

## *That We Will Sing*

I call you a saint, washing dishes at the soup kitchen, tutoring men who cannot write their own names, teaching poetry to the addicts, and I imagine Saint Sebastian, female and voluptuous this time, no arrows this time, white robe slipping to her waist, writhing in ecstasy at the touch of an invisible hand, green eyes cast heavenward, though we know there is no God in Paterson.

Yet, in poetry class today, you gave the addicts a poem and they sang the poem back to you, *Lift Every Voice and Sing*, and so they did, even the man with one arm, and so their voices became human again, not the baying of wolves to be shot on sight by police after sundown, but church voices, school voices, voices before the needle flooded their bodies and drowned all the songs, all the poems they knew.

I imagine Neruda telling the crowd he could not read to them the poem they wanted, the poem that begins *Puedo escribir los versos más tristes esta noche*, tonight I can write the saddest verses, since he did not bring that book with him, how the crowd rose together to chant the poem from memory back to the poet, *Puedo escribir los versos más tristes esta noche*, the saddest verses.

Afterwards, the addicts in a circle of folding chairs rose for you, speaking of God in Paterson to their teacher the heretic, reaching for your hands as if they could take the spirit in your skin back to the shelter where they sleep tonight, touching you the way I touch you sometimes, not in lust but in astonishment, telling myself I did not imagine you, that you are here, that we will sing.