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DOUBLE DAYLIGHT

IN 1988 THE TIME WENT AHEAD BY TWO HOURS instead of one. Mom said it was the Newfoundland Government's way of playing God. I was only nine years old, but I knew what she meant. If the government liked playing God, then they should do something useful like cure cancer or, at the very least, pay for the medication.

We had already sold everything we had to sell: the Timberjack and the loader, the logging rights on top of 34 Hill, and the five acres of open pasture along the main road. Our holdings had dwindled to the small, unfinished bungalow in the woods behind Nan's house. My sister, Liz, and I stayed with Nan while Mom drove Dad back and forth to the Corner Brook hospital. You could hear our K-car screeching from miles away, the fan belt signalling Mom's return whenever she pulled off the highway into Black Duck. No matter what we were doing, swimming in Harry's River or firing sticks at each other in a game of War, we would run back to Nan's as soon as we heard the car.

Whenever Mom stayed the night at the hospital, it was Nan who signalled us home. It hurt her mouth to shout, so she stood on the porch beating a metal pot with a soup spoon until we came slumping down the road. Nan went to bed at nine, even with the sun high in the sky, and couldn't sleep if she didn't have the place all locked up. There were only a handful of houses in Black Duck, and the greatest threat might be a black bear, yet Nan still had to lock the door every night.

When Dad first went to the hospital Mom would take us to visit every weekend. We brought snacks, colouring books, and handmade get-well cards. We sat on his bed, read stories, and pushed the buttons that made different parts of it go up and down. Eventually, our visits grew more and more infrequent. There was always a reason why we couldn't go.

Dad had fixed the fan belt before—took the whole thing off and oiled it with WD-40 before putting it back on—but now it was getting worse, and

the whole car rattled when it idled in the driveway. The racket woke Nan up one night. She shuffled out to the porch and stood in the doorway behind me and Liz. Mom was standing there, rooting through her overnight bag looking for something while I pelted her with questions about Dad and Liz, bouncing up and down on her toes, bragged about climbing a tree that didn't have any branches.

"You need to do something about that car."

Mom's hands went still. I stopped asking questions and touched Liz on the shoulder to shut her up too.

"How?" She looked up, hand still gripping the bag like a claw. "Who the fuck's going to pay for it? You?"

Nan flinched, and Mom flung the overnight bag on the floor.

It was dark when she woke me up later that night. She had her housecoat on, the brown one covered in tiny teddy bears, and her hair smelled like Tame 2-in-1.

"Come on. You need to see this."

She woke my sister, too, and led us outside. We stood on Nan's front step, wrapped in blankets, and looked up at a flaming sky. Undulating waves of florescent green, blue, and yellow had turned the night into something living. A sudden flash of red took my breath away.

"Now that's one thing they can never take from us."

The word "they" was as heavy as cut timber landing at my feet. I understood then that she meant more than the government. She meant doctors, insurance companies, and social services. She meant God, Fate, and Destiny. I wasn't sure what the one thing was that they couldn't take from us, but as I watched the aurora borealis blaze across the sky I thought she probably meant miracles.

By July, the sun didn't set until almost midnight. I tried shutting all the curtains, but the lace fabric did little to filter the light, gave the sunny patches on the floor a textured quality, and set every dust mote dancing, frenzied and incandescent. Dad was moved to the Health Sciences Centre that month, and Mom went with him to St. John's, which was a whole day's drive from Black Duck.

My sister and I spent the day in the woods. We tried to play Hot Lava, where we pretended the ground would kill us if we stepped on it, but the air was hot, sticky, and full of flies. They buzzed in my ears and at the back of my neck.

I jumped to the ground and my sister yelled, "You're dead!"

Ignoring her, I headed down the path towards Harry's River. When I broke through the woods a cool breeze instantly soothed my skin, and I walked down to the water's edge, river stones shifting and clacking under my feet. Liz showed up while I was standing there watching the rushing current. She stood next to me for a while, staring at the water, quiet until she said, "How long are we going to do this?"

Without answering, I sat down and stretched out on the rocks. It was strangely comfortable, lying there, one arm extended towards the river, water trickling over my fingertips. Liz flopped down next to me and squirmed this way and that until she was still. We closed our eyes, and I reached across the rocks to hold her hand.

It was dark when we woke up, as the sound of Nan's clanging pot had been drowned out by the river. We made our way back to the house, shivering, sunburned, and covered in fly bites.

Nan met us in the porch, face creased with worry. "Oh, sweet Jesus!"

She pulled us into her arms, smooshing us together, and then ushered us into the bathroom, where she coated our skin with calamine lotion. It did little to soothe the burning, but it helped with the itching. After that, we spent our days watching soaps in the living room, avoiding direct sunlight. We sprawled on towels on the carpet wearing shorts and t-shirts. Nan served us bowls of Neapolitan ice cream and sat on the couch eating plates of buttered saltines.

Our sunburns eventually peeled and flaked off, but we lacked the energy to go back outside. Instead, we kept watching TV and waiting to hear from Mom, whose phone calls were growing more infrequent. At first she called once a day, then once every few days, and in the middle of August an entire week went by without a single call. The phone finally rang on a Thursday evening.

"When are you coming home?" I asked.

"I don't know. Put Nan on the phone."

"I want to see Dad."

"That's not possible."

"Why not? We can take the bus."

"You can't."

"I won't even wake him up if he's tired. *Please*. I have to."

She sighed and said, "He doesn't want you to remember him like this."

“Like what?” I stood there going numb until the receiver slipped from my fingers. It bounced off the floor and dangled from the wall until Nan came and picked it up.

I went back to the living room. On the TV, an intern winced as he watched Dr. Westphal push his hands wrist-deep into a patient’s open chest cavity. Blood splashed onto the metal clamps holding open the ribs, and I could see the patient’s heart thumping like a fat fish in open air. As I listened to the sound of the heart monitor, I looked over to see if Liz was still watching, but she was asleep.

I kicked her, but there was no reaction. I kicked her harder, and she moaned.

“*Magnum, P. I.* is coming on next,” I said.

She narrowed her eyes and kicked me back. “So what? I can’t even see it.”

The screen was a washed-out glare, so I got some garbage bags from the kitchen and taped them over the windows. I kept working until the window was black and I could hear the opening theme song of *Magnum*. I stepped back and saw Tom Selleck cruising down the highway in his red Ferrari. The image was clear enough, but light was still coming in through the kitchen windows and pouring through the living room archway. I dragged a chair across the carpet and began taping bags to the wall above the entrance until they draped down to the floor like a curtain.

“That helps,” Liz said, still on the couch.

Then the phone rang, and we went still. Mom never called twice on the same evening. We listened as Nan got up out of bed, springs groaning, and walked down the hall to the kitchen.

“Hello?”

Her voice dropped, and she uttered one word over and over, short and quick on little intakes of breath like cracking twigs. “Yeah, yeah, yeah . . .”

The room was dark now, and the only light came from the TV. Colours flashed across the carpet, the empty couch, and my sister’s face. There was green, blue, yellow, and another flash of red—not a miracle, just the Ferrari up in flames.

The phone made a *ding* sound when Nan hung it up. She drew in a deep breath and let it out through her lips in a burst. We listened as she picked up the receiver again, about to call someone else. Instead, she hung it back up. Slowly, she shuffled over to our make-shift wall and tapped on the plastic.

The spot where her fingers touched bulged a little, like a tiny black cyst, and the wall swayed.

“Girls?” she said.

The floor creaked as she shifted her weight from one foot to the other. We heard gun shots and squealing tires from the TV. I reached for my sister’s hand, and she gripped onto my fingers as if she were about to fall. We kept squeezing until Nan turned and shuffled back down the hall, leaving us alone. Her bedroom door clicked shut.

We settled back on the couch, feet and calves touching. The screen was a blaze of Hawaiian shirts before it blacked out, signalling a commercial break, plunging us into deep-space darkness. Underneath the TV, the VCR blinked 11:03pm—a reminder that time still existed on our little island, which was spinning an hour out of sync with the rest of the world.

A woman walked onto the screen, held up a tube of Colgate toothpaste, and flashed a mouthful of gleaming teeth. It was the widest, whitest smile I had ever seen, as if dental hygiene was her only worry and she had no idea that the world was out of control—that it was spinning erratically, bumping and rattling on its axis like a fraying fan belt, and about to start falling through space.