

I heard one branch crash before I went to bed, it fell a foot from my car. As there were plenty more branches hanging with ice precariously above the lot, I moved my car to the road, out of so much harm's way. As I walked back to my door, the wind blew and icebergs in the trees above me shrieked their torsion. The branches that usually bring me such peace and respite from the city landscape were threatening and creepy. I went to bed and dreamed of trees dropping out of sight, one by one, as the real trees outside provided my subconscious's soundtrack, cracking and breaking with the weight of the ice.

I woke up and saw a war-torn scene out my windows. Pith and splinters in the road passed for blood and guts, gaping yellow wounds dotted the dark wet bark of the trees where branches and limbs had been peeled off in the night. Our parking lot was strewn with wood and ice, and still there were branches crashing every so often, menacingly warning of the harsh weather beyond my door. I went for a walk to explore this new world, and was instantly humbled into taking baby steps on the ice-pebbled sidewalks to avoid slipping. Sirens honked and whistled as emergencies took their toll and called for help around town. Falling sleet made a slushy sound, softer than the ice it formed, belying the destruction it caused.

On one home, there were Christmas lights still adorning the eaves. They were the white ones that drip from the main line in angled threes and fours, imitating the icicles that we rarely have in Kentucky but love to see during the Yule season. They were sad, sad—drooping mightily and yanked from their staples by the real icicles that mocked them mercilessly. The heavy frozen water mocked everything, though. The tall, stout

oaks were snapped like pick-up-sticks. Only blades of grass and the smallest saplings escaped the breakage rampage. They were encased in glass, like museum objects, a perfect half-inch of ice displaying their fine tenderness. One such sapling caught my attention, and pleased that it was not harmed, I started to pinch the ice chunks off its little limbs to lessen its weight, as if to stop its growth from being stunted. A few rounds slid off readily when I bent the limb to break the ice, but then with one snap, a twig broke off in my hand with the ice, and I felt very bad for having interfered. This was the ice's war, and I was just a spectator. I continued down the street.

In front of one house, a tree had uprooted, torn down two electric poles, swiped the side off a roof and demolished an SUV parked below. The auto had its emergency lights flashing for no other reason than to hail passersby to the party going on in the lawn. A supermarket cart had been turned into a bonfire receptacle, and a keg of beer had been brought in for the occasion. Several college-aged kids and a TV crew congregated in the yard around the blaze. "Man, sucks about his car, but this is great!" I overheard. Though I smirked, acknowledging the irony of the situation, it struck me that this would probably be the same kind of guy to say, "Man, sucks about the dead people, but shooting guns is great!" With all the arboreal carnage surrounding me, and impending "possible war with Iraq" blaring from the media for weeks, I couldn't help but think such thoughts.

I watched a branch fall, crashing and tearing with it more branches, sending a shower of frozen water glass before it. It occurred to me that this was simple. There was no fanfare, there were no instant replays, no slow-motion repeats. There was no one

heralding the fall, pointing it out and preaching its horror. This was not television, so hyped up and sensational, it was just outside, the day.

I started walking towards the arboretum where friends had spent the wee hours of the morning jumping into the stand of wild, tall grasses.

“It was amazing,” they had told me, “the ice broke slowly beneath us as we landed, and it made a perfect cushion.”

On the metal electric pole by the hotel I watched bug sized drops of water wriggle underneath the sheet of ice stuck to the pole. They were pulled by gravity to join the creeks in the street, but fell jerkily as they navigated between the frozen pole and ice. It reminded me of blood vessels, and if the water was the blood of the ice, then the streets were full of blood, too, and not just pithy innards of the trees. The war was between trees and ice, and there were casualties on both sides.

As I walked on Alumni towards the arboretum, I had to walk in the grass since there was no sidewalk. The grass attacked my boots with every step. Each blade was covered with a thick layer of ice, but none were crushed because they were ironically supported by the ice itself. It was like a foreign legion that had gone into a weak country and had given the weak grasses their arms and taught them how to fight. The clear-covered green soldiers stood alert and attentive, waiting for my kick-step when the ice would launch here and there like shrapnel and the grass with bases blown apart, would hug my ankles and toes, top heavy and already disenchanted with war. More water blood splattered my pants.

Weeping willows thought they were on the ice's side, already bowing and sweeping the ground with their branches. They were hopeful when the ice started to pull down other trees. They let the ice coat them, positive that by cooperating they would be spared. But like the Arabs that cooperated with California officials and showed up to register as Arab immigrants in America and were detained for days without reason, the willows lost hope when they witnessed several of their fellow species split in two by the storm.

A small grove of sumac were slathered with an especially thick coating of ice: it was at least a full inch thick all the way around each trunk, limb, twig, nodule. Sumac sticks that would normally be slimmer than my pinky finger were now heavy and fat enough to lay in my open palm, distressed and phallus-like, though not erect. The ice around the main trunks had twisted and turned, crackled and creased as the outer limbs had gained their extra weight throughout the night, causing an illusion of bandage swathed sumacs. Why would the ice cause so much damage, pillage so many other species and then coat this one specie with beautiful bridal-veil bandages?

I reached the stand of wild, tall grasses, and instinctively kicked the base of a still-standing frozen clump, to rid it of so much weight. But the weight of the ice was surrounding the grass, not just the base of the clump, and so, with my kick, the grasses bent in half, bowed over with top-heaviness. I jumped into the stand to experience the "perfect cushion" that my friends had spoken of, but I only crashed through breaking ice and got wet. I tried it a couple more times, but their experience was undoubtedly much different than mine. It made me sad that when I crashed into one clump of tall grass, the

lower ice would fall off the next clump, causing it to collapse, which would cause the next clump to collapse, and so on like dominoes. These grasses had stood tall through winter and even the ice storm, and then here I came, barreling into them, and breaking them. For what? I left the stand of grass, cold and ready to go home, tired of seeing so much destruction. I slipped on the black-ice on the pavement, fell and sliced my palm open. Red blood dribbled down my wrist, and stained the pavement, joining the splinters and melting ice there. With a sigh of resignation, I allowed that I too was part of this war, but then walked briskly home, ignoring the beatings of the grass soldiers at my boots, and huffing with disgust when strings of icicles nearly skewered me as they fell from electric lines overhead.