

I, the Victim.

words solo by Simona Semenič

dedicated to Črtomir

my mum and dad

*as well as to Matej, Boris, Rok, Vesna, Lara and all those who - one way or another - walk with me
through the clouds*

Ljubljana, Slovenia, 2007

a short break
breath in
breath out
and then it starts:

the first in the sublime selection of my diseases
- troubles
handicaps
annoyances
or whatever we call them
- is bed-wetting

i wet my bed for a long time
i mean a really long time
at least it seemed long to me
until i was about sixteen
half of my life

it felt most horrid when i was in england as an exchange student of english
i stayed with a british family
in a semi-detached house
at the time i was about fifteen
and i had period
and i peed
i had my pink linen on the bed
as always
as everywhere
but it moved
the mattress pissed
and covered in blood
and i didn't know what to do
i was embarrassed to tell the family
so i flipped the mattress
to hide it
and then i went home
about two weeks later a letter arrived
from the mattress' owner
the mattress is ruined
and we should pay for it

anyway
this is what it was like with this
from doctor to quack
and back

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i slept on some special anti-peeing nets
then i didn't drink after 6 pm
then i took some pills
and some witch's remedies
then i drew little suns and clouds in a notebook
to take to the doctor
and the witch doctor
a little sun for a dry night
a little cloud for a wet one

waiting for a doctor

i collected quite a bunch of little clouds
and a little sun once in a while
little clouds and suns
i thought i must be the most stupid person in the world
do i really need this
i wanted to close my eyes
and wake up in a place where there with nothing but the wind
nothing helped
of course

sometimes i punished myself
through isolation
by not hanging out with anybody
because i wasn't worth it
because i didn't deserve it
because i pissed in my bed
because this is disgusting
and nobody else does it

i didn't discuss it with anyone
my girlfriends didn't know
or at least i thought they didn't
and i hoped so much
that it really hurt
i never slept over at friends'
except twice
aged 15 or so
once at vesna's
once at urška's
and afterwards i always drew a little cloud in my book
once i also turned around the mattress
and then it was over
sleepovers at my friends

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and little clouds persisted in my notebook
and then my mother got some good advice
from some friend –
of a neighbour
of the aunt
of an acquaintance
of a grandmother
of my father's former schoolmate
- to crush egg shells every night
and to eat them
and that would stop it for good
and i ate
and ate
and ate
and ate

in the notebook
on the sheets
on the mattress
on me
little clouds.

little clouds
little clouds
little clouds

alone and the only one in the world
the pisser
whatever i try
i wake up wet
stinking
no matter how hard i wash myself
i still stink

until once i entered the room of a friend
and smelled something familiar
i didn't realise immediately what it was
what it reminded me of
this smell
piss!
the mattress, sheets, walls, furniture
everything was permeated with it
you can't get away from this smell
my friend

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you can wash, clean, do whatever you want
it still stinks
i, as an expert, recognised it
that familiar stench
and at that point i realised i wasn't alone
that liberating smell
that there are at least two of us in 100 square metres
the smell of the two of us
and then it was slowly three of us
our smell
i guess we didn't know of each other
and then our number grew even more
and then i suddenly realised that we are a civilisation of pissers and that's just the way it is
and it's definitely not worth worrying about
now when - once in a while - i wake up in a little cloud next to my six-year old son
i am a bit embarrassed in front of him
but it doesn't burden me with major trauma
ever since i stopped drawing little clouds

second in the sublime selection of my diseases
is genital herpes
it first happened to me when i was eight
first fever
then penicillin
i had been healthy until then
and i never took any medicine
the doctor didn't know i was allergic to penicillin
he prescribed me ospen 1000
and then swelling
on all my joints
bigger and bigger
as well as herpes all over my ass and genitals

not even the doctor knew what it could be
because herpes is sexually-transmitted
let me illustrate:
in a medical lexicon
for example
under the title genital herpes
you find a nice photograph of condom
and i was eight
first redness
it burns, itches
and then
pop, pop, pop

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small white-and-yellow clouds
all over my ass and genitals
bigger and bigger
white-and-yellow

i don't remember it all
i know it hurt
but i don't remember

all i remember is that i was home alone
we lived on the fourth floor
at tovarniška 3c in ajdovščina
and when my mother came home
she supposedly could hear at the entrance to the block of flats
how i screamed
with pain
i remember this event
i remember calling my mother
crying
screaming even
i remember sitting in the living room
on my grandmother's green armchair
which was covered with a really disgusting brown cover
imitation of animal hair
then the emergency
my dad's white *zastava 101* ambulance
whisked off to šempeter in the middle of the night
but i don't remember the pain
i guess it couldn't have been that bad
and the nurses in the hospital were right
when the following day
they said i couldn't endure anything

anyway
this sexually-transmitted disease
is incurable
but my doctor
once
when i was nine
and i had a relapse
decided she would help me get rid of this trouble for good
she wrote a prescription
“simona, it will burn a lot”
she says
“but you have to bear with it – and then you'll be cured forever”

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and i bore with it
it's not that i remember this pain
all i know is that it burnt as if they were scorching my ass
every morning and afternoon and evening
when they applied the cream
formulated by my doctor
and they scorched me
little by little
on my ass
until it became completely black
my bum, i mean
black as if they had burned it
but little clouds did not disappear
white-and-yellow
they were transformed into dry cracked muddy pools
and came back again
white-and-yellow

i had to go to the specialist
dermatologist
so that he would see this marvel on my ass

waiting for the dermatologist

i felt a little bit sorry for myself in the waiting room
and at the same time made plans for how i would go back to hospital
i liked going to the hospital
i figured that only by being in hospital
i would eventually prove to them all
how seriously ill and
poorly i was

anyway
i get to his surgery
with my mother

take off my trousers
maybe a skirt
and panties
and i bend over
and mr. dermatologist puts on his glasses
and observes
the marvel on my bum
black
with little clouds

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“this is interesting”
i bent,
“this is really interesting”
i still bent,
“does it hurt?”

i no longer remember if it hurt
i remember that i lied in my grandmother's room for ten days
that i read robin hood
that my grandmother brought me tea
that my mother brought me tea
that it felt so good
that even now when i'm sick i still remember them bringing me tea
and i wish that today i had ten days to lie in bed
to read robin hood
and my mother to bring me tea

when i have herpes today
nobody even bothers to ask if i'm in pain
it's there on my ass
itching
hurting a bit
but most of all getting on my nerves

if it gets too bad
i go to hospital for a couple of days
but now i'd rather not go
so that sick old ladies won't tell me that i can't endure
i'd rather endure
wear it on my ass
and keep smiling at meetings

during my last stay in hospital because of this
i decided
that from now on
my herpes
will be just mine

and perhaps of some sexual partner
for better or for worse as they say
anyway, if i can quote my dear friend, playwright milan marković – *ima i u tome nešto lepo* - “there's
something nice in all of this too...”

my next disease
or whatever it is

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is a god's disease
- epilepsy
or falling sickness
or whatever

my epileptic seizures started when i was about eleven
but we didn't know what the little absences could be
i thought i was just sick
little absences
which didn't harm anybody
and didn't bother anybody;
then they began to bother
i started to slobber during the seizures
my schoolmates said i threw up
but i didn't
the same as i didn't know how to explain what was happening to me
as if i were in a cloud
fog, fog everywhere around
i am conscious
but i can't react
and saliva is dripping from my mouth

i didn't exactly know for a long time
why these clouds
folded up on me
what's the point
and then i again started drawing small suns and clouds
in a slightly different way
i thought it was some sort of a punishment
- these clouds i mean -
which comes upon me whenever i masturbate
and then i drew a small sun for every orgasm
i had with myself
and a small cloud
for every seizure, before i actually knew it was epilepsy
and i was looking for relations

this thing with masturbation goes even further
but it doesn't have to do with any diagnosis
perhaps some other time
when i am diagnosed
with PCES (post-catholic environment syndrome)
for example, or,
within this diagnosis
considering that i never went to church

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nor was i raised in the christian faith
and not been baptised
maybe its even DCVS
(disrespect of christian values syndrome)
unless of course they decide
i'm not even a lunatic
but the number one enemy of the state

the problem was that my mother and father
never saw these seizures
i just told them i was sick again
and that was it
whereas the teachers at school
- and this i really don't understand even now -
never said
or asked anything
for example:
i'm quizzed on a subject at school
i get up
and the cloud
saliva
and nothing
as if nothing happened

actually the first to tell me i had god's disease
was vesna
the one i turned the mattress around at
i still remember it
we were at her place
she is standing at the top of the stairs in front of the kitchen
i'm down in the hallway
and we quarrel
and we shout at each other
i forget what it was about
all i remember that vesna at a certain point says
"simona, you have god's disease
so that you know
you have god's disease"
and i look at her
from downstairs up
and reply
"yeah, i know, so what"-
but of course i didn't know

vesna had found it out before me

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because we practised handball
her father was president of the handball club
and the coach asked the doctor what it could be
this saliva all over me
the doctor told him that it was most likely epilepsy
and then the coach told the president
and the president told vesna
and vesna told me

i had my first major official seizure at my first visit to the neurologist
my mother and father were with me
i was sleeping in the car

waiting for a neurologist

and i was hit
by god
the cloud

when i was 16 i was sent for surgery
to eliminate epilepsy
for good

waiting for surgery

for a year
i put on a lot of weight
about 19 kilos
then they shaved me
and operated
and when i woke up
it just hurt a lot
i couldn't open my mouth
i couldn't eat
but once again i don't remember the pain
thus it can't have been that bad

after a week i went home
on friday
saturday morning i was lying on a couch
that green one
or it might have been the red one by that time
oh dear
i don't remember this either
and then i had a seizure

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it just wouldn't stop
fifteen minutes
then i went to bed at night
and it came back again
my mother found me
in convulsions and foam
that time it just went on
and on
and it wouldn't stop
then a doctor came
i remember him
sitting on a bed next to mine
while i was having a seizure
in the cloud
but i do remember him
then he gave an injection of valium
in my bum (no small clouds)
and sat down
i was still having a seizure
and then he was saying something
and gave another injection
in my bum (no small clouds)
and sat down
today i can still see him
sitting
on a bed nearby
all crushed
it seemed i was a lost cause
that i was going to die
i was having seizures for about two and a half hours
and then it stopped
god's cloud
and then
(and this is the best part)
they came to pick me up with an ambulance
i'm all dizzy
slightly in a cloud
slightly on valium
they put me in an ambulance
shortly before i had watched a movie
in which they kidnapped people in ambulances
to do experiments on them
and that night i knew
no, i was absolutely sure
that they were driving me some place

where they would do experiments on me
but no
i said to myself
half-dizzy in that ambulance
you won't get me
you have no chance
i don't remember throwing up all the way to the hospital
my mother only told me that later
but i do remember being determined that nobody would do any experiments on me
and how i was scared
because i couldn't get away

in secondary school it was somewhat cool
in the morning i would come to school
looking broken
and all around me understood
i could cough gently
and all around me were hushed in terror
and then i could say in a broken voice
that i didn't feel good
that i wanted to go home
and i could go
to the video store to rent a movie
and to pizzeria for a pizza
and i could stare at television all day
and in addition be a victim

in short:
at a certain point during my teenage years
i was sick of everything
school in particular
and obesity
and i decided to kill myself
one day when i really didn't feel like waking up and going to school
not even to show my painful face
and then come home to watch movies
said...
and done
i had quite some pills in stock
i took a glass of tea to my room
barricaded the door
and started taking the pills
but i failed to predict that it takes more than a glass of tea for that many pills
then i just swallowed them for a while without tea
i knew if i went back through that door to the kitchen my suicide would be history

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and it hadn't even started properly
so i swallowed the pills without tea for a little longer
until i couldn't do it anymore
and i check if there's any liquid
but there isn't
just the acne tonic
and i went on swallowing the pills without liquid
and then i had enough
i'd die anyway, it didn't matter

waiting for redemption

i took the rest with the acne tonic
and then ER again
the ambulance was dad's silver-green *renault five* this time
rushing to šempeter in the dead of night
and then stomach pump
and the lying
nothing worked
neither arms
nor legs
i just lied for a few days
they turned me around
when they got tired of bringing me a pan
they inserted a catheter
no way this
i said to myself
semi-conscious
no way this
not a catheter
no way
but they wouldn't take it out
and i'm lying with a catheter for a few days
then i could move my hand
and because they still wouldn't take the catheter out
i did it myself
ignorant me of course had no clue
that a catheter is not just a tube
that there is this plastic ball in the bladder
which slightly tears you apart
and then blood
blood everywhere
but at least i no longer had a catheter
and then i had enough
i asked them when i could go home

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“when you're able to walk by yourself
from the bed to the wall and back”
i'll go today
“you can't even lift your arm”
then the nurse went home
and i said to her – goodbye, i'll be gone tomorrow
and she just gave me an indulgent smile
then the doctor came
and i told him what i had been promised
and when he had confirmed he would let me go home
i got up

walked to the wall and back to the bed
and then i couldn't make another step
but they released me

i only mention this event in order to again cite my dear friend the dramatist Milan Marković:

this, my second favourite quotation:

ne postoji put do sreće, put je sreća -

there is no road to happiness

the road itself is happiness...

anyway

afterwards i had to see a psychiatrist

of course

waiting for a psychiatrist

in his office

or surgery

i rummaged among his notes

and then among the testimonies of teenagers

and among others a seventeen-year old girl who had contracted aids

then he came in

sat down

and we started

soon he enquired what i had on my arm

i had three cigarette burns

i caused them myself

and he asked me:

“simona, why did you do this to yourself?

do you think claudia schiffer does this too?”

and there i was again

among the small clouds and suns

secondary school was over

the first year at the college i went to the hospital in grenoble

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for examination
because of the epilepsy, of course
they implanted internal electrodes
14 internal electrodes
those which go through the skull
directly into the brain
if i understood it right
and then they passed some small electrical current through
and observed what was happening to my body
anyway, to stick with the subject
they pass this electricity
and my arm lifts
all by itself
or my leg
it was utterly fun
or i was overwhelmed
(and this was best of all)
by a special cloud
not as a seizure
but as a fantastic feeling
i can't really describe
it's not like when you smoke pot
nor is it like an orgasm
but something different
it might
or it might not
be better than this
because i no longer remember this feeling
but i do know that it was really cool
and that i wanted more
but unfortunately it only happened twice
or maybe three times

last time i had a strong seizure
was about a year and a half ago
precisely on monday 6th march 2006
i was sitting on a bar stool
with my dear friend rok
having a coffee
i'm enthusiastically telling him about a hedonistic weekend
and then it hits me
i'm sitting too high
and that's why i'm still a little scared of bar stools to this day
and was kicked off god's cloud
to the ground

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i again woke up in an ambulance
semi-awake
i didn't know a thing
i didn't know who or where i was
all i knew was that i had to pick up my boy from daycare
and then passed out again

when i regained consciousness at the emergency
they're all around me
matej, črtomir's father
črtomir
and rok
matej and rok look at me
with pale faces
scared
worried
whilst i just keep on being enthusiastic
and in a good mood
and on the left there's my son
who two days later turned five
he wouldn't look at me
he turned his back on me and wouldn't look at me
and i just keep on being in a good mood
"guys, why those long faces everything's just fine"
i say to them
and matej and rok give me a sour look
while črtomir turns his back
"give me the mirror to see this marvel"
i tell them
and i have a look at myself
only then it got really funny
when i saw myself
i couldn't hold the laughter
all bloody purple
black and blue
i don't remember the colours exactly
all i remember is that my face was a mottled swollen cloud
no eyes
chin and cheeks melted into one
stitches on my right eyelid

i can feel absolutely great
but look awful
i arouse pity
and a bit of disgust

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but hey
i have just had a marvellous weekend
and a couple of stitches can't change that
besides
and this cannot be ignored
i have a new episode
in the self-narration of a victim

later on when i walked around
with my purple face
which i probably shouldn't have
because it embarrasses people
and then they stare
and stare
and stare
and i was really sick of all these looks
i said
it was all my fault, he does love me
or
he bought me flowers afterwards and now we love each other again
then they turned in rage

when at the age of nineteen
i came back from the hospital in grenoble
after my second surgery
it was the same
my head was shaved
and i had stitches
i was shut in a hospital for almost two months
without saying a word to any of my colleagues or friends
at that time there were no emails
or SMS
i was literally cut off from the world
a letter here and there
and when i got back home
i couldn't care less
about a shaved head
scars
stitches
all i wanted was to mix with people
wearing a hat
until it got too hot
and then these accusing looks
and words
how i should be at home

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how people feel uncomfortable seeing things like that
how i should understand this

to be honest
i too don't enjoy seeing people with crutches
or hearing aids
or dental braces
or piercings
or polished nails
or grey blouses
thus i completely understand
as well as empathise with them

when two days after that sensational fall from a bar stool
i came to pick up birthday-boy črtomir from day-care
a little less swollen
thus a little more purple
he was no longer afraid of me
he came to meet me at the door
a group of children watched in fear
whereas črtomir swings one hand towards me
and the other towards the children
and screams
“and this is – the purple surprise”

before that sensational fall i came across
an excitingly smart
successful
talented
- and all that comes with this -
man
who asked me
why i don't use makeup
“do you believe that you look beautiful enough without it”
after all
i'm a woman
at that point it crossed my mind
that he definitely has a mattress at home
that he turns around every second day
but when i was this purple
walking around made-up in purple
without spending a cent on makeup
i finally realised
what the man had wanted to tell me
being purple

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i felt a woman
from head to toe
well
at least from my left to right eye

i shall put an end to epilepsy with an anecdote
i have a bunch of anecdotes about this epilepsy
i never get tired of telling them
and i do have one that absolutely breaks every record
and i just have to tell it
so
once we went to a meeting of self-help groups
for epilepsy, of course,
and since epileptics usually don't drive
we hired a van
and a chauffeur
so
there are seven or eight epileptics sitting in a van
driven by a chauffeur
we are headed from gorica to maribor
we stop at a petrol station just outside maribor
for a smoke
and then we wanted to get back in the van
but our driver was thrown to the ground
by god
and he was in convulsions
until the ground was completely covered in blood
because he broke his head
and there are seven or eight of us official epileptics
just watching
and we don't know what happened

we all survived in the end
including the chauffeur

the latest in the selection of my diseases
is mastitis
that is
inflammation of the breast after giving birth
or just giving birth in general

meaning: the diagnosis is giving birth
symptoms: huge belly, low backache, swollen breasts, joint pain, water breaking, contractions, the
birth of a new human being
i arrive in the maternity ward

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on women's day
and first they shut door to the father
in front of his nose
because he didn't attend maternity class
mainly because he didn't pay for it
and now it's too late

i'm allowed to give birth
on women's day
although i didn't attend maternity class

and then all those disgusting things
an enema
and contractions
i'm lying there alone
on women's day

waiting for an obstetrician

during the contractions
i read romantic souls by ivan cankar
i need to pee
and i have no place to draw a small cloud
i hold it
because they won't let me get up
i mustn't damage this new human being
because my waters have already broken
i call the staff
but they don't have time
i'm not an emergency case yet
and besides i'm alone
and then i have seizures
small clouds
nobody comes
i'm not an emergency case yet
and besides i'm alone
i'm telling them they have to perform a caesarean
due to the herpes
which could be lethal for this new human being
that is what i was told
but at the same time one of the gynaecologists told me that i didn't know what herpes was
i don't know
i guess i probably don't
but we have to be careful that this new life isn't damaged or hurt
they wouldn't listen to me

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and i'm waiting
i'm not an emergency case
and i need to pee
and i have contractions
and seizures
but i'm not an emergency case
and i can't endure anything
and
on top of all this
i'm alone
why didn't we attend maternity class
for the sake of this new life
and then finally the right person arrives
appears by the door
as if by miracle
my old gynaecologist
and sends me to the operating theatre
and they cut free
a new human being

the only fear i had about this new being
is that it would be really really tiny
because
first
if you take anticonvulsants during pregnancy
there's a chance that the head circumference
of this new human being
will be smaller
and that it is smaller in general
and second
if you smoke during pregnancy
the chances are the same
a smaller head circumference
and a smaller baby
and then my perverted mind made a picture of this new being
who just didn't exist at all
because it had vanished amidst tegretol and nicotine

when i slightly came to myself
after they had cut it out of me
and one huge seizure ceased
which they weren't expecting
because they forgot to check my medical chart
all i wanted to know was if the child was big
is it big

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is it big
i kept asking
slightly under the effect of anaesthesia
it's huge
they told me and showed it to me
four kilos and eighty and 53 cm long new human being
who had fat rings around the neck
and he pulled faces
as if he was laughing
at all of us old human beings
loaded into a huge ambulance
with six and a half billion seats

and then i wake up in a room
and i want to tell the father
that he has a son
but they wouldn't give me the phone
what would happen if they gave every mother the phone
we don't want to bankrupt the maternity hospital

and then it really started
i'm breast-feeding this huge new being
and this hurts
hurts
hurts
i no longer remember this pain too
the only thing i remember
is that tears flowed down my cheeks
and that i was looking at this new being in my arms
my torturer
and this is exactly how i perceived him
for a moment
as a torturer
and then the guilt
of course
terrifying guilt
what kind of a mother are you
surely this is nice
having blood run from your boobs
and i say to a nurse
- it hurts, it hurts, i can't breastfeed
blood is coming from my breast -
"don't you worry"
she says
with a smile

“he'll spit it out”

my boobs clouds of pus
but i'm used to clouds
small clouds
and clouds
it doesn't matter
the new being is in my lap
this is what matters

but i've done my share
i put a new human on the six-and-half-billion-seat ambulance
i could tell you something about his diseases
but this is his story

because i've done my share
i'm not a dry branch
i've realised myself as a woman
and of course as a victim

the only thing that bothers me
i mean really bothers me
is that he is now in the centre of attention
the new human being
not me
none of my diseases draw any attention or sympathy

and then i think to myself
something needs to be done
something

and then i figure the only thing that could save me
my personal integrity
is a new disease
so that i could look around with a broken look
and people would understand it
so that i could gently cough
and people around will be hushed in terror

something like that
but
to my great sorrow
and disappointment
i don't like prepared fruit juices, i rather make them myself
i don't like too much sun-bathing

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i don't like hamburgers from mc-donald's
i don't like lipsticks and makeup and hair dyes and hair sprays and nail polish
i don't like alcohol (at least not in exaggerate doses)
i don't like fizzy drinks, not even cockta or coca cola or beer
i don't like fried food
i don't like fruit and vegetables from interspar, i'd rather get them from my mum's garden
i don't like frozen, i cook almost every day
i don't drive and thus walk rather a lot
and i don't like high heels
i don't like air-conditioning in the apartment or car
i don't like food with a several-month long shelf life
i don't like perfumed toilet paper
i don't like artificial fragrances in my home
i don't like bleaches or softeners
i don't like anti-wrinkle anti-aging or anti-cellulite creams
and so on
again cum *gratia in infinitum*

i figure the only thing i can try
that i have left
that can save me
is a coffee and a cigarette
one fag after another
chain smoking
more and more
and try
try
to produce another diagnosis
so that i can write a new episode in the victim's self-narrative

and i beg you
i urge you

short a break
inhalation
and exhalation
and then it ends

let me smoke

THE END.