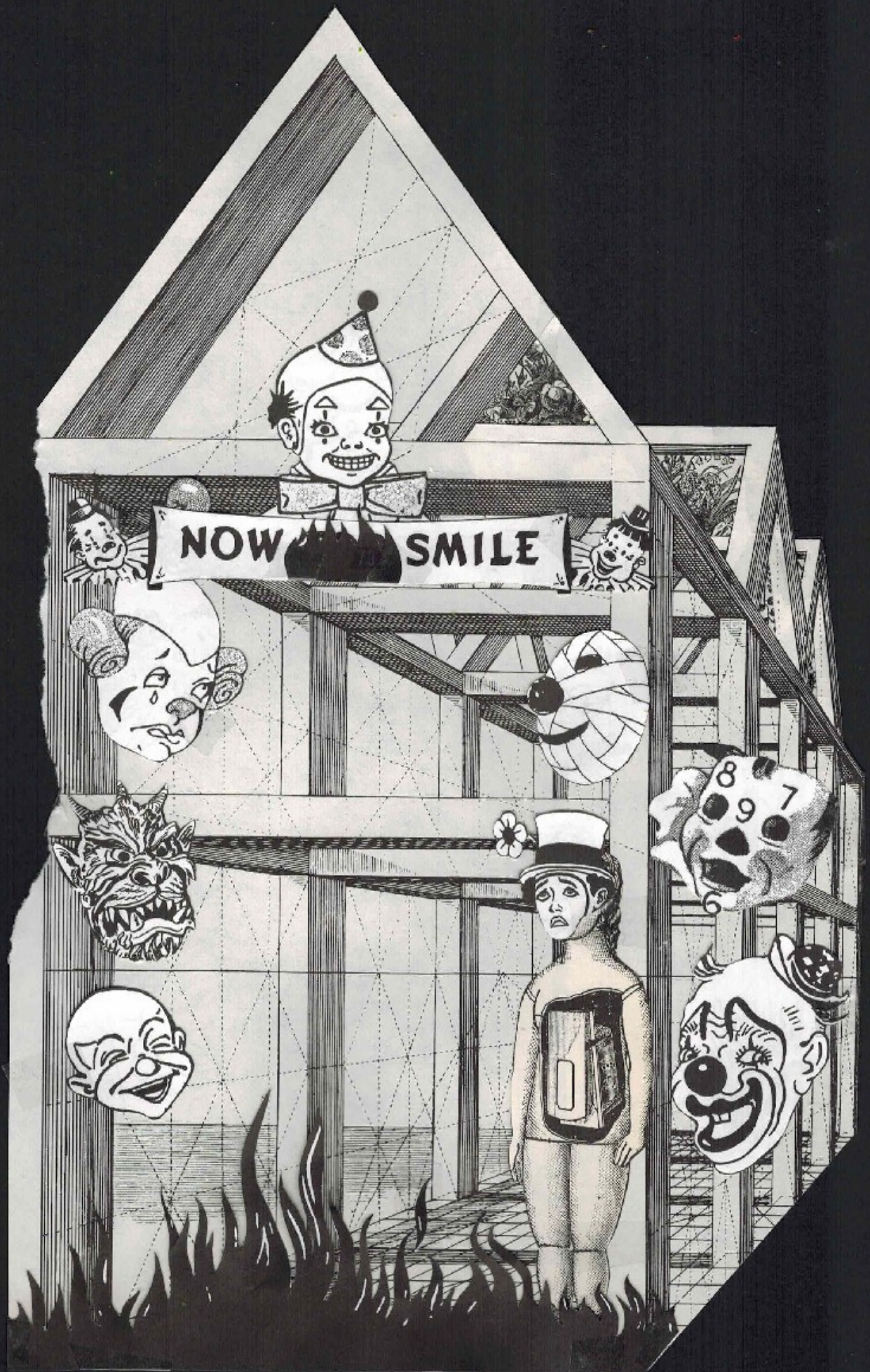


# Autistic Unmasking In the Time of Covid-19



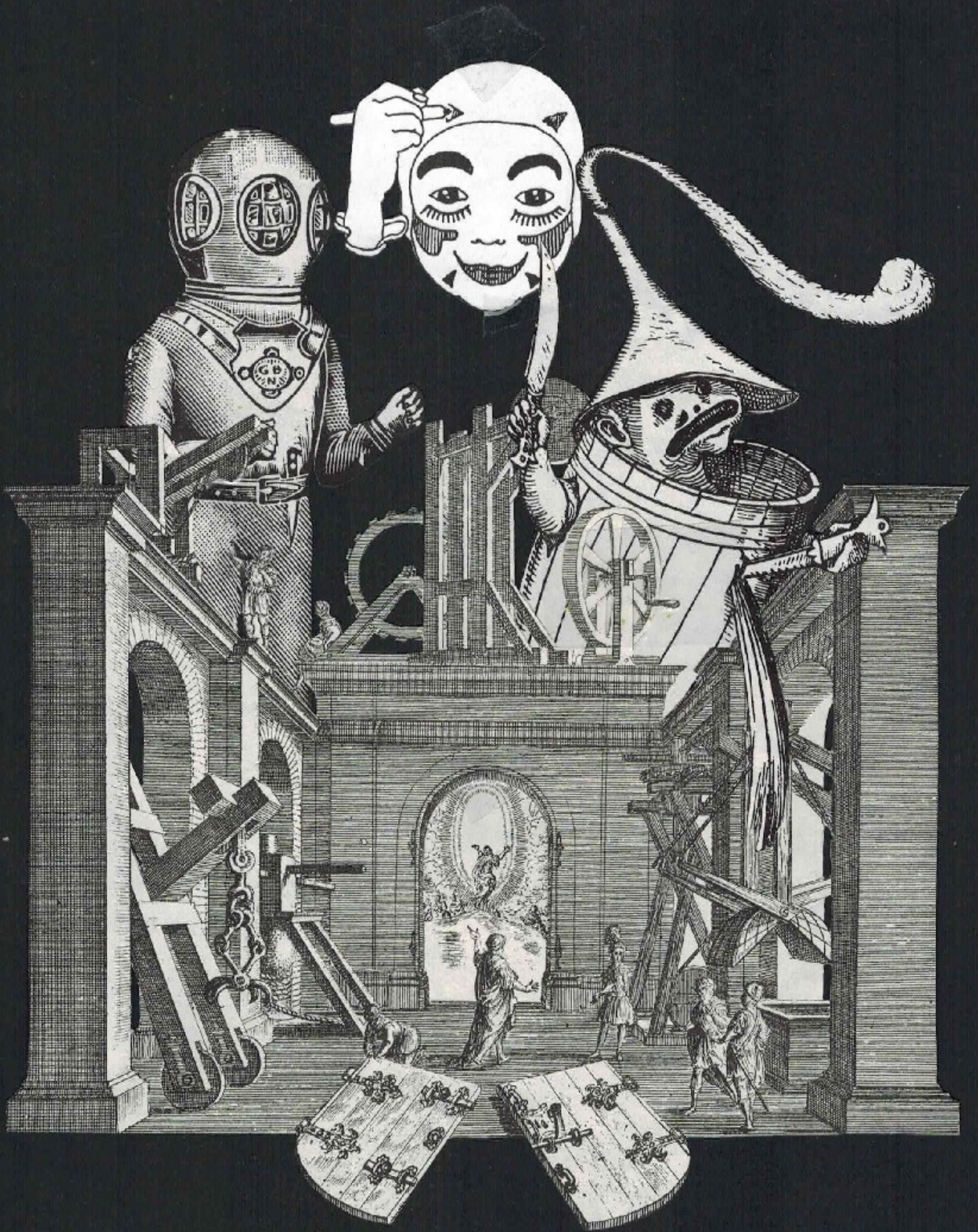




# **I Only Feel Like Myself When I'm Alone**

**“You don't look Autistic”, always expressed so earnestly. As if 'high functioning' is a badge to wear with honour instead of a state I occupy within only certain moments, places.**

**Masking is a temporary disguise I use to survive the economy masquerading as our society. I lose spoons like a saucier who just can't get the recipe right. Cooking to impress a crowd of palettes whose tastes differ while I forget to feed myself.**



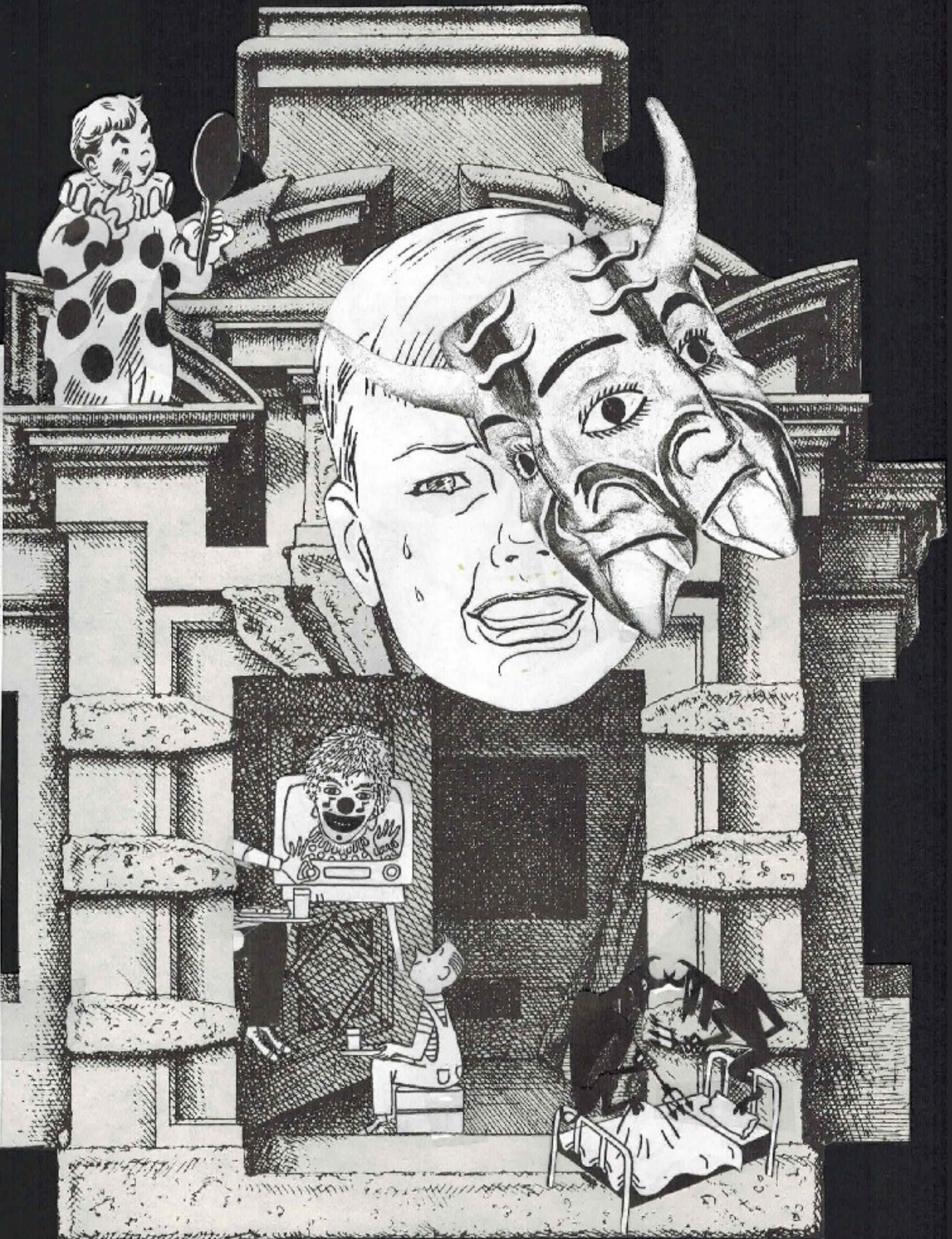


**Pushing through exhaustion for a chance at validation, that's forgotten the moment I collapse alone. In my bed lies another meltdown I call atonement, as if suffering in silence makes me a martyr of those who "really need the support".**

**So far such willful self-sufficiency has only led to grit teeth, clenched jaw and a pit of nausea that hits like a gut punch. Been riding a ferris wheel of perpetual burnout so long, getting off feels woozy and unnatural with cautious steps on solid ground.**



CUT OUT THIS STRIP OF FACES AND INSERT IT INTO SLOTS A, B, C AND D ON LAFFO THE CLOWN





**Familiarity will try to convince me that if I ride the wheel long enough I'll build resistance and figure out that trick all the other passengers seem to know. But all I'm really doing is ignoring my discomfort, refusing myself safety so I don't feel left out.**

**I still feel left out.**





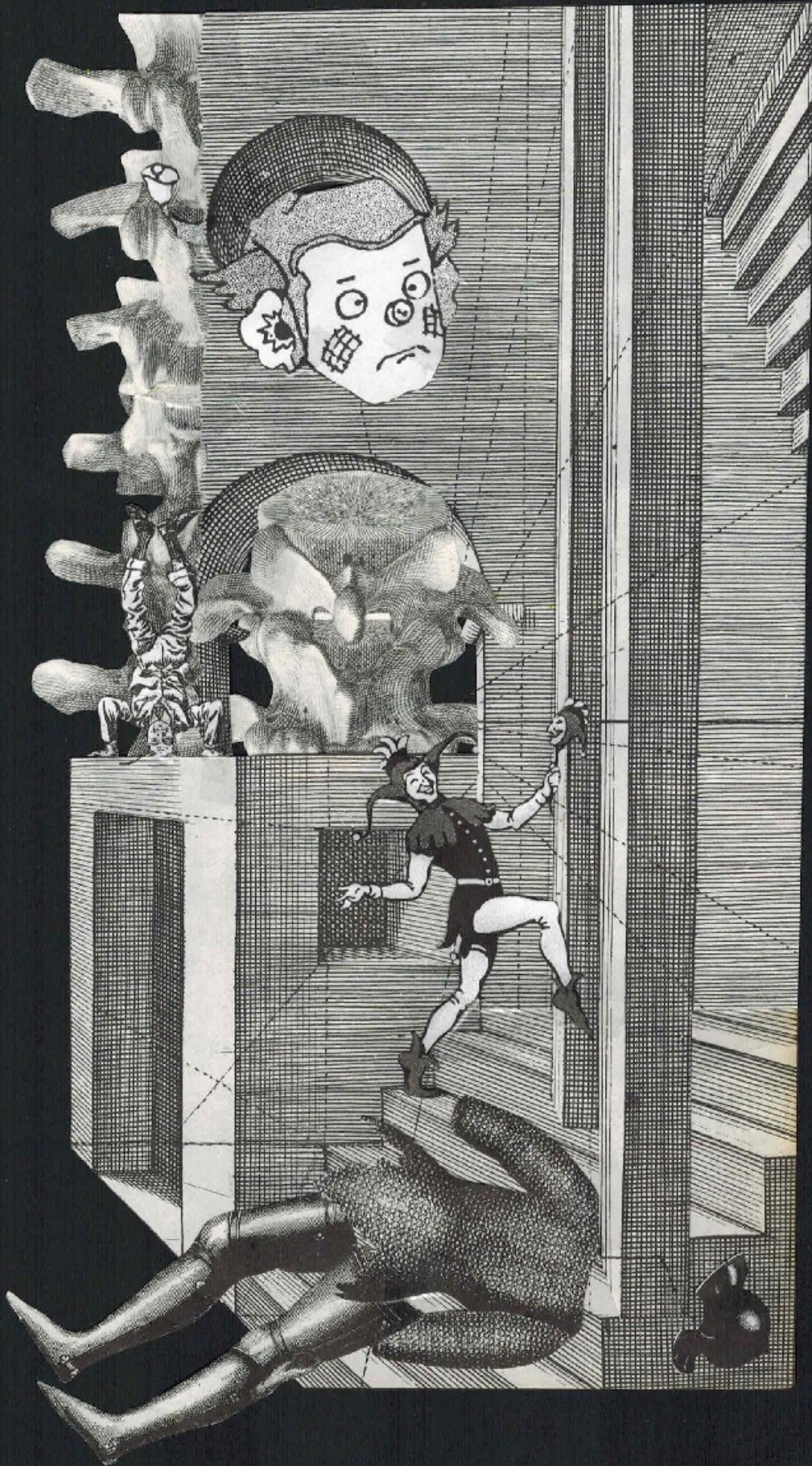
Orion



**Unmasking is a conscious effort, it's painful unpeeling the layers I've dawned in protection. I don't want to preserve this diluted sense of self anymore, I'm not certain I could anyway.**

**Forgoing my own comfort to make others more comfortable and avoid rejection, has made me hate myself. Resenting all the parts of me I can't change.**

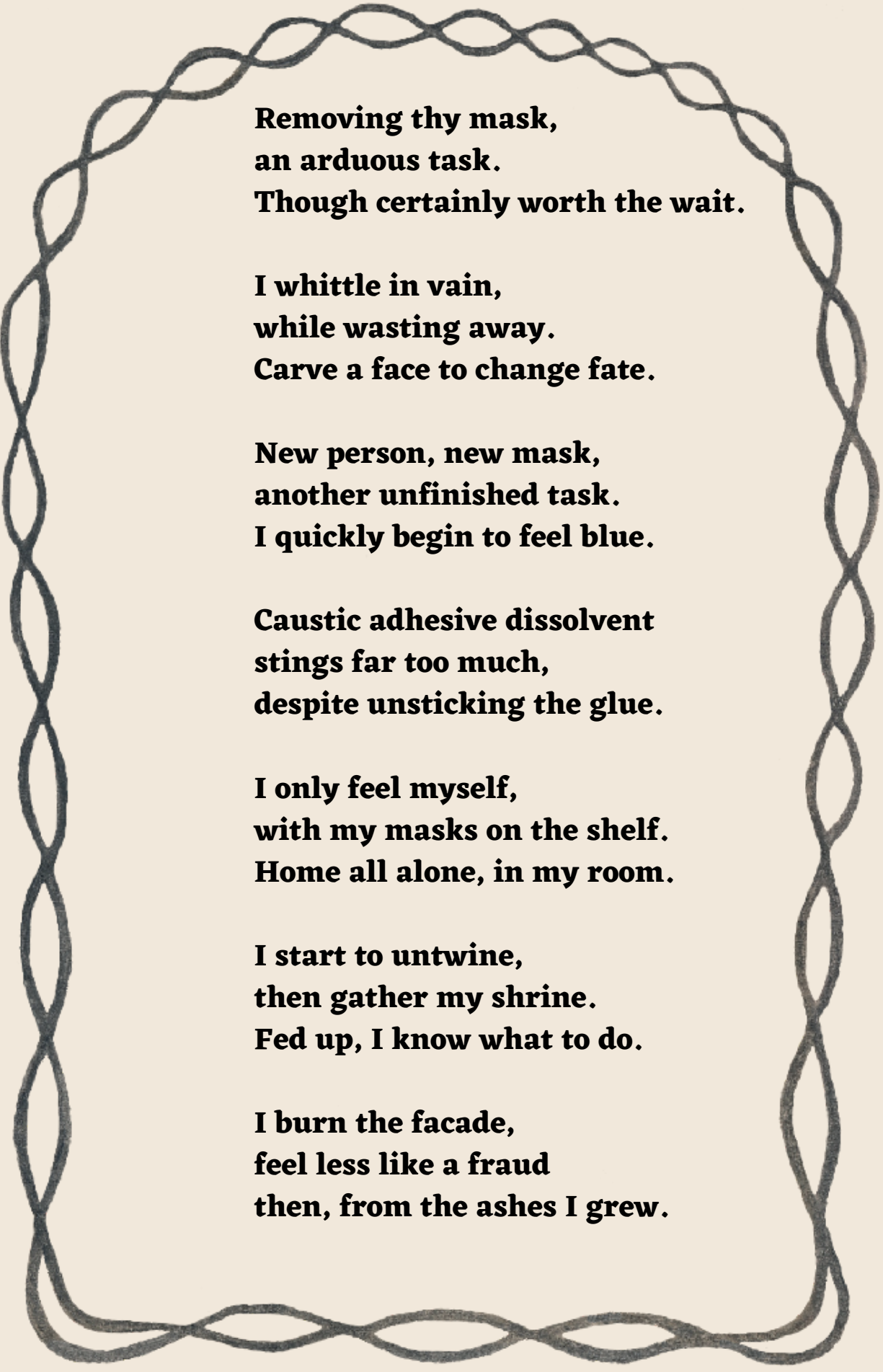
**Covid has been isolating, but masking has made me intimately familiar with isolation.**





**I don't have to force myself to speak through shutdowns for a paycheque. I no longer need substances to push through sensory overload for fear of missing out. Right now my time is wholly my own and this year has been hard but I have felt more exuberant joy than I can ever remember.**

**The process is on-going, I am nervous for what comes next and I am finally starting to love being me.**



**Removing thy mask,  
an arduous task.  
Though certainly worth the wait.**

**I whittle in vain,  
while wasting away.  
Carve a face to change fate.**

**New person, new mask,  
another unfinished task.  
I quickly begin to feel blue.**

**Caustic adhesive dissolvent  
stings far too much,  
despite unsticking the glue.**

**I only feel myself,  
with my masks on the shelf.  
Home all alone, in my room.**

**I start to untwine,  
then gather my shrine.  
Fed up, I know what to do.**

**I burn the facade,  
feel less like a fraud  
then, from the ashes I grew.**



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321 FRUITLAND ROAD #3  
STONEY CREEK ONTARIO L8S 3N5  
TEL: (905) 643-9788

