

# Bastion

*Alexandra Balkovatz*



# Hiding in the Pews

*Matthew Williams*

**April 1, 2018**

My fingers caress the once-smooth pew brim, acknowledging every crack in the surface brought on by the decay of time. Surprising that this church still stands amid the recently reconstructed sprawl of one of the most earthquake-torn cities on the planet. Yet somehow, my half-day of exploration has brought me, at its end, to a man-made construct I have entered no more than three times since the fall of 2016. Stained glass windows that serve only to distract, a congregation barely surviving through a celebration of their beliefs, a choir pulpit without a choir, and a priest with no life or conviction behind his statements fulfill the recipe for my first self-imposed excommunication (I mean, who knew you could slow dance to “Canticle of the Sun?”). So why does my voice keep getting louder and my heart wider and my cheek muscles tighter? I dare not blame divine power because I still want free will and I gave up on finding His presence in churches long ago. Yet what else can explain this dopamine and serotonin imbalance that makes me think my depression is a choice? Like a ship passing by an island in an old castaway movie, or the last piece of pizza from a college dorm event, I somehow know that holding on in this godforsaken mess of a life is my only way forward. I just hope I have a good enough answer to the question that has haunted me since—

**March 18, 2014**

The static nature of my Confirmation sponsor’s pristine office unnerves me. Even the air molecules don’t move, stationary against my attempt to justify my belief in God with something more personal than 16 years of Sunday morning mass and 12 years of Catholic education to inundate Catholicism’s truth monopoly. I have

discovered the hell of good intentions on earth, formed by my bipolar sense of vulnerability expanding the space between us without either of us moving. No wonder I am the guy everyone respects instead of the first invite to Friday night parties. People make my home, books make my refuge, how else can you tear a person in half? Speaking of books, hers are organized perfectly alphabetically, like mine, suggesting a personality type too familiar, too distracting for me to answer any questions intelligently or truthfully. The desire to leave too great to ignore, the pressure to stay too great to defy, perhaps explaining the tension I feel on—

**November 22, 2018**

Pews again. Unyielding, yet unsupportive. Does breeze or bare feet induce constant shivering? Although I know the love that surrounds me, my diaphragm barely gives away enough to keep me awake, any chance at singing long forgotten. Even if my diaphragm could move, my shoulders, abs, and tongue would keep anything but whispers and screams from escaping. My body, the bowstring, separates heart and mind, keeps them apart to maintain my mind. The simple path my bandmates believe, denies too much experience to follow their lead. I try to speak, to confess my bisexual nature, but questions of acceptance keep me silent too long. If only someone could see past my raised cheeks to my iron jaw, maybe I could stop believing my confession is the final straw. How long must I persist to silence 19 years of Christianity, whispering that God can't possibly love me anymore? I have no more need to ask why God exists. Instead I ask why he made me like this? Morality confuses my eternal interior; no divine presence can help me choose well. Dr. Seuss wisdom may fill my mind, yet cannot change this endless, repeating rhyme.

## mask

*Sierra DeAtley*

