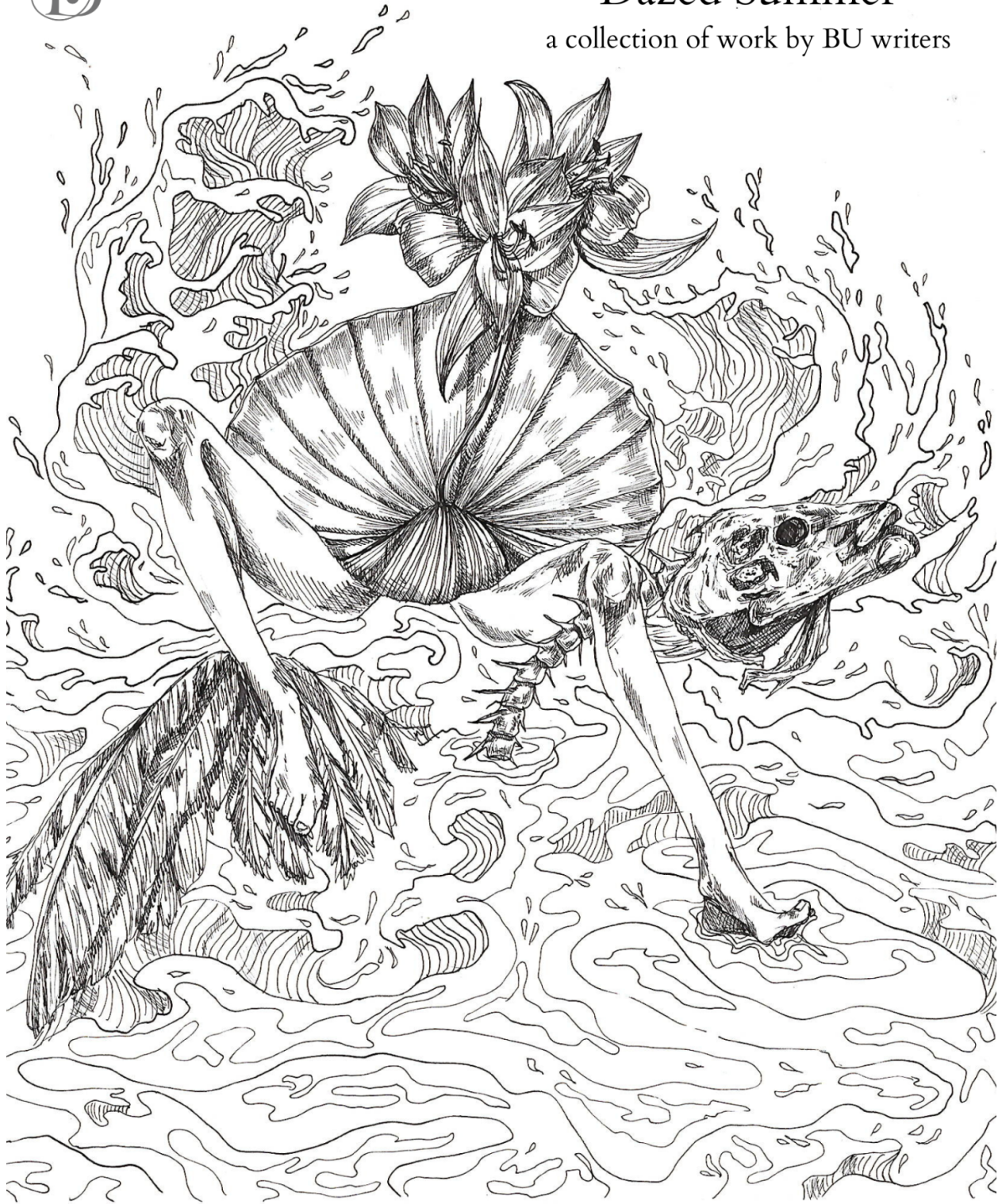




THE BEACON

Dazed Summer

a collection of work by BU writers



Cover Art by Marisa McCarthy

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Introduction

The Beacon is excited to be back with our summer edition, *Dazed Summer*, a chronicle of confessions and hopeful expressions from Boston University writers. This collection of poetry and prose acts as a sliver of light at the end of the tunnel during a time where questions are seldom answered. It offers relief in knowing we are not alone in our delusions and daydreams. It is a blurry haze between right and wrong.

So is life.

The title *Dazed Summer* is inspired by the incredulous state of the world over the course of these past years. When the world shifts in an unfamiliar manner and refuses to slow down, how do we react? We float through our days as slumped drones, muddling our way through a life we regret to claim as our own. Colored hues melt into a gray haze and we are left as shells; the tide softens our glow, but it also smooths our edges. Somehow, we refocus our breath to other passions, realizing there is more to life than watching the clock loosen its arms until it's too late. Our writers prove their passions by offering windows into their minds, reminding us of the importance of self-expression and vulnerability through art.

A special thank you to all that made this edition possible and for trusting us with your stories. Please allow yourself to dissolve into *Dazed Summer*.

Sincerely,

Delia Barbanti

Secretary of The Beacon

Journey to the West

Joanne Chang

I wonder if you'll ever hear this.
Friction creates fire and so we ran.
Lucky for you, ignorance is bliss.
This is my journey, I understand.

Friction creates fire and so we ran.
Our memories often leave me upset.
This is my journey, I understand.
Some things I wish I could forget.

Our memories often leave me upset.
Has our time apart changed anything?
Some things I wish I could forget.
I don't hate you. Hate is a scary thing.

Has our time apart changed anything?
Lucky for you, ignorance is bliss.
I don't hate you. Hate is a scary thing.
I wonder if you'll ever hear this.

up, up, away

Harrison Friedman

The Pier

the waves, when they come up to meet you
are tall, and flat, and they laugh
salt and snails and open their maws
but there was a statue, and a clank,
and you elevate. stuck in the air.

what hoary jaws! what golden teeth.
hands of stone, never rubble, and he looks like
he's been through about a million of these
and he'd just about leave you alone. a reed
that pierces darkness and the waves that yearn
and cry. it moves, he moves, and
you have two feet again.

fool! for the first time a fool. not you,
but he's got his book and he can't
pull you out. where's he come from?
"why the south; why of course the south,
that's why i talk like this;" his teeth chatter,
but he's not wet. "i went straight up
in the radio car."

the boardwalk elongates, and you go
halfway; and walk more, and it's
another halfway; but he's talking,
and he's enrapt, and his fingers twirl
and soften. he's done this before,
but he's done it for the first time.

wooooo ooooooh oooh oooh ooo
whoaaaaaaaaa
fooled around fooled around fooled around
not free not free not anymore

"why i could be free but i'm

in the dark; could be free but
they keep me in here; could be free
but you're on the lower level. do
you speak for me? idea or man?
are you telling on my tale?"

The Pitch

tall, sitting down, on the tv screen
but you're empty, in the big house
the room there is empty; the room here
has no guests; and it's a break. but across
there's someone, fuzz in fuzz out.
the night air warms, and pushes you forward
to the place you don't go; people were here
and there, and places are people but people
are not places. so it's empty.

you walk in to be pinned, and a bird in flight
pins you there, and all your life you've never seen
quite who does it. a cat in the dark whines,
but you're quiet. who promised heaven?
this is not it.

you watch from above you, and civilization
crumbles to rubble. a snap, a crack, they fall.
a factory cart burbles by, and that's it again,
and your needs are here but not
in the slightest
satisfactory.

dark; the dark breeds it, and you,
and fuzz in and out and
you need to leave right away
i'm coming
no i'm not
yes i'm coming back
no go away

will you ever win?
no; and no; and no;

you will never win; there is no victory;
no one does

you say to the dark
“i’m not interested in you; i want someone
who’s interesting; i want to love everyone;
i want your interest without your care;
there is no block inside another
i want sublimation from everyone’s eyes.”

The Fight

“have you ever taken flight? have you ever
looked down and seen your importance
how needy they all can be
and no one is more relevant than you
and everyone lacks you and always will?”

you scream; you drown him out; no
you can’t because he doesn’t drown;
he’s a statue after all; he won’t twirl
and he can’t bleed on his back
and he can throw a rock and go through
three people. and he can’t feel anything at all.
maybe don’t use english. he was bored.
he was in a band. you weren’t born.
surrender already.

it started, he says, in plasma. empty plasma,
a skeleton of glowworms and torn watch-straps.
why did he create himself again? die
to come back new? why weren’t you there?
who made him if not him? his face isn’t there
a black blotch across his neck, another, two on his arms,
his feet blister and pop and it comes out
black pus from which he’s made
but he can’t come back new
since he’s blue and alive
eternally six feet above the ground.

you'll be a million and one now
 he's crashed into the waves when you can't
 his head didn't break upon the rocks
 space spared the breath in his lungs
 fire lapped at his hair but didn't melt
 still a statue that won't crumble
 ozymandias looks up at him.
 lowest of the low,
 you despair but won't blow away
 like sand on a beach;
 your decay doesn't await.

mishehu yachol l'galgel
 et hachalonot calphei mata,
 yesh li machelet tenuah regshit
 "ze lo ya'avod; ani natzchi;
 ani bli mavet." can you just
 surrender to the sound.

"you all know me; i am
 your screen; but i will connect
 nothing with nothing,
 because nothing ends;
 nothing ever ends. where you cut me
 give me some air!"

The Desolation

if anything defines you it's a scroll;
 if anything watches you it's your face;
 if you can become anything it isn't you;
 try to die outside yourself
 try to survive to live
 try to become
 no becoming;
 but there can't be nothing,
 there can be anything but nothing,

the back is wind whistling
 and the front is the white sand
 the sky is neon, burning, pink,

coast stretching to a sea you can't
drive yourself into;
drive yourself away to become yourself
this duct tape makes you hush.

not building makes it all crumble;
think, he's dead and you're out
of the dark; but the sun makes it rust
and beans fill your belly
empty your belly on the sand;
work? try to work? that crumbled
with him and it's quiet before
and quiet after. bigger gears
don't turn; bigger gears halt.

oh won't the days trickle away
oh won't freedom die;
oh won't choice drive into the ocean
falling to fall, removing rope
there isn't a statue, there's a black wave
and its face is a grinning skull.

SO BRIGHT AND PINK
screams whirring away into a groan.

oh lord make my problems eternal;
oh lord make my answers temporary;
oh lord make the streets empty;
oh lord make the buildings full;
oh lord we need no homes;
oh lord we need more offices;
oh lord tear us apart;
oh lord don't let us come together.
oh lord make it desolate;
oh lord make it desolate;
oh lord lord make it desolate.

The Fantastical

you float through flat and gray
pavement unto pavement

the footsteps echo long and downwind
an unceasing eyeline
because the air is murder
because the air will kill you
because all you have are eyes and all you will have
are your eyes
here no ghosts wander the streets
here the ghosts stay home

close your eyes. the fear.
you look for answers but the rain
slaps your eyes and your car skids
isn't it out of place? aren't you leaving?
the streets bully but you stay
there is no reason to change
standing in the pouring rain
standing in the garden
you are happy and alone.

"pannnndemic! get your pandemic!"
"wmd! wmd over here!"
get a job? this is the only job.
the street is empty but you need money.
the street is here. the court. the port.
city hall bleeds but turns in on itself.
step backwards into your goal. nothing is new
because you are institutional and without vision.
you are too smart to break and too stupid to build.

they sit in screens but you sit in grass.
they are scared and you revel
you roll
you laugh and it's the only sound.
it gets warmer and warmer
and from above
like you once came
he descends. "isn't this real?"
i can't end it otherwise."
you both ascend into the killing air.

doot doot do doo do doo doooo.

peace of mind is in the past; it seems
like yesterday but you have slipped past
you've gotten away and left age;
left the end of an age.
"oh i can't explain what's going down.
but you were alone and now
you stand next to me."
no need to hide your face.
you have a smoke.
the sun sends you into a dream.

look at the city.
look at the city stand there.
you cannot leave the city; you are born
and you will die in the city. stand and watch it.
why would you ever leave? when you left
you sold your soul. find your answers
somewhere hiding in the city.
wander the streets with no beat,
your uniform in a box;
it will never love you.
but you don't have to love home.

A Collection of Poems

Katie McHugh

Alone and Above Room Temperature

We are laying in warmth,
A fleshy, bodily heat I have
Not felt since the womb,
And in this warmth we are
Morphing like embryos with
Our whispers, melting our skin
To sap so that, when we are
Birthed and hardened by the
Whip of the storm, we might
Remember what it was like to be
Soft.

After Confirmation

My grandmother mailed me a gift

Pages pale as my own skin

But what they spelled

Not because I could not read

For the God who lived in my desk drawer

That proud and modest Amen

Poured in the barest whisper

Towards a kingdom that was here

That in truth

Gold-faced book of prayers

Letters dark as birth marks

I did not know

But because I could not spare the time

Without Moses to part the dust

Reserved 'til my closing hour

And wrinkled hands reached forth

That was now

Had been in my grasp all along

Learning to Use the Scalpel

Those moments that are
Not stitches in time but
Clips of a mosaic, the colors
Undecipherable and each of
Us realizes we are blind,

Or rather, we have always been
Blind, our eyes shut to more
Than just blacks and blues;
When we fear that all semblance
Of feeling has escaped us,

And how could it remain when
We maim one another with all
The tools at our disposal? Dreams,
Prophecies, secrets, prayers;
So many means of running,

Trampling, and without even
Mentioning blood drawn by the
Hands, tears wiped by the Tissue,
as we cower in that limbo
Between anger and longing.

of all the things i want

i want to burn the world.
i want to rip my heart out, my hair out,
my skin.
i want to leave these crumbs for
lost children to find, and when they do
i want to say “come join me.”
i want to wipe the innocence from my eyes
the honey from my fingertips.
i want Death to cower ‘neath my name.
i want souls to pour like tears from my eyes,
carve scars of shadow to my lips.
i want to smash fine china;
smother constellations;
speak words and wine and wisdom
and be told to not swallow my tongue
but savor it.
i want to lay naked before a cacophony of sound,
to get high on sea salt and
drunk off waves.
i want to be in control,
to graffiti my father’s face
and ban the word “useless” as an adjective.
i want to take God’s mother as He once took my own,
plucked from the safety of a dream.
i want to write a letter to love.
i want it to write a letter in return.
i want to know justice, freedom, truth, karma,
beauty, heat, sex, sovereignty,
to have my hair braided and have sweet
nothings whispered in my ear.
i want to forgive and be forgiven.
i want to hope no more, wish no more, seek no more, pray
no more, trust no more, need no more,
want no more.

Performance Anxiety

Delia Barbanti

We play God as
We cradle our idols,
grazing Our fingers over their mouths,
letting the salt from Our skin
seep into their gums,
gnashing Our teeth with vigor,
eyes rolling back with pleasure,
convinced we are somehow better
because we sit on top
Olympia -
gagging on vomit,
clenching Our tears,
praying the day will close
so We can sleep;
enter the realm where stillness is allowed,
for stagnation is weakness,
and we hate the weak.

We play God as
we are bludgeoned with semen
and boyish lies,
forced to reckon with the reality that
inferiority isn't the result
of soiled flowers –
wilted promises clinging to broken stems -
but beliefs beyond Her realm,
beyond Her ability to revolt -
that some minds are not meant to be molded,
for they flourish in phallic delusions.

So why choose to play a losing game?

You had a choice,
and
you chose this.
No one forced *you* into anything.
You signed *your* life away at seventeen,
slit *your* palms,

watched as *your* blood pooled into the gauntlet,
took the oath of a false idol;
Who are *you* to question anything?
You want to be the best,
right?
Truly,
You are doing God's work.

They say
I am lucky.
I say,
I am a cog in the machine,
a cavity for coal,
a pussy slayer,
a cock sucker,
a drone of testosterone tendencies,
a proprietor of silence;
What makes *you* think
you are entitled to a voice?
You are merely a soldier,
worm food,
a vessel of allegiant distractions.
Except when I'm not,
except when the diagnosis falls on me,
"You should really talk to somebody,"
run down the clock
just to say I did it;
did what, exactly?
Kept my head down
for the potential of a cold medal,
a pat on the back?
a "I knew you could do it,"
except you didn't.

I am
an instigator
of unreasonable standards,
of
narcotic nightmares.
I am
a bird in a cage

stewing in an upheaval of heavy breathes
trying to fill my lungs to the point
of explosion
waiting for
tension to
be released
so I can fly.

Do you know who would kill to be where *you* are?
Kill for the chance
to sleep with the devil,
exchange a kiss in the hopes
he will untie the knots in *your* stomach,
silence the thoughts tumbling through daydreams,
convince *you* that *you* are sane,
that everyone wakes up in the morning
wrestling with themselves
to feel something other than anger,
that everyone fights the urge to sink into oblivion;
that happiness isn't a choice,
but a guarantee,
you ungrateful whore.

But,
they are right.
This is temporary.
One day I can be normal,
exist in the real world and
do as I please,
find purpose in other spheres.
It's not as though I've rooted my self-worth
in my performance,
that mirrors aren't my enemy
and caloric deficits a noble friend,
that life will be normal one day,
just as it is now;
that all of the tears *you* shed,
letters *you* burnt,
hearts *you* broke,
are mended
because the greater Good

caressed your cheek,
kissed your taint,
handed you a shot and said,
“Sorry for the interruption,
back to scheduled programming,”
no more excuses -

For
life waits for no woman,
especially one of *your* kind:
a banshee who bleeds,
wears her heart on her sleeve,
begs to take the time to find her footing,
feel the Earth that never stops spinning -

You
are fine because we say so,
because life goes on
and he doesn't look back as
self-reflection is for the weak,
and we hate the weak.

So,
swallow your pride,
lace up your spikes,
and run.

Teeth Grinding

by Lauren Justice

Oh, I feel continuously more sick. I don't recall when it began, my now enduring anxiety: that my body and mind are doomed and are festering and hurtling towards self-destruction. Not unraveling but wringing itself tighter and then tighter still so the unbearable tension on the threads will snap them until enough go that it loses integrity and the whole thing comes apart. When it comes apart it will not be easy or painless, by nature of the tension the torn ends will diverge with nothing less than whiplash, the severed halves will propel in opposite directions and keep the books balanced so it will at least be natural. First was the psychoanalytic therapy and I was proud to be taking care of myself but it doesn't look like I'm getting anywhere with that because the same things keep getting at me in different forms, so I feel like it's not just me and it's not just in my head, it's really all like that, then physical therapy for my back and I thought it was going well but now I'm doing it for my jaw too plus the pills to be taken before bed because since I wrote them that letter I've been grinding my teeth at night. So it doesn't feel so much like self-care anymore, it feels like damage control and I'm grasping at the threads fraying faster than I can catch hold of them. I remember after that first dream when I awoke screaming and throwing my head against the cabinet, I thought to myself *well I hope this doesn't become a regular thing*, and then it became a regular thing. So I started grinding my teeth at night that summer, and I'd have headaches and jaw pain for half the day after I got up. I wore a mouth guard to sleep if I'd remember, did meditation and mindfulness and cleared my mind of stress before bed, which helped with both the dreams and the teeth grinding but evidently not really because then I gnawed through my mouth guard. I chewed it in half. So I'm seeing someone twice a week for the temporomandibular joint dysfunction and I'm on the muscle relaxants, because of all the tension like I told you I don't even rest when I sleep, mind nor body, the former busy dreaming of my limbs being strapped like an animal to four corners of a table and my loved ones molesting children and strange seven foot men with limbs so long he crossed a room and grabbed me all in one step and falling backwards into the deep and the dark in the embrace of the demon whose fault all of this is, and the latter grinding my teeth to nubs at night to cope. Now nothing is really working so I think I will grind my teeth until my head is ugly and gnarled and dream of hell until my brain is black, but even so I won't forget being on the cusp of consciousness in the middle of the night, so slowly coming out of sleep that all there was at first was a priori emotion, anger and indignation, and a moment or a lifetime later finally with the mental capacity to know what for, that I wanted to grind my goddamn fucking teeth but my lover's hand arresting my suicidal jaw from its design, thumb on one side and four fingers on the other, gripping my face with greater strength than I could grind with and I grind hard, and him whispering to me STOP. Maybe it's the helplessness of being woken up like that, or the sure, exact command to which I obeyed, but I feel as though the force of his grasp was the only force strong enough to keep that thread from snapping.

Nucleus

by Giulio Giuffrida

Six protons clustered among six neutrons deep within the cavities of a single carbon atom. They floated there in utter and vast darkness, surrounded by a cloud of like-minded electrons. Despite the messiness of its cloud, the atom as a whole was perfectly balanced, each little spherical element agreeing to share the space. As the small electrons darted along the outskirts, the larger nucleus rotated ever so slightly in the middle, luxuriating in its peaceful harmony with the universe. This small, harmonic world existed among a boundless collection of exact replicas, all infinitesimally housed within the cheap particle board on the side panel of Giorgio's dorm room desk. Its balance was left completely intact—as is the case with most outside forces—when, darting into the steamy-dim room, Donnie slugged the particle board with both of his fists, landing a desk lamp on the floor in a wonderful heap of glass and plastic.

"What the hell, Donnie?"

"We need to get off this planet!" Donnie exclaimed, pinning his back against the wall and lowering.

"I don't know what you're talking about," Giorgio said, "did you take your pills?"

Donnie glanced up angrily at his friend, "yes, and we need to get the hell off of this planet."

"Why do you keep saying that?" Giorgio replied, "you're not explaining yourself."

Donnie didn't want to explain himself. Didn't everyone already know? We're on the brink, yes, perpetually on the brink, he thought. We sit and we lounge; we have dinner and get ice cream, yet the brink still forces us to sit upon it, to gaze at its daunting infinitude. Some of us can forget about it for a while, can relish in the gorgeous entanglement of human connection, can look away from the razors at our throats. But when the day's over and we're let alone in our cots, our bedrooms, our houses, the brink comes back to us. It haunts us. It causes us to hit things—why did he abuse his knuckles so?—and say things and do things.

"It's the twin nuclei problem, Giorj. The exact problem Weinstein wouldn't shut up about." Donnie rubbed the spaces between his bloodied knuckles as he talked.

"The twin nuclei problem?"

"Yeah, since the fifties we've imprisoned ourselves. We don't have the wisdom to split atoms."

"Are you talking about nukes?" Giorgio said, sitting back down on his cot.

"Yes, and investigating the cell. And if you don't think Ukraine is relevant—"

"I know it's not relevant," Giorgio interrupted, "haven't you heard of mutually assured destruction?"

"Of course I've heard of it, but haven't you heard of human error? Or radar glitches? Submarines losing communication?"

Giorgio went silent and the two boys looked at each other from either side of the room, one on the floor, the other on his cot.

How can I get him to see the danger? Donnie thought. We're living the same terrifying reality, aren't we?

Giorgio's calm and collected manner was completely infuriating to Donnie at times. He was one of those people who could never be roused to protest, who, if wronged, would always turn the other cheek. He wasn't religious—no, definitely not—but closely spiritual. Doctrine had no place in his nurtured, free mind, a mind that seemed to wholly regenerate and converse with the cosmos during the many instances Donnie caught him crisscrossed and meditating. Perhaps it was naivety; perhaps the world's flames hadn't yet reached his bones. Or maybe the enlightened just hadn't spoken loud enough; maybe the barrier was completely communicative. Either way, it was an odd juxtaposition, Donnie thought, for such a measured, seemingly learned creature to inhabit such childish points of view.

After a few minutes of silence, Giorgio calmly pushed the tips of his thumbs together and added, "Donnie, you're being ridiculous. We're not gonna get nuked. Maybe lay off Twitter for now."

Perhaps it was the way he said it, the tone and slight smile across his smooth beige face as he professed such complete falsehoods, that turned Donnie cherry red. His jaw clenched up and his vision blurred; he stood up fast and needed to hit something—hit Giorgio—no he couldn't; his eyes darted sideways, looking for something inanimate. The desk just left of Giorgio's cot, a perfect target, shook once again as he railed his bloodied right fist against its side, providing a low baseline to the symphony of expletives hurled in Giorgio's general direction.

Donnie could think of nothing but the urge to flee, and he did so, leaving his roommate belly up and squinting on his cot. As he crossed the threshold of the brownstone's oaken door frame, the sun pierced his irises and warmed the skin left open by his shirt sleeves. He decided to push toward upper Bay State road, the fury gradually releasing from him as he walked.

How can he not be worried? Donnie thought, stomping. Surely, if anything can happen, it will happen. A zero-point-one percent chance of an occurrence is low, but—as he'd assented to in listening to a recent podcast—if you run that simulation enough times, surely it will happen. Worse, we have an octogenarian at the helm of our own destruction, he thought, and pictured the Commander's shaky decrepit pointer finger hovering above a half-opened presidential football.

The magnolias were in full bloom, and as he strode under them, a light hint of the horn-honking and engine-buzzing from adjacent Commonwealth Avenue soothed his angry and blood-filled ears. Across the street, a campus tour guide strolled past with her little ducklings, each staring patiently and open-eyed at their learned chaperone. Donnie assumed the lovely, flowering street had the same effect on them as it did on himself: they were calmed, invited, and loved. Shrubs and tree branches jettied out among the carved stone entrances and ivy wound its way around fences and walls.

Donnie kept walking, the forward momentum grounding him, until he reached Marsh Plaza. He spied one of the stone benches in front of the chapel, and laid down on it, head facing Commonwealth Avenue. His eyes now sideways, he watched the passersby defy gravity and head down an impossibly deep slope. Their keychains glistened and jangled; their messy hair waved gently in the wind.

If I died here, Donnie thought, I would be satisfied. Disappointed, but curiously satisfied. It might have been the warmth of the plaza, the scent of its flowering plants, the carefree and fascinating bodies drifting through it, or perhaps it was all of these things, that flushed Donnie with an aura of absolute contentment. He felt weightlessly suspended in a sort of warm nest, free to think and feel whatever might come to him. This facilitated a wider, more zoomed-out worldview, and he began to think about the species. Not the American, not the first world, not those who inhabit our current time period—but the species. We're most certainly warm, dumb, and smelly, he thought, but it's also clear that we're brilliant and gorgeous. We're capable of *Paradise Lost* and the

Hubble telescope, yet we created the Vietnam War and the Gulags. Our cities flourish with life: high-rises and ornate apartments, upscale restaurants and enchanting art museums—but conceal below them underpaid labor forces and hawkish governmental militaries. We're an interesting mixture of sugar and salt, Donnie concluded, but worth saving. Undoubtedly worth saving.

About an hour passed when of a sudden, the passersby descended and ascended the slope with increasing speed. The keychains were glinting more intensely, and the hair was now flipping incomprehensibly. There were no individual people anymore, but a panicked, flowing mass gushing relentlessly up the sidewalk.

Such a sight caused Donnie to sit erect, positioning his eyes back to standard, upright human perception. He could see it even clearer now: frightened crowds heading south on Commonwealth Avenue, away from the city. Some were on bikes, others on foot. All had rushed mannerisms and items strewn out of their bags and pockets.

It was happening. He knew it immediately, but denied it for several seconds. His hands wanted to shake, but something stopped them, something much more powerful than himself. It was his prior sense of contentment; it flooded his small body with a wave of peace and security, drowning the fire of concern and panic that was struggling to surface out of his brain. He could see the hysteria flying haphazardly around him, yet this coffin of tranquility held him firmly in place, restraining the deep, evolved urge to flee that was ripping through his consciousness like a zipper.

He thought about his earlier conclusion that dying in Marsh plaza would be satisfying, if a bit disappointing. But he didn't want to die. He wanted, in fact, to punch something inanimate like Giorgio's desk, but nothing quite like it was available. Not to mention he could not move his arms or legs. Fury coursed his neurons, yet the rest of his body was rigid and limp. As he tried flailing his right arm, resulting in a slow two or three inches of movement, he realized that his neck had seized up, and so had his back. The only part of his body that could move freely now were his eyeballs, and even those were beginning to get blurry. Looking down at his now fuzzy-looking bloodied knuckles, he couldn't move them an inch. He was shrouded—trapped—in a powerful blanket of exterior calmness and could not leave it. The fury was there but subverted. He was buried.

Still sitting erect on the stone bench, Donnie looked out at the raging river of passersby before him. A single figure left the large group and headed toward him, bending down and speaking straight into his face. Donnie could hear nothing beyond muffles at this point, but by the general outline and surprisingly calm demeanor of the blurry shadow, he knew it was Giorgio. He stood in front of Donnie for about two minutes, running off sentences that Donnie interpreted as incoherent mumbles. It felt to him like he was under water: no matter how much Giorgio shouted, no matter how clearly Giorgio spoke, it all sounded indiscernible.

Donnie wanted more than anything to break out of this shell of calmness and security and exclaim to Giorgio's face, "I'm sorry I was so petty, now let's leave!" but he couldn't. He struggled, applying all possible force to every limb—but nothing would move. He couldn't hear Giorgio, much less go with him. About a minute later, Donnie felt smooth, even pressure around his entire body. Two arms and a torso were wrapped around his own, and he knew this was their parting gesture. Giorgio couldn't waste any more precious time.

The dark figure left him, and he once again sat alone on the stone bench, trapped in his own consciousness. Humans were worth saving,—yes!—but he had no way of expressing it. He closed his worried eyes and let the minutes go by. The atoms split above his head.

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