

Icy Snow

by

Kevin Stillwater

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this is part of my
Broken Stories Unfinished Dreams
series

I would say Kevin never finished this, but maybe this is all he ever intended.
Either way, it's dead in the water.
Somewhere along the line it made it's way into my garbage file, so garbage it must be,
even if on the rereading, I find it's not so...

Whatever!

Feel free to enjoy it for what it is or turn the page at your own discretion.

Like what you see?
Want to carry on carrying on?
Or transform it into something else?
Let's work out a deal.
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Icy snow, my feet are numb. But I don't mind. I'm standing
in the sun and at my leisure: discharged.

It's not the sash, the scarf, that catches my eye: red, anti-war,
she's lost someone -- lover brother. Rather, the way she wears it.
Tight, like a mask, across her face. She's even wearing a breather
underneath as if an attack was imminent this far removed.

I follow her into the store. She doesn't notice.
I pick up the cheese, she puts down. No coupons.
It's the meatballs, she pauses over. Doesn't even have to
check if she can afford them. But I can. And she hears my order.
Enough for two.

Down produce she's shaking.
Maybe ties that sash a little tighter, choking down her
feelings, so I don't stress it. Just come out.

She looks I grab.
At the wine, I know she's testing. She's not a drinker.
Check she tries to loose me. But not really.
Down the street. Not even running, hiding, or looking
behind.

Half a block behind she stumbles on the stairs, drops her
keys: too artless to be planned. She's on the run, but doesn't know
how. And then I'm there.

"Let me help."
"No, I've got it." And then, "Please." Just go away. I'm
sorry. It was just a game, in the store.

But it's not a game. I flash the metal: my fingers. The hand's
gone, the arm's gone -- all the way to the shoulder.

Reaching into the snow, pulling up keys, letting them dangle,
ice and water, dripping. Toss them to my good hand, open the door
like I know what I'm doing; and then, take her bag.

"After you."
"No..."
"Yes."

And just staring into her eyes {blue, green, crystal,
loveliness}. Nothing more to it than that. Nothing more.

She turns, slowly, hesitantly. Looking back once, grabbing
the railing, shaking, taking the steps slow, deliberate, afraid she'll
fall, afraid I'll follow.

The clink of metal tells her that I am -- using the railing,
metal on metal, feet shuffling, playing a little.

God help me, I like her scared, terrified.

At the door, I take the keys out of her hand. She's forgotten how to use them. It's not an act.

Inside, bags on the counter, I turn her to face me. She can't hold my gaze. She'd like to look away, like a deer in the headlights.

I untie the scarf, unzip the jacket she's been wearing: Infrantry -- Frontline, you know he's dead. And flip off the breather.

She's an angel, Heaven sent, my savior.

I must have lost track of time.

"What... do... you... want?" It takes her awhile to get it out.

I look at those eyes, those lips. I know what I want. And so does she.

"A bath. And if you've got heat, turn it up. I haven't felt my toes in..."

I pause, to unbuckle the boot. Metal again, to the hilt. The whole left side.

"Well, it's been awhile."

But she's still asking the same question, so I ask her one of my own.

"Your brother? Lover?"

"Sister."

"Sister?" Cause there was something about the way she said it. And then it hit me. "Well, I'm going to spend the night, at least. Till the food's gone."

"And then?"

"And then?" What did she want me to say? And then go shopping again. Stand out in the cold. Not likely. "I'm going to take a bath. And you," cause she had that look in her eyes, "are going to figure out why you invited me here."

"I didn't..."

But then, she knew that she did.

###

{Let's try again.}

###

Metal from the waist down.

Metal from the waist up.

{It's retro -- inaccurate -- so sue me.}

Feet in the snow, wiggling toes, there is no sensation, just an indicator, a gauge.

I could pretend, run a shiver down my spine, shake, and convulse. I've seen others do it. Others of my kind. Not like those around me.

Human, mostly.

A missing arm, there. A missing leg, here. Maybe an eye, glowing ruby red like a laser scanner, just to be sociable, to differentiate from the black pits of death of the killing field.

{Not that I know the first thing of war.}

I didn't tell her I was coming... ever. She doesn't know.

Missing In Action.

Presumed Dead.

Presumed wrong.

I don't know the particulars.

{And why work them out.}

A memory here. A memory there. Bits and pieces. A composite.

Maybe I knew my own name. Maybe they told me. Maybe there's no way to know. Maybe what's left doesn't care.

So, I sit. I wait, my feet in the snow.

My brothers in arms without arms surround me, drinking, eating, watching time go.

It's been years.

Time to make my move.

###

Speed up, fast time, we've been here before.

See her come. See her go.

My little sister is going to college.

And her roommate.

No rush. The days past. I see their routine.

She doesn't notice. Me sitting in the snow, drinking with the rest. Her stopping giving a dime, a loaf of bread, an extra blanket.

Never looking me in the eye.

Not this one.

But eventually,

I followed, to the store. Her roommate playing the game: this one, this cheese. Meat? Yes. Oh, meat would be nice. And coy, at the wine, the whiskey. Never telling her friend, my sis.

Following down the street, her making it easy to keep up, my sis in a rush. Dropping a key, knocking it out of her hand.

And then my hand, grabbing a bag, opening the door, you know the rest.

Until she was going to tell us, why I was here.

{So, flip it. My turn.}

Something about how it was part of the program, to keep me in tune, with what we were fighting for.

And her roommate asking, "So, like, working parts?"

{And the answer is, Yes.}

###

{Amber and Mouse.
It's coming along.}

#

5-10-14

Brett Paufler

Don't ask me why Kevin didn't label this track Amber and Mouse. But he called it Icy Snow and so shall I. Anyway, I think this ditty explains what I find compelling about his work: short, sweet, and to the point.