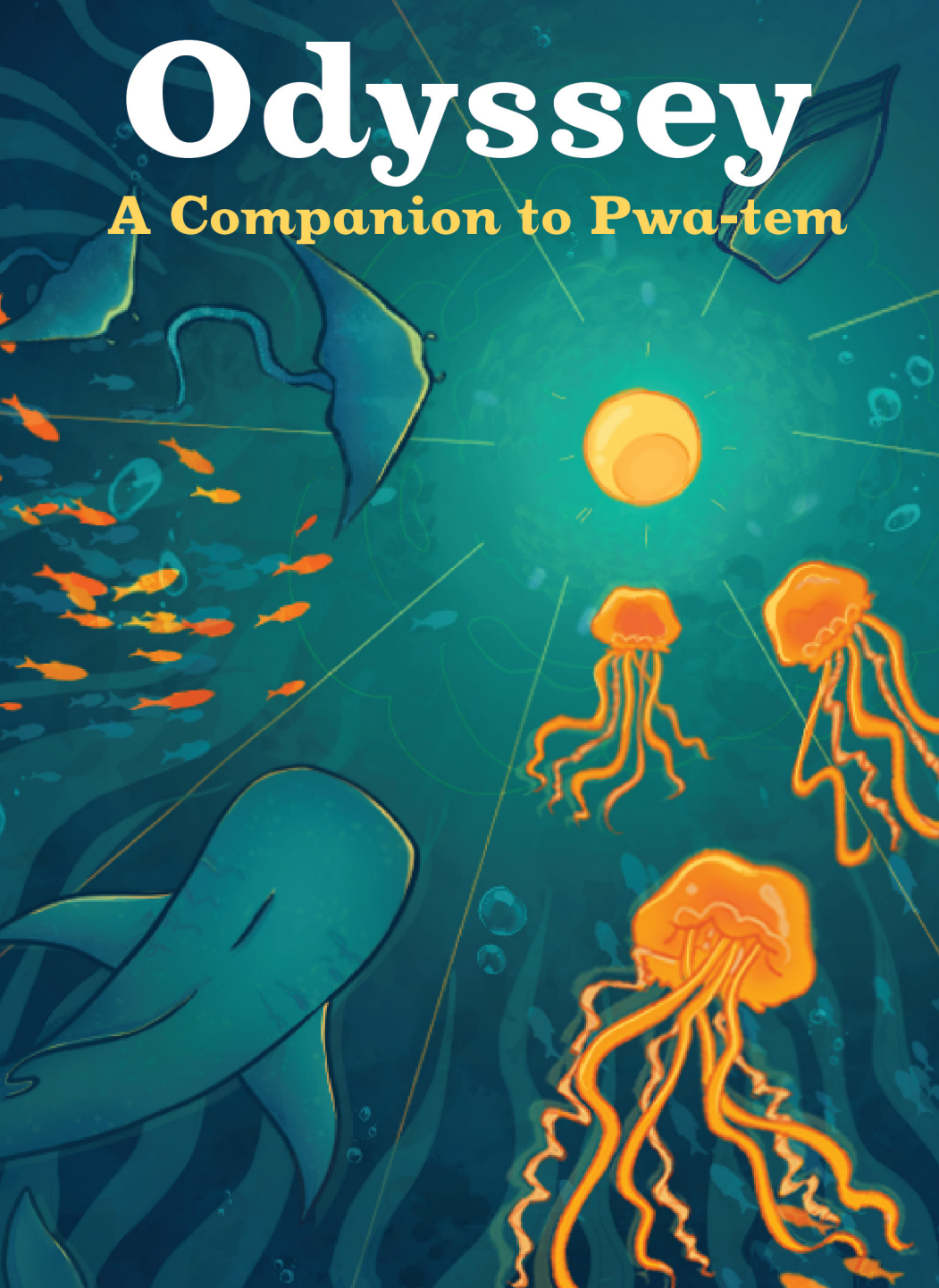


Odyssey

A Companion to Pwa-tem



**“Tell the rabble
my name is Cabell.”**

- James Branch Cabell to his editor, to help people learn how to pronounce his name. Cabell used the word derogatively but we are taking it back. These pages will showcase the writing and illustrations of our rabble-the ordinary students of VCU.

Odyssey

noun

1. a long wandering or voyage usually marked by many changes of fortune.

Masthead

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Thank you.

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Ballad of the War-Bird

Noah S. Elliston

See the bird from the outland, see it c'mon around again,
See it fly, near here on by, oh way up high.
See that bird from the outland see its feathery blood soaked soar,
See its wings spread, its seen bloodshed, fly from war.
Arrows from the night, seemed to linger on the sky,
Twists and turns from crafty wings still kept on high!
Oh it's flight was descending as an arrow that offered mending,
Struck her leg dead, she's still wingspread, fly on more.
Burdened in the flight still kept high up in the sky;
Soldiers screamed, "she must not make it, she must die!"
Oh poor bird in these outlands,
You have but a mile more, keep that cool air in your soar,
Born to work within their war, a job done again once more,
Oh why she flies, still not knows why, she'll yet still soar.

Kirsten Sturgill



The Storm

Connor Walker

In the distance, just on the horizon I
spied a storm as the winds were rising
High on a cliff, solid and firm
I watched the ocean swirl and
churn I felt the wind blow and
howl

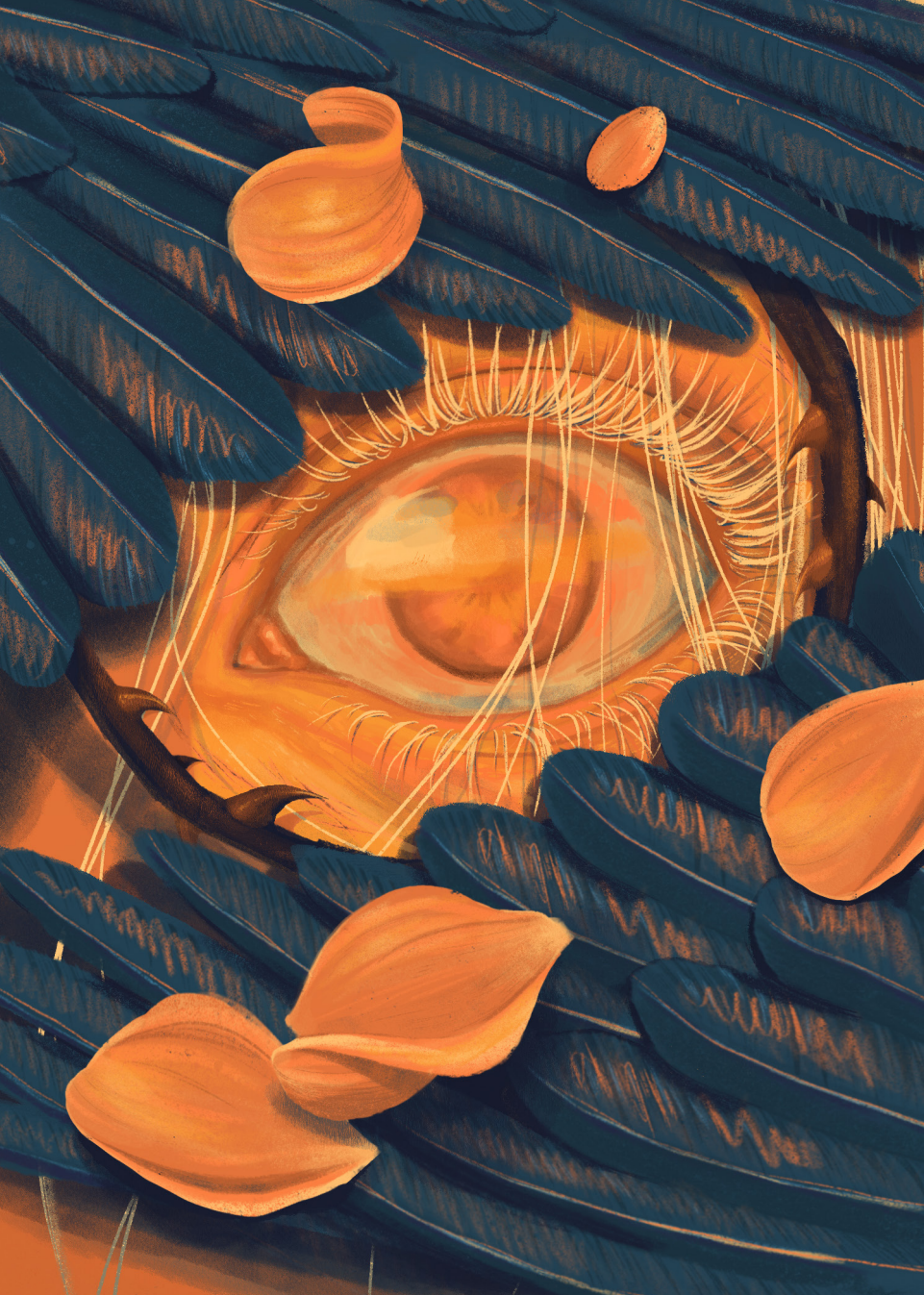
The sky began to moan
and growl The winds whipped past
And the lighting flashed
And before I knew it, the storm crept
past The shoreline of that churning sea
Approaching, sights set right on me
Before I knew it, my flight began The
storm on my heels, I ran and ran The
tempest, like a shark it sought For my
life, to snuff and blot
Despite my flight, despite my fear

Sofia Rahnama

The blustering storm grew ever
near No matter my effort, try as I
might Mother nature would win
this fight That starving storm, did
overtake Consume me whole and
seal my fate As the storm buried
me in its hate What came next, I
am unsure

The storm made it all a blur
Perhaps an hour, maybe more
Was I in the storm's stock and
store In its bowels, in its rain
Its unending howls within my
brain The storm had passed,
blown away

But in the storm is where I stay





Headlights

Jessica Schultz

On our anniversary we took the train and got off
on the wrong stop when stares from strangers at
our interlocked fingers blinded us.

We missed our dinner reservation and I got mean
after two drinks at the bar.

Manhattans with maraschino don't kiss her
the way she wanted me to.

Asleep in hotel sheets, her body begged
to be held. Instead I wandered the carpeted hallways
searching for the husk of our past selves.

If Virginia is for lovers, then New York is where they come
to die. Hurtling toward the dark abyss
of home the next night, we shaved off years
I couldn't keep as a promise.

From the driver's seat
she glanced at my silhouette glowing red
against the tail lights. When she caught my eye
she hit a deer on I-95.

The miserable stag left a dent and a dead body
that she dragged onto the shoulder at dusk.

Nights later I stopped to find the deer carcass

and climbed inside.

Tell me how her headlights stopped you dead in your
tracks and how her good heart pulled you away. This
bed of rot and hollow bones, rid me
of a body that has forgotten how to love.

Soiled in this deer's blood,
I am lulled to sleep by rumbling cars
speeding on the overpass.

The headlights don't blind us anymore.

When I awaken
under a cloudless Virginia sky,

I walk home plucking flesh
from my sleeve while rehearsing an apology.
But the house is empty,
apart from my boots dirty by the door, my toothbrush
still in its cup, and strands of my hair littering the
floor.
This is how it ends. The mangled deer, dead
by bone-crush and a silent break-up.



Flight of Fancy

Ellie Rushing

A distant land waits for me

I'll pack my things in a small suitcase

Maybe I can find myself far away

In a scenic place you only see in movies

Oops I forgot my maps, I'll be right back

I dream of meeting a handsome stranger

We'll travel together and fall in love

Then raise sheep in the Italian countryside

Oops I need my passport, I'll be right back

We'll stroll the streets and drink coffee At

one of those cafe's we saw in a magazine
We'll take a boat ride down a blue canal And
listen to music playing on the streets

Oops I need my wallet, I'll be right back

We'll live an exciting life and grow older together
And I'll gradually forget my past
We'll travel to as many places as possible
Collecting as many experiences as possible

Oops I forgot my ID.

But one day I'll miss home
And make the plane ride back
I didn't realize how long I was gone
I somehow still felt lost.

Oops I forgot the time.

I'll arrive back to my friends and family

Back to the neighborhood I grew up in
I'll realize I didn't need to travel
Across the globe to find myself
It turns out everything I was seeking was here the whole time.



The Fibonacci Curse

Madeline Trice

I killed my brother today.

Down under the bridge on the forest road.

We were taking the long way home and stopped to get a drink.

On the underside of the old stone walkway, I saw it painted in gore; a perfect
spiraling curve curling on itself.

Something was at the spiral's center. I felt it pounding in my bones, pulling me
closer. Without thinking I reached out toward the mural of viscera and touched
my finger to the coagulated paint.

Pain shot through me, drawing me rigid. Something cold hit my veins and my
heart thumped audibly, rocketing the sensation all throughout my body. The
spiral on the wall was twisting inward and disappearing up my arm. It ran a
circuit through me until the cold collected in my mind, calcifying into a
blind rage.

The wretched gurgle of searing hatred and unbridled fury enveloped me. Consumed me. Every inch of sensation hit like hot branding irons rammed against the tender flesh of my very soul. The only exception was that singular anger, an oasis of euphoric mania in a desert of torments. Something filtered reality as it passed through my perception and percolated into thoughts and feelings. It twisted my world into a tapestry of violence. There was nothing left but the pain I felt and the pain I knew I must inflict.

I was only there in flashes after that. A few thin moments of helplessly watching between eons of naught. Standing waist-deep in the water holding something under while it thrashed in my arms. Darkness. Dragging the cooling corpse by its increasingly rigid legs down the road into the forest, toward home. Gone. Stopping at the old abandoned well at the edge of town and prying free a loose rock from its dilapidated mouth. Emptiness. Crouched over the chest of my dead brother, dipping my fingers in between the cracks in his skull and bringing them up red and dripping. Nowhere. Painting a perfect spiral on the smooth stones of the well in sanguine shades of fratricide. Dead. My finger tracing out the line to exactly the shape I had first seen at the bridge, then carrying out the pattern just a little bit further.



Swimming With Ghosts

Kelly Ritenour

On the other side of the ocean,
I indulge in ripe salads on church lawns
With wire-frame wearing musicians
Somersaulting by the Baltic Sea
Skirts rising in the sixty degree winds.

I packed modestly but
The German girls wear slits on their thighs
And tank-tops showing strips of stomach
So, I ditch the ruby sweaters and slacks
At the nearest Top Shop
And show skin as I toast some other American goodbye
By the pickled seawater
Against the beams of the pier.

He asked, "What keeps you alive?"

I told him the stories I store in my bag

Of the girl with the deep accent

Who I follow day by day through this colorful world I find unfamiliar.

Who gestured to me and called me her best friend.

Of the travelers whose mouths were shut from misunderstandings.

Of the drunken boy on my arm who said he found a better place to be.

Of the girl who I waited with at the train station whose loss could
rattle warzones

But whose smile could split the sea in half.

Of the person who looked me in the eyes and told me they were so proud of
how far I've come

Of the girl who asked me what she should do for me

If I lose my control.

Of the sunset I never got to see

Until my last night on the terrace

Of the girl who told me with every goodbye we needed this dance.

Of the people who told me this life will grow on you in time.

Of the friends I may never see again whose words I will carry with me for the
rest of my life.

I sink into the city on the U-Bahn
Grabbing bottles of bubbly water
As I retch in the bathroom of a Jugendherberge
Wondering how I survived this long
How I allowed myself this life.

Language barriers are diluted by the impressive power of tic-tac-toe
And monster movies.

I have an invitation to France from a fellow exchange student
A cottage outside Paris,
An open invitation from my German friends
To an apartment nestled in the cream-colored siding
And cherry-red roofs of Berlin architecture.

I write poems raw, by hand
On multicolored notebook pages garnished in
Disposable film and footnotes from friends
And feel blessed to be a teenager.
He asked, "What keeps you alive?"
Before this, I wasn't living.

Modern Odyssey

Angela Oandasan

Immobile but still moving.

Life's journey stuck in place.

A single person, clawing desperately out of

The depths of life's lows.

Yet still eating, breathing, working, slaving.

Shipwreck drifting in a storm.

Immobile but still moving.

City skyline, car lights flowing.

A society of freezing fear.

Individuals, people, lives.

Hoping to not be dragged into the shadows.

Never to be heard or believed again.

Wandering as herds of Nobodies to hide.

Immobile but still moving.

The world keeps turning.

But is it really?

Oppression, division, scarcity: the list goes forever on.

How do the scales of progress tip?

Which paths continue on, have met dead ends?

A winding trail laden with blockades, an Odyssey towards home.

Moving on towards home after being immobile for so long.

Oh how I long to see it.

A home of hope for the future.

Jaime Ryan





Jessica Jirapinya Schultz

Kirsten Sturgill



Cheese and Flowers

Jessica Nguyen

As the blood trickled down the sidewalk, Pistachio couldn't help but feel a sense of accomplishment rush through his veins. He scurried across the street to grab the piece of cheese with an excited smile on his face, the malicious glint in his eyes shining brighter than before.

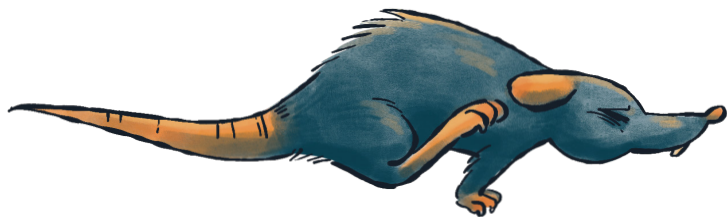
Walnut had fulfilled his purpose and Pistachio was finally satisfied. Pistachio hadn't always been like this. There was a time where that malicious glint had not even existed, but rather was occupied by heart shaped pupils that would stare in adoration at his lover. Everything he had done was to keep her happy and healthy, and even now, months after her death, he was still trying to appease her. As the months went on, the town had begun celebrating the one responsible for her death, all while he weeped at her grave - one that hadn't even been properly marked yet. Her death was too sudden and completely unexpected. They had planned out their lives together, to get married, have pups, and live out their old age, happy and content. With all that planning, neither had ever morbidly thought about the possibility of one leaving the other any time soon - so there was never a need to bring up grave sites and funeral wishes. Yet, even if her death wasn't so sudden, so brutal, he's sure he'd never be used to her absence.

Weeks of sorrow turned into months, and eventually, those months became filled with rage and Pistachio could no longer recognize himself. His dreams that were once filled with the comfort of her presence, were now replaced with the horrid memory of discovering her cold, bloodied body in the damp alleyway with nothing but a shiny bracelet to identify her with.

He turned around, scurrying to find help, only to realize the crowd had erupted in cheers and kept their attention on a certain, raggedy individual. Pistachio stared at the crowd, as the individual was lifted into the air, making eye contact with him.

The smirk that graced his face left. Pistachio feeling uneasy, desperate to return to the decapitated body of his lover.

As his fingers traced over the cold, expensive marble of the grave marker, his cries died down and with dark eyes, he stood up and walked away, quietly muttering, "I'll be back with a present for you soon, darling."



**Read the rest of Cheese and Flowers at
pwatem.com**



So Long, Automaton
Kelly Ritenour

And with blue-metal magic

You managed to overtake

Cobalt ridges and old brooks

View the intestines of open houses

A monarchy of rivers and turquoise mountains

Pass through sugared glass

Outstretch present-tense

And depress into the famed grooves of old mythologies

Let fresh pink simmer into salted nectarine

Baked in sweet associations

Drive past the sour of a pre-loved place

Ride along the run-on sentence

And taste the passage of time

Time which moves with hardened tar

And silver music

Fruit and dried fables

Branch past interstate routes

Sand breathes like a biloquist

Two melodies made sisters

On screened in porches

Light pools old chlorine recollections

Seeping fleshed evenings

Until pruned past old earth

A family tree of labyrinth roads

Breaks off into beaches and

Divorced history

Roots crushed by empty rubber

Fertilized with fiber carpet

Young grass turns to lose strings

Made into skeleton keys

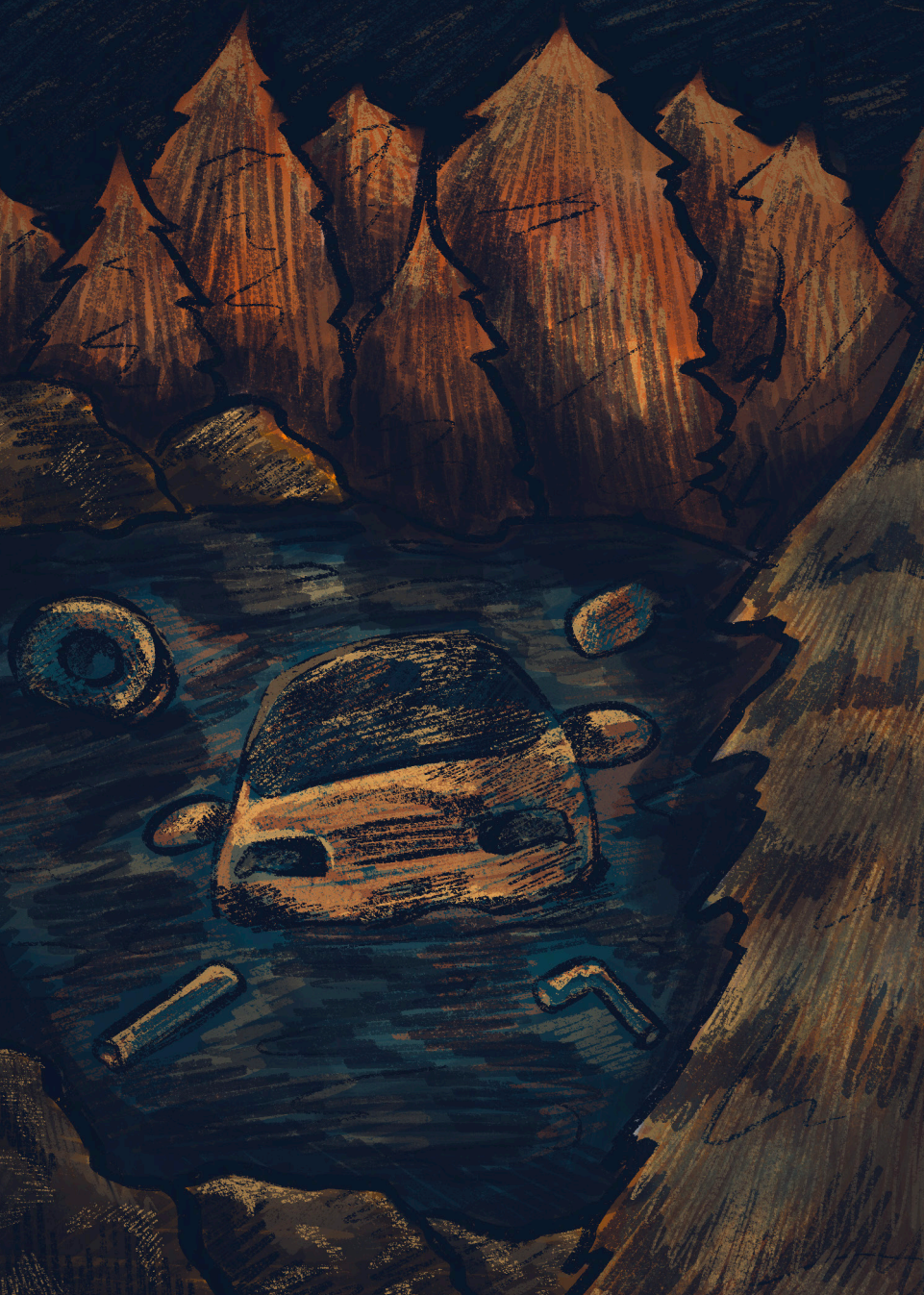
Bones born to a drenched body

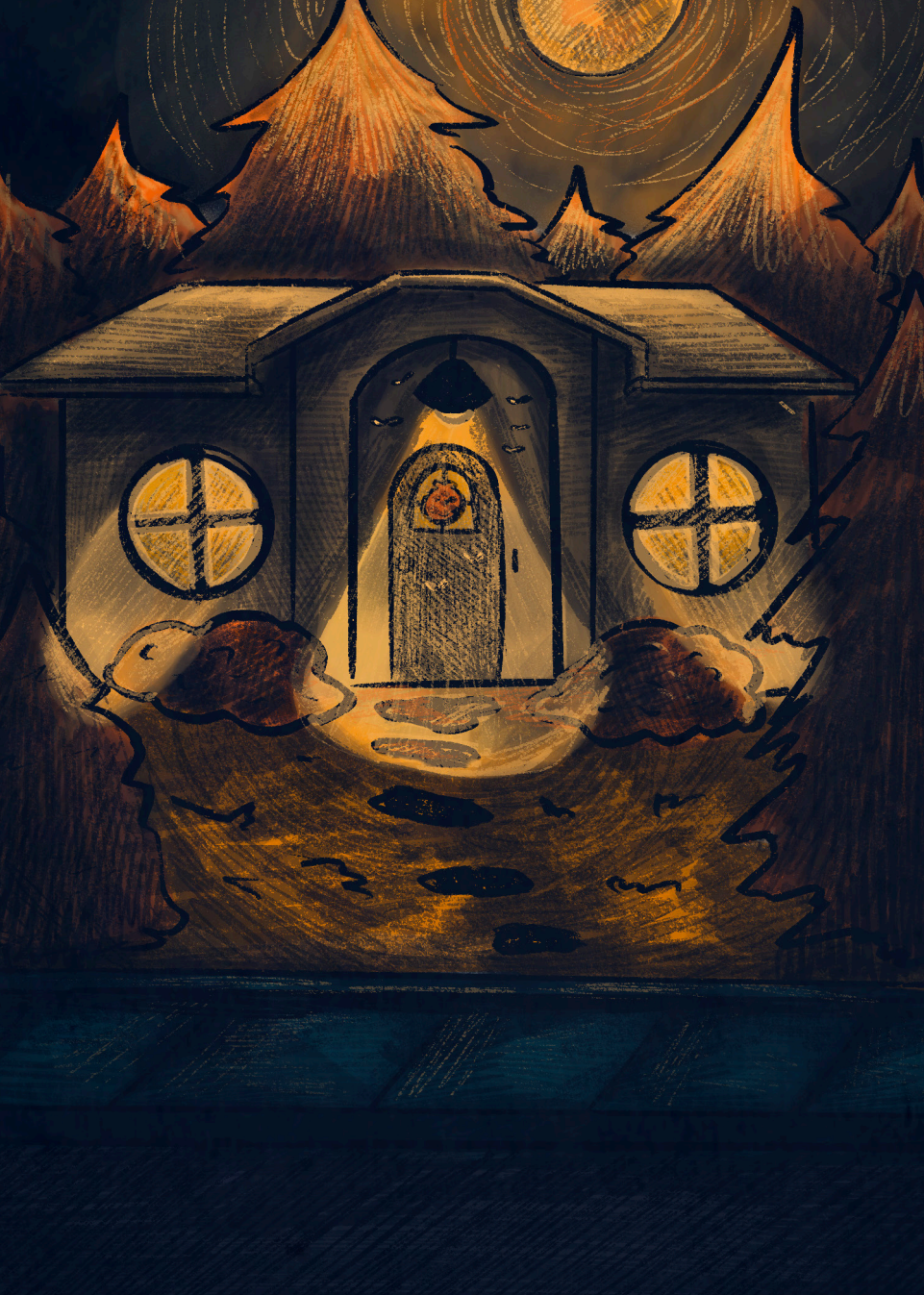
That floods a flat planet

Stones recall salt and young skin

And with one last breath of stale exhaust
You managed to drown the arc in a junkyard
A childhood of overpriced repairs
And fast Virginia, tang from time
Memories lost to a metal sea

Reese Cilley





POMEGRANATE SEEDS

Jessica Jirapinya Schultz

I haven't come home for dinner in six months.

The porch light stays on to guide me like an aircraft runway.

The bulb hums. The bugs buzz.

Moths do a little dance when they get too close.

I know aching desire, I feel its burn
and how it hurts to be scorched alive.

My mother cries

but tears don't make a harvest when death's still in the air.

And I'm not talking about the bugs.

There's a stink of rotting roses curled over
in a Mexican Coke bottle.

She always prefers the taste of sugar cane.

Ash piles up in the crystalline tray.

I miss the perfume of cigarettes she carries.

Reese Cilley

I miss it in the browning, faded green wallpaper.
I miss it enveloping me every Christmas and my birthday.
Mama, I would say,
Wait for me when you get to heaven, okay?

She always said that she would
and that a world without me
is a world she didn't want to exist in.
Well I'm in Hell now, Mama. I'm in Hell.
When he took me—
a basement beneath the church,

under the earth,
he told me it was a sin
only if we got caught. And that he never gets caught.
I became his Death Bride, his lover for the winter
who still shivers against his touch.
How much of a bleak season can you call my fault?

I stopped counting
the number of times he spilled amber over me.
Fossilized like a moth, I am inside who I was.

My yearbook picture plastered on the side
of every Winn-Dixie's carton is replaced
with another poor soul who doesn't believe in a god anymore.

This stranger's sacrilege,
with his handsome eyes and callous smile, teach me
no one else is gonna save me.

The preacher will still give his sermon.
My mother will still be out searching.
Don't start a forest fire or funeral pyre yet.

But then this morning,
down on one knee at the foot of my cot,
six pomegranate seeds are cupped like communion
in the palm of his rotting hands.
He presses the bleeding fruit to my lips;
red so rare it tastes of nickel and blood.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be undone.

And from a cleft in the earth, a slant of sunlight,
I see my mother. I see home.

Colophon

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