

## The Thought of Some Place Warm and Two Steps More

I hope you dressed warmly – it's cold out there, honey. The kind of indifferent, absolute cold that freezes the snot inside your nose, hardens your tears, then closes your eyes.

Even the most persistently raucous and disloyal mutts have returned home, their tails withdrawn between their legs, looking for a fireplace, a radiator, a rug. They've given up the chase – no bitches, no cars. No howling at a moon that's lost itself in a cloudy sky, and may not be coming back.

Only the truly hardened and needy are out thieving tonight, sifting through unlocked cars under the cover of ice and darkness, taking advantage of a populace under blanket, keeping its distance from the chill-seeping windows. Are you so brave, honey? So unfeeling?

All but the most foul-weather smokers have resigned themselves to a continued existence in the non-smoking indoors – their porches, balconies, backyards and driveways have been claimed by the cold. They bump and stomp and curse and sneak quick cigarettes in the bathroom, trapped by the heartless cold into an imitation of willpower.

This old house may creak, stretch and pop, feeling the weather in its boards and beams like an amateur meteorologist, a prognosticating arthritic. The vigilant hair-dryer wielding landlord, stalking the house in a fit of faucet-testing might fail, and let the pipes freeze and snap. But the streets are so cold, there are no chances there, honey, with such a long, long walk home.

So few are the cabbies who'll open their doors to the frigid world and its frozen fares, who chatter through teeth like castanets – “t-t-take m-me t-t-to the airp-p-ort.” – and you haven't the money to find them.

The homeless are committing crimes in a petty wave – willing to place themselves in the hands of a system that positioned them so expertly on the periphery, underfoot and shivering. Only the painfully stubborn, the resolutely reckless, could refuse a warm keeper tonight.

There are people outside in the street screaming. They are laughing loudly, helpless with the thought of some place warm and two steps more. Then two steps more. You mustn't get mad at the cold, go mad with the cold, it'll do you no good.

It's a long walk home. Maybe you should have thought of that, honey.

—Matthew Dorrell

