Sounds of Silence

by Andrew Stancek

Mirko is humming as they sit in the waiting room. All the words have been said.

“Hold my hand, will you,” she says.

“The doctor is running a little behind,” the nurse says. “A few more minutes.”

“I don't wanna do this, Mirko,” Terka says. “Maybe I should keep it. Maybe this is a sign. The doctor is late so that I keep it after all.”

Mirko squeezes her hand. “Ruin your life, that's what it would do. A kid at sixteen? You gotta be kidding. We've been through this. You don't wanna keep it.”

She snatches her hand back, starts sniffling. “What the hell do you know? Why the fuck are you here, anyway? It's probably not even yours. Could be Duro's, or Fero's, or Tomas's. Shit, at that party.... Could be ten guys. Why the hell don't you just go, leave me alone.”

Mirko takes her hand again; it's trembling and sweaty. “It'll be, OK, Terka. Just breathe. It's the right thing.”

Her sobbing intensifies. “I can't...can't. I'm so scared.”

The nurse comes over with a tissue. Mirko notices a stain on the sleeve of the blue uniform. She's chewing gum; her breath is minty. “I'll take you in now. By yourself. They'll look after you inside.” She's trying to be kind, Mirko thinks. He wants to thank her but Terka is digging her nails into his hand, her face against his shoulder. He pulls her up; the nurse takes an arm, guides her to the door. Terka

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clutches the door frame before going in, gives him a last pleading look. The door swings behind her.

She comes out without a word, does not speak on the streetcar. She unlocks the gate in front of her house; it clicks behind her. Mirko does not speak either, watches her go in.

She doesn't answer the phone in the next week. As he puts the receiver down Mirko is struck by the silence in the apartment. The parrot, he realizes. No squawking this morning. He walks over to the cage, looks at the bundle of feathers at the bottom. Father will be upset.