

Being Baptized for the Dead, 1974

Lance Larsen

It throbbed a little, the gash in my left palm.
I pressed the gauze, something to finger
while we waited—boys here, girls over there,
all of us wearing jump suits heavy enough
to paint pictures on. Wet to his waist,
right arm squared, the bishop was baptizing.

His voice, calm, lifting a little, made me think
of the hymns that morning, and the miracles
the temple matron dropped into our laps:
tumors melting, bones reknitting themselves,
angels pulling children from swollen rivers.
All it takes is faith, she said, a little prayer.

Staring at the oxen, their broad simple faces,
I began a litany of pleases, which I kept up
well over an hour. I pictured the gash
hemming itself closed with stitchless thread.
Above me, lions grazing, wolves nuzzling lambs.
When the bishop took my wrist, I bowed my head.

With each name, each watery erasure,
a glossy-haired spirit man thanked me, my left hand
pulsing in a glove of light. The wound?
Still scabbed, jagged—dark as an unwanted tattoo.
And the room filled with angels, frozen in flight,
wings severed by the same rusty tin can.

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