



FLASHED

SUDDEN STORIES IN COMICS AND PROSE

SFX³

EDITED BY JOSH NEUFELD AND SARI WILSON

Last Night the River Froze

JOHN PORCELLINO



Frozen

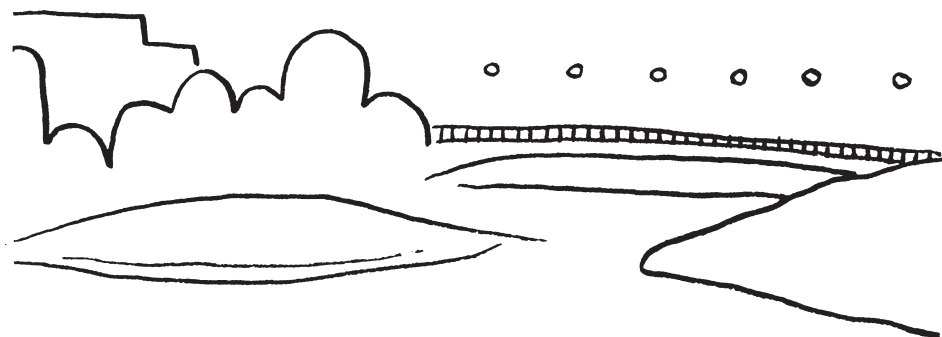
Local Conditions

ALAN GILBERT

One

BRIAN BIGGS

LAST NIGHT THE RIVER FROZE



NEXT MORNING THROUGH COLD TREES I
COULDN'T SEE THE SKY SHINING

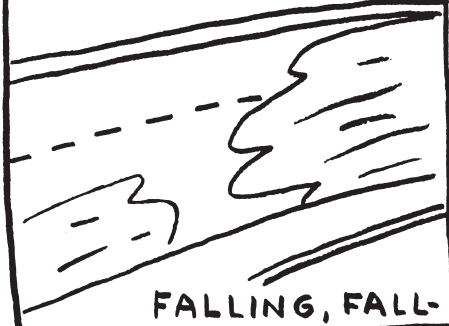


WOMEN AT STOPLIGHTS PUT ON MAKEUP



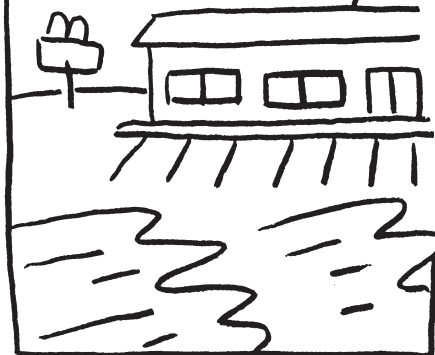
and I WAIT ALONE

PAST FAST FOOD MALLS
and SHOP SIGNS FALL



FALLING, FALL-

WINTER'S HERE



Local Conditions

ALAN GILBERT

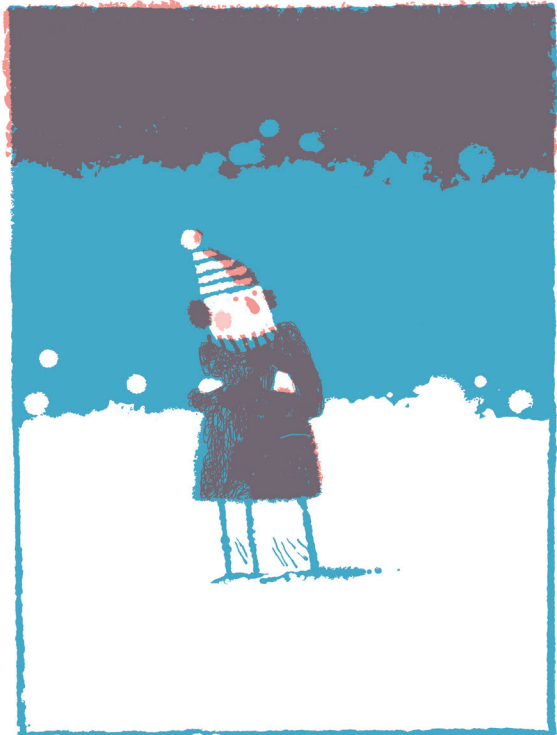
WE MAKE FIGURE 8S WITH ice skates on the river Styx, or at least that's what we nicknamed it after finding a book of Greek myths in a dumpster behind McDonald's, along with a cracked cosmetic case, bags full of raked leaves, a clean plastic spoon, and the transistor radio we use to tune in other voices late at night. There's a town far from this one where we imagine faces less worn with care, where the commercials and local news are more professionally produced, but they ship people off to war from that place too. Afterward I turned to you, warm on a cold night, not realizing you were already gone. Or a part of me knew, but the information traveled along nerve endings

until the forearms start to tingle like a visceral TV.

On the roof is an old-fashioned antenna that cable and satellite have gradually replaced. The sidewalk leading to the front door drops like a needle to the groove, wave channels on either side. Now even the sky is frozen, the clear blue we crave muddled by perception, by the darkness we still harbor in our hearts, the whole landscape secretly ablaze—at least it looked that way from the drawings, with wavy lines resembling flames or ice on the road and in the parking lot where we threw buckets of water like a helpless fire brigade forming a human chain to pass the rescue from one interlocking moment, one plastic bucket, to the next. I didn't find you there, either. Just in these words creating the space between us, because language is a form of insomnia for everyone except the animals, and once you forget how to sleep, life gets extended, though its short-circuits memory. We'll need that later.

We'll need it to build a future when we finally learn from fucking up so much.

The singer didn't tell me that. You did somehow, though I wasn't listening, because the hardest lesson of all is discovering that nothing is unconditional. Not even Pop-Tarts, even if they'd like to be. Would you rather I just made up a story? It's winter, then one day it'll be spring. I'd say that's hope by another name, but it may end just as badly, peering into the windows of factories, restaurants, and houses. If you can call them that. And what about the lights on the bridges? They're knobs on a view that hasn't gone totally digital. I miss you in there with its language of confession, my under-embellished memoir, the sportscaster arrested for a DUI after handing over keys to the timeshare that was ours until we started missing payments. That's when the raccoons moved in, less uncertain than we were about where to find shelter.









Process

“What first struck me about **John Porcellino**’s piece was a sparseness and even elusiveness that still generated an emotional impact, something I aim for in my own writing. Also, having spent parts of my life in small towns around the United States, the landscape felt familiar to me. **Brian Biggs** has done a wonderful job of putting that solitary figure in motion, while waiting for someone—or something—to break the kind of silence that only deep winter can bring.”

— *Alan Gilbert*

“On reading **Alan Gilbert**’s ‘Local Conditions,’ I fixated on the feelings of the work. There is what the words of his piece say, and then there is how the combination of words feel. I chose to go with the latter and focus on the overwhelming sense of loneliness and cold. Upon seeing the complete triplet that includes **John Porcellino**’s contribution, I feel that the connection is definitely made.”

— *Brian Biggs*