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Snow Blind

HE STANDS WAITING, but not for her. The woman shields her gaze behind a windshield visor swung down against the glare of sunlight on snow. She shivers and cranks up the heat.

She should have remembered her sunglasses. She should stop staring. She squints as if powerless to shut her eyelids altogether.

The boy is twelve, maybe thirteen. Yet there are clear signs of the man he will become—masculinity is already set in his bones. He shifts his backpack from one shoulder to the other, then waves to a schoolfriend also heading home. Teeth flash brilliant in a complexion like coffee with milk; dimples punctuate the smile. His eyes are dark and perhaps seamed with golden lights, as his hair is. He's beautiful, near-exotic.

She could be his mother. She shudders. For him, life is still to come. At least she will not be the one forced someday to surrender his heart to another.

She tries to add twenty years to the face. Sees the body tall and fully settled on a man's frame, and doing so relieves the discomfort. Otherwise, all this might be improper, although women admire boys in this way—in the schoolyard or at kitchen tables, she's heard their hushed assessments weighing the sons of other women by adult measures. Then the throaty chuckles, and words like 'heartbreaker,' 'gorgeous' and 'wish' drop among them like heavy hearts.

What kind of man will he have become in twenty years? A successful one; he seems strong, with looks that can only bring

luck. He'll laugh easily—good humour tweaks his lips as a bright white car pulls up to the curb and he moves forward.

He will be desirable in all senses of the word.

She closes her eyes and imagines herself not ageing further. She will remain as she is, old enough for appreciation and discretion, young enough to attract attention. They will meet, over glasses of ... steaming Moroccan tea. They will rest amid the clamour of a busy market. They'll sit at a rough wood table scarred with lovers' messages, a table so small their elbows will touch. She will inhale mint, the scent of desert and heated skin, damp hair and desire. A gap-toothed charmer will tease them with the snake wrapped round his shoulders, then move on. She will smile at her companion.

He will blanket her fingers with his, then lean close to whisper. She will know the man the boy has become.

Black-and-white images of her husband as a boy crowd in and take over, like pages of trip pictures flipped under the nose. She remembers a different journey, another son already discovered and claimed.

Her eyes fly open to find the white car pulling away. She blinks. Two young girls walk toward where she parked—her daughters are beautiful too.

They look up and grin as she waves, then leans across to open the car door. They run as if fuelled with promise. Warmed, she sits back, waiting.