

Emily pulled on her grandpa Luke's brown work boots at the front door. Her feet occupied a mere fraction of their available space - her ankles banging back and forth into the sickly lolling tongue with every step. She zipped the front of her pink coat and tucked her hands into the woolen mittens her mother had prematurely attached to the end of the quilted sleeves. She stood on tiptoes, knocked her grandpa's plaid hunting cap off its mahogany peg, and pulled that down over her ears. It slipped past her forehead, past her eyes, and she pushed it back. It slipped, she pushed. Repeat. Emily unlocked the front door, glancing one last time at the grinning man on the television, and then stepped out into the yard with no sun. The sidewalk with no sun. The street with no sun. Grandpa Luke's long, fraying laces dragged behind her, jumping and skidding like dueling snakes. The dull, green moon...

Emily knew the route. Down her grandpa's street, take the cut-through at the top of the circle, go over the bridge, through the parking lot, behind the pizza shop, and into The Bar. That's where grandpa would be.

The calmness outside permeated Emily's every step. She grinned, laughed: the neighborhood was underwater. The neighborhood was muddy. The neighborhood yawned, stretched, walked with a cane, muttering to itself. It was as if the world was frozen in time and Emily the only person alive on the planet. In a good way. Now everything belonged to her because she was a child alone in the night surrounded by the familiar made mysterious. And grandpa was ahead. He would smile, pull her onto the stool next to him. He would rub her back. Order her a soda. His red face. His cold hands. His crinkled eyes.

The black limbs of trees flagged Emily down the cut-through and toward the bridge. Deep shadows were warm quilts. The lilting breeze her best friend. Emily stopped in an areola of dull green moonlight in the middle of the bridge over Chub Creek. The breeze sped up to a light wind zipping down the banks and straight through the weave of her pink woolen mittens. Emily faced it. Opened her mouth. The wind blew past. Cold, bracing air flowed along her teeth, down her esophagus, into her belly. Emily closed her mouth and swallowed the wind without chewing; she rubbed her belly and stared down the banks into the shadows. Emily opened her mouth. Ate more wind. She ate and ate and ate until the wind finally gave way. She ate until her belly was full.

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