


5 Photoshop Lighting Techniques You Can Use Today!

A woman with long blonde hair, wearing a white, flowing dress, is floating in a dark, gothic-style interior. She is looking upwards with her right hand raised. The scene is dramatically lit from a large, circular stained glass window in the background, creating a warm, golden glow. The architecture features dark stone walls and pointed arches.

If you have ever tried to create a light source, or even amplify an existing one, you have probably run into some challenges. Manipulating light in Photoshop is one of the most powerful effects you can achieve. After watching dozens of tutorials by artists from around the world, I have chosen a few excellent examples that illustrate different techniques from existing Shift Art tutorials.

I hope you find them helpful in your work!

Shift Art

#1. From Tutorial: Big Shoe by George Christakis.



As a simple first example, let's take a look at George Christakis' Big Shoe.

The light cast on the ground was created to match the light falling on the shoe image.



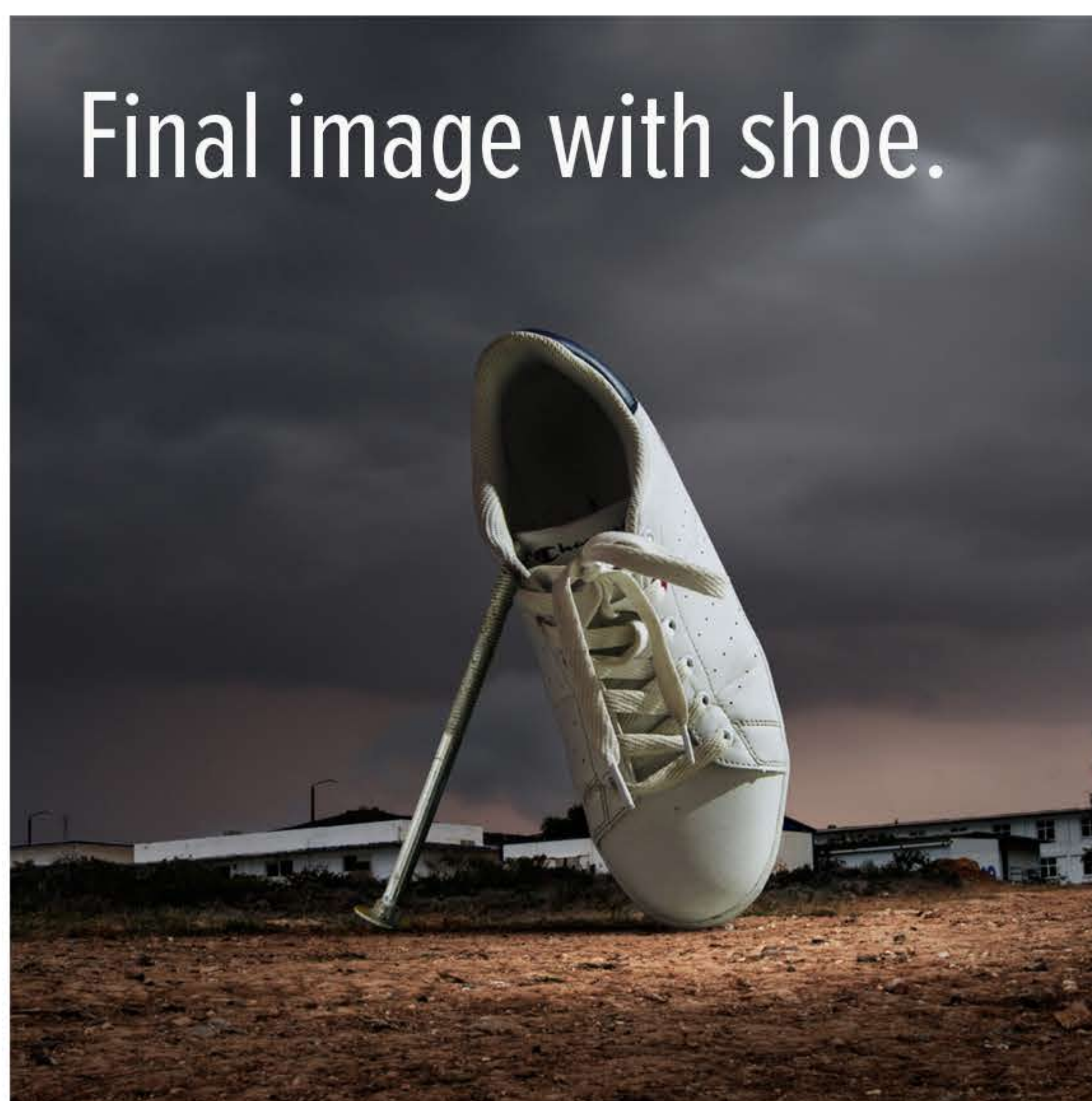
2. Transform to size and shape.



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As you can see above, the process is really basic. First he paints a big dab with a large soft white brush, right in the center of a new layer. He then simply transforms it (Ctrl/Com+T) to the size and shape that makes sense for this image.

To complete the process he simply sets the layer to Overlay blend mode to allow the dab of white to interact with the ground photo layer below it.



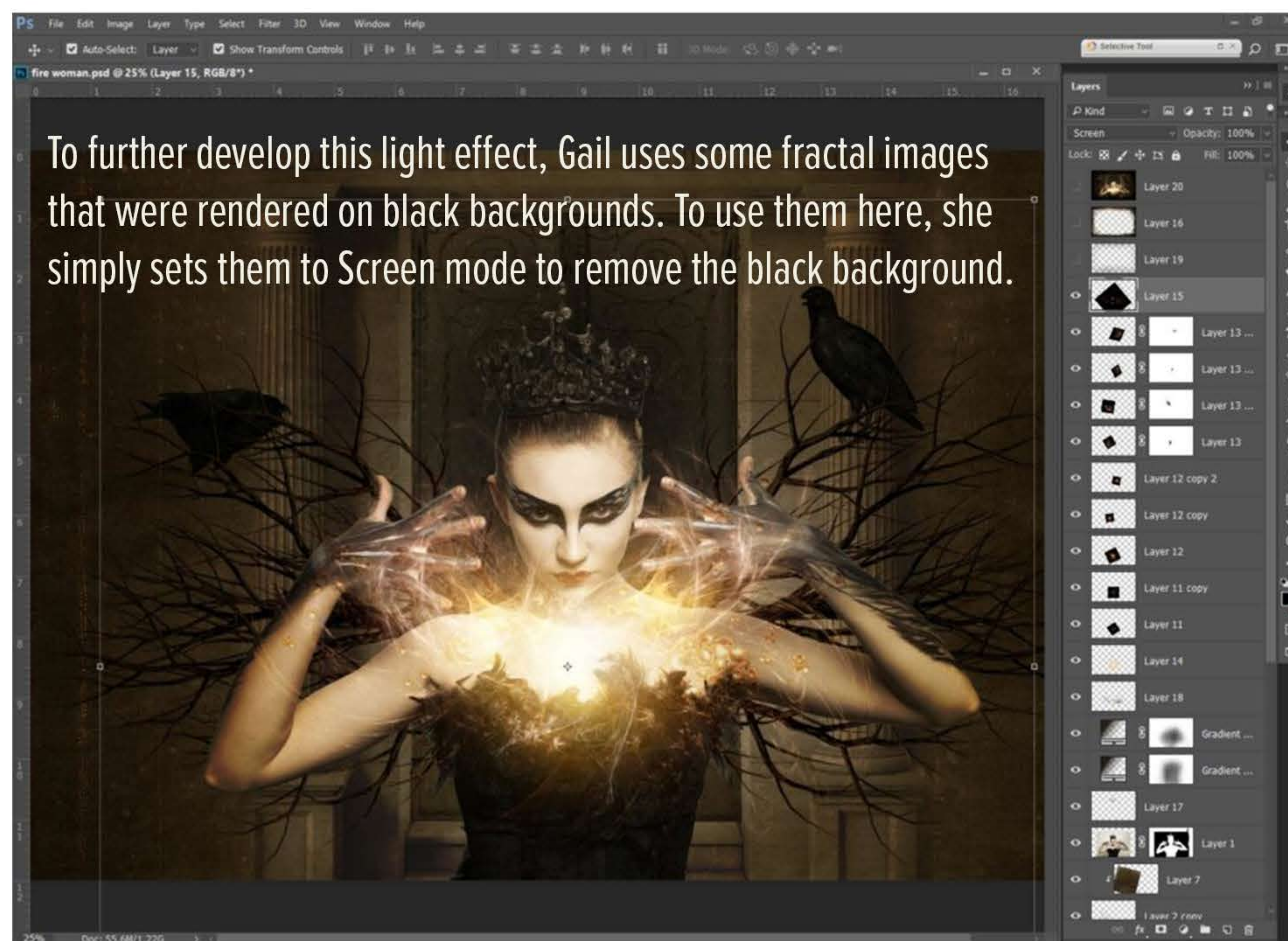
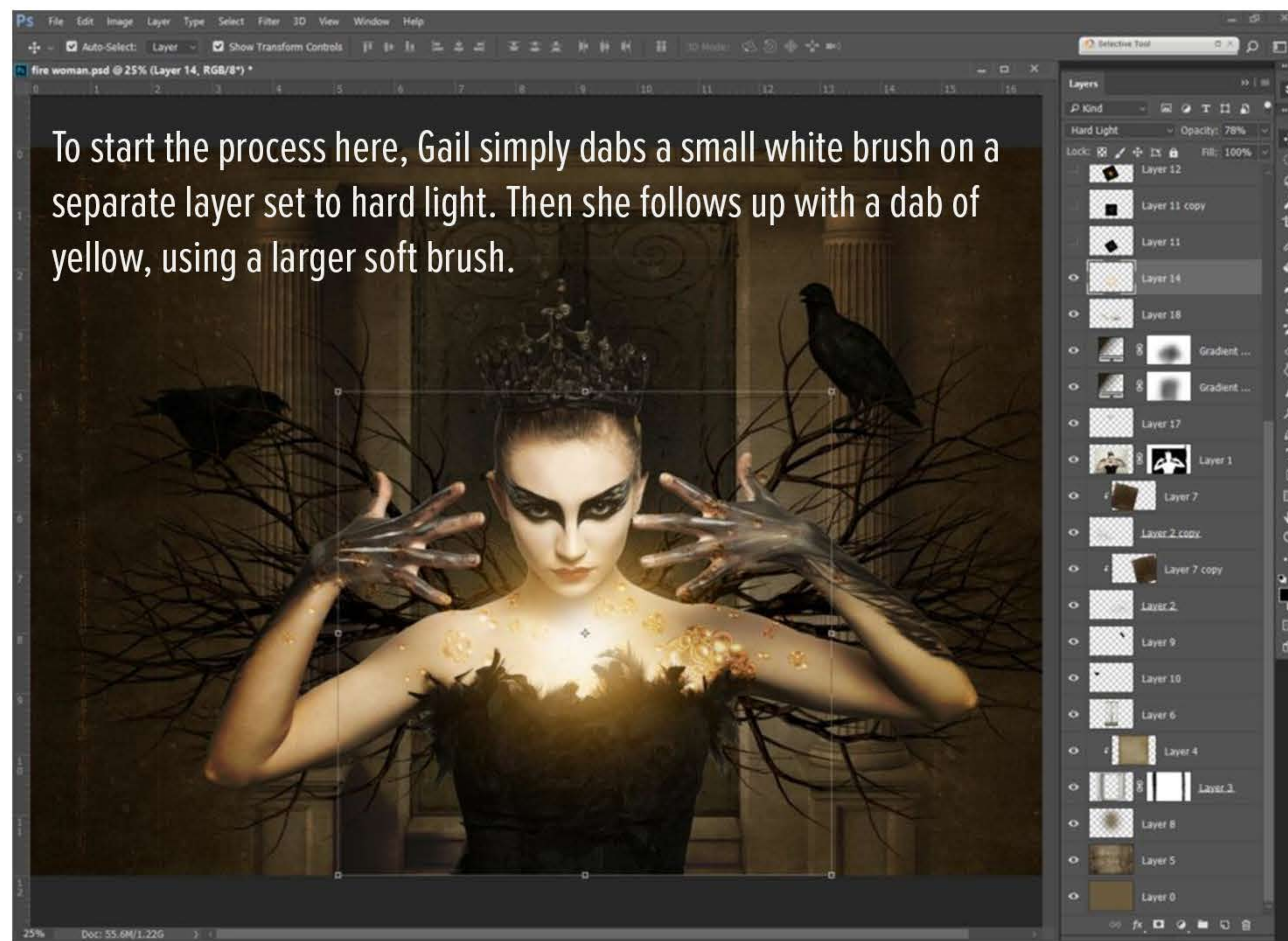
Layer with white dab set to Overlay blend mode.

A photograph of the same dirt field and buildings as in the previous image, but with a large, soft white dab applied to the ground. The dab is positioned in the center of the frame, and its edges are blurred. The overall scene is dark and moody.

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#2. From Tutorial: Fire Starter by Gail Edwards.

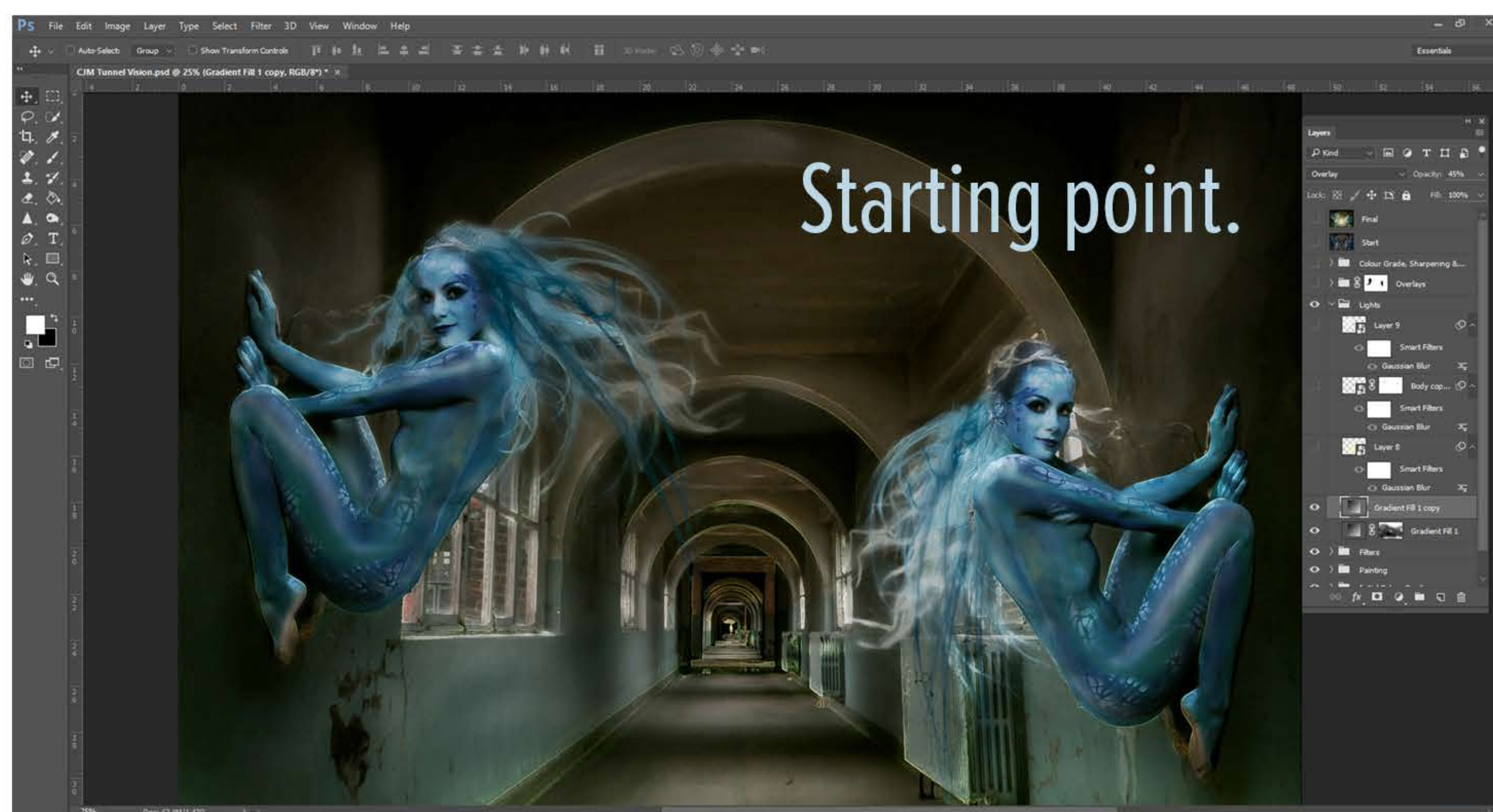
This incredible image is an excellent example of how light can be created from scratch using just a couple of simple steps.



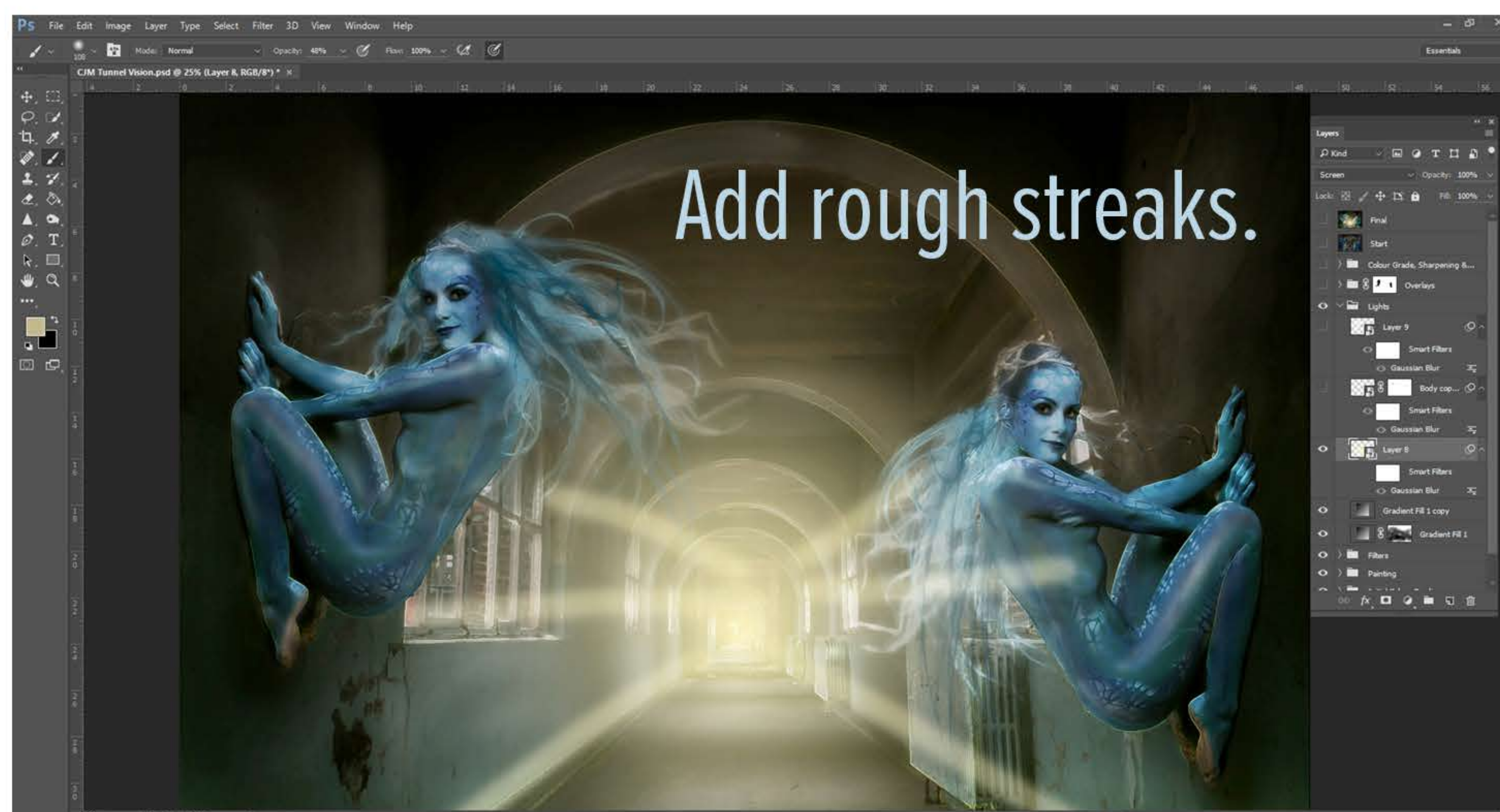
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#3. From Tutorial: Tunnel Vision by Caroline Julia Moore.

Starting with a background image with no significant lightsource, Caroline created this bright light using a combination of dabbing light in the center of the source, and painting individual streaks of light.



Caroline first added some dabs of light with a soft yellow brush on a layer set to Screen mode, and then painted in rough directional light streaks on a separate layer:



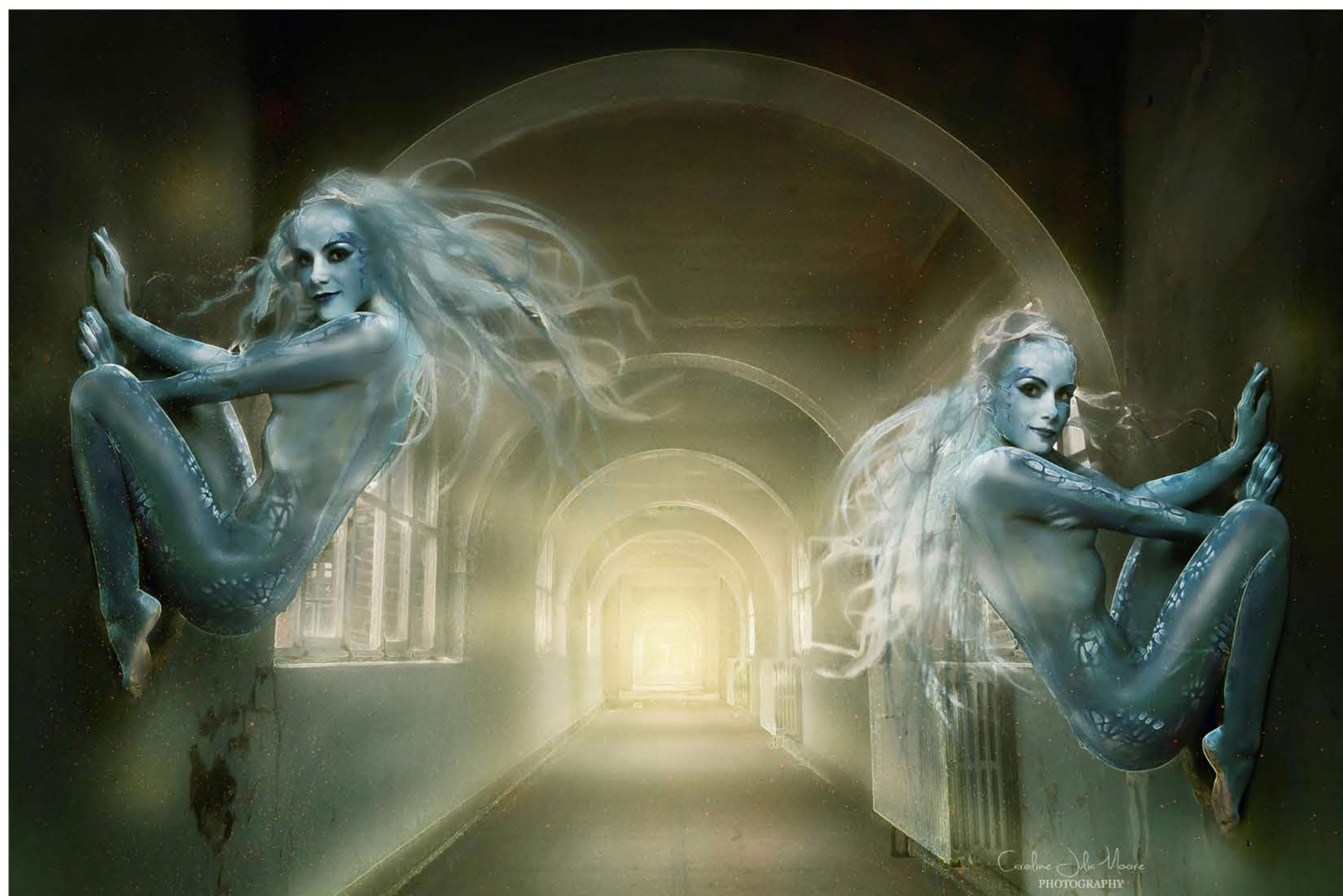
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#3. Based on Tunnel Vision by Caroline Julia Moore, continued.

As a final step Caroline added a Gaussian blur to the layer with the painted lines.



Final image:



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#4. From Tutorial: Dark Forest by Bunty Pundir.

If you need to amplify an existing light source, there are some simple solutions too. In his piece called Dark Forest, Bunty Pundir accentuates existing highlights on a model, and then amplifies an existing light on the horizon for a very dramatic look.

Accentuate existing highlights:

1. Clip a new blank layer on the layer with the extracted model.
2. Paint in highlights with a soft round brush.
3. Set this layer to Overlay or Soft Light blend mode and adjust opacity as needed.



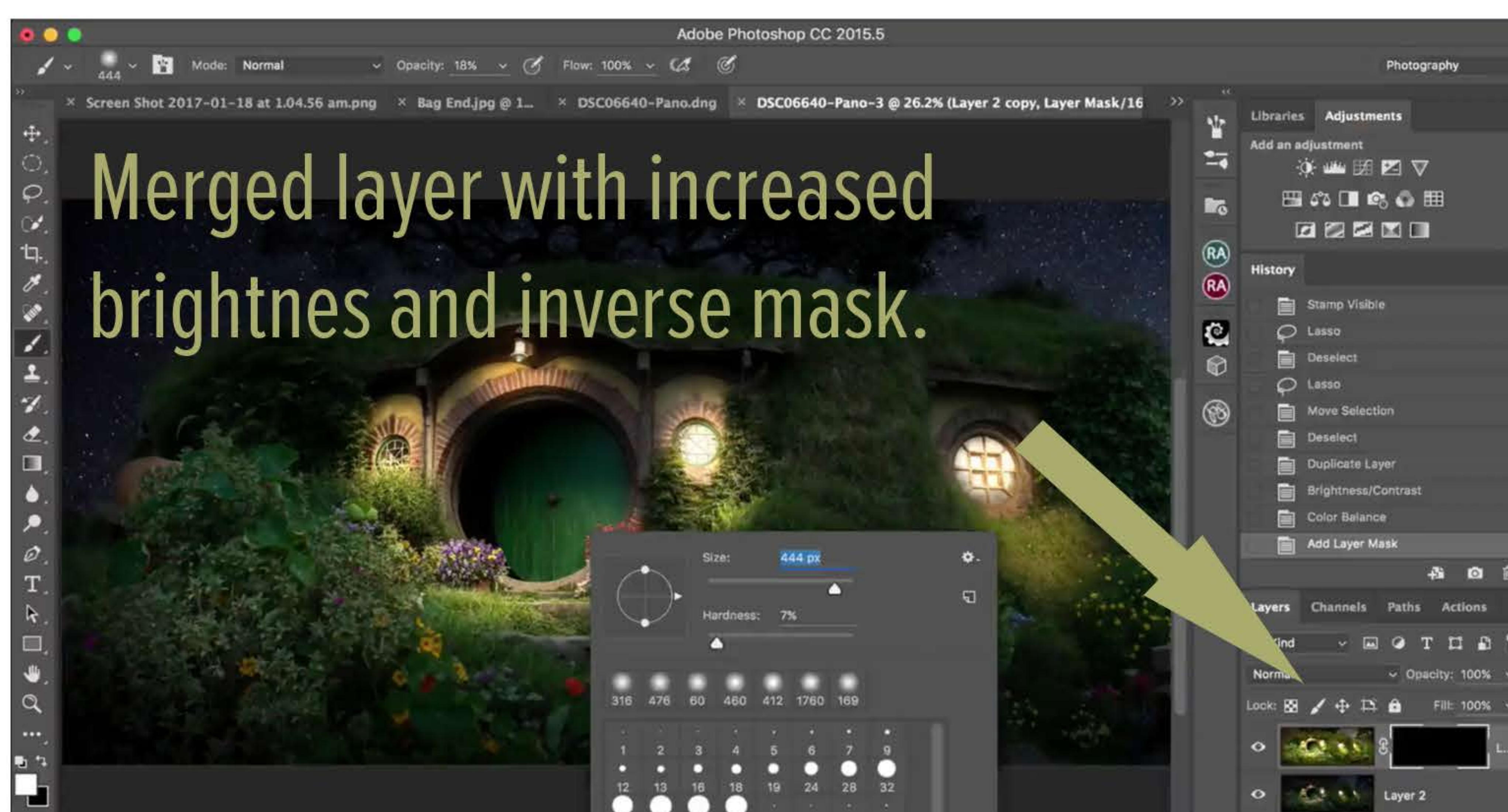
To *amplify the light in the background*, Bunty uses one of his favorite techniques. He first paints with a dark color, sampled from the image, as shown below. Then he sets the layer to Color Dodge blend mode with an opacity of choice.



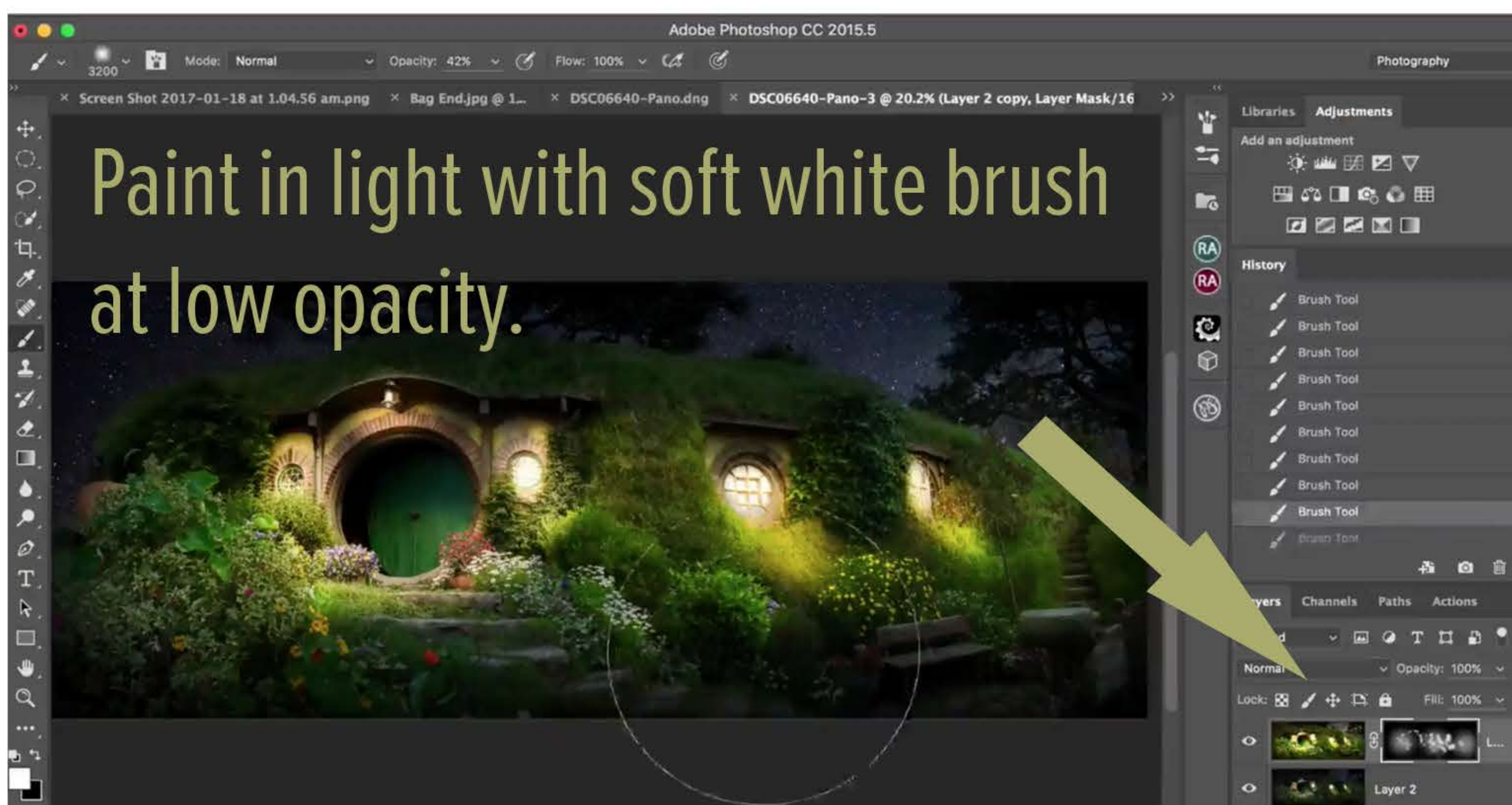
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#5. Day to Night at Bag End by Tanya Wallis.

This image contains five main light sources, each casting beautiful ambient light around the surrounding foliage. To achieve this effect, Tanya created a new merged layer (Ctrl/Com+Alt/Opt+Shift+E) and duplicated it (Ctrl/Com+J). Then she adjusted the top merged layer by dramatically increasing the brightness, to the point of blowing out the brightest parts of the light sources.



She then added an inverse mask (hold Alt/Opt while clicking on the mask button) which allowed her to carefully paint in the highlights using a soft white brush on the mask.



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#5. Day to Night at Bag End by Tanya Wallis, continued.

Final image



I hope you picked up some new ideas and techniques from these examples. All the examples shown in this guide are from tutorials on Shift Art. To access the full video tutorials sampled in this guide, sign up at ShiftArt.com.

At Shift Art you'll be joining thousands of fellow artists on a quest to drastically improve their art. By learning from accomplished artists, this goal is within your reach.

Thank you,
Andrei Tallent
Shift Art Founder & Photoshop Enthusiast