

The Amber Sea

by Paul de Denus

The blizzard has picked up in intensity. It stretches along the horizon, fusing clouds, snow and iced air into one. It blasts up the drifts like white dirt dug from the earth, a frozen burial ground encircling our thin tent, entrapping us. It may well blow us clear off this floe into the arctic sea. Captain Wells has stepped outside to secure the rigging; "batten us down for the night ahead," he said. St. John is bundled up beside me, asleep. His eyes twitch and roll as he escapes into the warm safety of his dreams. Lucky him... able to drift off so easily.

My fingers tingle. Frostbite I'm sure but what do I know for certain? They are remote from my hands, floating just beyond but I can still see them move. I can barely keep a clutch on the pint bottle. It is my true savior. My insides burn with its fire as it consumes my being, dulls my thoughts. If I could only climb inside, immerse myself in its warm amber sea. It is the color of the earth. The earth. What I wouldn't give to have it under my feet again... green grass and the hot soil... the smell of clean rain... the seed of life bursting everywhere. There is no life here, only a bleak slab of frozen desert and a sorrowful wind that calls for me to venture out.

How have I come to such a desolate place? Was this not what I wanted? An escape? Her letter spelled out her wishes, a biting end to our engagement, pure and as cold as this foreboding landscape that surrounds my heart. Emilee, I have tried but you... I cannot escape or forget.

I stare into this bottle and the calm amber rolls in a gentle wave, back and forth, side to side, leading my thoughts to a safer place - - oblivion - - slowly taking me down. I can hear it now, clearer, just behind the flap, a whispering call beyond these thin walls. The isolation has crept in; I can't keep it out. It is colder, though only to

that of which I can feel. Captain Wells? He should have been back by now. I lean into St. John but he doesn't stir and his eyes no longer move. I'll wait a little longer... before I go out. The wind is insistent though, with my amber all but now gone.

