

Snowdrop on the Mountainside (Runner-Up, WriteInvite, March 2014)

The climb up the mountain was a stiff one, even in the sunshine. As the clouds closed in and the light turned that peculiar yellow that heralds snow, Igor wondered if he should turn back - but with the first flakes beginning to fall, he knew he stood little chance of returning to the car park in time. Safety and shelter were his immediate requirements - and the mouth of the cave was an answer to his prayer. He stumbled inside, threw his pack on the ground and bent, hands on knees, to recover his breath.

He didn't notice the figure at first. The wall of ice was at the end of the passageway and as his eyes became accustomed to the dim light, he realised he was not alone.

Encased in ice stood a young woman. Her red velvet dress was trimmed with ermine. There was a matching pill box on her glossy black hair. Moving closer, he could see her hands were beautifully manicured. Each blood red nail was decorated with a tiny holly transfer. Her slim legs and child-sized feet were swathed in thigh-length patent leather boots. Her skin was translucent, the colour of the surrounding snow, but with pale bluish lines marking the veins where blood no longer flowed. There was a large purple bruise across one side of her face and a single trickle of dried blood ran from her hairline to her cheekbone.

Igor gazed at the woman, transfixed. Then, stretching out his hand, he ran it across the ice as though stroking her face. His fingers moved downwards, across her breasts and came to rest at her gently swelling belly. He wondered how anyone could harm such a beauty. He'd heard tales of such crimes, dead bodies hidden throughout the winter, only coming to light in the spring. Snowdrops they were called by the locals.

He stood unmoving for a long while. Finally he sighed and turned to look outside. The snow had stopped. Beginning the descent, he pulled his mobile out of his pocket, but was unsurprised to see there was no signal. At the bend in the path, he turned and looked back towards the cave before resuming his journey downwards. The sun had completely disappeared and the wind was getting stronger.

Alone in the cave on the mountainside, the girl's eyes opened and a tiny crack appeared in the ice.