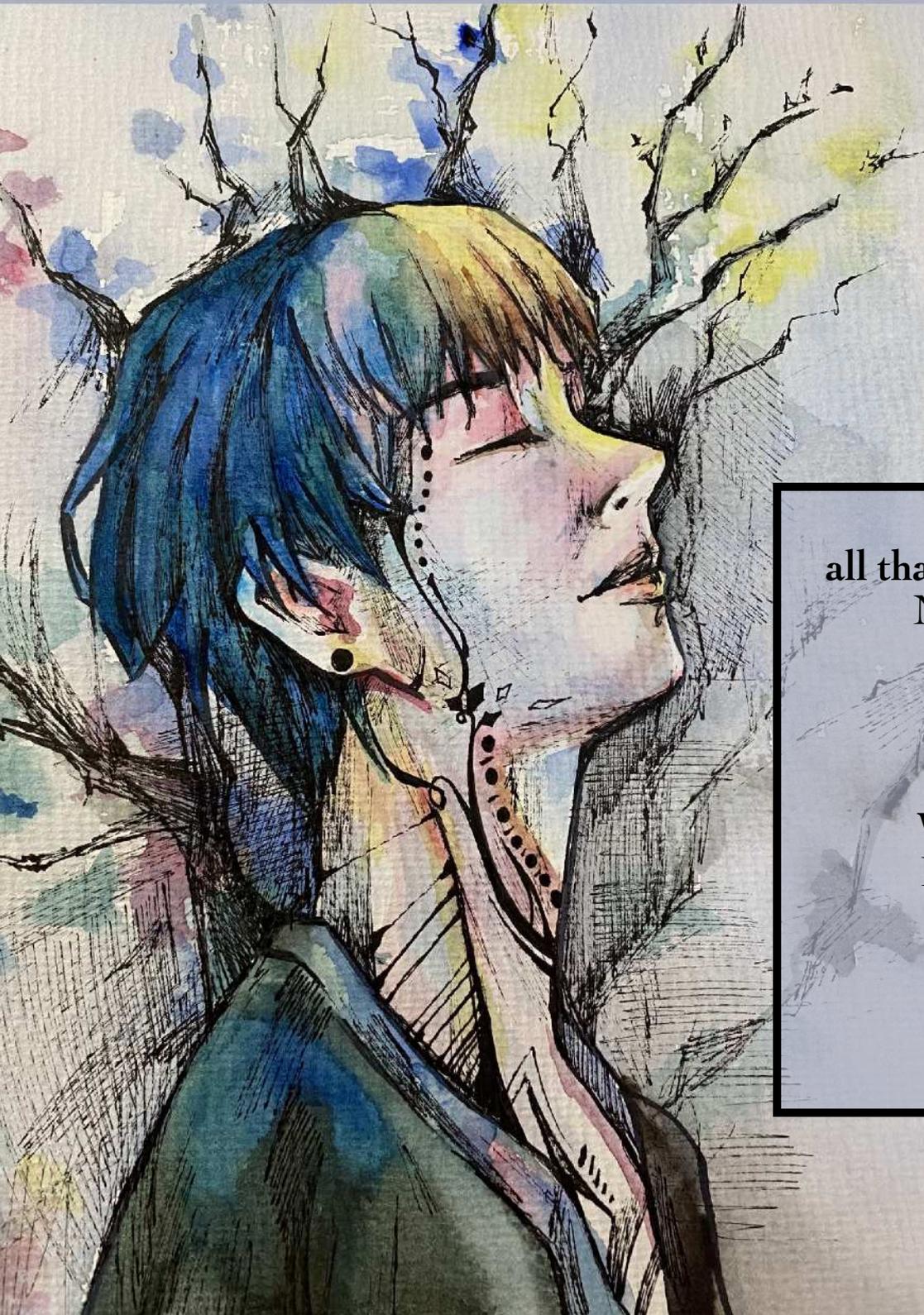


Zeitgeist.

VOLUME 10 NO. 3

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FEATURES

all that happened inside
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d-1
Catie Yu

We are relics
Henie Zhang

Outside
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Zeitgeist

/ 'tsīt-gīst; zīt- /

The general intellectual, moral, and cultural climate of an era.

A student-based enterprise that seeks to entertain, motivate, and inspire through short stories, arts, columns, and a variety of other media.

Provides a platform for aspiring writers and artists to express their identity.

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Theme

Chrysalism (n.): the tranquility of being indoors during a thunderstorm.

all that happened inside

By Natasha Sung

Layout by Celine Hung

before the storm,
i hardly knew him.
i was always coming and going, to and fro.
never stayed still, restless to the bone.
a self-proclaimed “holy” hustler, hopping
in and out of the heathenly and the heavenly.
he was the one who stayed put, constant to the core—
never in a hurry, never quite bored,
just was, quietly defying my norm.
when i stepped in, he’d beckon
for me to linger, but it was i who’d reckon
the lures of secularity as first place.
“pop goes the weasel,” and just like that, i was
gone with the wind.

a storm came,
rainfall trapezing down.
upon river roaring he asked me to stay.
an invitation,
more bona fide than chivalry but
just an ounce softer than a command.
an authority, almost,
that called for undivided attention,
a whole-hearted gaze.
i mean, there wasn’t
anywhere to go anyways.
so i stayed.

then came the wind,
like the wooing of darkness—
an owl’s call behind a mingling of twigs,
stabbing at the compact stillness of the
hovering night air and
blowing punches at my
sickly sensitive heart.

a loud pounding that
shook the house, shook my peace.
oh, how it kicked and twitched and jumped out of my skin,
like a fetus jabbing at its mother's womb.

but somehow he wasn't surprised.

i wanted his calmness, his composure.
so i stopped watching the rain at the window,
wishing it away.
instead i spent time at his feet,
in the thickness and consistency of his love and glory.
the repertoire of his demeanor
was a heavenly chord of anonymous notes.
in the richness of its suspension were a thousand clicks of puzzle pieces
all waltzing into fabrication.
as he was exalted, i was but a
small flicker of dust,
frail but ripe in humility,
a work in progress.

the house, perched on a rock, never toppled.
it stayed, despite the
howl of the wind and the
scrimmage of the clamoring waves,
a tranquil little cottage being fully rebuilt into
a Temple of the Most High.
eventually the storm tiptoed away,
but i wasn't paying attention anyways.
my little unraveled soul
was too busy being mended.

now i still stay when the sun's out at noon.
sure, it tempts, calling me forth,
but i've got the Son in the room.



Outside

By Ashley Yu

Materials: Digital

Artist Statement: Outside, the rain dances nonstop and the wind howls relentlessly. Raindrops assault the passersby and mercilessly strike everything in their path. Yet, as if in the eye of a hurricane, all is at peace on the other side of the glass.



Respite

By Celine Hung

Materials: Digital

Artist Statement: Respite - A short period of rest or relief from something difficult or unpleasant. I've always liked the comforting feeling of being indoors while it's raining, listening to the sounds of thunder.

d-1

By Catie Yu

Layout by Ashley Yu

Back home, when it rained, I would never close the window.

In my typical suburban two-story house, all the bedrooms, including mine, were on the second floor. It was high up enough that I wasn't eye-level with the shrubs but low enough that I could hear everything going on at ground level, whether it be the neighbors' kids building a bridge over the tiny creek or the squabbling goose couple that took up residence in our backyard one summer. When it rained with my window open, I could hear the quiet cacophony of the water against the tree leaves and grass blades and flower petals. It always gave a calming feeling with an interesting tradeoff: there would be no sun to warm me, but at least I had some kind of white noise to stave off the dullness of the skies. It never felt quite right to shut all that out, even though my walls were old and frail and not suited for the damp weather at all.

But I suppose it wasn't the sounds I enjoyed the most; it was the tiny breeze that each falling drop created and blew into my room, making it colder than all the rest, and the light dusting of rain that would coat my windowsill while I was asleep—a little slice of nature, the morning dew, delivered right to the foot of my bed.

It's been years since I've been home or anywhere near as mundanely suburban as it was. There is no morning dew here—not really, anyway. There is only the subtle heaving of the steel engine under my feet and the stale whoosh of the climate control system. There is a bubble of homesickness choking up my lungs that has grown big—too big. I fish out the one scratched rain cassette I've kept tucked away, force feed it to the system, and simply lie on my bed with my eyes closed, trying to imagine that the wavering lights behind my eyelids are the raindrop tracks that would race down the windowpane of my dad's beat-up SUV on nights when I couldn't sleep. I, always the romantic, would crank down the window handle until the droplets slid down my face instead of the glass.

Behind my eyelids, the lights shift around until I'm falling through a tunnel in the exact shape of the porthole that spans half my bunk. But instead of being met with sub-zero oxygen-less air, I would be lying on the pavement next to that same SUV as the gravel and puddle water mixed with my hair. I've always wondered if that was what flowers felt like—just existing and breathing the cool midnight air, choking on whatever the sky wanted to give to them. Then and now, I lay down on my back, staring at the stars and casting wishes onto them.

Back then, I wished for a way to escape the chain-link fence surrounding the parking lot, to get out and be the face of the future—something more. I got my wish, and it

consumed my life happily until it didn't. Now, I only wish to go back to then, to taste the sweetness of the rain as it mixed with the bitterness of my mascara, to feel the weight of the moonlight keeping me strapped to the ground.

It feels like my brain is pulling itself to two opposite ends of my skull. It hurts, but I can't help but want more of it.

I can no longer see the wobbly colors behind my eyelids, and I spend a second wondering why before realizing that my eyes are no longer closed. Instead, there is a single light source from somewhere to my left. I don't know what's causing that light and it makes me uneasy. Every day, a new star, a new sun, a new light source – it scares me.

As I sit up, I realize that the mascara I tasted while dreaming had really dripped down my face to coat my tongue, and I try ridding my mouth of as much as I can. After expelling what felt like half a lung, I finally turn my attention to the sights outside the porthole. I am presented with an odd image. It is much too dark to be a star. But as the ship moves around the object a little more, small bright pinpricks start dotting its surface, more and more until the whole thing appears covered in tiny radiating spots. It reminds me of the maps they used to show us in social studies class, where we could see every little light from every little skyscraper that shone in the night sky of the U.S. Perhaps the chemicals from the mascara have made me loopy because it feels compelling to me, more than anything else I can ever remember feeling. I want to touch it. I want to taste it and inhale the scent of burning coal and charred firewood one more time. But instead of feeling the warm fire that I know is under the ship that is just within my reach, my hands meet the icy chill of sterilized military-grade glass, and I crack.

Home is at my fingertips and thousands of miles away, and impulsively, I decide.

With my eyes wet, shattered crystals at my feet, and the stars embracing me, I am finally free.

The Daily Routine of

By Sara Pratt

Layout by Vivien Yeung

Cycling through the unknown,
Agreeing to be agreeable—
To be content with the hole I stand in, shovel in hand.
Maybe the fly on the wall has a greater understanding of this universe,
Of why we sit in wait, in silence.

Rather, why does the music of traffic,
Of leaves ripping from the stability of its branch,
Stretch from my fingertips to my vocal chords.
Why can I look at the sun and fantasize about its unknown?

When writing does not satisfy, will words lose meaning?
Will thoughts become clogged in the sewing machine,
Creating nothing but uniform stitches overlapping each other?

The weight of our words could break the tables,
The ground beneath us.
But instead we sit in silence, at peace with the confessions we don't share.
We sit and accept that this is a part of us, forever and always.

When breathing becomes heavy,
When I can't find myself in a room of mirrors,
I'll whisper that this is just another day to overcome,
Just another drawer that has to be closed.

Today I looked into ur eyes

By Mamie Yang

Layout by Vivien Yeung

would you gift me 7 seconds—
let me carve my initials
into this sweet, sweet sand?
i'd escape
like a slip 'n slide through wet cement.

the cicadas'll join me in a song
as i recall the taste
of bitter pond water,
McFlurries,
and youth

i'll sneak a glance at the withering fantasies behind me, but
like precious, shattering china,
red petals'll fall
carried,
 slipping,
into the wind.

so tell me,
if i take the batteries out of the clock
will time stop altogether?



Five Little Scoops

By Vivien Yeung



On a cold winter's afternoon,
When the air was thin, drawn, and easy,
The trees wore snuff-coats of pure white
And breath frosted over.



Beside my feet brushed thick fur,
The pitter-patter of a nosey little thing:
A child of a creature whipping its tail,
Running from the frigid, open air.

I turned to spot ginger, cream, calico, dark truffle, coffee
Five timid ice-cream flavors worn like sweaters, hiding from the snow.
No sign of a sixth motherly tint anywhere.
So I crouched and lay until my eyes were level with the candle-lit pearls.



They were the tiniest creatures,
Barely larger than an infant's pillow—
Paws tucked, like wee-little marshmallow mittens
Under a careful, careful tail.



Two came to greet me, rubbing her full fur
On my poofed socks and wrapped shoes.
I saw a trusting sweetness in her eyes,
One that warmed over the cold, lonely winter nights.





The other three stayed some distance away.
The world has not been kind to you.
A scar near the brow and a gash at the foot,
Hollowed ribs that showed through the hem.



They stayed in the hedges,
Where sheltering branches stretched overhead.
As if to protect the little beings
From the white powder, or even me.

I said silently,
This is no way to spend a Christmas.
I scooped each color into my arms
And walked them home with me.

Now, curled next to the sunflower chimney
Are five little scoops, dreaming in my home.
On a thick, warming, cherry carpet
Souls given a day in the year not alone.





Tides

By Joe Liang

Materials: Charcoal pencil on 4K-sized paper

Artist Statement: This piece uses smudging of charcoal and the fine hatching of pencil to create texture for the rocks. When confronted with this sight, people cannot help but feel small compared to the primordial power of nature.



Here I Am

By Sophia Xin

Materials: Digital

Artist Statement: “Liberosis”— the desire to care less about things. This artwork attempts to capture this liberosis within a scene of slight bizarreness.

Fireworks

By Julia Fang

Layout by Finna Wang

The dim lights overhead barely illuminated the rotting walls of Anna's old cabin, where a brittle old chair stood beside a cluttered desk. It had always been tradition every Fourth of July to visit their cabin up north. That was where the best fireworks were—fearless, dazzling explosions of starry specks that you could feel booming in your chest. Anna remembered sitting on her father's lap in the grass field, transfixed by the bursts of colors painting the night sky and outshining the stars. When she heard the hiss of the first firework shooting skyward, she would grip her father's hand and brace herself for the loud bang. Shortly after the blast of sparks, the embers would fizzle out as if they never existed, but the thrill in Anna's chest would tell her otherwise. That's what the fireworks were: a scintillating blaze followed by silence. And it was always over too soon.

Every year, they would attempt to sneak onto the roof, but the mischievous scuffling of their shoes on the cabin shingles would never escape the notice of Anna's mother. She would immediately order them onto the field where the rest of the families watched the show. So onto the grass they went, where they stayed bound to the earth. Anna's father was always enthralled by the fireworks, and—only now did Anna realize—maybe a little envious of them too. The roof, being so close to the limitless sky, might have felt something like liberation to him.

Anna had sat with her father on a thin picnic mat, her dainty hand curled around his index finger. As they lay on the grass, toes touching the pink horizon and the crescent moon smiling down on their hopeful faces, Anna closed her eyes and inhaled the evening air. At some point, she began playing with his finger restlessly, whining about how the fireworks never came. Anna's father looked down sympathetically and ruffled her hair, smoothing her bangs flat over her eyes.

“Be patient, Anna,” he chided. “It will start eventually, but only if you're patient.”

She pouted and crossed her pudgy arms in defiance, but eventually conceded and waited placidly until she glimpsed the first flare set off into the sky. The tedious wait became worth it as the blooming sparkles unfurling against the black sky filled her vision. Although the lights were brilliantly hypnotizing, Anna couldn't bear the frightening noise and insisted that her father cover her ears. When a particularly loud firework bloomed wider than her two hands, she tugged on the sleeves of her father's plaid jacket and brought his warm palms to her ears, feeling the rumble in his chest as he chuckled.

Anna almost smiled at the memory. Almost. Outside, the sun dyed the sky a deep violet ombré as it sank beneath the snowy peaks in the distance, a scene which Anna had long since memorized. Until the brilliant explosions lit the night, she could only wait patiently in her old room, imagining her father beckoning to her outside, through her window. But instead of

letting herself be deluded with these fanciful visions, she came to her senses; the musty stench of the old cabin filled her nostrils, and her eyes refocused on the decrepit wooden panels embedded with rusty nails.

In the corner of her vision, a splash of light caught her attention. She squinted and moved closer to the source—a photograph discarded in her otherwise empty trash can. Although the broken glass distorted the image, enlarging facial features and morphing expressions, it didn't matter because the picture was seared into her memory. The curves and linings on her father's jacket, the little girl perched on his shoulders which she barely recognized as her five-year-old self—Anna could draw it all with her eyes closed. Sometimes, she wondered why he wasn't here with them. Hadn't the fireworks kept them tethered? Wasn't this dusty old cabin their sacred space? When did it stop being his?

Anna reached inside the wastebin and picked out the ripped photograph, feeling its smooth surface as she sank into her chair with a creak. Staring at the faded picture, she couldn't help but sense the memories hidden in the creases and frayed edges of the sheet. The way the glass shards bounced off the floorboards when she smashed the photo into the ground, betrayal and confusion blurring her vision. The little action figurines and racecars littering her desk, only serving as spiteful reminders of her father driving away in that white sedan. That day, he didn't even spare a second glance for the little girl pasted to her window, yearning.

Anna watched the fireworks alone that year and tried to cast her foolish hopes aside. But year after year, the heartache and longing never left.

Anna didn't notice her tears until they began dribbling onto the paper. Once the first droplet fell, the paper began to wrinkle and wither against the onslaught of tears that streamed down her face relentlessly, each one mottling the photo with dark spots until, eventually, she let her head rest against her forearm as her vision faded into darkness.

Anna opened her eyes to the murky image of her father gazing longingly at the sky, his bright flannel washed in darkness. She leaned back and placed her hands behind her. They scraped against textured shingles, sending jolts of wonder and excitement through her when she realized they were sitting on the cabin roof. She reveled in the accomplishment before calming herself and adjusting her feet surreptitiously, glancing around for any signs of her horrified mother. Finding none, she turned back to her father.

“Dad?”

He merely smiled back at her, pointed to the empty sky, and then tapped his wrist.

“You don't have to tell me to be patient,” she said pointedly.

They sat on the roof, enveloped by twinkling stars and the shrill cries of the cicadas. Before long, her eyes began to droop, and she fought to keep her chin up. But the sky remained opaque and dark, devoid of the familiar shooting streaks trekking upward. Finally, she couldn't stand it anymore.

“We've been here forever,” she groaned.

Her father simply shrugged. Anna scanned his features for some semblance of anticipation but instead, found his empty eyes staring into the blank night in defeat.

“There aren’t going to be fireworks today, are there?”

She looked to the sky without waiting for an answer, but all she saw were the stars blinking a broken promise before the darkness swallowed her.

She jolted upright in her chair, mild confusion muddling her thoughts before she realized she had been dreaming. The ruined photo was still in her hands, but she quickly dropped it.

Suddenly overcome by a rush of agitation, Anna grasped the crinkled handles of the black trash bag and twisted them together, fingers flexing as the opening sealed into a tight knot. She felt her anger simmering like a volcano as she lifted the bag from the metal trash can with a clang. Broken glass rattled against the sides violently, threatening to break through the fragile plastic enclosure, but Anna ignored the strain of the thin bag and strode through the living room and out the front door.

The cool evening breeze sent shivers down her spine as she made her way to the garbage disposal, listening to the insects and rodents scuttling through the thick vegetation that surrounded a tall, black bin flecked with sticky amber stains. She lifted the lid, allowing a group of moths to escape the odious interior, and hefted the trash bag in front of her, letting it hover between her chest and the disposal bin.

She released a shaky breath and began to let go of the memory, letting the plastic handles slip from her palms. The handles were wedged in the last inch of her trembling fingers, the entire bag quivering along with her body—

A familiar sizzle pierced the air. She looked at the sky as it lit up with fireworks exploding into kaleidoscopic brilliance. Anna could faintly hear her mother calling for her to come inside and watch the firework show with her, but she stood frozen, the trash bag suspended in her hand. At that moment, she was with her father again, except instead of his eyes being fixated on the fireworks, he was staring at a shadowy figure in the distance, hands reaching out in an invitation, but it might as well have been a goodbye to Anna.

She clenched her fists and turned away, determined to ignore the sight that she once marveled at, but with each explosion, the bag felt heavier in her hand, as if the world was taunting her. How she longed to be inside, sheltered from the loud reminders of her father’s absence.

Then, another shower of sparks blossomed through the wide expanse of the sky like a sunflower, breaking her resolve. In a daze, she stepped back and let the bag fall to the ground with a clink, her shoes silencing the rustling grass beneath her as she held her breath. Everything fell quiet for a moment. The cicadas hushed. The wind calmed. The garbage bag at her feet ceased its rustling. But there was no one to cover her ears when the loud crackles hit.



Wachau in December

By Henie Zhang

Layout by Ashley Yu

Materials: DSLR Photograph

Artist statement: The Wachau River Valley right before the holidays. It is mid-morning, but a thick mist drapes over the valley. For a moment the hazy town seems to hang, precariously, between all the ghosts of Christmas future and the ghosts of Christmas past.



Immortal

By Katherine Da and Henie Zhang

Layout by Celine Hung

I forgot when it started
but I ended up in the middle of the flock,
mindlessly shuffling,
hollow.

I peeked inside my chest and tried to find my heart.
In the dimly lit tower, long, spiraling stairs stretched down,
shadows danced across crabbed walls,
a distant roar pierced the air.
I descended slowly.

At the bottom of the stairs, the air is lighter.
A strip of sunlight tips from the nearby window
and rests upon a withered, decrepit fountain.

In low whispers, the fountain confesses its dream to be immortal.
So with my fingers, I try to wipe the dust off its body
and then bit by bit off the tower's walls.

Along the staircase, I wrestle to
squeeze ajar windows so the universe
may fall upon the fountain's bowls like warm rain.

Drops of water, glistening, glide past one another
on their trek down from level to level.

I lowered my head, took a sip:
felt the sweetness course through my veins
until my fingertips tingled from its touch,
and the window panes shivered like a chorus
in the downpour—

What does it mean to find afterlife
in the chambers of my heart? What does it mean
to give more than I've taken?

A soft whip crack. A hissing of stone. I wait
with my skin unbolted. Then

above me, in the light—the sound of an opening door.

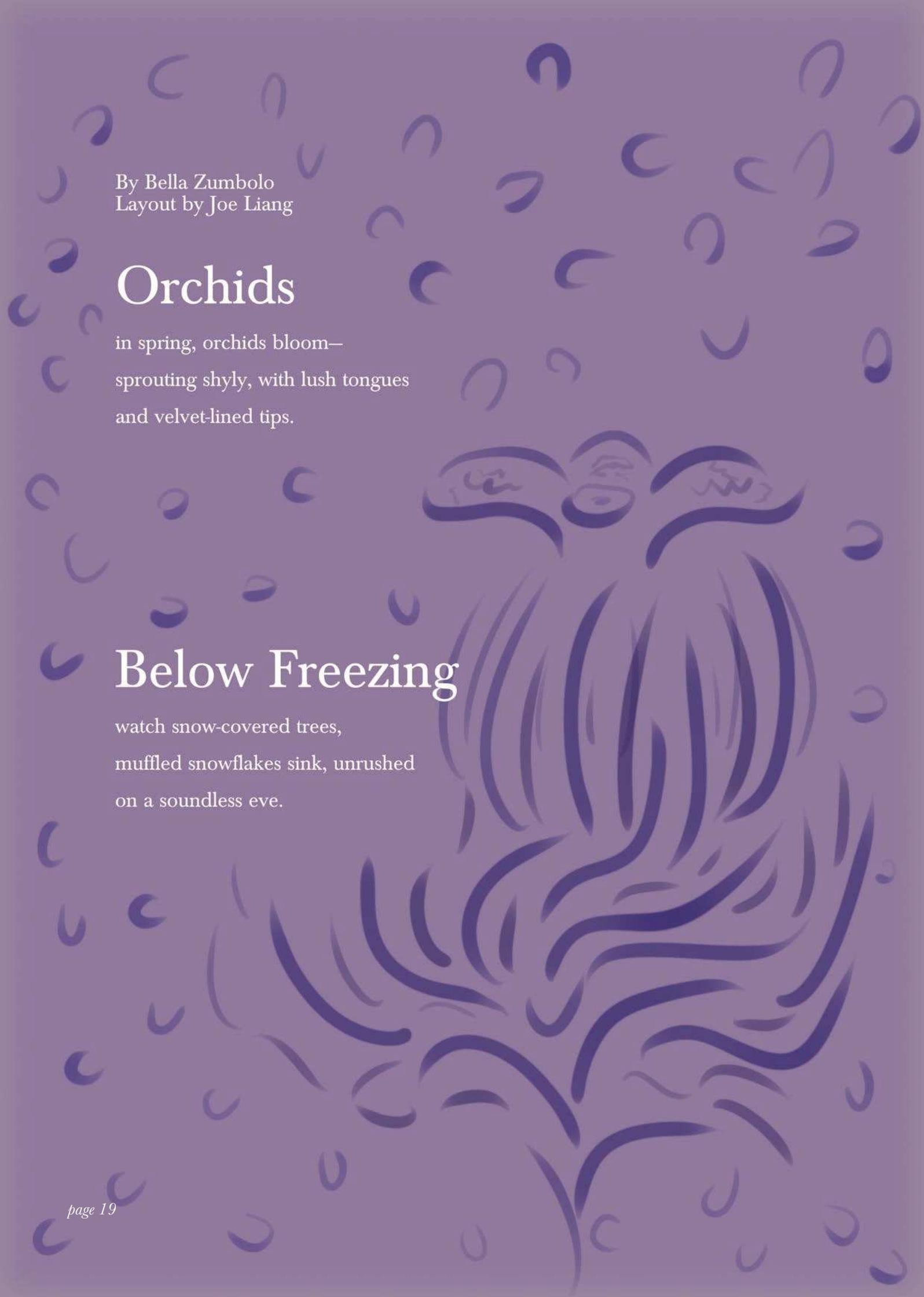
Watery Sunbeam



By Finna Wang
Layout by Alisa Zheng

Materials: Digital

Artist Statement: Sometimes, even in the midst of a thunderstorm, the sunlight that filters through the curtains makes the days look clear. This piece was inspired by the lethargic sensation of warmth on a rainy day.



By Bella Zumbolo
Layout by Joe Liang

Orchids

in spring, orchids bloom—
sprouting shyly, with lush tongues
and velvet-lined tips.

Below Freezing

watch snow-covered trees,
muffled snowflakes sink, unrushed
on a soundless eve.

Blossoms

by Elizabeth Chen



Materials: Photography

Artist Statement: This photograph was taken prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. The beautiful street scenery full of blossoms and tourists reminds me of the joy of being able to travel freely.

rainy days

By Alisa Zheng
Materials: DSLR Photograph



Artist Statement:

Amidst the crazy bus tours and chaotic tourist adventures, we sat back and watched the rain. Despite the feverish rainfall, my grandma found it soothing. And for a moment, everything stood still.

Off to Nowhere

By Alisa Zheng

Materials: DSLR Photograph



Artist Statement:

In the dark and gloomy, I seek adventure. In the fog and smoke, I see purpose. And I ask you, the train that goes off to nowhere, where will you take me?

We are relics

By Henie Zhang

Layout by Sophia Xin

Can I start with the obvious? You:
a rush of twilights, shifting
incessantly behind the glass. In the garden,

all the orchids suddenly close.
The unborn geraniums forget the beckoning
of the sun. Of all the seasons, you
are my favorite, so I keep by keeping you
embalmed in leathered loops of the letters,
sown like a tune into the crown of my head.
That day in the tree,

a friend told me the truth
about catching fireflies: that which you love the most
you can never own. I imagine their tiny fists
beating feebly against the jar,
their last breathless conviction, the arrival
of a dimmer sunrise.

Please: I want you to live, long. I want you to know
that you are beautiful. I want this so deeply
that survival has drawn out in an endless silver wire.

But could we look away? Could we stay
up here, and forget that we will not find answers?
From up here, we can watch the dusk salve
the black-blue mountains, and the wind
snag on the swishing of pines. This
could be how eternities vanish:

hushed, like hands closing over the sun.

Caption Contest Feature



“Dog’s Pavlov”

Caption by Cyrus Hung

(Winning caption for Zeitgeist Issue 3)

Cartoon by Sophia Xin

Layout by Vivien Yeung



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