

Karl Knights

Carol

You were toothless, and shuffled towards me on my first night. You asked my name. I asked yours. *I have many names*, you said. You asked to see my arm, trying to find a number. You believed we were in a camp, and thought yourself Anne Frank. I'd listen to you for hours, rambling on about how the meds were poisonous, and how they'd try to get in your head, tractor beam your thoughts out for all to see. I'd nod along like I used to with my gran.

Once you scrawled your inner bible onto the quiet room's walls with crayon. Hushed whispers and low key fear made their way to me. The others melted away. I peeked around the corner, afraid. A ladder of words met me, and seemed to leap. You'd wrote what you'd told me, about Gabriel's horn and their rays and their conspiracy and how you were Anne Frank, Calypso, a Danish spy and the Queen on different days. The handwriting was scratchy like a child's. The staff rubbed your words out sadly.

Within minutes you were arguing with the staff again. The ban had just come in, no smoking on the grounds. No exceptions. You barely smoked, you liked to hobble around and hold your rollies. *Not to smoke*, you'd say. Staff were unconvinced. You just liked to touch them, to point them like daggers as you shuffled about.

You never had any visitors. I kept hoping a daughter or a brother would come. None did, though you didn't seem to mind. On some days you thought the staff had bludgeoned them all with hatchets. On others you thought you had killed them with your thoughts. I'd fantasize about pinning a relative down, and asking them who you really were. None of the staff seemed to know. Where had you come from? How long had you been here?

Sometimes, like a stranger emerging from the fog, the old lady you truly were would emerge. *Help me. Why am I here? How long has it been?*

And as quickly as you'd appeared you'd be gone. Even in your world you seemed to care. When one violent character took a swing at me you berated him. You desperately wanted to protect me from the gas chambers, from the gestapo. You'd ask me, with large saucer eyes, *have they got you too? I hope they haven't.*

When I left I saw you shuffling directionless, like a beggar with a tin cup, tugging at anyone's sleeves who passed by; murmuring about an escape plan, how you'd evaporate and reappear outside the walls. You were tapping your fags on the locked door. The staff asked you what you were up to. *I'm sending a message, you said. I'll evaporate and I'll be gone. Gabriel will come soon.*