

2017 AFSA Art Merit Award \$2,500 Winner - Grace Thompson

A short story segment written as an attendee at the University of Virginia's Young Writers Workshop Advanced Session that Grace attended in the July 2016, the summer of her junior year.

But Injure My Heart

Mihai watched Adrian's still form enthralled in sleep. His brother lay perfectly content across the room, sheets rising with his breath. They were twins, identical but for a single exception. Selfsame excepting the four minutes and thirty-seven seconds between their births. Utterly symmetrical, two parts of one person, two halves of a single soul until this morning when reality cut them in two.

Pastel light soaked the ragged streets of Bucharest. Mihai's cigarette was stale so he accepted the stranger's offer gratefully.

Then the man introduced himself.

Now in bed with darkness between them, Mihai remembered the words of the *Securitate*. They were so clear, orders *so* simple.

"Report on your family and live..."

"Refuse and..."

They wouldn't kill him. They wouldn't dare to. That would attract too much attention from the cameras on the other side of the curtain.

Instead they would ruin him.

No secondary, no university, no work. He would be driven to the northwest, to the mines with their emaciated faces and giant skeletons called workers. His mother and father would be dragged north to the jails.

"Report on your family and you will not only live. ...you will thrive."

"Refuse and ..."

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Mihai watched Adrian's tight body curled around his blanket. He heaved out a deep breath. Mihai rolled over so he wouldn't have to look at Adrian when he closed his eyes and made his choice. His parents were clean, but the *Securitate* demanded *something*.

I'm sorry Adrian, Mihai thought. His heart hurt for his brother, who slept soundly, arrantly unaware of the treachery looming in the cool night air.