

### **3:13** by Maeve Vasko

The woods are covered in a light dusting of snow. The date, by your count, is July 3rd.

You lift your eyes to the sky, You cannot remember the last time these trees were not white, the last time the great oaks had leaves on them and when the pines were not the only source of green. It is twenty-three degrees outdoors.

“It was warmer yesterday,” you say to the sky. Naturally, the sky doesn’t answer.

You pull your coat closer to you. You may be used to snow all year round, by now, but that hardly means you have to ignore the slighter changes. Hardly means you can’t feel the shift when the temperature drops. You stamp your way through the snow to the car, half-covered with drifts. Your hands fly over the metal. You wipe the snow away in minutes, hissing when your chapped skin comes into contact with the cold.

Your gloves are ripped. You do not remember when you bought them. The car doesn’t start. It hasn’t started for thirteen months, you believe. You’ve tried most days.

You turn and face the wood. It’s silent, most animals gone or dead. The only ones you ever see are resilient little birds and squirrels, pawing or hopping through the snow. The next day, pawprints cross the same paths. You’ve never met a wolf or fox or coyote, but metal weighs down your coat pockets all the same. A precaution.

Your breath is white in the frozen air. “What is the way home again?”

You can never remember the way home. You always wander your way through the woods until you happen upon the tin-roof cabin once again, smoke trailing from its chimney. A fire burns inside and it always scares you, because you don’t know how to start a fire, not really, and the cabin is always empty of people.

(It has been eighteen weeks since you saw another human being. It has been thirty-six weeks since you saw another human being alive.)

The only place you can ever remember is where the car sits, burrowed in the snow.

A root. A rock. You don’t know what it is but something catches your foot as you step forward and then you’re on your knees, snow soaking through your layers. The gloves on your hands are turning to threads and your coat is falling apart. You brace your hands in the snow, trying to push yourself to your feet, and you gasp at the influx of cold.

When you fall again your body turns, so your face looks to the sky. It is gray, cold. Ready to snow again. You crane your head to look at your watch, and it reads 3:13. It has read 3:13 for the past eleven minutes.

It is going to snow. You must stand. You cannot be buried like the car beside you, another body lost to the woods.

But your eyes close, and you make no attempt to open them.

When you wake, your body has been propped against the car, blanketed with a fresh layer of snow. There is no imprint in the drifts around you, not that you can see, and there are no footprints but your own.

You wipe your watch clean. The time is 3:13. It is July 3rd.

You tip your head backward, breath frozen in your lungs. The trees rustle pleasantly.