



Volume V
2026



Brush & Ink is a compilation of short stories, poetry, photography, and art by Sachem Public Library patrons of all ages. Submissions for Vol. V were accepted from January to March of 2026.

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Reader discretion is advised.

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SHORE TO SHORE

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Message From The Editors

We are so grateful and excited to celebrate another year of *Brush & Ink*. We can't believe this is the fifth volume! It is truly an honor to showcase the creativity and talent of the Sachem community.

Every year, *Brush & Ink* grows in size. We received a record breaking number of submissions for Volume V, and the variety of art, photography, and writing has been astounding.

The voices of Sachem are rich and diverse. Thank you for sharing your work with all of us. Seeing your creativity is one of the biggest joys of our job.

None of this would be possible without our endlessly supportive Board of Trustees, Director, and Assistant Director. Their leadership is crucial, and their care for the community is palpable in all they do.

We dedicate this issue in memoriam to Marguerite Barone, the Vice President of our Board of Trustees. Her firm faith in libraries and the work that we do has helped to shape not only this magazine, but everything that this library has dared to become in her 23 years with us. She will be deeply missed.

Enjoy *Brush & Ink* Volume V: **Shore to Shore**. See you for Volume VI in 2027.

Christine Latham
Sara Neil
Editors-In-Chief

Part One: From Sea









The Tables We Inherit

The Nail Salon

It was like looking into a mirror. The gentle curvature, the delicate angles, and the mystery in her almond shaped eyes, conjured an image that was familiar yet distant. The smell of acetone permeated the room and the cushioned chair was too large to be comfortable. As I studied the face across from me I reduced the question to its simplest form: where did our identities diverge?

Our faces both lacked sharpness, absent of protruding features, so in that way, we were the same. But the table that separated us, no larger than two feet in width, divided us in ways I couldn't comprehend in full, yet the feelings were palpable. There was curiosity met with confusion, kindness stifled by shyness, and a reckoning of identity.

We were no older than five or six, when we stood we saw eye to eye and our mothers watched over us with the same care and attention. She resembled her mother, almost a model of one another. But when I looked up to my mother's face, I was met with contrast - her prominent cheekbones and light hair shared no resemblance with me.

I sat beside my mother and deliberated over which color suited my personality best. My small hands flipped through the lacquered nail samples as the girl across from me watched. I wondered what she thought, what color she would pick, what she thought of me. Mom and I sat side-by-side; women who looked like me sat across from us, dejected as they cut and filed. I couldn't remember a time before where I had seen so many women who mirrored me, not altogether in a way that held a group identity. The little girl stood beside her mother and watched as she gently shaped my nail beds and lacquered my small fingers. She watched with great attention, and every so often we would lock eyes, studying one another. There was a comfort in one another, an acknowledgement of familiarity and reassurance that remained unspoken. In that moment, the table that divided us didn't exist, but as we ventured through life, the table would become more symbolic than the Berlin Wall.

But here I was, a child forced to confront my identity, and I learned it not by turning inward, but by looking outward. Through reckoning with what I was not, I learned more about who I was and how that would determine my trajectory as an Asian American.



I didn't choose what side of the table I would sit on, or what economic privilege allowed me to be a patron and not a worker. I wasn't granted authority over which language or ethnic community I would identify with. Neither did the little girl across from me. I was introduced to the complexity of what made us different. Yet at face value, we were the same. Our eyes curved on the same slanted line, our dark, silky hair was indistinguishable.

And as we stood under the careful watch of our mothers, stark contrasts to one another - we both inhabited worlds that felt safe and secure, they were our defenders. Under my mother's care, I would come to know the "American Dream" as an expansive opportunity, the freedom to wander through ideas, the quiet luxury of life's small indulgences. I would learn to see the world through a rose-colored tint. But in the eyes across from me, eyes that reflected my own, her dream was unvarnished, shaped instead by calloused hands, by diligence, by the steady rhythm of work that left little room for illusion.

Despite our faces reflecting one another, our lives began with similar arrivals - off a plane, through the gates of JFK, into the country we would come to call home. But arrival was also the moment we diverged. Mine was met with inheritance, a foundation already laid and secure. Hers was a passage shaped by sacrifice.

Our identity could be shared in the quick glance of a face, but not in the deeper architecture of our lives. That difference was not held in our eyes, but in the unseen forces that shaped our days - forces that would go on to dictate the rooms we were allowed to enter, the decisions we came to make, the paths we learned to follow, and the assumptions the world placed upon us.

Time would elapse and we would both go from childhood through adolescence and into adulthood. And from our respective side of the table we would watch one another grow. She would learn to work with precision and dedication just like her mother, and I would continue to dream up a world where arbitrary marble tables did not divide one's access to opportunity.

It would take years of honest confrontation with myself to understand what my younger self already sensed across that small table: who decided what side of the table I would sit on?

Milky Way

There's a half-eaten Milky-Way on my desk
The wrapper was peeled meticulously as to not make a sound,
leaving it neatly torn open halfway
Even in my care, I can feel the turning of heads
neatly torn from their focus,
halfway.
and so it sits unfinished, waiting,
calling for me try one more time but if I open the rest of the
wrapper I will surely open the rest of their eyes
So I don't
When will I let my universe open up any more than halfway?







Sunset at Robert Moses

*Píping plovers roost
As gold and crimson hues meld
Above pristine shores*



Mystical Shore

*Shore to shore, sea to sea, we are bound together in the mystical sense of things.
Driven by force and poised with patience, we trample through life wrapped in the fragrance,
Caught in the cosmetic parts of our days,
yearning for silence with the debt that we paid.
Missing the light and shore we once knew, this cosmetic force blinds our eyesight too.
Awaiting to return we flee to the shore
Reminding once again that we were born.*

IN THE MIRROR

IN THE MIRROR'S GAZE, I SEE HER THERE,
THE GIRL WITH DREAMS, WITH LAUGHTER TO
SHARE.

WHISPERS OF JOY, NOW TINGED WITH REGRET,
LIFE TOOK A TURN, BUT DON'T YOU FORGET:
THROUGH VALLEYS OF SORROW, AND SHADOWS
OF DOUBT,

WE STUMBLED, WE FALTERED, BUT LEARNED
WHAT LIFE'S ABOUT.

THOUGH WE LOST OUR BEST FRIEND, A PIECE
OF OUR HEART,

TIME WEAVES ITS MAGIC, A BRAND NEW START.

DEAR GIRL IN THE GLASS, HOLD YOUR HEAD
HIGH,

STORMS MAY HAVE COME, BUT SO WILL THE
SKY.

AS I GAZE AT YOUR PAST, I SEE MY TRUE SELF,
STRONGER AND WISER, EMBRACING MY WEALTH.





Our Last Summer

Darcy stepped onto the dock, her bag slung loosely on her shoulder, flip flops trying their best to stay on her feet despite the trek through the sand they just experienced. The beach was hot, but not the sticky kind, where you feel as though your clothes are glued to you. It was the kind of heat that amplified the salt in the water, the kind that almost made things feel like they were out of a movie.

It was the first time she had been back at the shore since her grandfather passed, just six months ago. She'd come here with her cousins from as early as she could remember, when she carried shovels and pails instead of books and towels. Days when she stuffed pb & j's in her bag, which were later replaced by acai bowls and salads. She'd wear her water shoes and floaties on her arms, running up to the shore with her older cousins leading the way, her younger ones trailing behind her. Her grandfather had always joked that she was born with fins, and somewhere along the way they'd been replaced with arms. It was her grandfather who first took her down to the shore, just the two of them. While she appreciated those days spent bonding with the family patriarch, there was something about the loud and rambunctious days running along the sand with all 7 of her cousins. She's always been thankful for her large family, it was as if she was destined to always have 7 best friends.

When Darcy was just five years old, her grandparents first moved. As most grandparents do, they wanted to retire somewhere warmer and sunnier than where they lived before. Darcy didn't understand it until that first summer they went to visit. Her grandfather took her down by the water, her hand tightly clasped around his as they walked down the sand.

"You hear that?" her grandfather said, the sun reflecting off of his glasses. Darcy furrowed her eyebrows, tilting her head.

"No," she replied honestly. Her grandfather, Rich, chuckled.

"Exactly. It's so peaceful, isn't it? It's like everything else shuts off. You can just...be."

It went over Darcy's head when she was five, but as she sits on the dock now, freshly 27, it all makes sense.

After that first year, her family decided to start a tradition. The entire family would pack up and travel from their corners of the tri-state area, fly down to the shore, and stay nearby in a beach house. It was heaven for Darcy, a week-long sleepover with her best friends!

This annual tradition remained for years, with memories made and places explored. The best trip was the summer that Darcy turned twelve. She was entering puberty - albeit, a miserable time for most girls. However, all of the pre-teen worries disappeared that summer. She was at the perfect age where she could still run along the shore, play mermaids with her younger cousins, and build sandcastles. She was also able to play card games with her aunts and uncles, laughing as she accused her Uncle Jeff of cheating in Uno.

There was one morning, toward the end of the trip, where she woke up earlier than the rest of the house. She got dressed and headed down to the beach, her new book in hand. When she reached the usual spot, her grandfather sat in his bright blue beach chair.

"Good morning," she said softly, setting up her towel.

"Good morning Darcy. You're up early this morning."

"I could say the same to you. I couldn't sleep, I just get too excited being here."

"Does your mother know you walked down here by yourself?" Darcy chuckled.

"My mom doesn't even let me walk through the mall by herself. I'm almost thirteen! I can handle walking one block down to the beach."

"I know you can. But for my sake and yours-let's tell her you came down with me, okay?"

Darcy nodded, smiling as her grandfather gave her a wink.

"How come you're here by yourself?" she asked.

"I like coming out here to think sometimes, clear my head. It's not so easy when I have eight rascals running around kicking sand on me," he replied. She smiled.

"But you love having us here."

"Of course I do! You're always welcome here. I love that you guys come down and see us every year."

"Duh, best vacation ever!" Darcy exclaimed.

"Is that just because I let you eat ice cream every night?" Rich asked his granddaughter.

"No, it's because you let us eat ice cream for breakfast too," Darcy joked, and now it was her grandfather's turn to laugh.

"Do me a favor Darcy. Don't let this tradition end. No matter what happens, keep coming back here, okay? Even when I'm not here anymore."

"Of course."

The two sat quiet for a bit, watching the waves hit the shore.

Darcy was taken out of her therapeutic moment when her younger cousin, Max, practically knocked her over as he ran to her.

"Darcy! Are you making sandcastles without me?!" he yelled as he collapsed onto her towel. She placed a hand on her chest and opened her mouth in shock at the accusation.

"Never!"

"I'll race you to the water!" Max said, getting up quickly and taking off.

"Hey! You cheated!" Darcy yelled as she ran after him. Rich smiled softly as his moment of quiet came to an end as more family members started setting up their chairs around him.

After that summer, things did start to change, much to Darcy and her grandfather's dismay. It started with Max's family, as they started doing annual Disney trips and couldn't make both trips happen anymore. Before Darcy knew it, she was off to college, where her summers were filled with catch-ups with old friends and part-time jobs. She saw her grandparents every holiday, but nothing was quite like that summer trip.

Her grandfather got sick shortly after she graduated. Her grandparents didn't have much of a choice, they had to sell their home they loved dearly so they could move back towards her family, and the cold climate. Although it was cold, family was always readily available, and some of the best doctors were there.

Summers started to look different, as the beach trips turned into visits at the nursing home. Darcy went as much as she could, but life gets in the way sometimes.

Now, she sits on the dock, six months after losing him. She thinks of everything she could've done. Should've done. She looks behind her at the house she loved, the house where her and her cousins put on plays after eating slices of pizza, where chaos was common but love was neverending. The house now looks almost unrecognizable.

She turns back to the water, soaking in a second before she hears the sound of young children giggling on the beach. She turns to see an elderly couple with four young kids of varying ages. The grandmother is building sandcastles with a young boy and girl, and the grandfather is splashing in the water with two girls. A familiar tune rings through Darcy's mind:

"I can still recall, our last summer..."

"I thought you'd be out here," a voice says behind her, taking her out of her reminiscing. She stands up to see Barbara, her grandmother. She stands up to meet her eyes, her grandmother noticing her tears.

"I know you miss him. I do too."

"I just feel like I let him down. He wanted us to come back here every year, but it got hard."

"Darcy, he never thought you let him down. In fact, he would be so proud of you for bringing all of us back here for this trip," her grandmother said, grabbing her hand.

After her grandfather's funeral, Darcy arranged for her and all of her cousins to come back to the beach house for a week, and they brought their grandmother. It wasn't easy, but Darcy was able to do it.

"I just wonder if things would've been different if we knew that our last summer together was really our last," Darcy said, crying softly.

"Honey, we never know when it'll be out last. That's why we just enjoy it now." Darcy turned back to the water, taking in the sweet sound of the ocean. "He's here, isn't he?" Darcy asked.

"Of course he is. Your grandfather would never miss a beach day." The two generations of strong women smiled at each other.

A voice called from the other end of the dock.

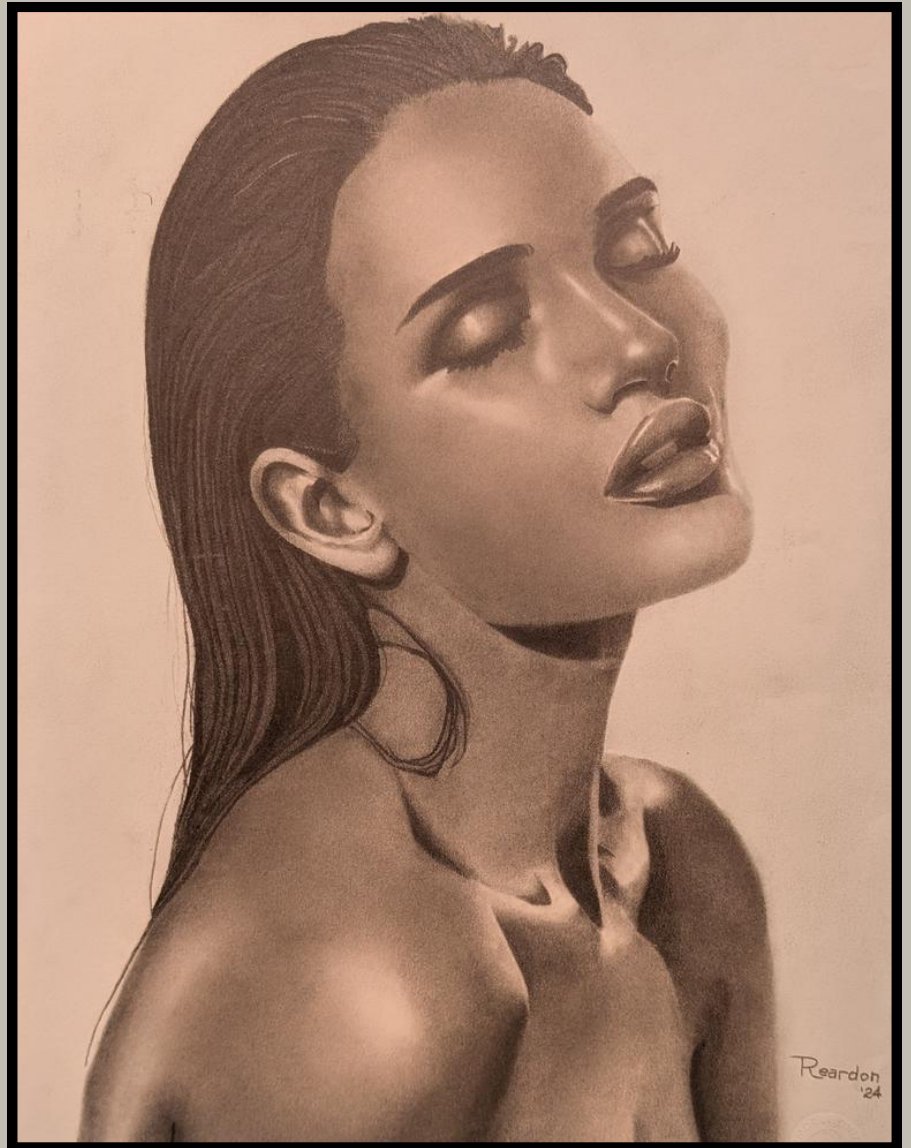
"Darcy! Are we playing mermaids or what?" Max yelled, her other cousins behind her.

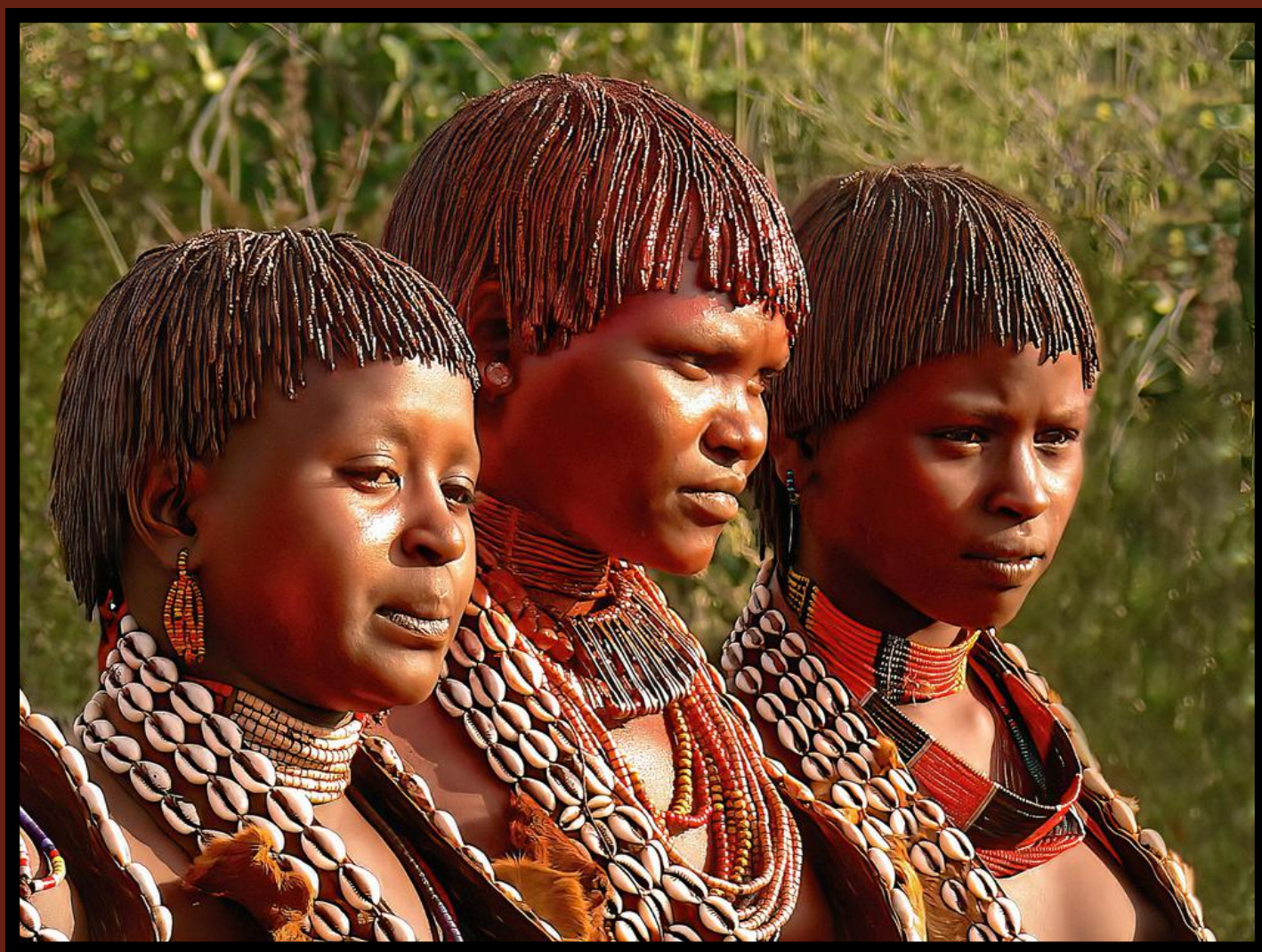
Darcy laughed as she gave her grandmother a hug before grabbing her bag and running towards her cousins.

Darcy remembers their last summer quite well, and she always will. Soon, she'll bring her husband and kids here to make new summers, and new memories. But she'll always love the quiet.

Port Jefferson Ace

Your deep blue eyes.
Your soothing voice
that
washes over me like a
salty breeze.
A quick glance that
soon turned
into a lasting romance.
As the sun faded you
became
more illuminated in
the darkness.
And I began to fall
more in love.
But as the night went
on our
feelings began to
disappear and
you turned into
nothing but a vivid
dream.





Lost In the Blizzard

There was a house in the woods. In the house are four children. Their names are Mark, Addy, Sally and Sam. Mark is thirteen, Addy is eleven, Sally is nine and Sam is six. One day the children went to school and studied, and the teacher said that there will be a big blizzard and that we must go home quickly. So, they packed their bags and hurried outside. It was a long walk back home, so they ran. While they were running Sam fell into a hole. Mark, Addy and Sally screamed for help, but nobody heard them, so they made a rope out of strong stems. Then they said to Sam to hold on to the rope, and they pulled and pulled and after a little time they finally got him out - they were so scared! Then they walked even further. Then in the middle of nowhere they found an abandoned house. They looked at each other and Mark said "We should go in because it's getting dark."

So, they went in and found an old man that lived in the house. Mark asked the man if they can stay but the man was rude, so he said "No."

But Mark begged him, so he said "Fine only on one condition." The kids asked what it was. The man said "You must do some chores. Mark's chores are to cook, Addy's chores are to sweep the floor, Sally's chores are to mop the floor, and Sam's chores are to clean the table."

Then Mark made a dish that the man had not eaten for a long time; it made him think of his mom. Then the man became nice. They talked for a long time. By the time they were done talking it was time to go to bed. So, the man tucked the children in and went to bed. They stayed for 3 more days till the storm was over. On their last day the man dropped the children home. The mother thanked the man and invited him for Christmas. After 4 days the man came for Christmas and had lots of fun.

The Timekeeper

Quietly,
He opens the gold-trimmed box
And removes the key.

How heavy the brass *passe-partout* sits in his aged hand,
His gnarled fingers trembling as they clench it tight.

Up the stairs,
He climbs with increasing difficulty,
The winding steps reaching ever higher into the tower.

Before him stands
The Clock.
It boasts of eons past,
And solemnly sings out its syncopated rhythm,
As the agile church mice dance about its base.

The Clock chimes.
The rodents scurry.
He approaches.

Gracefully,
As graceful as the pounding pains in his stiffened joints
allow,
The timekeeper thrusts the key into the slot,
And turns...

Another day's cadence guaranteed.
Another mischief of mice born.
Another descent of the stairs.





growing up on the water

growing up on the water
meant tanning was a hobby
left sweating on the dock,
strawberries tasting like summer
and salt.

salty tangled hair
knotted by wind and waves,
never brushed, never cared—
just flipped back with wet hands
and laughter.

sandy skin stuck to everything,
car seats, towels, the backs of my knees,
a reminder that the day
had held me close
and didn't want to let go.

ice cold showers at night,
salt water spiraling down the drain,
the smell of sunscreen still clinging
to my shoulders,
to my memories.

ice cream runs barefoot,
coins warm in our palms,
dripping faster than we could eat
as the sun sank lower
and the sky softened.

jbl speakers humming life
into the air,
music mixing with waves,
beats carried across the water
like secrets.

barbeques that lasted forever,
smoke curling into sunsets,
fires crackling as wet swimsuits
hung heavy on railings,
cool against warm skin.

warm weather lived in my bones,
a sunkissed feeling I never outgrew—
because growing up on the water
wasn't just a place.
it was the way summer
taught me how to feel.







DINOSAURS AT NIGHT

DINOSAURS,
T-REX ROARS,
DIMORPHODON SOARS.
RAPTORS RUN,
TROODON STUNS,
A SETTING SUN.
MOSASAURUS SWIMS,
FLIPPERS SKIM,
A MEGALODON FIN.
THE NIGHT APPROACHES,
FEAR ENCROACHES.
A RAT SCURRIES
AS IN A HURRY.
DARKNESS FALLS,
DANGER CALLS,
RAPTORS STALL.
THE STARS SHINE BRIGHT,
THE DINOSAURS FIGHT,
ON THIS NIGHT,
WITH ALL THEIR MIGHT,
WHAT A SIGHT.
JURASSIC WORLD...

BITTER BITE

IT IS TWO O'CLOCK.

THE APPLE LANDS IN MY LAP, A POLISHED ORB PRESSING
AGAINST ME WITH ITS PESTERING, GOADING PERSONA.

I HOLD IT WITH MY POLISHED, MANICURED HANDS.

IT STARES AT ME WITH ITS LOVELY, JUNGLY SKIN,

THE TISSUE DELICATELY MARKED WITH DISGRACE,

THE SURFACE RUINED BY HATRED AND BROWN
PIGMENTATION.

THE HUE IS BLOOD-DIPPING, HYPNOTIZING,

TINGED WITH MAGENTA AND VERMILLION.

I STARE DOWN AT IT AS IT WHISPERS LINES OF MOCKERY.

ODIUM AND OBLOQUY IT CHITTERS,

AND FOR THAT, TO THE WORLD, I AM DEAF.

THE GLOSSY MIRROR LOOKS BACK AT ME,

AND I SEE A HOPELESS GIRL WITH MASCARA RUN DOWN
HER FACE,

HER EYES AS BLOODSHOT AS THE APPLE.

THERE THEN IS A CRITTER,

ITS BACK TOWARD ME, SNEERING,

ITS MULTIPLE HEARTS THUMPING IN GIGGLES

AT THE JAGGED LINES OF MY WRINKLES.

THE SLIMY SLEAZE WEARS THE EDGES OF THE APPLE,

DEVOURING THE APPLE'S WRAPPING,

CURLING CRIMINALLY AS OBSIDIAN THE KNIGHT.

I SET THE APPLE TO THE RIGHT SIDE OF MY DESK,

BUT EVEN AS STILL AS A DEER,

IT GNAWS AT MY CONCEALED MUSINGS,

EACH TICK OF THE CLOCK DECLARES DELIRIUM, A SPASM
OF INSANITY.

MY MIND ROTTING ALONG WITH THE SPHERE,

GORGEOUSLY DETERIORATING INTO CHAOS,

DELICIOUSLY IMPURE.



IT IS 4 O'CLOCK.

I TAKE A BITTER BITE OF SOUR SUMMER RAIN.

THE SLIVER OF JUICE ON MY LIP, FRESH AND LEWD,

THE FLESH DARKENS.

I CAN SMELL THE ROT RISING,

THE SOUR STINK OF INEVITABILITY.

A TASTE SO JUVENILE, SO DEVILISH THAT I'M TIED.

AS I LAY THERE, NAILS SCRAPING THE DESK,

THE WORLD CHEWS ME BACK.

I FEEL THE RACE OF MY ORGAN,

THE INEVITABILITY OF DECLINE

SEEPING INTO EVERY VEIN.

FINALLY, THE APPLE CONCEDES TO ITS DECAY,

AND SO DO I, LAYING EYES CLOSED TO THE LAST BREATH
OF RUCKUS.

The Lake Outside My Window

**The lake outside my window
Changes throughout the seasons
Inspiring my heart.**

**The lake outside my window
With the cold breeze
Snow falls gently
Covering the
Lake with a white sheet of snow**

**The lake outside my window
Flowers bloom around
Ducklings learn to swim
Warm breeze kicks in**

**The lake outside my window
Hot sun bathing in the water
Warm breeze all around
Kids laugh and play
Butterflies make their own way.**

**The lake outside my window
Red orange all around
Leaves rest in the water
The quiet evenings
Ducks open their wings**

**The lake outside my window
Changes throughout the seasons
Inspiring my heart.**

The Tide Never Lies

Your smile, a tale as old as time, maybe,
a time that brought me to my knees,
breathing in the heady aroma of salt and
desire, for there was once a parting in
the waves in the distance, a pause in
your breath that told me soundlessly
to capture your eyes with my own,
and that smile that danced on your lips –
a tale as old as time itself.

There's a looseness in my chest, I think,
and the threat of every emotion living
inside there coming undone is enough
to wake the ocean, her tide breathing
over us in waves, our heads becoming
both heavy and weightless at once
as we ride out each wave like a
contraction, stuck in a never-ending
timeloop that only exists for our souls.

It happens to all of us eventually, I presume;
a rush to the head, a choking breath of
fresh air – the sensations that overcome you
when your lips make contact with the salted
air again, sky instead of water stretching over
your head, and you thank the stars for an
ecosystem that can hold both worlds in one
hand; water and land, the moon and the sun,
rain and drought, your existence and mine.

Imagination or reality, I'm still not sure,
but I know it's you when I feel a hand
wrap around my ankle, like an omen
preparing me for the pull down under
again, and it scares a chill into my bones
and a scream into my throat, of fear
or excitement, I can no longer determine;
because descending deep into the abyss is like
parachuting into the sky when it's with you.

When the pull never comes, it's believed,
that I should instead feel the tug on my soul,
being weighed down by heavy truth and sour
reality seeping into it; your breathless smile

won't emerge from the murk below me,
laughter skipping off the water the same
way a smooth, flat stone does, there will be
no tilt of your head and mischief in your eyes –
just the hollowed out skull from my nightmares.

And suddenly, or maybe not so suddenly,
my mind opens like a portal, the ocean
around me slipping away like white sand,
and the seaweed and algae that were once
wrapped around my legs become an infinite
blanket of darkness around me, absorbing me
whole, reminding me of where I began and
where I will one day end; an abyss
only living between existence and inexistence.

It all comes back eventually, or rather,
my memories wind up crashing over me
like an invisible tsunami, sloshing me
around with a rip current of grief so large,
not even the Pacific ocean could contain it;
your ever-suffocating goneness, your lost
smile and hollowed face, your weightless
body – now devoid of all its atoms and its
once-loud soul – all echo only in my mind.

Numb, as they once predicted I would be,
I trudge through dark, black nothingness
like I'm trying to wade through wet sand,
the feeling enveloping me whole, still
searching for a trace of you; something
for me to grasp onto – proven to be a
fruitless battle, me against this void,
the relentless search for your existence
against your death. This timeloop, I can't escape.

Somewhere, I know with certainty,
my physical form begs me to
call off the hunt, while she's lying
still, appearing to be asleep, and so
lacking purchase on my lucid mind,
unable to utter a syllable of what we truly
know; nothing can transcend this – not
the scalding sun, not the tide-turning moon,
not even the majestic rage born deep within the sea.



The Wind Can Wait

As we sit in this sailboat, waiting for the wind to pick up,
I notice the sun's heavenly glow shining down
on the ocean, forming a crystalline
like reflection. The water is still,
as if a small part of the sun's essence is instilled
within the water. And in this moment,
I feel at ease.

She slowly strokes her long, kerosene blonde hair
with one hand; with the other, she gently plays
with the water, like a child plays with sea shells
at the beach. Her newly tanned legs distract me and
I forget what my father taught me
about creating wind.
Doesn't matter now. All that matters now,
is this moment.

The way she is: so cool, with her leopard Wayfarers,
her waifish, nonchalant contentment on this boat,
drifting for what seems like hours, but could be just
minutes. In this moment, I couldn't care less
if we ever find wind, to move us.
She and I could lie here forever. But for now,
the wind can wait.





God Stress America

Copay hysteria impoverished us,
So my oddity of consciousness
Cut the oblong hour: a confluence of

Normalization and poverty
Cursed us. Unconscious material,
Scrambling life associations of

People I know, my possessions,
Identifying documents, health charts,
Valuable zeroes and ones,
Transactional promises,
Family trees in a forest of strangers,
Dead stories, alive stories,
Awaiting continuations and paused developments,

All curtained by nocturnal static: Black snowing oblivion
Of deleting winters
Raged outside my walls. I paced through hope,
Echolocating tomorrows, backfiring yesterdays: A remembering river
Flowed my bicycling beyond the driveway,

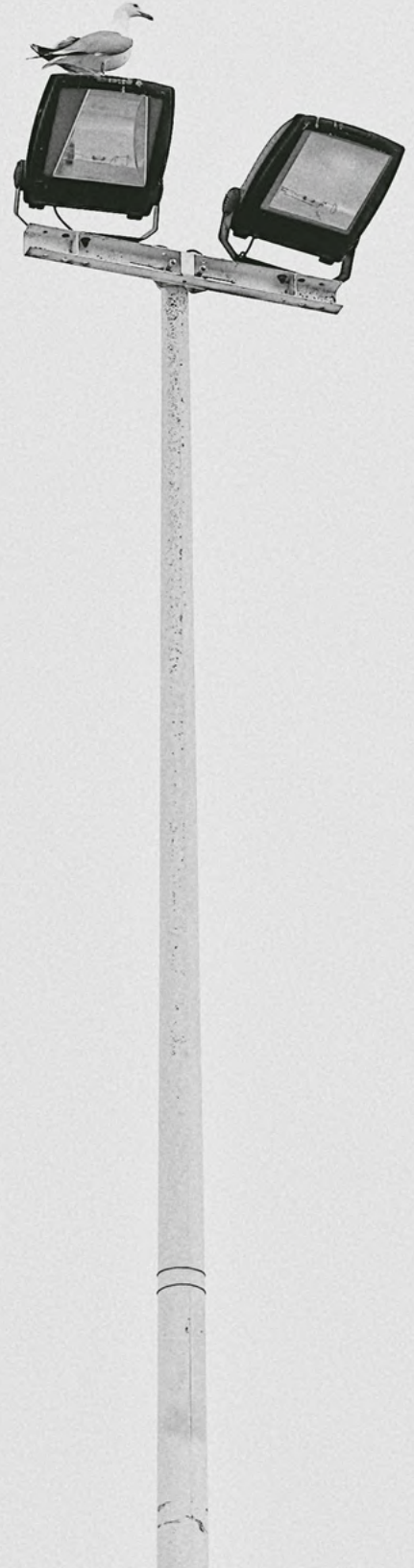
My home block, neighboring trauma,
And the farthest familiar sidewalk. I embarked
Upon cricketing rain, dimming connections: the mothering current,

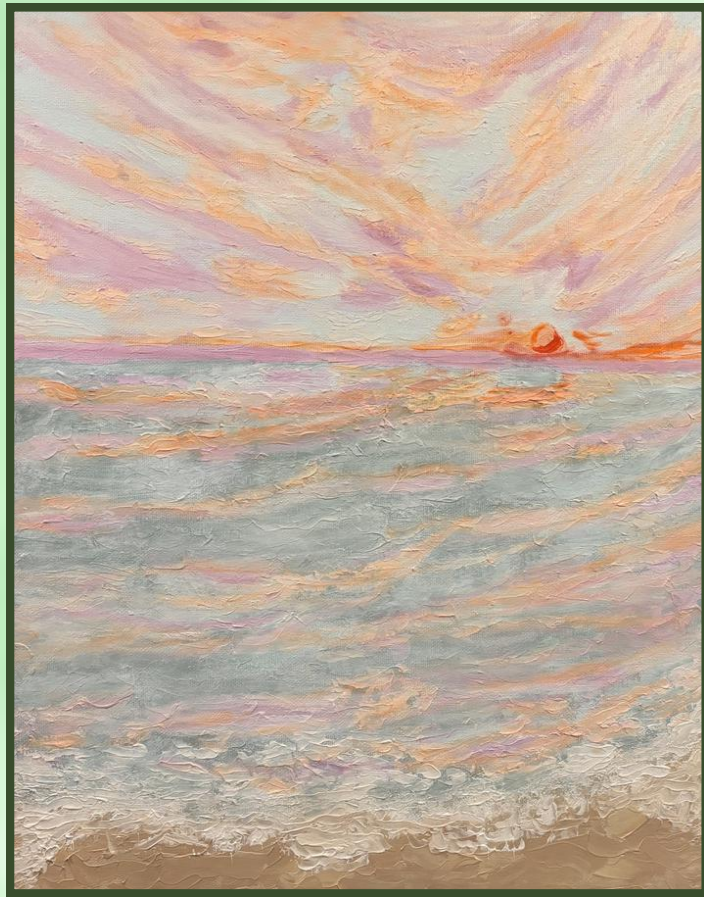
And the fathering gale
Depolarized to cancelation, via the streetlight, buzzed to
Alone activation: A dirty glow glared at me.
Defiance ricocheted shame. Authoritarian paper planning,

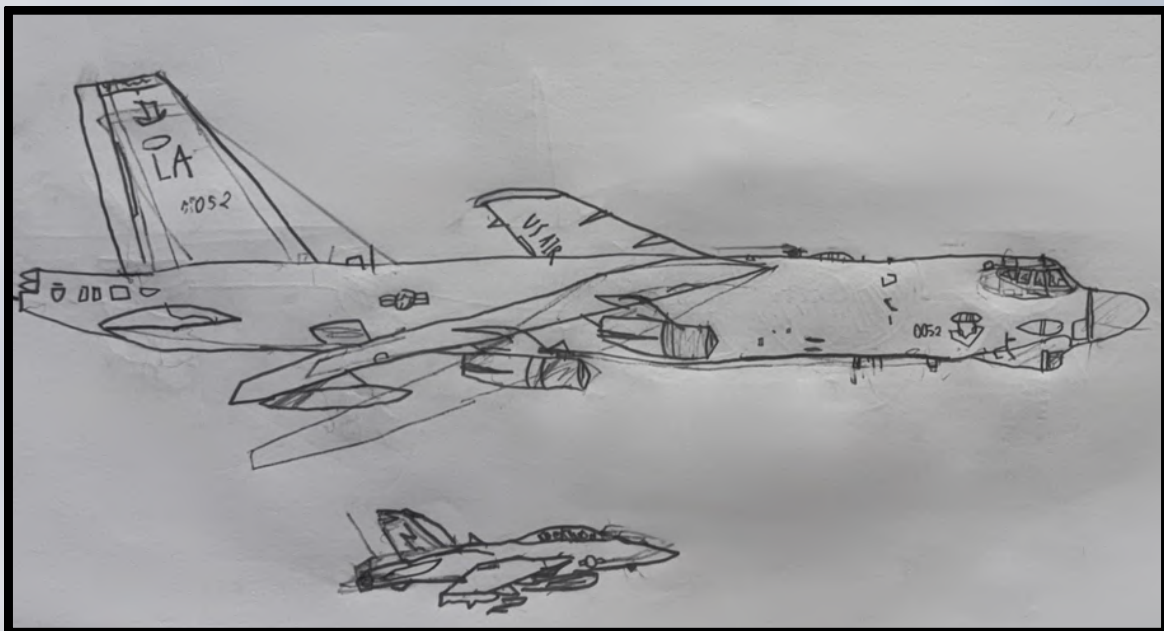
Tyranny written on a desk,
Rendered reality: the suffering touch

Authenticated America.

Land of the fee.









It was a stormy night. No reasonable child would be awake and about. Wren was no typical individual. Clouds grew over the once calm sea. It was so interesting how quickly something so seemingly calm could turn so hostile. Like the sea is how some would describe Wren.

The coast was thin and the sky was bright, with not a trace of the earlier storm. When Wren was alone, as she so often was, she was here. The sound of the waves clashing on the rocks was soothing. Today, it was not like how the old fishermen told tales about it. Large and powerful forces that attempted to knock you overboard. Wren's parents always told her the same thing. "Those old fish brained fools have got no clue what they're blabbering about." Wren however loved the enchanting tales. She could sit and listen for hours if she could, entranced.

One pleasant evening, Wren heard of a great sea monster. The strange thing about this one was that he could be tamed if he trusted the one who looked upon him. He would help and protect those he cared about. Wren didn't quite like this story. She found it strange that a ravaging monster of the sea could be a friend. Impossible. It looked deadly, why would one want to try to get so close?

Wren later forgot about it. That was until a small vial was stuck between a crack in the rocks on the beach. It resembled a long potion bottle. It had an old paper inside. What was the worst fate that could fall upon her? Wren tugged open the top and read. "I have written this as a last desperate attempt for some to not suffer as I did. This is to whoever it can find. I trust my good friend to find a worthy one for this task" Wren had a mission. Curiosity kills the cat. They never said anything about wrens. Different animals. Must be fine.

Wren came to realize a small detail. She was running away. For some reason, she believed that this wasn't a joke. Something told her this was something she was meant to do. She was insane, no doubt. No lead, no clue, but she wasn't happy here.

Wren was gone the next day. Not a soul knew what she had seen. Back at the beach the wind pushed her hair towards the sea and her eyes, which held so many thoughts and emotions, the color of sun lit sand. They didn't have the same warmth. Rather determination, so much for a young girl. She felt the now gentle water. Sea foam sprayed. A little at a time, the waves rose. They encased her in a shroud of clear crystal water, the color of larimar. Startled, she inched back. She always loved the stories, but she never imagined them being real. An event or sight that could actually happen or be seen. Here she was despite that in a cave that shined with crystals on the walls and vines with gleaming fairy lights and button sized blossoms. A single book laid open on what looked like a podium. The place also contained a few cracks like get away tunnels and matches in a corner. No sign this place had been habitable for living. Wren slowly and carefully walked to the book.

"Dear reader: I fear it may be too late now but alas we must try. Find the web of trickery and truth, spun with silver and never to be broken unless one attempts the wrong action, though which is correct none can share, A tunnel so ancient it may as well be a coffin. Come back when the waves could topple a boat. Take the staff, and leave before this place crumples."

The writing got scribbly and much messier than on the note. As if on cue the place began to rumble. Wren darted for the staff she now noticed hanging on the wall. She then sprinted out, the tunnels caving in and the cavern shaking. Wren began to wonder. What was she doing? What if something in the staff exploded? Where was she? How did she get back? Too late now and she had to think.

Suddenly a fiery trail blazed ahead there for a second, then vanished. All Wren had done was press her fingers to her head, like she did when she happened to be in deep thought. She raised the staff again. The scorching path of orange flames, and yellow like the earliest hint of sun at dawn. She ran in that direction, through trees and bushes. She was in a forest. It was magical with early spring flowers and fireflies. Though she didn't have time to sit and admire the blossoms.

Wren raised it again to make sure of where she was headed. She took a left and stopped at a large tree. No, not just "large" so much bigger. It was the size of a house. Steps lead to a door just big enough for her to crawl through. She wondered if she should. The staff had been very clear. Here. Here is where she must go.

Suddenly, Wren got a chill down her spine. She heard hissing from behind her. Turns out the tales of sea monsters did not just exist in the sea. More creatures, in fact, did exist, on the very solid land. The creature, monster, did not look at all to be friendly or accept catnip. It looked like it had the head and body of a cougar, the feet of a bear and a tail like a mutilated mermaid. Its features seemed to shift and mold into new, unnatural shapes. She stabbed it, as one does having grown up on fantasy and old stories. It shrieked and ran off. Well, as Wren saw, it's now or never. She bolted through the tangled vine entrance. Another quickly scribbled note lay on the floor. Cobwebs did in fact, hang on the walls. "Keep going for you are close. This beast is not patient. I suppose he likes to play with his food." Now armed with a piece of paper that she couldn't even imagine seeing better days, Wren followed her stick. She pondered for a long time before she came to a sudden halt. Sand. That means ocean.

Her pace quickened and one last note read. "If you have made it this far I admire you. You see the island that stands in the lake. Come." Coming was a bit harder than expected. Wren felt the water. It boiled and she quickly pulled her hand away with a yelp. The noise must have been loud, a large group of squirrel sized lemur creatures crept from the brush. They were all sorts of purples, blues and oranges.. Neons like the old signs in the city with one letter that doesn't light up. Blues like berries and hues like carrots. They, much like the cat, shifted shapes. For a moment she thought she saw numbers. That was only some more shapes though. The staff lit up like a bonfire. The lemurs shrieked and recoiled, soon they had fully vanished. She heard a loud clang sound all around her. The water was no longer boiling.

At that moment the staff flew wildly from her hand twisting and turning until it became a boat. She clamored in. It sped off towards the island, and in an instant she was there. A man stood in a tattered suit over another large beast. This one seemed familiar. It was just as described by the fishermen. "Haha yes finally, I knew you could do it! Well I must be truthful, you are stuck here now."

"Wha-what do you mean?"

"I needed a good adventurer for uh, some chores. You fit the bill."

Not a second later, a loud voice called "Wren?"

It was her teacher. She stared at her paper. Page 27. At the top read "GEOMETRY." The shape monsters were all the diagrams on the page. The loud clang was a classmate dropping a water bottle. Her pencil was a staff. And cobwebs, spun by normal spiders in the corner. The notes were what she imagined the crumpled papers in the corner said. Wren sat there for a count of 3 searching for an answer she didn't have. The teacher seemed to give up on her answering the question, as she stared at her blank pages. Truthfully Wren saw herself in the friendly sea monster. Perhaps that's why he came into her story. This was a nice thought. A character bouncing from one story to another. All she had done was run off to school, not a fairytale.

This was how she saw the world. Stories upon stories told to describe the vast, wonderful world at hand. Wren would continue to tell these tales to herself. One day she may replace the old fishermen at the town's beaches.

Her imagination will bring her shore to shore.

FLICKERING SHADOWS OF THE GIVING TREE

COME ON CLOSE MY CHILD
FORGOTTEN MEMORIES, THEY
SPROUT ANEW
SO WIPE AWAY THOSE TEARS
THERE'LL BE A TIME WHEN I
BECOME YOU
UNTIL YOU FIND OUT WHY
TIME LOOPS AGAIN AND AGAIN
I'LL BE SO SAD
YOU'RE ALL I HAVE
PATIENT AS DEW
THOUGH WE MAY JUST HAVE MET
MY CHILD, CLIMB ME AGAIN
CLIMB ME AGAIN





As the machine hums
Hands, broken, ever bruised
Left ungratified

I looked up above
I began to realize
The lights were not stars



Shore to Shore

Calling Shore to Shore
You're mine forever more

We live so far away
Can love last another day?

Calling Shore to Shore
I'm yours my little s'more
You are what I adore

Our love shouts galore
Is this our forevermore?

Calling Shore to Shore
Please pick up my Amore

Bay of Bengal

The Bay of Bengal, magnificent—
stretching far beyond the reach,
cerulean water flows gently,
each tide breathes in and breathes out a quiet prayer.

A cold sea breeze brushes past,
Soothing as a whispered promise.
Above the seagulls the blest of the blue sky,
where thoughts drift like fleeting dreams.

Coconut trees sway in their green leaves,
keepers of this endless horizon.
It feels ethereal, not of this world,
serenity rhyme with green and blue.

If this worldly beauty beholds such peace like this,
what would paradise be?
Oh, Bay of Bengal,
Home to the world's longest sea beach,
I walk in memory lane,
I feel nostalgic wave of emotion
My wonder echoing along your timeless shore.



Messy Kitchen Limericks

A young lad is done with a plate,
I say "Clean it up!" He says "Wait."
 'Twill be his demise.
 For 'twas no surprise,
he forgot. And now I'm irate.



Albert's Book

The find, when it came, surprised no one in the family, least of all Albert.

In fact, it was typical Albert. Saroyan's Daring Young Man, working the high wire without any discernible net; here he goes, there he goes, with a smirk and a shrug borrowed from an old James Dean movie. Clearly, collateral damage was not a concept for Albert. He lived life as he operated a toothpaste tube -- squeeze until its time for another. Wasn't it Dylan who said 'don't look back'?

"It's not funny," said Albert's wife, Susan. "It's emblematic of your entire outlook. Damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead--".

"Can I quote you on that?" said Albert, disinterested.

"Well, what are you going to do about it?" she demanded. "You can't just sweep it back into your closet for another forty years--".

"Fifty," Albert was quick to correct with a sly grin.

"It's not funny," she said. "It shows a real lack of character. It's like borrowing something from a friend and never returning it. How would you feel?"

Albert stirred whole milk into his coffee. "I think you're exaggerating the whole thing. Obviously you're looking for something to complain about today."

"No, I'm not. It's you. You have a cavalier attitude with everything you try. This is just the latest in a long line: I don't see anything changing or improving. You're an adult Albert, it's time to man up."

Albert silently drank his coffee. He rinsed out his cup and dressed quickly. "I'll be back later," he said to his wife, tucking the book under his arm.

By the time he arrived at the library, he'd already rehearsed the speech in his head several times. "I was a kid," he would begin. "What do kids know? Like most suburban kids, we used to have Thursday morning visits by the bookmobile. This big purple truck would park in a dead end or a cul de sac, and our parents would take us down to meet the bookmobile lady."

At this point, he expected the librarian to smile in that patronizing manner they all rehearsed.

"Anyway," his story would go, "I must have taken this book out sometime in the summer of '72. I kept the stack under my bed, and I can only imagine that one of them -- this book -- slipped off the stack and found its way deeper under my bed--".

And it took you fifty years to look under your bed? he could hear the librarian asking pointedly. Or maybe they'd be so tickled at this archeological find that words would elude them? Maybe word would leak to the local paper and they would snap his picture for the weekly edition. Might even end up on the news at six.

Albert pulled into an available parking slot and exited his car. He tucked the hardcover volume under his arm and entered the cool interior of the air-conditioned library. Two women stood behind the check-out, smiling wanly as the man approached.

"You're not going to believe this--," Albert said as he drew nearer. "Craziest thing, but I actually found a book that has an older due date than you're probably used to." He produced the book from under his arm -- a sepia-toned cover for a book that was an appreciation and history of The Marx Brothers, written by one of their staff writers. He set the book delicately on the counter. The first librarian -- a pinch faced woman with progressive glasses and lemon-colored hair - opened the book to its last page.

"This is not from our library," she said, puzzled.

"Funny story, that," Albert interjected. "When we were kids, we were visited weekly by the bookmobile. Remember those?"

Neither woman reacted. They continued to examine the book as if it were offensive turd. Albert hurried through his pre-rehearsed patter, skimping over it now as nerves began to kick in.

"Well, somehow this one got away! I realize this is not the norm -- but I felt it imperative that I return it back to the general population --".

"Are you a fan of their comedy?" said the other, without looking up.

"Groucho, especially," Albert smiled, eager to find any kind of kinship. "I thought, what's the worst that can happen? They'll bill me for past fines, and I'll have to remortgage my house--".

He searched their faces for signs of merriment, a crinkle in the corners of their eyes, the trace of a small bemused smile.

Nothing.

"This is a serious infraction," said Pinch-face. "How would you like it if a friend borrowed something from you, and neglected to return it for fifty years?"

Where had he heard that before? "I wouldn't like that at all," said Albert soberly. "But kids make stupid mistakes, am I right?"

The second librarian pursed her lips. "We're happy that you returned the book, sir. But this is an infraction that we take very seriously. I'm afraid it's not a matter of financial restitution, it's more a matter of principle. We like to emphasize that this can never happen again --."

Albert shrugged. "The Bookmobile is a relic from the past; I don't expect to leave books under my childhood bed or lost at the bottom of a closet anytime soon."

Pinch-face pressed a button on the counter. Presently a large bruiser of a man appeared at her side.

"You rang?" he said without expression.

"This gentleman --your name?"

"Albert," said Albert.

"Albert is returning a book about the Marx Brothers. It's over fifty years late--."

The big man looked at Albert with what could only be termed 'distaste'.

"I understand," he said quietly. "Please follow me, sir."

Albert frowned. This was being treated differently than the lark he had guessed it to be. He followed the giant across the lobby floor and down a flight of steel steps. At the end of a stark hall, there was a room. Windowless, air-less, sparsely furnished.

Albert was directed to the folding chair in the approximate center of the room. The giant closed the door behind him, and carefully removed his jacket. He left it on a peg behind the closed door.

"What's your name?" Albert said, ever the genial conversationalist.

"Lawrence," said the giant. "But you can call me -- Lawrence."

When he hit Albert, he took the seated man quite by surprise. The uppercut nearly knocked him from his chair.

"We're talking about a book here," said Albert, working his jaw with his left hand.

"If we let it go," said Lawrence, "where do we draw that line? Do you think it's ok to steal?"

"No. Absolutely not. I teach my kids to never steal. Well, if I had kids, that's what I'd teach them. But, technically, I returned the book -- "

The second punch caught him on his left ear, knocked him a quarter-turn in his chair.

"The entire library system," said Lawrence, "is based on a system of trust. If we can't trust you to return a book, how can we trust you to do anything? Society would break down before you know it."

"I think you're extrapolating wildly --" said Albert.

When Lawrence hit him again, the world slipped away like a lost balloon.



"You're crazy," said Susan. "That book isn't due for another month--."

"Better safe than sorry," Albert spoke quietly. "Neither a borrower nor a lender be. You can quote me on that."

"Ok, poor Richard," Susan said dismissively.

Albert walked sheepishly across the polished lobby floor. Pinch-face accepted his return coolly, without looking up. He let out a slow steady stream of pent-up air as he crossed the marble lobby floor and disappeared into the ether.

Part Two: To Shining Sea

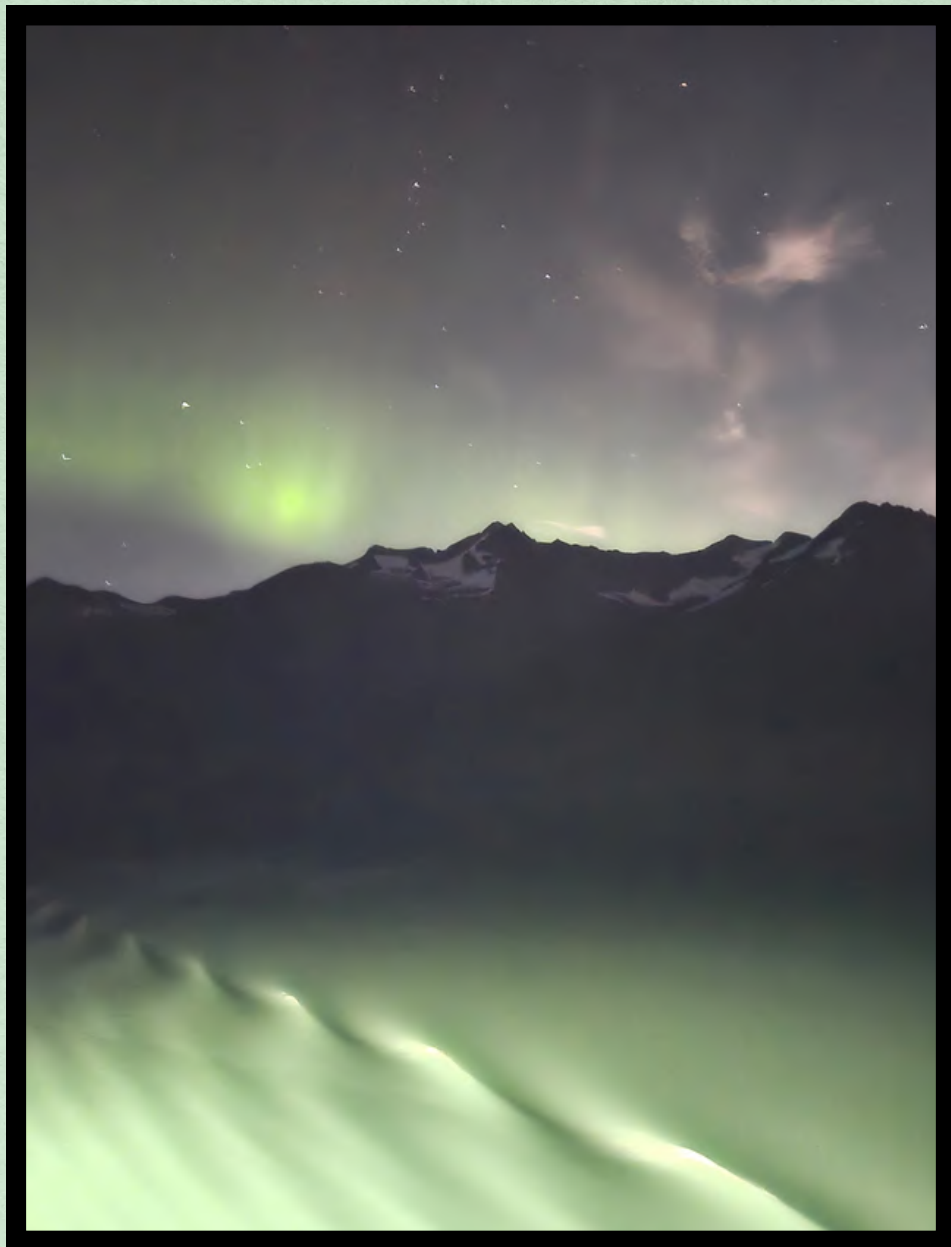


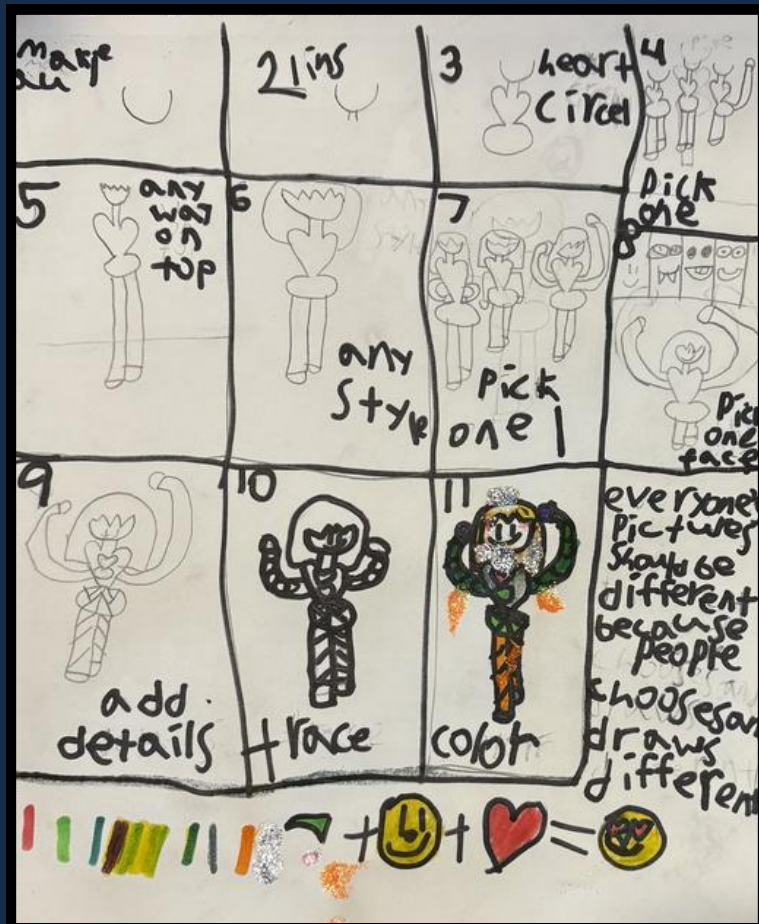
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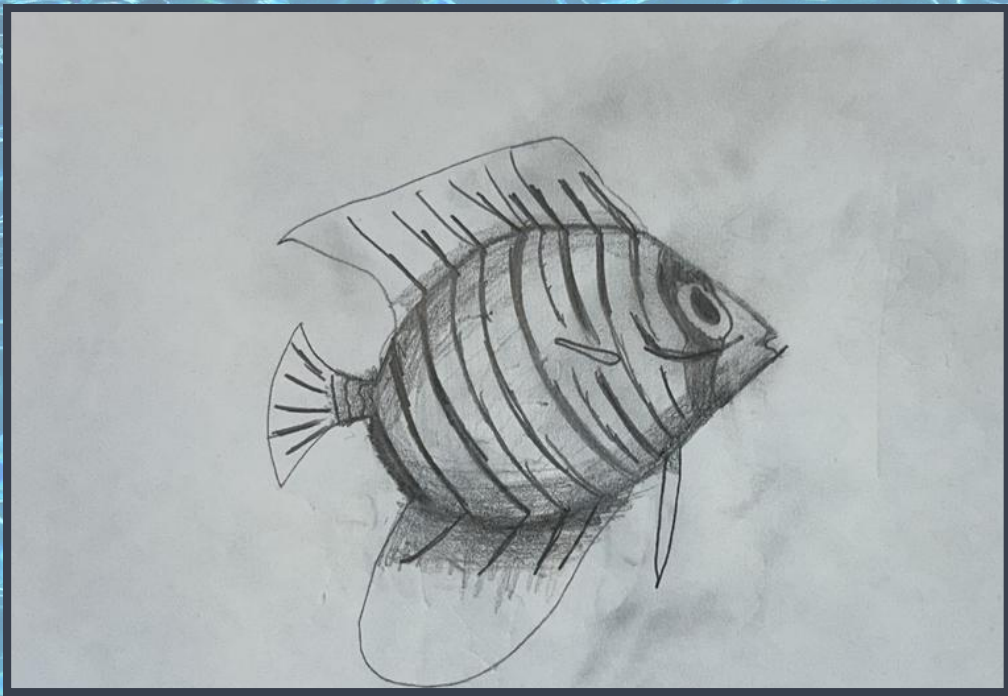
It hasn't been long
Since I removed the hinges from my imaginary wings
And placed them, in a box
Underneath my bed.

Every now and then
I get tempted,
To reach under the bed
And into the box.

Force them into the sides of my body
So that I can fly away at any time.









The Voyage Home

As she rows forward
islands of life behind her fade into mist
grow dimmer with each stroke of the oars.
Those most distant are barely visible,
only a moment of memory appears now and then.
Some of those isles were blissful havens
others turbulent, painful.
She knows now all were teachers
each a blessing of lesson and growth
that set the course for her next journey.
She paddles on but cannot see what lies ahead.
It seems formless, ethereal, not terra firma.
She surrenders in peaceful acceptance
lets go the oars, closes her eyes, and drifts.
She senses her next destination is not out there...
that her final voyage is inward
to Here
to Now.



Believe

*If I thought about sunsets
And believed in tomorrows,
I'd see the joy of the clouds and forgiveness of sorrows;
I'd see smiles in shadows; I'd see rainbows in puddles.
Hesitant to hope, because of life's troubles,
Yet I'll rejoin with new purpose, to promise and realize
And to quietly embrace the purpose of sunrise.*





Motherhood – A Haiku

***I pause just before
Eating the biggest berry
And give it to her***



My Licorice

It did not seem fair...

The alligators took all my licorice; I saw them do it while I was asleep. I am grappling with the reality that this might be a dream, but I know it surely happened! My licorice is gone after all. What else could have possibly happened to it?

I searched each corner of my room; I checked behind the disorganized stack of papers on my desk, each drawer in the apartment, and even zipped open every instrument case.

I did not eat it; no one else but me lives here. It is the only reasonable explanation.

I am not entirely sure what I did to deserve this. To be stripped of something I own, that is rightfully mine and no one else's! Last I remember, it was left on my nightstand for the occasional before-bedtime licorice boost.

Now I grapple with getting it back. In some ways, its absence has left me paralyzed in a thoughtless stupor. I know I could never compete with the rough exterior, the scales as hard as a meteorite before impact. They move with the water at incomprehensible speeds; I would not be able to catch up. The alligator must already be out of reach.

I could try to be one with the mud — the worm-infested dirt, but is there a point to the attempt? Will failure overburden the regret? That's the paralyzing question isn't it; to do or not to do. Leaving me motionless in my unmade bed in a state of mental anguish, to do or not to do.

I imagine an island. Quaint, far from the reaches of the unburdened fingers of us. The alligators have stumbled upon it, taking my licorice to their congregation. They taunt me, leaving me malnourished, forever thinking: to do or not to do.

Within this framework, this way of being, I am forced to ponder the true needs within my life. The pursuit of this lost licorice may just be another distracting ruse, one of no real promise. Though how could I ever allow something of mine to be swiped with no guarantee of return?

Often I ponder the earth and its needs. The plump, round nectar of our earth has kept us alive and provided us with what we require. But what of its needs? What has it been given in return?

What is a need? To some it may be a brand new day, and to others, it's every semblance of being. And to own — what is it? Is there a right to objects that have been claimed as mine? This licorice, a fading, twirling darkness. Who's to say it is mine or that I am more deserving than the alligators?

Maybe it was meant for them? Though why not me? And why must they take it now? I may take more time than provided to figure that out....



Shore to Shore

There was no sea between one shore and the other.

There was fatigue.

There was a body that asked for a pause and a small but firm decision: to stop crossing for others.

I went from exhaustion to rest, from belonging to everyone to returning to me. It wasn't a place.

It was a state where I no longer had to prove that I deserved to stay.

Sometimes it's not a big decision that leads to our downfall, but many small ones.

Minimal, almost invisible crossings, made to support, to please, to not cause discomfort.

Over time, one crosses so many paths with others who ceases to recognize himself on his own shore.

Then something stops. Not out of rebellion, but out of care. One stops crossing.

Return to your inner world: to the colors that belong to him, to the aromas that calm him, to the body as a home, to silence as a conscious limit.

Shore to shore

It's not an escape.

It's a choice.

It's deciding what does good. and to finally live one's true life.

It is not always a big decision that takes us away from ourselves.

Sometimes it's a sum of small, almost imperceptible gestures.

Minimal crossings made out of habit, out of love, out of fear of causing discomfort.

One crosses a line today, another tomorrow. and without noticing, he begins to spend more time on the other side than on its own shore.

Nobody is forcing us.

There is no explicit violence.

Just a constant availability that is mistaken for generosity.

Thus, little by little, individuality becomes blurred.

It doesn't disappear: it's postponed.

One day the body stops keeping up.

He doesn't protest: he stops.

And in that forced pause, a simple question arises:

Who am I living for? Coming back wasn't going backwards.

It was recognition.

Recognizing the colors that calm me, the aromas that bring me back to the present,

the body as a habitable territory and the *shore to shore*

It's not about leaving the world.

It's about choosing how to be in it.

It's about ceasing to cross one's own boundaries for others.

and begin to live from a silent coherence.

Silence as a loving boundary.

To live one's true life

It is not a heroic claim.

It's a daily practice.

Sometimes it simply consists

to stay on one's own shore

and learn to inhabit it without guilt.

Typical Heartbreak

I remember when you left, the world seemed still. Familiarity struck me, my head began to lower, the rest of my body following. I didn't feel anything other than a routine cycle of discomfort and sorrow.

How could it be that the actions of others didn't change? While shame was screaming at me to run and hide. Couldn't they sense my heartbreak, was I invisible to the eyes of those who claim to know my heart first?

I was expected to let you leave, to free you from the shackles of my hopes and dreams. Shackles that kept you entangled in me. Stubbornness and denial kept my heart beating, but reality to my life separate from you stopped it again.

My heart broke into 3 trillion pieces and no one could hear it.

It was routine the way it started raining, each drop representing every heartbreak felt or heard. However, the place where we last saw each other was so warm and futile. Simmering with past memories and pains.

I tried pushing my way into a new life, even as small as a new beat to my heart. I want to let it beat on my own time, with my own choice.

Nothing changed though. My heartbeat is the same, the droplets of rain didn't falter when I stopped my own tears, not a piece of hesitation from anyone who saw it unfold. I was expected to be fine. I am expected to let you leave, that is my typical heartbreak.





Model Kit Contest

Hi. I'm Walt, your narrator and host on your journey back in time to the 5th grade classroom where one student taught us all a life lesson.

The Dodgers were still playing in Brooklyn as we peek in on the mid-1950's schoolroom of suburban Long Island during one of those mellow yellow afternoons between Memorial Day and the last day of school. Blackboard, neatly aligned wood and metal desks, pre-teen students, and our teacher, Mr. Kevin G. Delaney. He presented himself as a neat, tidy academic scholar. White shirt, suit and tie, horn rimmed glasses. Also a square jaw, steely grey eyes, and the trim athletic build of a lightweight boxer or a track and field athlete.

Mr. Delaney was also keenly aware that some of us guys, namely Vinny, Nelson, Bob, Larry and I enjoyed assembling model kits. We were the sons of returning WWII veterans, and charter members of the Boomer Generation. Our model making allowed us to pay homage to our Vet dads, and allowed us to bond as guys in a shared activity. Members of our group often met at another member's home. There we assembled our respective kits. We shared construction tips. Vinny told us to use an X-ACTO blade to trim the excess plastic from the part after detaching it from the parts tree. Bob showed us how to apply a drop of glue to the end of a needle, and then dab the glue onto the pin protruding from the model. Nelson mentioned how he used needle-nosed pliers to place small windows onto the cockpit of a plane, or headlights onto a gas tank.

Girls also became noticeable within our suburban nirvana. At that age they became less objectionable than they seemed to be in the earlier grades. Sometimes my eyes would desert the blackboard and wander over to study a young lady's profile in sunlight...the highlights playing in her hair...the blinking eyelashes...the soft glow outlining her nose and lips...why do I like that?

"Walter!"

My head snapped back toward the board. "Yes, Mr. Delaney?"

"Walter, what is the difference between the numerator and the denominator in a proper fraction?" he snapped.

Snappily I replied, "Well, one is above the line, and the other is below the line..."

"I can explain that," interrupted Becky. "The denominator tells us how many parts there are in total, and the numerator tells us how many parts we are using. For example, two over three, or two-thirds, tells us that we have three parts in total, and we are concerned with only two," she declared. She was like that. Quick to show up another student. I must admit that she was usually right. She also figured out a "formula" to determine the Least Common Denominator. She shared that with other girls, but refused to let the boys in on the process.

"Very good, Rebecca," Mr. Delaney said. "Walter, you should spend less time staring out the window. Shouldn't you?"

"Yes."

"We have clarified that. Now let's move on. I'll tell you about the upcoming model-making contest. We'll hold it in class on the second Friday in early June, that's the 12th," Mr. Delaney said. "Bring in your model as early as Wednesday the 10th. We'll display them on folding tables. We'll have the judging on Friday the 12th. Judges are permitted to display a model, but those will be for exhibit only, and not eligible for consideration. Does everyone agree?" he asked. Only Becky raised her hand. Who knows what she will or will not say?

"Mr. Delaney, may the model be something other than a tank, or airplane, or a warship?"

"Yes, Rebecca, a contestant may bring in a model of any sort. You may make your own handmade model, though it is much easier to assemble a manufactured kit," he said. "Class, it's dismissal time. Gather your books and belongings. Align your desks, push in your chairs. Prepare for dismissal," he announced.

As we streamed into the hallway, one of the bigger boys taunted, "Hey Becky, what are you going to bring? A Raggedy Ann doll?"

She turned to face him. Becky took a step forward and stood nose-to-nose.

"My name is Rebecca. My parents gave me that name. If you want to talk to me, then use my given name. I have a special model to show," she said evenly. She turned and walked toward the exit.

Over that weekend the "boys only" model making club convened at Nelson's house. He was applying decals to his M4 Sherman tank.

Vinny brought in the box cover for his destroyer, the USS Fletcher. "I brought the box, not the model. There are so many small parts, like the gun barrels, the antenna, and the lifeboat davits. I have to figure out how to bring it to school."

I showed them my AT 6 Texan flight trainer. It was a basic single-engine plane.

Bob said, "What do you think Becky will bring? As long as it isn't another Becky."

"You never know about Becky," Larry said. In another time, Larry would have been known as an "old soul" even at age 11. He generally appeared to be calm, deliberate, not given to rowdiness when the other boys got out of hand. As if grown-up Larry had stepped back in time to advise young Larry how to behave, and how to present himself. "She's the smartest girl in the class. She can stand up for herself without losing control. If she enters this contest, you'd better make your best effort," Larry said.

Then came Friday the 12th. At 2pm we had put away our books. The folding tables at the front of the room supported our models. An index card showed the maker's name and identified the kit. The judges, who were Larry, Tommy, Barbara and Ann, sat behind the tables. Our students had presented an array of tanks, planes, ships, and military vehicles. One entry stood out - a proud Indian squaw and papoose overlooking the other models. Becky's entry.

The judges inspected and evaluated all of the models. One by one, each entrant's name was called. The student approached the table, retrieved his rejected model, and returned to his desk. My AT 6 Texan did not make the cut. Around 2:45pm only two kits remained on the table: Nelson's M4 tank and Becky's proud squaw.

The final vote split along gender lines, 2-2. Then Mr. Delaney stepped in. "In this final round, let's require the winner to gain three votes out of four."

The second vote repeated the first result. The judges decided to pick a fifth judge to break the tie. "Walt knows about models," one boy said. "Let's choose him to judge."

Mr. Delaney asked, "Is he acceptable to both entrants?" Yes, I was.

Well, I must tell you that Nelson was one of our guys who had made that tank. I could see that he used needle-nosed pliers to attach the small, detailed parts, like the shovel, headlight covers, and spare tank tread. Becky had made that simple model of a squaw. All she had to do was attach the front half of a body to the other half, then paint it. Larry had advocated for Becky's model in the initial judging. I couldn't see why. I was about to declare in favor of Nelson when Larry spoke up.

"Walt, look at that careful paint job on the squaw. The black straps on the white papoose. And the neat painting of the colored zig-zag lines on her clothing. The detailed beadwork on her vest. No paint out of line."

I said, "Larry, it's only two halves glued together, like a fuselage..."

Larry said, "Walt, look closer at the seam. No gaps, no squeezed-out glue. That takes effort. She must have applied glue with a pin, then secured both halves with several rubber bands."

I knew that I did not always achieve that neat, tight, fuselage seam. Then Larry said, "If you didn't know it was made by a girl..."

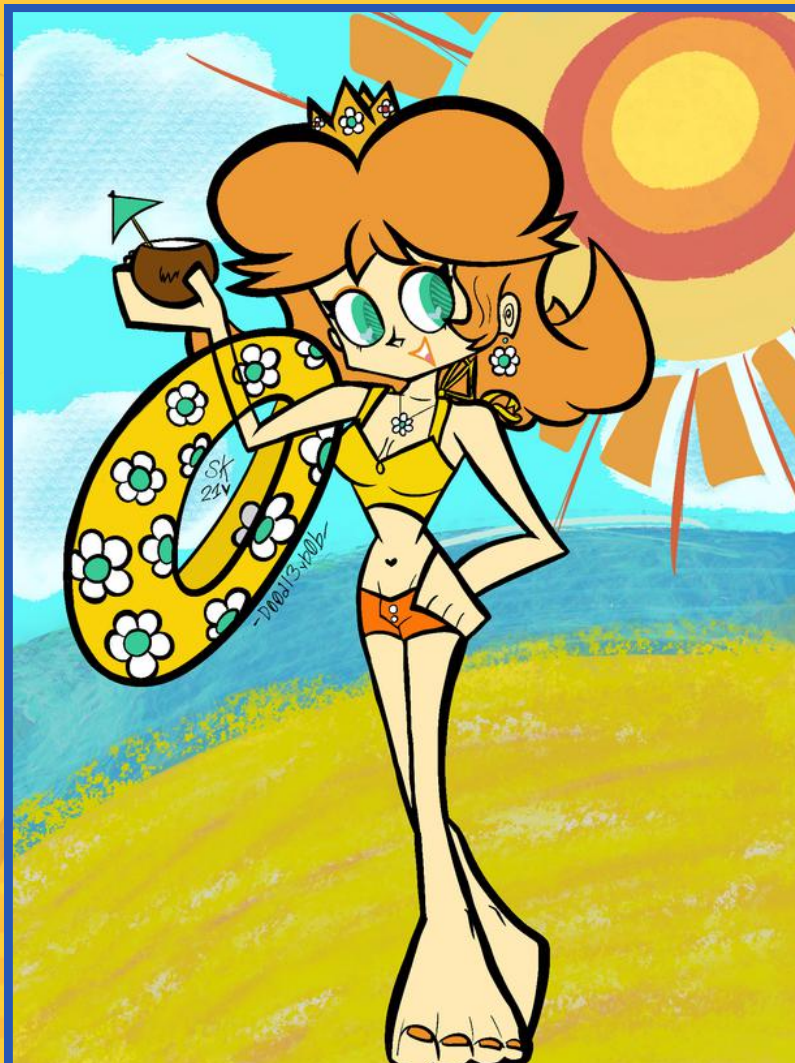
That remark made me think. I faced the class. I raised up both pieces. "Here's what I see. Nelson's model shows intricate assembly and an outstanding paint job." I pretended to study both pieces. I announced, "The squaw's painting is more difficult than the tank's assembly. I will award Nelson an honorable mention. The winner is Becky, I mean, Rebecca..." Loud cheering from the girls, polite applause from the boys.

From then on, everyone called her Rebecca.

Later in life, Larry became an attorney who served in the Public Defender's office. His even handed treatment of clients and prosecuting attorneys earned him an appointment to a judgeship.

Rebecca completed her MSW and practiced social work for the county. Later in life she became a university professor of women's studies.

My classmates and I experienced the change one person can make when Larry did the right thing.



America Now

Grab some paper and a pen
We'll start writing on the count of ten
Let's send a letter to a student in a far away
place
I picked a little girl, her name was Grace
She had long hair and eyes of blue
I started with "Hello, how are you?"
I live in a really cool town I started to write
I play, dance, sing, and fly my kite.
What do you do in your neighborhood ?
Are you happy, are things good?
I'll send a picture of my mom, dad, and
school
And she'll think I'm really cool
We'll hopefully meet one day
That'd be exciting, I'd have so much to say
A few years would pass and there'd be a
knock at
the door
My pen pal was here and we'd no longer be
shore to
shore
Grace was pretty and oh so smart
She liked to skate and create art
We laughed and smiled a whole lot
But Grace wasn't real, she was just a bot
This modern technology has confused me so
One can't tell what's real and what's faux
Happy birthday to our great land
Now put down your computer and give it a
hand





The Carousel of Life

I wanted to write a story. I thought and I thought. I thought so hard and long and then it came to me. Don't make something up - write about real life - write about experiences - write about how the world goes round and round like a merry-go-round and time passes so quickly.

I was once a little girl a long time ago. My parents would take me to Coney Island and put me on the merry-go-round. My father would hold me on with one hand and reach for the brass ring with the other. It was so much fun!

When I got married we moved to Long Island and eventually I took my little girls to Adventureland and put them on the merry-go-round and we would all try to grab the brass ring.

Now, I take my grandchildren there and try to grab the ring.

But now I realize we all are reaching for it but in different ways we all have it.

If we have:

Our share of happiness we have the brass ring

Our share of good health or if we successfully recovered from illness then we have the brass ring

Family that loves us then we have the brass ring

A close friend then we have the brass ring

A dog that sits at the door and waits for us then we have the brass ring

If you have done good in this world and have a caring heart then you have the brass ring.

Waking up each morning:

Seeing the flowers

Seeing the sun

Seeing the waves of the beach

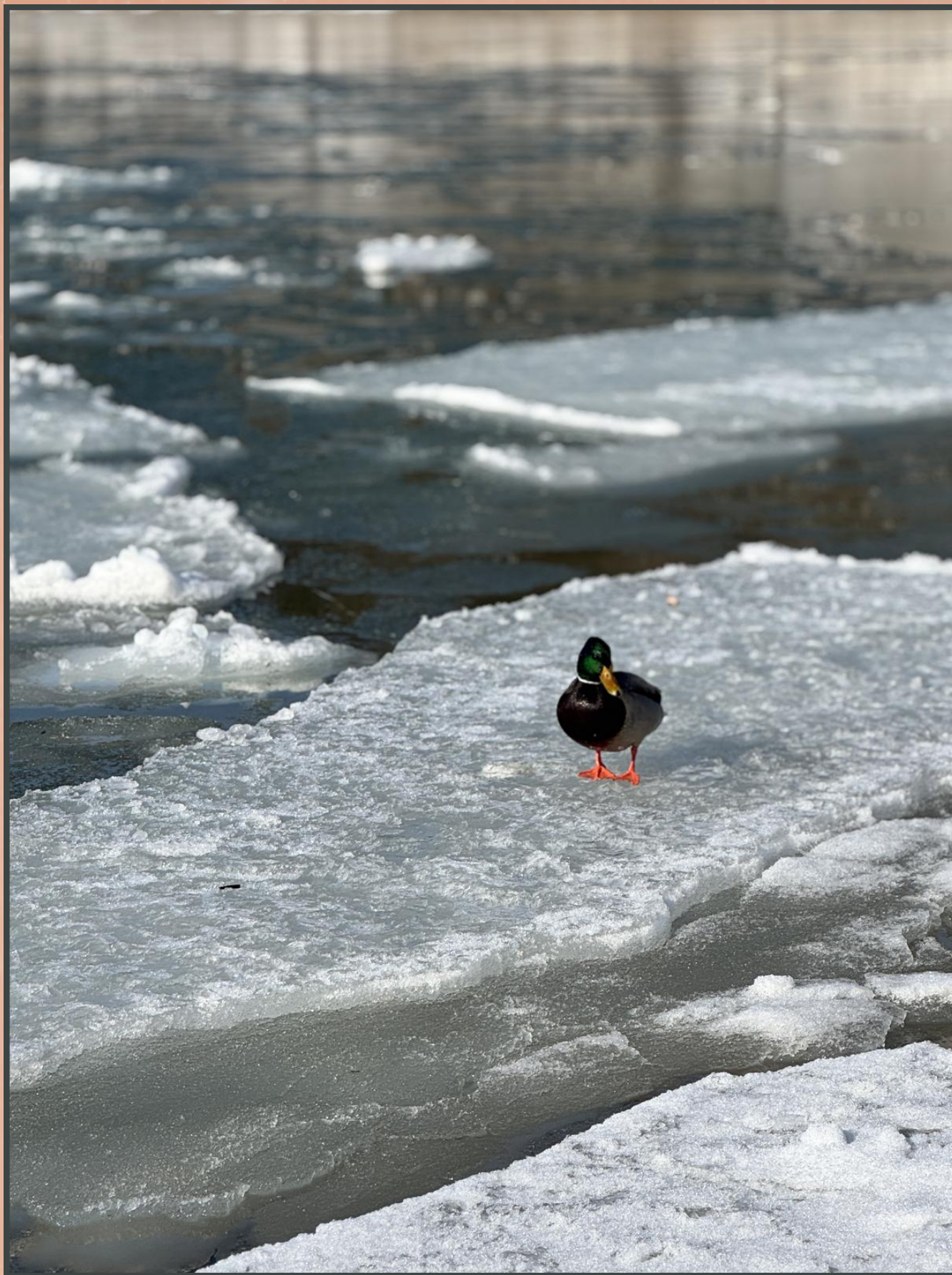
Seeing this beautiful country

We all have the brass ring

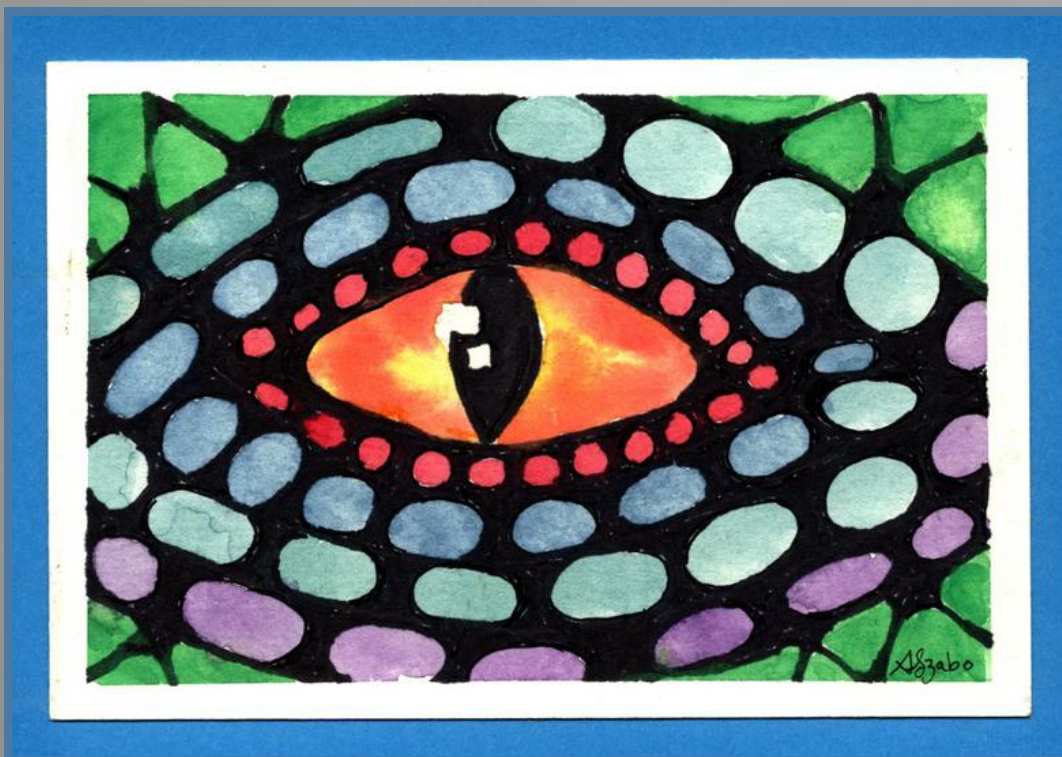
It is within our hearts!

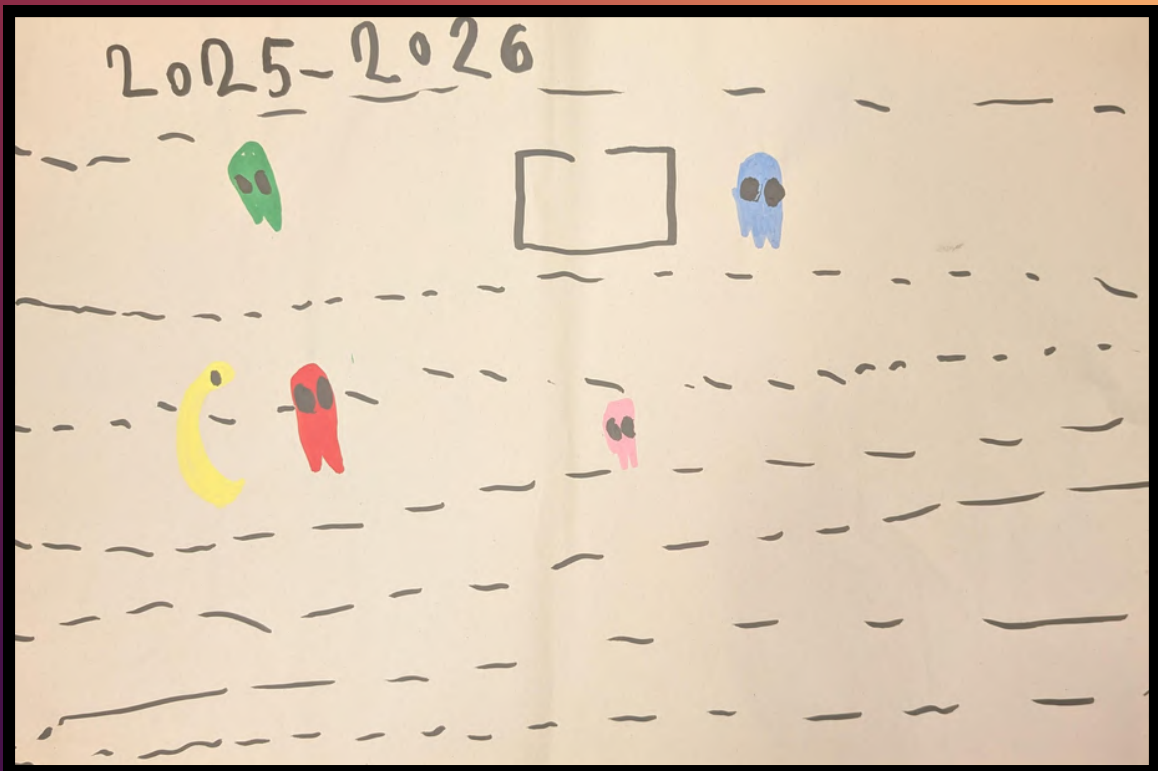
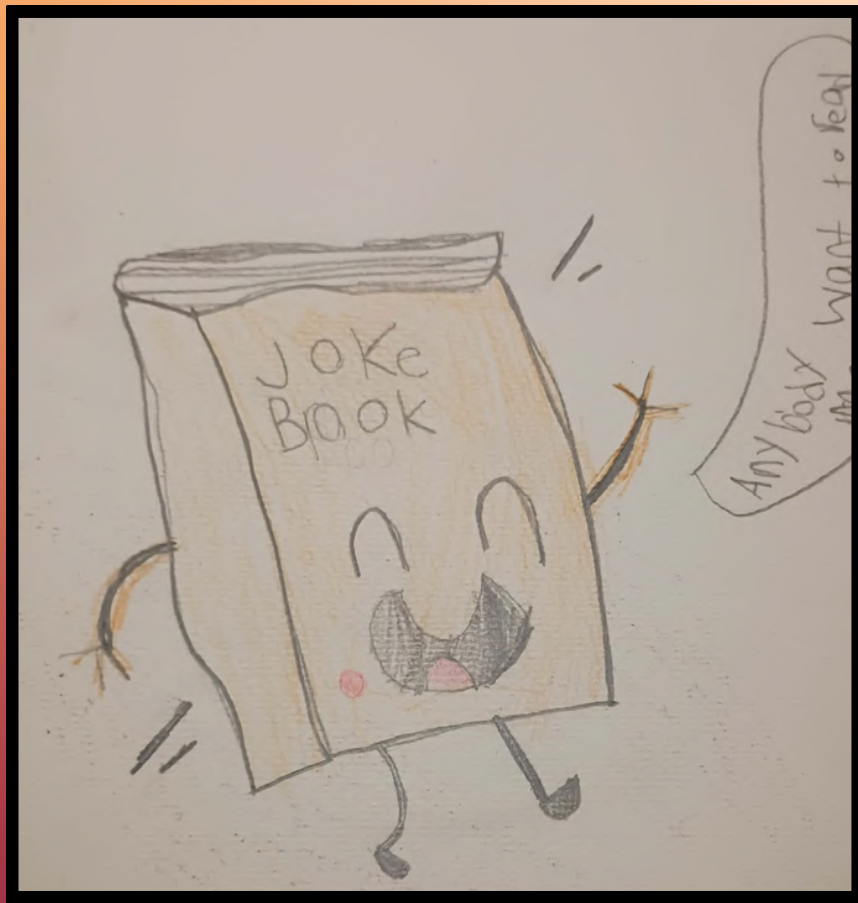
God bless America!















Kiss the Shore

The ocean and me,
We're one, you see.
The love I hold is as deep as can be

Truly I am both
comforted and terrified
by the capacity of
every grain of salt,
for it twirls
peacefully and passionately,
carrying a story within the heart.

Ancient waves, and even someday,
one might be blessed with a burden.
Others have sunk with the ship that was flooded.
The current will pull, push and drag you under.

This doesn't matter,
for every wisp of life is connected one
way or another,
for He knows us all,
as we are the salt.

Somewhere in these waters is a
whisper,
God willing,
every ounce is heard.
But what for?

I will tell you,
we all long to kiss the shore

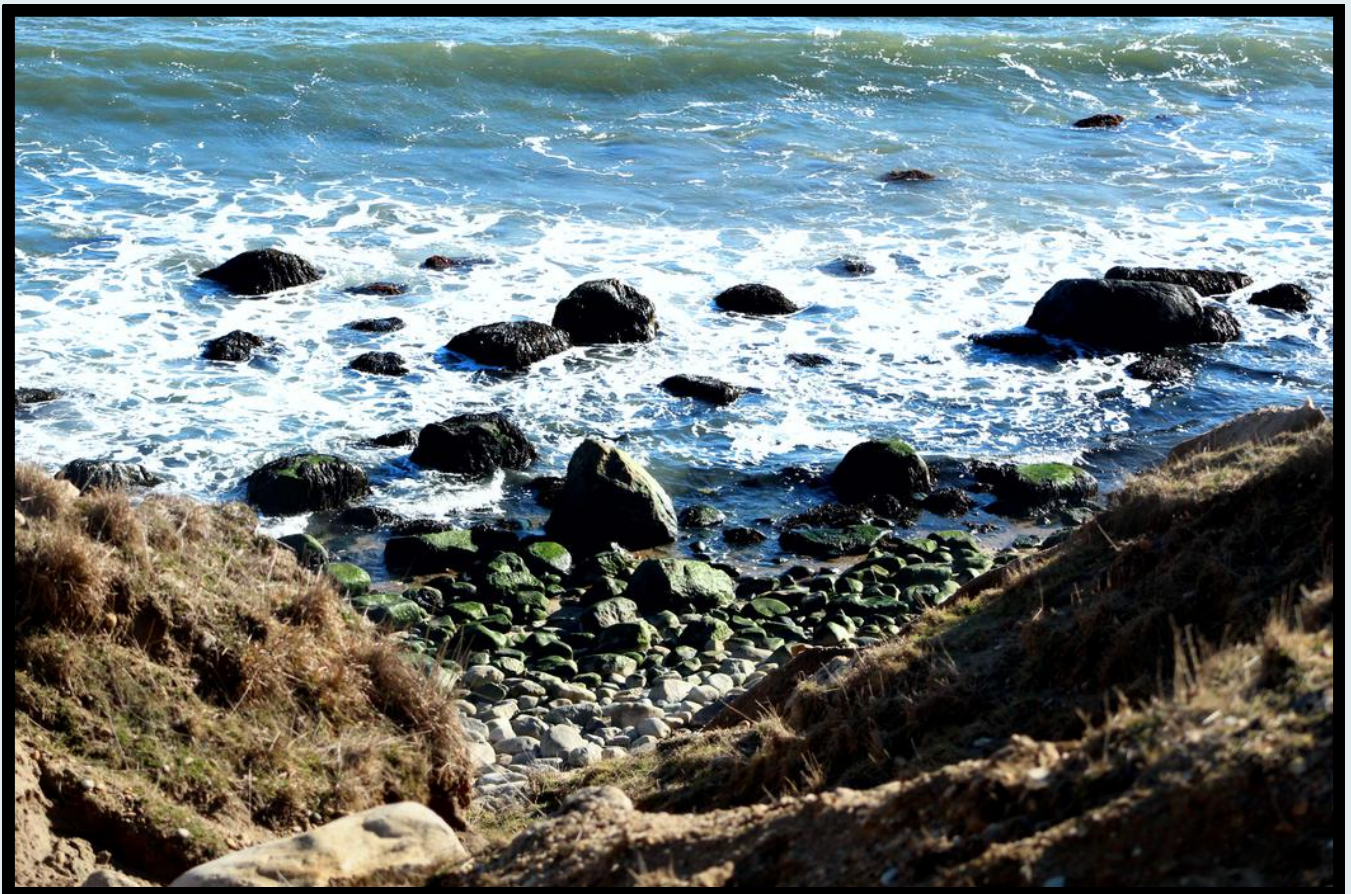
DISTANT VOICES

INFORMAL GHOSTS AND VISIONS
FAR BEYOND THE SEA
INTRUDE WITHOUT PERMISSION
IN VAST PROXIMITY.

FATHOM THE INTRINSIC
FLOWING FROM THE TIDE
DEEP WITHIN THE KINGDOM
WHERE GHOSTS AND VISIONS HIDE.

RIDE MAJESTIC CURRENTS
BARRIERS' BROKEN DOWN
TIME AND SPACE CONJECTURE
UPON THE SPEED OF SOUND.

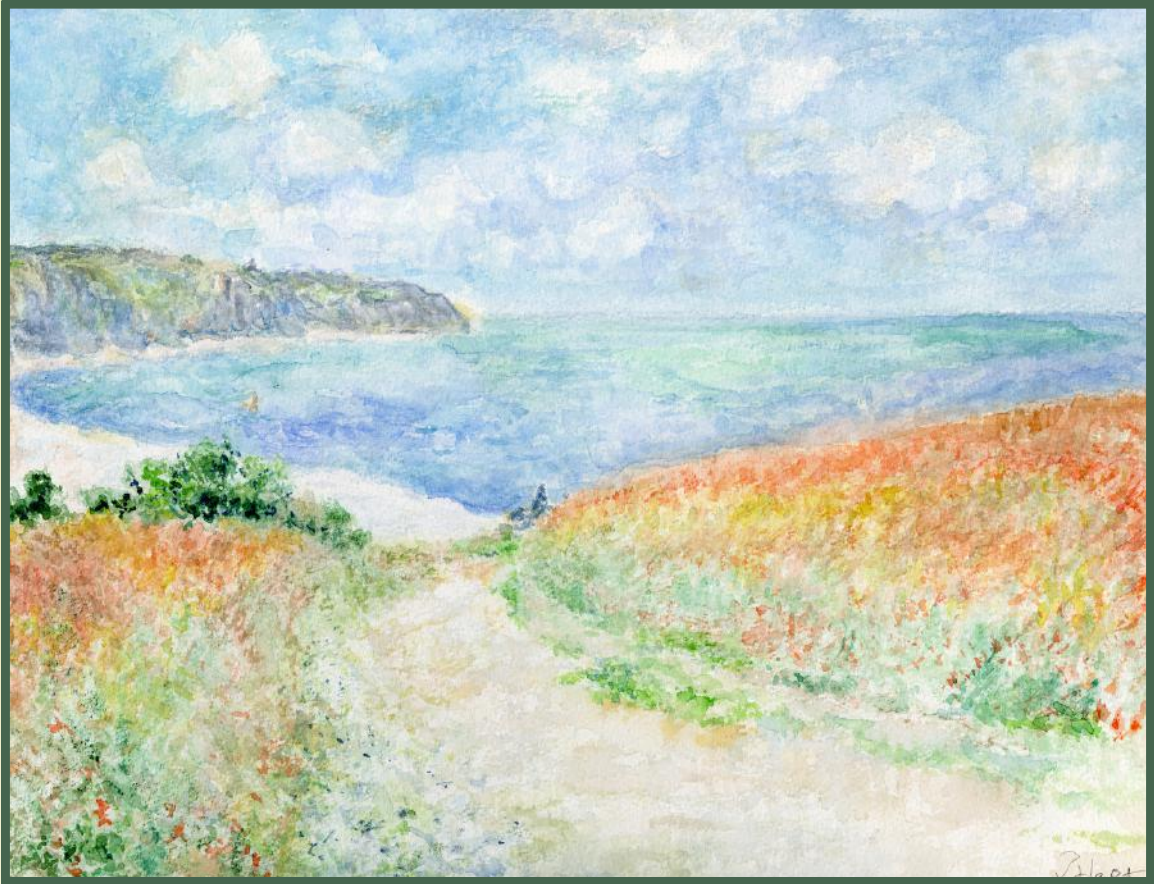
FAR BEYOND THE VISIONS
THE TIDAL WAVES BEGIN
TOLL THE BELL FOR WISDOM
GATHER ON THE WIND.





Spring rain washes away
scattered bits of crumbs
a gray mouse pauses

Two share a lukewarm bath
winter snow dusts the window
the furnace clicks on





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