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Everything Demands Salvation

Translation by Olivia Jung

“Mary, I lost my soul!
Help me, Holy Mother!”

Darkness and more darkness. This must be death.

“Mary, I lost my soul!
Help me, Holy Mother!”

The smell of burning, it’s getting stronger. The heat becomes fire, it’s burning.
I open my eyes onto the world as if it were the first time. I struggle to keep them open, just for a little bit.

“Mary, I lost my soul!
Help me, Holy Mother!”

A stranger is standing next to me. He looks like Saint Francis, but crazed, dirty, frighteningly skinny, and there is a lighter in his hands. The smell of burning comes from my hair, he is setting my head on fire. I want to ask for help, but I can’t manage to: it’s as if my brain were unable to communicate with the rest of my body.

The air is pierced by the clamoring scream of a girl. I turn my head and see that it is coming from the mouth of a forty-year-old man with reddish dyed hair completely combed over to the side. He screams again.

“Pino!!! Pino!!! Holy Mary, he’s setting the new guy on fire!”

The male nurse is a walking belly all in white. He peeks in from the door and hurries over as soon as he sees what is going on.

“This son of a bitch, where the fuck did he even get this lighter?”

“Mary, I lost my soul!
Help me, Holy Mother!”

The nurse rushes by me and leaps over to grab the lighter from the hands of the madman, who doesn’t say anything. He lets the nurse take him back to his bed without any reactions, like an animal that is suddenly defenseless and helpless.

“What the hell should I do with you? Give me any mo’ problems today and I swear I’ll lock ya in the bathroom.”

My body would like to go back to sleep, but I object. I try everything I can to resist, I try talking to it, but I can’t.

The nurse turns towards me and puts a hand on the side of my head that was catching on fire. There is still a lingering smell of burnt chicken in the air. He gives me a condescending smile.

“He ain’t even hurt you. Give it a couple weeks and your hair’s gonna be back.”

And, having said this, he leaves.

With the little lucidity I have left, I try to understand where I ended up. It is a large hospital room with six beds. The heat mixes with the stench, the smell of disinfectant and sweat.

The man who screamed like a girl takes a look around and, one step at a time, comes closer and closer. I am gripped by fear, which is amplified by my powerlessness: I can’t run away, I can’t oppose the slightest resistance or even scream. He smiles, his face now inches away from mine, and he whispers into my ear.

“I’m a virgin.”

He says it as if it were a tempting invitation.

I'm scared. I wish my family were with me, I wish I were at home, in my room. I know why I am here, I know what happened. The shame, the guilt, the memory of yesterday overwhelms me, I would like to let it turn into tears, but I can't manage to.
I fall asleep in that state, yearning for tears that don't come.