

OUT

by Laura Preble

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All I wanted was to love her.

It was a little thing. Don't most people want that, want love? For this I live with planks of dirty wood etched with days counted down, the cold breath of November night creeping in through the rattling windows, iron bars casting shadows on the bare wood floor from a moon just out of reach.

She's here, somewhere, in this compound. I hear bits of gossip sometimes. Scraps of disjointed information are traded like precious gems in the currency of whispers, words traced into dust with trembling fingers, the occasional triumph of stubby pencil on toilet paper. Carmen is here.

I say her name in my head like a prayer. I used to pray to God, but that was before all of this. I used to sit in my father's church and stare at the angels on the ceiling, hoping for a blessing or a direction, or even a good old-fashioned smiting, just something to let me know I'm noticed. And I was a good boy.

Until Carmen. Until the lighting of a single candle...

