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Deep Burn Blue

I pull the car over
In the angle parking off Main
We sit there
Together
Rain falling on the sunroof above us
I ask you where you see yourself in five years
You say married,
With two kids,
A dog,
A backyard across from your mother

When you ask me,
I say New York,
Writing for something,
Scraping by,
I say that I want the city to break me down
So that I am forced to pick up the pieces
I say that I really want to feel something
And I don’t have to look up
To know I need to ease you,
I mean that I need to feel something for myself

We make out like teenagers
Sloppy
In the back seat of my car
Our shirts and my white bra

DEEP BURN BLUE
Erin Sargent

thrown to the side
the cold November air
seeps through glass,
foggy windows and
breathless,
I press my nipples to your chest
hard,
They drag across your skin
Warm in this cold car
It’s fickle,
These taboo moments
Hidden in this city

The rain reflects downtown lights:
The little bulbs
Strung through trees
At trendy cafes
And neon signs at the parking garage
You know I like the colors on the streets
In the rain
There’s no future
Where we are together
We both know that it’s true

But here, in this car,
In the angle parking off Main,
Neither of us needs to say it

We surrender into shelters and wait, warding off his icy fingers with fires, furnaces, and electric baseboards, keeping a barrier between our skin and his touch with layers of fleece, cotton, and wool. Sometimes it’s not enough. On the darkest days, Death himself hovers in our frozen breath as we exhale. He’s touched us once and always wants more. Once the heat returns, we’re reminded of our carelessness; he leaves his mark, burning skin that flares with pain, swells, and oozes.

My great-grandfather, Thomas August DeCelles, told this story to my father and uncles on a moonlit, bitter-cold night, his voice not unlike snaps of split wood and crackling sparks. He spoke in short sentences, always breathless by his last syllable. “Replacing the salt lick and breaking up ice, I happened to look up. I noticed the sky. How it looks before the snow. Way the sky feels so low, like it’s standing right next to you. The air, it warmed up a few degrees. Light looked different. Sun filtered through gauze. Land, real quiet. I had to get those horses. Get them to the barn. It’s only maybe an eighth of a mile. Up there, where the old bunkhouse sits, huh?”

My father, eight years old, and his younger brothers nodded, knowing where the bunkhouse was. Where the old barn was.

Great Grandpa continued, sure they understood this short distance. “Blizzard come up while I was getting them inside. I started back. I couldn’t see. Not where I was going or where I’d come from, nothing. They call it a whiteout. I was snow-blind. I wandered in one direction long enough to know I should’ve reached the house. Then I went east for a while, thinking I was off, just a bit. Boy, I was getting just scared. I couldn’t feel my feet or my fingers. Then, comes this light. I could just make it out. It neared, an old man with a lantern, his breath white, calling me in my mother’s language. An old Indin man,” Great Grandpa closed his eyes and nodded, “he showed me home. He showed me home, then just disappeared.”

At first, it’s simply cold skin, then it pricks us, then it’s numbness. We may not even realize we’re bit until someone points it out. It was my mother who constantly pointed to the lack of sensation and numbness that severely affected my father. Raking and probing all his oozing blisters. Necrosis—the death of tissue—begins in prolonged exposure to damp, unsanitary or cold conditions. In extreme cold, blood vessels constrict. Blood is diverted from extremities. Cells within the dermis and subcutaneous tissue form ice-crystals, bursting and leaking fluid and proteins into tissue, causing blisters. Skin turns from red to white. Pale and hard, it becomes numb to pain until finally, black, leather-hard skin reveals the severe damage of the deep tissue.