

JACOB NEWBERRY

DECEMBER IN THE PYRENEES

I'm walking outside today with a mild intention of dying in the snow. I'm wearing layers but not enough. Or: I'm wearing layers enough that no one will stop me before I step outside; not layers enough to keep me alive should I stay outdoors.

I don't have a car, and this town demands a car. I eat a steak with fries every Saturday night by myself at *El Foc—La Cerdagne*. I don't order anymore, since the waiter knows what I want. He does ask me what book I've moved onto each week, though. He never finds them very interesting.

I want the world to burn up but only for the warmth. Who's punishing me for the twenty-five winters I lived without snow?

You're in another country: I can't text you here. I've taken to writing letters during the day, since Internet is so hard to come by. I write you letters on cotton paper I bought just for writing letters. It's very Victorian of me. You read the letters and e-mail back a response. Like writing letters to the future.

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I've given up. It's sometime in December. There's no reason, really, to keep on trying to be warm. You're far away, Christmas is coming without a family to call me home, winter has three months before it might start to fade away.

It's not even nine p.m. There are stables alongside the mountain road, there are constellations with French names I'll never know, there are distinct shades of night-dark that I've learned to recognize. But I don't know their names. I can smell the cold.

I'm numb in my legs before the rest of my body. It's not snowing, the constellations with French names are out, my thighs are sensationless. The frozen trees are still frozen. The pine needles shatter when I try to grab them. The branches have turned from brown to silver in the light. They're trying to become invisible. At night there are no shadows.

You're far away, and I can't text you here. I can't tell you: *The trees haven't been unfrozen in a week. Are they still alive?* I can't wait for your response: *You're not talking about trees anymore.* I'm on my own this time. The night-dark and the silver trees are everything that's listening.

Where should it be? In a snow bank, perched carefully with my eyes toward the sky, giving French names to constellations I've invented? (*La tête de Méduse; la barbe de Christ.*) Or is that too poetic? Maybe I should lie face-

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down somewhere, so you can say someday: *I was last on his mind when he melted the snow with his breath and drowned.*

I think I'd rather be by the stables. I climb the fence, but horseshit is frozen everywhere. At least I can hear the horses breathing. The doors are closed, but I know they're in a huddle in the corner. This is what my life should be: unfrozen, constituted by the visible breath of the ones I'm near. Is it enough, to see my breath? Is it enough to see the life that I exhibit? The pulmonary proof of living?

But I can't go like this: because you're far away, and I can't text you here. I want to share my dying. I want my last breath to be seen, to be lamented, to be exhumed before it's buried. I think I'll write a letter to you tomorrow. About this night I climbed through barbed wire to feel the breath of horses in the dark.