I’m sitting on the wooden floor of a cloistered, patchwork monastery cut into the side of a mountain, awaiting the arrival of a grey-bearded man who is not my father but who is, nonetheless, not unfatherly.

The enormous, ancient doors, covered with gold rings, will soon part to expose the dark, silent interior to fierce sunlight and terrible wind.

I both dread and eagerly anticipate this moment.

When the doors finally open and the fatherly man, barely visible, looms silently, I am overwhelmed by a violent sickness that rushes through my gut.

I begin to sob.

I feel around the floor and find a sharp rock, which I instinctively hurl at the man, and yet I also want him, need him, to enter, as his willingness to join me signifies something about my worth.

The man enters and I know instantly that I have succeeded, that I am saved, saved from myself, made good.
But I also know that this salvation comes at a grave cost because, in exchange for such grace, I must forsake an element of myself, something I have never truly encountered but that I nevertheless hold dear, or that I ought to hold dear, or that I ought to have held dear.

I must physically expel from my body this element and roll it out the doors and down the mountainside into the valley, where the snow and ice will quickly bury it and where, after the thaw, wolves will devour it.

In response to this exchange and my anxiety about it, my body collapses into a fleshy liquid and forms a sort of puddle, much of which remains upon the monastery’s floor, but some of which manages to ooze beneath the great doors and to slide down and down, to its quiet fate.