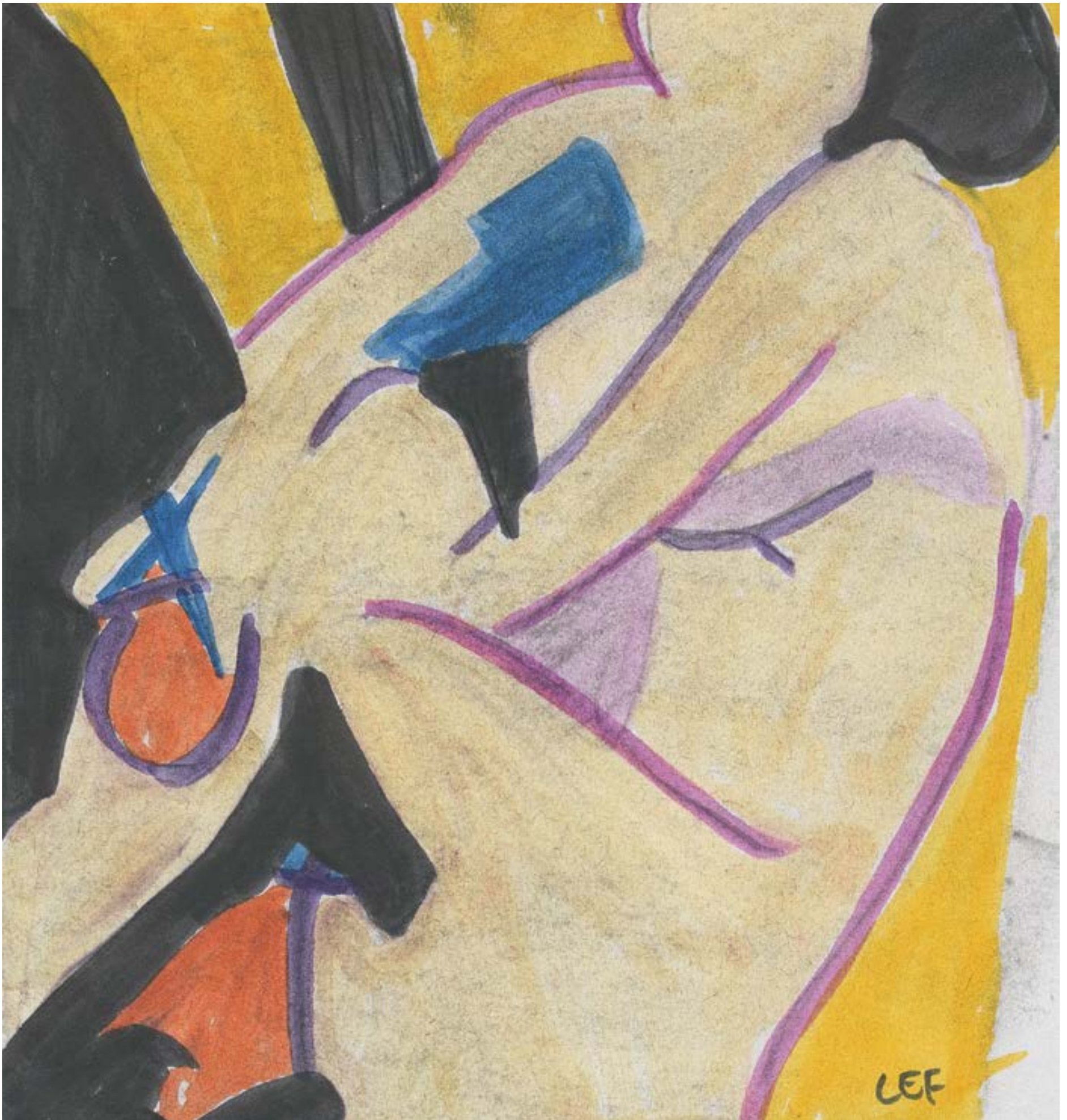


The
PHOENIX

est. 1887



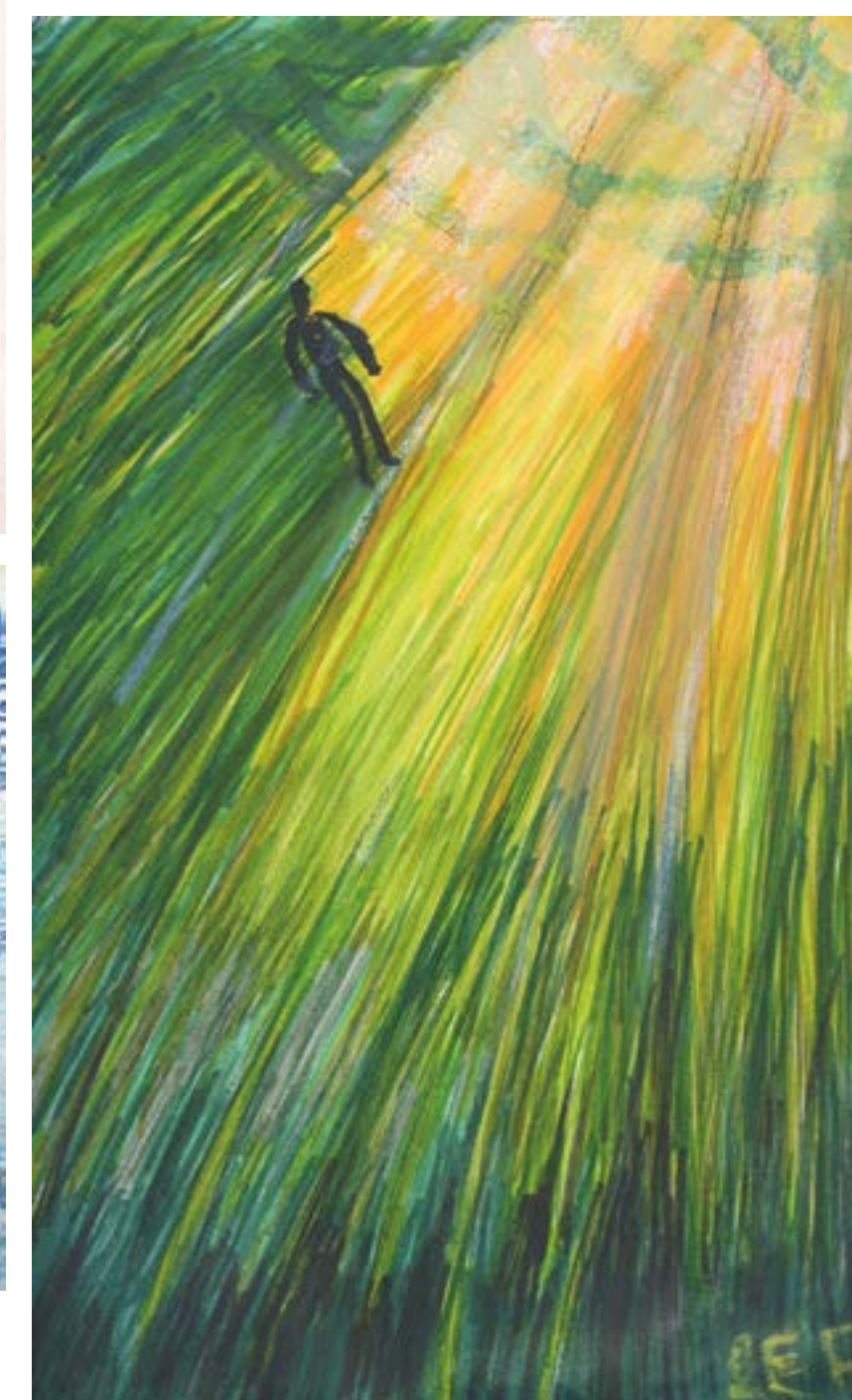
WINTER 2015

CONTENTS

- 3 -
lef apostolakis
- 4 -
notes to a fresher
- 6 -
topsy+bondo
- 7 -
GOD (el jefe)
- 8 -
light show
- 10 -
ghosts
- 11 -
the great american freedom machine
- 12 -
perimeter
- 13 -
paint brush
- 17 -
lekach
- 18 -
jazz visions - part 1
- 19 -
no path to paradise



Lef Apostolakis



And so we have reached that time of year again. It's cold and wet outside, the Christmas music is into its third month, everyone is bored of their course and the Felix Arts team have forgotten about their work. Nothing ever changes... Instead of working, we've stuffed this week's paper with the best and brightest work the Imperial Arts scene can offer. The best in photography, poetry, art and creative writing, Phoenix shows off the work we don't usually get to see, and we love it!

We've picked what we like and we hope you like it too. Thanks to all our amazing contributors and of course to our wonderful boss Grace without whom we probably would still be thinking this was due next week (there isn't an issue next week...) Thanks also to Fred for his advice and layout skills and Aifric Campbell for offering us the vast works of his creative writing course.

If we've not published your work this time we'll definitely consider you for the spring edition, and if you didn't submit any work, please do! We're happy to have your submissions anytime and we're already looking forward to prepping the next issue of Phoenix. Send your work to arts.felix@ic.ac.uk and be part of the fun!

Jingjie, Max and Indra



At first you're a lamb, with shaking legs and wide eyes, surrounded by wolves. You long to join the pack. So you get slaughtered on your first Saturday night away from home and wind up as fresh meat. Soon you'll be a rotting carcass, like those who have gone before you. You'll waltz up to the chopping block for the final blow, the last hurrah, and the sharp knife of reality in the form of "careers advice" will come crashing down, slicing the last shreds of freedom away.

Stay a lamb as long as you can.

Biochemistry, Year 2.



You've picked me despite the fact that there is a cheaper bottle of red just to my left. Very impressive. I do come from better climes: my Alta grapes are much better any shoddy old Merlot.

At least you haven't gone for Lambrini. I doubt anyone will notice at pre-drinks either way, but I promise I'll be a good shout until you get three glasses in and realise that perhaps you're not quite the heavy-weight you claimed to be at the Mingle yesterday and that 18% alcohol content is actually pretty good bang for your bottle.

Don't worry - what's one missed 9AM lecture between freshers? I'm sure you didn't need to be in that fire safety briefing anyway.

A.M., Physics, Year 3.



Illustrations: Jingjie Cheng

```
function Graduate = Imperial(Student)
Student.Happiness = 100;
Student.Knowledge = 0;
Student.Money = 50;
while Student.Happiness>0
    for year = 1:4
        Student.Knowledge = (TimeInLibrary/TimeNotInLibrary)*year;
        Student.Happiness = (TimeNotInLibrary/TimeInLibrary)/year;
        Student.Grades = Student.Knowledge*rand;
        Student.Money == 0;
        if Student.Money == 0
            if Student.Parents ~= Rich;
                break
                error('Student is Broke')
                while 1 == 1
                    Cry(Student)
                no end
            end
        if Student.Grades < 40
            break
            error('Student has Failed')
            while 1 == 1
                Cry(Student)
            no end
        if year == 4
            if Student.Project == Interesting && Achievable
                Student.Happiness = 100;
                Student.Knowledge = 100;
            else
                break
                error('Student has Failed')
                while 1 == 1
                    Cry(Student)
                no end
            else
        end
    end
Graduate = Student;
Graduate.Knowledge==100;
Graduate.Happiness==100;
Graduate.JobProspects==100*rand;
End
```

J.B., Physics, Year 4.



What was once whole and defined now blurs. Its edges diffused, thinning, becoming frail breaths through which the ghost of a time before time beats faintly. Back then its chest heaved with vigour and in mute splendour the spirit thrived in all things. Now, tremulous, its voice fades, yet remains unbent by those who march and trample over it. Over that to which they are bound. Over what spawned them, but which they believe themselves masters of.

As one, their cores palpitate, enslaved by the pulse to a course written in empyrean blood. To timeless and indelible codes carved from a language of gods. And they, in false reclusion, hidden atop ivory towers raised over open tombs, too anesthetised to see the evident: It is dwindling. The flame chokes and flickers. Sighing under siege by poison and greed. We wither, not with it, but as it.

Through the lens of delusion, with arrogance as fuel, they feel the demise as a surging. A confirmation of their strength, of their status as sole bearers of reason in the midst of mystery and chaos.

And their name for this downfall, this crumbling of the atavistic order that governs us, that endows us with true power, is progress.

topsy + bondo

art by Rafail Kokkinos
words by Alberto Alicca

Through this plane we roam, wandering in solitude amidst the masses. Our spines bent and a thousand eyes fixed on the barren earth in search of our becoming, the one riveted to the faith we place in will.

Here we lift a stone and peer beneath. There we dig a pit and gape into its hole. Naught is what we find. And yet we carry on. Scraping at the surface of what has no depth but in which our fate is contained.

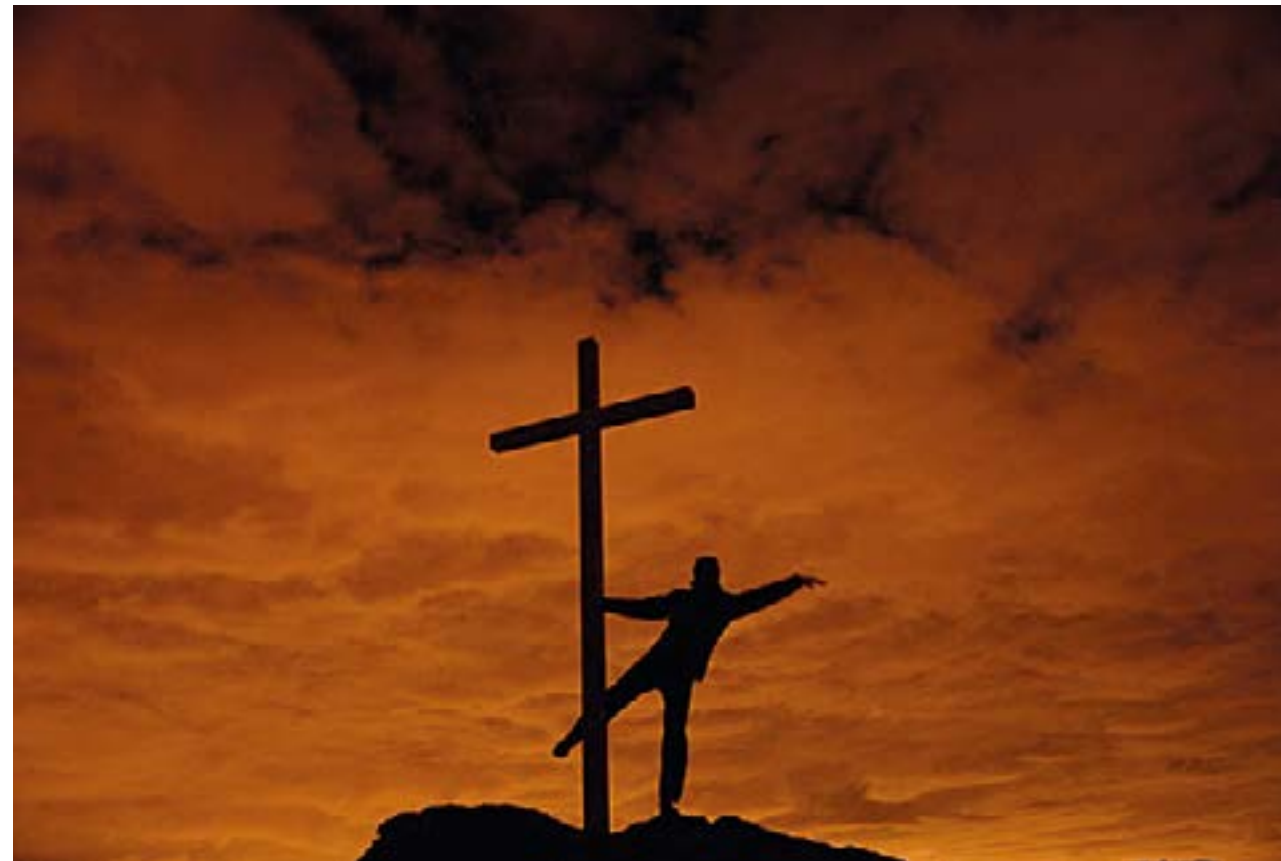
If only you raised your gaze unto the warping vault. If only devotion to the altar of your resolution finally caved in, its vacuous substance unveiled. Then perhaps you would see, without comprehending, that for which you crawl, for which you search. That for which you draw the next breath.

Towering, a shapeless thing. Casting its familiar shadow across the land and ages. A penumbra that is light in your blindness. It stands infinite, as its weight on all who dwell under its chains.

Under them no eyes are raised. No backs unbent. And all false creeds drag on through the waste.

GOD (el jefe)

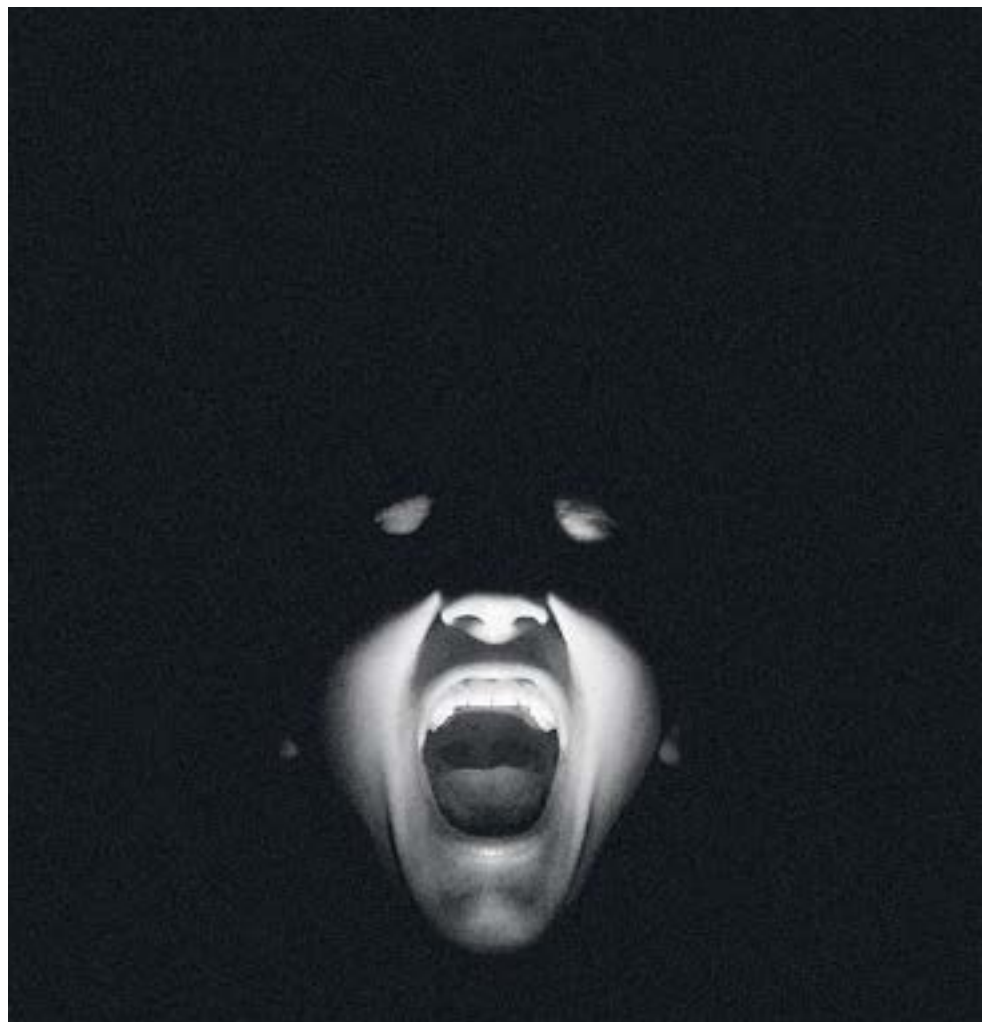
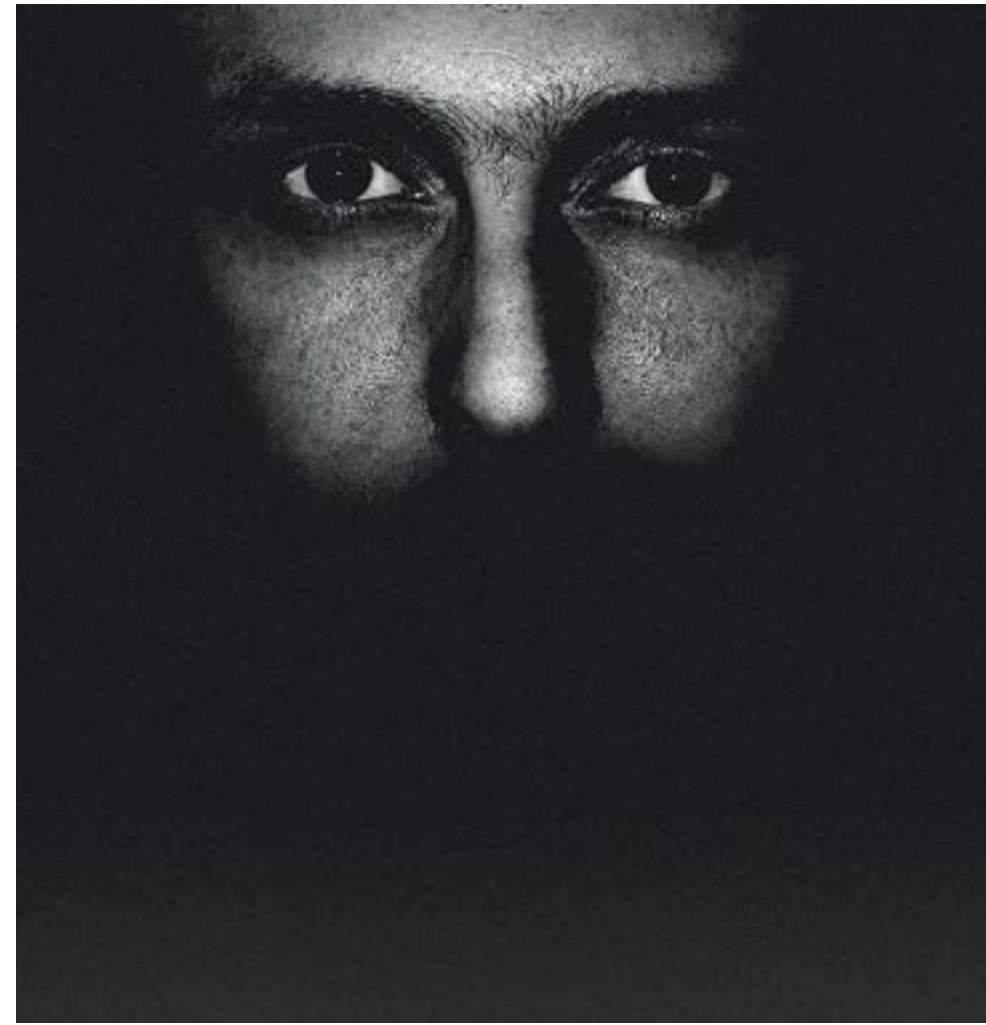




LIGHT
SHOW



Clockwise from top left:
Valle Varo Garcia, Matthew Chaplin, Andy Hui, V.V.G, V.V.G, Madalina Sas



GHOSTS

Madalina Sas

The Great American Freedom Machine



The burning sunset is an orange
Harley Davidson
The Great American Freedom Machine
with an angel
riding into the horizon
on great wings
of ocean blue and the sand
on the beach
A gold that reminds him of
the great deserts of Arizona
The one
conquest that mattered
because it was an illusion
A mirage of the unforgiving heat
No thoughts required
Just promise to drive fast
He rides on
towards the elusiveness
He has no rear-view mirrors
because there's nothing
behind him, anyway

Poetry by Elizaveta Tcheibanouik

Photo by Andy Hui



perimeter

dark it is without power, don't you say commander?
black the ink of space.

/

crying, the wookies are. limp are their paws.
sat like bears, like crying boulders they are.
separate from each others' their shoulders have become.

/

look not to me for assuredness commander. see,
for three days without my stick i have been-
fallen over many times, in the dark.
but learned now to catch myself with the force i have.
like a seizure i must look, hmm? in the dark corridors
falling and catching myself

/

swimming into the sea, the wookies are. swimming away from each other.
hurting, their practised legs are, the way fire hurts trees.
crying into them the sea is, the way it cries into boulders on the land.

/

but in the dark, no-one can see, hmm?
so the old man falling over, it is the same as the old man walking,
the old man dancing, hmm?

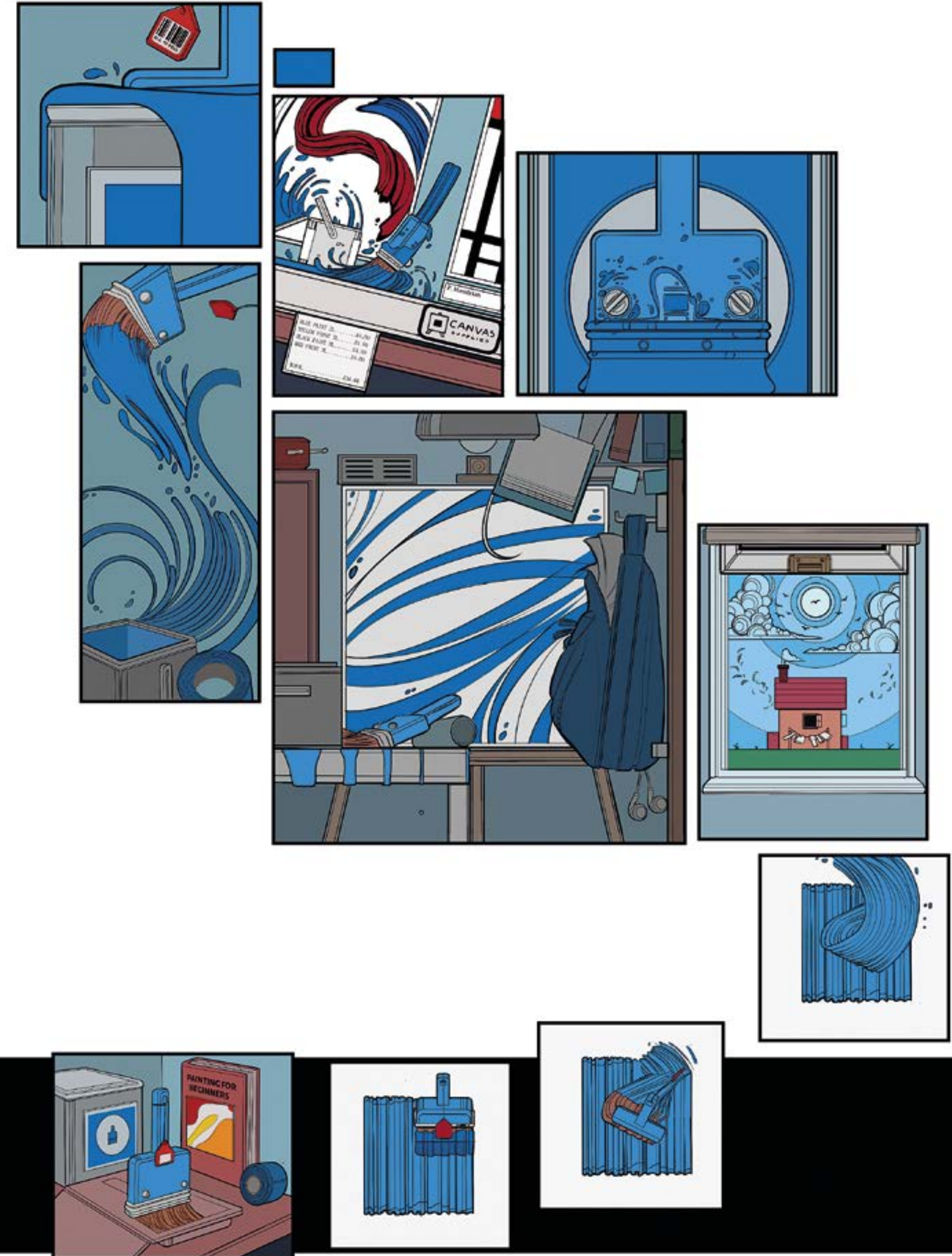
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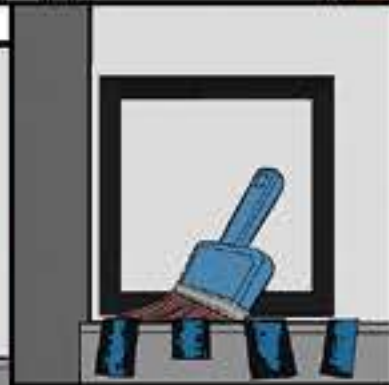
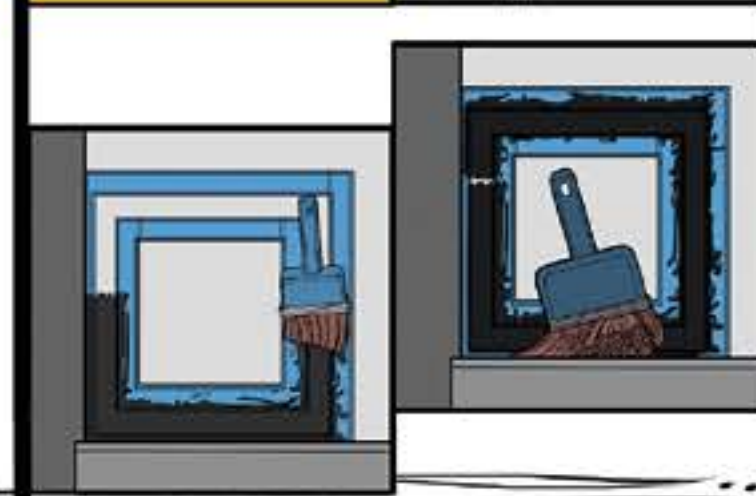
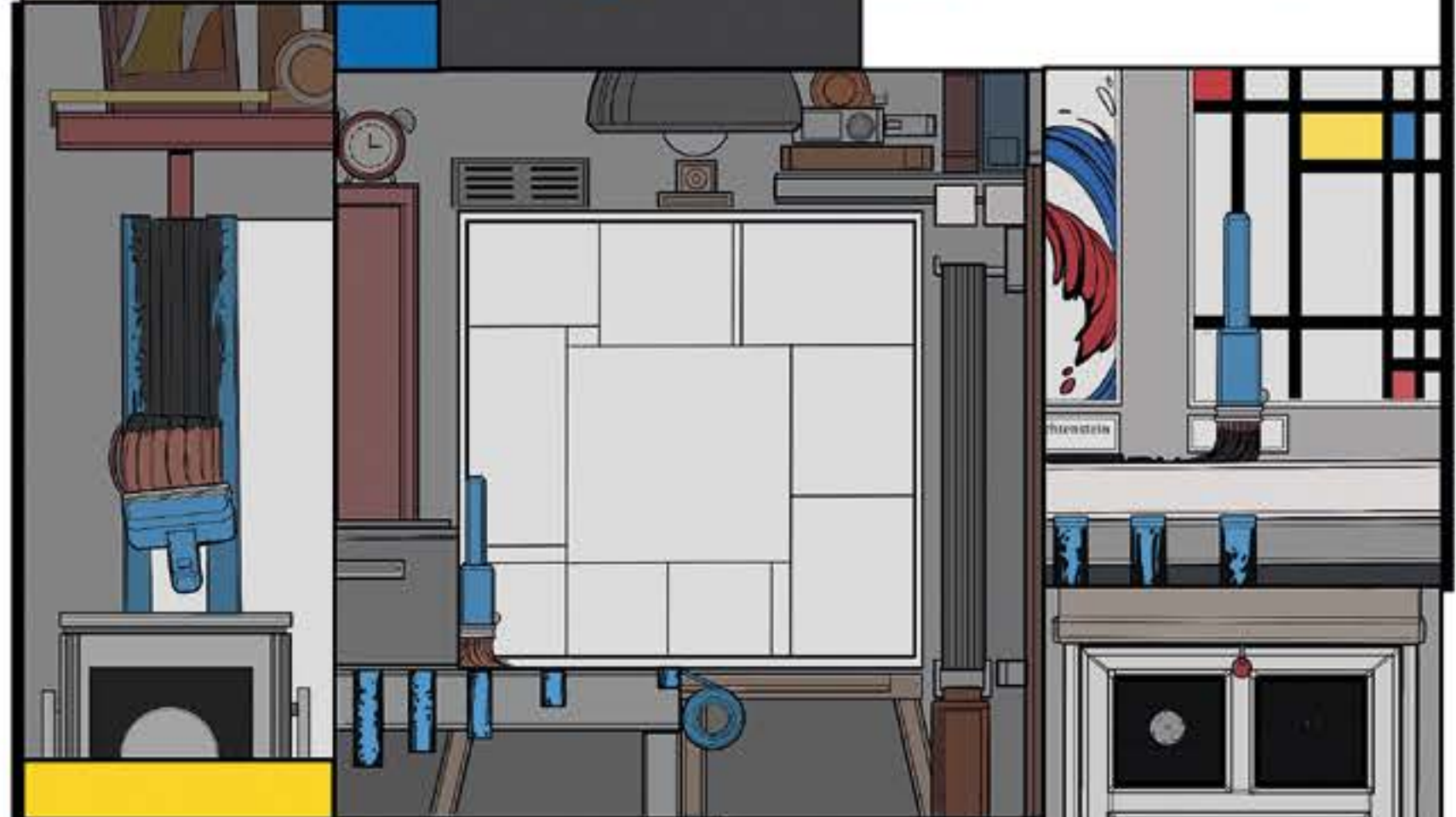
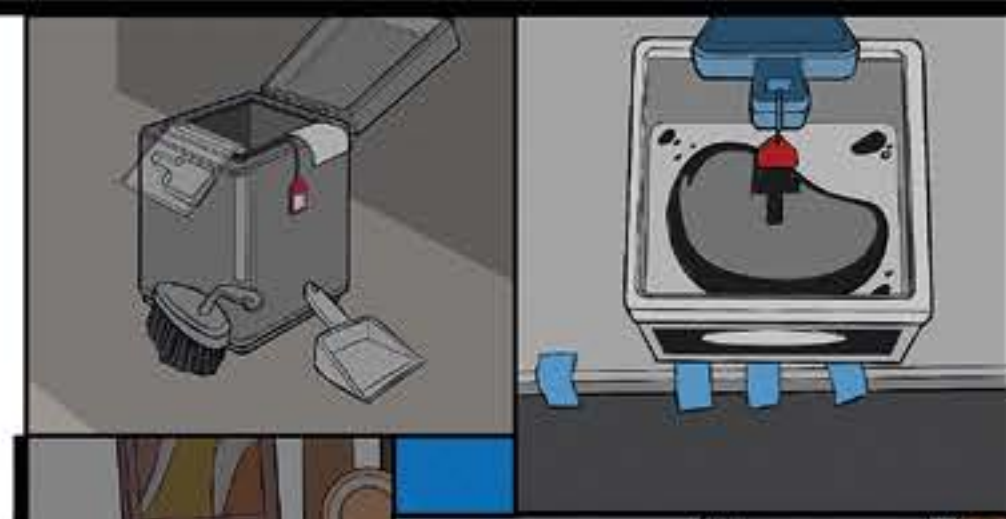
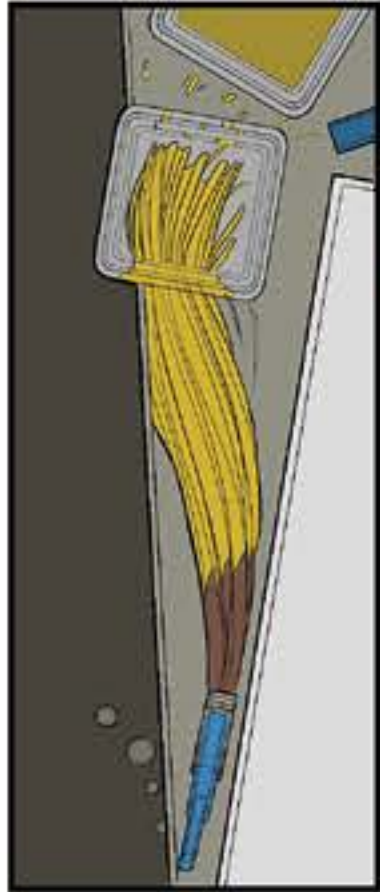
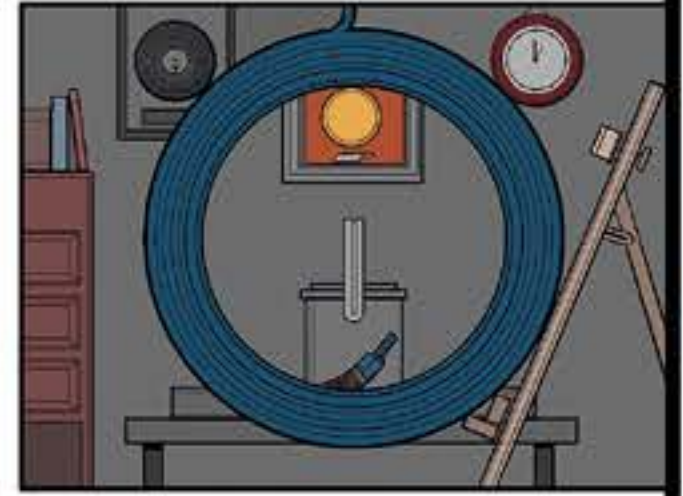
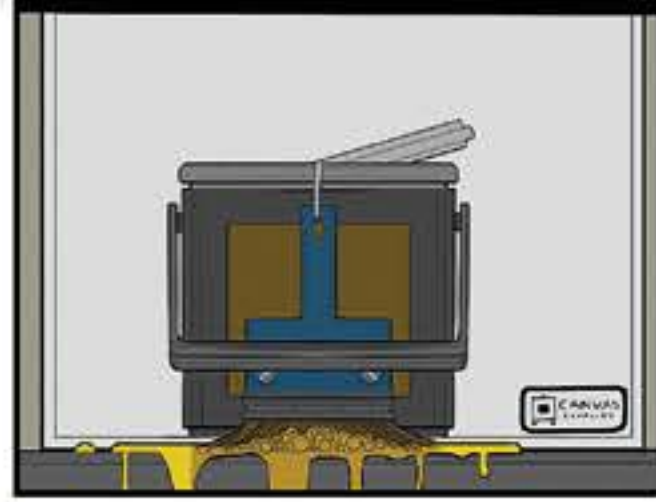
islands the wookies reach. alone each one of them is.
trees hang on to the mist, with tree-hands,
reach down to the wookies, cover them up,
talk to them.

/

you laugh, commander. for weeks without hope you have been.
wandered the ship you have.
stroked the cables of the ship,
its engines too, in the dark, tender.

words by kieran ryan
photography by abhishek mukherjee





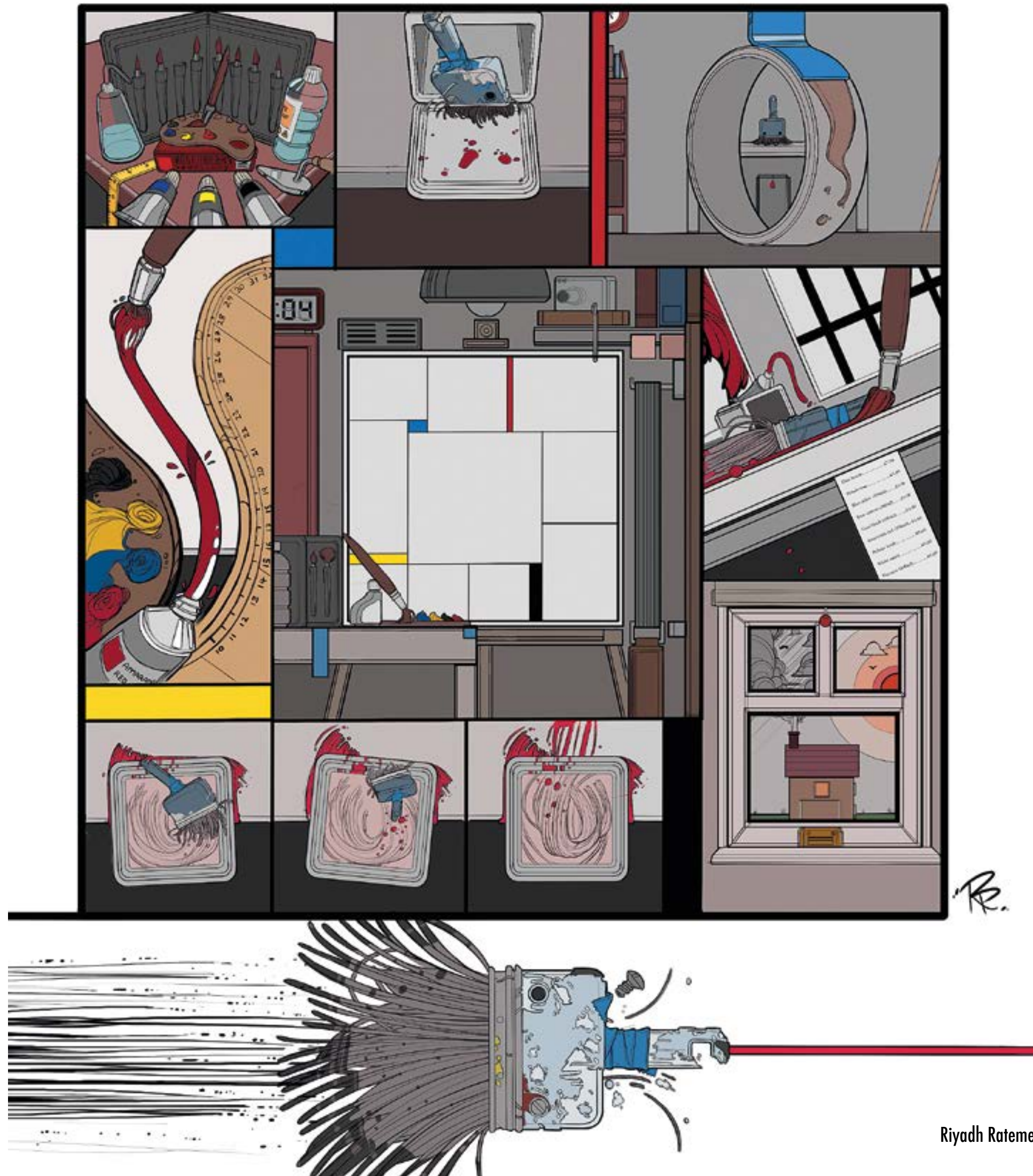
LEKACH



“The sweetness of this...”
fire
is that it doesn't burn ceaselessly
Cigarette warmth of
his cowboy kiss
Turns to soft ashes
as an end
A small death
in a valley of eternal sunsets
and then the waiting always
Expectations of ecstasy
almost start to feel warm, too

Poetry by Elizaveta Tcheibanouik

Image by Adrian LaMoury



Riyadh Rateme

Jazz visions - Part I

Behind me Mingus
boogies, stops and shuffles,
over and over again.
Charles, if I gave you
three colours
could you draw
my portrait as well?
I cannot understand
where I am.
Music fills my sight.
Words gasp and pant
as they try to come out
and every step
they make
up the throat,
they slip back down.
What happens?
The music
turns into hundreds
of beating voices
that ask me things
I don't want
or I don't know.
Sound has become
an insisting hammer.
This noisy sky
is unbearably
obsessive percussive
pervasive obstructive.
A man with a hat
pops out and stands
right in front of me.
He says hi.
He stabs me.
I ask him
to be left alone,
but that just
cannot happen:
contractual obligation.
I repeat the same word
a thousand times
and everything disappears:
I am in front of my computer,
hands on the keyboard.

Why do I keep
writing poems
nobody can understand?



Words by Giovanni Bettinelli
Photography by Neil Talwar

NO TO PATH PARA- DISE

Kate Ge

Trigger warning: Rape, sexual assault and suicide.

You lay your .44 Magnum on the tatami mat. Smith & Wesson, 6 ½", cold blunt steel.
It cuts a lonely figure against the igusa straw, its barrel pregnant with the thick weight of mortality. Six shots, six lives, six-winged seraphs, six points on the Star of David, six degrees of separation.
You find a peculiar beauty in this moment, an amnesty from self-scrutiny, as your mind wanders over the last seventeen years—as a felon might walk the plank—stepwise towards the great plunge. Little pockets of sensation resurface: the tenderness of a mother's touch, falling sakura leaves, the gentle brush of lips. Almost as if your body were desperate to remember what life, real life, feels like to touch, taste, smell, see.

You run an index finger along its spine and picture how it might all end. Imagine the gross burst of bones, a shatter of flesh, a sea of molten red. Bleeding, bleeding, bleeding. Then, a final thud.

And you are death. Death becomes you.

Oh Takumi, if you only knew.

How much.

8AM. Thursday 7th December. 2011.

Cold slippers, black coffee, a spritz of oil in the pan—two eggs, fried sunny-side up—a rustle of newspapers, slurp and burp. Domestic sounds once strange and foreign to my ears now easing into familiarity with the slow decay of time. They become no more than white noise, a quiet requiem to the stolid routine of winter mornings. Sometimes I'm caught off guard by how abruptly my senses have deadened; bright colours are offset with grey, bright sounds muffled by distance. The world has become thin, overstretched—like butter spread across too much bread. Yet I can't scrape the ash from my tongue; its burnt scent lingers on the verge somewhere just out of reach, quilting my meals in a bitter lather, unmoved by even the strongest of spirits. And don't ask, because I've tried them all. Everclear, absinthe, neutral grain, cocoroco, arak. There's no poison strong enough.

There are nights when I feel as if my entire person is subdued, tied down by apathy, by a vague sense of loss, by the cosmic weight of years passing by.

Thirty three fucking years.

Every single one etched on my face.

Oh Tak, you would barely recognise me now. I'm a poorly shaved Neanderthal with questionable sideburns. My armpits exude a faintly sweet smell: damp sweat, cigarette, and a hint of something tangy and nostalgic, like old wasabi. Those tarry eyes that confounded you so much have since been corrupted by a line of white—a halo around my irises, constricting them, confining them. My lips are dry from a simple lack of speech, their corners so permanently downturned they've become gravity's plaything. The only word I use now is the deathless, interminable "sorry". I think I'll be saying sorry right up to my grave. Sorry, sorry, sorry.

I don't sleep so well now. It seems this dollhouse I live in isn't built for lengthy dwelling. Its walls give me the vague impression of a dam caving in. I've shrunk to fit inside; it's greedily accepted my pound of flesh and hungers for more, stripping me from random places—the fleshy concave of my belly, pulpy rings around the neck, mid-thigh, buttocks.

These nights, Ambien is my friend. Round, pink pills with shallow notches like hieroglyphs, keeper of my dreamless sleep. Don't sulk; I know it's bad. Ambien is a fickle temptress. On the nights she doesn't deliver you invariably appear, Takumi, drifting in between the sheets, and I don't quite know if I should be scared or relieved.



1AM. Monday 9th January. 2012.

I'm sitting in front of a secretary's desk in a nondescript room of a nondescript building—the matte, faceless kind you always hated. Its walls are drenched in a faded bisque, interrupted by obnoxious "art" prints—bold slaps of colour across a white canvass—hung in tactical locations that hit you squarely in the eye whenever you look up. I keep my head bowed as I twist the business card around in my fingers: WILLIAM HUNT. A solid name; strong, full-bodied. Brings to mind suntans, full-fat milk, a thick bulk of muscle beneath a skimpy shirt.

But I digress; his full name is Dr. William Hunt. I'd cut his ad out of a local paper this Christmas, his name blazoned in Britannic Bold across a stock photo of a woman with her head cupped in her hands. COME TALK IT OUT, the script screamed, WE'RE HERE TO HELP. And as is that hapless end-of-year custom, I drank my way through two full bottles of 2009 Sauvignon blanc before thinking, fuck it! I knew you'd disapprove. You'd put on that quizzical frown and say, "Why are you paying for some thinly veiled Freudian bullshit? Are you crazy?"

Maybe that's why I'm so keen to try it out. Nothing ventured, nothing gained.

"Mr. Kaito Abe?"

That's my cue.

A fitting word for Dr. William Hunt might be clean. His expressions are transparent enough, lucid and open; his smile seems to permeate every sinew on his face, smooth tendons buoyed up in a glorious contortion that compels your lips to reply. There are no dark shadows on his face, no baggage beneath the eyes, a baby-smooth glabrous jaw. Yes, I know you'd scoff at my description, Tak. Your first response might well be a deadpan "Botox. Brow lift. Fillers. And that's just for starters." But let me backtrack a little. When I first entered the room I had to stifle a gasp that formed like a canker in my throat.

Because he reminded me so much of you.

It was really you sitting there, wasn't it? Fountain pen suspended two inches from your pad, one leg crossed over the other in its usual slapdash way, your steely eyes boring into mine.

Dr. Hunt beckons me in with genuine concern. "Are you alright, Mr. Abe?"

"I—I'm fine."

"Please take a seat." He gestures to the cup of water on the coffee table. "Or would you prefer something a little stronger? Tea perhaps?"

A whiskey on the rocks would be nice. "Tea sounds great."

He smiles knowingly.

"So. What's been bothering you?"

Straight to the point. Like a bullet.

3PM. Friday 27th January. 2012.

I've been seeing William for a few weeks now, long enough to be on first name terms.

On the fifth visit, he beckons me in with a wave. This is new.

"Sit, sit."

He bumbles about, dropping sencha leaves into mugs.

"Drink, drink."

I sip from the hot brew. Once again he assumes a predatory position in the swivel chair, legs crossed, pen hovering over his writing pad.

"If I recall correctly, we were talking about your parents?"

Freudian tactics. Start with the grassroots. Somehow it always comes back to those who brought us life.

"My father was a cell biologist. Spent more time culturing bacteria than he did with his wife and kid. Straight talking no-nonsense bloke. Shy. Bit of a goatee."

"Was he good to you, growing up?"

"If you mean did he buy me Lego and model racing cars, then yes, he owned that part of the parenting agenda. But did he take me bowling or teach me how to fix a bust tyre? Never. And what's good supposed to mean? He was the kind of parent who ignores you for most of the year, and then tries to make up for it in the holidays. Someone who thinks that time can be bought out with money."

"And did he ever buy you out?"

"In the beginning, yes. What five-year-old isn't won over by shiny new things? But then I grew up."

"And?"

"Toy trucks just didn't cut it anymore."

"You mentioned Lego, trucks and racing cars. Did he ever give you any, say, gender non-conforming toys?"

"Like what... Barbies?"

"For example."

I snort. "No, he was adamant I stayed well within the XY pool. When it came to girls and boys it was black or white, there was no middle ground."



"And how did he feel about Takumi?"

Bingo. The stumper.

"He hated Takumi's guts."

Winter fifteen is cold.

A thin glaze of frost coats almost everything in sight—lampposts, street-signs, the tips of traveller's noses. It seems nobody is immune, apart from you. Are you even human?

We're circling the Museum of Western Art now, tracing familiar steps down to Le Corbusier's square. You tangle your arm in mine, the crooks of our elbows meeting at perpendiculars—it's snug, a tight fit, it's like we're meant to be. You're pointing at something in the far distance. You say, "You know, it used to give me the creeps. But these days I just like standing there. A kind of morbid fascination. Is that weird? Aren't we all sinners in some way or other?"

We walk up to it, the so-called "Gates of Hell". Rodin, circa 1890. Cast in bronze, it's a towering structure standing six metres tall, its characters flaying and writhing at the site of hope's abandonment. There is Rodin's Thinker in centre, his head bowed down, brow furrowed in deep, impenetrable thought.

"I want to see him in the flesh. In Paris." You smile at me. "With you."

6PM. Saturday 4th February. 2012.

I'm almost there now, Tak.

I'm in London, the Swinging City. Not so far from Paris. Not so far from the Gates. Granted, it's not exactly walking distance, more like a three-hour train ride away. But it's a milestone. Baby steps.

People-watching has become my sport now. I have a birds-eye view of the streets, seeing without being seen. The little flyspecks on the playground below buzz with purpose, with direction. They have A and B points, goals and destinations, people to meet, things to do. And then there are the drifters, lone souls that haunt the dusk and dawn—the homeless, the drunk, the wretched and pathetic. Where do I fit in? Maybe I'm Meursault, that stranger on the outside looking in. He stood on the outskirts of his city too, with his mask of solitude, his numbness. Perhaps that's wise; to shield yourself from pain and anguish and hurt, you must first learn not to feel at all. The art of indifference. Of de-humanising. Strip away your fatty emotional layers, your hot-blooded cloak, be cold, inert.

I cannot do it.

Though I tried once. I stayed till early morning in a filthy nightclub, slowly gagging myself in spirits. In truth I was looking for a mindless fuck, to steep in someone else's warmth for however long, however meaningless—to feel numb. She came onto me, pressed her body against mine, stuck her tongue down my throat. What else could I do but give in? We did it a few times against the dank walls out back; it was short,

drunk, angry. She smelled of sweat, spicy shavings and cheap perfume. I didn't even catch her name. I think we both needed it.

Afterwards, I could only think of you. I couldn't get you out of my head. Your hands, your eyes, your lips, your tongue. You really do screw with people, Takumi.

When you meet my parents for the first time, you wear eyeliner. You have long hair, purple nail varnish, a gem in your ear. Why? Did you think you could smash their bigotry to pieces by arriving as the very impersonation of their fears? Did you think they would be shocked into acceptance? Did you ever think about how I could stomach living with them after your whirlwind appearance? Was it all a joke to you?

At dinner, you try to make small talk. Banal comments about the layout of the house, my mother's cooking, the weather. You're nervous, I can tell from the vein on your forehead, the slight tremor of your fingers, the soft vibrato in your voice. I want to touch you, to hide you, to shield you from their acid glares.

When we're finally alone, you drop the wig, the make-up, the redundant embellishments and you wink at me. "Didn't that go well?"

"Why'd you do it?" I can't hide the disappointment in my voice.

"Just to see their reactions. Your dad is such a stiff."

"They'll never want to see you again."

"Fine by me. We don't need them."

"But there's talk of sending me away."

"Where to?"

"Kobe. Osaka. Fukuoka. Anywhere. Away from you."

You look up, a clownish glint in your eye. "Come on, am I such a bad influence?"

You're Mephistopheles reincarnated. Satan in yellow. You're sin and greed and lust. And I just can't seem to get enough.

Then suddenly you stand, grab my hand and lift it up into the air. "I solemnly swear on Lucifer's furry wings that I will be your leech. Your personal bloodsucking leech. Wherever you jump, I jump, okay?"

Then you kiss me, hard and fast on the lips, as if to seal the deal.



9AM, Monday 6th February, 2012.

William's finally hit the jackpot. He's found my weak point. He's found you. I let him delve into my memories—of you, of us, the before and after. First slowly, and then all at once, the floodgates opened.

"So they sent you away?"

"They watched me pack my suitcase. I didn't bring anything with me, just some clothes, a few books and—and—"

"And?" he prompts gently.

"And the cigarette case."

The one you gave me for New Year's that winter, on the steps beneath the Gates. You'd hushed up about Rodin for a second, and pulled the case out from inside your jacket. It had a Thinker figurine carved on its surface. "Open it," you muttered breathlessly. You'd laid out a note over the first row of cigarettes.

It simply read—For Paris.

"Did you see Takumi before you left?"

"No. I was grounded for weeks before leaving, not allowed to leave my room, no phone calls, no visitors. He knew something was wrong, but we didn't manage to see each other in the end."

"Where did they send you to?"

"Somewhere by the sea. A small fishing town off the Tsushima Basin. They wouldn't even let me see the ticket."

"And what did they send you there for?"

A pause. I look him straight in the eye, see his face contorted in a storm of emotion: pity, sorrow, affection.

"For cleansing." I admit, head bowed. "They wanted to snuff out the homosexuality."

"I stayed with my uncle in his cabin. My father's side. He was an odd man, sullen, few words, cold. He made me—he made me do things."

"What sort of things?"

"He took me to a whore house on the first night. He locked me in a room with this—this girl. Young, kind of dazed looking, like she'd given up on herself. He told me 'You better have her fucked before morning' and then left."

"Did you?"

"Of course not. We ended up talking about childhood, about loss... about Takumi."

I remember the cool kiss she planted on my forehead the morning after, just before we said our goodbyes. “You’ll be alright,” she whispered.

“What else did your uncle do?”

“He forced my eyes open and made me watch porn. Made me sit through hours and hours of homophobic sermons. I can still hear them sometimes, those voices telling me I’m rotten... that I’m bad on the inside.”

“Did he ever try to touch you?”

I bring my voice down to a whisper. “He brought in a copy of Badi once. Five hundred pages, filled with pictures of naked men. Then he told me to strip. He held the magazine in front of my face and flicked through it while—while whipping me. Over and over for what seemed like hours.”

A sharp intake of breath. William looks shattered.

“I think that’s enough for today, don’t you?” He says kindly.

11AM. Thursday 9th February. 2012.

William drops his pen and pad. He sits closer to me now, our hands are within touching range, our knees almost cobbled together. He looks at me in the way a weary traveller might watch a caged animal.

“You can tell me what happened, Kaito. You’re safe here.”

“He led me to The Warehouse.” I stammer a little, my voice breaking. “A huge dark building they used to stock sake before it’s packaged and shipped abroad. He showed me to this wooden chair, made me sit down and—and—tied me to it. I couldn’t get away in time.”

There is a silence we let fester for a while.

“There were five of them.”

Five shadows in the darkness. Huge, brooding figures with broad backs and shoulders. They speak in sneers.

Then suddenly you appear.

You with your familiar silhouette; everything I had loved and missed and wanted. The slope of your shoulders, your lanky limbs, your stupid, stupid face. And you only have eyes for me.

You don’t see them lurking in the corner.

“Takumi, RUN! RUN NOW!”

“Kai-”

THWACK. Something hits the side of your head and you are knocked down, pummelled onto the concrete below. They ambush you, those fucking cowards; they kick the wind out of your lungs, the sense out of your skull. One of them unbuckles his trousers, while the others hold you down, their feet pinning you against the floor in a horizontal crucifixion.

I’m screaming. I’m screaming your name over and over and over while he corrupts you, he sticks his tiny dick inside you, and I retch. I taste blood in my mouth. My voice has bled dry.

Your face will haunt me forever. It’s the look of bruised and battered grief. Of disappointment.

Takumi, forgive me.

You kill yourself on Thursday 7th December 1995.

A gunshot. Sirens.

Bleeding, bleeding, bleeding.

The winds were still on that day. Holding its last breath.

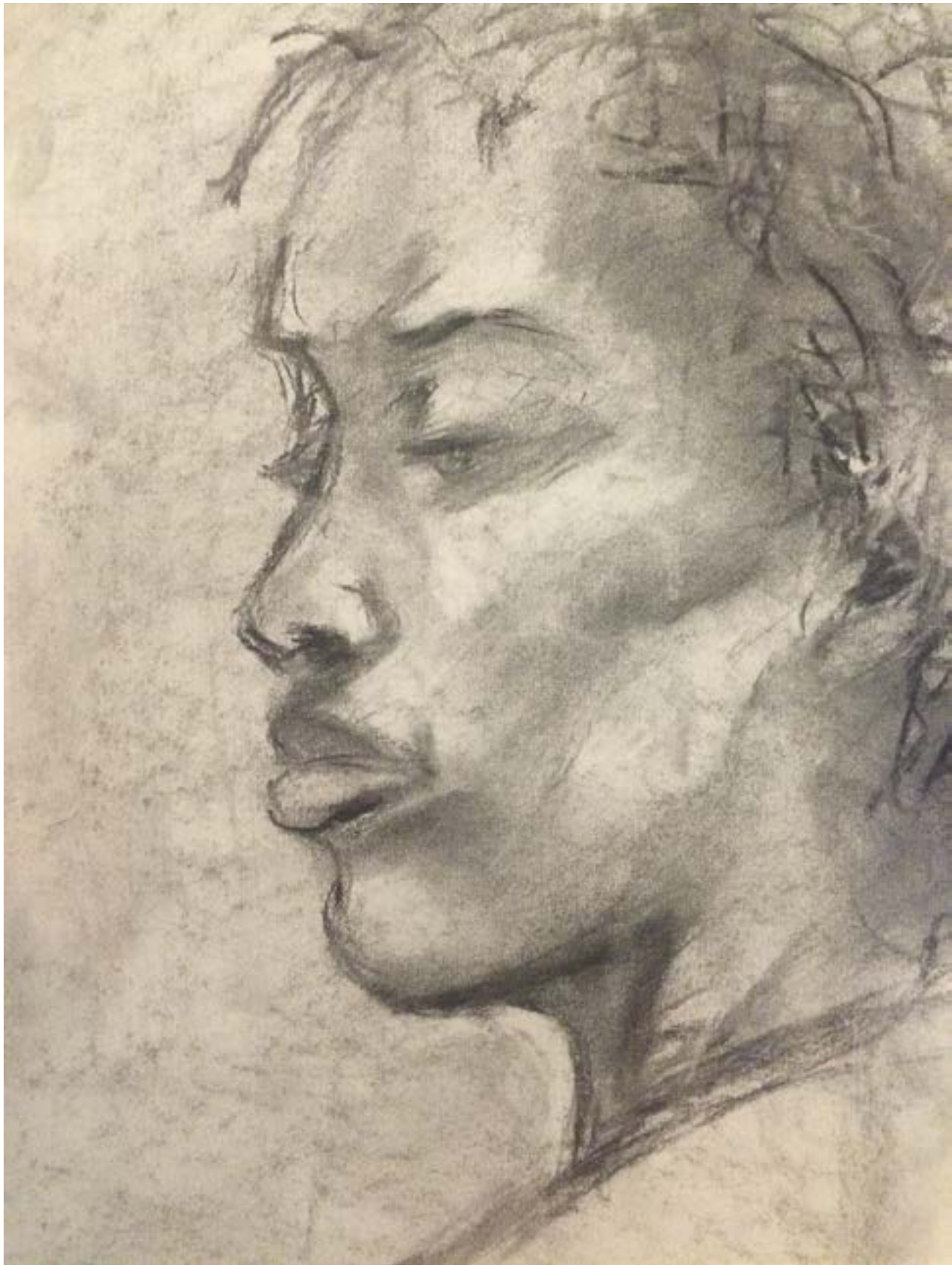
Do you remember the first time we met?

Outside the Gates of Hell, you were reading Yukio Mishima beneath the last sakura tree of summer.

We made eye contact, and in that briefest of moments, I think our stars crossed.

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