

Diary of 66: The Night I Burned Alive

Alexandra Furnea

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Alexandra Furnea links the nightmarish suffering of burn victims to the pervasive impacts of statewide corruption in *Diary of 66*, her memoir about surviving the 2015 Colectiv Club fire.

Widespread bribery throughout Romania meant that building codes and safety regulations went unenforced everywhere. Furnea, a music journalist, was covering a concert at Colectiv in Bucharest when a spark from pyrotechnics ignited flammable soundproofing material. The venue was packed, and people panicked, stampeding toward the club's single narrow exit. Sixty-four people were killed; Furnea and over 100 others who survived sustained mutilating burns. And Furnea was one of many who faced further ravages in Romanian hospitals where medical care itself was influenced by malignant corruption.

The prose is lyrical and compelling, even when describing horrific injuries in unflinching, disturbing detail. Before the fire, Furnea's generation already felt cornered, living in a corrupt state "so overwhelmed by evil, yet filled with what is most intimately ours" that escape was impossible. Such political issues are linked to the agony of people trapped and burned at the Colectiv Club, and then trapped again by devastating injuries and a punitive, incompetent medical system.

Furnea's voice is both urgent and elegiac as she recalls the friends who perished at the site of the fire, who didn't survive hospitalization, or who survived with scars: "The sensation of flames on naked skin never leaves us, it's nestled there, in our wounds." As the death toll mounted in the weeks after the fire, she imagined "drawing bloody cross after bloody cross in the calendar of our souls, to mark the dates for mourning. The fire keeps engulfing us even after it was extinguished."

Diary of 66 is a powerful memoir about a catastrophic fire that connects the personal suffering of the victims and their families to political malfeasance.

MICHELE SHARPE (September / October 2024)

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