

The Birth of Apollo

By

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The first memory Emma recalled was the sound of the tires on the bridge over the old railroad right-of-way. *Thumpety...thump...thump...thump-thump*. The sound was the same entering or leaving Pierred'eau. *ROSEmary ate a LAMB chop*, her father would sing to the rhythm of the wheels. Sometimes it was Harriet and a hot dog. Once it was Darius and Kibbee, but her mother said it was pronounced KIB-ba, and since they were crossing Pierred'eau into Holloway, Emma remembered settling into the backseat with her own mind while her parents argued the point then moved on to less-connected, more feral grievances.

But that was all a long time ago.

The last time she thought of the sound on the bridge was the year before when Lars Archer wrote in the HP Gazette that the rhythm reminded him of a corpse bouncing around in an oversized casket. The line got a lot of play in Holloway, not only for its semi-literary quality, a rarity in the Gazette, but also for its subtle but snide commentary on the circumstances of the two interlocked villages, sharing police, fire, and EMT services, in a state that didn't allow for civic divorce. Holloway was all artisanal and rooted wealth, whose stone-bordered farmlands and walking path forests surrounded a village filled with boutiques, art galleries, two performance theaters, and tasteful restaurants. Pierred'eau offered nothing but decay and ruin. Those who didn't want to be seen lived among those no one wanted to see: the criminals, the poor, the hooked, the runaways, the ones who fell or climbed through the cracks. Emma felt like one of them only in reverse, the person who tunneled out of the underground into the light and open air.

She didn't know how she felt about going back, except that the phrase "going back" seemed such a strange way to think about a place only a mile from where she lived. But the gap between the two villages was so vast, the intercourse so rare, that the right-of-way might as well have been an ocean.

Her phone propped up inside one of the console cup holder buzzed, and Jeff's number popped onto the screen.

"This is all your fault," Emma said.

"I know it is. I just couldn't think of anyone else. I mean, I realize since you opened the shop you haven't, you know..."

"Midwifed. Delivered a baby. I'll be fine."

"You understand this isn't an easy one."

"I'll be fine. How are things out on 36?"

"Carnage. I've never seen anything like it. The tanker didn't just jackknife, it slid on its own oil spill and cars were stopped in the other lane for the construction. The truck swept down the road crushing and mangling two lanes full of traffic. Then, it caught fire. Every EMT and fireman in the county is here. That's why, I want you to know—"

"I'm on my own. Got it."

"Call though, Em, please, if things are too dicey. I'll get someone to come over there."

"Don't make promises you can't keep, and get back to what you were doing."

"Promise you'll call?"

"Promise."