

It happened in December.

I cradled my purchase, the last vestiges of the warmth of the patisserie disappearing with the tinkling of the doorbell. I exhaled gently, spellbound by the fresh dusting of powder that coated the cobblestones. Pine needles swayed in the wind, varnished with the green lacquer of hope and life. The corners of my lips tugged upwards, my eyes drawn in radial lines inward by a smile. Eros danced with the snowflakes as couples scurried from house to house, hands linked in a promise of love. Flames burned in every house, breathing all the more deeply for their proximity. The gossamer vacancy that played across my lips turned melancholy. I resumed my tread to the quaint library that stood a block away, grateful for the chance to lose myself in the nexus of philosophy, waiting to come alive and breathe.

In that instant, a girl came flying out, crashing into me and sending my red berry parfait flying. Every detail is still etched into my mind. The moistness of her eyes, like deep pools of caramel covered with a lamina of gentle frost. The curve of her lips, the luster of her hair, her scent that filled me with vellichor, like she was conjured in a ripple of laughter - as if all she was composed of was musical and loving happiness. She clutched my hands in hers. "I'll never be sorry enough, but you look so beautiful." And she ran off, her hair trailing behind her like a watercolor in the rain, and I was left there, as though I was hollowed out by a nuclear blast and all that was left was ashes fluttering inside brittle bones.

At that moment love was sewn into my spirit, forced by a divine hand. Despite the snow around me, my heart was awash with erratic flames. I was ready to do anything. If she had grabbed my hand and run into oncoming traffic, I would have followed like a lost puppy, smeared in red sugar, Persephone to the pomegranate. I could not fault her for beguiling me so. At that moment, love was so easy. Love was blameless.