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I call him Yorick – the bear skull in my backpack. He – I guess “he,” knowing that a male bear is far more likely to actually die of natural causes in our park than a female – still has little pieces of sinew attached, where the flesh didn’t quite peel away. Oversized nasal cavity, small eye sockets, strong grinding-jaw – it is my example and model. In my Smokey-the-Bear hat, I lecture with it, tell stories-with-a-purpose around a campfire. In the front pocket, there is a paw from a “managed” bear, a forearm-pelt with paw pad still attached. Female. Brown spikey fur, like a stray dog, but more harsh, scratchy. Not cuddly like you’d think. Pet the bear, you know you want to.

No grizzlies here. Just black bears, even if they’re brown.

I give “the talk” on Thursdays at five in the campground, when the long weekenders come in with their coolers and cheerio crumb car seats and Yogi the bear pic-i-nic baskets. The talk is titled, “Seeing the World through a Bear’s Nose.” In their minds, most of the people who come to my talk, bears are the biggest, baddest, scariest thing we have here. We, the rangers, laugh about it but their fears are real enough. The gruesome maulings at Yellowstone and Glacier and other Grizzly parks have made their way into the news – six people dragged out of their tents in the middle of the night over the course of two bloody weeks. Most of them were partially eaten. But not eaten completely – they weren’t truly prey. It was as if the bears lost interest halfway through, decided that their predatory action had, after all, been misguided. Or maybe human flesh didn’t taste particularly good. Either way, we’re scared of bears like that too. We’re glad we don’t have grizzlies. People get nervous, terrified even, knowing that there are bears in the area. No one has ever been killed in our park. Not ever. But still, there’s always a first, in theory. The people who come to the bear talk – a lot of them think they’re the first.

But worse, in a way, is the extremist enthusiasm of those, the college guys, or the middle-aged men who are pretending to be college guys, who want to seek the bears out, and bait them while backpacking and try to sneak up on them. Then there are those who want to leave ribs smoking over a fire and ketchup bottles on the table along with the remains of the last night’s s’mores while they go off in search of a bear, heading, no matter which way they go, in the completely wrong direction.

We worry the most about them.
Thus the five o’clock bear talk.
And Yorick.
Also a box of bear scat. Droppings. Dried out and perfectly safe, scentless. It’s an interesting tool, mainly because people simply can’t get past the fact that it’s
poop. And it is, yes. But like owl pellets, it allows us to track diets and illness and migrating patterns.

Teenage boys won’t touch it.

We’re young, us new rangers – 17, 18, 19… People don’t know that – the hat and the badge and a good pair of aviators work wonders, adding five, even ten years. Suddenly, we’ve been thrust into the role of super adults.

Tor is only 18, but he knows these mountains. Grew up here. Learned to ski, snowshoe, hike, climb. He wears the badge now, has since 16, when they pushed it on him after six years of volunteering. He’s just as awkwardly tall as he was then, surprisingly strong underneath the too-big uniform pants he holds up with a thick belt, black leather visibly cracked. It was his dad’s, when he worked for the Park Service. I guess that’s why he doesn’t get a new one.

I’m 20 and from “back East”, the South if it mattered. I don’t let it matter, because “out East” is vague, meaning Boston or New York or Acadia. “The South” means Texas, or worse, Alabama, and “Why don’t you have an accent?” I don’t have an accent because then people ask me where I’m from. I don’t say where I’m from because then people ask why I don’t have an accent. I’d never heard of crampons, much less actually strapped them onto my boots to trek straight up icy slopes. I’d never seen snow above my knees. Enough said. I made it out here on a college-kid whim, an internship gone delightfully awry. When I merged onto I-40 the first time I didn’t know California had mountains. I saw the foothills – golden in the searing San Joaquin Valley June temperatures. “Why do you think they’re beautiful?” the locals ask me. “They’re dead.” I thought the foothills were the mountains, and then there was an afternoon thunderstorm, an event that in most of California continues to be discussed for weeks after it occurs and shuts down the state in the same way a North Carolina snowstorm does. The perpetual smog from China and Los Angeles cleared and I saw them – the hazy purple and gray peaks stalwartly impeding the expanse of groves of square-topped orange trees. Alta with its elephant of snow, visible nearly to the end of summer. Sierra Nevada – mountains of falling snow. And the coastal range: California does have mountains. The Eastern Sierra Nevada, forty miles of wilderness east of our station has the not-so-minor distinction of containing the highest peak in the 48 contiguous states, Mt. Whitney.

I applied for a permit four months early and trained for a year to climb it. I got to 12,000 feet before its perpetual snow slopes turned me back.

Not even close.

It’s so hard not to personify them, although we’re adamant we won’t after being instructed every day of our training not to do so. But. Mammalian instincts kick in and anything smaller than us which we perceive as having big eyes is automatically “cute.” Evolutionary instinct. Protect. Survival of the species. And so many of the animals are. But the stakes of personifying bears as opposed
to chipmunks, Yogi as opposed to Alvin, are much higher... Where a chipmunk may steal a bag of Fritos, yes, a black bear, even a small one, will smash through a car window, peel open a closed trunk like a tin can, overturn a tent all to get at a mushed granola bar or an unopened can of baked beans. Then it learns that humans have food. It will begin to charge, to get people to drop the trail mix and walk away. They're just bluff charges – usually. We protect the land, the animals, yes – but the guests, the Homo sapiens themselves, will always come first.

The man comes to our cabins, nestled away, hidden down-mountain. Screaming for help. To come here, he must know this valley. Yelling. Words. Banging on doors but it's Wednesday, so most of us aren't here. Tor is in the middle of making a peanut butter and banana sandwich, a quick snack before he heads to the coast for the weekend. Len, who first responded to the cries but is too frail for a mission like this, has a radio harness and emergency first aid pack when he knocks on Tor's door. Tor scarfs his sandwich in the truck on the way to the trailhead.

Through the snow
Downstream
Water bottle
Dug out
Blue

Our cabins have no electricity, so no televisions intrude, no music. The generator sometimes runs the washing machine and the hummus-making food processor. It roars with its own kind of silence.

The people too are the kind who don't need a lot of noise. Words, hurried words, frantic words – they're not a part of the sugar pine grove into which we're nestled.

Falling football-sized cones, no, larger, break windshields sometimes.

Hypothermia. The first signs: shivering, clumsiness, mumbling and stumbling. Then confusion, drowsiness, and a slow loss of consciousness, breathing, and pulse itself. It's terrifying because you don't know for sure when you have it, assume you have it when you don't.

It's so hot. I rip off my sleeping bag, my hat, my socks.
No it's not. He shoves my socks back on, forces me back into the bag. Zipper.
Stay in there.
It's two a.m. in April at 12,000 feet. I stay.

We live in a park known for its trees – the biggest, by volume, in the world.
Not the tallest, not the oldest, not the widest, but simply the biggest. Each tree adds the equivalent of 170 basketballs to its surface area each year. It takes the entire class of third graders bussed in from LA to encircle the tree, to hug it as one. Then they trek back to their busses and packed cardboard box picnic lunches which can overwhelm even the small army of trashcans around the Giant Forest.

Our area doesn’t deal with the school busses, the RVs, the drive-by Grand Canyon-Death Valley-Sequoia-Redwoods-Airport types. Our valley is one way in, one way out, no RVs allowed. People don’t come to us for the giant Sequoias, though we have them, tucked away on Paradise Ridge. On Paradise Ridge they’ve been reborn; a fire coursed through seven years ago, and between the blackened logs and the fire scarred old giants, chest high Sequoia saplings six years old have sprouted.

The big tree pilgrimage is through the main part of the parks, and dumps out conveniently within an hour of the Fresno Airport. The path to the General Sherman tree is paved; there are split rail fences, grow-your-own-Sequoia in the gift shop. People come to us for the backcountry – now referred to solely as “wilderness” as per a superintendent memorandum two summers ago. Backpackers leave from our trailheads and disappear into the wilderness for two weeks at a time. It’s a communion with nature for them, sometimes, or maybe just a shoestring weekend getaway. We’ve seen honeymoons and bachelorette parties. Ashes have been scattered off our cliffs, at special campsites near lakes – you need a permit to do it, but we never check.

The contract with myself for soloing – no taking clothes off after sunset. No matter what. I write it on my hand in sharpie because I know that this time there’s no one to zip me back into the sleeping bag. Plus, it’s more embarrassing to die of dumb mistakes when you’re in uniform.

There have been no bear deaths in this park since its founding in 1890. Over that same time period we’ve had only two injuries due to bears. In a Potwisha campground a bear ambled into camp, slamming itself up against the bear boxes in the hope that one was not securely latched. A bag of Fritos abandoned on a picnic table was easy pickings, and the bear took it. The man, the first injury, attempted to snatch them back. He was swatted for his efforts – a bear swat, which carries with it claws and 200 pounds of power.

The second injury occurred when a day hiker fell asleep with a Snickers in his pocket. Not a problem in itself, but it melted, as Snickers do. The hiker awoke to a curious bear attempting to extract it. He was understandably alarmed; there was an... altercation. The bear won, earning the Snickers back – as well as a nice chunk of thigh.

On my third hike of the season I followed the tracks of a black bear
through the snow up Timber Gap. To follow tracks in one direction is relatively easy; to trace them back is incredibly difficult, especially once it begins to snow again. It snows in our valley until June sometimes. I never crested the ridge; the road runs through the low point of the valley — down is safety. Crunching through the thin layer of ice glazing the powder, whuffing through the powder itself, still never touching the actual ground, hidden beneath the snow. The powder brushes off like sand, not like messy wet slushy east coast snow that permeates clothes and seemingly skin in an instant. When it gets inside your boots, though, sifting between the tongue and laces, your feet get heavy, needling, absent.

Blue lips. The flowers have yet to poke up through the snow. Blue lips. Too early.
Hers are literal. Teeth too tired to chatter. Muted eyes.

Stoned. Brown with black muzzle. Female. She's stoned.
Personification. It's stoned.
140?
We're talking pounds, bear pounds, still the same 16-ounce human pounds or bean pounds but now we're talking bears. She's right in front of us and her skull is still perfectly intact and covered in rough hair, more like a cow than the stuffed animal.

Hardly. Take off the fur — lighter than you'd think. Not that big. 125 max.
We've brought Danny in — Danny the frazzle-haired bear tech — to radio collar her, mechanically but gently, still with the excitement of a 10-year-old but with the practiced and gentle hands of a lifelong nursemaid, tattoo an Auschwitz-number into her lower lip, tag her ear with orange plastic, and eat razzle dazzle pie at the Silver City store. Standard spa treatment for an interloping bear. The rules are strict — bears can't be humans, can't visit campgrounds or eat razzle dazzle pie even if they can wear hats and suspenders and carry fire line shovels. The Smokey the Bear poster hanging in our station reminds us what we don't want to be — personifiers of cuddly, hat-adorned animals. A black bear has the mental abilities of a human three-year-old — very smart on the animal spectrum, yes, but not quite at the level of developing a fire-prevention stance. Unlike the Forest Service, to whom Smokey belongs, we're not in search of a Mickey Mouse mascot.

The bear was captured with a milk gallon of dog food suspended in the back of the bear trap, a glorified old-Chevy mint green tin can. Pull the milk jug, the latch catches, the door slams and locks. Then it's wait all night on the sparse bed of pine straw until the trucks drive up and boots get out and a curiously comes through the moon holes and horsefly bites and denning sleep.

An LED flashlight through the air holes elicits no growl. Eyes can't track it. Not yet. When they can track it, when it growls, bares her teeth, pulling her lips
back to make the tops of the numbers just visible in a menacing, spider-veined smile, we’ll draw our weapons, fling open the door and, firing caps and birdshot and paintballs, blowing whistles and yelling, we’ll drive it into the woods. Often the terror of being captured alone will prevent any repeat in behavior.

But we can’t release yet. It’s not safe for either of us. Wait for the tranquilizers to wear off.

Drowning wasn’t as easy as I thought it would be. When the floor disappears and there’s water, rushing water and its shock of – just pure sensation – and breath is an afterthought.

Not that I didn’t know it was a risk but prepare or not it’s never expected, solid ground melting out from underneath in a sudden rapture of substance...

she says.

Cold. Ice-heat. Where there was no floor there is now ceiling. Purchase is impossible.

An alpine spring is 70 degrees and snow bridges. Shorts and crampons. Snow and ice linger well into July, August, looping the calendar some years, the heavy ones.

It looks like a mountain lion has dragged a dead mule deer across the snow, leaving a bloody smear. Crimson splashes stain snow that is beginning to be oddly pocked, like an egg carton. The shape is suncupping – as the snow melts, it melts from the top down but in uniform patches, leaving strong elevated ridges and weakened low points. At the same time, the ground warms the bottom of the snow, melting it from the ground up. The result are suspended layers of snow, sometimes a foot deep, sometimes ten, sometimes merely a few inches, over open air. The stain is “watermelon snow,” an algae that feeds off high Sierra snowfall and sunshine.

The edges of her fingers are blackened. A trail runner. No gloves, no jacket – shorts and a t shirt and a water bottle that had been birthed from the entombing snow.

The story arrives in triaged pieces.

Three guys out for the afternoon, Sierra Nevada beers chilling ironically in the snow. Light jackets, back to the cabin well before dinner.

Walked away from the trees, from the others to piss.

The apparition of a camelback. “Hey guys, was there a –“

A foot away is the wound in the watermelon snow.

Something moves.

Kneels.

Three feet down, the face of a snow queen, blue in the fragmented crystal-refracted sunlight.
No voice left, mute tongue flashes through cracked cerulean lips.  
“Help me.”

The fawn trembles in the middle of the road. Instinct has felled it here: immobile, scentless spots ostensibly blending into the habitat, essentially invisible to predators.

But the steel predators with round rubber paws – noisy glowing eyes don’t see, and scentless spots don’t help.

Picking up a fawn deposits human scent on it, yes. Don’t worry, the doe won’t abandon it. It’s most likely watching, waiting for you to put down its young (don’t say baby or child – breeds personification and Smokey-the-Bear empathy) and walk away. It will come back.

I wonder sometimes whose valley it is. We all wonder that: the owners of the sixty log cabins nestled in the trees have a longstanding feud with the park service, who came in in the 1970s to block a Walt Disney ski resort. The avalanche chutes have a feud with us all. They kill skiers, take out trees, whole cabins. I saw my first avalanche from across Eagle Lake. We’d planned on backpacking, but decided we wanted to be back in time for Silver City movie night. The avalanche buried the best Eagle Lake campsites.

It’s hard to say where the animals fit in, if they really do at all. People come to see them – they like the idea of them – but only under proscribed conditions. People don’t want to be surprised – neither do the animals. People want their space – their campground, their trails, their stores, their roads, and the animals – well, they’re supposed to stay outside all that. In exchange for our protection of their habitat, that same habitat is encroached upon, trail by trail, visitor by visitor. We adapt our park to the changes of our world – WiFi at Silver City, solar panels on the ranger station – and expect the animals to remain the same, year after year. We confine the land to save it from ourselves – every policy choice is a careful balancing act.

I lit the park on fire for the first time as part of a continuing education eco-literacy class. We used drip torches, the Wizard of Oz Tin Man’s oil can but with a flaming tip. We poured fire onto the ground like watering daisies.

As we walked away, back to the already dug-out fire line, the sequoia cones began to pop in the flames.

It was a beautiful day, columbine flames licking the bluebell sky.

The mission of the park service is to protect, preserve for the enjoyment of future generations, but the mission is inherently self-contradictory. Natural processes are in constant motion, constantly changing – so to preserve is to take away the natural. And each human who enters our park to enjoy it introduces
an element of the unnatural – a camp stove, tent stakes in the ground, a trail switchbacking across a slope, fishing hooks in the stream – even the traces of boot prints in half-melted snow.

When the ground disappeared over Franklin creek and became frozen ceiling, ice-fire makes breathing impossible and thus drowning harder. Too much current to sink – seven months’ snow melt galloping through an undersnow artery to the San Joaquin drainage 8,826 feet below.

Swim it is, ghost-light-search for a bank. Protect the head, protect the neck.
Blue is light and light is air and air is not-water.
Clawing fingers blacken-freeze, upward, upward, scraping, warm with purple -- crimson running warmth drips down, rejoins the river-vein. Returning.

The bear, orange tagged and tattooed and radio collared came back a month later, ripped off the side of the Silver City Store and sent its two cubs in to forage. The cubs smashed the pie cabinet, eating the razzle dazzle, leaving the secretly store-bought fruit of the forest alone. They ignored the off-brand chocolate chips, picking just the bags of Nestle to drag back through the hole in the siding. On the other side of the building, ten of us were projecting Brave Heart on a sheet tacked over the window. We heard nothing, and for awhile, assumed that the notorious late-night-snacker Josh was to blame. Then we saw the pie-filling smeared siding.

The Armenians are our favorite campers. We rove at dinner time, at seven, and make it a point to hit Site 4 last. Campfire tongues lick browning spit-meat.
Goat, they say.

Homemade white sauces with crunchy pan-baked flat read, popping warm bread-air bubbles.

Strips of striated thigh meat, catch juices in the bread. Once a summer they come up, this particular family. They camp for the week. For most people our campground is a jumping off point to the backcountry wilderness over the passes. Not the Armenians. They come for the camping itself, the rustic excitement of tents and cooking over the fire. There are four generations in that site.

Site 3 comes back up from the creek. They flag the badges over.
“We saw them chasing deer. They chased the mother away.”
(personification) “They took her fawn with them.”

The savory juices run from the bread onto our hands. We try to wipe it off, but the green woolen uniform pants are oddly resistant.
It isn’t goat.

Guns were illegal in the parks until 2010. Then the Supreme Court issued a verdict that concealed carry was permitted in all federal lands. This includes
national parks. The central office mass produced brown metal signs to tack up over the existing ones. It is now illegal to discharge a firearm within a national park. This isn’t exactly true: you have to be a certain kind of person to discharge a firearm.

Cindy had an outline of a human torso nailed to the wall in the cabin we shared. I rarely thought about what she did for a living – we talked mainly of hikes we wanted to try together, backpacking trips we were planning for the end of the summer, what it meant to leave home, what it meant to be in love, what we could cook each other for dinner on the nights when we worked late. I only noticed the job when she was getting dressed. Every morning when she clipped on her duty belt, she’d check the taser, pepper spray, and handcuffs. Then she’d walk an ambling lap around the kitchen – once, twice – then whip around and draw, one eye staring down the barrel to the bulls eye, right over the paper heart.

Parker was the horse, Shadow the mule – size of a horse, rabbit-long ears, three feet on the ground at a time always. That’s why they use mules in the Grand Canyon. More stable.

It was Parker that did it, that bolted on patrol, that actively forgot his training in a moment of – panic? Was it really that?

The bulletproof vest saved her life, or at least her ribs. A desperate horse on a trail at a gallop – bailing is best, perhaps, but sixteen hands is a long way down for a 5’2” 98-pounder, even with her vest on. The Franklin trail is bone-splitting hard.

I pull the straps that lashed Cindy to the backboard, spider straps. She screams. She screams and swears and says that that is enough and in between screaming and crying she locks her eyes on mine. “Fuck you,” she says and I am her paper target in the living room. But I have to pull harder, have to immobilize so that the helicopter can come. That’s what I tell her. She’s crying once they drug her. Tears run into her ears. I wipe them out for her as best as I can. Once lifeflight comes in and they airlift her to Fresno, I throw up in the sink. That’s when we get the missing persons report.

Helicopters make me nervous now.

She’s freezing to death. Safe from drowning, but who cares? Soaked and buried under snow bears the same result as never leaving the river at all, and with a much slower progression.

Upward, upward.

Punch through. Light. Oxygen. Face pressed against the portal. Ring around the rosie burn.
Rise to widen, then emerge...
Knees. Fingers. Not happening. Three feet away, but three feet up.
Water. The one thing not in short supply. The bottle. It can go.
Upward – upward – out.
Watch the pinkening blue.

The smoke of 40,000 acres funnels into our valley over the passes, clogging the air. It is a claustrophobia-inducing haze, blocking out the skyline of the mountains. Trapping us. The poor air quality – slide the indicator above the counter to red – makes leaving the valley by foot impossible without scorched lungs and wheezing.

The road from grocery stores, gas stations, and fishing license issuing is twenty miles, takes an hour and a half. It’s only paved where you wish it wasn’t. Helicopter is the only answer if you actually want help in time to save a life. You need a ranger for that. A radio. Station closes at 4:30. It’s 5:15. The payphone at the Franklin trailhead is broken; it always is.

The same bear trap was set up in the exact same place, rigged once again with dog food. The same result: caught after a few days – the sow and one of the cubs. Call Danny the bear tech, drugged, measured, and documented. Pie break: razzle dazzle. But this time there’s no loud punishing release, no pellet guns fired, no chase into the woods. When there is a response to the flashlight, more drugs are given. They hitch the trap, bears and all, to a dirty white government truck, then haul it down the 625 curves of the Mineral King Road to headquarters. Then law enforcement puts a bullet through each of their heads. The mother, because she didn’t learn from her mistakes. The cub, because he doesn’t know any way of life but the one he has been taught.

The other cub, on his own for the winter, has just as much of a death sentence.

She was under the snow for three hours and 26 minutes. Her watch kept ticking, the backlight luminescent in the hazy bluish darkness. Fumble with the buttons with oversized numbed thumbs. It’s still timing the run. Once the bottle’s out, tossed out onto the surface snow, somewhere, that’s it. Hope that someone sees the red in the snow, pinning everything on the off chance that someone will come across the six-inch portal to the under-snow river. What would anyone do down there? she says. You pray.

Alpenglow is the red on the mountains, the moment just at sunset when... something happens.
Dusk-dark mountains glow like blood, and plunge, just as quickly, to
blackness.

The long-time policy of the National Park Service has been one of fire suppression. Put out fires, save trees. Save animals. Save people. We still save people – we preserve human structures at all costs. But we let fires burn. Only You Can Prevent Forest Fires? Well, only we can set them.

We, the park, had been putting out fires for decades, when the park botanists noticed something very strange, something very troubling – there were no sequoia saplings. Almost none at all. The only thing that had changed from the natural forest environment under Park and Forest Service management, the only thing that could possibly have negative impacts, anyway, was the fire suppression. Scientists, botanists, took to their labs. They took sequoia cones, lit them on fire.

Sequoia cones don’t burn. Neither does the rest of the tree. Not easily, anyway. Their bark, like Styrofoam, is fire resistant, and blackens and scars long before it ever burns.

They exposed the cones to fire, held them in the flames.
Nothing happened.
Then they exposed them to smoke.
The smoke of burning underbrush sets off a chemical reaction in the semi-serotinous cones, which linger on the tree for decades at a time, waiting for fire below. The smoke opens up the cones, releasing the seeds to scatter on the ground now cleared of underbrush. Sequoias may be the biggest trees in the world, but their saplings are weak, and can’t hope to compete with young fir trees. They’re fast, though, and given an even start, they can outstrip any arboreal competition.

So, we burned the Redwood Mountain Grove. That was in 1964.
It worked.
Despite public outcry and protests and internal worries, the forest was reborn.

To burn a sequoia grove is a strangely beautiful thing. Flames kill. Animals flee with personified terror on their personified faces. Whole trees crash down, embers exploding like sparks off an anvil. The flames, for the most part, burn themselves out. The gray remains are a defeated war zone, a sparking and dulled winter wonderland. And then, softly on your shoulders and the burned and blackened ground, a rain of oatmeal flakes falls, a gentle snow of sequoia seeds.

EMS arrives in the afterglow, checking pulse and response. Better now, much better, after the backpacker passing by donated his subzero thermal down sleeping bag. One of the men curls inside it with her. Necessity. A bag can’t reflect heat that isn’t there.

The first time I’m out solo it’s a perfect sunset 200 feet above the half-frozen lake and two thousand feet above my valley. Clear the snow from the
campsite, pitch the tent facing west. Watch the sun set. Pinks, golds, fir trees in silhouette – look at the needles, flat for white fir, round for red. Attached to the branch like a hockey stick.


I’m secretly cheering for him, the defeater of Eastern Orion – I dread his reemergence, dread Sirius and the Atlantic and electricity and turning in the badges. But I get to keep the hat.

Back to this sky. Dolphinius. Blurry, dizzy, foggy glow –
“...I can’t believe I’ve never seen the Milky Way, and the sky’s this clear.”
“...Look up. Those aren’t clouds.”
The not-clouds signal just how late it is, just how cold it’s getting. It’s California in July and it’s 28 degrees – and I’m still wet because the river was just as deadly today as it was two months ago.

She walks back across the snow bridge. Further down, far away from the break. Tor tests it – snow-solid, not-trusted ground.
She refuses treatment, self-medicates with our wood stove, rejects the ambulance, drives herself home. Her fingers are still charred.

Two weeks later she runs the Franklin trail again. Ultramarathoner, she calls herself. She comes by to thank us.

We hang the newspaper clipping on a thumbtack in the station, warn people with her story, still send them up the trail.

Months later I plunge through a sun cup myself – a foot of snow suspended above ten feet of open air. No water below, so I’m lucky. Just bruises and scrapes and a water bottle sacrificed to the not-ground.