

ZAZEN

Ch 21—Into the Snow

Two days later I caught the bus to Breaker's Rise. I had Tamara's folded swan with the directions in my pocket but I didn't tell her I was coming. Creeping past my hidden desire for things not to be fucked, I made up other reasons for my trip—It's a lovely time of the year to see the coastal range; I heard they've got raw goat's milk kefir—my violated hopes, that there really was a place for me, weren't real if no one else knew about them. In the same way that someone's not dead until you say it on the phone.

The Blackberry Apocalypse was settling into a traffic menace and maybe Sasha was right that not much had actually changed but I saw it differently. Over the digital streams and dammed expressways, my flag flew like gauze in front of the stars.

I packed like I was going to sea. I took my maps, my rock hammer and the last Hive phone. In my PO Box was the newest issue of *Paleobiology* featuring my name in black script on the yellow peach cover. Out of sentimentality I took that too.

Credence got the morning off and drove me up to a small town north of the city so I could catch the bus there and avoid the long security lines downtown, which was an all-around good idea. The rains started again but it was colder and I heard there was snow in the pass. We talked a lot about the Candlelight Vigil. He said they never even got across the bridge. The police came in from both sides and started arresting people. One girl got so scared she jumped. Broke her leg in three places. Before if I had said I was leaving town after something like that he would have called me a coward and accused me of exercising white privilege in the face of the real costs of gentrification. But when I told him I was going out to a friend's farm he seemed relieved. He was probably just glad I wasn't lost in the Target parking lot. Lowering expectations being the secret to my success.

Credence bought me lunch in a Mexican restaurant near the Fallon City station and waited with me until the bus came. We talked about the babies.

Annette had picked a birthing center. He had negotiated his time off with the union. They were going to go in for another ultrasound the following week.

“Got any good twin names?” he asked.

“Romulus and Remus?”

He smiled, ordered an horchata and stared out the window. The parking lot reflected in his eyes.

It was raining harder when the bus came. An older man with matching luggage got off and they switched drivers. Two women who got out to smoke were complaining about being late. I was standing in the aisle when we pulled out and Credence flickered away. Dog salmon super 8.

The bus moved north then east along a river. We stopped in a few other small towns before turning onto a long stretch of road that ran parallel to an old railway line. I looked at the bedding planes of the road cut. My mind ran between riots and Rat Queens. I'd remember Sasha, stark in the green of The Motel, and suddenly see Grace, her dark hair streaming over an aquamarine dress and tiny creeks flowing from her fingers. There were no anchor points to my thoughts at all.

I laid my head on the glass. A wave of nausea swept through my body when I thought about the bombings and what I had done. But eventually, lulled by the vibrations of the bus and the passing geology of my childhood summers, my mind cleared. Nobody was dead. I didn't need to know what happened. And living in the center of that thought the vertigo and nauseous fear came and passed. Twice I had to stop looking out the window, fix my eyes on a single point and remind myself that while on the edges I was terrified, in that bright moment I was okay.

The bus pulled sharply to the side and the engine made a loud stuttering sound. People who were dozing woke up and looked around as the driver edged us onto the shoulder. We were there for about twenty minutes then the driver got back in said we were going to have to find somewhere to stop for a while. He limped the bus a couple of miles ahead to a truck stop right off the main highway and tried to fix it there but he couldn't so we had get out and wait for a new bus. People started calling their friends and trying to get rides. The rest of us set up camp in the truck stop.

The Farm was only about four hours away but it was on the other side of the mountains and the woman behind the counter said the pass was getting worse and would probably close by nightfall. I had an address not a phone number so I couldn't have called anyone anyway. I found a place near the showers on the drivers' side of the truck stop, a waiting room with black vinyl seats, a television and three courtesy phones. I curled up there near a window and watched as the rain turned to flurries, a white line moving down the mountain.

There were tanks on television rolling through the snow somewhere far away. It was night there and everything looked green on camera except the icy ridge they were climbing. Tanks disappeared over it like seals into water. Then there was an explosion. I could tell by the way the sky lit up. After that they just showed maps.

I got up and got a cup of coffee. The snow was falling thickly. I looked out at the bus parked at the far end of the lot. Soon the wheels would be buried. Already the roof and windows were covered. I sat back down and pulled out my notebook. A man with a belt buckle the size of a steak got up and switched the channel for a weather update. More snow. Early for this time of the year. Pictures of flooding roads in the valley. Pictures of giddy jocks on the slopes. A reporter in pink fleece with a cup of hot chocolate. The trucker changed it back.

They were showing footage of the fires for anyone who missed it and then Newscaster Ken's Black Friend Garth interviewed the minister of Higher Ground of Africa Baptist, then back to the fires. For a second I couldn't tell if it was really happening or not. Like the first time I ever heard a bomb when I was four and I didn't know what it was. It was on TV but there was no screen between the fire and me. There were all these apartments burning and I couldn't understand where it was because the newscaster kept saying Philadelphia but then people talked about how they bombed Africa. I couldn't sleep. Grace and Miro stayed with me. I remember Grace talking. She walked back and forth trying to explain something. Some things she said again and again but it didn't get any clearer. We were in a war, but not really a war. Not everyone knew about it. Some people did but pretended they didn't. But it was

going on all around us all the time and we must never forget or we'd lose. Everything depended on that. Miro sat on the bed while she talked with his heavy hand on my leg. I woke up in the afternoon. I'd been dreaming of dead birds.

A man nudged me.

"Hey, are you Della?"

Then I heard the page.

"Della Mylinek. Della Mylinek. Please come to the convenience store counter. Della Mylinek."

"Never mind," someone said, "I see her."

Tamara tromped in wearing a big green coat with a fuzzy hood. There was snow on her shoulders and boots.

"Come on, quick. The others are in the car. We're going to try to make it back through the pass before it closes."

She grabbed my bag and we ran out the back and climbed into the car. There was a guy in front passenger seat and a girl in the back. We took off with the chains ticking as they dug into the snow.

"I called Mirror to see how the party went," Tamara yelled over the rattling engine "She said you were coming." She looked back at me and grinned, "There aren't too many busses that go all the way out to Breaker's Rise."

The man in the front seat watched me get in but said nothing. I glanced at the woman. She had short henna-red hair. Gray eyes and a wide flat milky face. I knew a hundred people who looked like her. When I got settled, she handed me a thermos of Yerba Mate and we pulled out onto the highway, now a white alley where the sky and road met. Steering between the dark underbellies of trees shrouded in snow and the hazard lights of stranded trucks, we headed for the pass. Tamara's hands were the color of bone on the ochre steering wheel.

When the pitch of the road lessened, she formally introduced us.

The man was Jules and the woman was Britta.

"I told them all about you," Tamara said.

Jules glanced away. I could see freckles faint on his cheeks, his blonde hair ashen in the snowlight. Tamara slapped him in the stomach and he smiled. They had the same bone colored hands. I wondered if they were related.

Britta pointed to an abandoned D.O.T. truck on the shoulder.

“That’s a bad sign.”

Jules rolled his window down to wipe more snow off the side mirror and I thought I heard a dog yelping somewhere but it was a just harmonic created by the wind and it went away when he rolled it up.

Closer to the pass were more parked state vehicles, ploughs and salters buried in the whiteness. I closed my eyes. Tamara was telling a story about some guy she knew who was so afraid of snakes that he broke up with his girlfriend because she got a snake tattoo.

“What a fucking coward!” Britta said.

I went to sleep wondering what tattoos scared me that much.

We came through the pass when I was only half-awake. It was dark and they were talking about what to do if we got stuck and had to make it through the night. I raised my head. The dashboard was a constellation of vectors and points and the view through the windshield was a gray parabola. Tamara said it would be fine as long as no one got out to go to the bathroom. Jules said it would be fine even if they did, just colder. Britta laughed and said she’d rather use the thermos. Their lips were teal. They might have been speaking Yupik or Estonian. That’s how foreign I felt among them.