

The Storm

Snow loses its features the longer it goes on. Cars became mounds became crests became snow. Sophia, who had just returned home from a long day to a loud fight with her boyfriend, who stood by the window became a woman became a figure became a shadow in the light in the snow.

The storm went on for three days. In those three days fourteen liquor stores were robbed, ten grocery stores looted, five children kidnapped, and twenty four homes attacked. An abandoned factory at the edge of the city finally, under the weight of the storm, caved in.

Connor, who tried to get home from work that first night found the snow so bad that his car broke down on the bridge and Connor got out and walked home with the snow closing in all around him. And when he finally got to his doorstep it wasn't his house at all and he spent the rest of the storm with the Markovics, Peter and Anna and their two little girls Lila and Simone. Peter told Connor that his hands and feet were frostbitten, that he was welcome to stay the night, and that the wind—which usually had a voice—sounded hollow tonight and this meant the storm would be particularly bad.

Hundreds of strays died across the city, too, and late into spring the small thawed bodies of cats, dogs, mutts, and even a hawk found by a little girl and her mother in May in the crook of a rock's crevice, appeared. Less birds overall. The birds managed to hide away somehow. It was mostly dogs who died during that storm, curled up beneath cars and alleyways as the snow filled the air and all the smells were replaced—the Mister on the corner who sometimes had treats; the bakery and the heat and bread scraps; the Man in Blue who kicked and was to be avoided—and all that was left was the smell of cold and the snow coming down like a constant heavy handed patting: pat pa pat heavier and heavier...

None of this mattered to Bernhardt and Jane who by the beginning of the first evening already had rosy cheeks. Bernhardt was a strong man leader. He was pointed energy in action. He knew nothing about tying his shoes, how to eat with his mouth closed, how to change a light bulb, or how to read a clock. He had Jane for all of these things. He had never thought to learn what Religion was or how and why snow fell. He knew how to drink, how to shake a hand, how to be listened to, how to charm, and how to dismiss.

He had been at Jane's when the snow began, and in his unsettling Bernhardt way had declared the storm was likely to last four or five days and that getting home at this point was already futile. Instead he had made drinks for them both and then called up as many people as he could think of from Jane's phone for a wonderful winter party.

"Wear as much fur as possible, it's about to become horribly cold...How do I know?" Bernhardt hadn't a clue. He had never really thought to think on *why* something *was* this or that. He was exceptionally good at pontificating and this is always what people first noticed about him and the first thing they forgot too.

"I would say it's in the clouds, I would, Margret," he said into the telephone—it was a ripe tomato in his bulky hand—"but honestly the real reason is because all day Jane's radiator has been making a racket, and if her landlord is willing to turn up the heat even a little then that must mean it's going to be a wretched type of storm."

Bernhardt had thick lips and they groped at the rim of his glass as he drained the last of his drink and, seeing that Jane was finished too, eagerly fixed them another round. He had shown up earlier that morning. Jane had known he was coming but all the same he had come at a completely different time than expected. She had opened the door in a baggy sweater and sweat pants, the things she slept in, with her hair a mess, and the make up from the day before now streaked across her face, because she hadn't bothered to take it off the night before. It had made Jane upset that he had seen her this way, not because she particularly cared, but

because Bernhardt particularly cared and he had come upstairs with her to make sure she applied the right amount of fresh make up, the right long plaid skirt and sweater combination, and even jewelry for, as he was already telling her, a “very brisk and chilly day”.

Jane was, in Bernhardt’s words, extremely clever, with a shrewd eye and a habit of not taking herself seriously enough, and—not to mention—a true and loyal friend. This was how Bernhardt described everyone he knew and the first time Jane heard him describe her like this she had been deeply touched and warmed and now—as he told her again that she ought to take herself more seriously because if she didn’t the cabbie she had failed to tip the right amount certainly wouldn’t either—she heard him like the cooing of some especially large pigeon, or rooster.

Their lunch together that first day when Bernhardt arrived was nice enough. Bernhardt had insisted they go to a place in Jane’s neighborhood that Jane had never seen or heard of before. The inside had been all velvet cushions and booths with a full bar that was probably very crowded at night, but right now was clean and empty and a nice black marble that wasn’t being blocked by people crowded around it trying to get drinks, and they admired the smooth inky surface from their table in a corner of the restaurant. Bernhardt was the type to mispronounce every single thing he ordered, and as his inevitable conversation with the waiter began—as if this was part of the meal too for him, as if there was a secret fourth course between aperitif and entrée that consisted of the most delectable and delicious of words—Jane excused herself and went to the bathroom.

As she looked herself in the mirror, Jane noted a couple of things. She wasn’t as tired as she had thought. She was holding herself together quite well too. Maybe this was all due to the drinks Bernhardt had ordered for them. Jane noted too that her outfit really did work quite well together, as did her make up and jewelry, and it annoyed her in a very small and needling part of her heart the way Bernhardt always did when he was right.

After lunch they had gone back to Jane’s. The snow had begun to fall in thick clumps that clung to them like burs. The afternoon had already turned dim and murky and the sun that came through the clouds didn’t feel like sunlight at all but a dull lamp. They almost slipped twice the snow was all over the pavements, it was getting into everything. Bernhardt brushed it off the plants Jane kept on her stoop as he waited for her to fumble with the keys and let them in.

They hustled inside and it was then, in the hallway as they took off their coats that Bernhardt had proclaimed the snow would only get harder and that the only reasonable course of action was to hunker down and have a wonderful winter party.

Bernhardt was making yet another phone call and Jane, who’d been helping Bernhardt think of people to call, had soon become obsolete. She wandered out of the kitchen where Bernhardt was making the same joke about the snow coming down so hard that it must be snowing even harder in heaven. Bernhardt’s rumbling laugh bounced through to Jane sitting with her new drink in the living room on her mother’s old blue sofa that faced full on the large windows already tinted with frost. Jane loved to look out of these large windows. She liked all of her house, she liked the upstairs bedrooms and the old tiled kitchen downstairs. She liked the fireplace and liked the three blue sofas all crowded around it. But most of all they loved the old chandelier that hung from the ceiling, a mobile of brass and light, and they loved to turn off all the lights on very dark nights and watch it shine like their very own personal star. Their. Her. *Her* very own personal star. Jane felt a shiver run through her that had nothing to do with the cold, and quickly she took another large gulp of her drink. Bernhardt was still on the phone and she listened to him guffaw and she felt better that she wasn’t stuck in her old creaking house alone after all. It would be good to have a party, it would be nice to see all the halls packed with people, the silence of the house drowned out by laughter and mindless chatter and—she could see it now—Bernhardt’s great figure right in the center of the party. He was incredibly good at

that. Or maybe it was other people who were very good at putting Bernhardt in the middle, like bottom feeders on a big fish, not a shark but maybe a carp. How did Bernhardt know so many people? How did Jane know Bernhardt? She couldn't remember. It was there, somewhere...it felt buried under so many other things, a metal statue that had been covered over with other trivial memories and thoughts until all she could see was a very large snowman with thick lips and thick brown hair and a drink.

"And don't forget to bring more limes and lemons when you come," Bernhardt was saying to the telephone, he laughed, "yes limes *and* lemons, and I wouldn't say no to olives too thank you very much."

There was the sharp click of the phone and Jane heard Bernhardt shuffle into the living room behind her. She kept watching the snow fall outside. She imagined all the snow as little triangles falling neatly together, making a diamond pattern that was too small to see. Then she remembered that all snowflakes are unique, and that exactly the opposite was happening. That every snowflake was a brilliant speck that got lost among all the other brilliant specks, and maybe that is why snow fell, to make all the different and unique things simply fields of white. Bernhardt sat down next to her.

"Who's bringing limes and lemons?" Jane asked. The wind was a single strained note.

"Hm? Oh, Joseph is. Good sport."

Jane felt the ball that spun round and round inside of her plummet. The cold she had felt earlier, the sorrow that she had all but managed to reduce to a dull hum since that morning came welling up with the wind outside. She felt her heart thump in her chest alone. The rest of her was hollow.

"Oh?" She replied, "Joseph said he'd come?"

"Of course," Bernhardt replied, "of course, you don't think I'd forget to invite him do you? Jane, I know you think me forgetful, but I take pride in remembering the little things. Besides I like Joseph. He's much better than some of your other fellows, I'm looking forward to catching up with him. He said he's excited for the party, told me he thinks this wonderful old house is wasted on you and that you ought to do things like this more often, and I agree with him there Jane. It is such a lovely house, it's no fair you keeping it all to yourself."

So that's how it was going to be. Like it never happened. He would breeze through the door and plant a kiss on her cheek and ignore the fact that the last time he had been there he smashed two vases, had demanded an unfair ultimatum from her, and stormed out leaving her crying on the stairs. Jane felt herself already resigning herself to it. She did not want to feel the way she felt right now any longer, and the fastest remedy was to play along sweetly until she once more settled down again into the person they both liked and play along until she forgot too that she was anyone else besides that.

Or maybe this time it would be different. This time he would be willing to listen, this time they could begin again. He would come in from the snow covered, he would be just coming in from the cold, he would have just seen how cutting it can get and then he would come in to the familiar warmth of the house, of the hall with all her old coats and boots and his peg that they had laughed and kissed over when he had demanded that he deserved one. She would forgive him and him her in the kitchen surrounded by Bernhardt's strangers and someone would open a window because it was getting so stuffy and the snow would come rushing in and the two would laugh at the cold. The cold something to be laughed at with everyone else as Bernhardt bravely surged forward against the snow, the wind, and the cold to close the window again, and then the entire house would be filled with the party, the party that swelled until like all good parties the only laughter you could hear was Bernhardt's great bellowing voice, happiest of all.

If it was one of Bernhardt's parties it could go all right and this time be different.

“You know I’m no good at throwing a party,” Jane said, “I’m nowhere near as good as you when it comes to parties.”

“*Well then,*” Bernhardt replied, his expressions had already taken on a blurred glow around the edges, “you simply have to invite me over more.”

They cheered to that. Bernhardt remembered that they were having a party and that if they were having a party they needed to have hors d’oeuvres and so the two of them returned once more to the kitchen to prepare.

Bernhardt had a wonderful knowledge of recipes. He set about making his home made pigs in a blanket. He needed Jane to figure out the stove. He made a plate of cheeses, meats, and crackers from Jane’s fridge. As he bustled from standing by the sink to standing by the window to standing by the oven Jane fixed them new drinks and as long as she was making them drinks she made a pitcher as well for the guests. By now they were quite tipsy. By now they were finding just about everything quite funny.

Outside the snow continued to pour down. Down and down. Jane and Bernhardt’s conversation now filled with hot air and floated around the house; across the ceiling of the tiled kitchen, past the crack made from a pan thrown years ago by a man who had lived here before and thought he saw branches and flowers where there were none; through to the living room where it swirled around the chandelier and the electric lightbulbs before floating across the ceiling again; past the locked door that led down to where the landlord lived; instead flowing up, weaving its way through the banisters of the stairs like fish past rocks in a stream up to the landing and the doors left ajar where the two bedrooms were; into the master bedroom where Jane had slept the night before alone between the four plain calico walls and then listlessly into the small bathroom with the big tub, a whale in a lake, where finally it slipped through the crack of the top of the window Jane always left ajar—so it didn’t get too hot—into outside where it was at once swept away by the wind.

The city was getting darker and darker. The lights in all the windows were one by one being turned off, retreating further and further into their homes. The snow now surged and raged. The wind and the snow had become synonymous. The wind was white and the snow howled. The storm slammed on doors, the angry and insistent knocking of needy salesmen, of drunken ex-boyfriends, of unwanted aunts, of absent fathers, of malicious teenagers, of strangers. It was first and foremost the loud and heavy knock of a stranger at the door wanting to be let in, pounding on the door, fists of snow that hit and slumped against the frame like a heavy shoulder pushing and pushing to cross the threshold.

The cold was quieter. The cold was a thin cat that lanked in through half open windows and cellar doors. The cold was content to lay perched on the sill until the fire died down and no one remembered to put more wood on. The cold was the true killer of that storm.

Nine came and went. So did ten. No one came. On four separate occasions Bernhardt and Jane thought they heard someone knocking at the door, and twice they forgot to look out the window first before opening the heavy wooden door to let no one but the cold in.

But the two of them were quite fine in their own company. They were certain that everyone was just a block away, that at any moment the entire party would burst into the living room and neither Bernhardt nor Jane was about to be caught out of form. They set up party games on the coffee table they could all play once everyone arrived. They hollered each other hoarse trying to guess each other’s charades. They threw cards across the room at each other, not even sure what game they were playing. Bernhardt insisted and Jane relented and the two joined hands and Bernhardt drew Jane near and shuffled her around the room. Bernhardt was a terrible dancer, and he stepped and stepped on Jane’s feet as they edged their way between the couches and the coffee table.

This is how a storm can be forgotten. At the end of a good night Jane helped Bernhardt up to bed or Bernhardt helped Jane. She stumbled out of her clothes and stared at her body in the bathroom mirror for a while. She gawked stupidly at herself, fascinated with the slight plump of her hips, the swell of her thighs, the vacant look of her mouth, and the blurred mascara—she would take it off tomorrow—and finally she crawled into bed. It was only then that she felt the cold. It had slipped underneath the covers before her. Goosebumps and chill crawled up her body, the strong grasps of an overeager lover. Jane shivered. She stumbled back out of bed to her closet and pulled at the top shelf until her extra blankets dislodged and fell to the floor. She chose one and left the others where they lay. Back in bed it was still cold. Jane could feel her breath, it was too dark to see but she knew it was there each time she exhaled, gray and fleeting. Her heart was racing. She tried to calm herself. The storm outside went on, and Jane gave herself up to listening to the snow.

As time went on Jane became adjusted to the gloom, and she began to see the only two colors the storm had been unable to sponge away: shadow and white. Jane remembered that she was alone. She didn't know what time it was, but in her heart it was midnight and morning was still a far cry that was liable to get swept away in the wind and lost outside. The last thing Jane remembered was fumbling out of bed to close the window in her bathroom.

Jane woke up three times before rolling herself out of bed. By then it was already quite late in the day. But the snow was still there outside, and so, she thought, it didn't really matter. What mattered was her headache, was the cold that clung about her. She hopped from foot to foot as she made her way to the bathroom, to the knobs, as she waited for her hot shower that would begin to exorcise the cold from every part of her. She ducked underneath the running water and sighed. But the hot water was already waning. Jane gasped as ice cold water began to come out of the shower head. With an injured yelp she got out. She felt betrayed as she dried herself off, and dressed with vigor and many layers. Her headache was not getting any better. She felt awful. It was because of all they had drank last night. Jane groaned. She couldn't remember any of it. If she thought about it in sequence, Bernhardt's arrival, getting her dressed, the cab, lunch, walking back from lunch...phone-calls...a party...buttery hands...but then it all became blurry. They had been waiting for a party. Bernhardt's party. But no one had shown up. Joseph hadn't shown up.

Jane didn't feel any better as she came downstairs, in fact she might have felt worse. Downstairs was warmer than her bedroom, and for a moment Jane wondered why that was. Heat rises but it was warmer in the living room. Warmer, but still cold. There were cards all about the floor. A half eaten plate of cheeses and meats began on the coffee table and ended on the rug. Jane counted seven glasses. It was ten to two.

Bernhardt's laugh tumbled out of the kitchen. He was telling a joke about how the angels must be shoveling all of their snow onto us. Jane listened as Bernhardt laughed again.

"I thought I was perfectly clear, my dear," Bernhardt proclaimed, "yes yes yes, of course you're right. Well I'm specifying *now* and I'm telling you *today, tonight, and on into tomorrow*, come whenever you can. What? Oh! But snow this lovely is meant to be watched together. Don't tell me you want to watch this ghastly weather *alone*? Alright. Alright. Yes. Wonderful, wonderful, well see you soon darling. Yes. Much love."

There was a sharp click of the telephone and then the crisp notes of the phone as Bernhardt began dialing. Jane was hearing a ringing in her ears that wouldn't go. Bernhardt was trying to have another party. She was in no shape to have another party. Was anyone else seriously ready to? Jane slumped herself onto the couch and watched the snow go by outside. The light seemed to be coming from every angle and direction. It was hard to look out at so much white. Jane closed her eyes again. She felt like crying. There was no one outside but the

snow. Everyone was inside like her. No struggling figure was going to appear, he hadn't come last night why would he come now. Why would anyone come in all this snow. Bernhardt was talking into the phone. Maybe he was just talking to the tone. Jane knew that no one was going to come to any party they held. The weather was just too awful. Everyone was wrapped up in layers at home with everyone they loved, wrapped up together. Maybe he was wrapped up with someone too. Jane felt small and ugly, she tried to forget that she had ever thought such a thing. Bernhardt laughed again from the kitchen and Jane wished he could be quieter because her headache was only getting worse, piling up. Why was he laughing anyway? What was there to be happy about? No one will come Bernhardt, she wanted to say but never would. You couldn't say things like that to Bernhardt. She had never seen anyone say anything like that to Bernhardt. She supposed people did from time to time, but no one ever really said anything but yes to Bernhardt. They would all say they would come. They would all make promises with straight faces and pleasant laughter before going away from the phone and forgetting all about him, and in that moment Jane pitied Bernhardt even more than herself.

He shuffled out and joined her on the couch. Bernhardt was wearing slippers, loose corduroys, a fading yellow shirt, and a thick beat up old sweater. He looked the image of comfortable. The two of them exchanged pleasantries. Good morning. Good morning. Sleep well. Yes, and you. Very well, but it was a bit chilly when I got up. Me too. You slept in this morning. Is that wrong. No no. The storm hasn't gone down any. It'll go on until tomorrow at the least. What makes you say that. I wouldn't want to leave yet either. Oh Bernhardt. They smiled from their places on the couch.

"My mouth tastes like a pickle," Jane said.

"My mind is a DMV right now," Bernhardt said.

They chuckled and fell back into silence watching the white snow coming down. It was a softer type of falling. The wind had quieted and the persistent quiet of snow reigned clear. Looking out the window, the lumps of snow could've been much more than just the brick buildings across the street. The view could really have been anything under so much weather.

"I've been talking to everyone this morning," Bernhardt began, "and it seems like I bungled everything up. Everyone thought I meant tonight for the party instead of what I meant which was last night, but it's been cleared up it's been all set, we'll do the whole shebang tonight, it'll be better that way anyway, that way we got to have last night all to ourselves isn't that right Jane?"

"Bernhardt..." Jane sighed. She felt tired again. It felt like she could only feel two ways recently, tired or upset and both wore her down.

"Bernhardt," she tried again, "I don't think I want to have a party. It's too cold outside, no one will come."

"Nonsense," Bernhardt dismissed, "*because* it's freezing outside we must have this party. It's too cold to be alone, it's much too dark out at night with all these clouds. If we don't all come together, we—none of us—won't make it through the storm."

"Bernhardt," Jane said, "I'm too tired to have a party. I have a headache. We drank so much last night, I don't think I want to do that again."

"Nonsense," Bernhardt said. Determined now, he stood up and shuffled around. He continued to talk, listing reasons, supplicants, rationales, and debunking arguments, weak spots, and other shortcomings Jane might think of. He was talking now for both of them as he busied himself around the living room tidying up the place for their *inevitable* wonderful winter party.

But being Bernhardt he only knew how to tidy up. He knew how to tie ties, how to tip right, how to open lids, how to criticize constructively. He did not know how to clean. He had Jane for these things. And finally Jane got up and began cleaning, because she knew if she

didn't pick up the cheese off the rug it never would. If she didn't wash the dishes they remained dirty and in the sink. If she didn't get up she stayed watching the storm outside collect more and more nothing, and as she got up and began cleaning up Bernhardt allowed himself to become obsolete, to stick to straightening pillows and dusting things off (neither of which he knew how to do, but which he thought it wouldn't hurt to try).

As the day passed—and all the light went away again so that there was only the cold and dark, and here now the storm was picking up outside like children who have once more remembered what they were upset about—Jane quietly became more and more fed up with everything. She was fed up with the cold. She was fed up with Bernhardt lounging in the living room. She was fed up with the farce of a party. A fresh drink made by Bernhardt sat ready for her at the edge of the counter and this made her more fed up. She was fed up with Joseph for not coming back yet; for not bursting in through the front door; for not showering her in warmth and affection; for not yet defying all her expectations, her ugly insecurities, her petty slanders against him in her mind, and her crushing solitude the way he had done so many times before; for not yet making her believe once more that he really was incredible and worth all his faults; for slamming the door in her face and for now making her wish he would swing it back open. She was absolutely fed up.

That second night of the storm was the worst night. In Jane's neighborhood alone eight trees came down underneath the storm. A little boy described the sound to his mother after waking her up with his crying, that the great birch outside his window had coughed quietly and that he had been calling for her for hours, and they spent the rest of the night curled up together listening to the long wail of the storm.

In the living room now they couldn't see through the large french windows Jane loved to look out through so much. Or rather there was nothing left to see, and instead the glass rattled at them and the wind was so loud as to be monotonous.

Bernhardt was in a dark mood. It was turning eight and they remained the only ones at the party. He had gone silent an hour ago, as if he had spent all his words filling the rooms with promises of how wonderful a time it would be, which records they would play, who Jane simply had to meet, and how lovely it would be to watch the storm pass by surrounded by friends and now had nothing good left to say. He got up and made himself another drink. He was welcome to it, Jane thought. She refused to break the silence. She was more than happy to talk but only once Bernhardt really gave up on all this nonsense.

He was glowering at her now. Jane glanced at him and then turned back to the rattling windows. With a snort Bernhardt lumbered out of the room. She heard him hitting the buttons on the telephone with his fat fingers. There was a pause as they both listened for someone to answer.

"Now really Joseph," Bernhardt said from the other room, "*Epecially* you, when someone makes a promise it's proper form to follow through."

Jane rushed into the kitchen. Her mind was icy with hot rage.

"Hang up the phone Bernhardt," she said.

"*Excuse me* Jane," Bernhardt slurred, "I am *busy* having a *conversation*, for your *benefit* I might add."

"Hang up the goddamn phone this instant."

"You're being incredibly *rude*, Jane."

Jane pressed down on the dial and the tone rung out through the house. Bernhardt said nothing for a moment. His face was curling into something of a mask of rage, but his eyelids were heavy and his lip not sneering enough. His face was turning red, it looked as if he was trying very hard to look angrier but was failing. His cheeks sagged and more than anything he appeared grotesque. It was laughable. Jane laughed at him. It was a mean and mocking laugh.

“You *ungrateful* little,” Bernhardt began, then started again, “here I am going out of my way to do something *nice* for you, here I am trying to have a party in honor *of you*, and all you can do the whole day is sulk—sulk and *pretend* like you’re some pathetic thing that *constantly needs attention*—and then *hang up on my conversation* with *your boyfriend* to demand *where he is*, I consider myself *tolerant, Jane*, but if there’s one thing I find disgusting in someone it’s *thanklessness*.”

Jane shrieked, “Oh you’re doing something nice for me? Bernhardt you only ever do anything for yourself! You’re the most selfish person I’ve ever met! You’re the only one who wants to throw a party, you never even asked me if I wanted to or not. You never ask anything! You never asked me why Joseph isn’t here, didn’t it even occur to you that maybe something had happened between us? Didn’t it even occur to you that there might be something wrong? To ask me before you call him?”

She was yelling. Bernhardt stormed passed her to the liquor cabinet in the living room and slammed the bottles as he poured himself another drink.

“You only ever talk about things in terms of you Bernhardt,” Jane shouted at him, “you never think about other people, never think that maybe someone doesn’t want to see you.” She paused, “Because let me tell you Bernhardt, they don’t.”

Bernhardt brooded. His jaw had clenched tight, his teeth ground in his mouth. He downed his glass.

“So *Joseph finally left you did he?*” He jeered, “*How long has this one been?* Twelve months? That sounds *about right*.”

Jane felt the ball that spun around inside her shrink until it wasn’t there and all she could feel inside was a surging rage.

“What does that mean,” she said.

“It means,” Bernhardt sneered, refilling his drink, “that *which one does this make?* The fourth? No, *Eric* was the fourth. *So the fifth*. The fifth one you’ve *let implode* on you, and now you’ll *let yourself feel miserable* until *Mr. Six* comes along and you can *let him carry all your problems for you*.”

“You’re disgusting,” Jane hissed, “At least I can care for somebody, at least I don’t live a life of shallow relationships.”

Bernhardt looked at the bottle he was holding then put it down and walked away from her and towards the door. He threw on his coat, the big one he had worn when he had arrived.

“Where are you going Bernhardt?” Jane jeered after him. Her voice was high pitched and the tone of the wind that rang through every moment. He was struggling with the laces of his boots. Jane laughed. Bernhardt flashed an angry and hurtful look at her, and instead stuffed the laces into the sides of his boots.

“Oh good,” Jane said, “arrived a day early, leaves a day early.”

Bernhardt pushed the door open and snow rolled in across the opening. The cold too rushed in. Jane gasped as it touched her, everything seemed evaporated in the face of the cold. She opened her mouth to say Bernhardt but it didn’t come out and then he had walked out without another look.

The first thing he noticed were the colors. It was so dark. The lights were all but out on the street. The few that were on seemed pale and feeble. Jane’s window bloomed brightest and that was only because of her chandelier and even then he only saw the light splayed out on the snow in front of him. Bernhardt had walked out of enough doors enough times to know the only way to go was forward, and never to look back.

The cold didn't bother him much. Mostly he felt the cold between his eyes, as if someone was pinching the bridge of his nose. Otherwise he felt the chill a little but he was always cold in one way or another and so it didn't bother him.

The snow had piled up high and at first Bernhardt waded through waist deep. Slowly though he let himself be carried up until he was walking on the first few layers, only his shins and boots pushing through the snow. Bernhardt was very good at keeping his balance. He knew how to stand straight, how not to wobble, how to put each foot before the other with purpose, that it was bad to hold for things for support, and how not to let his head sway either. All of this he had learned from experience. He pushed forward.

It didn't bother him the fight they had just had. Already it felt like it had fallen into the snow as he walked. Maybe he should care more, maybe he should apologize...but he was already far enough away and it seemed too late now to believe in anything but moving forward. They were all things he had thought before, the same way every snowflake is unique and yet becomes another storm, another world of white. Another thought became another resolution he knew all along.

The world seemed so odd to him. He could barely see yet everywhere he looked was the shimmer of white. It was as if dark was trying to become light, as if white was trying to be shadow. It was cold. The cold didn't bother him, he barely felt it. He could feel the numbness that the cold brought but not the cold itself.

The snow broke underneath his foot and he sunk deep into a drift. Swearing he tried to push himself up but his gloved hand only sunk deep too. Foundering, he grabbed for anything in the snow, anything he could grasp. Desperate he flung snow away from him, he tried to dig himself out. He could feel snowflakes landing all over him like words the way words cling to a person and press down on him. Violently, he flung himself out of his hole panting. His big body surged through the snow until finally he felt the solid ground underneath his boot. But he was too high up above the snow. He was standing on a car, or something that allowed him to look over the dark corridor of colorless drifts.

Snow. Did snow dream of warmth? Did it yearn for the warmth of the sun? Did it yearn to feel the hot sensation of sun? Did snow wait for it to come and purge it away, to burn away all its fears, its hate, its sorrow, its mistakes, its trespasses; was the snow wishing to be washed away by warmth? To be evaporated and made free and simply a breath of air once more, to rise and float and exhale and feel nothing but nothing...Or did the snow soak up everything underneath it? Did it absorb all the terror, misgivings, nightmares, sweet words, mean words, sighs and confessions, the anger, obsessions, and delusions, did it swallow it all up? Did snow turn everything to white...like a scared child's blanket on a stormy night...

The door rattled as someone tried to open it from outside. Jane lifted her head from the couch. The door shook and cold and wind and snow blew in.

"Joseph!" Jane wailed. She jumped up from the couch. She hurried into the entryway, the door was opened only a crack. Joseph couldn't get it open any further with all the snow piled in front outside. Jane pushed against the door. The cold and snow flew in, it bit at her feet, at her face, her hands burned, but she didn't care she kept pushing on the door with all her might, she was crying now and the tears were warm against her cheek.

"Joe, Joe, oh Joe," she said. But the man who pushed his way in was large and bulky. It was Bernhardt. He was covered in snow. He pushed his way past her into the hall. He wasn't wearing his coat but holding it in front of him. He shoved the door closed behind him.

"Bernhardt," Jane said. She didn't know how to feel. Bernhardt seemed not to notice her. He shook the snow off of himself, he shook the snow off his jacket. Snow got on everything. The rug in the entryway was now white.

“Jane,” Bernhardt said, “we need blankets. Quick.”

“What?” Jane said, appalled. “You leave like that and now expect everything to be alright?”

“Jane,” Bernhardt said, “this isn’t the time.”

She was about to retort but Bernhardt had taken his coat and hung it up and underneath it now Jane saw the little boy standing very still beside him. She gasped. Bernhardt took another coat from the pegs and wrapped it around the boy. He led him into the living room, and sat him down on the couch that faced away from the windows outside, that looked around at the living room, and through into the dining room and through into the kitchen.

“Jane,” Bernhardt said again, “blankets.”

“Oh my god,” she whispered, “they’re upstairs, I’ll go get them. Oh my god, Bernhardt where did you? Who is this?”

“He was in the snow, but, Jane, the blankets.”

Jane nodded and hurried upstairs. Bernhardt looked closer at the boy now in the light. His lips were almost blue. His skin was chalk. The only thing that followed Bernhardt were the eyes. Bernhardt looked a moment longer. Then he turned to the fireplace. He couldn’t remember how to make a fire. The last time he had made a fire he had been fifteen and as drunk as he was now. It had been summer and they hadn’t needed a fire at all and he had made one anyway...Careful, he stacked a log or two on top of the other. He stuffed newspaper underneath the grate. He lit the edges with a match. He watched the flame take hold.

Jane came back down with all the blankets. The two of them took off his coat, his soaked clothes and only then did the boy start to shiver as they wrapped the blankets around him one by one, the soft one first so he could be comfy and then the heavy woolen blankets for deep winter nights like this one. Bernhardt brought him over to sit on the floor next to the fire. The boy’s two eyes moved from Jane to Bernhardt to the fire.

“Where did you find him,” said Jane.

“I don’t know,” Bernhardt replied, “just in the snow. I couldn’t see anything, I was only able to bring us back here because the chandelier was so bright in the window.”

He looked so tired next to the fire, he looked as if he had aged right there before her very eyes, and Jane realized that she had no idea how old Bernhardt was, that she had never bothered to ask.

“Aren’t you cold?” She asked. He had given the boy his coat and now his sweater was becoming soaked through in the heat of the house.

“A little,” Bernhardt replied, his voice was soft.

“Go upstairs and change,” she told him, “it’ll be okay, I’ll watch him, go change Bernhardt.”

When Bernhardt came back downstairs now changed he had brought a sweater and pajama bottoms and they peeled back the layers of the boy, who began shivering when the last blanket was removed, and they dressed him in Bernhardt’s clothes. Bernhardt lifted the boy back up onto the couch and they piled the blankets on top of him again until only his head stuck out resting on a couch pillow.

“I think he should sleep down here,” Bernhardt said, “he’ll be closer to the fire that way.”

“But won’t someone be worried about him by now? Won’t they go looking for him?”

Bernhardt sighed, “There’s nothing we can do until morning.”

Oh Bernhardt Jane wanted to say, but something held her back. Maybe it was the cold leaking in from underneath the doorways, from unseen cracks in the windows and walls, all pressing down on them, pressing down on their words.

They fell asleep on the couches, all the lights still on, waiting for the fire to need tending. Jane woke up with a start. It was dark. The fire was dimmer now, she could feel its heat but its light was all but gone. She could hear crying.

Jane's eyes adjusted to the gloom. The boy was sitting up underneath a tortoise shell of blankets, crying softly. Jane looked over. Bernhardt was sitting up on his couch too, awake. He made no effort to move. Jane got up and hurried over to sit next to the boy.

"It's okay," she said. She stroked his brown hair as best as she could, "it's okay."

"It's not," the boy cried.

"What's the matter," Jane said. She tried to soothe his voice.

"Timothy," The boy sobbed, "I didn't find Timothy."

"Who's Timothy," Jane asked as calmly as she could.

"M-m-m-ma-mah-m-my dog," The boy shook out between sobs, "he's still out there! I left him out there, I couldn't find him."

"Ohhh," Jane breathed, "so that's what you were doing out there in the snow."

"I didn't find him," The boy cried, "It's all my fault."

"It's not your fault," Jane said, "you did your best trying to find him. Sometimes there's nothing you can do. It's okay, I'm sure Timothy is alright, just you wait, don't you fret. Here, here."

"It's not okay!" The boy said, "it's not okay. I let him out. I wasn't supposed to but I did, and then he didn't come back when I called, and now Te-t-t-te-te-timothy's never going to come back!"

The boy cried more. Jane was holding him close now, trying to calm him down.

"You don't know that," she said, "why, I bet Timothy is waiting for you at home right now. The moment you get home he'll come running to greet you."

"No he won't."

"Bernhardt!" Jane said.

"Andrew," Bernhardt said, "There's only light because there's sin."

Andrew only kept on crying. Jane tried her best to comfort him until he finally fell asleep.

"Why didn't you say something better?" She hissed at Bernhardt.

But Bernhardt was looking past her at the storm outside. Very soon his thick eyelids faltered and fell, and he fell asleep. Jane sat up longer. She didn't remember turning off any of the lights. She tried a lamp on the table next to her. It didn't work. The storm had knocked out the power. She looked at the boy as he slept. He must have told Bernhardt his name as they trudged through the snow. She wondered what else they had said to each other. Off, in the dark, the chandelier above her head shimmered and shone. Jane found it soothing. Watching the brass she wondered why she had never seen her chandelier like this before and then closed her eyes and fell asleep.

That storm of the weekend of January Sixth would be labeled as the worst storm of the first half of that decade. The five children were all located, and returned home. A hot spell in the first week of February saw the last of the dirt covered snow gone. At the beginning they had been so high that people had climbed to the top of them to hang shoes from traffic lights. Children had built forts up and down the largest ones on the corners of streets, and there were so many near accidents of cars hitting sledding kids that finally the city put up yellow tape around the great mountains of snow. Not that this stopped anyone. By the time the hot flash came in February though the piles were all but gone, and what remained was covered in thick layers of dirt and everyone was glad to have the snow that had crowded the sidewalks gone.

Jane does not even remember the storm. All she remembers is Bernhardt's party. When she remembers it she remembers it in spring. She remembers all the people who came, all the

fabulous dresses and suits. Clothes of all colors. She remembers that it was in spring because it was at Bernhardt's party that she met her Charles, and she remembers meeting Charles crowded by people in her backyard, just as all of the cherry blossoms were coming into bloom. She remembers all the wonderful food. She remembers because it was about that time she realized how beautiful the chandelier sparkled in morning spring sunshine. It was at that party. Of course she remembers Bernhardt most vividly of all. She remembers him laughing as only Bernhardt can as he burst through the door. She remembers him coming—for some reason—with Andrew, the boy who lived up the street from her and always brought her presents (oh what a lovely boy!). She remembers the two of them coming in laughing, from the cold, covered head to toe, of brushing them both off in the entry way, of cherry blossoms getting everywhere.