

Black Snow

written by

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EXT. LANE, OUTSKIRTS OF BARNSLEY - DUSK

FLASHBACK

A rainy evening in God's country. Surrounding vista, one of undulating hills and hedged fields. A long country lane cuts through farmland.

Sporadically scattered hay bales lie in fields. Milestone, dirty and unkempt reads 'BARNSLEY 8 MILES'

Far away, over the brow, a figure hoves into view. The only motion in a still landscape. He's wrapped up against bad weather and his flat-capped head bowed.

Heavy boots and weary legs hinder his gait. Feet splash through puddles. Lunch pail swings in time with his step.

INT. KATE'S COTTAGE - DUSK

KATE (30s) a woman with a huge heart and the protective instinct of a lioness. A knitted shawl covers her well-worn dress. She hums as she slices carrots and adds them to a large pot on the stove.

INTERCUT BETWEEN THE LANE AND KATE'S COTTAGE

With world-weary features, blackened with coal dust from the days toil, the homeward bound miner scours the road ahead. He appears older than his thirty-something years.

His pace trudging, consistent.

A foot sinks into a deep, water-filled hole, he doesn't falter. Merely takes off his light brown cap, flips excess water away, before it's replaced. He pulls his coat tighter.

KNOCK

Kate places the knife down and wipes her hands upon her dress, frustrated by the interruption.

Three identical tatty dwellings in a row. Chimney smoke rises high above the blue slate roofs. An old retired pit pony grazes, tied to a crude fence. Colliery official, dressed in a long black coat, stands at the door. He carries a bundle.

Door opens. Kate smiles at the visitor. Eyes drop to the bundle, her expression changes to one of overwhelming grief.

KATE

Sam...

Official solemnly nods and the bundle is handed over. A Miner's coat and on top a light brown cap. Distraught she falls to her knees.

Miner stops, turns his head behind him. His focus returns towards home and he smiles.

As he plods on he slowly fades away. Lane deserted once more.

FLASHBACK ENDS.

INT. KATE'S COTTAGE - EVENING

Kate sways in her rocking chair and darns a well-darned sock by candlelight. On a sideboard, the tatty coat. Folded neatly and upon it rests the flat cap.

A child runs in. JOHN (9), Kate puts her darning down as he leaps into her lap and cuddles in. Embers glow in the grate. Kate strokes her son's blonde bedraggled hair and kisses his head.

John peeks up and smiles before he snuggles back into his mother's embrace. With an affectionate pat from his mother he gets up. The chair vacant. John climbs on and curls up.

Kate pulls a blanket from a chair back and covers him. She crouches and holds his hand in hers.

At the sideboard she collects up both coat and cap. Pulls them tight to her bosom before they're raised to her face, she rests her cheek on the cap.

A deep breath, she drinks in her memories. Glances back at John and watches him doze for a moment. Refolds the coat before and places her treasured keepsakes back. A final straighten of its lapels.

Fingers run across the cap. Unseen dirt is brushed away and the cap is reunited with the coat, back where they reside. Kate doesn't want to relinquish her touch.

Door opens and breaks her melancholia. WILLIAM (late 50s) enters. A once strong man, ravished by time and hard labour. He has an air of defeat about him.

William closes the door, shakes off rain, and removes his overcoat and hat. Kate takes her father's coat and hangs it behind the door. He slips off his unlaced boots. She takes them from him.

He warms against a fire, stretches out his stocking feet. Rubs his hands together.

KATE

Wash up or you'll get nowt.

Sat at the small table, William considers his filthy black hands and wipes them on his shirt. From her stove, Kate picks up a pan of broth. Her father stands again and reaches to a shelf for a bowl.

Kate waits for him before she serves. He eats heartily on poor offerings. William watches John. Kate sees him.

KATE (CONT'D)
He's tired Pa.

William takes another spoonful of broth.

WILLIAM
Wait till he's trapping.

Kate tenses and changes focus from her father to her son.

INT. SEAM TWO, TRAPPERS DOOR - FOLLOWING DAY

Pitch black. Sound of drips, barely audible breaths. A distance rumble.

A match strike, it illuminates the dirty, sweaty, scared face of a young flat-capped DAVEY (11). Naked from the waist up and coal dust filthy, he fumbles in his pocket and drops the match. Blackness.

Another match, Davey wipes his brow. Candle now in hand, he lights it. A rat scurries past. Davey wipes his brow and pays it no heed.

A noise. He listens, cranes for a sense of direction and distance. It approaches. He plunges his hand into a puddle. Grabs at something and yanks hard. A rope flies from the puddle and pulls taught.

Small wooden door, no bigger than Davey, swings open. Incoming draft extinguishes his candle. A figure rushes into view, his silhouette cast by a small candle on a cart that he pulls. Davey flings himself back out of harm's way.

At the rear another young Hurrier, his head firmly rests against the cart, drives it forward.

YOUNG HURRIER
Ow'do Davey lad

Davey gives a wave. Drops his rope and the door swings shut. Wagon train disappears taking what little light there was.

SUPERIMPOSE: "OAKS COLLIERY, 1864"

INT. PIT HEAD - MOMENTS LATER

A full coal cart rises from darkness.

Handsome, well-dressed JONAS (30's) watches two men manhandle full coves from the cage. With an understanding of every move the workers make without ever having raised a finger to experience it. Full coves are replaced with empty ones.

Steam expels from vents as another cage sinks. Jonas follows a full cove out.

EXT. THE ENGINE HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Jonas sidesteps a Miner off to clock-out stopping at the bottom of a set of stone steps.

JONAS

Harry.

No response. He steadies himself on railings and whistles.

HARRY (60's) appears, his white beard blackened with grease and dirt. Steam rises from his greasy and dirty vest. A once strong man shows ravages of time.

JONAS (CONT'D)

Has Mr. Tusker given instructions?

Harry shuffles his feet. Jonas rolls his eyes upwards. Harry follows his gaze to a first-floor office window.

HARRY

Everybody up... blasting.

Harry sets his cap and retreats inside. Jonas lifts his dirty hand, takes out a handkerchief and wipes.

EXT. KATE'S COTTAGE - DAY

Kate hangs out over-washed clothes, which billow in a breeze.

A large plume of black smoke heaves above tree lines. It grows and swells, silent and serene. BOOM/CRACK. A gust of air, as sound waves reach the cluster of houses.

Pony rears up in fright. Kate reacts, watches for a moment before she starts to grab her freshly washed clothes.

Dust arrives. Kate shields her eyes as it coats everything it lands upon. Kate abandons, an already discoloured shirt and darts inside.

INT. KATE'S COTTAGE - NIGHT

Kate at the stove. At the table William stretches from his seat and ruffles John's hair. Kate approaches with a pot and ladles stew into his bowl.

William scoops a spoon full. He tips it, watery contents splash back into his bowl. He picks up bread and rips a wedge off, uses it to soak up his dinner. He holds the bread near his mouth. Kate eyes him, ladle in hand.

WILLIAM
's good lass.

William smiles weakly at her and tucks in.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)
Blasted today.

Kate nods. William fills his stomach.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)
New seam off the Barnsley main...
eight foot.

John doesn't change focus from his food. He goes to speak.

KATE
Eat, John...

John abandons his sentence. Kate folds a tea towel.

KATE (CONT'D)
Black snow everywhere.

William wipes his hands on his shirt before he rips off more bread.

WILLIAM
That snow brings work.

He addresses John.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)
Soon be your work.

John slowly stops mid-chew and turns to Kate.

KATE
Let the lad be dad, time will come
soon enough.

William smiles with his mouthful and chews.

WILLIAM
Don't be so keen on keepin' the lad
meadow side, extra shillings are
needed if we're to keep a colliery
roof above our 'heads.

Kate's shoulders lower as she watches her young son.

KATE
Bairns should be allowed to be
bairns... the pit's no place for
them.

WILLIAM

He'll hurry or dig if he wants to eat.

William can see that Kate is upset.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

Now lass, but what'll you do when I'm gone--

KATE

Don't...

WILLIAM

It's to be said lass, my time will come as did Sam's...

Kate's demeanor changes and she seeks solace in her late husband's belongings.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

Be different if you had a suitor.

Kate rolls her eyes.

KATE

It's been a few months...

WILLIAM

Months is enough. You need to get your head past my time. The lad'll need to earn or else you'll need to marry a wage.

Kate tugs John from his chair and nudges him upstairs with a stroke of his head. He smiles back at her and goes up.

EXT. PIT HEAD - DUSK

Winding wheel slowly comes to a stop. Steam expels from vents as the engine house shuts down. Harry steadies himself on the door frame. Rubs grease from his hands, wipes his face, and stuffs it back into his pocket. Jonas watches from a first-floor window.

INT. FOREMAN'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Jonas's gaze follows Harry as he leaves for home.

Behind him, TUSKER (60's) pours over a ledger at his desk. A man whose suit hangs large and who hopes he'll soon have a full belly with which to fill it. His unruly comb-over drapes his face.

His eyes dart from ledger to Jonas, a rat eyeing his meal.

TUSKER
Months before ruin.

JONAS
How long have you worked for my
father Tusker?

Jonas turns, Tusker shuffles papers, and avoids eye contact.

TUSKER
There's more out than in Jonas. Six
months at the outside...

Jonas cringes at his over-familiarity.

JONAS
Then you have a month to turn it
around.

Tusker barely glances up from his books. He places his pen
down and rubs his face.

TUSKER
It's the labour cost... the
addlings won't turn a profit.

Jonas studies Tusker's weaselly features.

JONAS
Increase manpower which increases
the coves mined and therefore--

TUSKER
Profit. It makes some sort of sense
but not financial. Perhaps longer
hours?

Jonas takes a leather-bound ledger from Tusker. Tusker goes
to grab it but thinks twice. Jonas casts a flippant eye over
it and tosses it back.

JONAS
I don't care how you do it Tusker,
I'm just keen that you do it.

Jonas crosses the office to the hat stand.

JONAS (CONT'D)
My father expects it... after all,
that's what he pays for.

With his back to Tusker, he picks up his overcoat. Tusker
scowls at him till he turns back. He gives a sickly smile.

TUSKER
Nineteen and a half...for Mr. Lyle.
Nineteen and a half years... come
winter.

Jonas adds his hat to his ensemble.

JONAS

Let's see if you make twenty.

He leaves. Tusker's face contorts in anger. CLERK (30s) enters and gets the ledger thrown at him, he catches it.

TUSKER

Put that away from prying eyes.

Clerk eyes Tusker with contempt and lifts the Monk's seat. Inside a large number of notes and coins. His gaze lingers before he casts a glance at Tusker and throws the ledger in. The clerk looks as if he's about to say something.

TUSKER (CONT'D)

Your council is neither sought nor sanctioned.

Clerk closes the lid and is ushered away. Tuskert plays with a quill pen and mulls over his exchange with Jonas.

EXT. ROAD TO THE COLLIERY - DAWN

William treks pail in hand, with purpose, but little enthusiasm. Behind him, at a distance, John darts, unseen, in and out of trees. William enters the Colliery gates.

EXT. THE YARD - DAY

Horse-drawn wagons head towards pit head. William lets them pass. He checks his pocket watch and heads to clock-in.

JOHN (O.S)

Grandda!

John runs to his Grandda and William scoops him up. Kate rushes through the gates.

KATE

John Lancaster!

John buries his head. William smiles and puts him down.

JOHN

Wanted to see th'ole?...

Kate grabs her son's arm.

KATE

What's been said about following your Grandda to the pit?

WILLIAM

He's keen, wants to see the drop

Kate scowls at William for encouraging him. John pleads with his eyes. Kate relents and they head towards pit head.

INT. PIT HEAD - MOMENTS LATER

Kate holds John as he peers into the hole. He scoops a handful of gravel and goes to throw it over the edge. William stops him.

TUSKER (O.S.)
What the bloody 'ell?

Tusker storms over. Kate instinctively shields him behind her. Tusker reaches around and grabs John.

TUSKER (CONT'D)
Out of here. Should Lyle hear--

KATE
He means no harm Mr. Tusker.

Tusker squares up to her. He waves his finger at William.

TUSKER
Cards... as well you know.

WILLIAM
The lad's just keen.

Tusker smiles insipidly, he can see there's no harm done.

TUSKER
When he's of age he can take his chance. Dare say we'll get twelve months from the lad.

Kate horrified at his casualness.

KATE
My son is not a commodity--

TUSKER
Everything that can dig is a commodity.

Outside a coach and horse arrives. Tusker turns to go.

KATE
My boy is better than the pit.

TUSKER
Let's see. Disobey me again Lancaster and I will make that day your last descent.

INT. FOREMAN'S OFFICE - LATER

Jonas reclines with his feet up on Tusker's desk. Tusker enters, and glares and crosses to the window. Below a young ginger-haired BOY (10) enters the engine house.

He rests his hand on the seat. He reassures himself it's shut before he plants himself down and faces Jonas.

INT. THE CAGE - MOMENTS LATER

William stands shoulder to shoulder with four other Miners. A young lad nervously waits. The cage gate moves as another boy pushes into the cramped space.

William reaches over and playfully clips the youngster's head. The lad grins. The gate closes and the cage judders.

INT. THE ENGINE HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Ginger-haired boy pulls at various handles. Harry's distracted, a bell rings and he releases the brake and taps a gauge. Boy watches closely.

The BOY mimics Harry and taps a steam gauge and places his hands on the release handle.

INTERCUT BETWEEN THE CAGE AND ENGINE HOUSE

William and his colleagues descend in silence. The cage rocks them as it slowly drops underground.

The ginger-haired boy pulls at a handle, grabs it with two hands and uses his body weight. The handle jerks free and wires free falls from the drum.

The cage drops, the passengers all cry out as they free fall. Everyone thrown about. Screams of terror.

INT. PIT HEAD - CONTINUOUS

Those who wait for a later descent rush to the hole as the wires spin uncontrollably from their spool. They can only stare into the pit.

CRASH

STOCKY MINER

Jesus!