

Rusty Barnes

The Prince of Everything

Clarissa held on to Donnie's elbow with one hand, her drink in the other, as they swayed in the near-dark to a song on the radio. His hand traveled down her back to her bottom and she tightened inadvertently against his hand but worked herself in closer to him. He smelled of curtness and pine scent deodorizer and the microwave popcorn he'd eaten for dinner at Jimmy's Junk, where he worked as a mechanic. They'd decorated the apartment over her mother's garage with all the wreaths and red velvet bows and silvered tinsel they could find, enough to cover over the shoddy metal dining room table, the broke-leg chairs and the cat-piss smell of the carpet. They had a stereo and a real tree with her mother's ornaments on it, the lucky rabbit's foot ornament her grandfather had given Donnie, and the hiss of the radiator at night when the stereo sat silent in the corner. Donnie had a job at least until the new year, and then the county trucks would all need winter repairs, and she had the slow cold jogs she took in the early part of the day, after the morning sickness wore off, where she ran up the switchback dirt road and back down before 9:00, stoked the wood fire, and soaked in a bath for an hour before she joined her mother in the house to help with the daycare kids, wondering what hers would be like. She felt Donnie's head on her shoulder, and knew he was tired. "You know," he said, and then stopped.

"What?" she said, holding the curls at the back of his neck.

"It's all me," he said. "This life—it's not what I expected. I feel like the king of all the world."

"This baby, it thinks you're king," she said. Clarissa put down her glass on the table and stood on his feet, her tummy prodding against him.

"Yeah?" he said.

"If you're the king, then I'm the queen. This baby here, it's the prince." She pulled his head into her neck.

"The prince." Donnie shuffled slowly over to the couch, and she got off

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his feet, and watched him as he tucked a pillow under his neck. "The prince of Everything." Clarissa leaned down and kissed him on the cheek. His eyes had already closed, and she walked over to the window and looked out over the driveway at the plowed snow stacked against the door, the bag of salt and the shovel, and the skis and poles lined up against the garage wall, and she thought about a straight schuss down the hill behind the house, and what might lie at the bottom of a night-ski down a long hill where you couldn't see the end, but trusted there had to be one.