

In the Snow

Bright sheets of untouched snow lay flat on the Michigan plains. Weary ranches sat next to towering silos, and the sky was low and white. Could barely see ten feet out the car, but it was still an improvement. The blizzard had settled for now though wisps of ice still fluttered about. The engine choked and rumbled and skipped and chattered running over gutters in the half-plowed road. The heating element in the old Chevy had burned out last winter, so the bitter cold seeped through the gaps in the rattling doors, and the cracks in the back windshield. Its tires were balding and the fender was about to fall off, but despite that I knew my love Dean, behind the wheel would keep us going until we were across the border where we would be safe.

We were going about fifty on those straightforward roads. Red barns looked like miniatures on the white plains, like toys out of a farm play set or like dabs of paint on a landscape. They whizzed on by. I felt the brunt of the chill as a draft came in every few miles. But then Dean would take his free hand, lean over to pat and smooth the flannel blanket I had swaddled up in, and I felt all the warmth in the world.

The road came to a fork, and we turned to the right toward a dead fishing town on the shore of Huron. *Johnsons' Fishing Co. est. 1902, St. James Apothec. Rx, Huron Diner "BEST CRAB CAKES FOR MILES..."* The storefronts looked abandoned besides a message of hope on the door of Huron Diner saying "OPEN NXT SPRING." Tarry snow piled up on the curbside like another sign of life. We'd freeze in the car and had to find somewhere to shack up. So we did—in St. James where the resident pharmacist, John, took us in. He asked us where we were headed, and my love explained, "The border. Got a friend up there who'll take us in."

"Now for how long?" said John.

"We'll be staying up north for a while."

“Til when?”

“Long enough. But don’t worry, as soon as sunrise, we’ll be out of your hair.”

John touched his whitened beard. I saw generosity in his eyes and kindness in his face when he told us to suit ourselves and take the room up-the-stairs on the second left.

The room had a bed with a bare mattress and a desk with a drawer. An ashtray sat on a nightstand with a few sprinkles of ashes. The musk of tobacco coated the room. Dean turned on radio, which was playing a staticy weather forecast—cold—and tuned it, but nothing else would play.

We sprawled out our things: a couple blankets, a trunk of clothes, Dean’s school diploma, my mother’s ring, and a few wads of bills we had saved over some months. It was enough to get started. We would stay with our friend for twenty-three months; Dean would find work in oil, and I could sew.

Dean said he was going to check on the old Chevy. I told him to patch up the crack, so no water could get in through the night and gave him a roll of tape I found in a drawer. He kissed me and held me and left. I crawled in bed alone. I heard the front door click shut, the little bell above the threshold jingling.

In the morning, I wiped clear a spot on the window but only caught myself looking back. The storm kicked up snow about six inches up the glass, the rest fogged up with a lace of crystals. I remember his eyes were as pretty pale gray as the foggy scene outside. I wouldn’t cry, because I knew he would come back, and I got in bed alone again, the chilliness eased as the John turned on the upstairs radiator and the woolen blanket wrapped around me. A snow drift piled up against the front door, but the golden light melted away most of the snow by the time I

saw it out there. John put a heavy hand on my shoulder, and I palmed my mother's tarnished ring.