International House
Zhi-Ying Chua

For Vanderbilt’s International House—to be missed deeply, after 40 years

“Isn’t it obvious that we ‘inter-are’?” — Thích Nhất Hạnh

Thursday night and the walls bend in. The rain shudders on its way down. Our windows gaze out onto more windows, and the ceiling drips into our cupped palms — arms heavy with food, so you hold the door open. Your plate my plate. Your worries ours. Your hands’ veins, like the redwoods, old and still growing, twined through mine—

Don’t we bear a duty of care to each other? And here, is one way of fending off the end of things telling stories: looking, honestly, at our selves. And outward. Windows through windows into this blue world: the lotion you soothe over my raw skin. Belligerent caw of a squirrel. Murmuration of starlings, crying in the pink dusk — your

tray heavy, your dripping shoes, so I catch the door and hold it. I pull you up and out of the rain. Tell me love isn’t possible, not here, not where voices layer voices bend, and carry voices each day, in languages not owned — and tell me again. Tell me. Tell me our survival isn’t possible, our roof will shudder, salt, and crack our hands can’t possibly hold each other, while we join together in roaring song.