lifted up by hands far steadier
Paints glass ornaments opaque
Weaves clay pots into a braid
Lets metal wilt and thin off my shoulders
Rolls buttons and beads into small seeds
Which clatter at my feet and roll into cracks in the stone tile
And can no longer be seen.
Heavy fabric spills from my arms
Falling with my elbows
And flowing off my chest
Sinking into the stone of the cliffside
And forgetting the footsteps sunk into them as I leave.
Fortune—
My life has changed since.

Luca Wormsley - Atonement



Luca Wormsley - Abnormal Nights



Amelia Samuelson - Blue Woman