

## Breaking

The power was out. Snow and ice had fallen the night before so that the combination encased the ground in a strange pack—like crème brûlée with a caramelized top layer that when cracked revealed an inner soppy slush. There was no possibility of taking a walk that day, because Dan was wearing his slippers and thought his boots looked stupid.

Toby was bouncing in the snow, taking pleasure in breaking the ground with his little weight, yapping sometimes when the sharp ice of the holes he'd made scratched his ankles. Dan yanked the leash. It was too cold for just a cardigan.

Dan only remembered the power was out when he tried to turn on the coffee maker. He had started drinking coffee recently. His dad had always drunk it, making a pot on the weekend, but Dan had only started when he found out his girlfriend did. He didn't mind if he got addicted to it, and he drank it every day, but the power was out. He had to improvise, constructing an ad hoc percolator and pouring water he boiled on the stove over it. It took a long time to figure out how to do it without making a mess, but it didn't matter since school was cancelled and he'd still woken up early. No one else was up but him.

The kitchen was the coldest room in the house because the previous owners weren't handy like his dad was. His dad hadn't had time to fix the cracks in the door, and Dan wished he had now that the furnace was off, standing at the counter in jeans with holes in them, an old t-shirt, and the cardigan. He watched the water he'd boiled drip through the filter as he poured it, coming out brown and hot in the plastic lemonade pitcher below. He made enough for his dad when he got up.

Stirring sugar and milk into the coffee, Dan looked out the window to the pool. He was still tired and drank the coffee as quickly as he could.

A crack sounded like a slow bullet, and a tree limb fell from the sky above the tarp covering the pool. As it crashed through, it hit the diving board, breaking it in half and bending the aluminum pipes cemented to the deck. The limb was encased in ice and must have weighed more than Dan did. It shone in the light that came through the gray sky, immovable.

Dan didn't like loud noises. He had a strange relationship with sound; a lot of times he couldn't hear when people talked, and he wanted them to speak louder. But he hated loud music and car honking and ambulances. They made him jumpy. The coffee spilled a little on the floor, and Toby licked it up.

Dan went outside again with his coffee to ward off the cold. He hadn't seen before because the trees were in the backyard, but the world seemed wrapped up in ice and flashed like little lights seen through a window. The diving board had just been put in last summer and now his parents would have to get a new one. It probably wouldn't be fixed by the time he left for college. The ripped tarp had a hole just the size of the tree limb because the tarp was so tight, a hole made and plugged up in the same instant.

Dan and Toby walked to the big tree, the one that his dad and he had to cut back a while ago, removing the branches that were too old to leaf. As the wind came up, the ice creaked and tiny things fell everywhere. Dan looked back to the dark house. Toby yelped

as another branch fell, this one hitting the roof and slipping to the brick patio below. More creaking and Dan decided to go back inside. This was no day for a walk; apart from the crusty, slushy ground, the sky was unstable and he wasn't as strong as brick or aluminum. He went back inside and cooked an egg in a hole like his mom used to, cutting out the middle of the bread and cracking an egg over it. He gave the hole to Toby who almost bit Dan's finger. He used to like the holes the best. It was weird how a hole of bread cut out by his mom tasted so much better than a slice of bread did. It was colder than before; the seepy house had begun to let go of its warmth. If he was younger he might have crawled into bed with his mom and dad. It must have still been warm upstairs where everyone was sleeping, but he'd had coffee and was up for the day. He had to stay down.