

# ERATO.

GEORGIA TECH  
LITERARY & ARTS MAGAZINE

2021-2022  
LII EDITION



THE  
**COMING  
HOME  
ISSUE**

*erato.gatech.edu - Atlanta, GA*



**Rocks**  
Matthew Walloch





# ERATO

2021-2022  
LII EDITION

LETTER FROM THE  
**EDITOR**





Dear Readers,

It would be a gross understatement to say that the past few years have been a challenge for us all. Two years ago, Erato published its 50th anniversary edition at the beginning of the pandemic. The hope was to return within a few weeks to celebrate all the hard work the staff poured into the edition. Sadly, that did not happen. A year passed and the boxes of magazines remained undistributed.

This year, we were fortunate enough to finally meet back in person to our dingy little office, smelling of mildew and old magazines. Naturally, my first priority was to recruit as many new members as possible. To my happy surprise, there were plenty of eager eyed individuals wanting to participate. I'm grateful to report that our numbers have doubled from the previous year and this edition truly would not have been possible without them.

I can say with confidence that this year is truly the beginning of new horizons. We put more effort into creating a social media presence, web design, and a newsletter. We published a new staff zine in addition to the annual magazine. We even sent this edition to contest for the first time. And next year, we will be moving into the Student Center with a brand new office space. I cannot wait for what's to come.

My goal for Erato is for it to not only exist as an outlet for students to express their talent and creativity, but to also foster a welcoming community of like-minded individuals. Every meeting, I begin by

asking the staff what is one good thing that has happened to them in the past week. It's a way to connect more on a personal level and spotlight some positivity in our busy lives.

The idea for "Coming Home" was brought up by a staff member during one meeting. We all agreed that not only was it appropriate in terms of literally returning to campus, but also in terms of the overall state of the world. As you read through this book, ponder what this theme means to you personally. Is it a place, a feeling, a person, or perhaps a moment in time?

Consider this book as a collection of all these different interpretations through writing, artwork, and photography. It's an exploration into the impact of the past few years on our lives and subsequently the meaning of coming home.


Chronologically, this book begins with the innocent idea that home is where the hearth is. Then it slowly spirals into a feeling of suffocation and stagnation. Finally, it blooms into a feeling of nostalgia and surrealism— not quite knowing what's truly normal anymore.

Happy reading!

**Jimmy Liu**  
Editor-in-Chief



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THE  
**COMING**  
**HOME**  
ISSUE

## Home in my Heart

Sadie Palmer

If home is where the heart is  
My house is a weary traveler  
By day, a ready guide  
By night, a tired shepherd

It carries its wares from place to place  
Hoards memories like old photographs  
It cannot forget a name or a face  
Nor smile or gentle laugh

Some pictures hang out on its walls  
Albums played on repeat  
It just can't seem to let them go  
Cannot discard or delete

And sometimes it parks itself for a while  
A sojourn between stops  
And recalls each contour  
Of the house in others' hearts  
So when it finally pulls away

The afterimage is blinding  
Vibrant colors and emotions  
New untrod paths unwinding

Because tired legs will always need rest  
And not all buildings are made to last  
The heart stakes up its steady walls  
And guards its fragil past

There is no foundation like that of the  
mind  
Steadfast and determined and bold  
Rarely aching for a solid stone  
When it has its palace of gold

If I ever need to visit that celestial place  
Depart from this unforgiving world  
I'll ismply close my eyes and  
Become one with the home in my heart



**Untitled**  
Chloe Morris



**A Community of Life and Love**  
Taylor Hatridge





**The Universal Language**  
Sandy Xie

## Dad and I

By Grace Pietkiewicz

Tangled white earbuds linked us together as *Stairway to Heaven* filled my ears. I looked up at my Dad, saw the memories of school dances and dark drives home from football games flash through his green eyes as he smiled wistfully down our neighborhood street. We walked along.

"This was the song of my high school years," he proudly told me, taking out the left earbud from his ear and handing it to me so I could share the song with him, "They said people used to commit suicide to it. But I don't think that's true."

"Because it's so depressing?" I asked.

"No, it's hopeful. Just listen."

I put the earbud in and leaned into his shoulder as the short cord pulled us together. I bounced

a neon tennis ball in front of us once, twice, three times as the bounces beat along with the soulful guitar.

Everything felt like home.

We walked up our hilly street, saw the neighbors with their golden retrievers, Chevy Tahoe's guzzling home from dinner, red leaves dancing down from trees, and yet it was just him and I.

*A new day will dawn for those who stand long, and the forests will echo with laughter.*

My Dad jumped ahead of me, pointing at the inflatable Halloween decorations covering the lawn of a household organized enough to have decorated by October 3.

"Stop blowing holes in my ship!" he exclaimed, pointing his finger at me, grinning wider than his cheeks would go. Behind him the inflatable pirate ship swayed in the autumn wind, pirate and sails dancing with the breeze.







eeeëêe eeeeeEEE  
Mason Mann

I laughed —it was true, hearty, from somewhere deep within me. I thought of our Pirates of the Caribbean marathon a few years prior, and remembered the dim lights, curling into our couch crunching popcorn while cheering on Jack Sparrow.

"Inflatables are awful!" he laughed. "I'm never buying one."

"Yeah, but this one was pretty good."

He handed me back the earbud, rewound the song 30 seconds, and we stepped forward.

*Dear Lady, can you hear the wind blow? And did you know your stairway lies in the whispering wind?*





11.13.2021 05:44

**Cô mặt trăng**  
Angela Huynh



**indigo motel**  
Sultan Sayedzada





**Warm Nights**  
Joanna Zheng



## General Relativity

Connor Flannelly

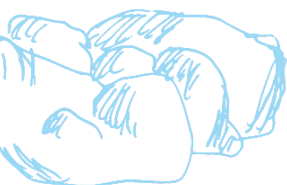
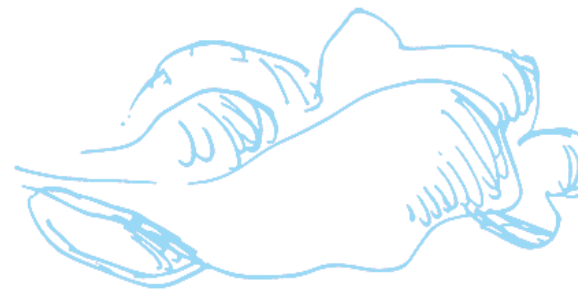
Say what you wish, but I know  
there's a reason our paths crossed  
at the old Einstein statue  
on this starry Thursday night.

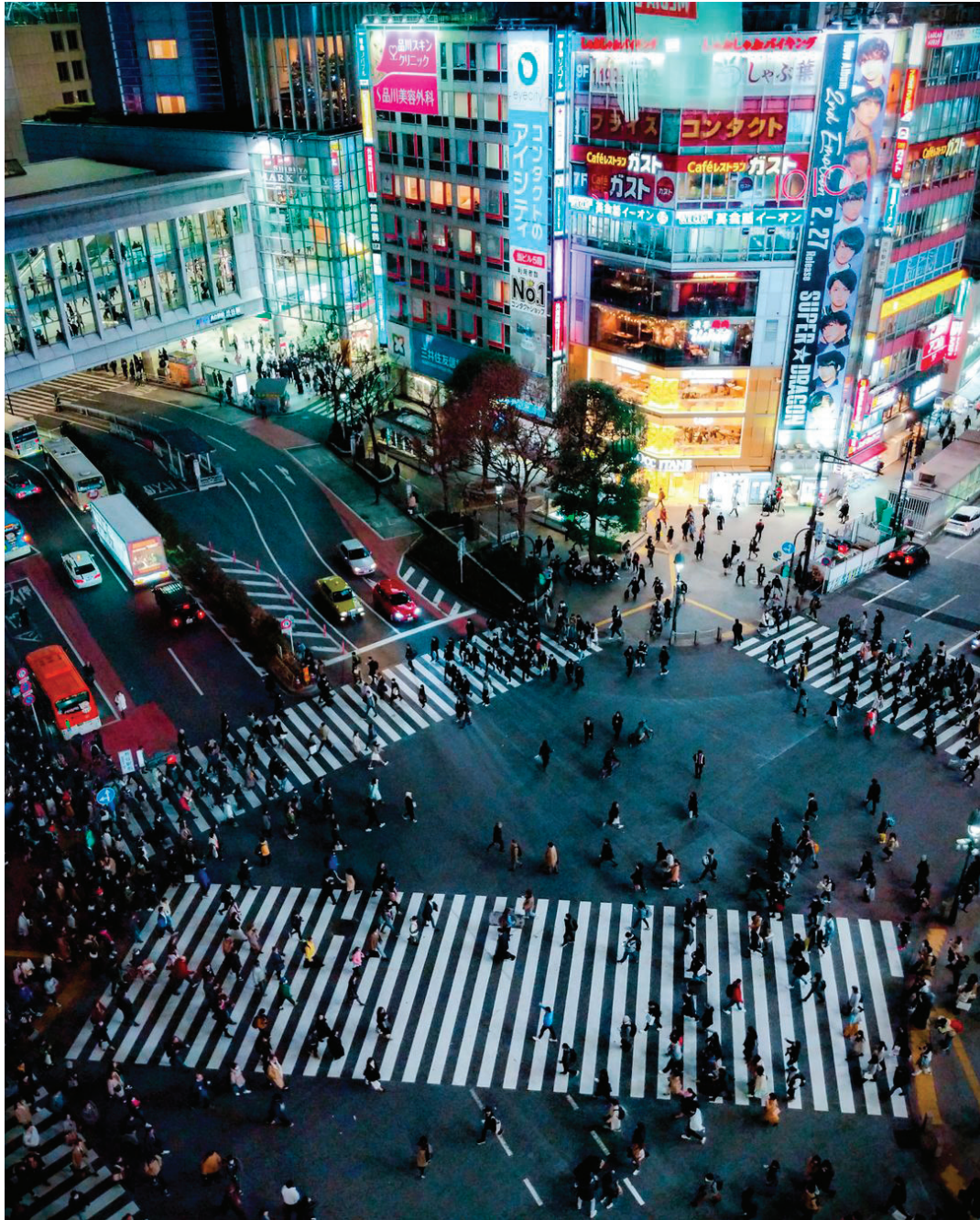
Speak to me of singularities,  
of initial conditions and fine-tuning,  
but place me anywhere in the universe  
and I will still gravitate to you.

Shoot me out into the farthest reaches  
of space where no star has ever been,  
and I will bend time itself  
to be with you in this moment.

Scatter my ash in every corner of  
the cosmos and see how I,  
hitchhiking on photons, race right  
back to you at the speed of light.

Call me crazy for thinking we  
could be the only outcome, but  
I find all the proof I need in  
Einstein's knowing smile.





**Connection in Progress**

Oliver Zheng

**monday, 3pm,  
third floor of the library**

Emma Ryan

it's raining today,  
down & down & down,  
like sheets, like gravity,  
so gray i don't remember  
what blue skies look like.

it's raining today,  
sad & sad & sad,  
a waterfall inside my head,  
a fog inside my chest,  
i want to cry, i don't know why.

it's raining today,  
but up here it's yellow.  
pages turning, soft murmurs,  
you sit across from me, laughing,  
and the fog begins to lift.

it's raining today,  
but tomorrow the sun is shining,  
warm on my skin, gold in your eyes,  
so bright, i remember  
what blue skies look like.





**The Creek in the Woods Behind her House**  
Molly Niemczyk



**Desperation in Isolation**  
Uchenna Godwin-Offor



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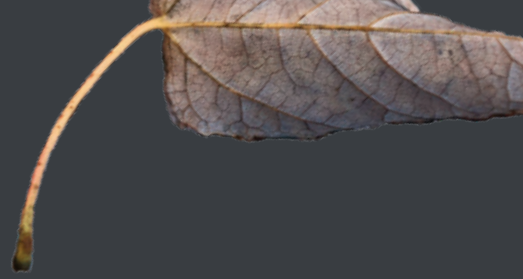
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Edward Michael Supranowicz

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# Home for the Holidays

Claire Deng



Winter break was too short, Mallory surmised. But at the moment, the time until she had to return to college seemed to stretch lazily before the road in front of her. She took her hands off the wheel and raised them up, feeling the pull of her chest expanding as she took a deep breath of the cool December air.

The neighborhood was quiet, just like she'd remembered. The soft whisper of shaken leaves accompanied the hum of her Honda's engine. She was alone on the road. The houses that rolled leisurely to her left and right had a few warm lights on, and a couple of new cars in their driveways. If she tried hard enough, she could imagine the murmur of it's-been-too-long's and you-haven't-changed-a-bit's within. The neighbors had gotten lazy with the holiday decorations this year, but it wasn't like her family put any up either. Can't judge what you don't have.

Mallory pulled up to the final house on the block, her own. Everything was as it was last spring, the last day she had spent at home before her summer abroad and fall semester. She sighed at the peeling paint, a dull shade of brown that Dad was always talking about fixing. And who could forget the leaves that no one ever cleaned out of the gutters? Her

bedroom window was still adorned with the tangerine curtains she had gotten when she was thirteen. Deirdre's silver bike leaned against the porch, a good bit more worn than it was when Mallory had left. The grass, once an immaculate carpet of emerald, was now dry and dead. Damian was reluctantly raking the last of the leaves in the front yard, as if he were brushing fleas off an old dog's pelt. He waved. Mallory waved back.

Mallory parked along the road, turned off the engine, and put her keys in her back pocket. She approached the boy with the confidence only an older sibling would have.

"Since when did you do yard work?"

"Since six months ago," Damian scowled. "Now that you're gone, we have to do all your chores. Welcome back, I guess." Mallory mussed her brother's hair, and led him back towards the house. "I bet you're so excited to be off to college in two years."

Damian squirmed out of his sister's grip. "Two years. That's what keeps me going."

He turned, running back to the house. He wrenched open the door, yelling: "Mom! Dad! Mal's here!"

An aproned woman in her early fifties emerged from behind the oak door, grinning.

“Mallory Dolores!” She clutched the girl in her arms, who made vague choking noises in response. “Don’t you dare go off again! No way were you too busy to see us for six months, young lady! Dinner’s in the oven. Come in now, come in!”

Mallory obeyed, following the smell of cornbread and ham. She noticed that her mother was not wearing her wedding ring. She must’ve been baking, then. When she’d accidentally dropped it in the kitchen sink once, the repairmen spent three hours getting it out.

A small meteorite collided with Mallory’s shirt, leaving sticky handprints on the plaid patterning.

“Hey, hey. How are you, little gal?” Deirdre accepted her sister’s hair rub, a little reluctantly.

“Mal, you shouldn’t do that anymore. You missed my birthday--I’m eleven now!”

“Aww. First Damian, and you too, Dee?”

“Call me Deirdre. Deedee was my baby name,” the girl frowned. Changing pace

at the speed of light, she launched into one of her customary word bombs.

“Sixth grade is weird, Mal! We have to go to a bunch of classes, and it’s weird at first, and you don’t remember the names of your teachers, but I guess it’s okay. It’s hard to remember everyone in my classes, and it took me a while to learn my teachers’ names. But, like--”

“Deirdre, leave your sister alone. She’s been home, what, five minutes? Go find Damian and tell him to help set the table. Mallory, put your things in your room and wash up. And welcome back.”

“Hi, Dad.” Mallory squinted. “You look... different. Are you parting your hair on the other side now? You never change your hair.”

Mallory’s father shrugged. “Why not? Does it look strange?” He patted his graying scalp.

“No, no! It looks great, Dad.”

“If you say so. Now get ready for dinner and we can hear all about college.”

Mallory felt a chill when she crossed the threshold into her old room. Nothing had been moved, but it felt unnatural,





like if she stepped into an old, yellowed photograph. Maybe it was just an effect of the orange light seeping through her curtains. She'd been gone too long. If she really considered it, she had never left her family and her home for more than a week or so before this.

Funny how you really notice the importance of a home when you miss it. Before college, it seemed like all she was focused on was school and extracurriculars. How well did she know her family, now? I suppose this break will be an opportunity to reconnect.

A knock at the door. "Dinner. Now." Damian's annoyed command dispersed Mallory's thoughts. She followed him down the stairs to the dining room. She could swear she heard the words "sentimental airhead" as she came down. It was good to see her brother had come out of his shell a little, even if it was just to make fun of her.

The dining room was decked out in various forms of holiday-themed foliage. The tablecloth, a rich, garnet velvet, spread luxuriously beneath platters of steaming dishes. A centerpiece of ivy tendrils rose like a grave-like spire in the middle of the table. Mallory took a seat between her mother and her father. Her siblings fidgeted in their chairs: Deirdre clenched a fork and knife with a ravenous

look in her eye, and Damian's gaze kept flickering to the phone in his lap.

"Let's eat," her mother announced.

"Mallory, honey, eat up. Remember to save space for dessert. I made your favorite, key lime pie."

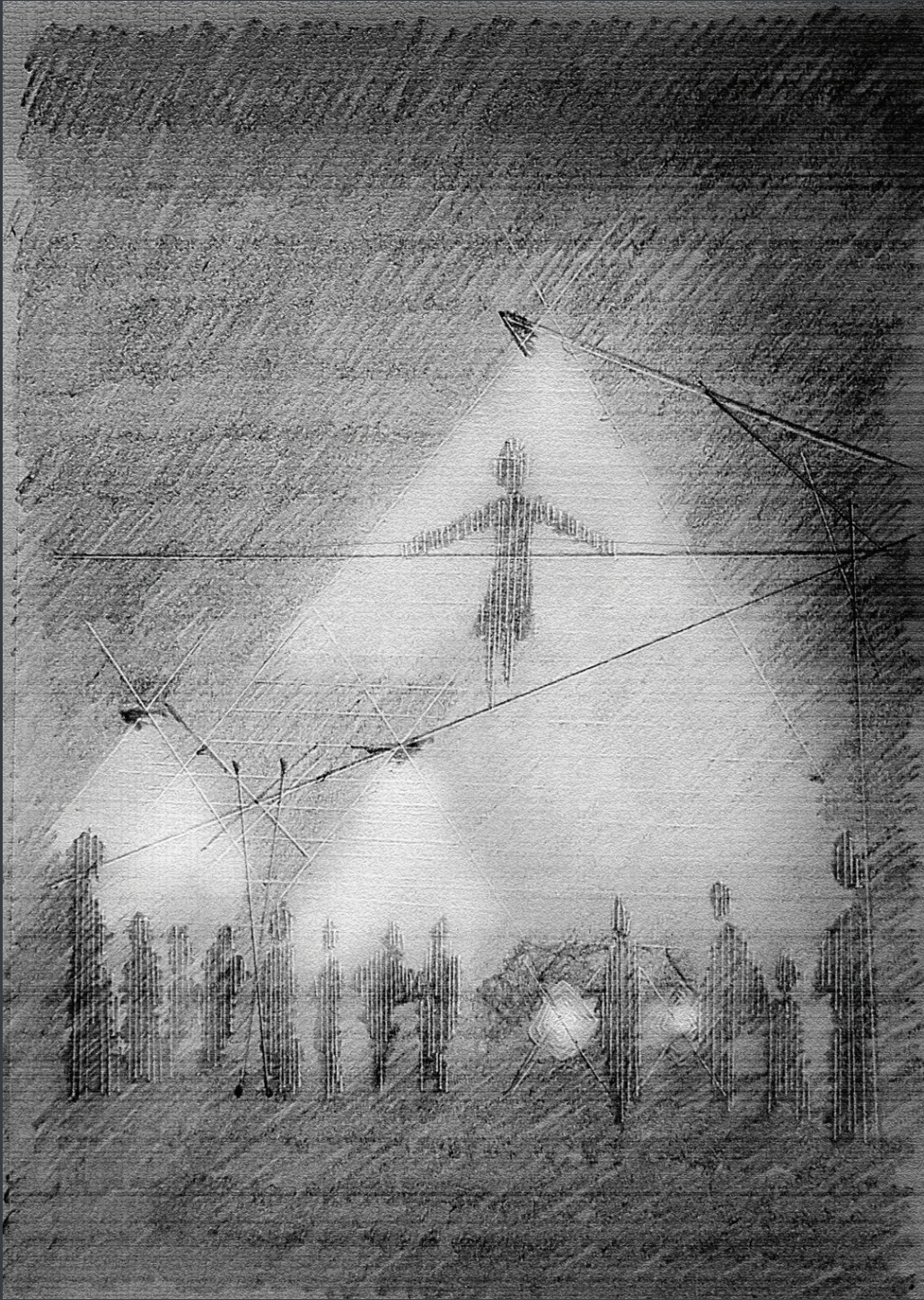
"I helped!" Deirdre added through a mouthful of casserole. "See, look at my almond topping! It's like a flower!" Mallory gave her a big thumbs up.

They ate in silence. Mom was always a good cook. But previous holidays never felt this smooth, this loving. It was too perfect. Could you complain about something being too perfect?

Still, no one talked. Maybe they didn't have anything to say to her anymore. Guess it was kind of her fault for not keeping in touch as much as she should have. Say something, anything!

"I'm really liking the plants you guys are using for decoration. You don't usually do that."

"Ah! We were thinking of you, so we bought some at the store. You know holly's poisonous? The berries, actually." Mallory's father pointed to a bunch of blood-red orbs and snake-green leaves woven into the centerpiece. He rubbed



**Street Tightrope**

Harini Patel

his chin in thought. “Very interesting.”

“Oh, yes. You know, your brother put that centerpiece together. You know the mistletoe in it is poisonous too?”

“Everything in it was. You know how hard it was not to cut my finger?”

Damian growled.

“Yet the plants look so innocuous.

That’s how they operate. Hide under the guise of common houseplants, waiting for someone to fall into their trap,” Mallory’s mother gestured to the centerpiece, smiling. “Mallory, dear, have some more pie.”

She did, remarking as she shoveled the confection into her plate, “You four went all out this Christmas. Also, are you all majoring in botany too?”

Deirdre spit out her dessert.

“Now, we thought it would be appropriate to learn more about an interest our child has. Nothing wrong with that,” Mallory’s father murmured warmly.

Mallory’s mother handed her daughter a napkin, then smiled. “Tell me how the pie is, dear.”

“It’s great! It tastes a lot different than how you used to make it. There’s a sort of acidic, slightly bitter tang to it. Very lime-y, but more...if that makes any sense?”

Her father put down his fork. Was he always right-handed? Mallory couldn’t remember.

“Yes, Mallory, lime. It is key lime pie, after all. Have another slice, it’s Christmas.”

Honestly, the pie was good, but just looking at it made her queasy. She’d probably eaten too much. The post-meal drowsiness was coming on. Head was getting woozy, too.

“Dad, I really would, but I am about to burst. I’m going to go out back, get some fresh air, check on Tex.”

He nodded. “We’ll clean up the table, you go say hi to him.”

Mallory put her dishes in the sink. A few cups and bowls had thin cracks running down their sides like snapped silk strings. Mom must be less careful with the china than she used to be.

As Mal crossed the living room to the

back door, she heard the TV blaring. Dad wasn't there, but Grandpa's old hatchet was. Why was it in Dad's chair? It was usually on the mantle...right?

"... and after almost a year, the Truitt family is still missing. Last winter, a fire in the Truitt home burned the house to the ground.

However, authorities did not find the bodies, nor remains, of the two children and parents. The children, a boy and a girl, were fifteen and ten years of age before their disappearance. Anyone with any information on these missing persons are urged to contact the police. The number is listed below."

The screen showed a middle-aged couple, a man with grey hair and a woman with blue eyes, and their two children. Their daughter and son seemed content, their arms wrapped around their parents' limbs. The family was so much like hers, from the girl's smile to the mother's glinting eyes, from the boy's bushy brows to the father's stubble. Mallory wasn't the type to pry into others' business, but she would never understand why someone would just disappear like that, leaving their identities behind. If you did it like the Truitts, you wouldn't even be able to collect insurance money. What would be the point?

She twisted the brass knob of the back door, which was cracked with age and disuse. The backyard laid out before her like a dirty beige carpet. Along the offwhite wood boards that made up the backside of the house crept kudzu vines, the wide leaves like greedy envy-green paws going up the wood. In the farthest corner was a patch of moss that she knew was going to spill over the whole yard within a few years. The other corner was where Tex was buried, beneath bugs and bushes and fallen bird nests. She tread lightly over the moldy, neglected leaves. A few white shapes stuck up halfway in the ground. Turnips? They never planted turnips. The eggnog was making her lose her edge. Rocks, yes. Rocks. Dad would need to clear those out soon.

Mallory didn't really know exactly where she buried Tex all those years ago, so she stood among the white rocks and addressed the entire row of bushes lining the back of the lawn. It was the thought that counted, right?

"I'm back, Tex. I'm sorry for leaving for so long. I guess people haven't come here often to see you. I miss how things used to be, and coming home now makes me miss it even more. I wish you were here."



If dogs go to heaven, could they still hear the words that people say to them? Mallory was doubtful. But it felt good to say it. Even if her heart sighed a little that she couldn't remember his bark, or the feel of his fur, or his favorite hiding spots after all these years. I'm going to ask Mom if she has some pictures of him.

As she faced her back to Tex to go back into the house, she slipped in the mud. Her foot hit something hard and suddenly she was facing the sky.

That darn rock. But now, up close, the outcropping of stones looked more sinister, like grave markers. She pushed herself up from the cocoon of dirt she had fallen in. Something glinted, golden as a canary.

She wiped it on her shirt. Her mother's wedding ring?

Mallory grasped the stone that had felled her and pulled it out as if it were a wisdom tooth. It came out longer than she had expected. It definitely was not a rock. It was a leg bone. It was Tex's, she hoped. How long are leg bones...usually? I wouldn't know! Plants don't have legs!

No corny jokes, Mal. What's going on?

Just how many of those things were around her? They were all sizes, all shapes, but all were the identical shade of off-white. To her increasing horror, as she kept digging with her bone-cold hands, she only found more and more of them. A tremor, like a fleeing mouse, sprinted from her throat down her spine.

Fingers twitching, Mallory picked up another. Maybe these are just leftover Halloween decorations. Maybe my slightly stuffy parents like Halloween now. This one was dome-shaped, and as she brought it up to her face she realized what it was.

Two caves, dark as coal, now served as a home for a family of worms. The cartilage on the nose had nearly rotted away, but the most amazing discovery—

A yellow crown in the rows of piano-key teeth, right where her father had gotten it fixed from a bar fight he was in thirty years ago.

The missing wedding ring, the strange behavior, everything. There could be only one conclusion. But when had they been...when had they been...

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...and good eldest daughter straight-A student, pride of her family, Mallory didn't even notice. Oh, no...

And the pie! Mallory remembered the headache that she assumed was from overeating. Now, it was chewing her apart. How stupid was it for a future botanist to fail to recognize bitter almonds? And god knows what else was in there.

The back door of the house opened. Mal couldn't do anything but shiver, still sitting in the mud amongst the rot.

Those people in my home...the family that looked so much like mine on the news... no...

Footsteps, muffled by the dry grass, became louder as Mallory's father approached. Grandpa's hatchet glimmered in the late sun, slung casually over his shoulder. But of course it wasn't Dad, because even on his worst days he would never have worn the unnatural grimace he now sported.

"It's time you said hello to your family, Mallory. It's nice to keep in touch."

She clutched at the dirt, eyes jerked open as she fixated on the swing of the hatchet, a whirl of Death's scythe. She was home.

**Soothing Serenity**

Erin Falejczyk



# WHAT IF THE WOLF IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING WAS A MAN IN COAT FUR CLUTCHING FOR HOME?

Angela Huynh

Sometimes days go by  
and I forget to look into strangers' eyes  
I forget of light peeking through  
their shuddered windows and  
mile-piles of laundry left by the door  
I forget of backrubs and quick-fix meals  
and how laughter can sometimes sound like a song

Some days it is easy  
to forget and to go  
and sometimes  
I am the mirror held up  
right before the shatter  
I become the fires they've all warned you of  
in burning search  
to fill a gap unreachable



**Moonscape3**  
Cate Crutcher



Some nights I pray  
the Sky will mistake  
my tiny fire  
on desolate earth a star  
and she will take me to stagnant waters  
and soundless wings urging me to stay  
and I will

I am home!, I say  
I've let go!, I say  
I am home  
I am home.



**WISH I WEREN'T  
HERE!**



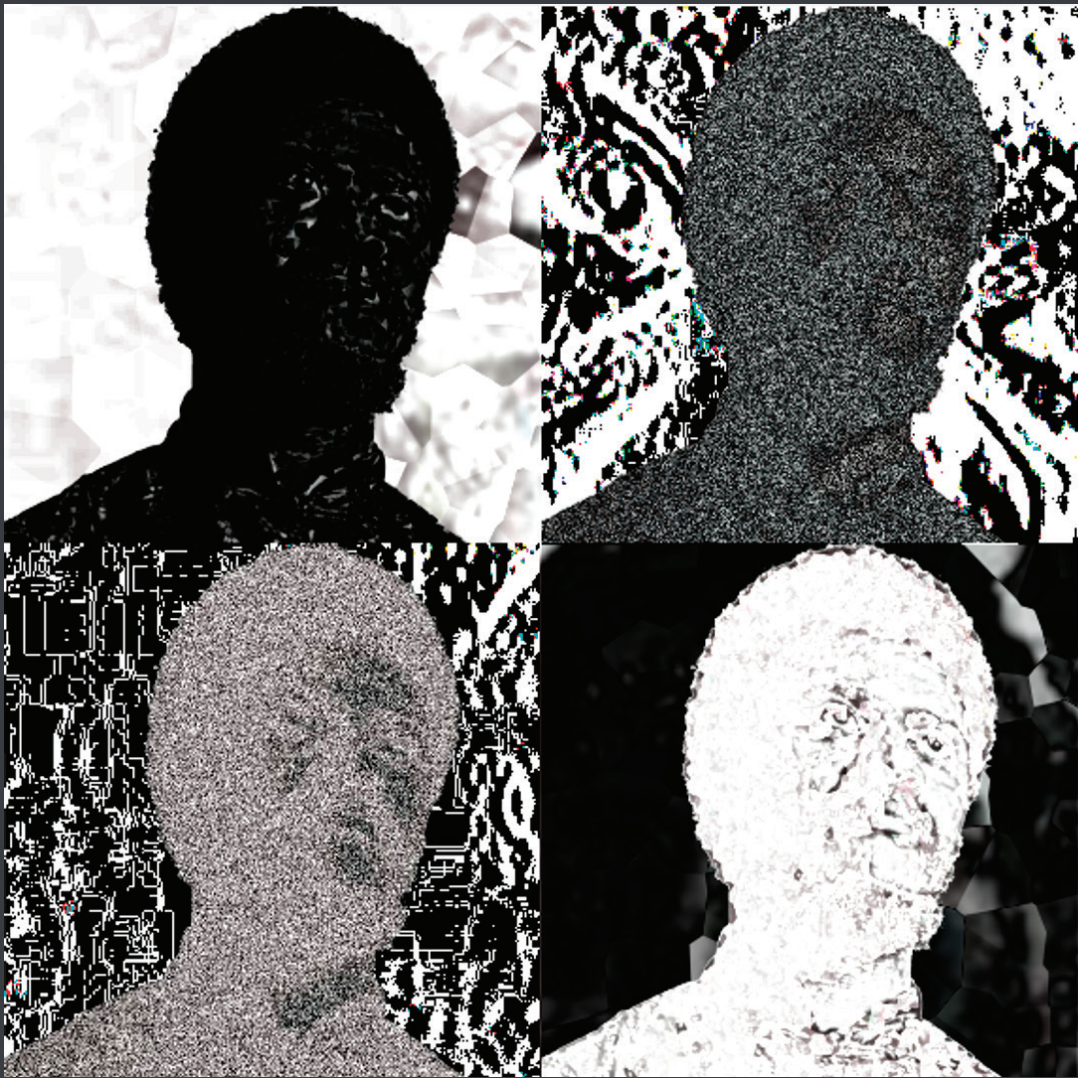
**I AM UNDER  
HOUSE ARREST**

June 20  
A. Ziemecki

**Untitled**  
Chloe Morris



**Pharoah**  
Connors Knight





**The Four**  
Yuxuan Yang



## Before Beginning Whatsapp Storytime

Rocio Soto-Gomez

Sammy fidgets.

A summer *tuna*<sup>1</sup> sprouted too soon,  
in Spring,  
it'll be three months  
since I've last smelt  
*los higos*,<sup>2</sup>

*in el solazo*<sup>3</sup>

languid with saccharine syrup,  
*gordura sabrosa*<sup>4</sup> drooping lustily  
over the tin roof.

An hour's preface,  
she's quick to interject  
about her *gatito*<sup>5</sup> *Frijol's*<sup>6</sup>  
newest unconventional romance  
with the lanky *gatito negro*,<sup>7</sup>  
who's always stealing his food,  
next door.

*Y yo le sigo la corriente*,<sup>8</sup>  
riding the waves of her expectant eyes,  
I pour out my dread  
in laughter  
about yesterday's  
eyebrow waxing fiasco.

Pressing what once was a  
particularly well endowed *ceja*<sup>9</sup>  
against my iPhone's front facing camera.

She erupts,  
giggling.

*"Ay no, Rocio!*

You don't have no eyebrow!"

Eventually,  
we hang up --

*"Y ahora empieza,  
La lloradera."*<sup>10</sup>

-- really,  
lost connection.

*Tragedia*<sup>11</sup> streams  
down the trunk  
of *mi mejilla*,<sup>12</sup>  
As you lay,  
lazily,  
in the shaded luxury  
of my *misericordia*,<sup>13</sup>

Be wary  
of what you choose  
to do next  
with that axe  
against  
*mi cuello*.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cactus fruit

<sup>2</sup> The figs

<sup>3</sup> The motherfucking heat

<sup>4</sup> Tasty fatness

<sup>5</sup> Kitten

<sup>6</sup> Bean's

<sup>7</sup> Black kitten

<sup>8</sup> And I follow her current (and I go along with it)

<sup>9</sup> Eyebrow

<sup>10</sup> And now begins, the sobbing

<sup>11</sup> Tragedy

<sup>12</sup> My cheek

<sup>13</sup> Mercy

<sup>14</sup> My neck

وَالْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي  
خَلَقَ لَنَا مِنْ دُونِ  
الْحَمْلِ الْوَلَدَ الَّذِي  
يَكُونُ لِلدِّينِ  
مَعْنَى

بِأَنَّ الْعَبْدَ  
الَّذِي يَتَّبِعُ  
الْحَقَّ وَالصَّالِحَ  
الْمُتَّقِيَ

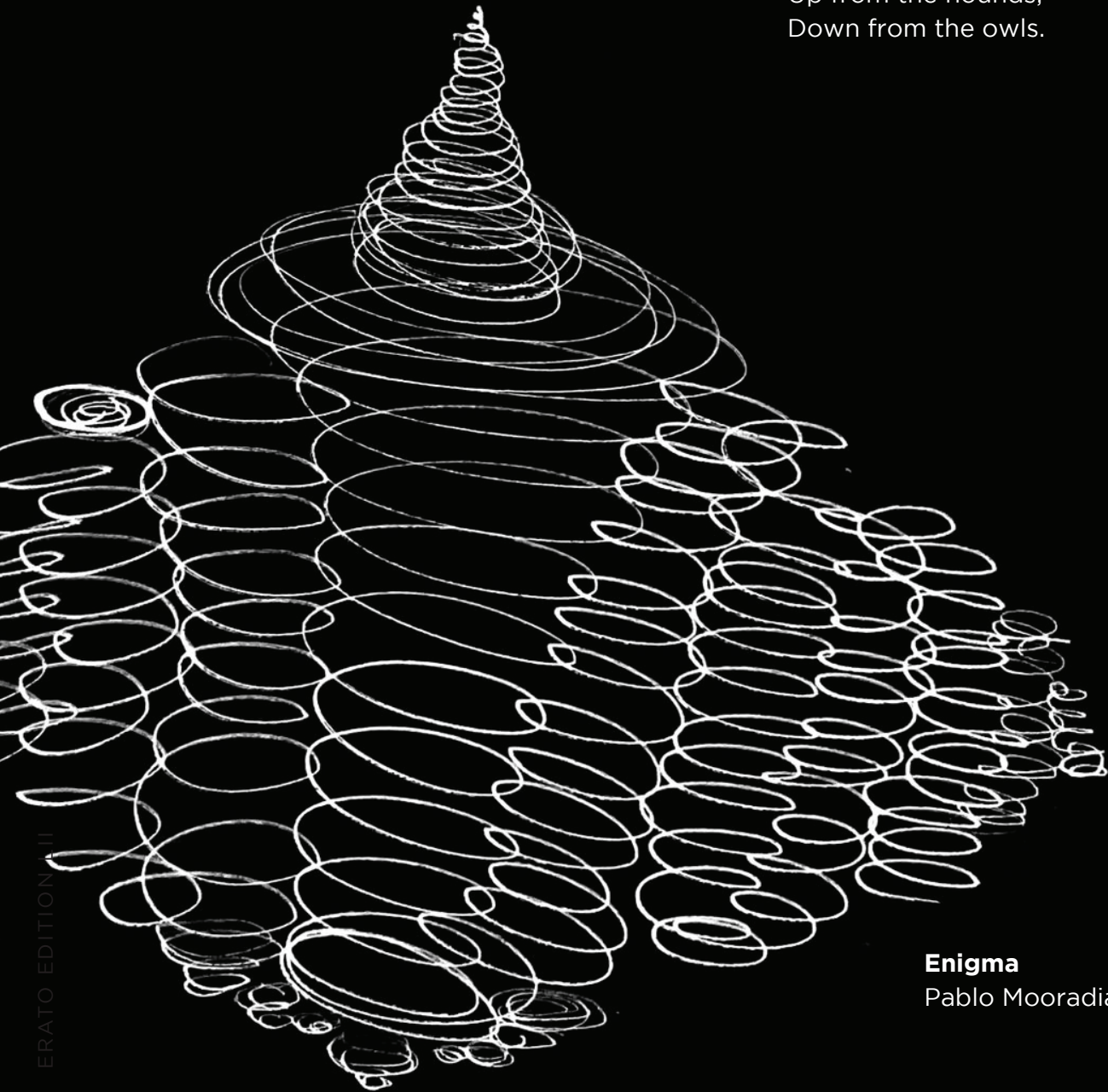
Hagar and Ishmael  
Ivan Li

## **Fossils**

Jake Harmon

Take the dogs out by flashlight -  
Watch the fireflies gather round.  
Hear the weird bumps in the night -  
See the moon the trees crown.

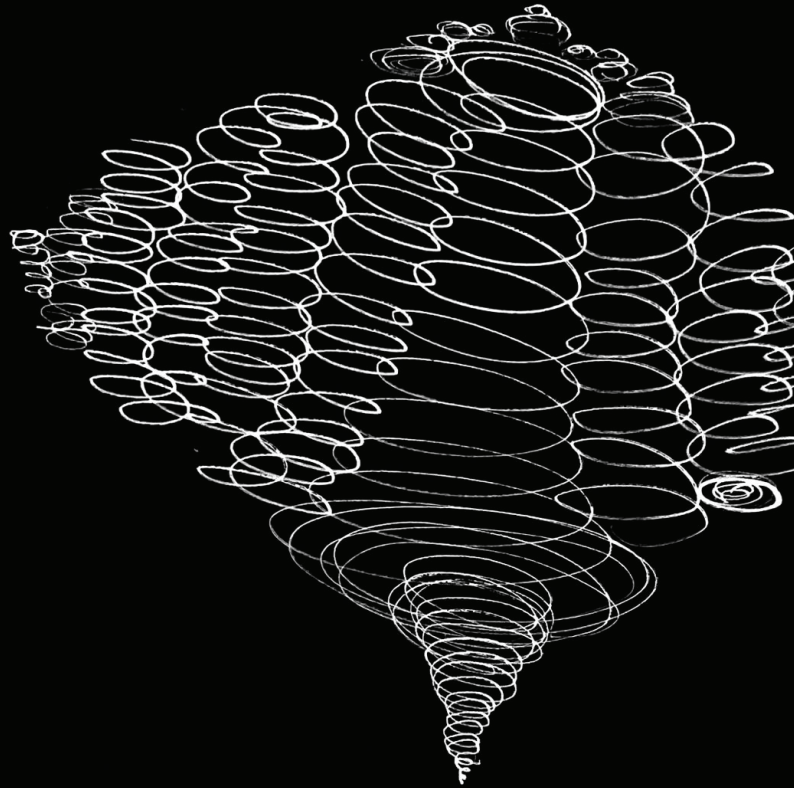
Traces of childhood through the yard,  
Unsettling stares -  
Up from the hounds,  
Down from the owls.



**Enigma**

Pablo Mooradian





This night was meant for someone  
More mature,  
Who trusts their eyes closed.  
So how was it thus thrust upon me?  
Nature gives no burden we can't handle:  
Save the avalanche that buries,  
Save me, caught in its midst,  
Save me, in the sorrows old home brings,  
Save me the troubles of writing this.

Save me from my younger years coming back.  
Nostalgia, it seems, is the current that sweeps us away,  
And wears us down with each advancing day.  
Cease to look back you fool! while you're still young  
Count yourself the present a peer among:  
For you cannot make a single hair turn gray.

Come what may: you will cease to keep it at bay



## A.B.C.D

Soham Kar

This emotion is unmatched  
This emotion could mend a heartbroken from a conscience detached  
Friends and family amassed?  
Nothing could ever surpass  
The elation from relations that payback would otherwise lack—  
Isn't it apt for one's tact to adapt?  
Thoughts relaxed, stress replaced by zest that shuns momentary relapse  
Celebrations of individuality from different points of contact  
Banished notions of isolation made to vanish by forming new pacts  
Laid a foundation that no axe could crack  
The fickle mind halting its backtrack, running over those old facts  
Thank God for that, I would say it stopped me from talking smack  
But what's better than that?  
Well, the fact that it brought me back home.

Brown is successful, but is brown meant to be special?  
All that's seen are stereotypes occupying the TV screen  
Since thirteen, it seems they reinforce the same old scene  
Representation becomes expectation that feeds the routine  
Pedal to the metal for a medal, hoping it can dispel

Feelings of inadequacy that make the mettle tremble  
When wealth weighs on the mental, health is just a rental  
The curt truth is stress in pursuit of success, who would have guessed?  
The best at taking tests if it means making more cents  
Makes sense — money trees don't prosper in reality  
The perfect place for shade lies in a white collar degree Is it for me?  
Supposedly, but excess security  
Comes with the prospect of contracting Vitamin D Deficiency  
It's much like a simile for the purging of creativity

But how could one come out of their comfort zone on their own  
When their dialect is dead set on being independent?  
Shushed at every opportunity, a didactic tactic that attacks  
Self-confidence and the self's confidants with feelings unmatched  
The ceiling's lowered to the ground, can it be bypassed?  
Tongue-tied, I didn't realize that the answer lies in the cracks  
Until the day I came home.  
I spotted a little boy that resembled my features  
Greasy bowl cut, rounded glasses, aloof demeanor  
I approached with hesitation, hoping to be his teacher  
He gazed off into the distance as I uttered my entrance  
Hands in his pockets, frugal fashion spoke his existence  
Heavy was the head that wore the frown — he must have missed it  
I listened as he broke the silence:  
"Soham, you do know my language You suffer from a stutter too?  
We're already acquainted  
So don't take offense and go on the defense when I say this"  
I waited in suspense, lost for words as he paused to reminisce  
He said, "I see why you're restless, you think you're being tested  
Searching for clarity, but you're bursting at the seams — can't help it  
Your intentions are pure, but you need to put them into practice  
Take the scenic route so that you can say that you've seen it  
Stand for something others are able to believe in  
So that the fish in the sea can occasionally  
Poke their head out above the water and see  
All of the beautiful things that could be  
If they could perceive something other than the mean"  
I looked at him earnestly, trying to read the lines in between  
He smiled softly and said, "I can attempt to show you the truth  
But to fully understand, you'll have to return to your roots  
So please, take a comprehensive look at our mutual ancestry  
Gather your brothers and sisters around, tell them what you see  
And let them know where they can find home."





## The Trouble with Gratitude

Daniel Aum

*Author's note: This is an imitation poem modeled after Billy Collins's 'The Trouble with Poetry.'*

The trouble with gratitude, it struck me  
one morning at the breakfast table,  
hot black tea roasting my bare stomach,  
Youtube for Kids screaming in the background –

the trouble with gratitude is  
that it begets more gratitude,

more lizards bathing in the sun,  
more honey ham  
in gravy suits and pineapple bowties.

*How will it ever end?*  
unless the hour finally arrives  
when we have counted our blessings for everything  
and everyone,

and we have nothing left to do  
but slowly unravel our hands  
and release the sick and hurting from our thoughts and prayers.

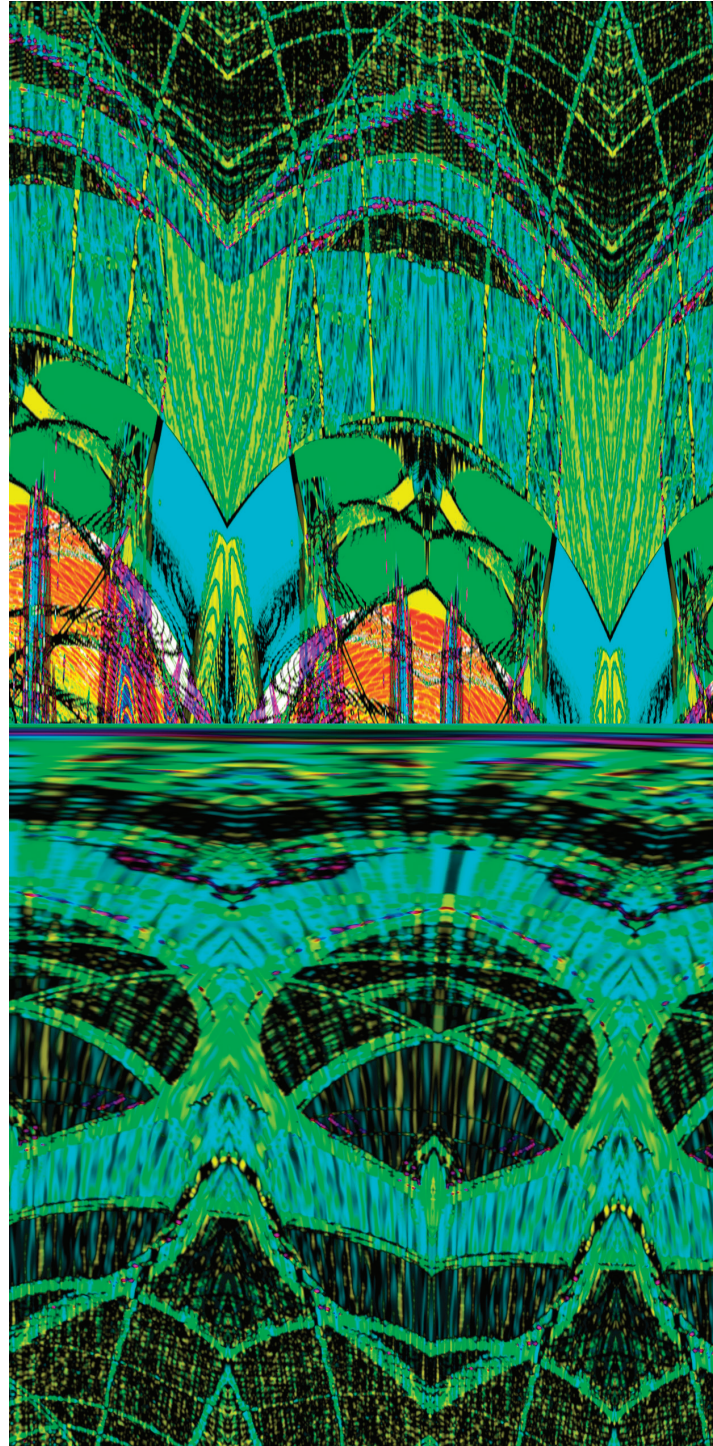
Gratitude fills me with joy  
and I burst, a glimmering star in the inky sky,  
Gratitude fills me with peace  
and I be, a faint ant folding its arms to rest.

But mostly gratitude fills me  
with the urge to have more gratitude,  
to sit quietly in the dark and wait for a lost memory  
to flicker from the back of my head.

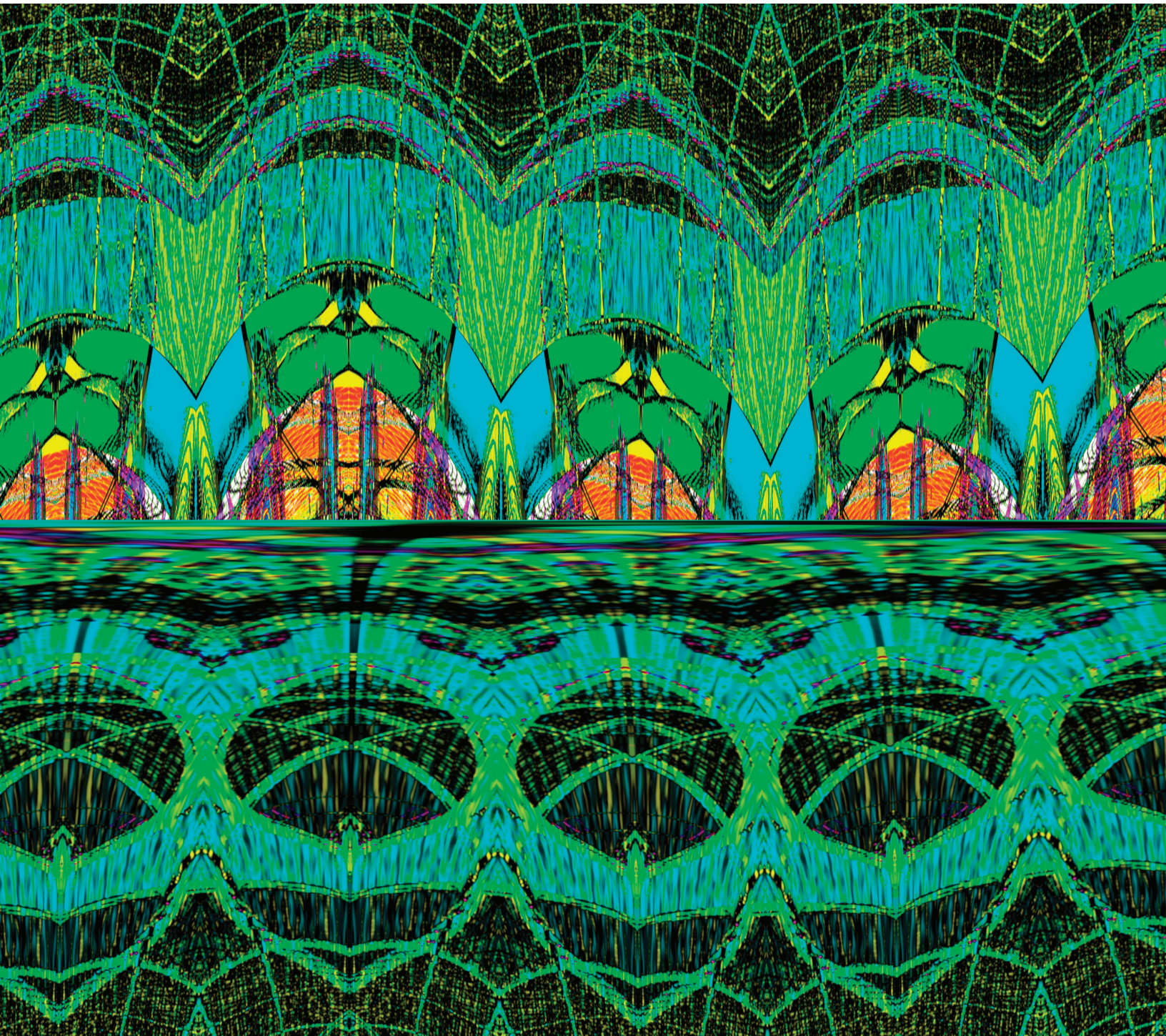
And what's more, the longing to share,  
to evangelize to others,  
with pamphlets and hot soup.

What a merry band of missionaries we are,  
grocers, clerks, plain clothes propagandists,  
I thought to myself,  
as my daughter nodded along to the next song,  
and I noticed a white bowl of lemons on the table,  
which is an image I lifted–  
just between you and me –

from Billy Collins, "America's favorite poet,"  
whose hyper-sensory chamber of a book  
I carry in my leather backpack  
on long drives on I-85 going home.



**Village on a Hillside**  
Edward Michael Supranowicz



## Reality Murmurs what Dreams cannot Echo

Jasmine Hsu

She flashes a smile at you  
And with one look you are  
Enchanted;  
Hopelessly spiraling into currents of conflicting thoughts that seem to  
Flow in a never-ending stream out of your heart and into  
Your fingertips:  
Infatuation is not enough to describe  
The beauty that has suddenly come into the world;  
Have the roses gotten brighter since last winter?

It is as if the stars have imparted their flittering dust  
Onto the remnants of this Earth  
In which you call familiarity,  
Blessing a cursed few with the character of loveliness  
Never meant to exist.  
Such a wretched affair to love one touched by the gods,  
For they are souls long claimed by the dragons who  
Hide maidens deep in their caves,  
Surrounded by silver smelted from temples and gold extracted  
From the crowns of fallen kingdoms.

Oh how you have fallen  
Into the hearth of your lover  
Into the intimacy of home  
Into the mouth of the beast

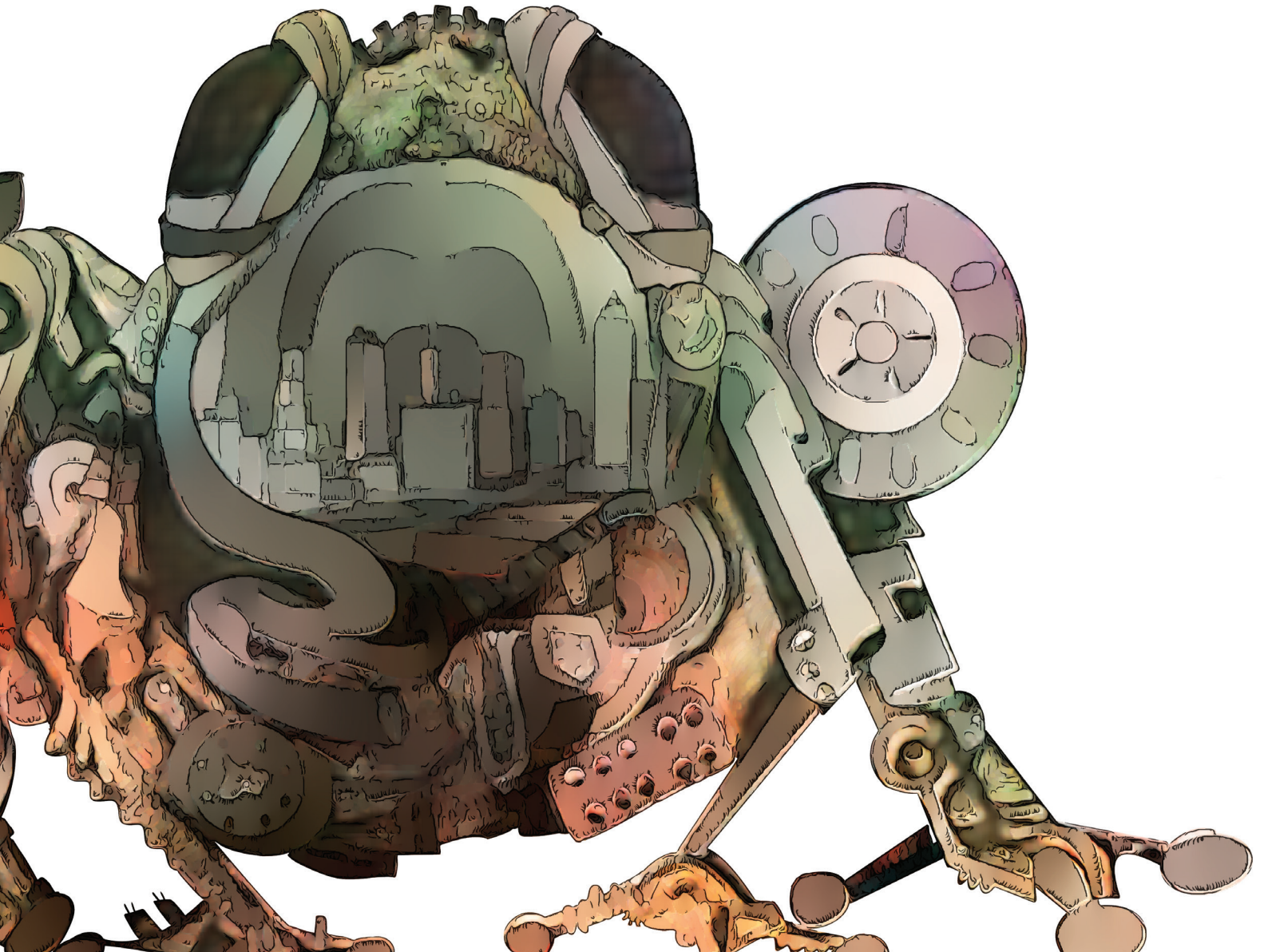
Her warmth becomes yours, and you have found  
The throne at which you kneel  
As you are crowned  
In the brilliant light of  
A resonant soul.







**Georgia In my Mouth**  
A. Ziemecki



## Beach

Niki Wells

A sign above reads 'welcome home'  
It is a bittersweet day  
I have a love/hate relationship with the sand  
A beach vacation is always fun, but the sand was always present  
It was fun to play in the sand, of course, to make castles and dig a giant hole  
But eventually, once you leave, it stays around you everywhere  
In your bags, your teeth, your shoes and clothes and car  
I took comfort in the water  
Though sometimes salty, it washed me of the unfamiliar grain sand provided  
Of the piles of it on my skin, until only small remnants and the memory remained  
And though the waves push me back to the sands of my new home  
I desire to swim back into the ocean  
Not to stay forever, of course  
But just for a moment  
Eventually, you will have to leave the water  
Time cannot pause while in this moment  
I do not think of it as a home divided  
The beach cannot be without the sand or the water  
They are both home  
I am lucky my homes, my sand and my ocean, are but a car ride away  
I sympathize with those who are not as lucky  
Whose waters are across the country, the world  
I sympathize with those who never considered their ocean a home  
Whose push to the beach meant a personal freedom  
An immense relief  
The water never gave them  
I hope they find home in these sands, that new waters, better waters, can wash up to their shore  
As much as the sand can make me uncomfortable  
Its new, unfamiliar textures and situations that come with it  
I enjoy being in it  
As our car pulls up  
As the waves gently place me on the sand  
A sign above reads 'welcome home'  
I smile fondly, genuinely  
I know I am coming to my new home, finally at the shore  
I know my ocean will always be there





**PLAYSCAPE**  
Chris Geng

## Intersect

Abbygale Owen

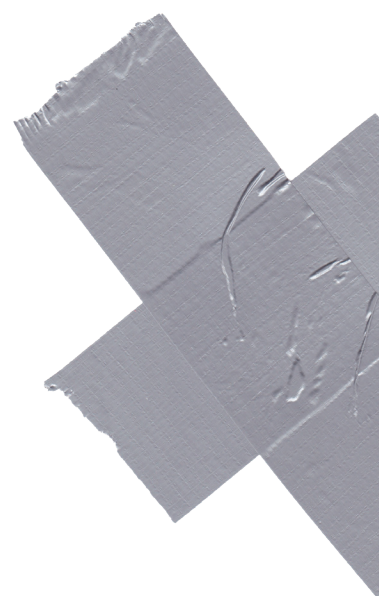
I was at the seaside when you called,  
mouth stuffed full of salt  
which spilled in my speech to the air  
as I answered, asking for your name.

It felt tender on my tongue,  
soft against the coarse grains  
which filled my voice with grit.

I'm looking for you, you said,  
but we were equally strangers  
as you and the one  
who you wanted to meet.

It was a blessing then,  
to be chosen,  
though it became bittersweet.

I've tried to call you back since then,  
but time gives nothing else.  
Our phone lines just turned parallel,  
or so I tell myself.





**Out in the Dunes**  
Thomas Jackson

## Temporary Home

Tim Shel

City water mingles with tears  
 seated on that shower floor.  
 this is okay -  
     both wash way the past.  
 This is your home now.  
 This three by three cubicle.  
 This artificial rain.  
 Rest your head beneath,  
 breath a river down your back.  
 Find peace in your facade,  
 because it's yours.  
 Play the music loud  
 no one cares.  
 You are the only one who tastes these tears.  
 Exist in that feeling  
 grow old there - wrinkle in your tilted room  
     Just know:  
     Soon, you'll find your two legs  
     and take your heart (patched surely)  
     away from that dark comfort.  
         Because we can't cry forever





# Ways Out

Drew Yates



“Tell me traveler, why must I die?”

Ray stopped where he was kneeling, turning to look incredulously at the man tied to the base of the tree. The rope wrapped around his wrists was frayed and stained with blood, the knots tight enough to turn his fingers slightly blue. The stranger’s gray ponytail was matted with sweat; a line of blood smeared from his hairline over one eye. His baggy clothes were soaked in mud. One of his legs was extended, the gaping wound on its calf bleeding sluggishly onto the ground.

Ray turned away. “You know why.”

“No, I don’t. There’s no need for this.”

Ray ignored him, continuing to pack his bag with the supplies of the ruined camp. Thunder rumbled in the distance. Oil from broken canisters had begun to leak out of the trampled tents.

“There are still two days left before I turn.”

“I’m not taking that chance.”

The man leaned his head back against the tree trunk, eyes looking up at the orange leaves. “You already have me tied. I can’t move, I can’t leave. There’s a car half a mile down the road. Leave me alive, take it, and drive south; within an hour you’ll be beyond my reach. I ask you, one survivor to another, to give me this.”

Ray said nothing.

“Give me one mercy.”

“This is mercy!” Ray rounded on the man, furious. “What, do you want to be a monster? Cause there’s no cure for this! None, I swear, we’ve fucking- there isn’t any way out! Nothing is gonna change, nothing is gonna save you! Nothing! Fuck!” Ray grabbed a crushed box and threw it across the yard. When he turned back, breathing heavily, the stranger was staring back at him placidly.

“You are mistaken, I believe, about my motivations.” The man shifted his bitten leg to the side, wincing. “I have the luxury of retaining my senses for the next 48 hours, and I would like to use them to cherish this time I have left.”

Ray stared at him. “You’re nuts.”

The man raised his eyebrow.

“Why,” Ray started toward him, “in the ever loving fuck. You want me to leave you here, chained to the tree, with no food or water, so you can die slowly of dehydration, or from turning, or from more of those Things coming and eating your guts, so you can have more time to be aware of it happening?!”

The man continued looking at him, saying nothing.

Ray stared down at him, the man sitting at the base of the tree with his hands tied behind him, his still bleeding head resting against the truck. He felt sick.

“Why would you want... we’ve been alive, through all of this. It’s hell. It’s been hell, every moment, for three months. Every time I wake

up, I see it, I hear it again— why do you want to be awake, to see this? To feel this shit?? There's no way out. There's never going to be a way out, except this," Ray waved the handgun in his right hand. "You want mercy? I'm offering it to you pal, right here. Take it, cause it's the best thing that's gonna happen to you for the rest of your sorry 48-hour life."

The man smiled wryly at him. "Is that an offer you would like?"

"What?"

"Forgive me my friend, but you sound almost jealous. It seems as though you are the one hoping someone would give you a way out today. Ironic, I suppose, given our circumstances." He shifted his leg again, still smiling that crooked smile. "But you have the gun; if everything is so hopeless, why are you still here?"

Ray's arms fell limp to his sides. "Cause we... we don't really have a choice, right? We're alive, so we have to stay alive. There's not really any other choice. They never gave us one. We're survivors, that's what we do, that's what we have to do. Until..." He gestured to the man's bleeding leg. "Until we can't."

"Ah. So is this cowardice masquerading as duty. Or masochism."

"Fuck you."

"But you do understand. You want what I want— to be at peace. But my peace will not come from the barrel of your gun. No,

mine is found sitting by this tree to feel the might of the storm as it passes. By seeing the dew form on the ground here, and watching the sun rise in the morning. That, traveler, is my peace. And if the Things get to me before then, well, then I'll still be glad for the moments I've gotten. I will die or I will turn, but not now. Not yet. I ask you, survivor to survivor, to grant me this."

Ray stared at the man tied to the tree for a long moment, before stepping back.

"...Fine."

The man closed his eyes again and tilted his head back, smile wide upon his face. "Thank you."

"Don't thank me," Ray said as he turned away, picking up his bag. "You'll regret it. When you're having your guts torn out or screaming from feeling your blood turn to gunk as you Turn, you'll wish you'd taken the quick end."

The man continued smiling as he watched Ray walk out of the ruined camp.

"And perhaps when your time comes, you'll wish you had chosen mine."







**Untitled**  
Chloe Morris

# Kaguya

Karina Tichert

How tired you are, my little peach blossom  
How long your bones have suspended you above  
A cruel and delicate planet  
Held you upright despite yourself

Do you remember your first honeysuckle summer?  
Daisies sprang up beneath your feet,  
Each step a naive attempt to kiss the moon,  
To go back home

But your hands always came up empty.

Time hangs above Gaia's great thimble,  
Your sign that you are ready to return.

My love, you are the light of Persephone,  
A beacon for the hopeless ones,  
A lighthouse on the bleakest shore,  
You are the perfumed blood that drips  
From a Bodhisattva's fingertips.

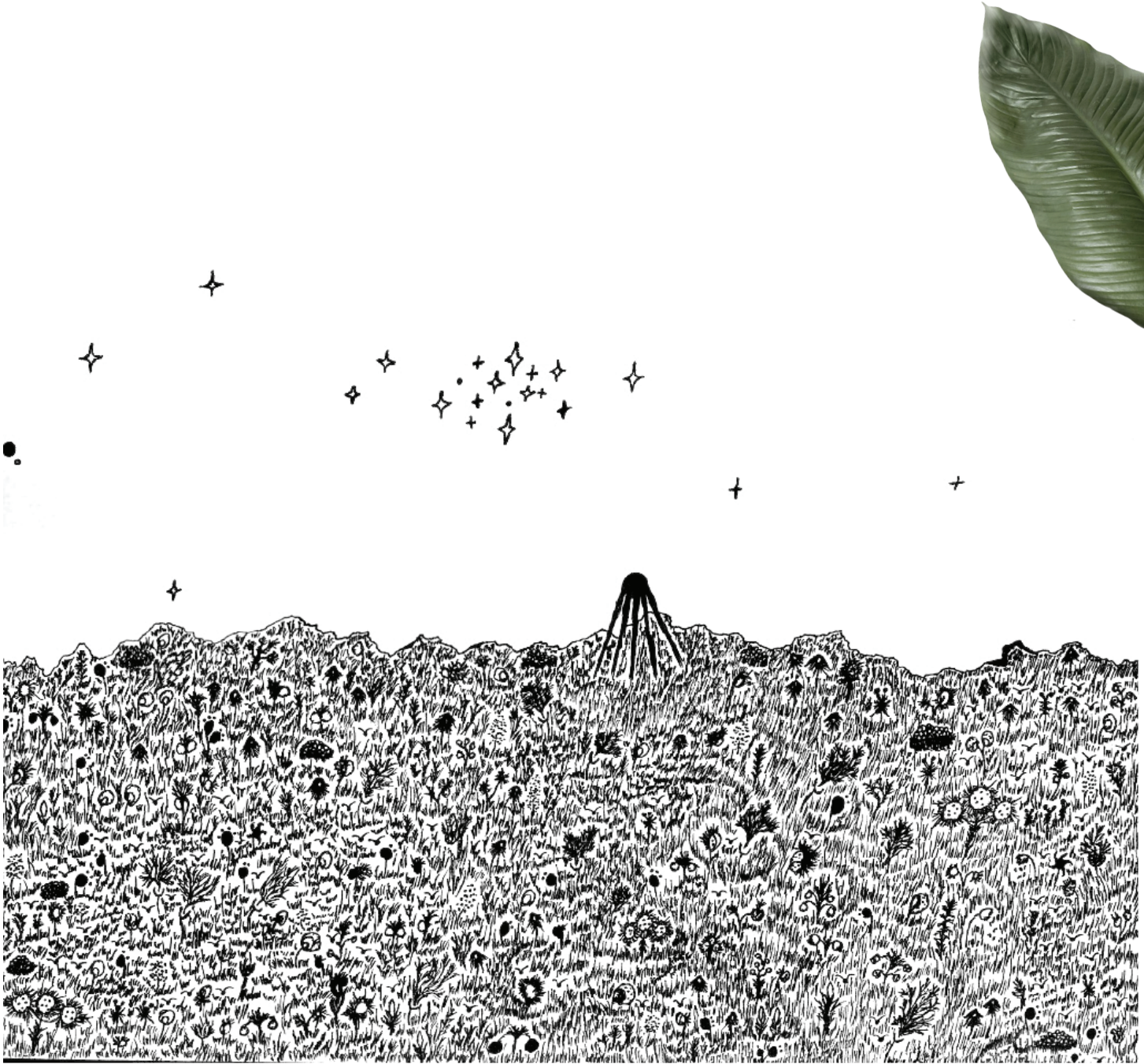
My sweet yellow orchid,  
Do you know now?  
You have yet to reveal your shape to us,  
Least of all to yourself.

You are not of this world,  
Born in the palm of the universe's outstretched hand,  
In a place beyond light, stars, violence, and voids.

You ache because you are not from here  
You have harnessed yourself ridiculously to this pitiable  
planet  
Have screamed and sung and laughed and cried  
And each day trudged forward through the bamboo  
grove,  
Despite the archers who lie in wait.

We are ready for you to come home, my dear.  
Remind us of the beauty that purifies sorrow  
And tell us again how to use our tears  
To water the cherry blossom trees.



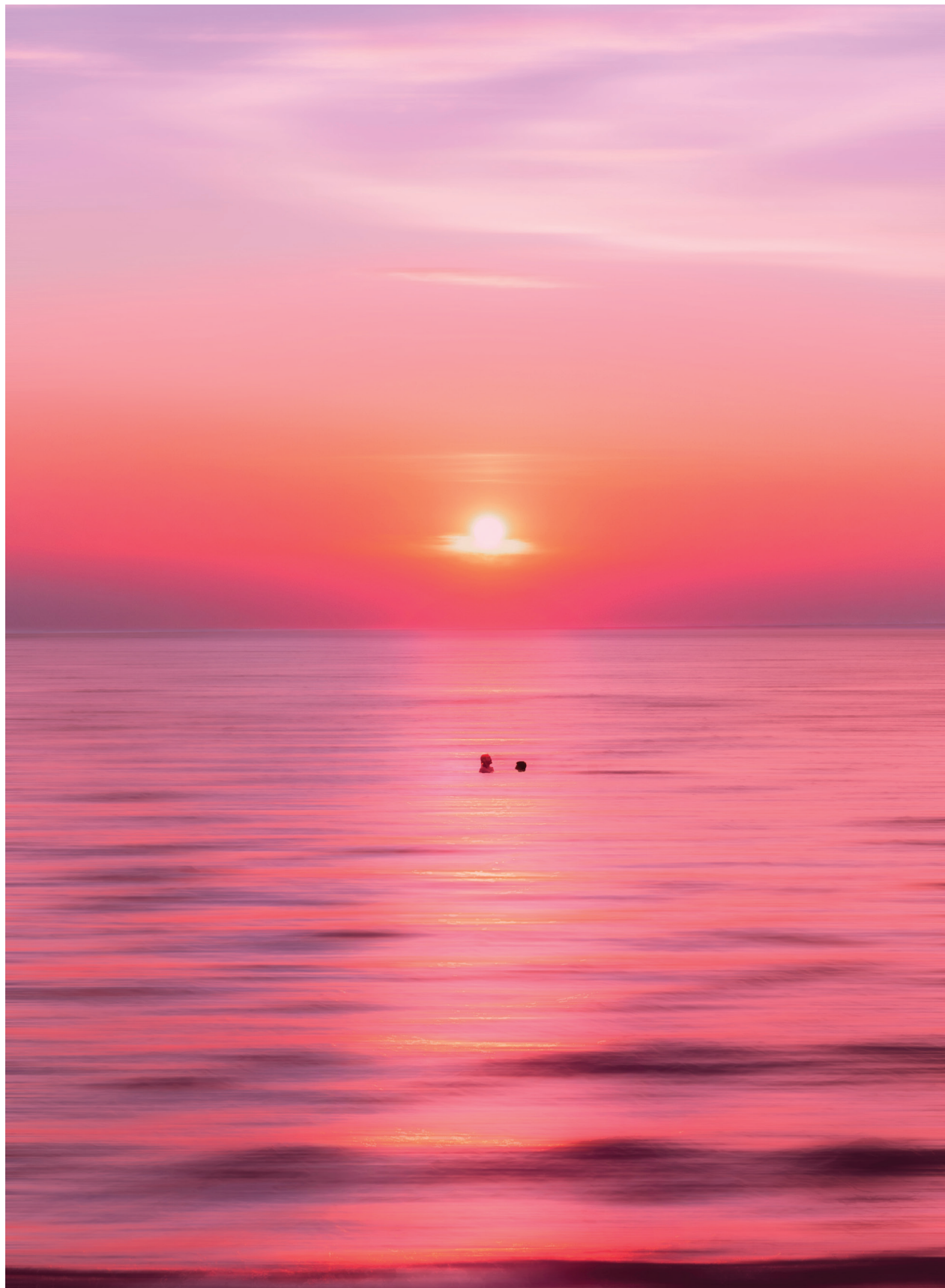


**Yearning**  
Abrar Siddiqui



**An Eternal Moment**

Adit Desai





# Insouciance

Lily Kate Soetebier

Smoke began to fill the musty air during the immobile hours of the evening. Blistered by the dripping wax from the candles above, she was unfazed, unchanging. In the place where time stood still, anyone could do anything, be anything, or even be everything. There are no rules when existence itself ceases to exist.

Too enraptured by her silent dance to take notice, she began to venture across phenomena to places never to be seen. The music of her steps awakened the epoch of the present.

Soon beneath her feet, she felt the soft caress of moss, as verdure sprang from the depths to join in her waltz. Picking up the tempo, her foxtrot rained arbors and waterways complete with paper boats floating carelessly downstream.

Soon the soft buzzing of bees joined the canticle, and they too began their work, drinking the sweet nectar of premature Liliaceae and building their home in the arms of the willow tree. There these creatures worked in harmony to craft their elixir, which she paused from her whirling to savor.



While her senses were draped in delicate florals, from her hands sprung another like herself. Clad in the same swishing garments, her partner reached out a hand, and the two took off, dancing together. In the dappled light, she couldn't help but wonder at how her partner's face shifted. One moment, the light would paint a strong jaw in sharp hues of defining yellow, and the next she would stare into soft eyes and watch as jagged edges eased into rosy cheeks with a smile. The air turned thick with the sickly sweet scent of tenderness.

With life flowing so fervently, it's no wonder she didn't feel the heat steadily rising around her and her partner; why she didn't notice when the sweat turned to tears as cloying smoke filled their lungs. She could

pay no mind to the anesthetic sensation creeping—seeping into her veins as her partner rose up with the mist. For in such a place where time stands still, life cannot be sustained.

But in these fleeting moments of honey and sunlight, she no longer feared the flames that licked at her feet, as the place where no one is anyone and nothing is anything crumbled. Instead, she took one final glance and ensured that when all was said and done she would remember the fleeting home that lived only in the hollows of memories of a time when the world stood still and, for a single breath, stood together.

In this one moment, when nothing occurred, and everything changed, a cycle of collapsing realities began, snuffing out the flame whose glow had once rivaled Sirius and Arcturus, a smoky haze descending. Time's oppressive hands took hold once more, and sent all hurtling forward. When time finally paused for a breath, a spark was found amongst the destruction, and soon a glow could be seen softly pulsing in the darkness.

The tapers on the hearth were relit, reminding her that in an instant she could return to her impossible place and step off on a novel waltz, feeling at once reborn and unchanged.



make  
amazon  
ps

**Living Under the Stars**

James Messer





## Winding and Unwinding

Samuel Walters

I'm forced inside as flowers bloom  
So I prepare my weaving loom  
I pick out every thread I see  
The colors of friends and memories  
A spectrum warm and deep

I feed each thread through its own slot  
Carefully I pull them taut  
For even though the tension strains  
They stay together in the frames  
My warp is now complete

And now I can begin to weave  
Who knows how long before I leave?  
I pass the threads from right to left  
I pull them tight along the weft  
The shape begins to creep

A story speaks from each thread's hue  
Happy times red, and sad ones blue,  
All of them vibrant, from black to white  
All of them rich, from dark to light  
I laugh and then I weep

My shuttle still moves after a year  
But I see that the end is near  
The scarf's long and slender form  
Will forever keep me warm  
Until our hands can meet

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