



HOME COMING QUEEN

Erin Clarke

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For those of us who
get lost a lot, may we
keep finding home.

♡-E

home noun

(hōm)

1. **a** : one's place of residence

b : a contrivance of large boards, wiring, and pipes forming puppet theater castles in which the show is always running and no audience arrives

2. a temporary black hole into which rent checks are thrown

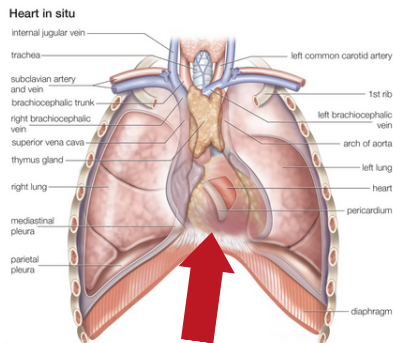
3. one's town of birth, and/or the place where the sidewalk stole skin from your knee, age 3

4. the patch of earth in which your great-great-great-grandmother's long-gone body now whispers in the dirty dust to your no-good great-great-great-grandfather's wasted ears among the trees, rocks, and running water which have known your bloodline from the time when cart-wielding, story-keeping homo sapien wanderers first crested the fertile hill

5. a high value commodity often traded sight unseen by strange, multi-appendaged organisms called "[property developers](#)"

6. **a** : the space from the soles of the feet to the crown of the head, and the universe between

b : colloquially, the region within the thoracic cavity between the lungs, posterior to the sternum and superior to the diaphragm (see diagram for reference)



7. the site at which one's favorite snacks are regularly stocked, and one's madness is kept, curled up on the rug

8. **a** : the place where one feels safest, eg; a person to whose inner gurgles you are privy when your ear rests gently on their tender belly-pillow

b : the place where one feels safest, eg; a person-sized, steel-walled, passcode-encrypted, laser-secured safe in which you are contained and finally able to be your full self without risk to the greater world

9. the theoretical construct whose nature is only understood when gone

Lemme Tell You

There's cold, and then there's
Midwestern cold,
A thousand steel blades that slice to the bone
And linger,
Thrumming with vibrating ache,
Hollowing marrow you once thought untouchable,
Cold that grips your lungs forcing shallow shriveled breaths
Whose moisture freezes on your eyelashes,
Dazzling weight distracting every blink.

There's heat, and then there's
Nevada heat
That bakes you dry,
Cracking pottery skin as you lie
On sun-drenched rocks
While a lizard scuttles closer
To the glossy, sweat-sheened lump of you,
Patchy grasses and prickly pears stabbing back
At the sky's smothering fever.

There's rain, and then there's
Portland rain,
A dripping faucet left gently maddening,
The gray seeping gray dripping clouds stain
Gray sweaters over gray rugs,
Relentless droplets smattering across the marbled monochrome world
Leeching color from memory
As puddles swell and shrink like tides
And your toes forget what warmth is
In reluctant surrender to the long-lived damp.

There's no place like home,
There's no place like home,
There's no place like home.

Makers and Takers

I'm so sorry,
Thank you for your body,
I think as I consume
Another being,
Or more often
I don't think anything at all
But "yum,"
Popping berry snacks in my mouth,
Juicy hopeful seed pods
Of a distant thicket
Dying in my gut
As I strip them bare of nutrients
To fuel my walking body,
My sitting body
As I doomscroll,
Adding little in their place
But worry,
A carbon footprint,
Strings of words and sighs.

Behold my inconvenient truth:
I am greedy,
My teeth are sharp.
I am a monster.
I breed little monsters in my image.
My kind has outstripped harmony, trashed every treaty with
Each citizen in this coalition of living things which carries our collective, colossal weight,
We simply do not stop.

I look forward to the day
When the autotrophs will be repaid
My debt,
As they feast on my decaying,
Dainty roots pressing deeper into my consenting dead flesh,
Taking it all back
With interest,
The berries and bones returning home.



Home is where your art is.

一人で
(hitori de)

I make the bed when you're not in it—
You're gone again, our goodbye kiss blended
With dawn-hazy dreams;
I think it happened, but I can't be sure—
Your scattered coffee grounds dot the counter,
The closet door is half-unslid,
And a pan I washed last night
Is now slick with oil and dregs of eggs—
All signs you were here,
Lumbering awake.
You become faceless in the mornings;
I only know the back of you while
You're cooking, leaving.
When I remember what you look like
I picture you in bed,
Your eyes on me—
Worshipping brown—
Face swaddled in cotton and down.
You're always on your right side
And I'm always on my left
While I watch your face softening,
Home at last,
I pull you home with my fingers
Painting the slopes and valleys
Of your face, dedicating them to mind
So I will always know you,
Even when your place is empty
And I pull the sheets taut, pristine,
A reset button
Like you were never there,
I remember your face and I wait for you to come home.



Clarke
House Rules

1.) Don't be a dick

(That's it.)

Weather

Sometimes I am a drought given flesh,
A vast deadened wasteland of rock-like earth–
Dryness clawing for relief,
A cold burn thirst,
While all living thriving lush loving green
Withers,
Crumbles misshapen, drawn down by gravity,
Then vanishes–a dusty figment–

How could anything live here?
“Of course nothing can. Just look at this place,”
And fueled by that encouraging belief
The scorched landscape of haunted empty spirit
Expands further, grows with ravenous
Moisture-sucking savagery;

Each whispered permission
Makes its boundaries swell,
Conquering my innards,
Scraping away lingering joy
As my eyes dull
And my skin chills
I soon forget birdsong–
There are no birds in this frostbitten desert–
And I forget words–
There is no connection in the void–
And I forget what liking means–
That tickly jingling lift and warmth and yes
That leans you forward with delight wanting
More of *that*,

I forget,
I forget everything,

Except I could swear
Something used to be here–
This cavernous agony void
Housed *something*,
And it was *good*,
If only I could remember
How to get it back.
But memory's a fickle bitch
So I wait,

Carving sullen dirt trails in my barren hell,
Circling with growing hopelessness,

And then you,
Sweet one,
You sing me home again.

Those first notes waft through
Land and take root,
And something like wonder, recognition, and startled joy
Shudder awake,

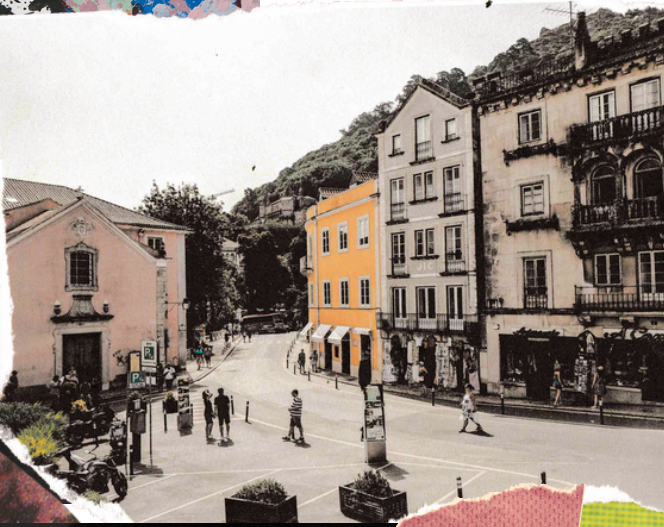
Once the filling starts it doesn't stop—
A cascade of remembering
Hugs from my children
With dimpled arms,
The taste of ice cream,
The high bell toll of my own laugh,

And then words break free,
I overflow with a torrent of everything I've ever loved,
Suddenly I am no longer
A dead thing walking,
I am vibrant, aglow,

And I will never know why you
Agreed to marry
A desert-haunted monster
But my god I could never survive
This curse
Without you,
My patient hero
Who reminds me I can bloom
Time and time again.

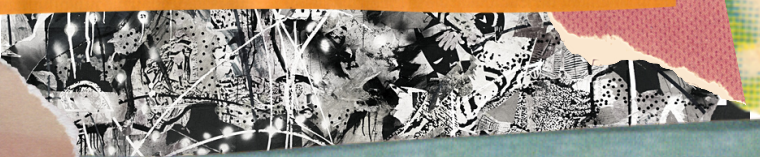
Waking, Sunday Morning

Reaching across the unfurled cozy sea,
finding an island of shoulders,
and chest,
nestling nose into quiet—
the glen between chin and neck
edged with jaw—
currents beating softly
under the surface of warmth,
my homestay afloat on memory foam.
Breathe and be,
it's enough for me.



"Hey, honey, are you coming home from work anytime soon?"

waiting has an end



Marshmallow

Walking through a marshmallow,
this sickening privilege goop-town,
its raptured silent streets and
kindred soulless houses
on spacious wasted yards,
water-gulping green velvet stretched
as far as eyes can see.

With each step and turn I squirm,
a physical recoiling at each
cartoon seasonal flag and beige stucco facade–

This town is only interested
in What's in it for Me,
when Me has two cars
and a third for their teen
and a fourth for their other teen,
and an island resort escape booked for every Spring Break,
and fails to see the value
in bread, milk, and broccoli
for those in other zip codes–
if they were as good as Me, they would live here.

This town has no consequences,
only positivity and pride,
upscale remodels, rebrands;
the do-overs are endless–
those golden chances
languish in lofty dragons' keeps,
deep in the belief they deserve *every* chance,
not noticing or caring
others have to fight
for just one.

This town traded chaos
for the quaint, wrangling any
and all loose ends into
appropriate containment;

it killed the messy for the
convenient,
then the elders sat back, shocked
at their strangely perfect
children playing violation games,
ashamed their shiny baby beasts
never learned run-of-the-mill humanity.

This town is mapped to meet
exclusionary dreams,
concrete and mortar poured
in order
to keep ruffians
and undesirables
out of sight of the Upstanding.

This town
with its houses cowering and looming
behind decorative walls
is my former corral
in which I bucked as many conventions
as they tried to slide
between my teeth

and also,

this town whispers deep
in the place time and
therapy cannot touch,
that I am home.

It's familiar, easy, horrible, a
suffocating study in cloying lethal white nonsense,
and home, my home.
I hate it here,
I am home.

Couch Potato

There is a landscape lost
In the slipstream of maturity
Into which I would happily dive, its hugging cushions
Nestling my form with the smells of wood dust and linen.
I would let my muscles unwind from their tightened spools,
Let my roundness resolve
With my weight held fully
By vast, stable pillows,
My hands flipping through a large hardcover book
Secreting a flower, beaming yellow
In two-dimensional servitude,
Laminated in a plastic choke-hold bookmark,
Preserved, spring forever,
Child forever,
Held forever
By couch cushions
As my first home sits at my feet
Idly massaging the toes she made long ago,
Rivulets of silver-white hair pouring down her sweated back,
Humming softly,
And none of the world's problems
Will be mine.

Nightmares in the racecar bed

You call me, hunted by self-made demons,
My fibers wrench as I hear your small voice

Screaming for mercy,
Begging for comfort from your

Haunted room.
How can I reach you

In your mind-oubliette, my dearest darling
Genius hijacked by horror-

I would scale rocky cliffs
With bloodied nails to keep

You safe-with no such tangible challenge my
White-eyed panic snorts and foams.

Climb down and be with me,
Warm and feather-light,

Where my body is here to hold and
Soften your quaking.

Come home to me,
Come home to me please,

If I could I would don legendary armor
And gut those conjured hateful things

Scaring my sweet boy,
But my steel cannot reach the recesses of your nightmares

So please, little one,
Wake up, and come on home.

家常豆腐

Home

see the word
translates
rolling the dice
what "home"
tastes like.

the taste of home we crave

wood

combine the
light

[Redacted]

Carefully

golden

add the
the ginger and star

cut into
pieces

medium

Add the wood
water.
perimeter

long
separated

around the
Serve.

[Redacted]

Coming Home

Closing the door to leave behind
the thrum and buzz of expectations.

Welcome to the hallowed houses of holy, cavernous headspace,
allowing room for all the things you've forgotten (such as):

You are a body, with a trillion harmonious pieces composing a single, flowing, supportive
whole.

And

Bridges through time connect us all from one heart to another like an infinite web of
unbreakable gossamer threads throughout all human history (and even before, if you ask the
trees.)

And

There is a time before the idea, when quiet inspiration
swims up gently from the depths of silence and takes your breath away.

And

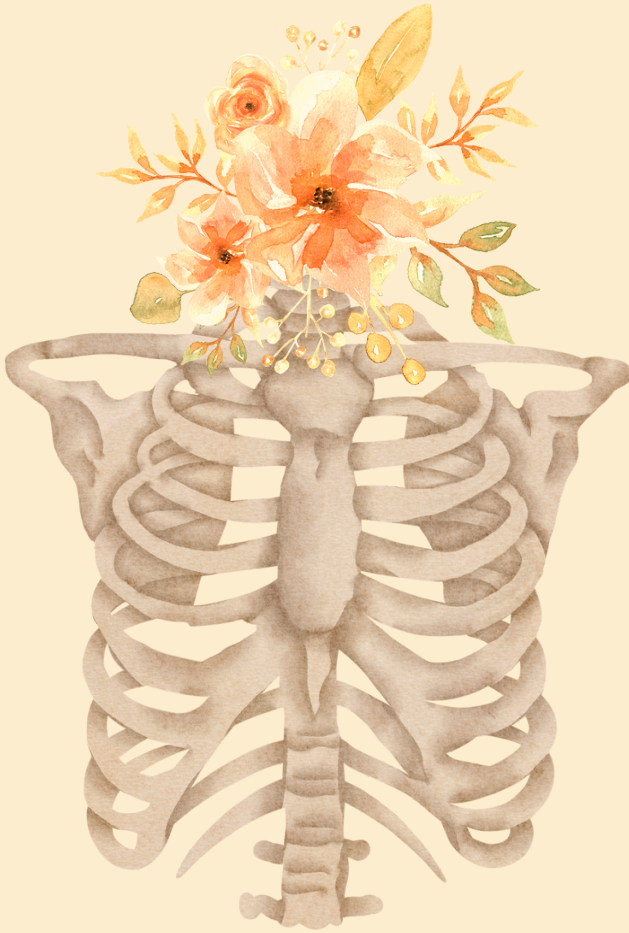
There is a gong vibration that
ripples through your body as stillness settles in,
warm and friendly as a purring cat.

And

You are home.
You always were
You just forgot.

"Welcome back," the pieces whisper lovingly as you see
the entire jigsaw puzzle for
three whole glorious
seconds.

You are home.



There's no place like home.



Erin Clarke is a copywriter, poet, and avid library fangirl. She currently lives in Portland, OR with her husband and their two children, and can often be found petting other people's dogs.

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