

Philanthropy

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This is how you see the forms and know they are flat. Do they seem to take the shape of man? Pale and tall, dressed for the ritz. They dazzle you.

This is how you see the shadows and know there is a fire. An amber glow from rising flames. There is no scent of cedar or smokey bonfire. When you get too close it smells of fumes. This fire is stoked from the bones of strangers, somewhere halfway around the world. All for your benefit.

This is how you break the chains you called your own. For the first time you see the damage to your ankles, black and blue from tightly clasped shackles. This is how you walk away from the others you were once in agreement with. Here the cave is cold, but it is better to freeze than to burn your flesh blindly. They call out to you. “Generous donation! Quality of life! Humanitarian!” Do you hear your own words leaving their mouths? They are shouting and shouting, but their chains stay locked. Why celebrate them for giving back a mere fraction of what they stole? It’s a drop of blood as a tax for exploiting human life. This is clear to you now. These men shit in the place where they eat.

The cave floor glimmers with scatterings of platinum, gold, rhodium, and silver. Whose fingernails split and sweat poured to produce these? Moving through the passages you find a gallery. This chamber preserves the arts. Here they throw lavish fund-raising events as an act of private initiative. Is the red carpet underneath your bare feet flowing? They herd and corral musicians while the ticket holders applaud. Poets slip through the cracks, the fractures, and the breaks of the cave walls, only to return with eulogies for the last trees. How sorry they are. In their words, the pain is authentic, which is why it fetches such a high price. You bow your head as you pass under stalactites dripping with crude oil. You feel sick. You want to close your eyes, but you know there is more to life than shadows.

This is how you refuse to turn away. They manufacture their comfort in green bottles. A familiar bitter-sweet black licorice tang. You keep your mind clear and weep.

This is how you grow the human nature philanthropists only pretend to have. This is how you explore the depths of the cave but still feel the warmth from the surface above. Stretching up you can almost reach the gemstones they used to build a ceiling. Quit reaching.

This is how you leave the flames and search for the sun. Crawl through the mouth of this cave.

This is how you leave the same way you started off in this life. On all fours, humbled and crying as true light floods your retinas and burns your eyes.

This is what you do once you reach the sun. Leave the cave, but don’t ask them to.

This is how you won’t let them kill you.