

1

A car, falling through darkness.

End over end, one shuddering thud following another. Fountains of glass showering outward and then—a vacuum of silence collapsing back in.

The vehicle came to rest on its back, at the bottom of an embankment below the bridge and propped up against a splintered stand of poplar trees. You could see the path it had taken through the snow, leaving a churned trail of mulch and wet leaves in its wake.

Into the scentless winter air: the seeping odour of radiator fluid, of gasoline.

They climbed down on grappling lines, leaning into their descent, the lights of the fire trucks and ambulances washing the scene in alternating reds and blues, throwing shadows first one way and then the next. Countless constellations in the snow. Glass, catching the light.

When the emergency team finally arrived at the bottom of the embankment, they were out of breath.

Within the folded metal of the vehicle: a buckled dashboard, bent steering wheel, more glass and—in the middle—something that had once been a man. White hair, wet against the skull, matted now in a thick red mud.

“Sir! Can you hear me?”

His lips were moving as the life poured out of him to wherever it is life goes.

“Sir!”

But no words came out, only bubbles.

2

Doors glide open, the sheets of glass parting like a magician’s gesture as the West African air swarms in, a heat so strong it pushes her back into the airport. She shields her eyes, stands a moment as the bodies shove past her.

On the other side of the pavement, a chain-link fence keeps the riff-raff at bay. Riff-raff and relatives. Taxi drivers and waiting uncles. Shouts and frantic wavings, hand-inked signs reading TAXI 4 YOU and LAGOS ISLAND DIRECT. She is looking for her name among these signs. Even with the jet lag and nausea weighing upon her, even with the flight-induced cramps in her calves and the heaving cattle queues she’s been corralled through, the customs officials who rummaged through her carry-on looking for stashed treasures only to throw her dishevelled belongings back at her in disappointment, and even with the sweltering air of the airport interior coming up against the blast-furnace heat outside, even with that, perhaps because of that, she feels oddly elated. *Calmly excited.*

Sweat is forming, the condensation that comes from colliding weather patterns. It trickles down her collarbone, turns limp hair damp and damp hair wet; it beads into droplets on her forehead. Somewhere: her name. She sees it being waved above the mob on the other side of the chain-link fence. But just as she is about to walk across, a voice behind her coos “Madam?” She turns, finds herself facing an armed officer in a starched green uniform, sunglasses

reflecting her face back at her in a wraparound, panoramic mirror.  
 “Madam, please. You will come with me.”

It is almost a question, the way he says it. Almost, but not quite.

“Madam. You will come with me.”

She pulls her carry-on closer: the only luggage she has. “Why?”

“Airport police, madam. The inspector, he wishes to speak with you.”

### 3

The boy’s father was speaking softly in river dialect, as he always did when speaking truths. “A father, a mother, must ask themselves this. If it gives the child a better life, would they? Would they die for their child?”

The mangrove forests were breathing. Wet sighs and soft lapping sounds. The boy’s father, deep in tidal mud, was hauling in nets flopping with quicksilver as the boy stood on the shore, fishing spear ready.

“Remember,” said the father, switching to English for emphasis as smoothly as one might switch from net to spear, “Kill the fish quickly. It is kinder that way.”

### 4

“Laura? Are you there? It’s—it’s about your father. Please pick up.”

The sound of a sob being swallowed.

Laura spit into the sink, scrambled to the phone.

“Mom?”

After they’d finished speaking, Laura hurried down the hallway, pulling on her jacket as she jabbed at the elevator button.

Outside the night air was crystallizing into snow. She crossed a street empty of traffic, ran-walked down the hill.

The bungalow of her childhood was a stucco-on-stucco arrangement thumbtacked to the side of a steep street. A police car was parked out front, with Warren's brand-new Escalade hogging the driveway. It didn't matter; Laura had nothing to park.

When they were little, her brother Warren was convinced that the small nuggets of glass embedded in the stucco of their home were actually rubies, and he offered her fifty percent of the proceeds if she would collect them for him. "But I thought rubies were red," she said. "Don't be so picky," he replied. "They come in every colour, like Life Savers. It's why they're so valuable." So Laura spent an afternoon knuckling green glass from the walls. Fingers beaded with blood, she followed Warren proudly to the corner store, where Mr. Li offered them two all-day suckers in exchange—on condition they didn't mine their parents' stucco for any more gemstones. Laura considered this a fair return on investment; Warren was less enthused. He muttered angrily all the way home as Laura swung the empty plastic pail and moved the sucker back and forth in her mouth. She found Warren's sucker, still unwrapped, in his room several weeks later. He would try to sell it to her for a quarter the next time she got her allowance.

Inside her parents' wood-panelled living room: a police officer. Holstered gun and pale eyes. Those crocheted throw-cushion covers that had been there since forever. The knitted afghan draped over the back of the chesterfield (both the cushion covers and the afghan her mother's handiwork). And on the wood panelling behind: clunky oversized picture frames (her father's handiwork, both the frames and the panelling). Mall-bought oil-painted scenes of Paris in the rain, of Matterhorn in sunlight. Might as well have

been paintings of Mars; her parents had never been to Paris or the Alps. And now her father never would.

Laura's mother barely noticed Laura enter; she was floating in place, scarcely tethered to the earth. Warren, standing to one side, fleshy face knotted with anger, his arms wrapped tightly across his stomach. Warren, as bulgy as Laura was thin. Family photos always looked like an ad for an eating disorders clinic.

Warren's wife Estelle, meanwhile, was attempting, mostly in vain, to corral their twin daughters into the dining room and away from grown-up talk. Squirmy girls, mirrored reflections of each other, full of giggles and sudden solemn pronouncements. "Dogs can't dance but they can learn." "Daddy's silly!" "Suzie's dog can dance, she told me." Kindergarten tales and childhood non sequiturs. Warren's wife mouthed "hello" to Laura before disappearing into the other room.

*Why would they bring their kids?*

The officer with the pale eyes stood, extended his hand to Laura. Instead of a handshake, a business card. "Sergeant Brisebois," he said. "I'm with the city's Traffic Response Unit."

His card read *Sgt. Matthew Brisebois, TRU*. She wanted to circle the typo, add an "e." But no, not a typo. Something much worse.

"I deal with traffic fatalities. I'll be overseeing this investigation. I'm very sorry about your father."

*No, you're not. Without traffic fatalities, you'd be out of a job.*  
"Thank you."

"Can you fucking believe this?" It was Warren, turning to stare at his sister, eyes raw. "Dad drove off a cliff."

"Warren," said their mother. "Language, please."

"Your father appears to have hit a patch of black ice," the officer said. "It would have been impossible to see. Missed the bridge onto Ogden Road, westbound off 50th. It's an industrial area, and

he was travelling at high speed. Very high.” *As if he were fleeing something*, Brisebois wanted to say, but didn’t. Instead, he asked, “Where would he have been going that time of night?”

“Work,” said their mother. “He was a watchman, at the rail yards.”

“He was a teacher,” said Warren.

“Retired,” said their mother. “We were both teachers. Henry taught shop, I taught Home Ec. Henry was feeling—was feeling housebound, had started working, part time, as a night watchman.”

“Would he have worn a uniform?”

She nodded.

“I ask because he didn’t have one on. He was wearing”—Brisebois checked his notepad—“a sweater. Slacks. Loafers. The loafers came off in the crash. Would he have kept his uniform at work?”

“I suppose,” said their mother, voice distant. “I just don’t understand why he would be on Ogden Road in the first place. He always took Blackfoot Trail.”

Brisebois jotted this down. “And did your husband wear his seatbelt? Generally?”

“Oh yes. He was very careful about that sort of thing.” Laura’s mother was holding a wad of Kleenex as though clutching a rosary.

“Mrs. Curtis, your husband phoned in a complaint a few weeks ago, said someone was across the street watching your house.”

“Oh, that? It turned out to be nothing. Henry was up late and thought he saw somebody prowling under a street lamp. The police came, but—I’m sure you have a report.”

The officer nodded. “We do. I’m just trying to ascertain if—”

Laura’s brother leaned in, bristling. “Why are you asking these questions? This is bullshit.”

“I’m trying to piece together what happened, and why.”

“Why? I’ll tell you why. Because this fuckin’ city never clears its fuckin’ streets after it fuckin’ snows. That’s why. Always waiting for a fuckin’ chinook to do their work for them. Assholes. The snow gets packed in, we drive on ruts for months. Sure! Why pay for snow removal when you can wait for a la-di-da warm wind to come down from the fuckin’ mountains and melt it. Well, it doesn’t fuckin’ melt, does it?” His voice was cracking in anguish. “Do you know how much I pay in property tax? Do you?”

“Language, Warren!”

“Sir, I understand you’re upset. But I do need to—”

“A fuckin’ shitload, that’s how much. And what do I get for it? My father— The city, that’s who did this. I pay my taxes, they raise them every year like clockwork. For what? You want to arrest someone, arrest the fuckin’ mayor.”

When Laura finally spoke, her voice was so soft the officer almost missed it. “Did they say what kind of sweater?”

Brisebois looked at Laura. “Sorry?”

“The sweater he was wearing, did they say what kind? Was it green, a green cardigan?”

“Um ...” He flipped through his pad. “No, I believe it was blue. With patterns.”

“What kind of patterns?”

“I’m not sure. It’ll be in the accident scene photos, and the Medical Examiner’s Office will have the actual sweater. Why do you ask?”

“I was just ... wondering. It doesn’t really matter. Not now.”

Outside, the first whisper of a warmer wind was stirring, trickling down distant mountainsides, moving across the foothills. Above Ogden Road, the tire tracks in the packed snow would melt, first to slush and then to sludgy water. Traces of the accident would slowly vanish—except for one distinct streak of rubber, an

extended skid on the asphalt where a second set of tire treads led toward the guardrail beside the bridge. Those marks would last a long, long while.

*I'm asking you—*

*Who is dey mugu now?*

5

Members of the collision reconstruction team had already gone through by the time Officer Brisebois arrived. They'd laid down tent cards for the GPS survey to follow, and under the glare of floodlights, their breath formed winter haloes.

He checked in with them first. "Colin. Greg."

The older constable, Colin, looked up, grinned. "Sergeant Brisebois. Nice of you to show up."

They never referred to him as Matthew. It was one of their few concessions to his higher rank.

Brisebois had been on call. "Pager was in my jacket. Jacket was in the coat check."

"Coat check?"

"I was at a show. Had to change in the car, if that makes you feel better."

He hoped that would be the end of it, but of course it wasn't.

"You can't sneak out of a movie? Flash your badge, demand a refund?"

"Not that kind of show."

Greg, the younger constable, laughed. "Don't tell me you were whooping it up at a peeler bar while we were out here in the cold."

"No, not that kind of show either."

Sergeant Matthew Brisebois had been at the city ballet's annual