

Tell Your Name

by Marion Umney

He woke in a cold sweat, the voice echoing in his brain, “Tell your name, your name, name!” Did he tell his name to anyone last night or didn’t he tell his name? He was sure he hadn’t. “Never tell your name” his grandmother would say. “They steal your soul if you tell your name”. His mother would just laugh. “Stop putting ideas into his head – he’s got enough already.” His heart contracted as he thought about his mother. They had stolen more than her soul. He knew what happened to women. Now he was one of THEM. He had told his name and they had stolen his soul.

Then last night she had wanted his name. He groaned as a wave of nausea washed over him. It was always the same after; when the adrenaline wore off; when he could no longer stave off the memories. He closed his eyes and tried to make the pictures go away, but he couldn’t get rid of her eyes pleading with him. In his dream it was his sister, her eyes holding his as they dragged him away, the man with the knife straddling her, his trousers undone and the knife poised for when he was done. Then it was the girl and he was the man with the knife. “Tell your name” she had hissed at him hatred replacing the pleading as she saw the coldness in his own eyes. She wanted his soul. Didn’t she know, couldn’t she see, he had to stay cold, he had to do these things or he would die. Kill or be killed was the law of this army. No escape for her or for him.

The nausea washed over him again and he could taste the vomit in his throat. He got up and indicated to the sentry he was going for a piss. The sentry nodded and watched him as he ran towards the pit. He held the vomit in until he was out of sight. It was dangerous to show any sign of weakness – they would be watching closely.

He took a few deep breathes to calm himself before going back. He couldn't be too long or they'd come looking. Calmer now and back in control he strolled back, nodded to the guard and crawled back under his blanket.

He was sorry about the girl. He was sorry about them all and he murmured a prayer to her spirit under his breath. A prayer for forgiveness. He didn't need her forgiveness, she couldn't take his soul, it was already gone, but he asked for it just the same. Maybe he should have told his name. At least then she would have felt she had taken something of him in exchange for him taking her. His name was no more after all, he was no more, he would never be himself again? That boy so full of love and hope was gone forever.