

Winter

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There is coldness inside me. It used to hurt, but now my nerves are chilled insensate. Any tears left inside of me are frozen; my face is dry again, my voice steady.

The heater clicks on, deep inside the apartment, and stale warm air flows through the vents; it swirls around me, drying my eyes and tickling my skin. Cold light presses in through the windows, showing the naked tree in the yard twisting arthritically in the evening wind. Leaves scatter and coalesce at its gnarled feet.

The nature of sunlight is different in winter; silvery, lifeless, thin. I am quick to forget the golden warmth the sun can bring; it's a dim memory, taunting, in the back of my mind. I shiver in the artificial warmth of the furnace air.

Outside, the world is cold. Barren. I feel the bones under my flesh, dry and brittle, creaking with the effort of motion. I've had these bones, this flesh, for only a short time, and yet they wear heavily on me, offer me little comfort. I feel the winter wind in my heart, even though it's blocked by walls and glass and neighbors.

Frost glitters silently on the grass, painting the world in crisp monochromatic tints. The world outside my window is sharp as a razor; worn thin, bleached pale by cold and wind. Once, before, there were children playing in this grass, when it was softly green and inviting. Calls and cries and laughter echoed; full, warm sounds. Now there is only the thin whistle of wind beating against my panes and rattling slender icicles that fall like prison bars across my view.

The furnace clicks off and a creeping chill reaches in through the window.

I long to reach through that window and touch something real, to escape this barren room surrounded by this barren landscape. Ice sits in the marrow of my bones. It is a wonder I don't crack open like the tree outside, its heart exposed and half fallen; ice has burst its veins, split its wood. It staggers there, leaning, waiting for the hot touch of the saw or the laughing pull of the storm to guide it down; it's too tired right now to complete its fall to the earth. Frozen, half toppled, a snapshot of destruction incomplete.

Where is my love, my lover, to caress me and bring back the warmth of my dreams? My fingers touch the window, slide along its slick surface; they sting from the cold. I have not always been alone, have I? Can it be that my life is here, sitting with my feet on these cold dusty boards? I know there was another life, once.

I remember. Or did I dream? It seems unreal, so long ago; perhaps it was just a dream.

We sat in the warm sand, laughing, as the dancing ocean laughed with us. Hot sun filled the space between and around us, caressing us in our embrace, as our love burned outwards into the world and lit up the very heavens.

Just a dream, a pale recollection, drained of life by winter gloom. Clouds boil across the horizon, silver tarnished black, crushing both sky and memory under their weight. Thin flecks of ice sting down, speckling the window and blurring the twilight world.

I wonder what sky is over my lover's head now? Is it the same cold and dark; slate and steel wool, sharp diamond stars frozen in black ice and thin sunshine that has lost its way? No, I imagine that they fled hand in hand, love and sunshine side by side, still together on some distant coast. Lost to me in this winter world.

There is a door to my room that I could walk through. Out in that icy world I could seek, and perhaps find, that which I have lost. A turn and a click and a pull and a step and I would feel the bitter wind on my face and hands, and I would know I was still alive and not buried in featureless purgatory. The ice in my heart cracks and I know there are still

tears within. I hide my face with my hands, feel the dryness of their skin; hot breath leaking from my nostrils warms their edges in short gasps.

I am like that tree, frozen, half broken, unable to fall and yet no longer alive and growing. Perhaps the ice has split me and I will crumble, shattered, to the earth; to be taken back into nature's womb, recycled into some other life.

I put a hand to my stomach and wonder at the emptiness within.

I can't remember my lover's voice. Has it been so long? What is wrong with me?

Ice slips in through the window and numbs my memory. Brittle crystals form in my imagination and burst forth from the cell walls of dreaming, leaving only grey mush and a silvery reflection, the sterile beauty of the snowflake.

Shadows crystallize in the corners of my room as the sky outside roils with darkness. Silvery hints of shape tease me from outside the frosted panes, a witchy wonderland wrapped in protective cotton. A white ermine stole falls around the shoulders of the garden, a glittering tiara rests upon its head, diamond jewels at its breast. A static, unmoving, beauty with no life in its womb; a mockery, light without heat.

I chip at my memory with short stabs of regret, digging to find my lover, to hear our laughter again, if only in echoes; memories fall in shards around me. Under the purple lights and flashing strobes of the disco we sweat and glisten, hot and flush, pulsing to the beat; our skins touch and intermingle, our sweat freely given and freely received, the heat within us burning in our eyes.

The café with its white linen and delicate plates, bordered by ornate silverware and glittering cups. Wine like blood slipping between our lips, a sacrament; this is my body, this is my blood, amen. There are no others but us.

A bulging black bag covered in zippers and pulls; little dusty wheels and a bright scarf around the handle.

A featureless room, empty. The TV and its blue glow.

The plastic bench. A wall of windows.

The whine of engines.

The murmur of the crowd.

Great steel birds flock on the ground, eating passengers, disgorging them.

Where is my lover's voice? I can see a face reflected in the icy chips; and touching them, they melt away, as fragile as new snow. The memory melts and slips down my cheek, cold and lost.

Curled in my chair I break apart. Floes of ice crack and scatter in the black ocean of memory. Winds whistle outside. Deep inside the apartment the heater clicks on and stale warm air flows through the vent, spinning me gently in dark waters.

Outside it is black, the world is gone; it has fled from my grief. I see the outlines of the window through blurry eyes; I see the outline of my own face reflected in the night. The world is black ice, frozen, empty. There is only this one room and I within it.

The door stands closed in the corner and I shiver in the artificial warmth of the furnace air.