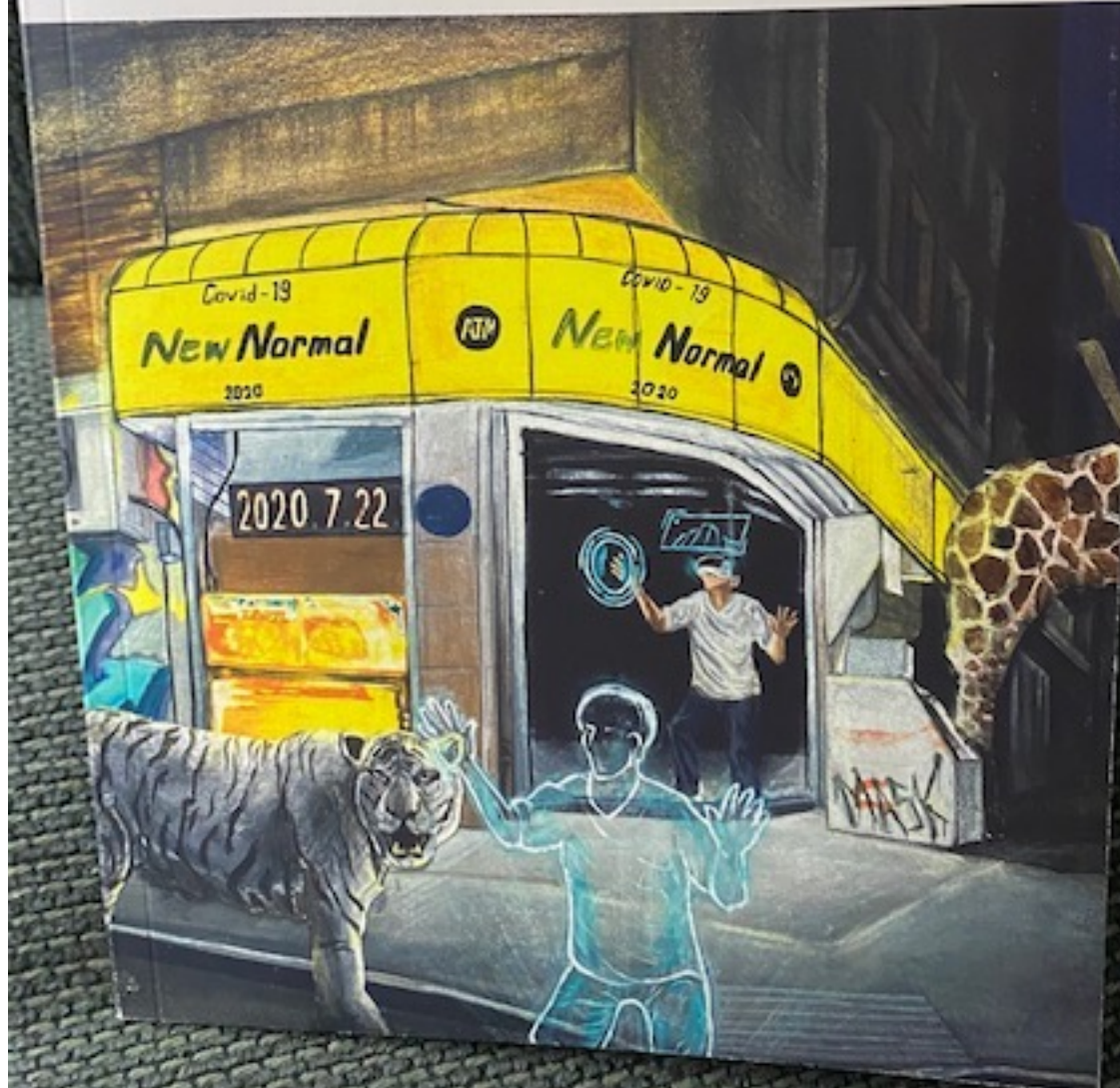


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## SEA WALL

Diane B. Forman

On the barrier island near me, residents are fighting the inevitable. Like death itself, the ocean can be stealthy and unrelenting, often angry when we wrestle with it, try to contain it, build walls against it. Every spring I witness marigold front loaders and backhoes line and stack gigantic jutting boulders, efforts to hold weathered summer homes against their sandy backdrops, to hold patios and barbecues and memories in place.

But stilts and rocks can't save these homes against the ceaseless battering of the Atlantic, navy blue and constant, or azure or aqua or even black. Opaque. Thick and threatening, the northeast winds and thunderous waves always come. Ultimately the sea walls fail, leaving bare and gaping columns of sand. Some homes are lost, simply washed away, and people suffer. This suffering is a space outside of time, a refusal to accept the endgame. The mind conjures threat, but there is also an opening to wonder.

Our island sands glint glassy pink in waving bands: fine granules of garnet and roseate quartz. Perfect gems, if left undisturbed, if we can accept this sand, this land, this mortality. The sky is thin and opalesque, like the inside of a whelk. I can hear the ocean and life and possibility in that shell, even if I am far from the shore.