

PIECEWORK

BENTLEY LITERARY SOCIETY 2021

Piecework

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Portrait of Guillaume Apollinaire,

Giorgio de Chirico, 1914

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Word from the editors

This year similarly to the last, our club as well as every club faced the challenges that came with the global dilemma we find ourselves in. Navigating this has been difficult, but it's a learning experience that has benefitted us. Doing a project as collaborative as Piecework over zoom calls, and a shared document really allowed us as a club to grow stronger, being that we needed to put the effort where it could have been easier to not. We learned a lot from our leaders last year who navigated through the beginning of this pandemic when everyone was sent home. Their effort continued even when everything else stopped.

With this we were really motivated to continue on and present our special 40th anniversary of our annual Piecework. We hope we can share the creativity and ingenuity of Bentley students. Piecework highlights the identities of the authors and the diversity of the students as a whole. This year's writing we can see many of the author's writing about the struggle with stress of this strange past year.

We would like to thank all of the authors who submitted their work, and all of the individuals who helped this project succeed.

Thank you,
Bentley Literary Society

Short Stories

Missing

Clank. With one flaming hot gulp, whiskey rushed down Jack's throat like water rushing down a ghastly rapid river. *Clank.* Sorrow washed away after one swift swallow. *Clank.* One year swept up into flames.

From a limited side angle, Jack is likely to be mistaken as a newly enlisted member of the U.S. military. The untamed waves flowing from the top of Jack's head, adversely, would tell you that Jack lives in a Chevrolet Astro Van. A lanky teenage boy, whose perpetual use of prescribed acne ointment is equivalent to a cruel game of whack a mole. To conceal his natural monstrosities, Jack devotes a large sum of time and energy into his attire. At least, *he once had.*

Jack peered out the clear glass window to observe the plush suburban neighborhood he called home. While the sky was bright blue, and the sun glistened gold, dullness lingered in the air. His homely street wreaked of routine and tediously trimmed lawn hedges. While the hedges were still neatly trimmed today, there was a voracious void gnawing away on Jack's brain.

"Are you alright?" K.C. bellowed from across the marble kitchen counter. "We don't look too hot."

Jack and K.C were extremely close. Jack had always felt comforted in having his pal close by his side. When life turned sauerkraut sour, like it had, K.C. tried to provide fatherly advice, "We shouldn't be drinking."

"I... why..." Jack was cut-off by A.J.'s half-hearted chuckle, "We're starting to sound like mad men! What we need is more shots!"

A.J. thumbed one shot glass and placed his middle-finger in another, pinning each of the three glasses delicately together, and hovered them over to the sink. He turned the faucet on and water hosed out, erupting out of each glass-like lava erupting out of a volcano. He then moseyed across the kitchen, towards the liquor cabinet, and sarcastically snarked, "If we don't practice now, how will we fit in at those senior parties?"

A.J. gazed up above at the magisterial liquor cabinet, reached for an oak wood chair, stumbled on his first attempt, and then successfully climbed to victory. When he opened the cabinet, mesmerizing arrays of green, gold, and clear liquor bottles reflected from his hazel eyes.

“How about sour apple Pucker? Mother pucker that sounds delicious!”

Jack positioned himself in his shot taking stance, as shots of sour apple Pucker were poured preciously. Liquid poison, almost as paralyzing as Prozac. He glanced over the counter and noticed an orange plastic vessel standing properly near the kitchen sink. Mom must have forgotten to hide those again. Jack quietly muttered, “What time...”
BZZ. BZZ. BZZ.

Jack released his grip from his glass and fuzzily stared at his iPhone as it did the Irish Gig on the kitchen counter. K.C looked Jack sternly in the eye, “Let’s not look at the phone.” The effects of whiskey were inching closer, and Jack felt nauseous enough to kneel before the porcelain throne. Instead of rushing to the nearest toilet, an impulse inside galvanized his right hand towards his iPhone. Hazily, he read a message from mom.

Honey, I need you to pick your sister up from school, she missed the bus.

One year ago, Emma sat wildly in her IB physics class. The final bell cheerfully rang. “Mr. Galeo? I’m still a little fuzzy on Newton’s first law of motion!” To the external world, she was as shy as can be, yet she felt a sense of comfort in this particular physics classroom. All of the outside noise dissipated at the sight of Albert Einstein sticking his tongue out at her. “Do not fret! Do you have a couple of minutes? I think I can clear up any confusion.”

“I think I can spare a couple of minutes,” she nervously glanced at the clock in the corner.

Mr. Galeo rolled up his sweaty sleeve, “Right then! You see... this English gentleman, Isaac, discovered that a body continues in its state of rest, or of uniform motion in a straight line.”

Emma interrupted, “Yes, yes, I understand that part. But not all objects stay in motion?” She wasn’t certain whether she just asked a question or made a statement.

“I like where your mind is at, Ms. Emma. There’s a caveat to the law. A body continues its state of rest, or of uniform motion in a straight line, EXCEPT in so far as it is compelled by external impressed forces to change that state. Also, let’s not forget our friend; gravity!”

Emma's left leg frantically bounced up and down as she quickly peered over at the clock. To accurately tell how much time has passed, you couldn't rely on the clock itself. It has never been accurate, but the little hand still innocently ticks away. How much time has passed? Was it ten or twenty minutes?

"Ohhhh, thank you so much Mr. Galeo. I understand now, and I hate to leave you so quickly..."

"Ms. Emma, it's my pleasure. Just remember, you're brighter than you give yourself credit. Go catch that bus." Mr. Galeo moved his arm like a crane to wipe the perspiration from his forehead, revealing a soaked stain of sweat underneath his armpit.

His words found a way to make her feel warm inside, like he gently wrapped a soft blanket around her soul. She's struggling with self-confidence. How could she, with the pressures of following her brother's perfect footsteps. Mr. Galeo recognized this sense of insecurity, of doubt, and he couldn't help but think of his younger self when watching Emma in class. "See you on the morrow kiddo!"

With those words, she bolted out of the classroom and sprinted as fast as her tiny feet could handle. She pumped her arms back and forth while her backpack swayed left to right hanging on by thin straps. As she shoved open the heavy door, with all her force, she found a vacant parking lot and the tail end of the last yellow bus wagging its goodbye.

"I need to pick up Emma." The words jolted out of Jack's mouth before he was capable of processing what he implied.

"Please. We know this is hard for you, but..." K.C. attempted to advise.

"Honestly, I feel fine. At most, I'm a little buzzed, but then again when am I not? You know the drive, it's less than five minutes away, that's all."

"Look, Jack, you don't need to do this..." K.C. was cut off once again.

"I say we take the trip. Who cares? We've been locked up in this house for what seems like an eternity, we could use some sunlight for a change." K.C. picked up where he left off, "Just think about it. It's a suicide mission! She doesn't need you right now. She..."

Jack articulated one last time, "She needs me."

A moment of deathly silence sliced through the air like a sharp steel knife through warm butter.

“Well, the last time I checked, a black BMW was sitting in the garage.”

With her heart pounding, Emma fumbled her phone out of her back blue jean pocket. Her thumbs wiggled in warp speed as she called for help. “Mom?” Panting “Are you around?” Panting, Panting “I missed the bus again.”

“Aw honey, I’m just about to enter the nail-salon! Your brother is home, he’ll come pick you up. Do you want me to text him for you?”

Emma nodded, “Yes, please.”

“Don’t you worry sweetheart, he’ll be there soon. Got to go!” and the conversation quickly died.

Emma smirked at the thought of her brother actually picking her up. Last weekend, the family had celebrated Jack’s 16th birthday. He secured his driver’s permit within one week, but he’s never shown any interest in being Emma’s chauffeur. Not that Emma ever asked.

“Hey, Emma! Let me guess, you missed the bus again? You’re always fussing around, aren’t you?”

Emma’s thoughts were interrupted, “Hey Molly! It’s been a long day, let’s just put it at that.” Molly felt obliged to help out Emma, as she knows the same would be true if their situations were reversed.

“Do you need a ride? John and I were just heading out to town right now to grab some much needed coffee from Bagel Shop.” Emma hesitated, revisiting her moms’ words. A small, dying part of her was somehow revived at the thought of her big brother picking her up from school. She repositioned her shoulders and stood proud. “Nah, thanks for the offer. My big brother should be on his way any minute now, did I tell you about the new BMW mom and dad bought him for his birthday? I better get the same treatment next year.” “Is it blacked out? I saw somebody speeding through town the other day in a slick black BMW, I figured it was Jack.”

With a bob of her head, Emma proudly acknowledged, “Yup, that’s him...Well, have fun with John and I’ll catch you tomorrow.”

“Yes queen! Give your brother a hug for me.”

The thought of giving her big brother a hug nearly sent up her afternoon lunch. Today was Mexican chili day, and she didn't want to relive that moment twice.

After stumbling down the wooden steps leading to the garage, Jack gazed at his jet-black BMW 7-series sedan, sitting quietly still. The automobile was barely visible as it blended into shadows of the garage. With no windows, and no working lights, the black abyss provided Jack with unusual comfort. A comfort only few would understand. Jack was tempted to sit down on the cold gravel beneath his bare heels, and allow his eyelids to rest. Instead, he gravitated towards the BMW. Before he could reach to pull the handle, the sleek door popped open as if this pristine machine understood his every intention. A whiff of luxurious leather filled his nostrils as he entered the automobile. Hands now hovering the steering wheel, Jack sat in silence as the warm and wet whiskey sweat began to sprout from the very tip of his acne ridden forehead.

Jack inhaled deeply in the darkness. No matter how hard he tried, Jack couldn't block the lingering doubt that seeped into his thoughts as water seeps into a flooded basement. As he exhaled, his thoughts rushed frantically alongside his breath like a swarm of bees. He pressed his foot against the break, and before he realized, the engine began to hum.

Jack just noticed that his pointer finger and thumb were wet. Strange.

“A.J., why are my fingers wet?” The humming of the engine vibrated the interior of the car.

Breathing heavily, he turned his head to the right. He proceeded to peer into the rearview mirror, only to find the backseats just as empty. He brought his hands on top of his head, and wondered if he had taken his pills for the day. Jack suddenly felt a familiar feeling creeping up inside; loneliness.

Twenty minutes had passed, and Emma was hit with the sobering suspicion that her brother was not on his way. She knew he wouldn't waste his time with her, especially considering the last shouting match they had a day earlier. The small part within her that had recently sprouted back to life, had just as quickly lost its line of oxygen. A tear slipped out of

Emma's left eye, and she rubbed the burning bullet quickly away. She began typing a message to her brother, but stopped mid-sentence. I don't need him. She picked her bag up off the floor, and swung it back around her shoulders.

Emma began the weary walk home, as she was already behind schedule and couldn't wait any longer. Only a twenty minute walk, I can do this. I don't need anyone else. Once she found herself off of school property, she paused a moment to digest the road ahead. The road home was one, lengthy, and windy path which resembled the composition of a vicious python. Each snippet of road extended about thirty feet before the next turn, making it difficult to envision the end. I'll be home soon.

Winds began to pick up, twisting dead leaves into mini tornados along the sides of the road. Emma noticed a dark cloud looming behind her, and picked up her pace in an effort to beat the rain. As she continued walking, she mulled over all the reasons why her brother abandoned her. Maybe he never got mom's text. I should've reached out to him. Her feet began to pace back and forth, as if they were two race cars fighting for first and second place. She was on her way, right as a white van pulled up beside her. "Little girl, do you need a ride?" Emma's heart began to pounce again as she was startled by the sudden interruption. She could barely make out his face, although he sounded like an old gentleman. His face was clouded in the shade of his car, but he sounded sweet enough. A ride home would save me twenty minutes.

"Yes....sir" she hesitated and gulped down what felt like an ounce of saliva. Emma pointed out into the distance, "Could you drop me off at the end of West Street?" He leaned over, and popped open the side door. As he returned back into his shady position, his mouth widened in pursuit of a smile. His yellow stained teeth brightly blinded Emma's sight, and sent shivers down her spine as she entered the van. "Off we go."

As the garage door mechanically moaned, Jack shifted gears into reverse, slowly rolling out of his garage. The bright sun beamed through the sunroof glass, bending the darkness within. Jack nearly went blind as if a flashbang exploded in front of his face. He squeezed the gear stick and pulled it back to drive. The hum quickly progressed through puberty and evolved into a deep roar.

Jack soared in his jet-black BMW, twisting and turning down West Street.

He began to notice the bursting blend of red and orange leaves. Jack felt comforted with the color, as if he was reuniting with an old friend. A friend he so desperately missed over the past year. Emma, I'm almost there.

Interrupting the mesmerizing spell of fall, an old piece of paper fell from the top mirror and flung across Jack's face. Just as captions slowly appear across the screen of a foreign film, the words popped off the page in front of Jack's eyes.

Belmont High School Junior, Emma Thompson, goes missing.

Jack's eyelids slowly shut, and a single tear burned down his cheek. His body blended in with his machine and accelerated in one uniform motion. As his foot began to weigh down the pedal, the speedometer rose rapidly. 65....70....80...100... On Jack's last inhale, he met his sister's sweetly smiling face. Jack had finally arrived.

Chasing Feathers

Another hour passes as I contemplate my next move. A soon-to-be college graduate, I need to figure out this whole, “Career” thing. You know... the search for a job, the interview for the job, and the acceptance of the job. I interviewed at Deloitte last month. For which position? I forget, but I know it had a fancy title and a fat salary to boost. I thought I would be happy right about now, but the sobering reality is that life moves too quickly to step back and take a deep breath. My eyes burn dry as I stare into the abyss of the pixels that percolate with energy on the screen of my Dell laptop. An endless search for the right job, one that I have yet to fall upon.

My only break from this timeless void is when I play with my new kitten. I bought this toy, and by toy, I mean a black stick with a yellow feather glued to a strand of white string.

I cannot help but be bewildered as my furry little feline continues to find joy in chasing this toy. It's day 1460, and by now, I would assume he has realized that this feather dangling off the end of a string is an imposter: not an actual bird, but a manufactured mockery of his intelligence. I want to scream, “It's a trap!” A trap of waking up every... single... day... with an undying desire to catch that damn bird.

Where was I? Ah yes, the painstaking process of putting my degree to work. My years in academia have been fun, but they were just a bridge between adolescence and adulthood. Most of my friends are ready to party, celebrate, and embrace the accomplishments of the past. Celebration disgusts me. It is just a degree, ink on paper, a minor step in the pursuit of happiness.

Exhausting, is how I would describe being a second semester senior without a plan. I wish I could just mosey around the house, with my cat, all day long without a care in the world. I would love to be the puppet master behind his playful profession and breathe life into his imaginary foe. Some days, he catches it. He holds on to it with all his might, and then lets down his guard.

In that split second, the moment of complacency, he loses to the divine spirits that continue to yank and pull on his dream: his dream of catching the bird. His eyes bulge, a beautiful blue, crystal clear, and burn bright enough that if you look closely, you can see the bird dancing in the air. An endless, yet graceful, dance. I wonder if this bird haunts him as much as he taunts him. When my kitten crawls into a ball and curls his head, closes his eyes, does the chase continue? Does the bird seem so close, right within reach, and then disappear into thin air as he abruptly awakes from his cozy catnap?

I pity him, my cat, that is. I will never understand *Felis catus*, clearly inferior to humans. If only he had my wits. Stuck in a battle he will never truly win, and yet he will fight it until his last breath. Then again, maybe he does not want to catch it. I think he likes always being one-step behind, always one reach away from that feather... on the end of a string.

Andrew Hollander

A Short Story

"Why do you drink so much?" She asked tenderly.

"What the hell else is there to do when it's raining?" he was frustrated with the question.

"Anything else I suppose."

"Well, anything else is boring."

"I really wish you wouldn't have another."

"Oh go to hell, I'm gonna do what I want."

She closed her eyes.

"Why do you have to be like that?"

"Don't you have other things to think about other than me?"

"No." Her voice had choked up.

"I'm sure you do"

Catherine stormed out of the place and went back to the room. She hated when he got like that, and it tested her love for him. He crossed his arms under his chest and leaned his head down over the bar. He held a frown while the bartender refilled his glass.

"Why does the world hate me?" Joshua cried.

The bartender raised his eyebrows amused.

"What's wrong?"

"The world is ending. At least my world is ending."

"That's a shame."

He felt bad for being so callous. But then It came back into his head, and he got mad again. He turned it over and over again and every time his stomach curled, and a rage came from deep within him. The rage turned into sadness, and he felt like crying. But the tears wouldn't come, and so he just felt helpless.

Outside there was a storm. The rain pounded heavily against the door, and it would whip the windows when there was a gust of wind. The exposed hallways of the hotel flooded, so the workers went out with their brooms and pushed the water away into the gutter.

The bar was made of wood primarily, and even in the rain, the windows made the place feel open. There were not that many tables and most of the floor space was reserved for dancing late at night. The bar was one room, and in the back, past the bathrooms, there were pool tables and an air hockey board. Around the pool tables, there were dark sofas, and it made the bar feel like a cafe, bar hybrid. Outside the rain kept on and Joshua sat drunk and alone.

In their room, she cried into the pillow and felt scared. She didn't know what to do, and she was worried about Joshua. She wondered if he would stay with her and if he did, would he become dead inside, a shell of what he used to be. So she cried some more and then fell into a restless sleep.

Joshua came back and fell into bed next to her and held her close. He put his arms around her, and his head rested behind her hair which smelled familiar. Tears came, and he wept. Catherine woke up and could feel his body shaking.

"Will you leave me?" she asked.

"No." He whispered.

"Even if it gets hard?"

"Even then." He had stopped crying.

"What are we going to do?"

"We'll love each other, that will be enough."

In the morning they looked at each other and smiled, reassured. Cathrine went to take a shower, and Joshua sat in the bed and looked at himself in the mirror. He looked at every detail of his face. There were bags under his eyes, and his brown ruffled hair swung to the side, and a slight beard was coming on. He watched himself until his mind faded away and all that was left was his body.

Benjamin Deckhut

Sometimes We Wouldn't Even Win

Sofia had told me about the job a couple of days before. I had asked her a few months before if I could get a job at the little Italian restaurant she worked at in town. She told me she would let me know soon but never got back to me.

I asked all around during that time just trying to get some work. I had asked neighbors, friends, family, and people who I had not spoken to in a while. Some answered and some didn't, I didn't blame the ones who didn't, it was a hard time for everyone.

I moved some boxes for Aimee who worked upstairs at my mother's hair salon. I liked working for her because she paid me a hundred dollars for it. She called me a while later to have me drive to Somers to pick up a product, but she gave me the wrong address and it ended up taking me twice as long. I didn't mind, I was happy to have the work, and she paid me another hundred for it.

My old piano teacher also answered me back for some work. I went to his house in the afternoons for the better part of a week weeding his backyard. I would hear him playing the piano as I sat outside, I assumed he was trying to come up with new music since he was in a band. I just wanted to be inside and play along with him like back when I was a kid. It was strange seeing his home life because he only ever came to my house. What was even stranger was meeting his wife and baby. He would come over every week when I was growing up for about thirteen years. So as he saw me grow up I also saw some of the new changes in his life. I remember him getting married, and I remember him telling me his wife was pregnant, and when he finally had the baby. So to be at his house seeing his life for the first time struck me differently and strangely made me feel old.

I worked at my mother's shop for a week answering the phones, doing the laundry, and if she needed me to I would go outside and weed the plants. I did not like working for her because it was too easy and I felt I was stealing from her by having her pay me regardless of how bad I needed it.

So then I worked at my father's Auto Body shop for a day and he had me move some old car parts out of a dusty room for a couple hours and then told me I could leave. I would come home and they would both tell me how they appreciated my help but that I needed to find an actual job. They both were struggling on their own during this time and I understood what they meant. It is not like I was being lazy I had taken the initiative to find things but nothing was working out. That's when I called Sofia back up and asked her if she had heard anything back about me coming to work at the restaurant.

I have someplace better, she told me. I half heartedly asked where, figuring she was just trying to get me out of her hair because she did not have any luck finding me a spot at her place. She told me, A new restaurant just opened across the bridge. I'm leaving here and going to start to work over there and I think I can get you in, she said. I'm good friends with the manager, she used to work here but left because the owner was an asshole to her, same reason I'm ditching because they wont let me serve, she continued. Now interested, I asked what the restaurant was called. Two Tannery, she told me. She said, I'm pretty sure I can get you in, I'll ask the manager if she needs anybody, I'll tell her you have experience in restaurants, they need people like that.

I almost forgot I had restaurant experience. I had worked at this steak house for a year until they shut down suddenly right before the summer started last year. Them shutting down really screwed me over, the whole rest of the summer I had to work in the shop with my father cleaning cars and sanding parts. If it had stayed open I would have had a place to go work when I got back from college. Instead I was stuck being unemployed during this tough time begging everyone I knew for some work.

A couple of hours later Sofia had called me up and said that I was to go to Two Tannery the next day at two o'clock and ask for Jessica. I told her how grateful I was and that I owed her.

I woke up the next day and found myself eerily happy. I went downstairs to the cupboard and took out some bread to be put in the toaster, and grabbed some eggs out of the refrigerator. When I finished cooking I went outside with my plate and ate my breakfast. It was still too early to get ready so I went back inside and turned on the television. I watched some movie that I started midway through about some degenerate gambler who always loses but at the end finally wins big. I thought about what if the next day he had just tripped and fell and hit his head a certain way that killed him. He would have died happy, but I guess the point is does the winning even matter, all that stress for nothing.

The movie finished around noon time and I had gotten hungry again so I made myself a sandwich. I ate, then decided it was about time to start getting ready. I went upstairs to the bathroom and as I was getting undressed I looked in the mirror and realized I needed to shave. I lathered my face with shaving cream and started shaving. I just washed the excess cream off in the shower and began drifting off into memories and thoughts.

I thought of my girlfriend who lived a couple states away, maybe I should call her when I get out to see how she's doing, I thought. I didn't want to bother her, she was probably busy. I figured I would just call her after it was over and tell her the news if I got the job or not. The movie made me start to think about how me and my friends would play poker at night in my backyard and drink some beer. We would each put in five or ten dollars and play until one person was the winner and got all the money. Me and my friend Ethan would sometimes devise a plan beforehand about where to look if one of us had a good hand so we could win the pot for that round. If one of us won at the end we would secretly split the cash between us. We didn't feel bad about cheating out our friends because we didn't do it always and sometimes we wouldn't even win, but the others would cheat too and sometimes look at peoples hands when they went to the bathroom or shuffle the deck in their favor when no one was looking.

After I got out of the shower I picked out what I was to wear. I had to make an impression because it was an interview but I didn't want to be overdressed, also partly because it was 87 degrees out that day. So I picked out some olive slacks, a tan short sleeved button down, and some brownish oxfords. They were too wrinkled though so I gave them a run with the steamer. When the steamer decided it did not want to work I put them under the iron. I put on some deodorant, and a new vetiver cologne. I was just about to leave when I figured I should probably print out my resume just in case she asked for it.

I got in the car and headed on my way to the restaurant. As I pulled out of my driveway I saw our landscaper mowing our lawn. He was scraggy, and dilapidated like an old shack. He wore his hat backwards and a tank top that showed off all of his tattoos. I looked at him and I was happy I wasn't him — that I was me and I was sitting inside my car going off to get a job.

It was about a ten minute drive just across the bridge but I wasn't sure where to go once I got off the exit, so I plugged it in on the navigation on my phone. I started driving and it was too quiet that I started getting nervous about the confrontation even though I prided myself on being good at conversation. So I turned on the radio and it started playing Still Ill by The Smiths which made me lighten up and I started to sing to it.

About half way through the car ride I got a call from my mother. She said, Ray, what are you doing? I told her I was on my way to the interview. She said that she forgot that was today. I wanted to see if you would come cut my front lawn, and get those weeds next to the lot they are getting so big, all my clients keep telling me my weeds are so bad, can you do them after?, she said. I told her when I was done I could stop over. I hung up and turned the music back up and kept driving. I determined I was ready for the interview. I felt good about it and I felt good just to have the opportunity at a job and I wouldn't have to keep begging people.

I got off the exit and turned left like the directions told me to. I kept going straight for a bit and it told me to turn left again so I could get on Main Street which the restaurant was on. I turned left again and looked down at my phone to see how far and when the next turn was. I started to look back up when I felt a slight resistance to my car from the front and heard a thud. I braked instinctively and finished looking up through the windshield where I saw a small body lying on the ground about 25 feet in front of me. I came to a full stop and put the car in park. My hands shook as I took the keys out of the car and opened the door. I walked towards the body on the ground. It didn't fully feel real until I made it all the way and looked down. It was a boy, his arms were crooked and blood was coming out from behind his head. He wore jean shorts, black sneakers, and a red shirt that said, "Easy Does It". His eyes were open and they looked at me. Then they twitched along with his feet and the stare became empty.

Angelo Amodeo

The Hangman

I was being pushed from behind. The force was the only guidance I had because I couldn't see in front of me. I could only make out vague shapes and fuzzy lines. As I was being pushed I eventually hit my shin and felt that sharp pain that comes with it. I realized I had encountered stairs so instinctively I began stepping up them. I made it up to some sort of platform and could feel the heat of the sun on my body now. With the sun I could see a little clearer through the bag over my head.

I heard voices and conversations between the voices. They were in front of me, I believed it was a crowd. I was not sure why I was facing a crowd of people. Frankly I didn't even know where I was to start with. Or why I had this bag over my head. Or why I was being pushed from behind.

A hand touched the top of my head and squeezed. It grabbed the bag off my head and tugged my hair with it. The sun blinded me for a moment and when my vision ceased to be blurry I could make out that I was right. I was in front of a crowd. I looked around more and found other clues. I was on a wooden platform. There was a man to my right who was standing by a lever. The source of the force also had been a man. He stood behind me holding my hands which were handcuffed. In front of me was the crowd like I predicted, standing under the sun. Men, women, and even children all looking at me. They were looking into my eyes and as I looked back and met with their eyes I saw the curiosity and disgust behind them. The contact could only be held so long before they looked away and the attraction was made with another stranger. The last place I looked was above me. There a noose hung.

Before I could even think about what was happening footsteps came up the stairs. It was a man and he walked to the front of the platform and faced the crowd. All the eyes focused on him now and the conversations quieted. He said aloud, "Today we hang this man for the terrible crimes in which he has committed. He has been found guilty by the court of law and sentenced to death by hanging."

Once I saw the rope I knew what was happening yet for it to be said felt like a stab. My heart dropped. I could not fathom that this was happening. I don't know what I did, there had to be a mistake. I don't know how a mind can function knowing that it is going to cease to exist in a few moments. I thought about all the people who knew that their death was coming. Is this what it felt like? The people who find themselves in this situation often know what they did to get to get there. A smoker is told he has a year to live because he has lung cancer. Or a man who spent his life butchering people is finally sent to the gallows. Is that me? Then there are the other half who know death is coming but it's not their fault. A woman with a gun to her head from a home invader. Or a man who suddenly sees a truck coming at him as he's walking across the street. And then there are the few who do it to themselves. I can't even begin to think about the mind of someone who knows death will greet them when they step off that bridge.

But what am I in this situation? I know for sure I didn't choose to be here. Then that leaves the other two options. I feel like it's not my fault. I don't even remember how I got here. I can't for the life of me think about what I did to get here. Yet I can't help thinking that maybe I did do something for me to be in this position. I can't tell if I am wrong or they are wrong. I don't know what I did to get here. Did I commit some terrible crime like they said I did? Am I going to see the faces of the people I killed in this crowd right before I drop? Or is this really all a mistake. I mean why would all these people think I'm the terrible person who did these terrible crimes if I was not?

I can't even change it now. There is no way in these few minutes can I change the minds of all these people. I am going to die and that's the end. I can't even cry or feel sad. I can't even look remorseful like these people are hoping I would. All I can do is stand here and think.

The man from the front of the platform walked over and grabbed the noose. He with the help of the man behind me placed it around my neck. The rope was kind of itchy. Bit stupid of me to care about how the rope felt now, since it will crush my trachea in a couple of minutes.

The man who announced my hanging turned to me and said, “Do you have any last words?”

I thought about it for a moment. The crowd stood absolutely silent, and I could feel the eagerness in the air as they waited for me to conjure up some sort of apology to finally show the remorse they are waiting for, or a non-apology just to ascertain that I am terrible. I thought how I have never used a quote in a public forum in my life, might as well make something useful out of the books I read in my life. So I said, “Sometimes carrying on, just carrying on, is the superhuman achievement.”

I looked to my right at the hangman. I wonder how often he does this. Be the driving force that puts into action the ending of a man's existence. I wonder if he goes to bed thinking he's doing justice, or if a little doubt makes its way into his mind and keeps him up at night. Or he could not think of it at all. He could wake up each morning and eat his eggs and bacon and go to work like any normal man, pull the lever and end something's life. Not a man but something. Maybe that's the way he stays sane and is able to go to sleep, by not associating a person at the end of that rope. I was just something to him. But to me he was the person who was going to end my life right now. I wonder what his name is, if he has kids, where he grew up, how did he get his mustache like that, where he lives now, if he has any friends, if my.....

Angelo Amodeo

Poetry

DEFINITION OF HOME COMING

- i. the simple act of coming home
- ii. nestling into one of your favorite cozy spaces
- iii. the act coming into one's self. returning into your own hands and body. returning to love in whatever form you desire,
converting your actions into what you've defined your home to
be-a place, person, a state of being.
- iv. coming home is like (ii.) maybe it's a location out of your presence or in the dreamlands but home should bring you inner
peace, inner love
- v. home coming feels like a meal, like flowers, toes playing in the sand or watching movies, loving the sunset home coming is
- vi. serenity
- vii. seeing angels

Ysanel Luciano

UNDERSTANDING AN ARTIST

We often don't get to chose what happens in life
Or what happens to our loved ones
Nor do we get to pick our stories
Our lifetimes,
Generations before us,
Or after at that.

Nevertheless a connection occurs
Through last names,
Photographs,
It's funny how life connects us to people we've never even seen
Yet
Something profound happens internally
That in return connects us to our moments in the present-

We don't get to chose much in this lifetime
But memories through someone else's eyes seem to connect us
anyways.

Ysanel Luciano

Old Paintings

Bring your white clouds to me
Like a door to your longing
I want to peek through

Bring your lavender smile to my eyes
Like a ghost I once knew before
I want to know your laugh

Bring all of your love
Like some giant gas drum
I want to drink it all

Bring what I am missing
Maybe your arms
I want them around me

Bring the spring lily
And let it sit upon your mind
I want it refreshed

Bring all that would be dear
Like a room for memories
I want to place you there

Benjamin Deckhut

Unnamed #1

Tonight I have forgotten my words
I have forgotten them as I have forgotten many things

Tonight I am lost once again
Where she once became apart, I have been left empty

And now the world has color
Not because she is gone, but because we have left

I miss her, but I do not need her
For she lives in herself as she always has and always will

I do not know If I know her
But at least I found myself near her and her green eyes

I do not know if she will love me
Or that I will love her
That is never certain

And now the days are drifting by
They cascade into each other
Where the sun burns the day
And emptiness fills the night

I cannot sleep, I cannot see
To say that I wish I never had her
To say that I never wanted her
To be free of the reachable past
Is to lie, and live without the courage of love

But now she has forgotten me
And I must live without her
So that I may love without her
But I will never forget her
That is certain

Benjamin Deckhut

2020

Our world set ablaze.
Scientists scramble through a sardonic maze.

It began with a whisper.
Transformed into a blister.
Slowly, slowly.
Then quicker, and quicker.

All the while, lives were lost.
You may ponder, at what cost?

A global shutdown unlike no other.
Reluctantly forced to rediscover.

Masks strapped around our face.
Gasping for air, we begin to empathize with her case.
For centuries, human activity has been a disgrace.
Now, mother earth earned her much-deserved space.

Emissions dropped, pollution partially halted.
Clearly, it is the earth we have so harshly assaulted.

We lit the fire and blindly doused her with oil.
Now our focus is on how we can virtually toil.

Questions remain as 2020 draws to an end.

Is this what we intend?

Can we be a better friend?

If so, take my hand, and together we ascend.

Andrew Hollander

identity

intimidating

simply the unknown

“what are you?”

an anomaly in a system void of grey

not only are you split in identity

but in place

“so you live in the ghetto?”

both sides tugging

who am *i*?

the suburban thoughts creep

making you lose sight

tainted by images created by society

city,

crime,

and vice

but it's home

where neighbors greet you with sunshine

and kids ride scooters along sidewalks that crack smiles

more white or black?
but you're not allowed to decide
others views determine
but why can't you both?

a history of jazz mixed with a symphony of reds
the crescendo filling your body
you remain full
even after the final performance

you know the two halves that made you whole

and while one may wear wings
they both exist within you

Taylor Haines

the nuclear family

family ties,
knots undone
the detonation of something nuclear
as two neutrons separate
you're radioactive
and neon signs contrast muted reality

where once stood one,
there now stood two
two homes
with complexities and impurities

within the first
sunset dances along midnight walls
low drones of virtual realities
dripping honeysuckle bliss

while the other lacks all
impurity writing cursive in foundation
secrets whispered through windows cracked

comfort in chaos
release from perfect posture and porcelain facades
it felt normal
easy

hindsight 20/20
your choice
childish whims
no curfew and sugary cereals
short lived pleasures
but not long term security

waking to uncertain future pounding at your door
you changed sides
and with view altered
you broke
through the picket fences

beyond the threshold existed her
the girl who wasn't and then was
embodying the separation

nothing more than a toy
a doll
propped upright by the delusion
of unity

it would have been easy to hate the glimmering perfection
the sparkle of her
but you didn't
because you could escape the bubble
she could not
and when she finally takes off the rose colored glasses
she will be forced to witness the reckoning

Taylor Haines

Ode to the Night Sky

Once Day withdraws its cozy brightness,
Thus bringing coolness to the ground,
You spread your missionaries of darkness
And let your children play around.
A stunning trace of Milky Way,
Your battle scar from the Bing Bang,
Steals our precious words away
And sets silence like a boomerang.
Your palette of shades: your emerald green,
Your midnight blue and indigo hues;
Your turquoise and black set the scene;
Your violet and cream leave subtle clues.
Your nocturnal portrait disappears
As Day arrives with dewy tears.

Alisher Birlikbay

Dang She's Kinda Cute

this poem is dedicated to
my best friend's big sister i'll always have a crush on
my big sister's best friends
the girl on my ultimate frisbee team who turned out to be a bitch
the latin@s in my ap spanish class i rarely miss
the beautiful queens i was in theatre with
the girl in my econ class w the back tattoo and about a million
colorful gel pens
the woman i worked with, who taught me sincerely trusting
someone doesn't always go amiss
the poetic queen i became dear friends with, confident and
fierce with her own sweet, soft spoken twist

it's intriguing
charming
enchanted
the way she expresses herself
do other girls
feel this way
about other girls
too?
i mean to be honest
i think i got a crush on u

but i wouldn't call it that
i thought maybe it just meant very close friends
but always holding back
i didn't want to slip up and do anything to make anyone
uncomfy
but i thought maybe you felt the same way as me
was hoping we both felt the same vibe
and that it wasn't just that you were perfect in *my* eyes
but that you felt it too
that you looked at me and maybe thought dang this girl is kinda
cute

i'm always caught between friends or maybe more
a guessing game really, i'm always unsure
always analyzing and re analyzing over analyzing every little
thing
like dang did she move her leg to touch mine on purpose?
or is it just a friend thing
is it normal to want to kiss the girl sleeping over at your house
who always sleeps over at your house
does everyone get that feeling around someone they care about

the funny thing is
she's just hanging out
free without a care

but me
i'm shaking im nervous
i'm overally aware
i want this girl to be into me
like dang i just want her to care
i'd do anything to put a smile on this girls face
i want her to know she's never been second plate
stay in this place with her
i wish i could read her mind
or maybe i wish i didn't feel this way at all
go back to a simpler time
when friends could always be just friends

is this feeling because something's wrong with me
something off with me?
sometimes i get too attached
i know i'm too sensitive
i know you may not feel the same at all
i know maybe it's all in my head
i know sometimes folks use me
it confuses me, sometimes i get a soft spot in my heart for a
beautiful girl...

but anyway.
i'd really like to know, do other girls ever feel this way too?
do you feel this way too?
dang, i think you're kinda cute

Nichole Kaba

Broken Promises

I was never the smartest guy, yet my mind races.
My thoughts scramble,
It's almost as if the year didn't exist,
But it did, although I wish it didn't.

Chance said "you can take your
Sweet time, but she ain't gone wait.
Cause a new coat of paint,
Won't make the stain go away."

Those words fit my mellow mood.
My soul, is torn at the seams,
The shreds are hard to recover, my hands
Trembling at the attempt to touch an idea.

I could say I'm sorry 1,000 times over,
They no longer hear it.
It's as if, I don't exist.
Escaping to the crevasses of my mind,

I see dreams. Unexplainable.
I see ideas and concepts,
With no real understanding in sight,
I wade in the water of my thoughts.

Quarantined, leading to isolation,
A time where everyone is at your
Fingertips...but me, I stray away,
Wanting to heal and be alone, finding

Nothing but solace in the hand of my savior.
I pray often, I don't read enough.
Guilt consumes my mind, and the anxiety
Of loved ones lost, but I stay silent,
Screams of sadness...

Am I ok, yes, but am I who I was created to be...
No.
I've broken so many hearts and promises
All I want now
Is to be able to say
I'm sorry.
To those reading, hope it doesn't scare you
I'm in a place heading out,

Looking on up, seeing light. I see progress
But I wish I could have closure.
Don't mind me, thank you God for always being by my side in
times of need.
Now it's time for me to pick up my cross, and walk...

Photography

Mount Katahdin



Amanda Carlino

Blueberry



AB

Alisher Birlikbay

The Endless Kazakh Steppe



Alisher Birlikbay

f



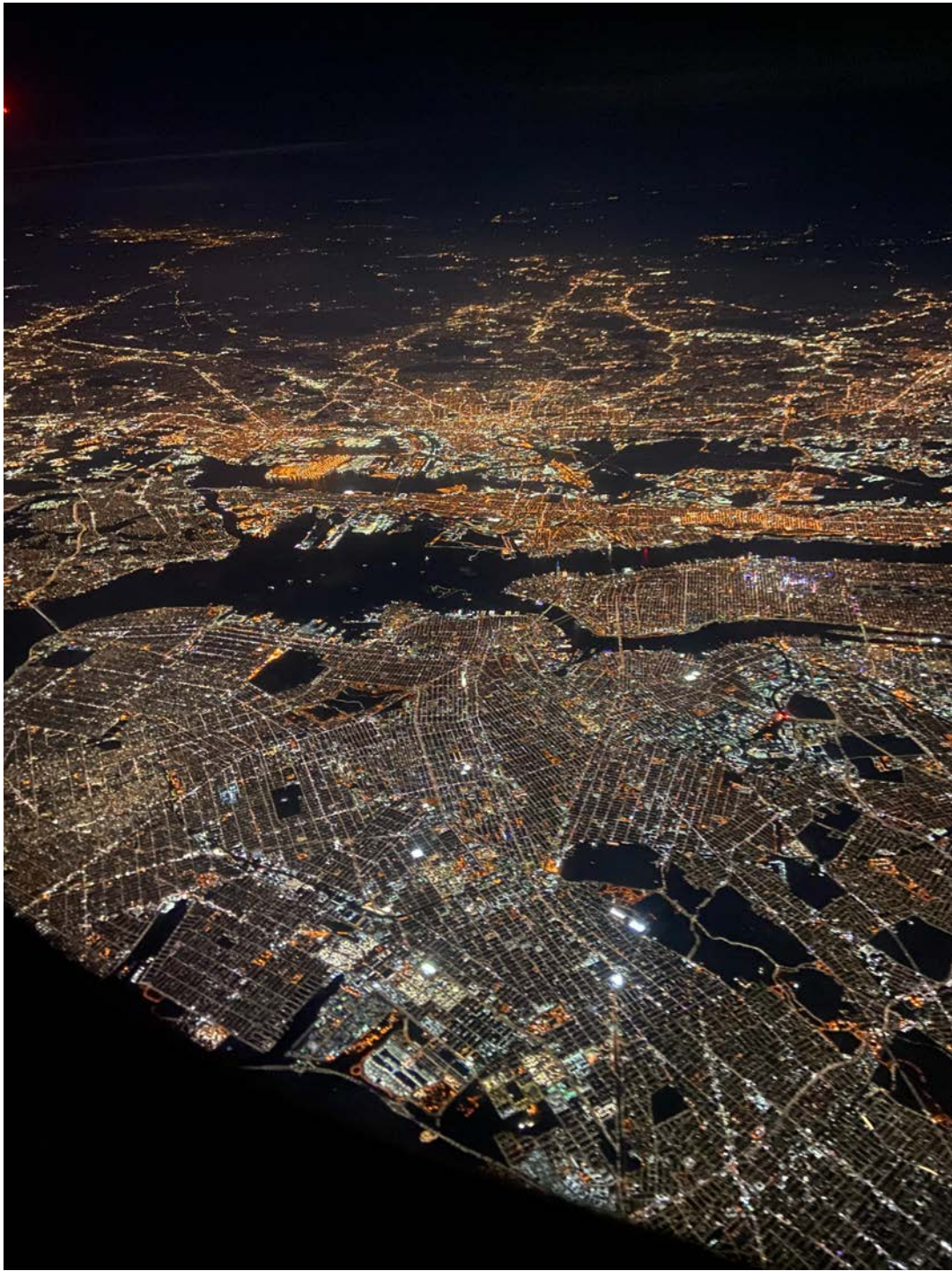
Nicholas Strauss

Portal



Nicholas Strauss

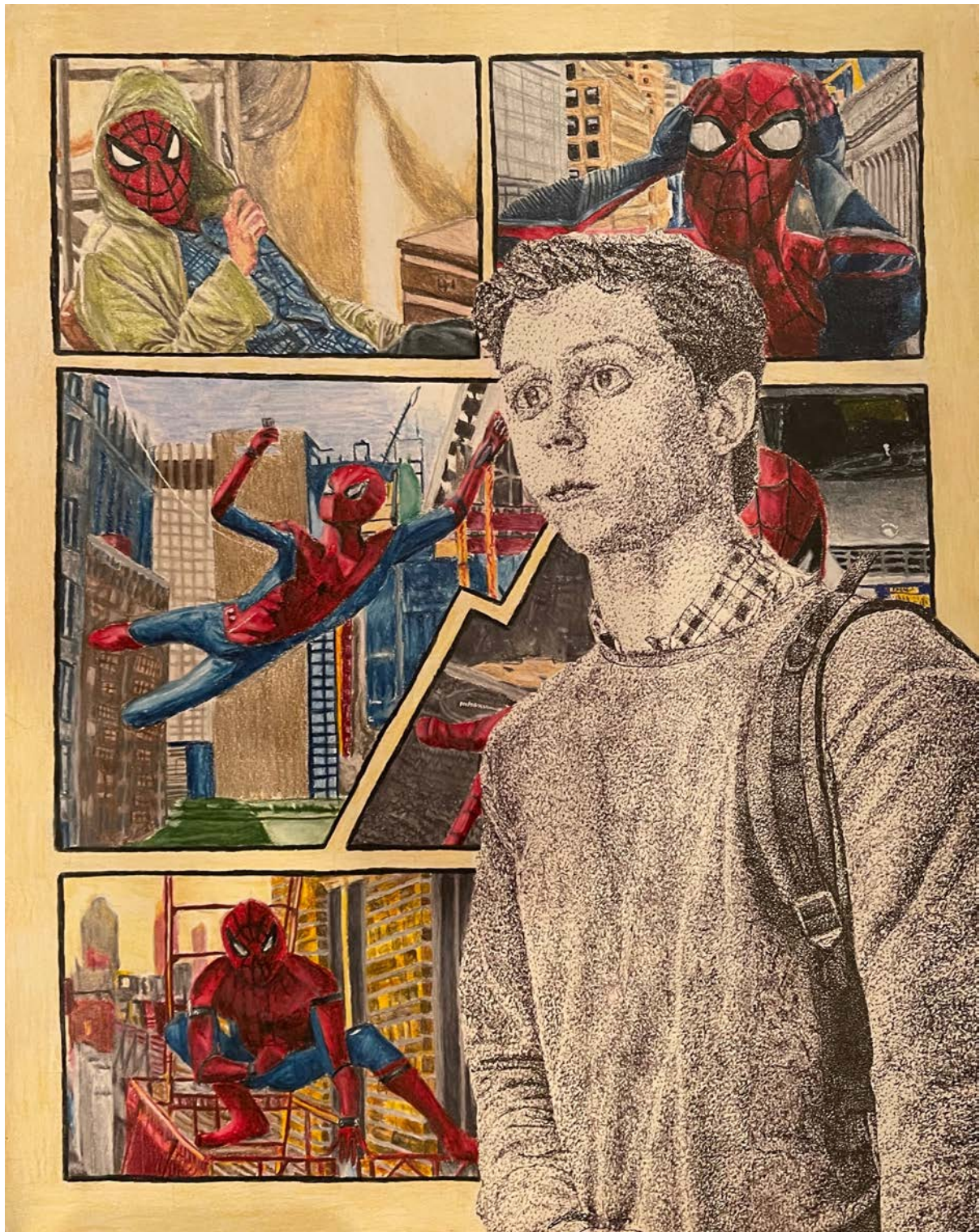
The City That Never Sleeps



Jacqueline Cupoli

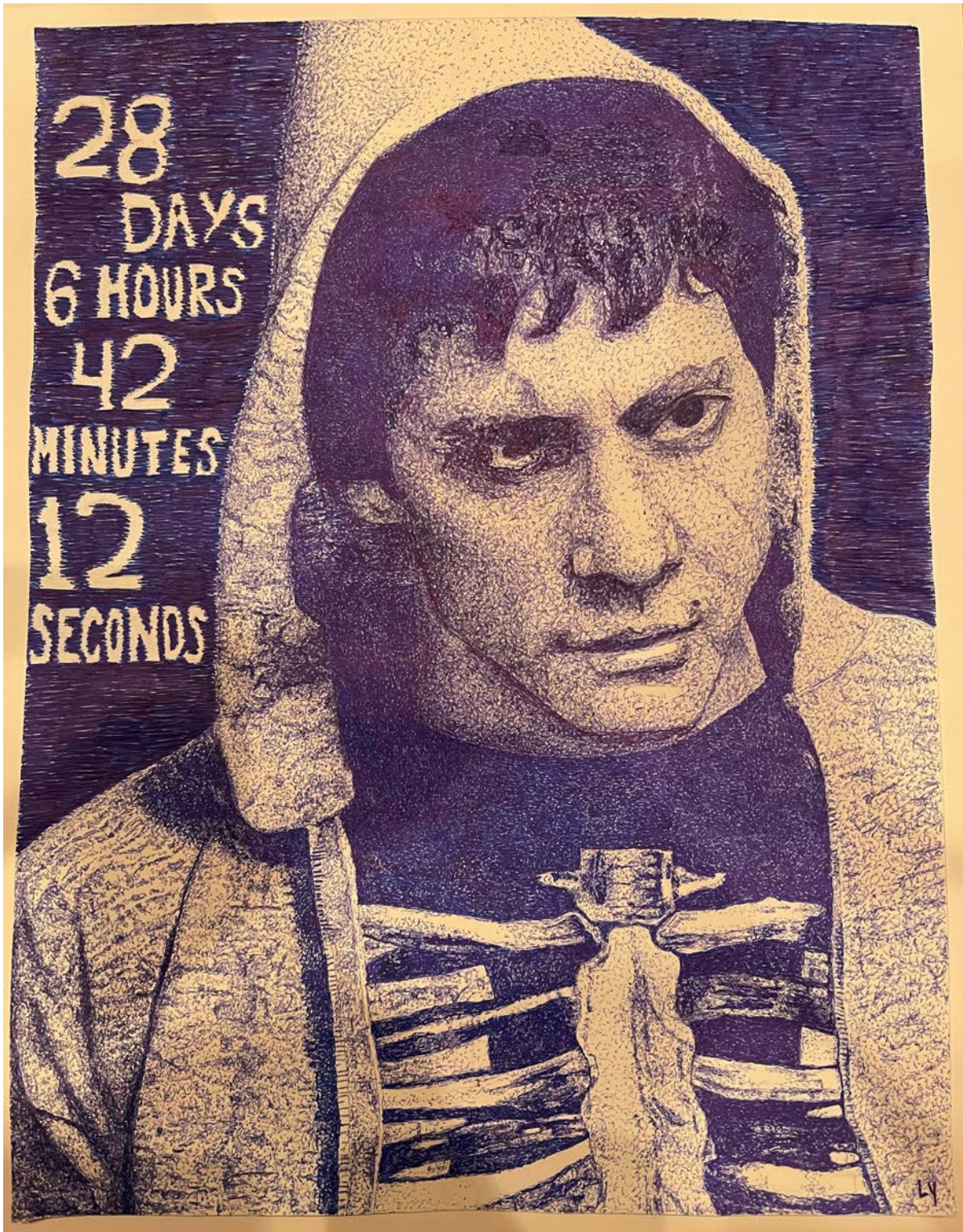
Artwork

Your Friendly Neighborhood Spiderman



Lauren Yacovone

Donnie Darko



Lauren Yacovone