

## **BORN IN HELL**

Sector 6. Orphanage Bucharest, Romania 1980 s

'Never fall asleep in the basement.' They all say that. Vlad did and when he woke everything was missing: the nose, his ears, two of his fingers.....

Vlad was truly disfigured but he didn't say why. And, if you stared at him too much he would whack you; yet none had the courage to ask him what had happened in the basement.

Its pitch dark down in the basement; the concrete floor is so cold that you have to keep walking or your bowels start hurting and then in a week you're gone. The cold starts creeping inside you. You want to lie down and rest, if only for just a moment. Then you'll need to get up immediately but you don't, because you know you're not going to have the strength to rise up from down there if you do.

Sometimes you fall asleep on your feet but you have to wake immediately or the rats will start to gnaw at your toes. You don't hear them but you know they're watching you; there in the darkness with their bellies hurting from hunger too.

You throb! Thinking you hear footsteps of the wizened old woman coming down to get you out of this dark hole; but it's not true. You deceive yourself and suddenly feel the need to eat something, anything, or your stomach will start to eat you. And what's worse is that you don't know how much time has passed. Sometimes you believe it has been weeks since you were brought down here; other times just few hours so you ask yourself 'how long is the old hag going to keep me locked up this time?' Did she forget about you? Or is she waiting for you to die?

You start to cry. 'Cry as much as you want,' you tell yourself, 'Nobody will hear you anyway.'

Some of us start shouting for help or kick the basement's iron door, but it only angers her if she hears the echoes; then it becomes worse.

I like to start thinking about my life.....

My memories are vague. I don't know if I was born at any particular moment or if I have always existed in this orphanage. Soon I realize that I didn't represent a whole lot of interest to anyone. My world was reduced back then to an immense room in which we slept, ate, survived but especially suffered. Back then I didn't believe that there was anything outside of that place. But I remember the shock I felt when they took me outside for the first time. Seeing the sky, the trees, the ground, and the buildings... the world outside as it was; as it is.

And so, I was born in a world where nobody wanted me: where my parents, relatives and even myself, never wanted to exist. But, what did I know back then? Whoever was supposed to love and protect me, didn't; they just buried me in this graveyard of my childhood, with rotten carpets, cigar-smelling drapes, and just forgot all about me.

Yet even here nobody wants you and you know it because they make you suffer, and that is when you realize that life is all about suffering, with only death the end of it all. That is why you begin to imagine how you're going to kill yourself! What would that be like? What does it matter anyway as nobody will mourn you!

But, you don't do it because eventually the basement door opens and for a moment you see a light at the end of the tunnel, even though in it is just the old woman's silhouette; the one we call Mama.