

Twilight slips in like a timid creature. Lights tick on around the trailer village. The air grows cooler. I grab one of John's old jackets and throw it over my shoulders. In a storage bin, I find an old gray wool winter cap to put on my head, which is freezing, unaccustomed to being without its hat of hair. The cold makes me think of a night after we were first married in the winter of 1950. We were living on 12th Street just off West Grand Boulevard. It had rained all night as the temperature plummeted. At about midnight, it stopped, and John and I, for some reason, decided to take a walk.

It was frigid, but so beautiful. Everything was coated with a thick layer of brilliant clear ice, as if the world was preserved under glass. We had to take tiny hesitant steps, so not to slip. Above us, power lines crackled and tore from their poles; a streetlight globe, laden with ice, dropped and shattered in the street with a muffled pop. We walked and walked under a brittle black sky, jagged with stars, moon shining hard and bright on the crystal buildings that lined the boulevard. The world looked fragile, but we were young and invulnerable. We kept walking, at least a mile, toward the golden tower of the Fisher Building, not knowing why, knowing only that we needed to get there. We returned to our flat that night excited, our hair glistening with shiny flecks of ice, full of a deep thirst for each other. That was the night that Cindy was conceived.

Right now, I hear the loudening thrill of crickets and the sizzle of gravel as cars slowly pass. There is no reason to, but I feel safe with all these people around us. John is awake now and I can hear him talking under his breath. He is telling someone off. I hear him whispering obscenities, threats to enemies, accusations. All our lives together, John was a passive, quiet man. But now, since he started to lose his mind, he says the things that he always wanted to say

to people. He is forever reading his personal riot act to someone. It often happens this time of the day. When the sun sets, the anger rises in him.

He appears at the doorway of the van. "Where are we?" he says, voice full of fight.

"We're in Illinois," I say, ready for it.

"Is that home?"

"No. Home is Michigan."

"What are we doing here?" he barks.

"We're on vacation."

"Well, I want a cup of tea."

"I'll make one in a little while. I'm resting."

He joins me at the table. It's quiet for about a minute, then he speaks again. "How about a cup of tea?"

"We're going to wait a little while for a cup of tea."

"Why?"

"Because you'll be up all night peeing."

"Goddamn it, I want a cup of tea!"

I give him a look. "Keep your voice down. People live around here. Why don't you get up and make it yourself? You're not crippled."

"Maybe I will."

He won't. He just sits there stewing.

"How about a cup of tea?" John says, like it's a new idea that came to him just this second.

"All right," I say.

I get up and make us both a cup of tea.