

Heat

by Debbie Ann Ice

Plants were too tired to look up. Thunderclouds appeared out of nowhere, growing up and out like nuclear explosions. It rained, then it turned hot again. Rain, hot, rain, hot. The air conditioning overheated trying to keep up. Bang. Gone.

We stared outside and noticed new life, plants of some sort, large and unfamiliar. Pointy leaves with mouths at the end and big noses in the middle. A new species? Global warming life?

It was so hot we walked out on our husbands. There were reasons, we supposed. They left the refrigerator doors open all day, grabbing beers when they passed by, tossing the sticky caps upon counters. They drove their Metropolitans to buy food, leaving the engines running as they unloaded. They ate the fruit right away, allowing seeds to fall from their hot, sweaty mouths onto the floor. Wet towels on the bed. Underwear, gooey and humid, on chairs. We said it was all too much. We said something about heat and food and new plant life that could creep inside our house, into underwear. They said something back to us, something we barely recall. They cussed. We cussed. We threw something. So did they. We walked outside, around the new global warming plants, all over the place, and down our driveways.

We kept walking till we got to our road. Everything smelled too alive, in a dead way. Our heads felt like potatoes right before they burst in the microwave. Our flip-flops did neither.

After a few hundred yards, we saw a new road, which seemed to have simply grown out of our road, like fungus. Steam rose from its edges. Green worm-like life lolled about the center line. We walked down it.

Large, overfed bugs slapped our skin. Ugly, obnoxious, talking, like hyperactive midgets.

We saw a building of some sort. A sign out front said: Store, lots to buy inside.

The door opened with a sucking sound.

Our husbands greeted us from behind a counter. They wore parkas and gloves. There were no shelves, no clothes, trinkets, pictures, toys. Not even candy. It was beyond cold, way below freezing. The walls and floors were made of ice and contained nothing, no clock, no prints, nothing.

One husband asked if we needed help. We said we were cold.

We have coats in the back you can rent, one said.

Rent?

He said, well, you could buy them too, but if you're just here to shop, I would recommend renting.

That was absurd. It was so hot new plants were growing, thunderstorms poofed into existence within minutes, bugs talked. We did not need coats.

They shrugged and continued to drink beer. The caps were frozen and stuck to the floor.

You can turn on that portable heater over there, another husband said. But you have to put a few quarters in it every ten minutes.

We asked what they sold. They said, Well, we think it's quite obvious. The one who said that spit a frozen seed into his gloved hand and placed it in his pocket.

We said we would rather not stay and buy something that seemed to be nothing, particularly if we needed to rent a coat to buy it.

They shrugged and turned on the TV.

We went outside so the frozen sweat would melt. We continued down the road, now loud. The bugs were all chatting with each other; a few laughed.

We kept walking. In the distance, we saw more roads, all green, bugs hovering just above the surface. A large cloud that had looked like cotton minutes earlier was now big and dirty. A tornado was trying to drop to the ground.

One of us said maybe we should go back to the frozen husbands who sold nothing, maybe put a few quarters in the heater. We stood and considered this.

The tornado was now halfway to the ground, bouncing in the sky like a slinky, a whirl of air ready to connect our heat with its chaos. We waited for it to drop down, but it didn't. It slinked above us, turned and headed for the store.

We watched it, not knowing what we wanted -- for it to blow away our frozen husbands who sold nothing, silence the chattering bugs, toss all the Metropolitan cars into trees. Or stay up there and let us be.

We all stood and waited for something, anything, to happen.

