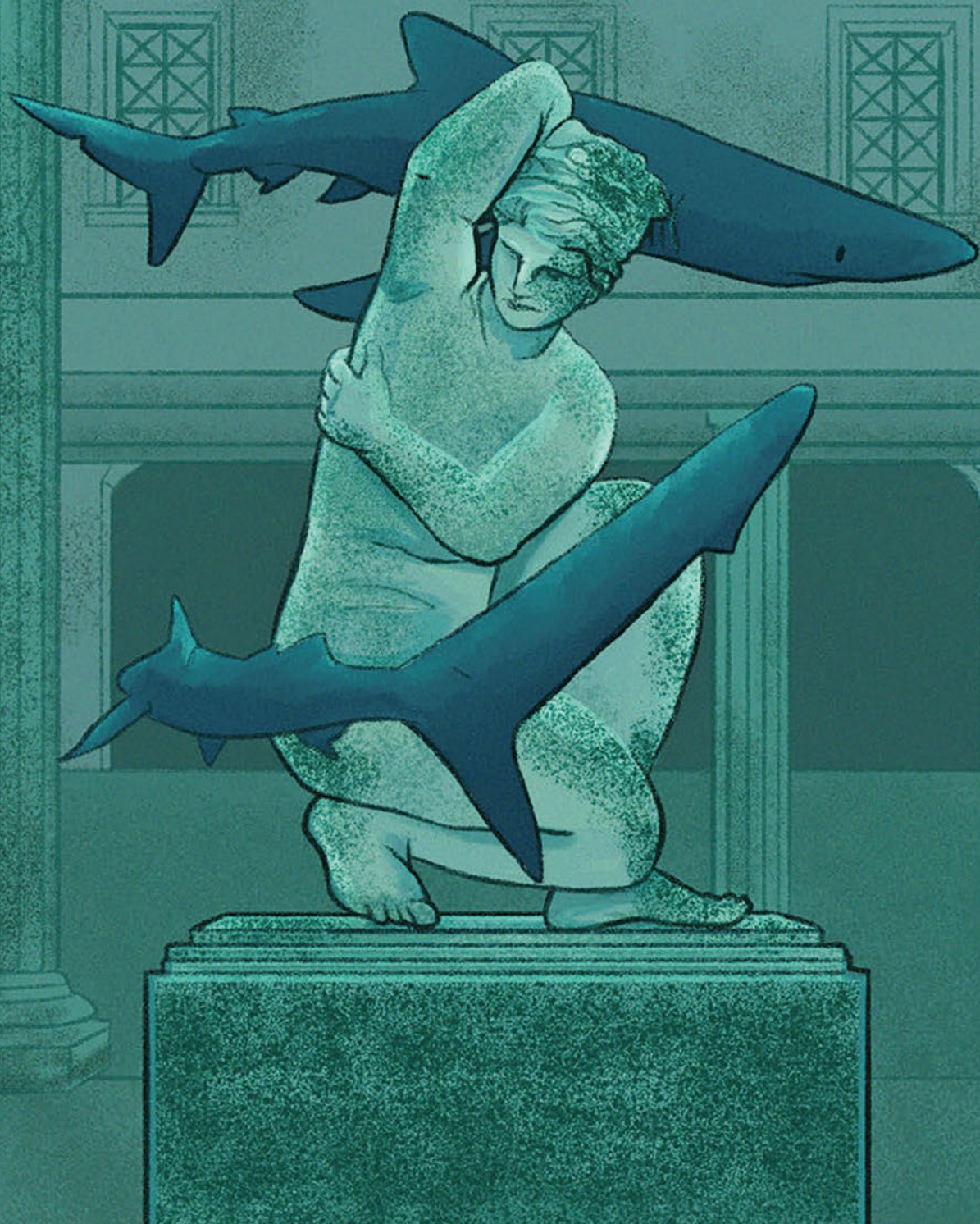


# (PWA-TEM)

AN ANTHOLOGY OF LITERATURE AND ART





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# *(pwa-tem)*

1. A fictitious French province created by James Branch Cabell that serves as the setting of several of his fantasy novels.
2. Virginia Commonwealth University's anthology of literature and art.

# Masthead

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Send us thoughts, questions, or concerns at [pwatem@gmail.com](mailto:pwatem@gmail.com).



# Editor's Note

**BEFORE I CAME TO VCU I HAD NO IDEA WHAT PWATEM WAS,** my first introduction to it was during my freshman year SOVO Fair. I've always had a love for writing and stories and knew instantly that Pwatem would be a great avenue to explore that. It was also a great place to go every Friday night and socialize since I have never been much of a people person. I would have never expected it to play such a big role in my time at VCU though. It has been a constant of my college career and has truly helped me to find myself and step out of my shell. It was because of Pwatem that I flew on an airplane for the first time for a conference.

This past year has been a journey for everybody as we adjusted to so many changes to the world. When I first applied to be the Editor in Chief of Pwatem I had so many plans on how I wanted the year to run with my staff. Unfortunately, converting those ideas to a virtual and covid safe environment was harder than I originally thought. Despite the difficulties, Pwatem still held in there and published our 2020 Rabble and 2021 Spring Anthology. I would not be able to do this without the help and support of my staff. Who honestly picked up a lot of my slack whenever things got too much to handle.

I can't even begin to describe the amazing people I have met here. Pwatem has always been a great community and is probably what I will miss most of all after graduation. The time I spent with the organization has been something I will never forget and I can't wait to see how it will change in the future.

Thanks for making my college worth it.

**MARLON MCKAY**

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# Ontitled

CHASE OBER

Welcome  
to el Paraíso.  
Yesterday they  
replaced His face  
with a wanted poster  
but didn't offer any reward.  
I'm not sure if there was still a script  
to seguir, but, some of us were wondering  
if we could make our own colores. And the cielos  
raved a fortnight until all be left were sinners with no one  
to cast them down. The antichristo yelled, "we are Sendero Luminoso!"  
And then the militares climbed up dragging cruces for those  
that read the poster, saying "you've broken so many  
crimes, you'd have to go into debt just to be  
able to understand what I don't get paid  
to explain to you. In fact, maybe  
I should've charged you  
money upfront to  
read this. And  
maybe I  
Have."

ILLUSTRATION BY SID ESTELLE

# Ghosts that are Eternal

CHASE OBER

breaking your brain  
trying to think  
about what you think think  
thunk. But what  
didn't think, we shall thenk.  
What about our  
numberth sense is it  
to sense time?  
It is slower,  
but longer times  
go by faster.  
Or recorded time  
feels like forever.  
Can you count—  
the days don't go by?  
Smell of "dying" or  
grey hairs burning,  
melted broccoli,  
the center of gravity.  
Reminder of our sin's sense,  
drawn from Gregorian  
an elliptic tape,  
measuring always the now  
and forgetting it is time  
to stop



ANGEL'S DESCENT NOAH WILSON





*CW: SEXUAL VIOLENCE*

# Western Whisper

CHASE OBER

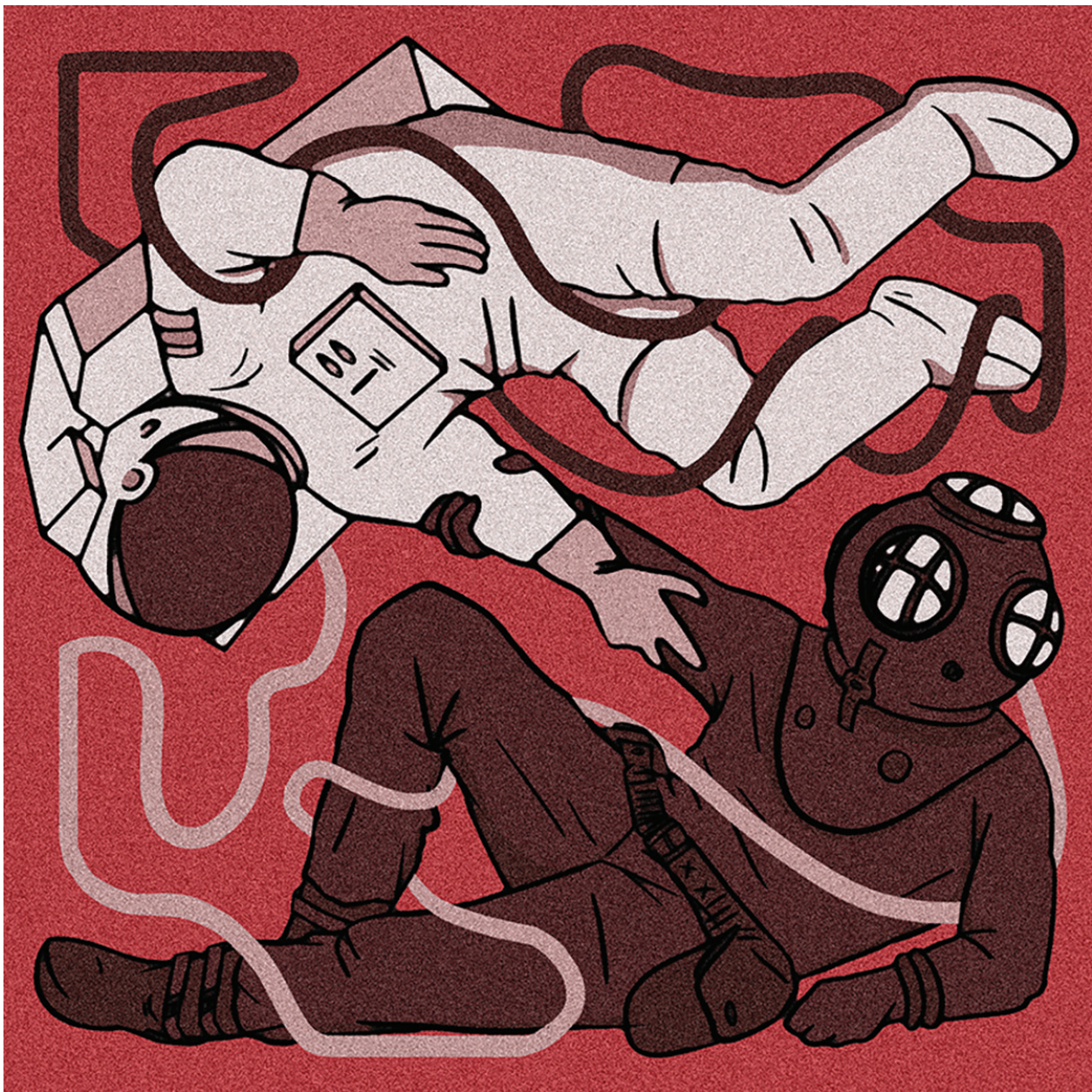
You speak of conquest  
when the world begs  
for mercy.

Man votes for peace  
as trees drop like flies.  
Silly natives, naive

Thinking they won't  
rape the rest of you.  
Red, blue, dead,

We're all under the same  
sky that lights up,  
a mushroom the size of God.





COMMUNICATOR CARLEIGH ROSS





SWABY KT NOWAK



# Angelic Behavior

IBTISAM SAID

Dear God, what am I good at?  
There have been days and times my courageous  
attitude has been brought up for questioning.  
When my aunt Helen didn't believe I could  
reach the top of the shelf to bring down her mug.  
Or when my sister Susan laughed at me when I said  
my biggest dream was to be on stage.  
How about that day at the beach, the group of girls  
snickered and squeaked at the sight of my stretch marks?  
Didn't they know it was a part of who I am?  
But I never let that hold me down.  
On Thursdays, I put my bright and brilliant apron  
on my sturdy, petite self and start my performance.

Despite the slight errors that come from my habit of overlooking--  
the measurements, expired items, and--  
oh my, when did that cumin get there and where is the cinnamon?  
It doesn't bother me—which spice goes in—the cake still delicious  
with its extra kick of flavor. Darling, if it's too much for you to handle,  
you may need a glass of water or to exit the room entirely.  
My confidence and poise will cover  
the confusion I assembled.  
*That* is what I am good at.

The yellow of sunflowers. A voice  
of an angel. Eyes sparkling brighter  
than the teeth of a little boy who's been at the dentist!

ILLUSTRATION BY NOAH WILSON

# Suppose

IBTISAM SAID

the clouds and their thorns decide  
to poke through the sky  
and a gush of orange!

the birds and the bees  
without direction  
crash into one another to find comfort.

children playing hopscotch  
up and down the streets  
suddenly outgrow their own  
childhoods, no longer wanting  
glitter and race cars  
they once cried for every Christmas.

I still enjoy my chilled  
soup, reminding me of warm nights out  
when I felt the ice down my neck,  
leaving behind the rest of my memories,  
the ones I won't repeat.



# Sent to My Mom from the Emergency Cell Phone

GRACIE WHITE

The house behind a home  
is where my father lived.  
Every other weekend I began  
My mental catalogue of his most notable items  
Again and again.  
A box of Crunch & Munch that never moved,  
The curtain that partitioned the bathroom,  
A lead pole in the yard where  
I swung around til' my hands were covered  
With white, papery, flakes.  
The peach tree with rotted fruit,  
A too-nice television, probably stolen.  
A framed photo of my parent's wedding  
My mother's dress hid me perfectly.  
A bookshelf warped by 100 CDs  
Crammed in every free space.  
The faded, suede, green couch  
With a loaded gun stuffed in the cushions.  
The ripped out seats of his car resting in the backyard  
Worn with bullet holes.

BEST ART  
ISOLATION SID ESTELLE







# Thalassophobia

GRACIE WHITE

Sitting on the edge  
of a catamaran in Cozumel,  
the glassy teal water rushes under  
the cargo-net where I'm resting my legs.  
The playful waves kiss my calves  
as we sail through the ocean  
like a skipping rock  
like my skipping heart beat.  
My palms becoming sticky and  
gritty with a divine mix of  
sea salt,  
suffocating humidity  
and apprehension.  
Fear is supposed to be conquered,  
hurdled over like a pommel horse.  
My fear is so juvenile.  
My fear is so idiotic.  
The boat sputters and sways to a stop,  
our guide passing out gear to smiling faces.  
Curious minds eager to experience the  
colorful unknown.  
And I  
get caught up in the net as I stand  
to grab my goggles  
and snorkel  
and fins.  
I'm terrified of the open ocean  
and always have been,  
but I dive into the dark azure.  
My breathing is shallow,  
and my feet have lost solid ground.  
I shouldn't be this afraid,  
that's what I tell myself.  
As my guide shouts  
Barracuda.

LIVE BAIT ALEXIS DEJESUS







# Against the wind, taut rope

BILLY HUNT

Against the wind, taut rope  
to tied ankle, three wolves swing heavy like sacks.  
A run of old blood through greased fur  
by the Chevy still breathing rust. West, rangy cattle  
carve badland gullies alone in wind made real  
and sand-laden with dust. I didn't know

ass could callus more than hand. Saddles  
still steam, steeped like the skin of steaming beeves

exhaling sweat like lifting fog, like drifting  
smoke dissipating but bound inside  
those brined and gurgling animals still  
churning with breath. Several horizons dense  
with clouds, weighed down like heifers  
we call heavies before they burst with calves

taken with taut chain around their ankles  
from the inside out. That winter every horse

and heifer would drown &  
I'd be gone long down the road  
lined with the iron of greasewood and creaking  
sinew of muscle-fibered trees, kindling  
for dry lightning. The virga a wet blur  
never reaching ground, never

touching the other, still uneasy  
like the meat on cricket's bones.

And then a flash in the eye, a grin raked from the devil's face--  
Back at the diner, John Lyle plucks a single strand  
of fine blonde hair from a child's head, a paintbrush  
for the mural. The hay like that hair now  
matted in wet piles of gold molded to brown,  
in boggy air with soggy breaths

from the inside out. From my wrist a rope swings  
contra viento, sweating in the light of the setting sun.







UNTITLED SID ESTELLE





# Downbound Train

BILLY HUNT

Stepped into a snare and now  
the hanged man hung by a red thread. Boughs bend  
and they also break.

Phantom nights the train whistle whines what would be  
*East Coker* if it was music,  
each toll of the bell a clanging kiss in misty rain  
while what feels like movement is not  
movement at all--

it's bound up and boundless  
downbound mad and howling at the moon,

it's frenzied fugues and prose and poems and  
it's trying and loving and it's trying and  
it's the gut-rot feeling of your boyfriend's bat on my back,  
blood from a nose steeped in hot tears, thick snot and yelling leave  
but won't you come back and it's trying but it's not but it's trying and  
that whistle's still whining when the seeping air heavy with water finally  
breaks and its fat drops fall for all that is and isn't and wasn't but wouldn't  
but was in the waiting and it's trying

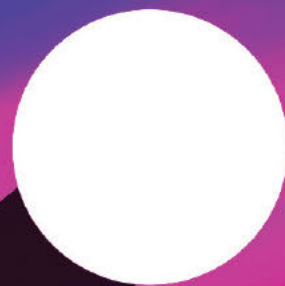
So  
*Yes let's spit*  
*the two of us let's spit*  
on our foundered hooves in  
in-between spaces with  
no place to put grief,  
which is love  
with no place to go.





FRUIT NEWT KT NOWAK

SEARCHLIGHTS JAYCEN MITCHELL



# Heaving Engines

BILLY HUNT

All morning the ticking engine heaved through thick air, a slow ricochet of diesel knock rattling distance. Acres away, another contrapuntal crankshaft turns, two tractors weaving with feed across the pasture.

*Chgchgchgchgchg.*

One driver uses a hand to text and the other to shift, mind tethered elsewhere. Then he notices the cold steel tenon warm to mortised muscle, a thick-necked steer pinned between the rolling bale and the blunt point of the tractor's pin. Its rough-haired hide bored through and leaking, limbs given-up and dragging, there's no telling how long it's been. The engine chugs a heavy rhythm. *Chgchgchgchgchg.*

It'll be pierced again, the lumpjawed abscess later milked with two hands like a nurse's breathing bag, the day after they can't pull the cow out of the springy meadow bog. Couldn't get her up so they had to put her down. But still after the punctured steer is vet-penned, a diesel knock still strangely rattles the distance. *Chgchgchgchgchg.*

They'd always had problems with the hydraulics. But what were the chances he was going to walk under those twelve hundred pounds of hay at the moment it dropped? The engine chugs a heavy rhythm now no longer tethered to time or distance, rattling the empty pores and all that solitude. *Chgchgchgchgchg.*



# I Am Getting Dry

ANYA SCZERZENIE

Where there is nothing, there is a desert.  
I lay out in the ghost-town sun.  
I have just come from the ocean,  
Where sharks bit my legs. Now it is gone,  
All the water, and I must get dry.

I see the burned-out shapes, the husks of buildings  
In a place no water could touch. Where the well sat,  
There is now nothing. There are no clouds,  
Just a dry, blue sky. The sun is a heavy presence,  
Sitting on my chest. It flames my skin into a red heat.

I am dry enough. Now I must go back.  
But there is no way back. All paths are covered with sand,  
Dry brush, a towering cactus. Brown and brown and brown  
And green that falls towards brown. And some yellow, for color.

I wish that the sharks were here to take me,  
Pull me violently and suddenly into the liquid abyss,  
Which must be better than this. I am tired of this dry,  
But when I return to the sea, I shall tire of that too.

# Apartment

ANYA SCZERZENIE

Let us reflect on the days we spent by that window,  
The one we couldn't open. It was painted shut with a thick  
White paint that seemed like hard metal. I looked through  
The dirty glass, seeing the city beyond. You said  
You were going to the grocery store. I told you to get  
More peanut butter. The list was fixed to your fingers.

It was a simpler time back then. There was a bookshelf,  
A computer. There were four white walls. There was a  
Bathroom and a tiny kitchen. The bathroom tiles speckled  
With blue. The scratch on the wall, all gray. A moon  
Peeked through the curtains one harvest night. Orange  
And round like a pumpkin, it hung in the sky.

There were posters on the walls, tape and tacks,  
The sink ran at a funny angle. On Christmas we hung  
Lights above the refrigerator. They illuminated a pool  
Of multicolors on the linoleum. We basked and danced  
In their light. Our tiny tree sat, out in the hallway.

Behind the latticed blinds was a looming tower of brick,  
Which showed a clock. The time was variable.  
An hour passed in five minutes when we were playing  
Cards, and five minutes in an hour when we did the dishes.

Sometimes the church bells rang. I can still hear them.

They rang for you, one day. That was the day I came back  
To peer through the window, to fall on our bed and cry  
With a longing I'd never known. Within months the place  
Was barer than it'd ever been. The walls were white,  
The posters were gone, but the scratch was still there.

ILLUSTRATION BY CARLEIGH ROSS









**MORPHEUS**  
NOAH WILSON

# On the platform: *A tribute to loss*

CARA CHOU

They joke and taunt and tease.

*Okay, see you soon!*

*You better call!*

*We'll still be under the same moon!*

a place of black and white – a 1950s film splayed  
smoke curled like ribbon, a twining dance with the clouds  
the engine coughed, as if weary from a diet of cigarettes  
metal beams stretching skyward for shade as  
a steel giant loomed over the heads of onlookers  
handkerchiefs waved, dangling from hands  
warding off the cries, the sobs, the sniffles  
blowing kisses and hugs to the sun  
swiping away tears, staining cheeks like colored dye  
loved ones set off,  
to new adventures, ready to fly  
then the train pulled away, and we all said goodb--

speeding by a few decades, with new people, different lives  
it was simpler than that

*Let's explore the sights when we visit!*

*Take a car, take a jet, take the subway!*

*Ah, we can shop, buy trinkets along the way!*

so we beat the sun when we woke  
and greeted the moon, silently  
waving to one another  
one boarding, two staying  
we were three willows amongst the metal beams  
the engine more a rumble than a roar  
he'd settle into his new city, and stay in touch  
distance was a fake thing, a forgetful thing  
when we had phones and screens to remind



we could connect easily – for sure, any time  
we all made plans  
as he blew a kiss, she wiped away a tear,  
and I watched with no fear  
when the train pulled away, and the sun peeked out shy  
it was quick, so we didn't bother to say goodb--

a year passed  
the sun was lonely as it set  
the world awash in gentle colors of reds, yellows, pinks  
they stained my fingers  
a call promised today, turned into tomorrow  
tumbling into a week and into a month  
we were two huddled rocks listening, amongst the metal beams

-then a voice, soft like trailing thread lost between seams  
*honestly, I can't remember if I ever said – hi, I love you*  
*"I'm sure he knows"*  
*But I never had the chance to remind him, to say it out loud*

eyes traveled down the track, our hushed thoughts  
drowned by the roar of wheels, by their rickety trek  
beside me, words whispered soft like a hissing brake  
*-God, I'm going to grow older than him now too*  
she let her cheeks stain with dye, I gave a weighing sigh  
the train wasn't coming and as the sun slipped down  
I waved because then,  
at least one of us got a goodbye



# Thump

CARA CHOU

*thump*

her mother used to say that hearts were like buds, waiting for the right  
moment the right second to come out and bloom, that it would flourish  
unafraid brave unbent. Large daffodil eyes and rosy cheeks thought of  
lush vines looping around calves, caressing cheeks when a bud would  
finally flourish out

and yet-

the coughing and sputtering of flower petals  
the tearing of thorns, bending in a hollowed stomach  
the dripping of leaves down a curved nape  
the syllables of silence could not slip past the trunk of a throat

grass grew around, tickling  
ankles and toes, a gentle  
reminder of the strength, the solitude of wood  
supposed to comfort, to nurture the feeling  
that no one was alone

but the grass only served as weeds  
twisting, her feet  
bruising them to the ground

*thump*

just one bud  
to get past the contorted kindling  
to shred through tissue and flesh  
to reach air reach soil  
simple, like the pluck of fruit

ILLUSTRATION BY HALDEN FRALEY



(yet flower petals stuck to the roof of her tongue  
and thorns marred a gash in her stomach of butterflies  
and leaflets bled down the back of her throat  
and syllables remained choked)

despite the strain, the attempted stance

her heart was the apple  
fearing  
the fall from the branch

*thump*

Small solid knot of seed  
unfurling curling spreading twisting crowding daring-  
to take up space and breathe  
when all that could be thought was  
to take root  
underground and b l e e d

*thump*

ANTHERAEA POLYPHEMUS NOAH WILSON





# God's Bug

MASON ROBERTSON

God's bug stalks  
the porch after midnight  
with cigarette burning ember  
Smoke puffs  
rise through the limbs  
and disappear into shadow  
cast skies  
floating through the dark  
O Moth, Old God  
of the Night and the Ink spilled  
across the treetops that sway  
deliver this wretched Creature  
from this world into Hell  
How miserably, he stalks the porch  
eating smaller bugs  
for supper.

ILLUSTRATION BY KT NOWAK







PESTILENCE KT NOWAK



# Quiet Dogs

MASON ROBERTSON

A bend in the road that calls  
me around the corner to look  
up. A steeple that brushes  
the clouds, stained camel brown,  
off the lapel and onto those below.  
I taste ash in the air.

-

trees black and white  
and brown and blooming  
against the twilight:  
Lilac, peach, and a brick  
hut  
sat square in the soft elm.  
I chew through the wood;  
it tastes like years of growth.

-

quiet dogs roam empty  
stomachs and throats growling  
blood stained white makes pink  
feet falling through frozen snow  
and find cold ground, permafrost  
Iron hangs in the air,  
drained from hares,  
helpless prey.  
for each other, they prowl,  
and for something to  
swallow whole



# Staff Bios

**MARLON MCKAY** is Editor in Chief for (pwa-tem). He is a senior majoring in Public Relations and Minor in General Business. He's been part of the organization since his freshman year. He likes to read, binge shows on Netflix and play Pokémon.

**HALDEN FRALEY** is Assistant Editor, as well as an illustrator, for (pwa-tem). He is majoring in Communication Arts and minoring in Creative Writing. He hopes to pursue a career in comic books and narrative illustration in the future, and has greatly enjoyed collaborating with the other staff of (pwa-tem) over the past year.

**ANYA SCZERZENIE** is a senior journalism major and creative writing minor. She is the secretary of (pwa-tem), and has been with the journal her entire college career. She likes reading, video games, iced coffee, and the very adorable Dumbo Octopus. She only occasionally assumes a physical form.

**KT NOWAK** is a current Junior at VCU majoring in Communication Arts: Scientific Illustration and Environmental Studies. This is their third year on the (pwa-tem) staff. When not busy with school they enjoy embroidery, insect collecting, and eating sweets.

**NOAH WILSON** is a third-year Communication Arts student at VCU specializing in illustration. This is his first year working with (pwa-tem), and he enjoys making fantasy and nature-inspired art. Noah especially loves bats, moths, and plants.

**CARLEIGH ROSS** is graduating this spring in Communication Arts with a minor in Art History. She is interested in developing a narrative and storytelling background and spends most of her time buying plants off of the clearance rack and nursing them back to health.

**SID ESTELLE** is an illustrator for PWATEM. She is a Communication Arts major with a focus on Children's Imagery and Editorial Illustration. Sid enjoys collecting old books, having political conversations with her cat, and curling up with a good cup of mint tea.



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