

GEORGIA TECH LITERARY & ARTS MAGAZINE

ERATO.

2022-2023 LIII Edition

VISIONS OF
FANTASY

erato.gatech.edu - Atlanta, GA



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2022-2023
LIII EDITION



LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Readers,

As my time with Erato comes to an end, I wanted to take a moment to reflect on my experience and express my hopes for the future of this publication.

Over the past three years, I have had the pleasure of working alongside a talented and dedicated team of writers, artists, and editors. Together, we have brought to life the creativity and unique perspectives of Georgia Tech's community through the pages of this magazine. From thought-provoking short stories to stunning visual artwork to breathtaking photography, our publication has showcased the wide range of talent and diversity that exists within our campus.

As the Editor-in-Chief, I have been privileged to witness the growth and development of this publication. I have seen the passion and commitment of my team members, who have poured countless hours into every edition to ensure that we produce a high-quality publication that accurately represents the voices of our community. None of this would have been possible without their help.

As I look towards the future, I am filled with hope and excitement for what this magazine can become. I have no doubt that the next generation of writers, artists, and editors will continue to build upon the foundation we have established and take this publication to even greater heights. My hope is that this magazine will continue to serve as a platform for the expression of diverse perspectives and the celebration of artistic and literary talent.

To all our readers, thank you for your continued support and engagement with our publication. It has been an honor to be a part of this community, and I am grateful for the memories and experiences that this magazine has brought into my life.

With that being said, I am thrilled to introduce to you the latest edition of our magazine. Erato LIII is a celebration of the power of imagination and the limitless possibilities that exist within our minds. It is a reminder that we are capable of creating entire worlds and characters that exist only in our thoughts. Moreover, this theme is about the escape from reality. By stepping outside of the boundaries of everyday life and the stresses that come with it, we can engage with deeper truths and universal concepts in a way that is both entertaining and inspiring. In this edition, you will find that our contributors have taken inspiration from mythology, folklore, science fiction, dreams, and their own lives to showcase their interpretations of the theme.

So, as you delve into the pages of this book, I invite you to close your eyes, let your imagination take flight, and see visions of fantasy.

I dedicate this book in memory of my dear friend, Vik.

JIMMY LIU
Editor-in-Chief



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VISIONS OF
FANTASY



A FAMILIAR FOREST

written by ASHU VIJAY GUPTA

A woodsman walks among ancient trees,
Leaves crunching under feet too large
Bear-like hands grasp a bow of yew
As he wanders alone in familiar woods

The woodsman sights a waterfall
Standing in the pool, a single figure:
Some elven maiden, minding her own,
Filling a flask in the flowing water

Her arms are adorned in elegant silks
Worn in comfort despite the wind
And on her brow an ornate circlet
Rests on features free of flaws
The woodsman tightens his weary cloak,
Watching the woman in awe and envy
Her eyes are kind, yet his are hardened
Her skin soft, his scarred from sorrows

“Perhaps one day he
would play roles no
more And enjoy life as
he had always wished”

How he wishes to wear jewels like hers
Or walk with grace in forests of green
How he dreams to be born different,
An elven maiden, not a hardened man

Perhaps one day he would play roles no more
And enjoy life as he had always wished,
Free from the bonds fettered by the world,
No longer chained to the label of manhood

But today he walks and wanders on,
For in his heart he fears the forest
That waits from beyond the walls he built
Calling for him to go hunting alone.





▲ digital art SEEING MAGIC JIMMYLIU



▲ digital art LOVE LETTER SUKANYA HARRIS

a key to certain MYTHOLOGIES

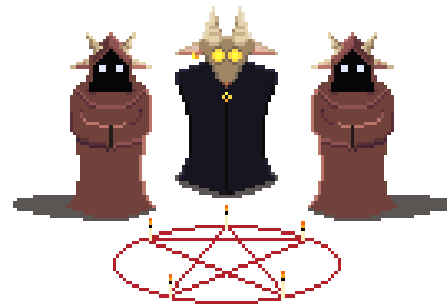
written by ARYA KARTHIK

In confronting us, their still-image (the two of them; soon, soon enough, one—but, [*only lost, so lost*] but we were never!), this dead-scene, reveals exactly that which it was composed so as to deny of, with such rigor—the durativity, the vitality that’s been from it with closure excised—and then not much more; we count the petals, drawing, as we go, an unvarnished finger along each of their skins; claiming them with number (our number); consenting, so they might their colors keep against the twilight we seek to mete upon this world; skipping sevens and thirteens, as anyone would—our brand of sanity—the beautiful ones, the rare ones as

beautiful as she, theirs is (so said a god) another way of being human—or maybe they just aren’t: that’s it, isn’t it? for they’ve them, perched atop their seamy spires; ensconced in fairy-tale castles that, in their repose, so brutally sag the skin of the sky; fantasies themselves; they could choose, as I might not, to pull free of the imaginative life; to sleep without dream’s encroach; to sew, even, their sighted eyes open, embrace the senses of their lamp-brightened, lattice-amplified reality—that is their privilege, that is the point—and they’ve me, an ocean away, tending to the lesser child (we survive, here, her and I; we make a life), mailing off letters



seldom read, replied to (a nymphic acerbity near always obscured by desperation, love): that's all there's to do, in the end; all there's to linger for, all that the guards would suffer me have—you see? that we've no us nor them, as they do; that, as we trudge through the forest (we've with us no second sound; nor third rhyme; only achy feet, dead stringencies), among deer and cottonwoods, what's after, its liquor-stink, seeks us, takes us, hovers; that we are afraid, that those who bear us (the proximity, that's all; reading wouldn't do) we similarly make afraid—we similarly affray—that is why they leave.



You, traitress, you of the sun-torn hair—my Lady, my lily-in-the-lung; coiled, wan—I must know (though it is not mine to know): since going, where've you gone? for to my breast naught's clung but a prim red line—that none but I shall know of, feel; so it is these days—an error, it would seem, in the inking of my skin, something for which I could blame another, one whom I have not loved; not yours only, distinctly,



◀ pixel art FLOCK ANON

▼ pixel art UNTITLED ANON

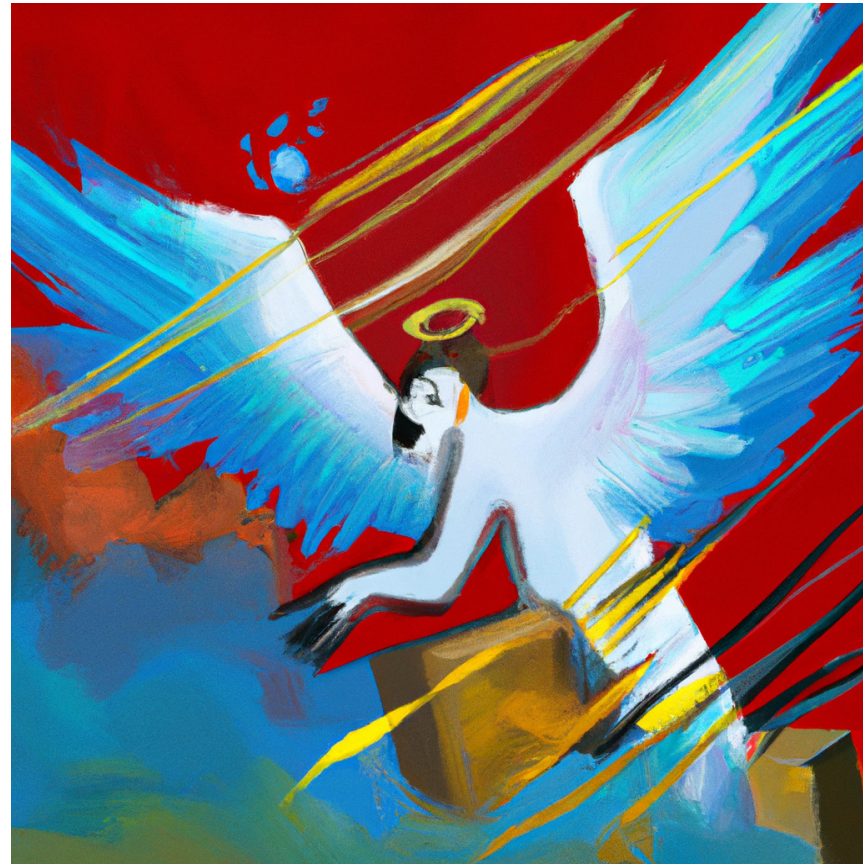
▲ pixel art UNTITLED ANON

then (this I tried to sell you, once) not yours at all. Know, for I will write of you, with that, once given of that—as princess of Kagrán, as mirrored mirror, as one whom others might willingly hear (I tried harder, I've always tried harder; you are, still, the author of us)—take what of you you'd pressed upon me amidst that ill-considered embrace, the day we parted (would you have meant it, that? would I?); all of it kept, of course, held as reliquiae—often worshiped—as proof of an angel's mild impurity,



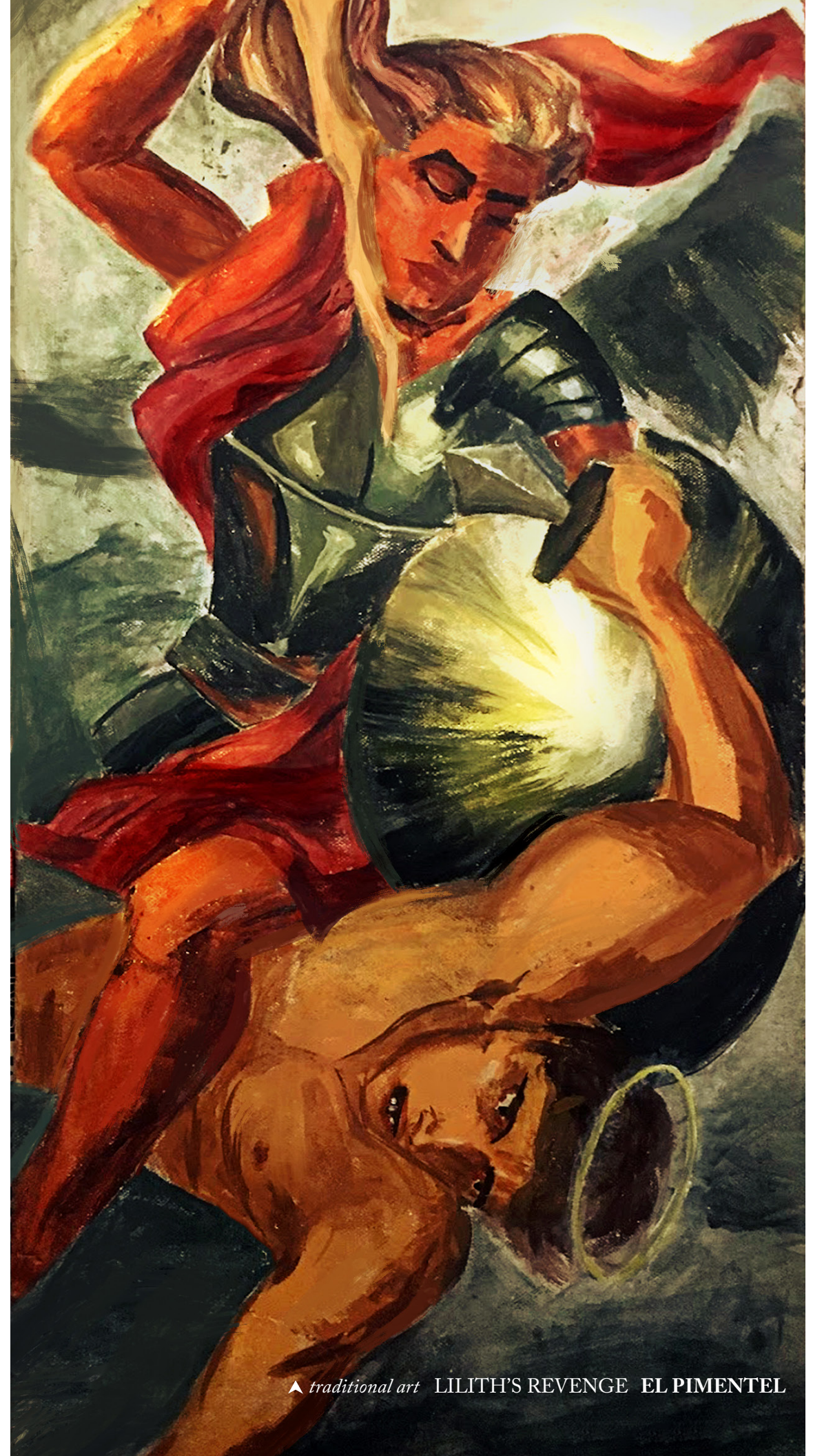
reality; and arrange it in a woman's form, and imagine it into breath: what I have of you, made you; what your life must be like, with your one, and the others (*all better, all of them better*); the mice still in your mind.

[What is here, in this mind-world—and not what you've made of me!—is mine, and is all that is mine.]



▲ *digital art* BANISHMENT ANON

▼ *digital art* SERAPH ANON



▲ *traditional art* LILITH'S REVENGE EL PIMENTEL



the
SPYGLASS

written by SADIE PALMER

◀ *traditional art* WHERE IS ABDO? YASHA HAQUE

My father owned many trinkets in his life, some of which I appreciate, and others of which I have much disdain for, especially now that I am tasked with purging his hoard. As I stand here, amongst his things, I can't help but stare absently out the small upstairs window and wonder how many times father saw the same view. He must've spent countless hours up here over the years, and now all that time is but a relic immortalized in his collection.

A few of the inspectors came by and remarked that father's items must be worth a fortune, though I can't imagine anyone that would pay good money for a dusty sewing machine or a chipped figurine or even a useless spyglass. Yes, my blessed father owned this spyglass, much like the ones old seafarers used to keep tucked into their pant pockets while out on their voyages. In my palm, it feels cold and useless. The lenses are scratched and the wooden casing is splitting so horribly that I worry no matter how gingerly I hold it, I will still end up with little shavings embedded in my skin.



But, this item was still my father's, and holding it in my hand makes me feel one world closer to him. And perhaps I am still the same child who used to sit in his lap and beg for his stories while playing with one of his shiny objects. Now, more than ever, I must entertain that nagging curiosity in my brain, so I bring the frail spyglass up to my face and attempt to peer through its dirtied lenses, if only to appease the item's purpose.

The metal rim grazes my cheekbone and stars explode in my vision. I don't feel the spyglass in my hand anymore even though I know it's there.

Surely sadness and nostalgia are not so disorienting? Though, that becomes a distant thought as my chest constricts with confusion. With only one way out, I shut my eyes so tightly I see cosmic swirls and endless patterns that burst like fireworks before fizzling back into my frontal lobe. I reopen my eyes and I am still amid my father's trinkets: shiny and full of life. An exhale escapes my lips at the sight of familiar things, but my ease is short-lived.

I dare to blink again.

The sewing machine is strung with thread. The figurine is whole. Blood rushes in my ears, for I know what I will see if I look down.

The spyglass is anew, sporting a polished exterior and clear-as-day lenses. My immediate impulse is to drop it, but something about the surety of its weight keeps it pinned in my palm.

A distant sound snaps my attention upward and at the window, I see a black bird peering through the glass. The creature pecks at the frame in a beckoning manner, but I am too dumbfounded to oblige.

Sensing my hesitation, the bird fluffs its wings in a gesture that I can only describe as a shrug before flying off out of sight. Not a second later does it return, brandishing a twinkling object in its beak. Only then do my legs seem commanded to move and suddenly I find myself at the window, staring at the peculiar bird, spyglass in hand, surrounded by my father's vast collection.

The raven drops its gift — an ornate key — onto the ledge of the window and awaits my reaction. I am hopelessly confused, and my face must show it. I cannot even school my features into some form of curiosity.

The bird does not find this reaction satisfactory, and it flies off again, returning now two seconds later. In its beak is a long line of thread, much like the kind father would rig into his sewing machine. From my view through the window, I cannot see where the thread ends; it simply winds away out of sight towards some unknown destination.

A pang of realization hits me and suddenly my hands know exactly what to do. I lift the windowpane, providing enough of a gap for the raven. The creature carefully sets its end of the string on the windowsill, and I dutifully place my spyglass beside it.

The bird promptly turns its attention away from me and begins its examination of its new trinket, and I can feel the corners of my mouth rise knowing that he would have done the same. I take my part of the exchange — the simple string — and roll it between my thumb and index finger. It shimmers like gossamer and when I tug on it, hoping to reveal its mysterious end, I can only feel the exhilarating pounding of my heart vibrating against the thread.

This time, I close my eyes with purpose, and do not need to reopen them to know where I am.

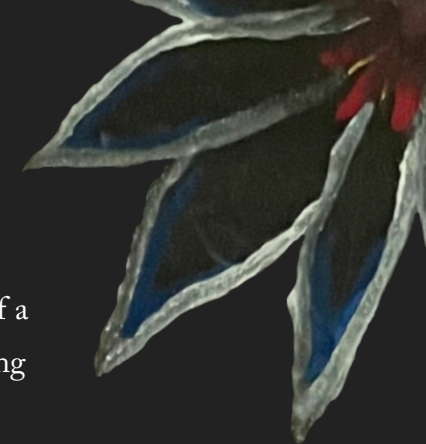
Where I have been all along.

Home.

Amongst father's treasures.

Amongst his gifts to me.

“This time, I close my eyes with purpose, and do not need to reopen them to know where I am.”





▲ traditional art FAIREST OF THEM ALL SHIRLEY NGUYEN

Run, Phoenix, Run

written by VICTORIA CHAN

I did not enter this world alone.
You came first: a dragon with his head reined back,
a son of heaven, waiting for an embrace.
Me, a phoenix with clipped wings,
splattered with viscera and bright red fortune.

Together, traversing our years in a foreign land,
where no one can see the tinder tied behind our backs,
we are bound because of time and fear
that cuts through steel spines of those
who promise they can protect their land from us.

What the dragon won't tell you is that
once, we found a home nestled in an island,
But a place is no longer a home when
the stench of fear permeates every crevice, and
we were perched to fly at a moment's notice.

They're hunting creatures like us,
but does that mean we have to die at someone else's
fingers for anyone else to notice that we were never one
of them? Dragon, will the tinder on your back ignite
And bring down the world in a haze of anger?

What I won't tell you is that
rebirth is never easy and every time
there is a moment of hesitation to begin again,
to simmer and burn until you've combusted—
I was taught that it's supposed to hurt.

Birth as a phoenix is a destiny
that comes suffocated with motherhood.
Birth as a dragon is a blessing that comes
with chains of expectations that keep us tethered
to this foreign land that will spit us right back up.

I did not enter this world alone,
but I did not realize that this whole time
neither did you.



▲ traditional art REBIRTH MURPHYJORDAN

► digital art WELTSCHMERZ ANON



FUTURE



“They accepted their roles, relished the control they took from those demons of the night.”

They greeted that spine-tingling sensation with open arms, knowing it sent life through their bodies that would protect them from harm. For when the first whites of those creatures' eyes showed through the encompassing blackness around them, in an instant that light would vanish, and so would one lone arrow. Then ten more eyes would beckon from the dark, itching for mayhem before pitching back into the abyss from whence they came. And oh, what a silent symphony would play from those bows as their arrows vibrated the strings, headed for their final destination! Not one miss, nor one graze; the hunters played the game they played. They accepted their roles, relished the control they took from those demons of the night. Far away, the villagers would imagine horrors and frights that would keep children up, but not the huntsmen. Before daybreak, they were back, bows hung slack from their shoulders and chins lifted, tilting back their hoods. Their souls bore witness to the world beyond their little town, but the heedful hunters had played their role, and for that, they could sleep silently.

The huntsmen were steady on the prowl, heeding whispers from the pines and otherworldly howls that rang through the darkened forest, shrouded in fog and moonlight. The shadows shifted as if lifting ghoulish creatures up from the depths, but the party of hardened hunters merely dipped their heads and trudged onward. Their eyes scanned the tall trunks from beneath their hoods, capturing glimpses of features that seemed to form from the woods. They were no strangers to the feeling of unease as they teased arrows out of their sacks and nocked them silently into their bows. In fact, that pungent scent of fear was a familiar smell, but not from their fellow hunters - from the prey they were soon to meet.

THE HUNTSMEN

written by SADIE PALMER
▲ photography UNTITLED MATTHEW WALLOCH



The Dream of Dreams

written by ALBERT NGUYEN

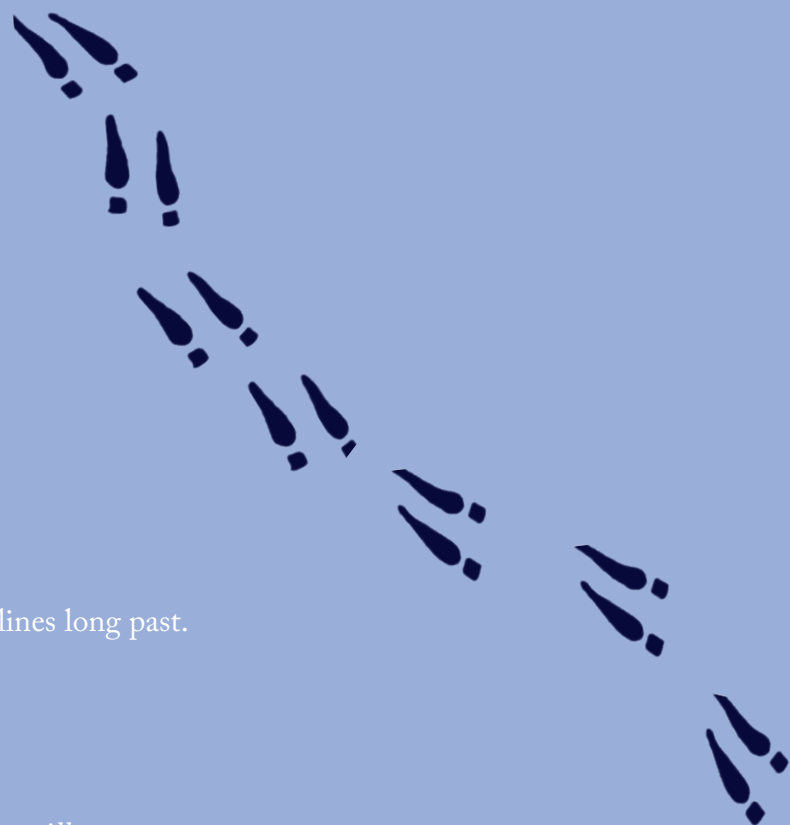
◀ traditional art SONDER AVENUE SHIRLEY NGUYEN

We all follow the same path.
The smoke billows from the city lines.
The same steps, the same words, the same dance.
A cat scampers about, hunting for survival.
No matter how different we think we are,
Their eyes look at me, broken and indifferent.
We are all cogs.
The crowd shuffles, the same steps to the same goal.

Home is no longer home,
The clouds are filled with dust, ash, and bone.
For a home requires ownership—and I own nothing.
A scream in the distance, the sound of bubbling madness.
I set down my bags and throw off my coat.
A splash of crimson amongst the grayscale.
I look at the desk, a flurry of red ink, deadlines, deadlines long past.
Just another Tuesday.
Just another Tuesday.

Individuality is not given; it is a privilege.
In every house, a myriad of flowers lie on the same windowsill.
There are those who do not follow the path by birthright or defiance.
The mattress springs creak as I slowly crumble.
The former is born a god, free to live.
The TV plays, advertising a new host for their new weekly.
The latter is crushed by the crowd, an ember snuffed out before ignition.
The sound of sirens screams out, the bodies shuffled away.
It is now 6PM.

I never let go.
The PoliceCo bot announces that the area is closed off,
But sometimes,
The shuffle of the steps grows quiet.
I relax, if only for a moment.
The birds are caw!—The birds are chirping.
I am sitting in a bed with a bedframe.
The wind is howl!—The wind is breezy, carrying the scent of apples.
I turn to look around.
My house has rooms, each with laughter echoing through them.
I get up and try to glance through to the other room.



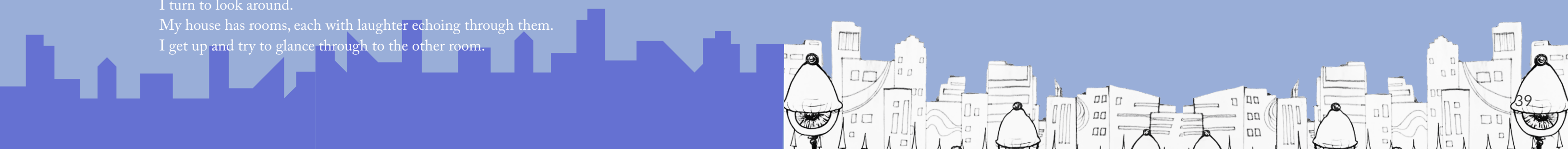
My husband is cooking. The stove is a nice electric one; we had purchased it yesterday.
We don't worry about the payments. We had been saving up for a while and were able to buy one as soon as we were allowed to.
I look at what he is making. Bacon, sizz—*The pounding of boots storm up the stairs*—ling, with eggs cooking right beside it on another pan. I look to his left, our toaster slowly toasting some of our own bread.
I watch slowly as it finishes, hearing it make a—*Banging on the door, the scream of PoliceCo*—sound. The children, our children, gather around my husband, and he notices me in the doorway. He opens his mouth—

“If only I could have dreamed a better dream.”

“This is the last warning! Vacate the premises for the next occupant or we will be authorized to use deadly force!”
I ask him kindly to repeat himself.
He lets out a —*the door explodes behind me, and PoliceCo swarms into*

the apartment. I chuckle and look through the door. My husband is no longer in the kitchen. He is flying, flying in the vast countryside—*cold, burgeoning city*— vast countryside, and he is smiling at me, the Sun and a blue sky—*gray clouds, the Sun is not visible, for it is MalinEP property*— blue sky, beckoning me towards him. I walk —*I am crawling desperately, my voice hoarse, the dogs biting at my ankles,*
Through the door, through the window,
My house is now colored in red.
If only I could have dreamed a better dream.
The flowers fall alongside me, the wind howling louder than ever before.

We all follow the same path.
The smoke billows from the city lines.
The same steps, the same words, the same dance.
A body crashes down from the apartment above.
No matter how different we think we are,
Their eyes look at me, broken and indifferent.
We are all cogs.
The crowd shuffles aside, the same steps to the same goal.



PYTHIA
ΒΥΤΗΙΑ

written by JASMINE HSU

Boy, she croons, men of many seasons:
Men of seasons past, children of your God
like cattle to your mouths.

Gnash your teeth in fury,

*Arise like the echos of sunken ships, ghost fleets in
your eyes and oracles foaming upon the surface of a
terrible death.*

Bring me my misery!

(fantasies wrapped in delusion beget no
falsehoods)

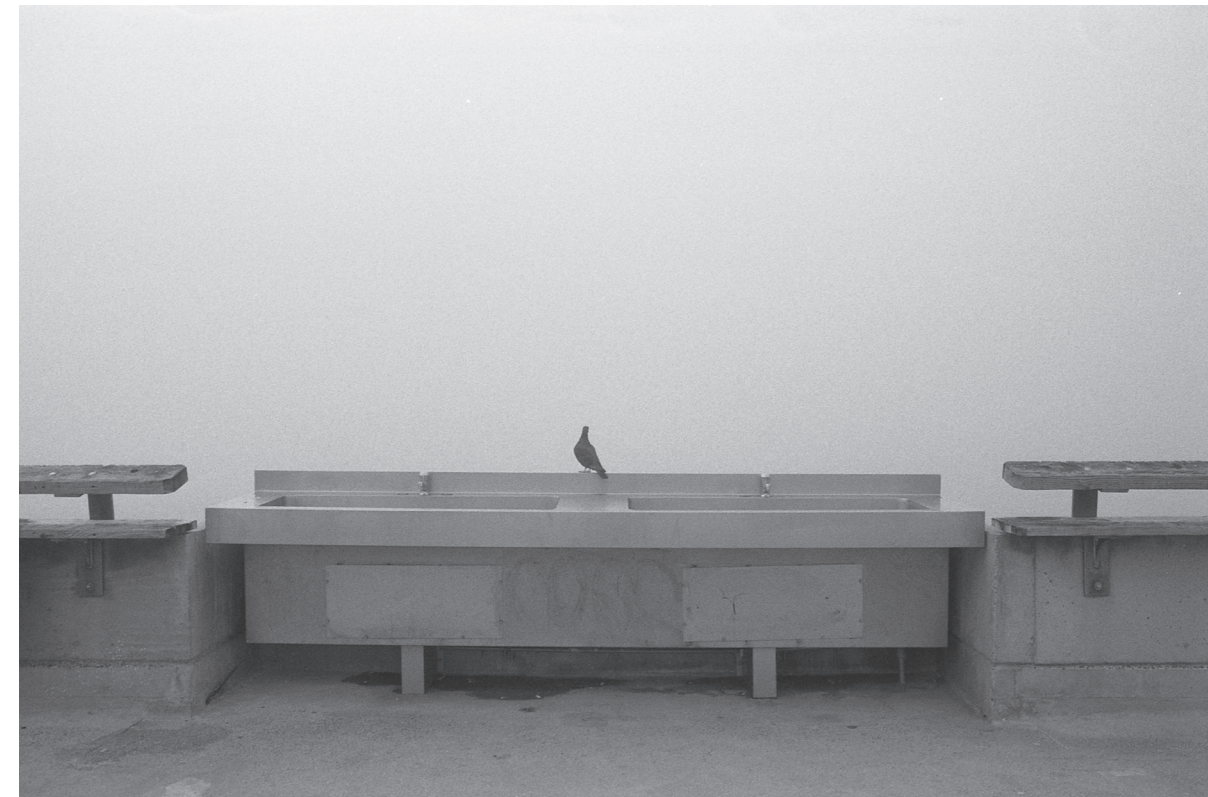
*Sanctuary, they cry, a saviour from our hells,
a valley of brilliance we see even in the luring
darkness of the abyss.*

But another: *Her riddles have run our wells dry.*

Cruelty runs deep in those festering wounds,
and the truth is no less startling when presented
on the altar in a pool of its own crimson wake.

She is bound to ash and lashed to smoke, but
her laughter lingers far longer than the night
skies. It has poisoned the earth in its cries of
black-songs and the feast of ravens. Paradise has
crumbled; *ruins rise above Babylon.*

*I am drowning in those dreams. The doves carry
news of destruction, and our world is penned with
no less glee.*



▲ photography SHORE HAZE 1 YIXIAO ZHANG



▲ *photography* WHERE IS THE WINDOW? YIXIAO ZHANG



▲ *photography* SHORE HAZE 2 YIXIAO ZHANG

ADMONITION

written by LILY KATE SOETEBIER

► digital art BEYOND SHIRLEY NGUYEN



Passably plain was the afternoon sky, as his webbed feet plodded along the path, tailcoats splitting the wind. The musk of toadstools wafted through the air as a deep voice drawled its way up from the ground.

“Did Cinderella and her carriage forget ya when y’all left the ball, or ya just playin’ dress up?” Taking another long drag from his pipe, the toad smiled to himself as he closed his eyes, attempting to escape the warm rays from the rising sun penetrating the cover of his bolete.

The young frog stood frigid, silently staring the toad down. The sweat glided smoothly off his sloping nose. His breath hitched, and his lip began to curl slowly into a moue. Eventually, he dislodged himself from his stupor and began to move along again.

Without opening his eyes, the toad calmly

continued “Now, there ain’t no reason for you to be so out of sorts. I ain’t too sure about where’er you come from, but in these parts, we answer questions when they’re asked of us.”

The frog drew in a slow breath, allowing the sharp scent of pine trickling from the forest to clear his head.

“If you must know, I am here on business. Now I apologize for my manners, but I really must be going, or I shall be late for my appointment.” His perfect diction cut through the air in a clean strike with the finality of someone who was acquainted with his will being the way.

The toad did not impede his journey any further leaving him with only a pleasant goodbye as the frog crossed the threshold of the forest. Alone once more, the toad began to hum a melody that begged for a fiddle and said, to no one in particular,

“Oh, he’ll dance for sure.”

With the tapestry of trees as his shield, the frog charged into battle with his past exchange.

“I have never in my life been met with such a toad. How I abhor their utter absence of decorum. I simply cannot stand these forest creatures,” the frog lamented into the ether.

His tirade of indignation paused only for a fleeting moment when his toe caught on a pebble, causing him to lurch forward. With a little huff, the frog ran his hands repeatedly over his belly, smoothing the perfectly pressed double breasts back into submission. Tilting his chin once more to the sky the frog huffed one final puff, and continued through the thicket.

“The melody was distorted and distant, but alive with the rhythm of a lilting dance.”

“Dear lord, the stench of this god-forsaken place.” He lifted one of his limbs attempting in vain to protect his nostrils from this offense, using the other to fumble through the pocket of his waistcoat, fingers catching on coins, cool to the touch, eventually retrieving his only map.

“This is why my father never let us vacation in the forest. Those pamphlets praised the ‘crisp air perfumed with the sugary sweetness of pine snap’. What a load of poppycock. Now let us see, how much further do I have to endure.”

The rustling of the aged parchment in his free hand echoed the crispy crinkling of dried, dying pine needles that fell gracefully from above. The frog poured over the twisting lines and sketches made by hand eons ago. Losing himself in the intricacies of navigation, he

took no care as he slipped into a viscous embrace.

The ooze pulled him in, as if it was desperate to be nearer. Slick and warm, perhaps it would have felt comforting if not for the miasma of decay. Twisting and turning proved only to make the frog sink deeper. The gravity of the situation settled into his bones as his hyper-extended forelegs skimmed the surface of the muck.

“The gates of hell are shortly opened” scratched its way out of the frog’s throat as the sludge began to constrict his chest and

he began to realize his efforts were futile.

The stillness of the frog’s resignation was disturbed by a wailing cry. The jagged scratching of a bow against the taut metal strings of a fiddle signaled an impassioned performance. The melody was distorted and distant, but alive with the rhythm of a lilting dance. The cries became distinguishable as cackling laughter crescendoed with the acceleration of the tempo.

As the cacophony grew nearer and nearer, a thumping joined the melody. With only his eyes free from his terra cavea, he watched as feet—webbed and furred alike—romped past him. The frog’s ribs were a xylophone in his chest, as the earth that encompassed him vibrated from the patterned footfalls. Soon, as the vibrations dislodged a pocket of air in the foundations of the decay; the earth’s grip gave way to an otherworldly slurp and down the frog slipped underneath the surface.

The bone crushing pressure faded away, and soon he had limbs light as air, no longer servants of gravity. For so long he had been slipping, sliding, sinking, that now flight felt just as natural. Searing spectral light pierced through his pupils and began boring a path into his skull. The spots in his vision metamorphosed as pain and paralysis confused the senses. Left in their

stead was a glowing gaggle of dancers, webbed-hands clasped and spinning in circles. The tune they danced to was hardly transcendental, but it was joyous, nonetheless. Their feet moved in perfect synchronicity, weaving an intricate lattice as they stepped and swayed in time.

Soon enough his presence was noticed, and a hand reached out to invite him to join. He reached forward on instinct, like he had been destined to dance alongside them. The frog found himself falling easily into the rhythm, weaving webbed fingers with perfect copies carved from pure starlight. Breathless and bubbly with unprecedented joy, he paused his orbit only to look up, desperately seeking the source of the sound, needing to thank the musician for the service.

Eventually, familiar eyes found each other once again, the frog’s feet and heart skipping a beat. With a fiddle nestled neatly under his chin, the toad’s fingers flew across the strings—speed-blurred. Once the tune came to a close, and his focus could return to the present, Toad spoke, the gravel in his voice as fuzzy and warm as the fading light.

“Welcome to nowhere, son. I knew you’d

join us soon enough.”

A soft smile graced his face as the toad paused for a moment, tucking his fiddle gently under his arm. Even without the music, the dancers continued their pattern on and on, picking up where the frog had dropped out. The toad offered his hand

to the frog, who turned his head, staring down into the darkness. Shadows caught on his features, painting a narrative of confusion and regret.

“You still don’t get it do ya? Bless your heart.” Spoke the toad with a sigh. Retracting his hand to fish into the pockets of his mud crusted overalls, the toad withdrew a glinting golden pocket watch

from the depths. Its pristine condition was a stark contrast to the rest of his appearance. So much so that the frog couldn’t stop himself from leaning over to take a glance at the face, eyes widening with each loop the hands made from twelve through six to one.

The toad then began to laugh as he examined the readings of the two faces, warm and hearty at first, but as it continued the sound became discordant melodies of vocal cords and violins.

“You got to get on goin’ back, now don’t

“The bone crushing pressure faded away, and soon he had limbs light as air, no longer servants of gravity.”



ya’? Back to somewhere” mused the toad—his voice deep, humming under the echoes of laughter. His smile grew as he saw the mist of disappointment settle into place on the frog’s face. The toad placed his leathery hand on the frog’s shoulder, the touch lukewarm.

“As the darkness quickly closed back in, he knew better than to fight it and instead let the end consume him.”

“Don’t ya worry your pretty little head, you can dance with us anytime ya like. We would never turn ya away, but we ought to say goodbye, fer now.”

As the toad’s final word was spoken, the frog found himself floating again. This time rather than being crumpled under pressure, the frog felt himself propelled upwards, a cooling breeze rushing along his exposed skin. As the darkness quickly closed back in, he knew better than to fight it and instead let the end consume him.

All at once the movement paused. When he dared to pry open his eyes, he found himself resting gently amongst the pine-dusted forest floor. He laid there for a moment allowing his skin to soak in the fresh air—its prickly perfume tingled

in his nostrils with a sense of sterility. Spotless was his suit, that he was certain should at least have mud speckled along the hem. Yet he felt freshly laundered, and lightly lavender scented.

In a familiar motion, the frog reached deep into his waistcoat to retrieve the map that he had believed to be lost. Instead, he found the worn page still showing leading lines to guide him to his destination. Knowing better than to turn back, the frog oriented himself and continued onward, for there really was business to be done.





ALONE UPON THE MOUNTAIN GREEN

written by MATTHEW WALLOCH

A lone, upon the mountain green, he stood.
His left, his right: ocean stood either side,
Pale green fades to deep blue cast with white,
The path before him now calls out his name.

And so he looked up on the mountain green,
As if Seurat dotted with small flowers,
And Gaia delicately placed the rocks
that have since been eaten by rain and wind,
That on the green, Held headfast as towers.

As you follow the beaten path before him,
The flowers glowed as those Icelandic nights.
And in disbelief, he stood there, watching
And as still as the rocks held around him,
Marveling the changing lights of the bulbs,
Beckoning, calling to come towards the cave.

As he stumbled across the mountain green,
Shivers ran down his spine, so he took to
His left, to his right, but the coast seem to clear.
He persisted into the deep, dark mouth.
As he looked at the welcoming abyss,
He was swallowed in, as Jonah has been;
The flowers glowed, colored by a new soul.

Unlike Jonah, he would finish no quest,
For the mountain is crafted by the gods,
And for it to glean till death, do us all,
More must stand on the mountain green alone.

INTRO

THE
SNOW
GLOBE

written by JESSAMYN LOCKETT

And there we stood at the edge of the street: dark red, like a schoolteacher's apple, and speckled throughout with unknown white flecks, as though a permanent snow littered every passing step. Our story took place on a nippy autumn day; the sort that feels like how rain smells or how a crisp Granny Smith picked at just the right moment, by just the right hand, tastes.

I remember how the leaves swirled off to the left: burgundy and blonde and burnt orange, whipping round and round in their little vortex, how they skittered across the pavement with

each gust of wind that seemed to blow handfuls of students by, in their beanies and flannels and scarves.

But my focus was on her, and how could it not be? She had that look again: mystified, *enchanted*. And I knew I was looking at her the same way. There was a magnetism there that drew me in, but always held me at bay a few inches from her lips, as though the magnet reversed its poles each time I came too close or went too far. Our eyes spoke to one another. I was so scared to lose her. "You know you will; we weren't meant to be."

► *photography* FROZEN IN MEMORY OWEN KERN



“You know it too?”

“I care for you all the same though. I cherish you for the moments I can have you.”

“I cherish you for the moments I can have you.”

And with that, she kissed me. It was timid, it was light, it was a ginger-scented breath of fresh air; bright like citrus, eyes wide open and I never wanted to go back. Above all else: it was something I needed more of, and so I intended to kiss her again. This time to be quicker, hotter, more desperate—full of the reckless abandon and youthful fervor I’d seen so much of, that I’d yearned so deeply for with her.

But I couldn’t have been more wrong. The second was not that variety of kiss at all. I had no control over myself and it morphed without my intention into a deep, passionate sort of affair: a slow-blooming sort of epicenter emanating from our point of connection. A deepness that transcended layers; as though two could achieve oneness through such simple means. We melted further into this voidless dimension, and everything faded to gray: not black or white or

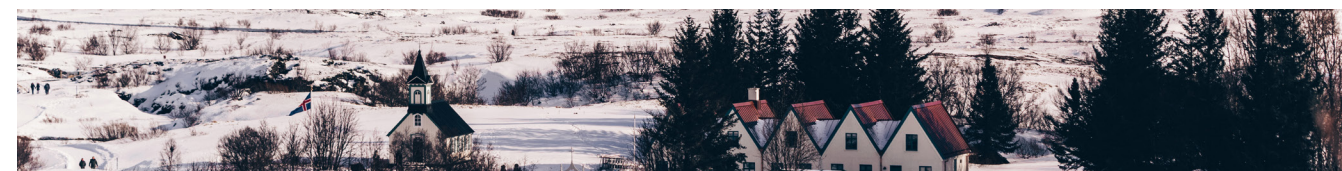
brown, just gray. And there was nothing else. Only her: bright and radiant and red. Glowing. Screaming. A pigment so vibrant, she were nearly ablaze. If I were a moth, she were a flame that would never burn me. If she were a match, I were a spark that would never fail her.

My head turned left as hers did right and we descended deeper. In contrast to our ignition, the nothingness surrounding us was cool and dark, as though we were underwater — and we did nothing to fight it, but let ourselves slip comfortably beneath the waves. Sinking lower and lower with each passing deluge, gliding seamlessly between layers upon layers of darkness as they swirled around us and over us and consumed us, rocking us in time with the waves and one another in perfect unison.

She wrapped her arms around me, drawing me nearer with such a warmth I could almost hear the kindling snap and smell the oaky, wooden smoke rise when I felt it: her eyes shot open. Brown irises with a richness to them unknown to even the Rockefellers and of course, I fell into them. Oh, they were soft. They were gentle. They were a deep dark—never to be confused for a deep, pitchless black. Rather, there were layers to them as though there was another lifetime

“Our eyes spoke to one another. I was so scared to lose her.”

as though we were underwater — and we did nothing to fight it, but let ourselves slip comfortably beneath the waves. Sinking lower and lower with each passing deluge, gliding seamlessly between layers upon layers of darkness as they swirled around us and over



trapped behind them; an alternate universe set in her past, and I saw *her*. Her pain. Her melancholy. Her loneliness. Why I was only allowed to get so close before the poles reversed. Her reasons for why she was, the way she was. I zoomed in further and I saw the abandonment, the scarred little girl she was and had built herself around.

I panned further outward and oddly, I saw another child. The scene was nauseating: dusty, stale, dank, like an old roll of film discovered in the attic. It was a black and white set that tugged at me in a nagging way- as though nostalgia and pain came together in an inexplicable fashion. The child had stopped speaking and it was intuitive to me that she would do the same for several years to come. And then I realized what I was seeing was my life reflected in her eyes: she was seeing me as I was seeing her. *My* pain. *My* melancholy. *My* loneliness. Why I never pressed any further when I encountered the poles. I’d all but forgotten, yet there she roamed in a recess so deep, studying my arc projected across her little eyes like a cinema.

“Is this why I have to lose you?”

And just like that it was over. Just as deeply and quickly as we descended, we ascended, as though some imaginary tether pulled us upward through the water, whirring through its many chilling layers. Slivers of turquoise, ribbons of red, streaks of white, all rushing one after the next in terrific sequence. As though we were flying upward underwater through some fantastic riptide. I could not see her, but I felt her hand firmly in mine and did not panic. We simply “stood” there in suspension, the same way you would as an elevator transports you, as we exited the land we had been taken to.

Spat out at the other end of this glowing wormhole, we arrived back at square one, ever red as the teacher’s apple, perfectly dry but slightly out of breath, as though we were trying to catch the breath we had not been denied. Jolted by the abrupt landing, our hands disconnected, and we bobbed left and right, catching our bearings. The bubble had been broken, as earth came

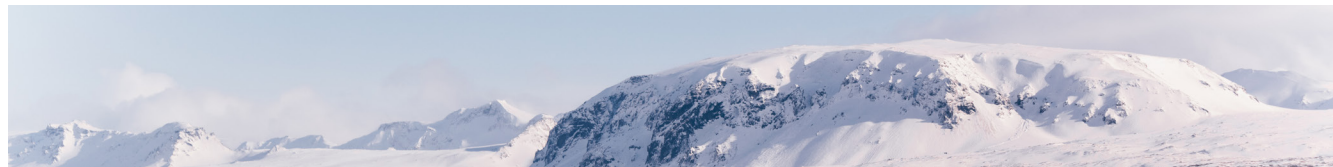
“And then I realized what I was seeing was my life reflected in her eyes: she was seeing me as I was seeing her. *My* pain. *My* melancholy. *My* loneliness.”

flooding back and the scenery shifted yet again; no longer were we surrounded by cool, dark, nothingness but livelihood—burgundies, and blondes, and burnt oranges 360 degrees all around. Muddled silhouettes took form to beanies and flannels and scarves, all buzzing about just as they had before.

Setting her eyes on me in timid wonder, she spoke not a word, the corner of her windbreaker tumbling gently in the breeze. Even the atmosphere knew to move accordingly, blowing her chin-length hair to frame her face as though a professional had. Although entirely unaware, she might have been the most beautiful moment of my life. Mesmerized, it was all I could do to ponder over the contrast between her fair complexion and the pigmented rose sky overhead, matching her cheeks, tinged ever-so-slightly with the lightest shade of peach, as

though the most gossamer of fairies had kissed either side of her nose just that morning. How the blush melted into the dark brown hair before giving way to the chestnut-hued eyes that had taken up a life of their own. Utterly breathless.

I could only imagine what she was seeing. I had no idea if this “return” plane was the same as the old or if seeing each other made any difference, or if I still had to lose her, or when or where or if we would be allowed to return to that oddly cool and passionate realm—that calmingly esoteric land marked by both shadow and substance; I had no idea how we’d accessed it at all. Though, it was perfectly clear *we* understood that moment was ours to enjoy together, making the most of the day as we traveled up that eternally snowy road, hand in hand, without a word of what had transpired.



AN ISLAND IN YELLOW

written by VICTORIA CHAN

▼ *pixel art* NIGHT LIFE SUKANYA HARRIS

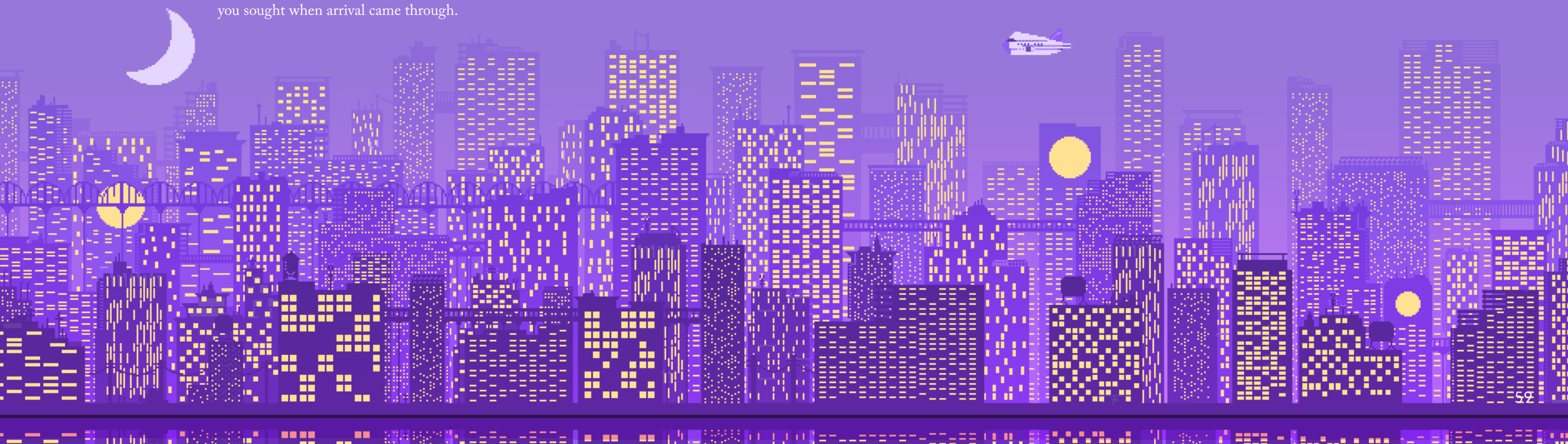
At the center of the earth,
Tucked between the low mountains
And hills, like a pressed white heather,
Lies a measly crumb broken off from the
country— A remnant of rich history and
memories of culture You had to shirk when it
was time to go.

A sea of red parts to give space for the tiny island
Bathed in yellow and in hidden corners, with enough
Exploration, there'll be an elephant in the room With
his trunk poised high, overlooking the lake Of fortune
you sought when arrival came through.

Even leagues away from what was once your birthplace,
Vindication is a nettle grating against your skin, a reminder
That anything created on this island in yellow will follow fixed,
Crossbred with colors that can't be erased like they
never Existed on this island that envisions land on its
horizons.

What geography doesn't get right is that it is lonely To be an
island broken off, where the erosion that rains Upon the
banks and the overhanging cliff is suffocating and Marring
the terrain you are still trying to fill with faithful Prospects
that *have* to germinate before we're pulled under.

Life is always beginning in the spaces forgotten Because
life has the ability to fit into broken chinks like Watery light
that will fill the space of any vessel or The tortured tree
that unfurls under the weight of concrete. Maybe you'll find
that life begins when you let it.





▲ *digital art* HOME PODS SHIRLEY NGUYEN

MASTS WITH FURLED SAILS

written by ABRAR UR-REHMAN SIDDIQUI

From Tech Green
Facing Van Leer
on the roof
next to the satellite
You can see rising on
waves of the ocean sky
the masts of an ancient ship
lonely and frozen but
still sailing proudly:

(through wind
if not water)
A forgotten
brig.
I imagine
adventure
but I see just
the skeleton of
strong ropes called stays

You'll never see clothed by sails
Because we do not dream
And I wonder how
many ships like
this are held
silently in
students
like me
furled

written by JESSAMYN LOCKETT

The Twilight Zone: Nightmare at 20,000 feet

“You unlock this door with the key of imagination. Beyond it is another dimension— a dimension of sound, a dimension of sight, a dimension of mind. You’re moving into a land of both shadow and substance, of things and idea. You’ve just crossed over into: The Twilight Zone.”



Imagine perchance, a relationship in its early 20s: an endearing Jane Doe and her Lover, a man adorned with soft brown eyes and a smile that would welcome any weary traveler; a picture of benevolence. *Perfect*, save one curious set of ears that would cause an otherwise caring man to do uncaring things. This peculiar pair of interpreters would cause him to hear, for example, his girlfriend’s innocent laughter at another’s joke as a declaration of Love for another man. On other occasions, they led him to believe she was saying that she’d “had enough to eat for the day”, when she was in fact, still hungry. Picture, on his worst day, he heard affirmative when the word spoken aloud was “No.”

It was a strange and sometimes backwards, other-worldly sort of Love that at times, existed on a plane higher than heaven itself, others, in a realm more sunken than Hades. Safe, warm, gentle, euphoric; violent, cold, harsh, desolate. In cycles like Sisyphus, but without his eternal strength until they reached a point of utter exhaustion.

Even after it was over, even after she’d returned to Smalltown, USA, to “Normalville” so to speak, who would believe her? If you jog your memory, you’ll recall, he was *perfect*: their shared world knew him as a man with soft brown eyes and a smile that would welcome any weary traveler, as a *picture of benevolence*.

It was the sort of perfection that could only exist, of course, in The Twilight Zone.

The Twilight Zone: A Quality of Coolness

"You unlock this door with the key of imagination. Beyond it is another dimension—a dimension of sound, a dimension of sight, a dimension of mind. You're moving into a land of both shadow and substance, of things and idea. You've just crossed over into: The Twilight Zone."

the same nature with ease. It was a quality of coolness owing entirely to herself.

A page straight out of Orwell, a sample from the very folds of another dimension. She would be Taylor's undoing, his unraveling, or rather his permission to breathe, his "all clear" to let go with eyes closed and fall freely from up above on that ninth cloud. And there she sat, quaintly at the intersection of his greatest fears and most

fantastic wonders—one step beyond his wildest dreams. She would fill him with a nervous sort of excitement, and in the coming days, he would find himself pinching himself often.

She was the shady provision on a scalding summer day and at that same time, the noonsun itself; she was unlike anything else that Taylor Brown would know.

She was joy.

Introducing one Taylor Brown: average man of average status living an otherwise mild-mannered life about to be interrupted in ways unimaginable to man. To his own ignorance, his existence was to become anything but average in a mere matter of days. You see, he was about to become absolutely blindsided by a certain quality of coolness.

Coolness that came in the form of Ava Carillo, who was average only in her name. She was a coolness unlike the forms you or I may think

of in the tradition of swagger or James Dean, but she was undoubtedly and undeniably cool all the same. She was a peculiar, fascinating thing with a penchant for the abstract. A mind that was as meticulous as a clock: intricate, complex, intentional, a work of art. She had a reach that was indefinite and a breadth that was infinite. When posed with inquisition, there was a natural relentlessness she possessed that came without the trait of mercilessness that it so often accompanied; a wicked intellect equipped to solve problems of

And rumor has it, she just might exist, outside of The Twilight Zone.



▲ *photography* CREEK CHLOE MORRIS



▲ *photography* SINK CHLOE MORRIS

TERMINAL

written by MADEEHA ANJUM

What's in a word—
meanings are folded like
origami,
a soft lotus,
floating atop the water,
or a small kite,
billowing in the wind.

In this valley of paper mâché,
where wings and limbs are caught
and mashed into a pulp, re-made to be
beautiful once more in
the figure of their siblings;
beginnings are carved from
colorful sheets and endings.

So join me while I'm here—
find the straight edges of the paper
of death and *fold, tuck, and slip*,
breathing new life into this
supposed end.



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