

In Hell, Two Angels Appear

When the pot of water slips from your hands, still bubbling, the noodles inside pliant and perfect, it hits your arm first, racing down to your stomach, legs, hellbent on destruction, as you fall, palsied muscles stuttering & frozen, into the pool of exploding, impossible, white hot burning; calves, thighs, ass, your body is screaming, begging for it to end; you can't make a sound. Your body knows pain, holds the memory of femurs snapped and turned, muscles torn and lengthened, but nothing to flesh being melted apart.

They call it "The Tank".

Maybe it's the stark white walls and the fluorescent lights and your body on display as you lie on a cold metal table reminiscent of a gurney in a morgue, perhaps you are the dead body now, or the body you once had is dead, and you wonder if you'll receive a new one in return. Will it be shiny & new, washed clean in these daily baths of all its scars & shame & burnt flesh, or even in rebirth will it be broken all the same?

At three in the morning as you loiter in the fog of panic and pain, you meet the tank for the first time in shadow, a façade of soft edges hiding its unyielding gaze. You fight to keep the tears inside, to answer the doctors' questions with a smile instead of a scream. This is nothing, you tell yourself. You're very lucky, they tell you, to not have splashed water down your chest, as they take your clothing and strip you bare, plaster limbs you no longer own, talk of keloid scars and skin grafts.

Hands all over you, touching, not asking, once more at the discretion of men, and you tell yourself to breathe breathe breathe. You kept your chest, becomes your mantra, you kept your chest, you kept your chest, at least at least at least. They shoot you up with pain meds but it's not enough, leaving you shaking, please, as if in a dream, as they approach the side of your metal coffin with a hose. You don't see the brush until it's too late. You try to pull your arm away, you forget your arm doesn't belong to you anymore, begging, dignity stripped with your skin, as they debride and clean. That's when you see it, so nauseous you think you might be sick, see the blistering, bubbling, brokenness, oozing all up your arm. Please, God, not your arm. He already took your legs, He can do anything He wants to your legs, but please, not - you know this is your fault, you know you did this to yourself, somehow, you shouldn't have been so stubborn and just asked for help with the pot, you brought this on myself, somehow, you know that -

You can't breathe, you're choking, drowning, it's too much, your entire body is on fire.

You have to go into The Tank every morning. Most days you vomit after.

There are two nurses, who start to take you. They brush your body gently, wash your hair and brush your teeth and bandage you tight and sing and dance to Caribbean music. They talk about going on a cruise. They tuck you in with two blankets and say, 'let us take care of you'. When the doctor examines you, his eyes trained high on your thigh, they tuck your gown around you and make sure you're covered up.

They tell you it's not your fault. They tell you that you're brave. When you can't keep the tears in, they pause, remind you to breathe, and rub your hand. They're the only medical staff who ever do.

On the day you decide to sing along, their faces beam, laughter and song cutting through the haze and the pain.

Without them, you wouldn't have walked out the door.

They steal your outpatient visits from the other nurses: only they know how to do the wrapping. They're right.

They give you a hug as you leave for the last time –

You still think about them, in that sterile room, deciding to dance, unapologetic in their loud laughter. A treatment as healing as Silvadene, a burst of soothing cool whose gentle reminder softens the remaining ache.