



Joeun Kim Aatchim *The Roulette Sunday: The Mezzanine Worshiper* 2019-2022
Mineral pigment, refined pine soot ink on silk mounted on aluminum frame, 925 sterling silver pendant and ring 9.5 x 11.5 inches

The Roulette Sunday: The Mezzanine Worshiper

There is a theater called the *Roulette* on Atlantic Avenue in Brooklyn, and a nomad church community holds a service there every Sunday. I lived a few blocks away and noticed the music playing and glowing people flocking in, so I started to attend the service covertly, not interacting much with anyone. I always sat on the mezzanine floor and drew people, primarily families and couples praying, musicians, and gospel singers. I loved to draw on a palm-size pocket notepad called a "*PD Note*" from Korea, known as a notepad for detectives. I felt like a spy; although my intention to attend the service was genuine as a returned prodigal son, I didn't feel I belonged yet.

While most people stayed on the main floor, I always went up to the mezzanine floor of the theater so I could have a bird's-eye view of the stage and people. One Sunday, a gentleman stole my seat, standing at the edge of the mezzanine level in front of me where I usually overlooked the stage and the people on the main level. I couldn't guess his emotions; his stiff posture and lukewarm facial expression contrasted with the blissful worshippers on the main level. I was curious about what brought him here; he was alone, not dragged by anyone, so there must be a reason. I drew him quickly in my tiny detective's notepad and left before anybody talked to me; my usual introvert's drill. However, I couldn't stop thinking of

him, not because of any attraction but because I had many questions. I later realized someone who could see me on the mezzanine floor would ask the same of me.

Why is sincerity so humiliating to some of us? Why is it so hard to be a passionate participant in our given life? (Or perhaps why do apathy and cynicism wear so much more comfortably?) What keeps some of us on the mezzanine level, wearing apathy as a protective gown to hide our vulnerability? What pride segregates us from the happy worshipers on the main floor? What keeps us on Mezzanine level looking *down* at the overjoyed people who don't hide their gratitude and cherish the moments of joy they experience? I saw a mirror reflection of myself in him. I saw my father in him, too, not from my perspective as a daughter but from my mother's perspective of watching her husband, if that makes sense.

While holding onto this piece and working on it for many years since the *PD Note* sketch, I still could not find an answer to those questions, though I have grown affection for this image of the gentleman. So, finally, I give him some credit; I outlined him and drew transparently as if I could see through his sincerity. Whatever the reason, he brought himself to the *Roulette* on Sunday, joined all by himself; he decided on his participation; neither his mom nor wife dragged him, and that's far from cowardice already, something worth noticing. And I noticed him skulking on the mezzanine level, ultimately myself.

It is an easy temptation to boil up or drop ice to the lukewarm, and things at room temperature are often not even options. However, perhaps a safer way to wake up after a long sleep might be a sip of lukewarm water, neither hot nor cold, that our body can accept, especially for those who are in recovery. It might be unfair to accuse those who lodge at "in-between;" sometimes, a prolonged stay is necessary to go to the destination till recovery. The *Club Mezzanine*—those who neither descend to the main level nor ascend to the upper level, standing on the edge of the mezzanine; awkwardly exist at an in-between level—*observing*, not eternally but *for the time being*.

Joeun Kim Aatchim
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