



Table of Contents



POEMS

Anxious by Nevaeh Tucker

Destiny by Carly Burgio

Aren't They Just by Frances Sharples

ESSAY

The Transference

by Matt Keller

PHOTO SUBMISSIONS

Noel Guidry

Carly Burgio

Diana Morley

Harrison Martinez

Jake Bancroft

Julia Grunes

Mareasa Giudici

Matt Keller

Mia Donaldson

Owen Vincent

Ralph Velazquez

Ruby Morris

Sam Ashton

Torianna Robleto

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S S E

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THE FAMOUS RHINESTONES - FREE WHEELIN'

13





Anxious
By Nevaeh Tucker

I think a lot about dying

*Not in the way that I want to,
in the way that all the unknowns and what ifs consume my mind*

I think a lot about dying

*Not in the way that its inevitability contents me,
in the way that it vibrates my insides with songs of despair*

I think a lot about dying

*Not in the way that I imagine my elder self,
in the way that I feel that its lurking in everything around me*

*I think a lot about dying,
but all I want is to live*



The Transference

by Matt Keller

It's been said that one day, either millenia in the future or in the past, there is a kingdom that breaks from the shackles of the past. The name of said kingdom has been lost to time, as have many of the details, but the legend remains as strong as it's always been.

There is a great warrior named Heron standing in the capital's coronation hall. The room, its paper-thin walls lined by solemnly flickering candles, will soon be filled by the reverberation of Heron's sword sliding effortlessly from its sheath. Flames reflect off of the surrounding candles, climbing the steel like ants flooding a tree branch. This blade is not Heron's, nor was it made for him. This is the transference blade; the hilt held only once a generation, all for the same purpose. Heron, or whoever it was who held that blade, is not to think of its balance or poise, only of the hands that came before.

"Send him in!" Heron calls.

The doors at the other end of the hall slide apart, bright morning light storming in and blinding Heron. Out of it comes a lone figure dressed in tattered robes. The last time Heron had seen the old man he was in gilded armor, beard trimmed by the best stylists in the land. Now he was scraggly, unkempt, sickly. He stumbles rather than struts, and when he finally makes it to Heron, he says nothing, just stares at the ground.

The doors slide shut once again and the light is vanquished.

"On your knees," Heron says, spinning the blade in his hand as to acquaint himself with the weight of it. The old man obeys, exhaling sharply as he sinks, arthritis battling him in every moment. He reaches the point of no return, his knees colliding with the floor like two gunshots. Heron flinches, and for a

moment the room dims, the candles fluttering, as if in sympathy for the old man. He hadn't even made a noise. Could the old man even feel pain anymore? Of course he can, Heron thinks. Just as he could when he held this blade. He's simply trying to gain my sympathy. Such a petty display.

The blade rises, pointing at the old man.

"Speak the rite. Let your words carry into me, and with them your failures. Teach me in death what you could not in life."

For the first time, the old man's eyes meet Heron's. Heron has never realized they were gray. All the years of studying beside that man, all the time spent with their blades met, eyes locked, knowledge passing between them, and only now, at the end of all things, does Heron note their colorless hue.

A shudder, and the old man sees. He shakes his head slowly, minutely, and breathes the words he had repeated often in the days leading up to this.

"They are watching."

Indeed, as Heron can see now beyond the paper walls of the coronation room. Shadowed silhouettes stand, formless besides that of a human-esque shape.

Anger flares, driven by Heron's own moment of weakness. The blade shakes.

"Speak!"

The old man looks back to the ground and begins.

"My death is proof that another line has been tossed aside. We could not find the answer, nor could we find the question. Nor could we expect... our failure to go unchecked. Heron checks and rechecks every word that comes from the man's mouth, grip blisteringly tight on the hilt of the blade. Any mistake, any deviation, and it was Heron's duty to swing, to silence that change before it had time to

disrupt the transference. The sins of the weak, Heron hears from whispers beyond the paper wall, must be the sins of the strong. There are those who wish to make it not so, that wish to alleviate the burden. To wish for a lighter load is to be weak, and so the strong must not allow it to be so.

“When the blade strikes me, our generations will become one. What was my success will be yours. What was my loss will be yours. We will become one, and thus there is no death as long as the transference proceeds.”

“The transference,” Heron says, picking up where the old man left off, “a connection that molds each generation together as one, that seeks to make whole the connection that can never be undone, was founded... was founded...”

The old man is looking at Heron again now, staring with those gray eyes. He speaks again, though not with words or breaths or even some kind of psychic connection. He speaks in truths Heron knew so innately yet never could acknowledge. Perhaps it's the combination of those gray eyes with the darkened ones staring from beyond the paper walls that finally allowed those truths to surface, to allow Heron to understand the irony of the ceremony.

The burden of the last generation only survives when we allow it to, when we give it these petty ceremonies. Petty... did I not just call the old man that?

Perhaps, Heron thought, there can be no learning from the last generation when we hold ourselves so completely to them.

How much do we sacrifice when we hold the past as truth?

Heron looks to the figures outside the hall. They're closer now, pressing up against the paper, glowing red eyes peering. The eyes of his ancestors watch him so completely, so utterly, and yet they have all died by the blade he now holds.

The old man, seemingly understanding what Heron now knows as truth, closes his eyes and tilts his head back. Heron closes his eyes as well, a tear rolling down his cheek, and swings. The old man's head rolls back and collides with the floor, ringing out the same sound his knees had only moments before. The rest of his body follows a moment later, blood pooling on the wooden floor.

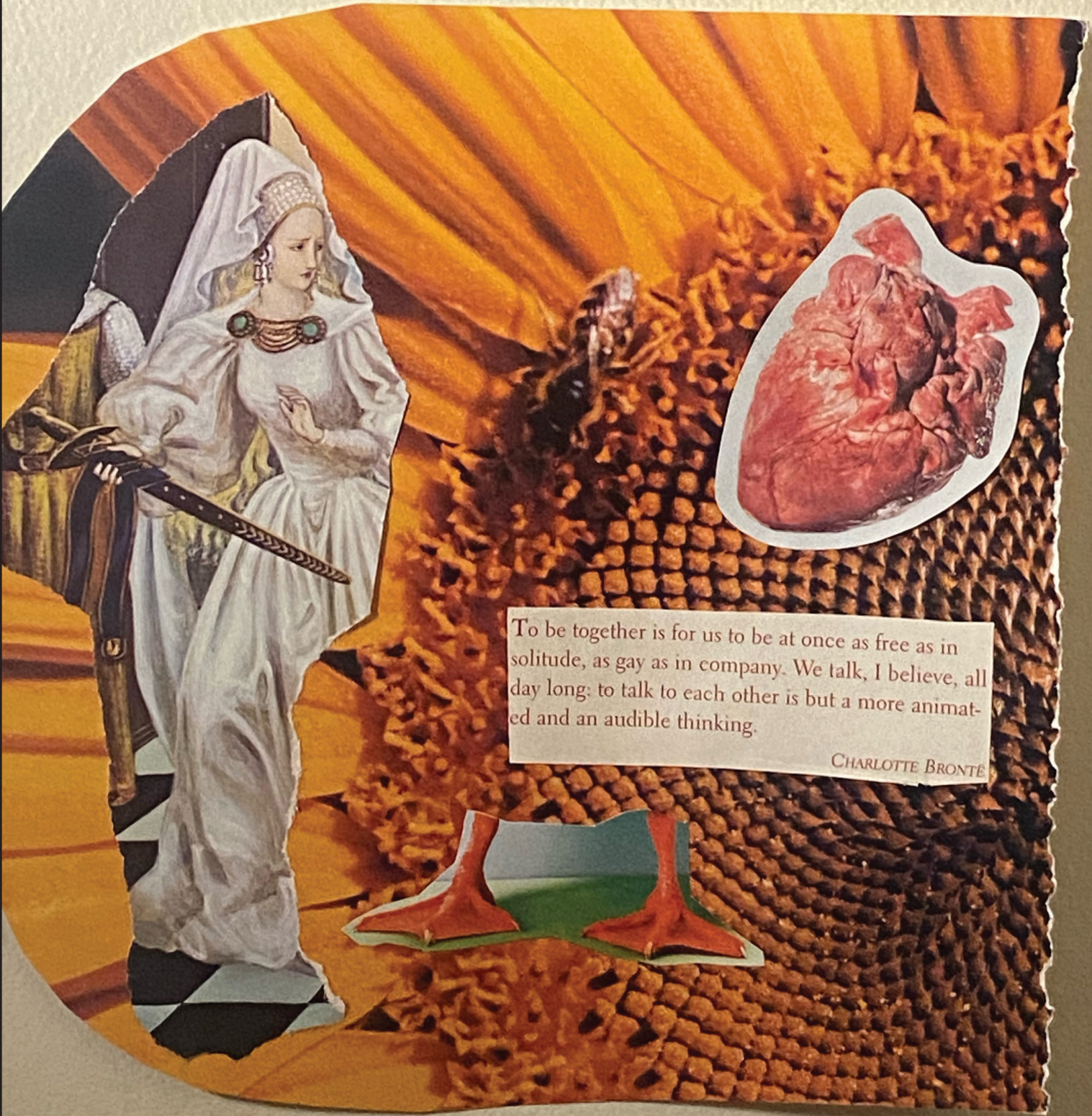
Heron's head is filled with drumming, ears ringing. They can't even hear the echoing clang as the blade falls from their hands.

When they open their eyes, it is dark out. The figures beyond the walls are gone, yet it seems that

their shadows have burned into the paper as they have burned into the minds of each blade-wielder who had completed the transference. The old man's body is gone, nothing but a red stain to show what had happened.

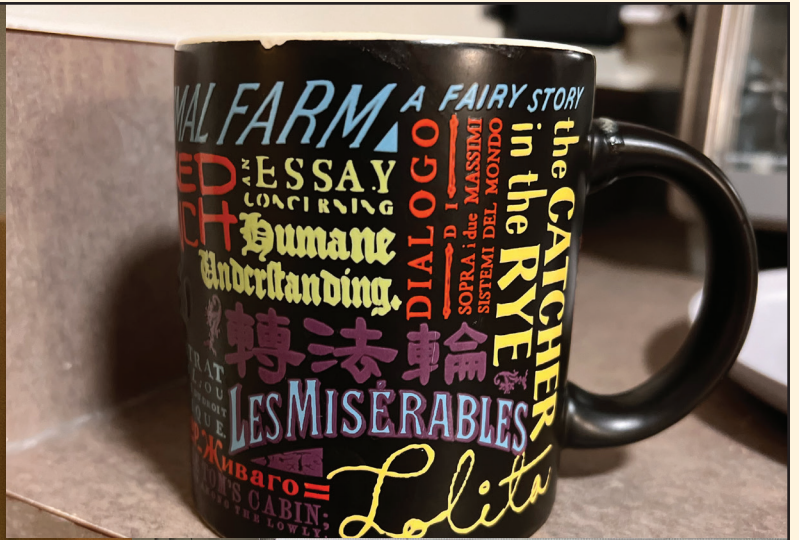
And perhaps this is for the best, Heron thought. They wish only to forget the day had ever happened until it was their turn to be on their knees.





To be together is for us to be at once as free as in solitude, as gay as in company. We talk, I believe, all day long: to talk to each other is but a more animated and an audible thinking.

CHARLOTTE BRONTË



destiny

Carly Burgio

TW: abuse/sexual Assault; suicide

Blue Sweatshirt Sleeves
will never belong to Her
again.

She strived to match the color
of her Lover's Eyes

calculated, capricious
scratching harshly on Her skin
then Eyes match color of the Hoodie
that transforms Her –
a laundry heap

of Second-Hand Baggage.

perhaps Old Oceans called to comfort
through the walls, extinguish
fire of the Lover's burning touch
but here, the tide is low;

we are warmed in the waves of the silence
remedied by the cozy arms of cruelty
solaced by the cotton that grazes our skin
when we long to forget sensation.

a Lover sustains
stains a Sweatshirt's right shoulder

unwilling exchanges
could never be clean.

there comes a time for the apocalypse:
unforgiving waves of consciousness wash over Her

she

rips

Her
Threads worn
to shreds;
Old Waters dry, They lose voices
but Fate hears Fabric tearing
And reaches her nimble fingers greedily
to grasp the pieces –
snipping Strings
one,
by one,
by one

until
she clutches a thread
holding stronger than the rest
a Sleeve

a final remaining article

it hangs
waiting for the descent;

Fate hands Her
the crimson shears.

snip,
cut,
at last

one Thread left
to tie the noose:

never

to be Used



again.

Aren't They Just

Frances Sharples

sweet cherished thing
on your kitchen shelf. me,

artifact. your house choking
with scrap & tshotske & all

the words you need
to explain.

for guests i am
charming. for play i am

doll. me, doll. when we leave
the lights are low & your touch

is everywhere. me, clasp. you,
hold, grab. me, drowning on you

in a room i cannot see. me, clinging
to the way eyes follow

across the floor,
to the lollipop thawing in

your cheek,
to the sticky sweet

tentacles of men
you explode around me. me,

cargo. you,
blue-blond fire in the bar. me,

doll. dime. a sweetheart, your
baby. & you tell everyone,

aren't they just.

i will hold myself
down in bed. trace my finger over

every inch of skin. this
part is mine. this part is mine. this part is mine.



V. SANCTUM
— quiet enough to listen



