

# The Winter Makes Quick

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Cigarettes confided their scent in the fabric of the car, the winding lace of the steering wheel, and the hole where the lighter had been. The mad auras of headlights during the mist of New England, Jim Morrison and Sid Vicious of the radio gods, and the carnivals of our silence when conversation stopped.

“Brian – that man’s got all my love.” Alex’s face lit up like the devil’s when he struck the match. He kissed the cigarette and grinned after he let the first smoke leave his mouth through the window. “Man, you can’t understand Brian, he’s like above it all. Recklessly. You know?”

“He’s still pissed at me, about Dylan.”

“Screw him.”

“Dylan?”

“No. Brian. You knew what I meant.”

Brian’s great uncle died and left him a decent apartment in New Haven. It was a widower’s place – the washing machine was next to the stove in the kitchen for instance, but it was a decent apartment. Alex and I had spent the past two nights there. The only reason we stayed so long was that we would each get to sleep on the couch once.

“Did you see the copy of Lao-Tzu he was looking at? Taoism is shit, you know. He shoots you in the foot about Bob Dylan and starts reading Lao-Tzu. Man.” I didn’t say anything.

We got to Boston while dawn was still happening to the city and the first cafes were opening their doors, the window washers were

standing up their ladders. In a few hours everybody else would be walking the sidewalks to their offices.

I saw Alex for the last time that morning. I dropped him off by his girlfriend’s place on Lexington. On the way there I saw a Moses on the corner, handing out flyers, or maybe bus tickets to Canaan, to whoever happened to walk by in the early morning. If Jesus were next to him handing out loaves and fishes he would not have seemed so crazy in the empty streets at dawn. I looked at Moses and I looked at Alex. Two prophets with the same hallucinations. I thought about the Temple of Dendur in Manhattan where Alex and I wondered mystical things to each other, and looked at old Egypt and New York at the same time with the same blue scarab on our wrists. I thought about the beach where we used to meditate together, leaving shapes in the sand. His was a moth and mine was a frog. Nothing in this city reminds me of the beach, the white horses of the waves and the pale miles of the shore, the universe of her empty hands, and the dawn’s lonely crowd – the boy in the sand, felt like I had made love to the shore in the middle of the night before the pasty blue shades of the predawn sky, before the car alarms and the swimmers and surfers, the banging doors and the literature of the bathroom stalls on the pavilion. The beach melted away into the city and Alex slid out of the car, my last vision of him as a crazy Moses without anybody to deliver except himself.

Later in Boston, I spent the day watching the city passively, standing anonymously on the “T” and waiting beneath the broken chimes of its tunnels. Boston was collective and quiet. Her buildings gloated like tall iron headstones. The gardens celebrated their imprisonment with the luster of a recent rain. By six o’clock every street lamp captured the birds of her light in small cages. I stayed with Sean that night. I told him where I was going and I knew there was nothing to explain to him. “I love your mysteries, sometimes. Boston’s too bare. It’s got the style of a bad movie.”

In the middle of the night Hannah phoned. She said her most recent nonsense to me, she and I and past lives. I thought to ask, “What about Alex? Do you love him anymore? Or did that stop, too? Is that what we buried at the beach?” Did I tell you, Hannah, that I would relinquish every vision except for yours? You inspire this beggar and murderer. I said nothing and hung up the phone.

An hour later I was turning onto Lexington. It was almost three in the morning. The moon had set and the city was hardly quivering. Hannah was sitting on the steps of the building. I knew how they felt, the city's steps. They dragged the heat out of you like a repentant to his cross.

"You're lucky I waited for you," she said.

"I couldn't forget. You said once – you know what you said." I remembered the moon's crazy rainbows over the dark concert of the shore, once, how I thought the clouds were wolves, the way they swallowed the moon. She made a god out of me in the sand and she thought I would not understand. Nothing reminds me of the beach anymore. And now we were in Boston. The fog was our last respite now and we followed the immediate yellow lines of the highway into it.

"When you have once seen the glow of happiness on the face of a beloved person, you know that a man can have no vocation but to awaken that light on the faces surrounding him; and you are torn by the thought of the unhappiness and night you cast, by the mere fact of living, in the hearts you encounter." She was reading from a book.

"Who's that?"

"Camus."

"That's beautiful."

"Yes."

"What about Alex?"

"What about ... what's her name? I don't think you ever said."

"Yeah, that's where we're going."

"Well what about her?"

"She says I look European. She says she loves me."

She laughed. "That's kind of ambiguous, European. I don't know. If she said you looked French it would've meant you're thin and pale. If she said you looked English she probably thinks you're snobby or smart or something."

"If she said Scottish she probably meant I had red hair. And the gout."

"That's a compliment. Only rich people get the gout."

"Right! 'I'm flattered out of my mind that you think I'm rich and slightly lame.' If she said German she probably meant I have a strong jaw and an overbearing –"

"Government."

I laughed. "Or, personality or something. I don't know. 'European' is kind of ambiguous, isn't it ..."

"So is 'She loves me.'"

"... she probably meant that I'm an open market."

Hannah fell asleep with Camus open on her lap. *I couldn't forget. You said once* – we watched the lighthouse at Montauk, the streams of golden fog in the air, casting about like a pantomime of a desperate search. They outlined every stretch of our flesh and the road's and the shore's. Inky cake of our bloody hands, morbid pavement of our path, graveyard of the shore, the bent elbows of our rusted frames and the concrete flowers of our ultimate indifference for the body that we buried there. The moon surrounded itself with a strange rainbow for us before the clouds swallowed it, like wolves, I remember. Hannah, you said once, if the world were to end right now you would rather be here with me.

The smokestack seemed like a monastery over Hanover's first hill. The town begs, "Please walk slower so I don't feel so small." Oh, where were you when I left? I saw the speckled surface where your hands had been, on the glass, the ice, the solidness of our souls. Where we had walked, the sidewalks were bare of their leaves and everything was in ice. (What weather could destroy our wings as thoroughly as the snow?) The spears of icicles defensively protruding from the buildings until they melt, and benches along the ailing park where people meet in a different season, now wading in the snow. The sky where gray collects like a dead feature of eternity, the sky that makes such quick ghosts of our breath, hovers over us and exudes calm. And over the northwestern shoulder of the town, no witness to the last hill and the last brave star while dawn is transpiring, and the sun burns from the ground like a revelation of the hills, and over Occum pond in the spring – as if it thought we wanted something like it but we could not describe it as clearly as the water.

Hanover, New Hampshire. March 1999.