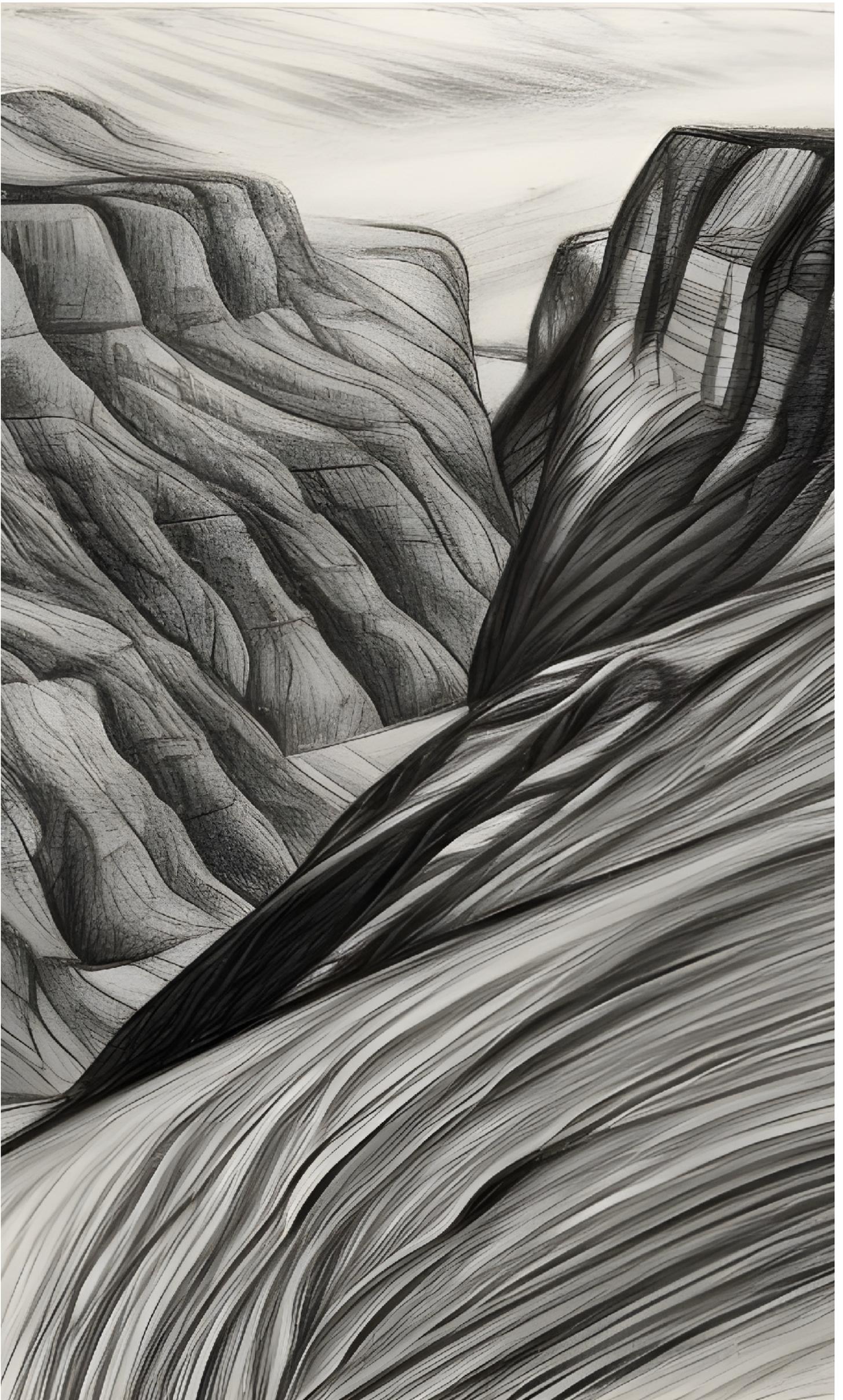


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Nostalgic for the Future

Howie Good

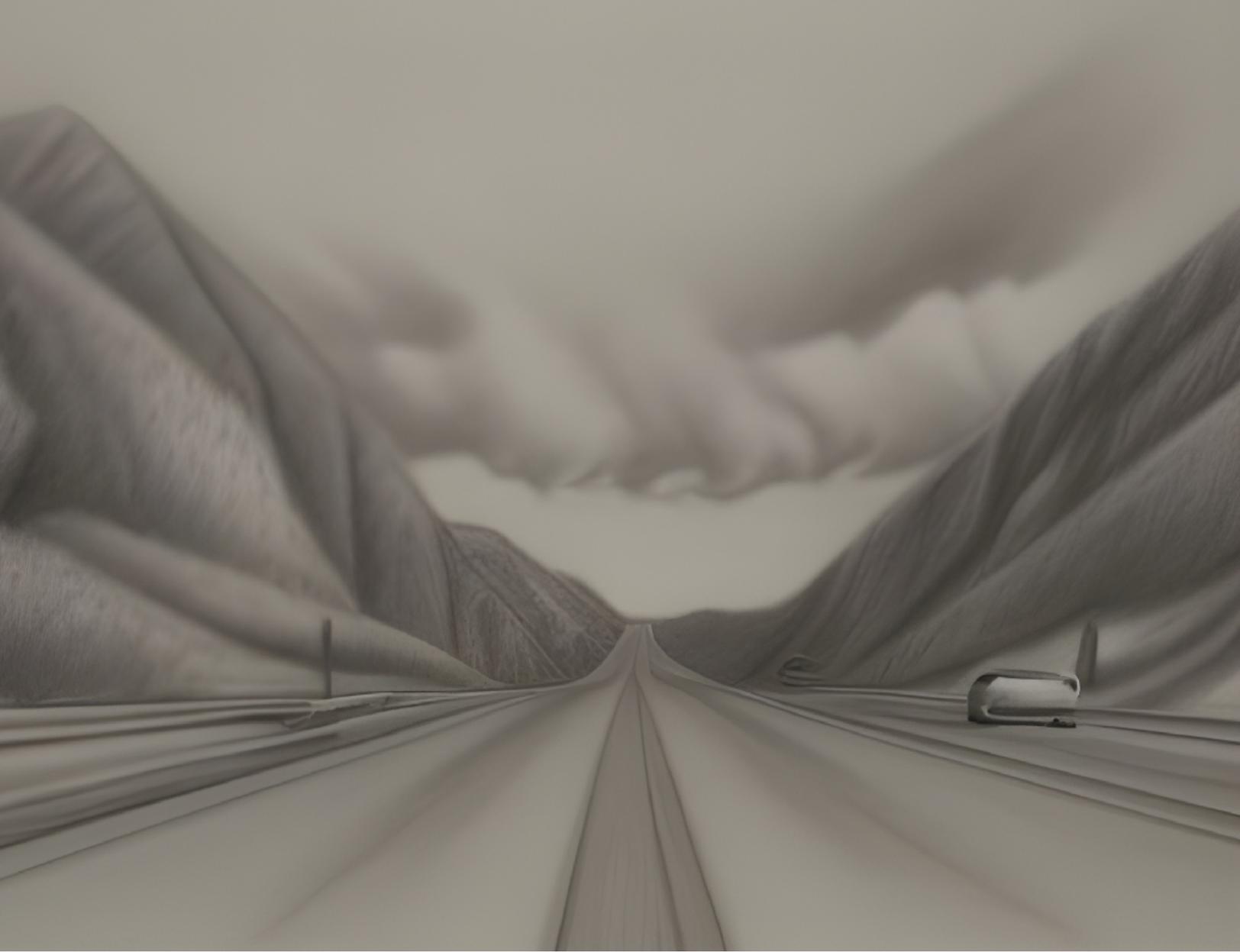
How do we sleep when the planet is melting? I have no clue. It's the dead of night, too late now for Dr. Heimlich to apply the Heimlich maneuver. I'm not really into cosmic things, but it's like you don't have a choice. I sometimes go crazy with the pain of it and have to pull over and take a Xanax.

*

We're in a downtown canyon of a ruined modern city. Is there violence? Is there murder? The birds are yellow and blue, like the floating spots you see after a camera flash. There's a grove of rustling sycamore trees where an Urban Outfitters used to be. Flowers have grown claws to scabble over the rubble.

*

Now every blank sheet of paper is a secret prison. Clowns have this way of getting inside very small cars in very large numbers. The woman with the flat black eyes of a shark slips a .25-caliber Berretta, a "lady's gun," and not a very nice lady, into her purse. Kids are warned, *Don't ever talk to strangers*, but strangers have the best candy.



Poetic Highway

Evan Cozad

I run into the poet Mathias Svalina on the highway. He has a backpack on his back and a dream in his hands. Upon seeing me, he whispers a promise to me about milk and dust. His words sink into my skin like wine. I ask how he does it. How his words are like wine. He only smiles and lets the dream in his hands fly away. Years from now, we will dine over a table made of blackness with a bottle of wine in one hand and a mutton chop in the other. But right now he marches away into the highway's haze with the sun illuminating his path.

GASTRONOMIE

Patrick Sweeney

The New York Public Library website had essentially gone dormant during the shutdown, with one exception. A fat 'Recipes' link pulsed faintly, directing me to a listing of food groups topped by a glowing 'Other'. The next tap would set the rules of foraging, composting, dumpster diving and nutrition on their heads.

The site offered a compendium of solutions for improvising a pantry in challenging times. Electricity had been spotty, so I was down to non-perishables and spices. Our housing development and the East River green belt boasted varied flora chosen for photogenicity, nothing edible offhand. Dandelion greens wouldn't cut it. I beelined for the 'Sweets' section which hailed uncooked maple sap as an elixir, adding that many other trees (notably birch, palm, alder, walnut and hickory) could yield tasty syrups. The locally-proliferating honey locust tree offers sweet pods and nutritious seeds convertible to beer and coffee facsimiles respectively.

The steel faucet taps and growlers from a failed home brewing experiment and a stray batch of tent spikes were retrieved from a back closet and efficiently deployed. I got the last of my dried beans vaguely mapley and attracted ants, which I rashly treated as an infestation rather than a crunchy treat. I soon had a pot or two of manna cooking down during waking hours.

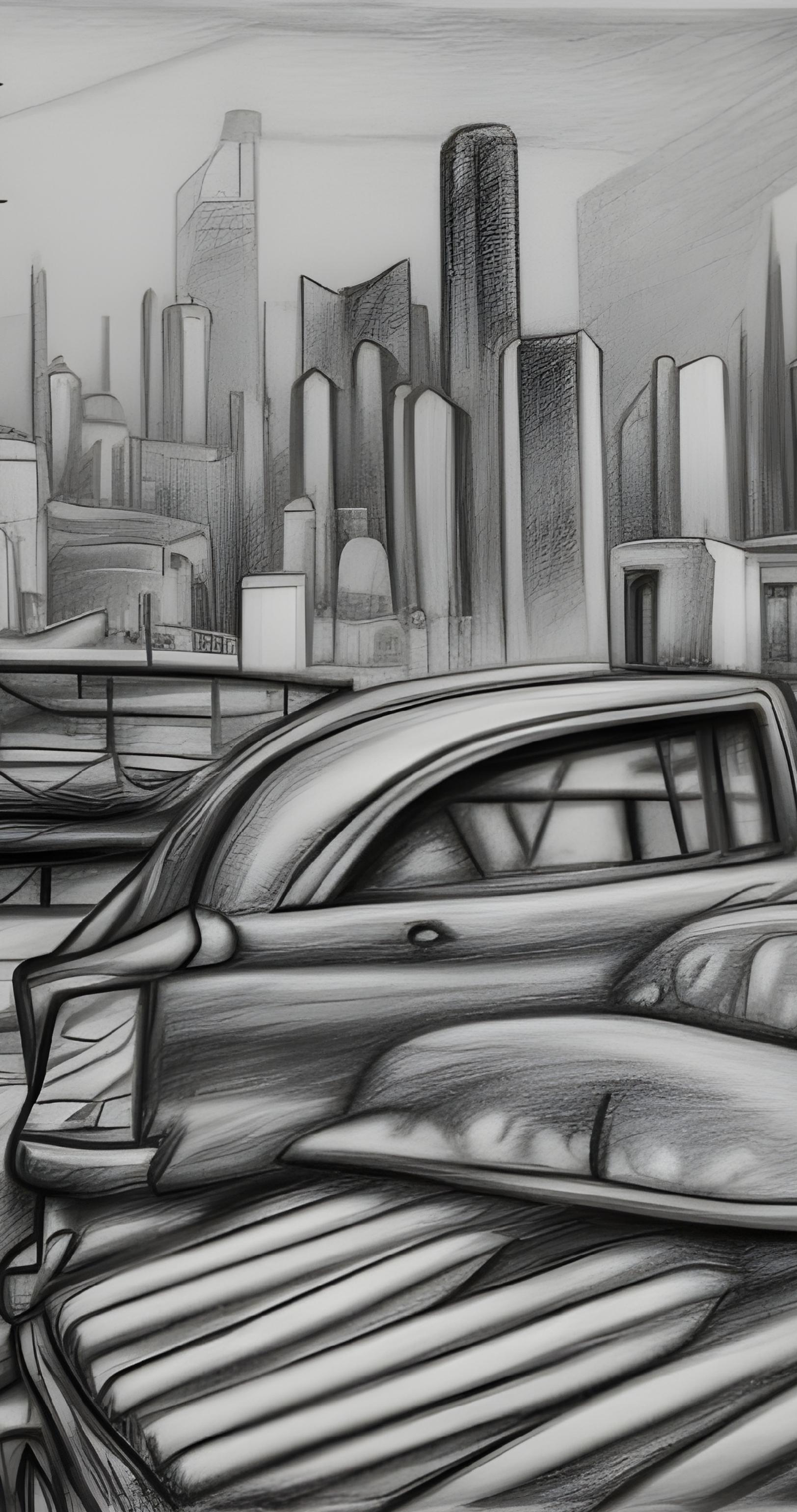
Harvesting started around dusk as it entailed schlepping a gym bag of supplies and a folding stepstool around as surreptitiously as possible. I'd grown paranoid about unwanted attention and, sure enough, I was eventually shadowed. Took some comfort in us all fearing each other. Inevitably, one night all the taps were gone and the honey locusts had been swarmed bare.

The layer of bark nearest the wood is a staple in many cultures, even milled as flour. Indeed, the name of the upstate Adirondack tribe translates as "bark eaters". I got some good recipes bookmarked and got to work with various implements but learned that I couldn't strip it effectively without a chisel and my closest facsimile was just sad.

Edible roots, leaves and seeds were also vetted on the site, but they were often hard to distinguish from their dangerous cousins and they skewed bitter. One foray with the free wild edibles app had filled a knapsack with crabapples, ramps, garlic mustard, blackberries and cattails for a compote and a pasta salad. Something in that batch raked my guts on the way out.

Fishing was boxcutter/cherry bomb competitive in the still plenty-polluted Hudson and East Rivers despite the continuing health warnings. I could watch mayhem on the latter from my kitchen window. While wary of the humans, I found myself cradling a tree branch on a nearby wrecked cement jetty during the pre-dawn bird racket. The sole duck I lunged for schooled me something fierce. I almost managed to cudgel a squirrel on the way home. One cruel irony here is that a massive re-seeding of oyster beds had started just downriver before the catastrophe hit.

Moving on to the inanimate objects menu, I learned that crayons are nutritious, chalk is pure calcium, and anything leather can be tenderized by a long simmer, but the broth from the first few hours, contaminated by tanning chemicals, would have to be ditched. The chickle used for chewing gum is derived from latex. You're not supposed to swallow, but who hasn't? Most packing peanuts are made from cornstarch,



safely consumed raw and supposedly delicious when coated with flavorings and baked or deep fried. Healthy, palatable cardboards are making some inroads and edible plastics helped put molecular gastronomy on the map. Food wrappers derived from seaweed, potatoes and milk are no longer a novelty. I took my magnifying glass into the pantry and found squat.

Somehow, the discouraging research left me ravenous. Buckwheat groats, sardines in mustard sauce and onion dip mix cohered about as well as I could expect. A couple of epic belches but they stayed down.

I circled back to the laptop and refreshed. Hot new content. Much of the molded plastic and upholstery in select new car models broke down into proteins, starches and sugars mimicking roasted pork shoulder over rice after just a few chews. My Prius was on the short list. Glorious news! I trembled with anticipation, so much that I thought it best to take my temperature. I couldn't handle the thermometer until I'd gotten control of my breathing.

The recipe called for marinating overnight. I went out to the garage tower at midnight with the best I could muster; a pipe wrench, rebar pliers, a claw hammer and a bucket for harvesting. My remaining spices skewed Indian, so if this came out right, it would be a balti and a good balti is hard to find around here in the best of circumstances.

I pried loose the backseat headrest and a fat slab of door panel then spirited them out like a thief. There was barely a splash each of naranja, sherry vinegar, aperol and sesame oil so I added water to the marinade. I dozed off with visions of sugarplums and slept straight through.

The refrigerator sighed open and, while I've no idea how a corpse would smell, this was it. The dubious feast seemed more corroded than tenderized. No way I could put a flame under that. The road had gone and forked on me and, yeah, finally time to brave that goddamn Trader Joe's ruckus.

Homeless

Mick Theebs + Nolcha Fox

Weathered sand dune ridges
worm up to wild curls.
Wind-scared cheeks.
Grey-splattered grizzle.
Those eyes, though.
Those wondering child eyes.
See less than face's years.

You will make every effort to
not see me.

Your eyes will pass over me
without a moment's consideration,
as if I were words on a page
in a foreign alphabet
unreadable, unknowable, impossible to process.

Because if you learn
the meaning of those words
you may understand
just how cruel we can be
to each other.

You pretend to be lost in thought
Thought is a place
without dirt, without pain.
I am a place invisible
to your unseeing eyes.
I'm not a problem
the City Council won't address.
I'm a man. I'm lost.
Open your eyes,
look into mine.

Perhaps you don't have
the strength or courage
to accept the reality—
an unlucky roll of the die
and a misstep or two

are all that separate
me and you.

Call it justice, call it order,
call it the way of the world.
Look in my eyes, coward
and tell me it's fair.

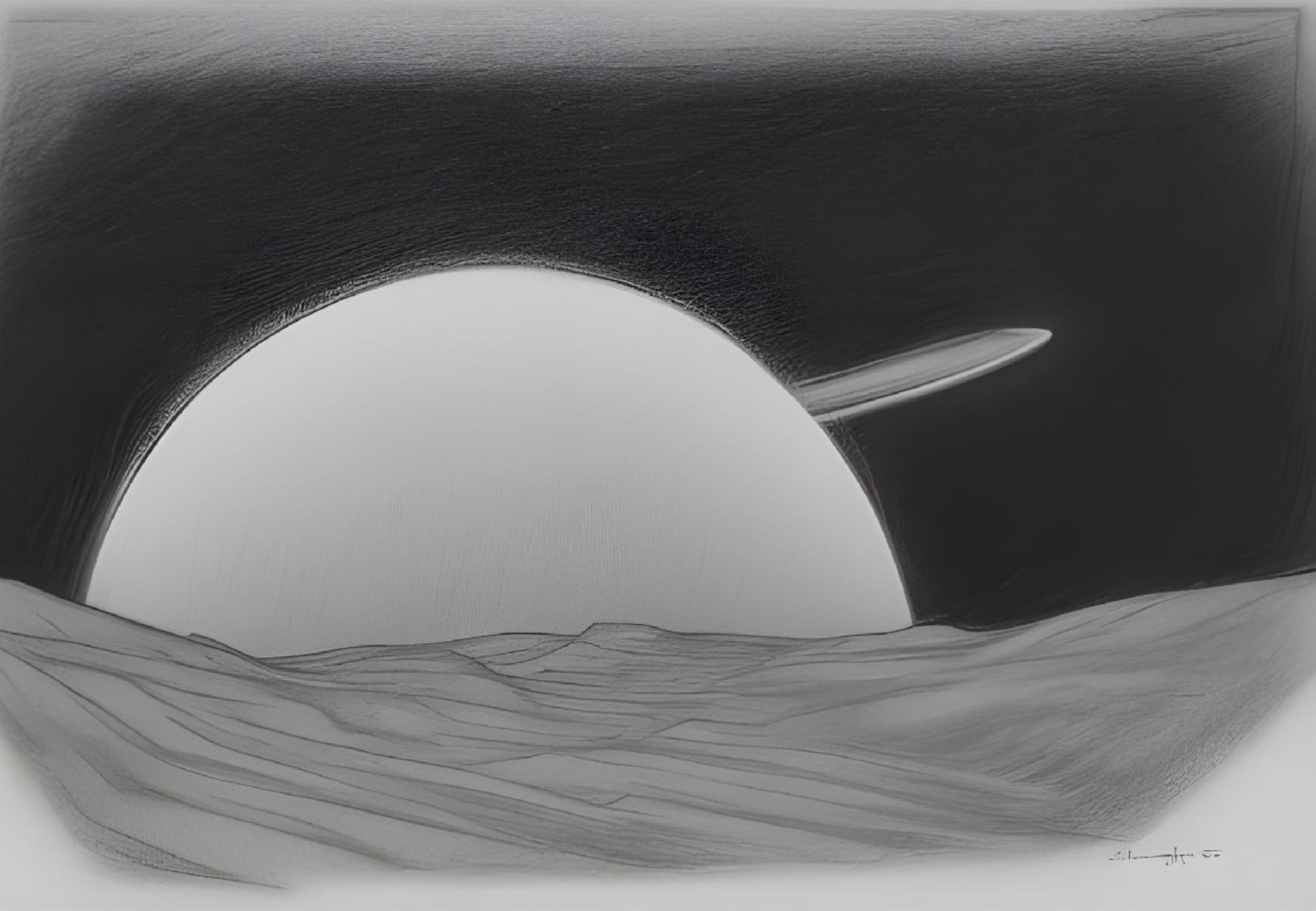
When you look
in my eyes,
do you see you?
Is that why you
turn away?

New Orleans 2018

Julie A. Dickson

He sat in a doorway, small dog close
his cardboard sign *anything will help*
held in front. Not knowing whether
he meant food, I handed him a wrapped
sandwich, Muffaletta, my favorite - he
smiled and nodded. Later, a bag of dog food
held before me, I went back - he smiled
wider the second time. *No one thinks of
feeding him too, thank you so much*

.



Three Places to Visit

Howie Good

1

Musk said if I got the cash together, he would take me and my wife on his flying saucer to a planet that was made entirely of drugs. At first I wasn't sure. But then I was like, "OK, why not?" Our own planet is fucked. You can smell it – a stench like dead flower water in a vase.

2

The people eat the same lunch every day. They believe the force of laughter can dislocate jaws and make hernias protrude. "White boys" is the street name for Xanax. Everything else has been declared safe for visitors and included on official tours.

3

It's the village where the kill switch originated. Something is always transforming into something else – friendship into love, words into a book, a bird into a song. Of course I am going to keep on throwing myself into the sea until I get there.



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“Nostalgic for the Future” and “Three Places to Visit”
by Howie Good
Poetry Book:
Swimming in Oblivion: New and Selected Poems
<https://tinyurl.com/33n6vp26>
Co-editor of UnLost Journal
<https://unlostjournal.com/>

“Poetic Highway” by Evan Cozad
Twitter: @evanjcozad

“Gastronomie” by Patrick Sweeney
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“Homeless”
by Mick Theebs (left-aligned) and Nolcha Fox (right-aligned)

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