

Cold Restless Water

Alzo David-West

She is standing at the foot of the bridge, staring at the river, in the snowy night, and the painful thoughts overwhelm her as she wonders in that moment, that terrible moment of anguished indecision.

She doesn't know what to do with her life because she feels useless and lonely and alone in spite of the doctrine, the teachings, and the double-portrait badge of the leaders on her breast, so she throws herself, and the winter wind rings in her ears like jangling teeth. Her body tumbles and sinks, and soon, the drowning comes. Her lungs become stifled, and she chokes, panicking and struggling, but only because the body wants to live while the soul wants to die.

Suddenly, a hard grip, hands in the dark submergence, and she breathes the violent stabbing air and sees a man, with grey hair, and the frigid waves trembling around them. She faints and later awakens, finding herself on the ground and him lying next to her, dead; and she is freezing. A life given for a life.

Shivering, with mist coming from her mouth, she cries and shouts and kicks him, demanding why he did it, this stranger, this idiot in a dress shirt and dress pants, with no shoes on, lying there because of her. She runs away, and the snowfall buries her shoeprints.

Schoolchildren playing on the frozen river, in the morning, find the man under a white mound and excitedly call out to the people on their way to work. Women scream and men gasp, and police and security agents come to take him away. Someone finds a coat, a jacket, and shoes on a bridge and a foreign book in the coat pocket, yet no one ever knew why the old man died.

He was going home much later than usual, walking from the editorial department of the Foreign Languages Publishing House, troubled over the upsetting French novels he was assigned to read and select for translation. That is when he saw the young woman at the bridge, and he knew there would never be a second chance for her or for him. No, no, he could not be an immoral man, not like the cruel existential hero who only cared about himself, so when she threw herself, he ran to the bridge, took off his coat, his jacket, and his shoes, and jumped after her, into the cold restless water.

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