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End of the Season

Rachel Burns

Persy walked into the grocery store like a gust of wind, but her bluster died as she crossed the threshold. The creaking automatic doors sealed behind her, embracing arms confining her in a languorous bosom of florescent light and assured plenty.

She moved through the store, passing by chipper advertisements and bright packaging at a leisurely pace. From row to row she lingered, up and down the aisles, her eyes roving but not seeming to see all of the boxed goods the world had to offer.

She was not enticed.

As far away her mind may have been, the minds of those who watched Persy pass were very much present. With rolling curves hinted at through her end-of-winter clothes and her dark hair unbound, men and women alike let their gazes follow her simple march, lapping at her motions with their eyes. One figure in particular seemed especially moved and followed behind at a distance.

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Either willfully or naturally ignorant of the attention placed on her, she came at last to the produce section and began to shop with a purpose. Running her tan hands over a display of apples, she inspected their red faces for imperfections.

“Why, hello there, darling.”

Persy did not respond.

The figure laid a pale hand on top of hers.

“Persy. Hello, honey.”

She tensed and cast her gaze up but still did not respond, her face immobile, her breath stolen.

“I knew that was you,” the figure said, his voice dripping with a smile. “How have you been, love?”

“Fine.”

“I’m glad to hear it! I thought you were still away at school. What year are you again?”

“I was a sophomore.”

Persy shifted so that his cold skin no longer touched hers.

He smiled even wider. “You look well, practically blooming with health! Your hair has grown so long, I don’t remember it touching your waist. I will admit, though, you do seem tired.”

He inclined his face closer to hers.

She stepped back.

He inclined forward again.

She stepped farther away until the back of her legs grazed a pile of pomegranates on display.

“I don’t sleep much anymore. I have responsibilities now,” she said to the floor.

“Well, you were always a light sleeper. I have not forgotten that. I have not forgotten anything.”

“I’ve tried to forget.”

He shook his head, a wistful sigh escaping from his twisted smile. “One should not try to forget love.”

“Then it must not have been love.”

“Or you could be lying to yourself.”

“Like you lied to my mother?” Her voice shook at the end.

“Ah, yes. Demi. Tell her I said hello.”

“She’ll just tell you to go back to hell.”

His mouth, a sensitive hollow in the center of a salt-and-pepper goatee, opened in an inappropriately raucous laugh.

“Look at these pomegranates,” he said. “I remember how much you loved them.”

“Once. That was a long time ago. Tastes change.”

Moving to stand next to Persy, he put his hand half on her hair, half on her lower back, turning her to face the pile of fruit with gentle pressure; she did not recoil.

“Do you remember?” he asked.

“What?” she whispered.

“That night...” he said.

“What night?”

“The night.”

“Oh--that.”

They were both silent for a moment, until he leaned forward and chose one from among the rest, the largest, heaviest, most ready to be eaten. He rolled the fruit in his free hand, the other hand still on her, light as a first kiss.

“You’ve been away for a long time, Persy,” he commented.

“Six months,” she answered.

“Such a long time...”

“They wouldn’t let me come back. I wouldn’t let me come back.”

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“Why?” His hand was no longer a peck, it was a demonstration on her body, a bite. She leaned into his grasp slightly, still not meeting his gaze. Persy found her words. “Your eyes, they’re so dark. So... full. They remind me of the before and the during and the after all at once.”

“Mine are nothing compared to yours, even when you have them closed. You have the eyes of a child.”

She stared at the mound of pomegranates. “There’s so many. If I pick one they’ll fall all over the place,” she remarked.

“That’s a chance they make you take. It’s the end of the season,” he said. “The store has to get rid of them while it can. But,” he continued.

“Yes?”

“I’d let you have this one.”

He offered her the fruit, rich and ripe against his pale

hand, the lively burgundy color almost throbbing in his grasp.

Persy turned her gaze from the fruit to his mouth then slightly northwards to his eyes. They burned with memories and like a snake they held her captive, tighter than the hand still on her body.

And then she began to burn, a flame in her chest growing, shooting across her veins, scorching to her extremities. With one violent motion, Persy slapped the pomegranate out of his offering hand. It sailed through the air and its ripeness burst out upon the dirty aisle floor, tangling with the waste and dust. Blood-red seeds spilled out, the spoiled essence of a ruined promise.

She let out a breath she felt she had been holding onto for an eternity.