

Getting There

by I. R. Thibodeau

I listened to the snow beneath my heels and the ever-present groan of the frozen river under our feet. For a moment I felt the water below the ice. Running not unlike blood. Cold blood.

I needed new boots.

She'd been talking.

Her eyes fixed on a point to our left, past one of the church steeples poking out of the flat, charred ground like a toothpick protecting a birthday cake from its cellophane ceiling, an untouched bethesda keeping the never-blue sky from crashing down on us. I wanted it to crumble.

And she was still talking.

"I want to die violently," she said.

Black smoke rose from somewhere past the cross atop the steeple. Even in the frozen, brittle air that bit at our cheeks we couldn't hear the gunshots.

"Violently," I said.

"Yeah," she stopped walking. So did I. "Like those people over there."

"In the smoke?"

"Yeah, the smoke. I want to burn."

She pulled her hood down, and let the wind grab at her hair. Long, blonde, dirty tendrils whipped out towards the raised banks of the river, pulling her. She let her rifle down from her shoulder.

"We should go," she said, "we can go."

"Not yet. We have to get there."

"There's nothing, Harper. They got to it."

She tapped her finger on the barrel of her rifle.

"We have to."

I started walking.

"Put your hood back on. They'll be watching."

She hoisted her weapon, and we walked. She was over my right shoulder; black, ashy land to my left just above eye level.

In front of us only bright white dipping into the horizon.

"There wasn't anything on that island. This place is dead. Whatever you call it."

"Detroit," I looked back at her. "You mean Detroit. And yes there was."

I stuffed my hands deeper into my jacket. The wind seeped through the fabric.

She huffed.

"Why are we going there?"

I couldn't answer her.

An engine rumbled close enough that it drowned out the noise of our boots. We dove into the unpacked powder, on our stomachs, chins pressed into the cold, eyes forward. The sun bounced off of the miles even snow. My eyes burned.

I hoped this wasn't it. Her violence.

The engine idled. They were close. I moved my hand towards the pistol on my hip.

She whispered.

"Is it them?"

I looked back expecting tears and glistening baby blues.

She was smiling.

Men were talking over the engine. One yelled something. I heard her rifle click. She breathed fast, and stood.

I thought of a scene from Tolkien.

I rose next to her. Pistol raised in my right hand. Five rounds in the clip.

Three of them dropped down onto the river, two with guns.

Six shots shattered the air, peppering the snow with blood.

I felt warmth from my gun or theirs.

We laid down.

Waiting.

