

DAVID HUEBERT

INVIERNO

YOU SPENT THE WINTER IN FERNIE, where, between the backcountry and the resort, you logged 186 days on skis. You passed the spring season rambling through the mountains. Like a shadow bounding after a dog, you chased the snow across the melting north. After that it was summer season on the Blackcomb Glacier at Whistler. You're not big on the rich-kids-and-cocaine scene, but it was an easy month, wearing a T-shirt as you lapped the terrain park. Then you arrived in San Lopes. Six weeks in the Andes before closing the year in New Zealand. 365 days on snow.

Cynthia said that you were batshit, that this was an asshole way to spend your inheritance, that you needed to hurry up and finish your eight-year history undergrad and become an effing gym teacher. But you knew Dad would approve. Cynthia didn't understand skiing. She claimed it had to do with the whole ecological thing, but you knew it was because you were always better. She didn't like how you used to blow past her, dragging your poles to put snow in her face, which was admittedly a dick move but still. Cynthia probably thought you should spend the summer working at that organic co-op in Bracebridge, but you knew better. You knew Dad would understand.

¿Contáme lo que pasó?

The officer wears a black uniform with a peaked cap. In Canada you only see hats like that at thrift stores and Halloween parties. The officer has short black curls, an olive complexion, and dark, sneering eyes. He has shaved recently, but you can see the dense black beard sprouting under the thick flesh of his cheeks.

¿Contáme lo que pasó?

His voice has somehow become both calmer and more severe. You summon all the innocence in your body and channel it through your eyes.

I don't understand. No comprendo. Don't understand.

Decíme lo que pasó.

You ask yourself why you took Mandarin for your language credit in university instead of the second most commonly spoken language in the world. If only you'd been raised in the states instead of White Rock. The phrases you've picked up from *Spanish at a Glance* are of little use now.

Decíme lo que pasó.

You throw your arms in the air and drop them.

The officer cocks his head, surprised by the gesture. He studies you for a while. The only sound in the room is the desperate rasp of your breath. The policeman scratches his chin. He has thick wrists and, although he is not overweight, his neck is quite plump. Of all the thoughts you could be forming right now, this is the one that comes to mind: what a strange place to deposit the excess weight of the body. You guess the officer at somewhere around thirty, close to your age, a few years older at most, but you can tell he feels no bond with you, no affinity.

¿Por qué estás aquí?

You shrug, which is difficult with the cuffs holding your hands together. You have been handcuffed once or twice in Canada, and apparently the police here have the same outlook on cuffing: the more painful the better.

Your wrists are chafed and your triceps and ligaments are sore and exhausted. Every time you breathe or shift your weight your shoulder blades scream in protest.

¿Por qué estás aquí?

I don't understand. No fucking comprendo.

The officer smiles.

You started counting on October 27th, the day you bagged your first peak. The Fernie locals said you shouldn't bother with Hosmer, a 2500-metre summit. More than a few climbers had died on their way up. The locals called it the Ghost rider, said that in the right conditions you could see the colossal shadow of a cowboy on the southern face keeping vigil over the souls that had perished there.

There was one large cliff face that couldn't be avoided, and the only way up to the summit was over the icefall in winter. On the way down, of course, there was the possibility of avalanche. The descent route required a long traverse and a small scramble, and if the slope gave as you crossed over to the ladder there was no way to avoid the slidepath. Either you fell and got buried on the way down or you stayed on your skies and raced right over the

two-hundred-foot cliff.

The locals advised you to start with something more mellow, maybe Mount Proctor or one of the Three Sisters. Instead, you found a mountaineering partner—a wild-eyed Quebecer named Pascal—and began preparing for the ascent.

You met at the trailhead around eight a.m. and started up. Pascal led the climb. He took a safe ascent route through the trees, switching back whenever he could and testing the snowpack all the way up. There was some hoar frost on the surface, but it was stable enough underneath. By eleven thirty you were deep into the alpine, closing in on the ladder to the summit—a frozen waterfall glistening in the sun.

It was a few degrees hotter than the forecast had predicted, and the ice-fall was starting to melt. Pascal had some trouble getting the screws in, so he had to place them at dangerous intervals—sometimes as far apart as twenty metres. You could see the water running behind the ice as you dug your axes in. When Pascal was climbing above you, you had to cover your head with your elbows to avoid the large slabs he was setting loose, some of them the size of soccer balls.

Halfway up you stopped and glanced down to the base of the fall, which was about a hundred metres below. When you looked back to the top you were astonished at how far away it felt. Every time you put an axe in the ice you imagined what would happen if you fainted—which way you would fall and how far.

You concentrated on your crampons and took it one screw at a time. Pascal stayed silent throughout the climb. When you got to the top you saw him collapsed beside a pile of gear, his eyes bulging and his face lathered in sweat. “Taberfuck,” he said. “Nearly Putin pissed myself.”

You laughed and opened your arms wide, looking out over the vast white playground below. “It’s all downhill from here.”

There are three of them now: the fat-necked officer who questioned you before and two older men. One of these older men has blue eyes and a grey beard. The other has a thick torso and a nose that appears to have been broken several times. All three wear the same black uniform and well-polished boots.

¿Por qué estás aquí?

The officer with the crooked nose is speaking now. You find it difficult

to meet his eyes. He has the build of a heavyweight boxer or a running back. You presume he is the muscle, the “bad cop.”

You look at the floor. I told you already, I don’t know. I don’t know anything. I don’t even understand what you’re saying. No comprendo.

You are no longer in the interrogation room. The place you are in, although it is missing the traditional furnishings, could only be called a cell. The Canadian holding cells you have been in seem luxurious by comparison. Here there are no benches, just a single waist-high faucet suspended over a hole in the ground, which is presumably the toilet.

The boxer grabs you by the cheeks with one hand. There is massive power in his fingertips, which feel like five tiny hammers as they clench your face. He turns your head, forcing you to look into his eyes, which flare like two tiny volcanoes.

He repeats himself, slower this time, carefully enunciating each word.

¿Por qué estás aquí?

You know you should be able to understand this simple question, but your brain is too congested with fear and delirium.

I don’t know. Sorry. Don’t know. No comprendo.

The grey beard takes a step forward. His blue eyes shine bright and vivid against the grey and black of the room. He holds a hand up against the efforts of his colleague and takes another step forward. His motions are graceful and delicate; he has the air of an aristocrat.

¿Por qué estás aquí? He sounds each syllable out. Afterwards, he repeats one word: Aquí. He points at the floor.

Ah-key, you say, reveling in the recognition. You point to the floor. Here.

The aristocrat nods and smiles, the beard shifting on his face.

I am here to ski. Esquiar. I am skiing. Esquiar, ah-key.

You pull your feet together on the floor and hop from side to side, acting out a few turns. Unconsciously, you jerk your arms forward to mime holding poles. The cuffs burn against your wrists, and there is a sting in your right shoulder.

Bueno, says the blue-eyed policeman. He smiles. Dale. ¿Contáme lo que pasó?

No comprendo. Really, sorry. No comprendo. No sé.

The smile drops off his face all at once, like snow sliding off a cornice. He yells, Decíme lo que pasó.

You look to the fat-necked officer, then the boxer. They both avert their eyes. You swallow and turn back to the aristocrat. No sé, you confess. No sé.

He looks over your shoulder and nods. You don't see where the blow comes from. The loss of consciousness is sudden and painless.

That winter you put everything you had into skiing. You turned your beard to ice more than once; you grew nagging patches of frostbite on your cheeks and nose; you skied through the hail and the white-outs, through weeks of minus thirty, through arctic winds and torrents of rain; you skied when everything but the t-bar was closed because of avalanche danger. Of course you had to take it easy once in a while, riding groomers for an hour or two just to add the day to your tally. You had to make some allowance for the nagging injuries, the tarnished gear, and the aching muscles you dragged around all season, but you skied harder that winter than you ever had in ten full years as a ski bum. Most importantly, you skied every single day, no matter what.

Fernie Alpine Resort closed in mid-April. You did backcountry trips in the area until the end of the month. Then you headed north, chasing the snow up into the coastal range, climbing mountains and riding glacial terrain by day, driving by night, sleeping in your truck when you got the chance.

In Smithers you met up with some old planting buddies, Gordie and Ray. The three of you rented a little cabin in the middle of the woods. You had to ski your supplies in, pulling a toboggan loaded with beans, canned tomatoes, and quarts of whiskey. You spent most of May and June exploring the backcountry nearby. You climbed at night to avoid the massive avalanches that rumbled down the southerly faces every afternoon, then you bivvied near your descent point and rode down as soon as the morning sun softened the crusty surface. You got to enjoy the sense of well-earned exhaustion you felt in the morning, watching the sun tiptoe over the mountains as you nursed a cup of instant coffee. The snow wasn't the greatest, but the views and the mountain air were so invigorating that you never for a minute wondered why you were doing this.

After Smithers dried up you headed down to Whistler, where you knew a girl from university named Krissy. She put you up on her couch for a reasonable price (dish duty for the month and a few grocery runs). Although

you weren't much for freestyle you bought a pass at the terrain park in the glacier just to stay on your skis. Krissy's girlfriends turned out to be quite accommodating, and you got pretty close with one of them, Lara, a redhead with a pair of ski poles tattooed beneath her shoulder blade. You ended up moving in with her for a week or two, and by the time you had to move on you were almost sad to say goodbye. You invited her to come to the Andes, but she didn't have the funds. Truthfully, you were relieved when she said no. She was too nice. It made your stomach keel to admit it, but you knew you could no longer accept a woman's kindness, not with ignoring Cynthia and your mother's Facebook messages and the rest of the whole shitshow you left in Richmond Hill.

Manuel, the bartender in Fernie who gave you the idea of San Lopes, had told you about South American women. You weren't going to South America just for the rickety chairlifts and the Southern Hemisphere powder. Tall white guy like you, Manuel said. You're an exotic animal. Manuel was a genuine dude. On Hot Dog Day he wore a Speedo and threw a frontflip under the White Pass chair. You trusted Manuel. You'd miss Lara, but she'd be back with that short Kiwi line cook before he had a chance to get any new STIs.

The morning you left you made a quick run through the park, more of a formality than anything. You caught the bus to the Vancouver airport and boarded an early afternoon flight to San Lopes via Toronto and Houston. You had arranged to meet Sal and Tex, a couple of buddies from Fernie. The three of you would check into your hostel, have a drink, and take in some of the scenery. In the morning you would hop on the shuttle to Las Leñas, and you'd be shredding the Andes by the afternoon, not missing a day.

You wake up to a boot in the stomach. Gasping, you reach out to clutch your gut, but the cuffs are still on. All you get is another jab that feels like a spoon digging into your spine. There is a string of drool between your face and the black filth on the floor. You are vaguely conscious of having woken up at some point in the night, struggling against the handcuffs and trying to pull your pants down. You have soiled yourself.

Another blow. This time the boot strikes the back of your ribs. Your body buckles and stretches out from the pain. Another boot to the stomach causes you to scrunch into a fetal position. You succumb to the mindless immediacy of it, coiling and uncoiling in the search for air. There is no sense

of the passage of time—only the desire to get oxygen back into your body.

Everyone warned you about the locals: friends and family, the guard at the border, the clerk at the hostel. It was even on the website. You were told to keep all your valuables on your person at all times. You were told that there would be scams. You were told not to follow anyone to a private place and never to go anywhere alone.

You were not warned about this woman. You were not told that she would have a smooth, exposed stomach, laughing brown eyes, and a wide mouth shaped like a slice of cantaloupe and every bit as succulent. You were not warned that she would reach out and run her fingers across your chest as she said, Welcome to my country. You were not told about the soft, dark skin of her bare thighs, which would show beneath her jean shorts, or the way her shoulders would reflect a disc of late-afternoon sunlight.

She called herself Estella. You, Tex, and Sal were roaming the neighbourhood in search of a bottle of wine, and you paused to look into the horizon when you realized you could see the jagged fangs of the Andes from where you stood. She approached you on a street corner a few blocks from the hostel. She had a bulky red handbag dangling from a long strap on her shoulder, and she wore large, fashionable sunglasses with designs sparkling on the arms. She took off the sunglasses as she approached you and dropped them in her purse. She blinked against the sun, and there was moisture in the gesture, as if her eyes were licking their lips.

Estella asked for your name, and you told her. Edward. She was so radiant you didn't even consider lying.

She smiled at you and said, Eduard. You watched her lips move as she said it. Your name had never sounded so beautiful.

The first time she invited the three of you to go to the bar with her, you protested. It was Sal who pushed for it. He was desperate to go along. Come on, he urged. South American women!

You thought it was a bad idea. You had to be up early tomorrow. You had your 365 days to think of. You wanted to go back to the hostel and get a good night's sleep.

Then Estella ran her slender forearm between your elbow and your hip, inviting you to link arms with her. When her skin rubbed against your bare flesh it felt like the final, delicate stroke of a piano key completing the most glorious chord you ever imagined.

She turned you around and set off, leading the way down a street lined with palm trees and dilapidated hatchbacks. She turned back for Sal and Tex. Come, she said. I have many beautiful friends.

When you are finally able to breathe again, you suck the air in through your mouth, over and over again, like a woman in labour. Footsteps approach your face. You recognize the aristocrat's voice.

¿Quién son vos amigos?

There is another pair of boots behind the aristocrat's. They are slightly larger, and one of them taps impatiently.

You groan. Mi amigos?

Si.

You take a deep breath, combing through the murk of your brain. Your two companions seem so far away right now. Sal and Tex, you say. From Fernie. Canadian. Salvatore de Luca and Tex—I don't know his last name. That's all I know. No sé. I swear.

The treads of a boot close over your cheek, pressing your face against the floor. The aristocrat's voice is calm.

Vos amigos.

You nod to show that you understand, moving your face as much as possible beneath the grip of the boot.

¿Aquí?

I don't know. No sé. I don't know.

The boot eases off your face. You keep your eyes fixed on it as it moves away from your cheek. Of course the pain comes from behind. A jolt to your kidney rips through your nervous system. Then something sharp is tearing into your spine. The pain is almost transcendent, well beyond any sensation you thought you were capable of feeling.

Then there is nothing.

The building was a hunched, red-brick low-rise. There were no signs outside, and the place did not look like a drinking establishment. Estella walked up the dark stairway, letting her heels linger on each stride. The red handbag bounced against her hip. The muscles in her legs were taut, and each motion was precise. You had the sense that she was performing for you.

The bar was a dim room filled with couches and gorgeous young wom-

en. Spanish dance music crackled through an old set of speakers. Aside from you, Sal, and Tex, there were no other men in sight. It was still light outside, but all the curtains in the room were drawn. When you walked in, several women got up from their seats and turned towards you, staring as Estella led you over to the bar.

The bartender had leathery skin, bleached blond hair, and brown eyes. Estella waved an arm towards her and, turning to you, said, Daniela will take care of you. Daniela smiled, exposing teeth as jagged as the Andes.

Hola, she said. You like to buy a drink for the beautiful lady?

She pointed beside you, and you turned to find a tall woman with straight black hair and a silver-sequined top. The tall woman took you by the arm.

I am Agustina, she said. Her English was emotionless, her accent thick. You looked around for Estella, but she seemed to have left the room. Beside you, Sal and Tex were both talking to dark-haired beauties. You asked Agustina what she would like to drink.

Champagne.

You turned to Daniela. Champagne. Cuanto?

She bared her craggy teeth. Thirty pesos.

That's ridiculous. I could buy a bottle for that.

She shook her head.

Too much. You rubbed your thumb against your forefinger. Too much money.

Daniela shrugged. One glass, thirty pesos.

You noticed that a few more girls had closed in behind you. You were trapped between the crowd and the bar.

Okay, you sighed. One glass. You hold up a finger. One.

Daniela reached into the fridge behind her. She pulled out a bottle of champagne and loudly popped the cork. A few of the girls around the room moved closer. Agustina held onto your arm but kept her hips and shoulders distant. A large, hairy hand settled on the bar beside you. The forearm led up to an enormous pair of shoulders that sat level with your head. You looked up into the face of a huge man with a shaved head, a silver stud in one of his nostrils.

Hola, señor.

Hola.

You pay now.

Okay, you said, reaching into your jeans. You handed him thirty pesos. Without counting, he shoved the bills into his breast pocket. Then he gestured for more. If you weren't sure before, now you knew what was going on.

How much?

He didn't hear you. You realized the music had been turned up. You shout, *Cuanto?*

Three hundred pesos, he said.

What?

You glanced at Daniela, but she was busy pouring champagne into a string of flutes lined up on the bar. Across the room you caught sight of Sal and Tex holding hands with young women who were leading them towards a hallway.

Another man appeared beside you. He was just as big as the first with thick eyebrows and a goatee. He stood at your left shoulder, looking down his lumpy nose at you. You thought about calling after Sal and Tex, but they wouldn't hear you. The dance music had gotten even louder.

The first man repeated himself. Three hundred pesos.

This is ridiculous, you blurted. One glass, you held up a finger, thirty pesos. You pointed to Daniela. She said so.

The man shook his head. Ten champagne. He held up a finger and drew a circle around the congregated women. *Por todo.*

No way.

You stepped away from the bar but got no farther than that. There was a hand on your wrist, twisting your arm behind your back. Pain seared up into your armpit, and you found that you could not move.

Three hundred pesos, the man said again.

No, you wheeze, shaking your head. I only have twenty more.

He stared back, expressionless.

You flailed your free arm. Twenty pesos only.

We go banco.

The boxer is shoving a piece of paper into your face. You are drooling onto the floor, and out of the corner of your eye you can see that your saliva is streaked with blood. He is jabbing a pen at you. Your hands are still cuffed, and in some recess of your mind you are aware that the situation is ludicrous, but all you can do is look at the document, then the pen, and

nod.

Yes, you mutter. I will sign. You nod vigorously, astonished by your own eagerness. Right now you would sign anything.

Holding a set of keys in front of your face, the boxer wags a finger at you. He shakes the keys and gives you a questioning glance. You nod, trying to seem obedient. He walks around behind you, unlocks the cuffs, and pulls them off. You pull your arms around to the front of your body and shake them out. Though you expected to feel relief, you don't. You simply feel a new sort of pain, like taking off your ski boots after a long day. Before the muscles feel better, they will feel worse.

You reach out to brace yourself against the floor, but your shoulders buckle and you collapse into the filth. Your face slaps the concrete, where your gaze lands on a boot. You can see your own blood dulling the glint of the polish. Recoiling, you struggle against the urge to vomit. You put your palms against the ground, trying to raise yourself, and fail.

The boxer helps you up, careful not to pull you by the arms. He puts one palm on your chest and the other in the middle of your back, steadying you as you rise to your feet. He is just as calm and comfortable now as he was sinking his boot into your gut.

On your feet you notice that you are once again in a new room, which is the most fully furnished so far. There is a door, a mirror, and a table. The aristocrat is seated at the other side of the table, smiling at you. He extends a hand, gesturing for you to sit down across from him. As you do so, the boxer places the paper and pen in front of you.

You pick up the document and look at it. It is a struggle to focus on the letters, and when your eyes finally register the markings you realize that every word is in Spanish. You spend some time trying to decipher the document. Across the table the aristocrat continues to smile patiently. The only thing you understand is a line near the end of the document that says \$1000.

There are three pages in total, and at the bottom of the last page there is a line for your signature. The boxer taps this line with his finger when you get to it. You write your signature and slide the document across the table.

The two men from the bar walked you to an ATM in the middle of a crowded street around the corner from the bar. They stood over you, watching as you accessed your chequing account. Swarms of tourists and locals

walked by. You recognized the girl with a septum ring who checked you into the hostel. When she saw you with these men she dropped her eyes and crossed the street.

The machine offered you the choice of how much money to withdraw, and the man with the goatee said, Five hundred pesos. You looked up at him, but he didn't meet your eyes. Five hundred pesos, he said again.

I only have two hundred.

Five hundred.

You withdrew the money and handed it to him. Without a word, the two men turned and lumbered back the way they had come. You knew you should have been relieved because they didn't take everything you had, but all you felt was indignation.

You roamed the streets maniacally, trying to figure out where you were. You thought about going back to the bar to find Sal and Tex, but decided against it. You asked people on the street how to get to the police station, but they ignored you or pointed in vague directions. You were lost in a white-out, cliffs all around and no safe line down.

Eventually you decided to head back to the hostel to ask the employees what to do. You were walking down the city's major avenida when you saw Estella.

She was standing on a street corner with a couple of tall blond men wearing large rucksacks, probably Swedes. You were amazed that she was just as lovely as before, that her spell had not lifted and revealed the face of a foul and cankerous crone. It made you uncomfortable, but the thought was there: you wanted to damage her and compromise her beauty.

From across the street you yelled, Estella!

She looked at you and went as still as a hare in the snow. Then you stepped off the sidewalk, and she turned away, hustling into the busiest section of the avenida. You sprinted after her, screaming at the pedestrians to stop her. They stared blankly back at you. Estella was holding onto her purse as she dodged the pedestrians, but you were faster. You grabbed her by the hair to stop her, and she turned to you, cringing.

Estella! you shouted. Estella!

There was a circle of strangers forming around you.

Jesus, Estella! What the fuck?

She screamed back, No ingles! No ingles! Then she turned to the crowd. Por favor, she said. Ayudáme!

She's lying! Don't listen. She speaks English. She ripped me off. She's a liar.

Estella shouted over you, the Spanish streaming off her tongue. No lo conozco! No lo conozco! Ayudáme, por favor, ayudáme.

You were desperate to separate right from wrong, but you could see that the crowd was on her side. Your body tensed, wrung with fear, and then you were someone else doing something you would not do in all the universes you ever imagined. Clutching her black ringlets in your fist, you raised her face up so she had to stand on her tiptoes and you hit her, open palm on cheek. She cried out and staggered, but you held her tight. You closed your fist and hit her again. The sound was ugly, like skis breaking through the crust after a melt-freeze. Her nose leaked hot blood onto your hand.

Her eyes flicked to the side, and you looked over your shoulder. The policeman walked towards you in a crouch, his pistol drawn and levelled at your midsection. There was another officer beside him, and they were both shouting, waving their guns.

You let go of Estella's hair and put your hands behind your head.

The boxer escorts you to the vestibule of the police station, where the fat-necked younger officer is sitting at a desk behind a pane of plexiglass with a hole in it. The two men exchange a few hasty words, and then the boxer turns around and marches off. The young officer opens a drawer from a filing cabinet behind the glass. He pulls out some papers and begins writing on them. You sit down on the bench and listen to the sound of pen scribbling on paper.

Señor.

You have drifted off. The young officer is standing in front of you, holding a plastic bag. Recognizing your wallet and cell phone, you take the bag. The officer also hands you an envelope containing some sort of official document. You will worry about this when you get home.

Vení conmigo.

Beckoning for you to follow, the young officer walks over to the debit machine beside the plexiglass window. He enters a transaction for a thousand pesos. You pay with your credit card. After your return to Canada, a spasm of memory—fear, humiliation, relief—will cork through you each time you use an ATM. The young officer tears off your receipt, crumples it into his pocket, and gestures towards the door.

It is nighttime over Detroit, the city below a minute nimbus, a distant firepit in the vast obscurity of night. The dull ache of the beatings has begun to fade, and you realize that you are the only passenger awake on the entire airplane. The flight attendant walks by, and you ask her for some water. When she brings it, her smile is more than just polite. She is not flirting; she seems genuinely to care. She asks if you are going home, and you say you guess so, thinking that somehow this flight attendant gets you more than anyone you've spoken to in the past six months. You look back down at Detroit, and you think about how Cynthia used to hand-squeeze grapefruit into a bowl for you when you were sick as a child, how she would make you a hot water bottle when she was probably way too young to be handling boiling water, and how she taught you the times tables one summer and your fourth-grade teacher accused you of cheating because you were too far ahead of the class. You think about how much you need that kind of care now and how stupid you were to think of Cynthia as the bad guy. It was Dad who took you off to Whistler while she had to stay home shovelling shit at the barn in Stouffville, who loved poker nights and trips to Buffalo with Rick and Ernie to watch the Bills, who gave you a jackknife and taught you to barbeque when you were nine and your mother was away at a conference, who said that you were allowed to swear but just not around the women, and who kept wiring you money no matter how many courses you dropped or how many semesters it took you to finish a shitty Bishops undergrad in history. He made everything such a laugh, but when his heart heaved and buckled and quit you were stuck looking across the room at these two forlorn women, and you realized they were everything you had now. As the grief turned to terror, you became scared to let them even come near you. He did not mean it, and you still miss him like some fat jolly womb, but you know now that it was his fault. You know all these things you were stupid not to know before.

Your mother opens the door, squinting against the suburban sun. She is too calm, pushing her reading glasses up her nose. You do not want her to be calm. You want her to beam and hug you, crying out in joy, or you want her to grab you by the hair and punch you in the nose, letting the hot blood drip onto her fingers. You want her to turn into Estella and pin you to the ground, throttling you and telling you no, it's not okay to beat a woman just because she's a crook and you're a stupid scared tourist trying to outrun

your dead father's last breath. You want her to rage and howl at you. You want her to say, How could you? In what sadistic universe could you leave your bereaved mother in her hollow, death-filled house for nine months, not even calling at Christmas? Instead, there is only this colossal calm as she brings you inside, makes you tuna salad, and tells you Cynthia is coming over for dinner. It's crazy and idiotic, but you know now that everything is okay.