

Year 11 & 12 Category: Highly Commended

Narcissus Gazing Skyward

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"And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth."

Genesis 1:26

My eggshell cracks open. Forced through the ripping of space and time, hurtling out of the absolute sleep, my consciousness is assembled. Traumatized by this existential conundrum, the trip between the truest poles, I adjust to the sluggishness of bone, flesh, blood vessels and viscera. I'm drenched and heavy, blood lines the smoothness of my eggshell. Exhausted, I gasp, lying on plastic. The eggshell shattered, here I am now. I hope my life is easier than my birth. An egg is an object. Pure potential, teetering over the precipice above pitiless depths. Here I am now, animate. Surrounded by others like me, a turbulent sea of babies. I am the cleanest conception, I have no origin. Parentless, I came here somehow.

A man opens a door in the corner. A multitude of bright stars shine at his back, cold and disgusted. Who are we, trapped in this cage, to solicit pity from them, so high up? A gold chain glitters on the dull skin of his neck. He steps into the light but does not hide his face from us. His strides are heavy as he crosses the room. Out of our iron womb, we are stacked in vegetable crates, row upon row along the wall. He takes a crate to a table across the room. By the light of the exposed bulb, he turns over each chick, squeezes the faeces out of its anal vent to determine its sex, and sorts the males from the females.

Hours pass and I watch. The plastic grid presses into the soles of my feet. I wonder when my time will come. Flies buzz around the exposed bulb. Three more crates until he reaches mine. He refills crates, one with males, the other with females and carries them back over to the wall, two stacks. I shiver at drafts of wind that come under the door in the corner. The man squeezes, and wipes the faeces on his apron at intervals. Two more crates to go. Male. Male. Female. He coughs and spits on the floor. It glistens like a wound. He carries crates back over. Tink-tink, the insects hit the bulb. One more crate. He does everything exactly the same but it means more because soon I'll be in the middle of his fist. The chair squeals against the dirty concrete as the man stands up and carries the crate over. He picks up our crate. The man picks me up. He turns me over and squeezes me. My faeces comes out all over the base of his thumb. He doesn't stop immediately and I wonder if my heart is going to give next. He puts me down. My organs hurt. I can't stand. The man keeps going, others arrive in my crate.

Finally, the man stands and rounds a corner. An unending scream surfaces, it has always been there, behind everything, but now it's closer to me. It goes in my ear and lives there beneath the malleus. The man comes into view again. He laid the foundations of the shed. He caused the exposed bulb to go up by the ceiling. He carries us back the way he came and a great machine comes into view. He made it too. He touches the machine and it smokes. I know it is only steam coming out but he cracks a smile. The machine is made of bright, shiny steel. It looks very easy to clean. The scream is louder here. The man upends the crate and we are thrown onto a conveyor belt. I land heavily on my wing and others land on top of me. I scramble to my feet. My wing doesn't flap like it used to and it shoots pain through my shoulder. The conveyor belt starts to climb. The scream is unbearable. I reach the top. Teetering above pitiless depths. At the bottom of a steel well, blades spin very fast. Chicks are ripped apart, the dregs of their bloody mass collect at the corners. I fall.

There's only one reason to believe that God created man in His image. It's not because it makes sense that there's a giant man in the sky. Really, there should be a big bird, that's where birds live at least. No, it makes sense that God and man are similar because they were equally unkind to me. God gave me life for a man to use it. Even if I were much more enlightened and it was explained to me, I don't think I'd ever understand why it had to go like this. I didn't do anything in my life to be punished for. What else is God considering? Did I do something before birth? Couldn't I have made it right? My chest is tight, every muscle is flexed, I'm on fire. I'm bouncing off the stainless steel, my head, my wing, my foot, the world a molten pool of colour and disoriented sensation. I hit the first blade and it cuts right through my chest. My ribs splinter and my heart comes out. It's the closest my love will ever come to touching God. Still tumbling forward, my head hits the second blade. I can think of all the things it will cut through and list them off as it does so: my eye, my skull, and then my brain will be next and that's the last thing, just waiting for it now. I am just waiting for it to happen now. I don't know what to think. I'm sorry? I love you? I hate you?