

2. Windsor Rain

THE FIRST TIME I SAW her, she was down by the river, running in the rain. Filly legs. Little show-jumper's ass. The sweetest moment of my 1998 (and, pre-you, probably my life). Katherine Chan, Scottish-Chinese-Canadian. She had this long Iroquois hair swishing across her back as she ran, the tail of a horse that looked about ready to leap the Detroit River and keep going on the other side. All this in a woman willing to pay for what she wanted, not taking rain for an answer. I was driving home after an honest day's house painting. Riverside Drive was thick with traffic and there went determination on two trim legs. She wasn't running in drizzle or a sun shower, but steady rain. Windsor under her feet and ghost-town Detroit hanging alongside her.

The first glimpse I had of her was dedication, self-sculpted legs scissoring through a syrupy September rain. When I drove up onto the sidewalk of Riverside Park, flung open the door of my painter's truck and began running after her—attracting up to two coast guards or police forces—the first thing she knew about me was risk. Or stupidity. Or brashness. But it was that or nothing, probably never see her again. For more than two decades I worked constantly to avoid police attention. At least three generations (the close, the distant, and the unknown) would have rolled in their smugglers' graves to see me hopping up onto the sidewalk like that. Then again, half those groaning ancestors might not be mine.

Fortunately the world has no better shoe for house painting than a running shoe, and I was raised by a yoga-crazy drama teacher who taught me to stand tall and stand on something supportive. I left the truck door hanging open and ran after her in the pelting rain. I kept a wide buffer between us, but saw her head tilt and dart a little as she heard

me approach. In went her elbows. I ran abreast, then a bit ahead so she could see me without feeling stared at. "Excuse me, I'm hoping to say hello before I get towed away." I pointed back at my truck parked on the sidewalk with its ads for foolishness and *Victor-Conrad, Windsor's Painter* hanging on the open door. "A self-employed voracious reader who cooks a mean basil peanut chicken. I was an engineering student but didn't want to become a drone."

Not a word from her, just the legs and the nostrils pumping their bit. Drapes of cold rain all around us. A flash of her brown eyes meeting mine.

"I'm trying to be honest here. My name's Antony Williams. Running in the rain like this, you're obviously not waiting for someone to hand you the world. May I get your name?"

Voodoo-the-dog and I had been jogging together for years. Eventually you grow to see running not as a spring from the calves or a reach from the quads, but as music on air. The bottom of your spine and the tray of your hips learn to fly in the airborne seconds between one leg and the next. When two runners pass each other they're weavers unfurling bolts of soul cloth. Tolerance for pain visible in a second. The balance of risk and reward. But she wasn't sharing.

"Okay, sorry. Back to your run."

Only after I'd cut my politely wide J-hook away from her and doubled back did I hear her half-yell, "Kate." She was deep into her run, all oiled lung machine, so she knocked the word out with belly and breath. *Kate* hung in that international air, a slow, aural flare illuminating the river and the growing distance between our backs. I didn't turn around to better savour the fading sound. *Kate. Kate. Kate.* A warm cloth down my damp back.

Of course I couldn't clutch at the stitch in my side, and was prepared, for once, to tell the cops the truth. "Had to do it, Officer. I think I'm in love. Thunderbolt." In my line, you *always* have to be ready to meet a cop.