

Flakes Bloom

(Two-Chapter Teaser)

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For the bird lay bedded
In a choir of wings, as though she slept or died,
And the wings glided wide and he was hymned and wedded,
And through the thighs of the engulfing bride,
The woman breasted and the heaven headed

Bird, he was brought low,
Burning in the bride bed of love, in the whirl-
Pool at the wanting centre, in the folds
Of paradise, in the spun bud of the world.
And she rose with him flowering in her melting snow.

--Dylan Thomas, from "A Winter's Tale"

Chapter 1

Annika - 2006

She loved the snow. For the tiny pieces of white brought a handle, or rather thousands of tiny handles. Each flake gave presence to the invisible that was already there, but could not be sensed. Riding on her motorcycle in the summer, she could, with effort, believe that she was cutting through the world, everything blurry and unnatural. But this snow, the first of the year, let her see the air separating before her. It allowed her eyes, rather than her mind, to tell her that she was riding in that delicate seam of inexistence. Like tracers hinted at the deadly stream of fellow bullets, so the snow uncloaked the air which was not merely the space between everything, but was comprised of very real and tangible substances: nitrogen, oxygen, hydrogen, and here, in Kiev, Strontium-90 and cesium-137.

The ground had not yet frozen so the snow melted as it hit the pavement instead of turning to ice. This allowed her to ride without having to cut back, save at the turns. She was on her winter bike - an old Voskhod 175. Unlike her Dnepr, she could feel and hear each pop of combustion, even with the wind rushing past her ears. To the passengers of the cars she was passing, her Vosk and cap-style helmet gave the impression that she was from a generation past.

When she pulled up to the *Bolnitsa*, she cut her engine and coasted onto the sidewalk. She leaned the bike on the kickstand and stood next to her for a moment, spying on its underbelly to see if it was leaking oil. She thought she had smelled some when she pulled in. Not seeing any drops forming, she pulled her plastic Lukoil bottle

out from the side pouch and checked to be sure the cap was cinched tightly. Though she made this same trip regularly, it always seemed to be this time, right before entering, that she felt like turning back. She thought of what she would see inside: her mother lying with Aleksandr at her side; Papa would be sitting in the chair across the room, and would likely have a magazine splayed across his lap with his head leaned back against the white concrete wall and his eyes half open. It was not that she didn't want to be there...she did. It was just that this was her only moment of freedom, because once she entered the *Bolnitsa*, she could not turn back. She felt the same way when there was a movie at the cinema that she had been waiting to see for months – the day it came she would suddenly feel like not going. But, she always went, just as she never got back on her bike in the hospital parking lot.

As she approached the room, her father stepped out. He walked to her, put a hand on each of her shoulders and squeezed them. “Good, good. I’m glad you’re...” He looked at her helmet, deliberately frowning, “Why do you ride that *mototsekl*, you know it’s a death wish in this weather.”

“I ride slowly, you know that.”

“Well, at any rate, I’m glad you’re here. I’ve got to go get something to eat. Watch Aleksandr, will you?” He gestured for her to enter the room.

“What about Mama?”

“Well, it’s not one of her good days. Just go and watch him, will you?”

“That’s where I was going, before you stopped me.”

“Okay, go ahead.” Grigori turned and began down the hallway.

She pulled off her gloves and forced them into her pocket. “Will you? Will you? Will you?” She muttered as she repeatedly used her pleading arms to mimic her Papa’s gesturing toward the door.

“Hey, Annika. Want anything?” Grigori called from down the hall.

She had thought he was gone. “Ah, sure...a Coke.”

Grigori snapped his fingers, turned around, and proceeded toward the cafeteria. Annika took off her helmet and clipped it back together so she could carry it by its strap. She walked into the room. “Hey Aleks.”

“Shh...she’s asleep.”

“Oh, sorry, how are ya, fella?” She whispered.

“Papa was pissed that you rode here, huh?” He said without turning away from his mother.

“Yeah, I guess. He knows I’m safe though.”

“I heard you tell him that you ride slowly. He still believes that?” Aleksandr stood up.

“They believe what they –”

“Your hair!” He had turned and ran softly over and reached his hand up. Annika bent down and he tugged gently at the ends of it.

“Do you like it?”

“It makes you look like mama.”

“That’s not exactly what I was going for.” She walked over to the mirror above the sink and used her hands to try to stick it up as much as possible. “There, is that better?”

“The same.”

Annika went over to the bed and sat down gently near her mother’s thigh. Aleksandr joined her. Annika put her hand on her mother’s arm and rubbed up and down, careful to avoid the plastic tubes. “Papa said she was worse.”

Aleks looked to his sister. “You know I…”

Irina’s body gave a start and they turned to her. She opened her eyes, looked to Annika and almost immediately her eyelids seemed to glide shut even though the eyes behind them were still focused. “I’m fine, you go to work.”

Aleks looked back at his sister and mouthed “Work?”

Annika shrugged her shoulders. “You’re feeling better?”

“Yes, yes, don’t worry about me. I’ll be just fine right here.” Irina used her hands while she spoke, touching own collar bone when she said “me” and patting the hospital bed at “here.”

Annika searched for a reaction that would steer the conversation toward normality for Aleks sake. “What did they give you for food this morning, Mama?”

Irina opened her eyes again and this time kept them open. “My Sasha.” She reached a hand up to Annika’s cheek. “I’ve been so looking forward to tomorrow. I was thinking we could try that deli on the east side. We could walk there and look…”

Aleksandr pulled his mother’s hand away from Annika’s face. “Mama! Mama stop!” He crossed his arms and lifted them slightly so he could hide his face in his sleeves. “You’re scaring me,” he whimpered, muffled by his clothing.

“It’s okay.” Annika’s wide eyes belied her calm voice.

“My Sasha, I feel like we’re on holiday.” Irina brought her hand back up to her daughter’s face and played with a lock of her hair. “Everyday’s a holiday. It’s like we’re strangers here, no family, no friends.”

This time Annika removed her mother’s hand herself. “Who’s Sasha?”

“Oh, don’t be silly.”

“Mama, I’m not being silly.”

“Tomorrow we can...” Irina’s voice faded and her eyes closed again. Trying to stay a rock for her brother, Annika tried not to let her thoughts dwell on how the way her mother’s eyes closed made her look like she was dying. She tried not to think that maybe this distant conversation would be the last she would have with Irina, and it was hard for her not to swallow audibly when she concluded that even if her mother did speak in the future it seemed likely that it would be more of the same gibberish.

Aleksander, who had been looking up at his sister, looked back to his mother’s hand, “Why won’t mama get better?”

“She’s...” Annika paused, she would have given anything to be able to get this sentence out without hesitation, but the next best thing would be to get it out without a wavering voice. She put herself elsewhere: her feet were drifted over by gentle mounds of browned leaves. Stilled there for an indeterminate time, the wind had brought the leaves here as if on purpose. The knot in her throat loosened and her own planted legs began to enervate the brittle leaves. They flittered and danced for a moment, struggling for the buoyancy to overcome their own weight – and then all at once they began to tumble upward tickling the underside of her chin and nose. As they passed she could see infinitesimal yet sharp, bright light leading through the veins on each, greening. It was

from here that Annika was able to say: “she’s okay, she just really needs her sleep right now.”

Grigori cleared his throat behind them. He was leaning against the door frame holding a Coke. “Annika, doll, can I talk to you for a minute?” He gestured to the hallway.

As Annika stood from the bed, her brother tugged her sleeve. He responded to Annika’s inquisitive look by standing on his tip-toes and pulling her shoulder down so he could whisper to her. “Can I come with you?” He looked back at his mother.

“No, *brat*, you watch mama.”

“But I don’t want...”

“It’s okay, I’ll be right there.” She pointed to the hallway. She patted his head and watched him turn back and take Irina’s hand. She wasn’t sure if it was the way he moved, but for a moment she was struck by how adult her little brother seemed. But her feeling was not that this was one adult moment plunked down in a childish tale, but that for this moment she saw the actuality – that he had always been this man she saw just now, and she was glad to leave Irina in his care for a time.

Outside the room, Grigori sat on the arm of an empty bench. He cracked open the can and handed it to her as she sat down.

“Nothin’ like a Coke.” Grigori said staring straight ahead. His presence loomed from next to her and above and his voice seemed to emanate from his gut creating something like what she had pictured God’s voice sounding like as a child.

“Sure.”

“Your mama was talking about Sasha?”

Annika had a mouthful of Coke, and was in no rush to swallow it.

Grigori took his cue. “She had been all morning, I was kinda hoping she’d stop.” He looked down at her, she was also looking at the blank wall across from them. “I guess, maybe, in a way, I was kinda hoping she wouldn’t though.”

Annika looked up at him.

“You know how sometimes you have to lie, I mean not even so much lie as just not say absolutely everything?” His hands were folded on his leg. They kept looking like they were going to spring into his usual grand gestures, but he kept them deliberately motionless.

“Okay.”

“Like, maybe for a surprise party or something, I mean certainly there is a need to lie in some...”

“Yes, papa, I get it.”

“Okay, I’m sorry, I just...” He took a slow breath. “You see, this Sasha, this is a real person. He was a friend of your mama’s.”

“I’ve never heard of him.”

“Yes, he died a long time ago. In fact, I’ve never met the man, but he and Irina, they were very close.”

“Before you met her?”

“Yes. Look, there’s no way to say this. I’ve always tried to be there for you and your *brat*. I mean I love you both, you’re a big part of my life, I mean practically the whole thing.”

Annika faced him and put her hand on his hands. “Papa, whatever it is, it’s no problem.”

“Thank you, *dochka*, but let me finish. This Sasha, from what your mama has told me, he was a wonderful man. I think I would have liked him. But he...” Grigori took a hastened swig of his coke and swallowed. “He is your real papa.”

He looked at Annika with an expectant look on his face, but she gave no reaction. She stilled herself, careful not to move her hand nor change her gaze. As they sat, she suddenly realized that she was still wearing her coat. It was eventually a bead of sweat that ran down the right side of her torso that caused her to move. She removed her hand from his and pressed against her side to catch the bead with her shirt.

“How could—”

“She was pregnant with you when we—”

“No, how could you never tell me?”

“I don’t know, it seems so bad now, but think of us – the family. I mean, I’ve always...” He paused to find his words.

Annika stood and faced Grigori. She leaned down slightly and took his hands again. “Grigori...papa, I’ve never known this man. You are my papa. This doesn’t change that. It’s only blood.” She stood straight again and began to walk back toward the room.

“Annika, I don’t know much about him, but I’ll tell you everything I know, okay?”

“Thanks, papa.”

Since she had arrived Annika felt like she was on a winding set of railroad tracks, taking her into and out of rooms, passing her by her mother and Grigori like scenic vistas. She had no power to slow down and take them in, she could only fill up with them as much as possible and mull them over later on down the line. This was an uncomfortable contrast to a usual visit where the excitement of an hour was walking to the vending machines.

Annika rode the rail back into her mother's room. "Aleks, how are you?"

"She's just been sleeping. Is it time to go?" As he spoke he walked to the tiny in-room coat closet on whose floor he had dumped his hat and gloves.

Grigori entered and stood next to his chair.

"Sure, I brought your helmet. It's outside." She picked hers up off the chair and unclipped the chin strap.

"You know I don't like him on that thing."

"It's only a couple of kilometers and I'll be extra careful."

"Yeah, it's just a couple kilos, papa." Aleksandr was frantically trying to get his arm into the second sleeve of his coat.

"You be very careful."

"I always am, papa." She left with Aleksandr walking tall right behind her.

After she turned the engine over she revved the throttle. She always did this when it was cold, but she gave it a little extra for Aleks. "Hold on now." She shouted. She felt his small hands grip her waist even tighter. She popped the clutch and they sped straight out of the lot and onto the road, returning her to her place between the white flakes.

Chapter 2

Sasha - 1986

He dipped his spoon just under the surface of his borscht. The non-homogenous concoction of countless substances parted just enough to allow the Cr_2O_3 and Fe to slip within. “This spoon will be here long after we are gone.” Sasha lifted it to his mouth and gave an exclamatory slurp. “And this is the way we will leave our mark, as a piece of this spoon’s life; which, if it is made of stainless steel, as it says, could be millennia.” He licked the fatty liquid from his lips.

“Oh, my Sasha, you know that is not true. Nothing ever truly leaves nor arrives – conservation of mass...Oh, that’s right, you were busy with...what was her name again? The singer.”

“Don’t toy with me.”

“That’s right, Molli, was it?”

“If you want me to say that I should have gone to class instead, I won’t. Believe me, it was worth it.”

Her joking face vanished.

“Oh, my Irina...”

She slapped his hand.

“...but how long will this remain a dumpling?” He put a spoonful with the dumpling in question into his mouth, then traced its predicted path with his finger down the front of his sternum and into his stomach. “Bout ten minutes?” Some broth dribbled out onto his lower lip.

She reached over the table and took the bowl, tipping it to her lips without sitting back down into the booth. She set the bowl down, “But how long will this remain Sodium Chloride? Could be very, very, very long time.” With each “very” she allowed more soup to dribble out onto the table.

Sasha sopped up the puddle with his napkin. “Classy. We’re really going to make a name for ourselves.”

“Oh, there’s no one from the plant here.”

“How would you know...how would I know? What about her?” He pointed to a girl standing at the bar with bleached cropped hair and a Union Jack leather jacket.

Irina craned her head around. “Work at the plant? I can’t believe she is even this close to it.”

“It was a joke. Maybe I should go talk to her. I bet she knows Costello.”

“Yes. I’ll bet they’re best mates.”

“Knows his music, baby, his music.”

“Either way, I don’t think it’s wise for you go talking to an English girl our first day in town.”

Sasha leaned out of the booth to get an unobstructed view. “Why? She’s not pretty. Well, not as pretty as you...” He looked back at Irina and added, “when you’re angry.”

“That’s not what I meant, and you know it.”

“Yes, yes.”

“Besides I have better plans for you tonight than chatting with the *politsai*.”

“Well we’d better get to them. Why don’t you finish the last of that and I’ll go pay.” He got up and headed to the bar. On his way he glanced around as casually as he could for government officers. He took a *Shah* out from his jeans pocket and placed it on the bar. “English?”

The girl in the leather jacket turned her body toward him, her head still looking down at the change purse in her hands. “What? English? No.” She put a pile of change on the counter. “Gotta smoke?”

Sasha pulled out a wrinkled pack from his shirt pocket, looked in the top and shook it. Two fags fell into sight. He handed her the pack. “Here.”

She pulled a coin out of her pouch and flipped it up into the air with her right hand as she took the pack with her left, which already held her coin purse. “Thanks.”

He walked back to the booth. “You ready?”

“Sit.” Sasha sat. “I saw you talking to that English girl.”

“She wanted a smoke, that’s all.”

“But how do they know that? It was stupid.”

“It’s no big deal. There’s nobody here.”

“It was stupid.”

“Besides, we were wrong—“

“Just say it.”

“Okay, okay, it wasn’t the smartest—”

Irina tilted her head down, but kept her eyes on his.

Sasha met her eyes. “Okay, alright, it was stupid. Happy?”

“Not really. Did she know Costello?”

“No, that’s what I was trying to tell you, she’s American.” He put the penny she gave him into Irina’s hand.

“Shall we go?” She said, twisting the penny around in the light. They got up from the booth and left the bar. There was a gentle snow falling and Sasha walked, Irina trailing behind stopping unconsciously here and there to inspect the penny. “Who is he?” She held out the penny, heads up, to Sasha. “A poet I’ll bet.”

“Let me see.” He took the penny and produced a green olive from his other hand. “It’s a little oxidized.” He began to scrub the penny with the olive.

“Where did you get that?”

“I grabbed it on the way out.” He scrubbed both sides. He stopped walking and squeezed the olive over the penny and tossed its remains into the snow. He took his thumb and forefinger and rubbed both sides. Then he knelt and took a bit of snow in his fingers to rinse it off. “He’s one of their presidents I’m sure.” He handed it back to her and began to walk again.

Irina stayed put. She was looking at the coin, tipping it to catch the street lights. “Can’t they make them so they don’t turn green?” She jogged to him to catch up.

“I guess not.” He took her empty hand with his and put them both into his jeans pocket. “Let’s see the river on the way back.”

They walked along the street, defined only by two sets of tire tracks, pausing occasionally to let a car pass. The snow was wet and soft under their feet. In the harsher winter it would be crunchy and it would seem not to interact with you. But this snow would stick to skin and clothes and you would bring it into your home on your hat and boots, where you would share the warmth of your stove with it.

They reached the Pripyat river, which was wandering slowly in the opposite direction as they were.

“If you put the penny in there, it will stay copper forever.”

She took it out of her pocket. “Never green?”

“Nope.”

Irina put the penny to her lips and lobbed it into the water. For a moment after it reached the water, it gave the impression of a piece of paper in the wind, then it sank out of sight. She went onto her toes and put her mouth to his ear. “I think we will live on in that penny.”

“Yes, I think so.”

Irina left his arm and began flitting forward and back, up and down.

“What are you doing?”

“I’m trying not to...*yebat*, trying not to let the snow touch me.”

“That’s impossible, it’s everywhere.”

“Not true, it’s actually almost nowhere.”

“Yes, yes, but you’re not small enough.”

“This body isn’t, but me...I, am going through with room to spare.” She continued to bob from foot to foot along the road toward their apartment building.

She danced out of sight over a hill and Sasha squelched the desire to run after her. He had heard once that infants cry so intensely when their parent’s leave the room because to the child all that is beyond the walls was oblivion. He thought it funny that he was experiencing a bit of this phenomenon at his age. It wasn’t for a minute of walking relaxed in the snow watching Irina’s left-behind footprints become more and more vague

as the distance between them lengthened, that Sasha realized it wasn't quite this infant rationale that had gripped his mind, but it was in fact a sort of mirror of it. He felt as though he were gone when Irina crested over the hill. At the moment he realized this he held these two opposite oblivions in his head, and he tried to hold them together in his mind as they immediately began to fade.

Irina was standing in the doorway of their apartment building entrance with her hands behind her back. As he approached she brought a hand forward that held a lump of snow. "I was going to throw this at you, but you looked so peaceful just now." She turned her hand over and let the clump fall to the ground and returned the hand behind her back. She walked close to him with her head down, then raised it to look at him. She put her arms around him and he picked her up with his hugging arms.

He felt an icy trickle between his shoulders, "*Cyka.*" He slowly set her down and she looked up at him, daring him to tackle her into the snow. Before he decided if he would, she bolted through the door and ran up the stairwell. He untucked the back of his shirt and did his best to shake out the remaining snow. He walked in and took to the stairs two at a time; he still felt like a visitor, like he was going up to see an aunt or a co-worker, but as he reached the third floor, this feeling faded. It began to sink in, that this was their home, theirs and theirs alone. Irina's mother would not be in that apartment, nor would his own parents. There would be no children there to feed, change, or play with. Before six months ago, he wouldn't have thought to entertain the idea of having a place of their own.

He opened the door to Irina standing in the common kitchen/dining room space with nothing but one of his button up shirts on. She was standing as she was outside the

building, upright, with her hands behind her back. Sasha looked for a moment, then slipped off his boots and walked over to the range. He turned on the gas and ignited it with a match. He unzipped his coat and unbuttoned his overshirt, taking them off together and hanging them over the back of a chair, which he slid next to the range. As he walked from the door to the range, the range to the chair, and back to the range, Irina stood on the same spot but rotated so as not to let her back face him. He walked over to the window “Hm. Still snowing.” He ambled over to one of the moving boxes next to the bed and picked it up. “Hm. Sweaters.” He said, reading the label. He set it on the bed and opened it. He pulled out a blue and white argyle printed one. “Oh, this is a nice one, I had forgotten about this,” he said quietly.

“Honey!” Irina stomped one foot.

“Oh, I didn’t see you there. Is that another snowball?” He gestured to her hands.

“Why don’t you go sit at the table and I’ll show you.”

“I don’t know, I was thinking of folding some sweaters. You’re sure it’s not another snowball?”

“Yes, yes, okay. Just go over there.” She pointed to the table with a cock of her head. “And close your eyes.”

Sasha put the sweater down and sat down at the table. He closed his eyes, unable to keep a small but deep grin from his face.

“Okay, hold out your hands.” She walked slowly to him, and he could hear the sound of her bare feet sticking slightly to the linoleum flooring over the sound of the burner.

He wished to linger there but he felt a smooth object in his hands. It was glass and slightly chilly. He held it firmly with one hand while he traced the other along the bottle's contours. "Is this what..." He brought it to his nose and sniffed the licorice odor. He opened his eyes. "Where did you get this?"

"I'm not saying." Irina lifted the cover off the bankers' box that sat on their formica counter. She began pulling out clumps of newspaper and stripping the paper away, setting the discovered glasses onto the sink edge.

Sasha turned to bottle over again in his hands feeling such a lack of friction, such a smoothness that he felt a tinge of paranoia that the bottle would just simply fall through his hands to the floor. He held the bottle up to the street light coming through the window. "It's a little green."

"Well, we could save it for a couple years." She stopped unwrapping and brought a cone shaped glass with a bulbous reservoir over to the table. "Where's the silver—"

"I put it in the drawer already." Sasha said without looking away from the bottle. It was funny to him to look through the liquid at the world on the other side. He thought it was undeniably similar to the way the world would look after his first glass – off just a bit, like a waterlogged photograph perhaps.

"Sugar?" Irina held a cube in her cheek.

"Sure, in the first one maybe."

She put the slatted spoon in her mouth and brought it back out with a slightly rounded sugar cube. She set it in the glass and took the bottle from Sasha. She took care to pour the absinthe down the side of the cone so as not to let it push the cube off the spoon. When she finished, she walked to the freezer and took a cube out of the tray, it

stuck slightly to her fingertips as she positioned it in the cone so that one corner hung directly over the sugar cube.

Sasha rose and walked to the kitchen window. He pulled the shade down and the room was thrown into the previously overpowered blue light of the stove's propane flame. He took a cube from the cardboard box on the counter, pinching it with his fingernails to remove it from an unbroken plane of cubes, and placed it in his mouth. He walked over to Irina and brushed a lock of brown hair behind her ear. He put his mouth to her ear and let the granules scrape her lobe; after removing his mouth he returned it to collect the sweet left behind.

She took the fabric from either side of his torso in her hands and pulled him slowly and strongly toward their twin bed, which still held sweaters and no sheets. As they shuffled, face to face, touching nose to cheek, then lip to lip, her bare toes bumped socked ones. With her calves against the cold bed frame, he put his mouth to her sternum and brought his fingers up near his own cheeks to undo her shirt buttons. He greeted each revealed portion of skin with the sugar cube, growing ever smaller and more spherical. After he tongued her navel, and moved to the final button, she kept her feet on the floor, but bent her knees to flop back onto the bed, catching her torso-weight with her arms to make the transition gentle. As his cube disappeared, she brought her hands to her face, holding some of her hair against it, sensing with her forehead the cool of her hands while sensing the warm of her flush face with the tender side of her fingers.

The dark air of the kitchen excited the slowly moving molecules of the ice. A drop formed and the shape of the cube with its building drop mimicked the shape of the glass. The awoken drop fell to the next cube, which soaked like a sponge and would not

release its sucrose until the next drop came. Sasha and Irina did not see the drops come more rapidly; they did not see the ice shrink until it would no longer be held by the cone of the glass. They did not see the ice come to rest on the spoon, and they did not see the gentle turbulence as the louche flowed atmospherically through the translucent green.

The drink had warmed from its time with the ice and she still wore his shirt, though now unbuttoned and soft. He walked to the drink, feeling his feet stick, as hers had. His eyes had adjusted and there was no need to feel the walls with his hands. He brought the drink to the bed and took a clump of sweaters with his other hand, placing them against the headboard. She leaned up on them and took the drink and poured it through her lips in a long, consistent flow. He took its remainder and put it all in his mouth, swallowing some and bringing the rest in his mouth to hers, letting it seep through. She swallowed and licked the remainder from his lips. “Another?”

After the drink had louched again, and again been warmed and consumed they slept heavily with his head on sweaters and hers on his arm. During their second drink he began to feel that he was in a painting, where the values were the same, but the colors were not right and the artist had let some of the contours bleed. In the at-first gentle rocking, he felt the ocean – and in the later turbulence, he held on to her as a piece of driftwood that he would continue to need on the other side of this storm.

Awoken, at the bottom of the Pripyat blue light coming from over he felt the weight of all the water he felt it like a boulder of warm ice shaped in the riverbed like an ice cube tray it was loosed but still fit snugly he could not breathe through it but this was not yet a cause for panic he lifted his head, but was held down by his arm through the ice he saw the source of the light: it was the head of man where the streetlight should have

been it was shining metallic his arm was let freed and he traveled through the block closer to it as he approached it was overrun with a moldmoss, it smelled of fuel and he reached to its base careful to avoid its hot ambient cancer it vanished and he was left cold, with cold feet on the cold ice. Here was a weatherwindow two meters away in which it appeared to be snowing walking to it he saw children on parade in a now luminescent snow they bobbed and frolicked and as the snow reached them it passed on through leaving holes and valleys and as the dots of snow came to the ground they continued swaying in the wind creating a puddle of white worm ~~~ the children and buildings slipped frictionless into the acrid whiteness and he was left before a window of blank worms fell from his eyes as he knew this world was gone the acidity built in a liquid pile at his feet erasing them he looked for all that was permanent but found none – the metal man was now balsa, the steel plant on the horizon, looked as if it were being consumed by aphids and a peaceful white consecration impended.