

Blood By Pines

by G.E. Simons

The bullet had passed through the black nylon mesh of his expedition jacket and nipped a thin furrow in the tender flesh beneath the bicep of his right arm.

He could feel a ribbon of blood, warm in the cold air, melting down the contour of his forearm. It was soaking into the fabric of his undershirt.

Long term, this blood loss was going to be a big problem.

Short term, he needed to escape the barking dogs. He could hear them straining and canine on well-made leather leashes in the increasingly near distance.

He had counted four dogs in total. Their leads stretched into the veined grip of the patrolmen. He pictured again the fierce yellow eyes, pierced with black ink dot pupils as they computed the hillside in grids. Their pulsing leathery nostrils were tracking down the tomcat.

The river was low and only reached his knees as he crossed it. Halfway across a drop of blood dripped from the cuff of his right arm, hit the crystal blue water and disappeared instantly on the current.

On the far bank he clambered up the loose rocks, coagulated as one in the deep freeze. His feet and ankles were so cold with the syrup of the river water that it felt as though they were being held to the blue flame of a fire.

When he reached the top of the bank he was confronted by an expanse of flat snow. A vulnerable surface. Beyond it was a dense forest of pines all filigreed with water vapour and desperate invitation.

It was the dead of night of course but bright as mid afternoons on a southern coastline. The lunar searchlight that reflected and amplified across the swathing oceans of whiteness made it look like an untouched planet.

He heard the first forepaw hit the river behind him, closely followed by the splashing rubber sole of the lead patrolman's standard issue boot.

The dogs began to excitedly skitter in aggressive circles as they drove up the riverbank, already tasting the excitement of steak on their gums and jaws that snapped and fizzed with spittle

But all that they found at the top was bloody red spatters on pure white snowflakes. And beyond that footprints that got smaller and smaller until they disappeared completely into the spicy green pines.

