

And the War Came

When tensions escalated, Dad negotiated half the company supply for Cape Spear. Government men haunted the house for a week, spectres with hollow eyes the bruised colour of expiring stars. Their cigarette cherries fizzled in the yard. Blackouts made it quiet but for the occasional scrape of skates at Bannerman. A generator kept the rink frozen. Nobody went mummering, fireworks were banned. Dad inked the contract as fog horns bellowed in the harbour on New Years.

Lawyers rushed the deal while no one paid attention. Publicly, the government disavowed known terrorists like Dad, whose oil fuelled both sides of the conflict. The feds agreed to block the road and Dad quietly renovated the bunker. Markets collapsed, men abandoned the job. Dad bribed the rest with barterable provisions. When the government declared a state of emergency, they demanded sanctuary for their families. He broke his promises with bullets when the work finished. Widows clawed raggedly at our front door. Bodies were found by people bathing at Middle Cove Beach, warm now as though it were the Gulf of Mexico.

Those with money went west. Most abandoned the island after spring icebergs bobbed along bigger, more frequently. By the time the war came, there were none at all. Families joined their men in Fort Mac, then bargained savings and soul for shelter in the Rockies. People too poor to travel stocked their root cellars. They bid for dangerous offshore work despite whispers of rigs lost to the belly of hurricanes creeping north. Despite reports that *Hibernia* had stopped producing.

Two years in, Dad brought me to Cape Spear in his helicopter. Sunrise burned

beyond the bunker, an overripe peach exploding the horizon. Solar panels tilted toward the blaze like unfurling flowers. Dad wheeled my suitcase over craggy rock and pressed my thumb to a panel at the door. He handed me a pistol, kissed me on the forehead. He jogged back to the helicopter and turned to scream something, words razored by the beat of the blades.

Communication dropped three days later.

I baked myself a birthday cake and ate it alone. Threw myself a graduation party. Watched every Bond film ever made. Got wine-drunk in the bathtub blaring *Dark Side of the Moon*. In the spring, I fed young hares nesting under the courtyard cannon. By July, I unwrapped my Christmas gifts: a cashmere sweater, a designer handbag, a Polaroid camera. In a long corridor, I posted photos of every sunrise since Dad left.

I waited.

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One morning in late August, dawn broke with distant explosions and metal screeching against rockface. I lay in bed, my palm sweating against the gun. Waited for the ceiling to collapse, ground crumbling beneath. I debated spending rounds on invaders or putting one in my head before they could get me. The explosions subsided gradually.

I waited for nightfall. Hulking and jagged, an oil rig swayed against the cliffs. Waves licked what was left of its base. Charred, twenty-foot letters spelled my family name on the hull. I climbed toward the lighthouses for a better look. Craning my neck to

glimpse the rig, I stumbled. The ground wheezed and swore. A badly burned man lay beneath my feet. Fine layers of his skin clung to my shoe, coming apart like tissue paper.

Later, he flinched as I touched antiseptic to his wounds. I swept it gently down his spine, across the broad of his back. When I tended to his arse cheeks I looked away. His burns were made worse by the sun. Nobody went out midday; the highest SPF couldn't protect anymore. I studied his shaggy hair, the long line of his jaw, gnarled hand sporting a gold band. He was about ten years older than I was. He had feral green eyes and a mainlander's slow drawl.

"You know what you're doing?"

"I'm in med school. Was, anyway."

"Nice pad you got here."

Fearing gossip, Dad avoided buying new furniture. Everything was salvaged from grandpa's old saltbox in Ferryland. Musty, but comfortable. Only the flat screen and blu-ray were new.

"Dad's got a twisted sense of humour. Figured a bunker should look like something out of the past."

"Where's he?"

"Newfoundlanders have this saying. *Stay where you're at til I comes where you're to.* He just hasn't come yet, is all."

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Doped on painkillers, he spent three days sleeping off the shock in a cell converted to a spare bedroom. The workers had neglected to remove the bars. He snored

like the dead. I crept into the cell every day to change his bandages and feed him ramen with tofu.

“Chrissakes, doc. Prison food for a prison cell. Was Dad cheap on grub, too?”

“You can starve if you want. I don’t give a shit.”

Grinning, he slurped the greasy broth. I asked how the rig had run aground and got his whole story, instead. He was from the north shore of Superior, a quartermaster on grain ships. When the Great Lakes had fallen, he came east for work. The border inched north daily. We’d lost the NORAD bunker and the Ring of Fire.

“Resource war, plain and simple. Minerals, water, oil. They ran out and other countries cut them off. Now they want ours.”

“What about the rigs?”

“They don’t give a shit about Newfoundland but for the oil, and it’s gone. Fucking company left us out there.”

I swallowed hard. “So you weren’t attacked?”

“Tropical storm took us. Most guys ditched the rig out of fright. I was the only one who stayed. Safer there than a lifeboat. Washed up here with you.”

“Lucky me.”

“Lucky you.”

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He wore clothes Dad left behind. Flannel shirts splitting at seams, t-shirts too tight on his frame, pants cresting his ankles. He spent a fruitless week trying to regain internet or cell signals. We played board games, coy nods to our former lives like

Operation, or Battleship. Over red pegs he spun yarns about braving the gales of November and sang songs about the Edmund Fitzgerald. We drank tea. We said nothing for days, breaking silence only to recommend a book or ask for crossword answers.

When his burns healed, I offered him Dad's golf clubs.

He laughed. "Your old man's got some screwy priorities."

He practiced while I snapped my morning Polaroids. Dawn was the only time cool and safe enough. Squinting, he drove balls into the wind for economy's sake, banking on them coming back. When he felt lavish, he bet me he could hit targets on the rig. We made a game of it. He wrapped my hands around the grip, squaring my hips. I hadn't been touched by anyone in over a year. His wedding band choked the flesh of his ring finger, swollen from fresh air.

At midnight, his cell bars creaked open. His feet cast long shadows outside my door. He waited until he saw my lamplight flicker at his toes. It was an unremarkable comfort, repeated long enough that it became habit.

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We took walks after dusk, our breath taking shape in the winter cold. We toured the lighthouses while I explained the history, and how we were standing at the edge of the world. The rig groaned in the distance. It shifted daily, drifting further away. I told myself he'd get back on it, leaving as abruptly as he came. The thought was mechanical, fleeting. It brought me no pain. But in bed, he traced rough fingers across the pit of my throat and clavicle. He made plans. Spoke in future tense.

He pointed at a line of stars pearling the moon's neck, then traced the big dipper. "What's your sign, doc?"

I winced. “Surely sailors have better use for constellations.”

“Brought me right to you, didn’t they?”

His words were layered with a grinding, subdued screech from somewhere below.

Instead of clutching my ears, I cradled my stomach. “That noise,” I said.

“You’re going a little screwy,” he said, heading for the bunker.

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One morning he made me wait at the mouth of the bunker. He returned covered in blood, a chain cutting the flesh of his hand. It was heavy with skinned animals. One peek at the long legs told me it was my rabbit family. His proud, crooked grin.

“My snares worked. Been so long, I almost forgot how. Gonna make Christmas stew.”

“I’m a vegetarian.”

He smirked at blood pooling on the concrete. “Tasty trumps cute, doc.”

“Not when factory farming and conspicuous consumption fuck your climate.”

“I’m glad you can afford the luxury of principle,” he snapped. “The rest of us do what we gotta do to survive.”

“I have food.”

“You won’t always. Did your Dad teach you to hunt? Leave you a gun?”

“No,” I lied.

He studied me carefully, saying nothing.

“He’ll bring more food. He’s coming.”

“Doubtful. You think I haven’t seen that logo? How else could you have scored a gun battery on government land?”

I bit down hard on my lip.

“We had satellite communication til just before the storm. He was taken in Banff.” He measured my shock. “I’m sorry.”

Sucking huge, staggering gulps of air, I closed my eyes to guard against pooling tears. “I’ll go back to town. Catch a plane. Maybe I can—”

His grip flexed and tightened around the chain. “That’s not a good idea. We’ve got a good thing going here. I can protect you.”

“You should go home. Protect your wife.”

He lowered the animals with a wet, sick thud. He wrestled the ring off his slick finger and pressed it, bloody and warm, into my palm.

“Does anyone know you’re here?” he asked.

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Each sound from the kitchen brought a dull, nauseous lurch, same as I’d had under the stars. Wet slicing. Bones cracking under the butcher’s knife. The hiss and spit of fat hitting the pot. I locked the bathroom. Head in the toilet, I retched and heaved silent screams. Tiny capillaries burst under my skin. Retch, heave, retch. My hand was still bloody from his ring. When I fell away from the toilet, ochre handprints remained where I’d clawed at the bowl and seat. The thick, heady smell of rabbit stew clung to my hair. I stripped my clothes and waited for him to go to bed.

I emerged in the morning with his ring on my thumb. It was the only finger big

enough to fit. He ladled a bowl and set it in front of me. I took slow bites and tried to chew in a way that was not spiteful. Onions. Rosemary. Potato. Bay leaf. Parsley. Celery root. Beef broth. Watery cab sauv from a bottle I'd saved for Dad's return. He left bones by the soup pot for me to see. Next to them was my gun.

"The stew is good," I said.

At night, he slept with one arm clamped around my torso. He snored like the dead. I lay stiff, pinching locks of my hair an inch thick between my fingers. I held them under my nose. Took deep, revolted breaths and counted the ingredients back. Dad's words echoed, not quite lost to the helicopter blades: *Don't let anyone in.*

I waited.

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He whistled the Edmund Fitzgerald song and packed the meat into Ziploc bags. His body bent into the deep freeze, shuffling things around to make room. He talked of trying to find deer in the fall, or maybe moose. Almost every species had died in the heat or had been ravaged by ticks or had been taken by the government. I didn't tell him this.

"That's a good idea," I said.

He kept the pistol in the waist of his ill-fitting jeans. When we resumed playing board games, he'd take it from the small of his back and lay it on the table. It sat, pointed at me, next to the Monopoly hotels and Scrabble tiles. I laid out V-I-R-G-O for a triple word score.

"Yours?" he asked.

I shook my head. "Baby's."

After he stopped crying, we left the bunker for the first time in a week. He pointed again to the constellations, twinkling and unmoved. Outrageous stories fell out of his mouth. He placed his hand on the back of my neck. I laughed. Funnier than his stories was his notion that I would run. That I had anywhere to run to. Behind us, the city lay dark and empty.

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We never missed a sunrise. I ran out of film in April, but there were still hundreds of golf balls. We rose before dawn and I watched him hammer exactly ten Titleists into the wind. The rig was gone. Every time the sun split the horizon, he turned his picket fence grin on me. I used my fingers to frame the shot, crooked my index finger, and clucked my tongue. I took ninety-four of them. On the fifty-sixth, I began excusing myself to pee.

The first time, his spine stiffened.

“Just over that ridge there,” I said. I pointed with one hand and clutched my swollen belly with the other. “Can’t help it.”

He shuffled anxiously.

“Stay where you’re at til I comes where you’re to,” I said, giving him a small kiss. By morning seventy-eight, he barely missed me.

After ninety-four sunrises, I waddled over the ridge and just a bit farther. Clearing away a bit of brush, I pressed my thumb to a hidden panel. I sat behind the kitchen island with the butcher knife in my hand, counting the rounds he spent trying to break in. Onions. Rosemary. Potato. Bay leaf. Parsley. Celery root. Beef broth.

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He lasted almost a week in the heat. Longer than I thought. He was also heavier and more sun-charred than when I'd met him. I couldn't move his body, so I waited til the night was cool enough to work. Dad never made me hunt. But he never left me behind, either.

There are more bullets in the storehouse. I considered putting one in my head, before anyone else could get to us. But you need someone to play Scrabble with. So I didn't.

Onions. Rosemary. Potato. Bay leaf. Parsley. Celery root. Beef broth. Red wine. Ziploc bags. I lowered him into the freezer next to the rabbits. It was mechanical, fleeting. It brought me no pain.

We're doing okay for now. There's still lots of ramen.

What I'm saying is, I'm not there yet. I still have the luxury of principle. One day we might not.

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When the time came, I crawled back in the bathtub. I played *Dark Side of the Moon*. I screamed. The pain came and went, came and went.

I waited.

What else could I do?