

Temples



The call to prayer beckons
over loudspeakers atop minarets, those
urban quotation marks, punctuating Istanbul.
I perform the ritual ablation,
cleansing my body in an attempt to
purify the uncertain soul beneath.
I enter the hall and lay down the prayer rug:
it stretches across the carpet
like a cat gently waking from a nap.

A pager emits a soft green backlight
and chirps its birdsong:
that familiar tune of duty and action.
The surgical scrub is cold against my skin,
and it lathers promises
of success and failure, both imminent.
I enter a sterile theater, its cold steel
instruments lined on the tray like silent violins
quivering in the anticipation of music.

And then the movement begins, flowing
as naturally as the rosary follows prayer:
as smoothly as a fresh blade cuts skin.
A calm order falls in these two temples, and
we execute the familiar choreography:
the prescribed sacrifice of a perfect ballet.
I dance at the altar of a God that has only
ever sent me mischievous angels and I wonder
what purpose there is to my supplication.

Then,
It occurs to me that in each of these sanctuaries
a grieving mother has wept on my shoulder,
and I remember suddenly why temples are places
of divinity.

Ali I. Rae

Mr. Rae is pursuing an MD at Brown University, and
an MPH at Columbia University, with a concentration in
Medical Humanities and Ethics. His poem tied for second
prize in the 2017 *Pharos* Poetry Competition. Mr. Rae's
e-mail address is ali_rae@brown.edu.

