
THE ICE ANGLE



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Text by Eric Schwabenlender

Illustrated by Mister Koppa & Friends

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Illustrations

Collage, Susan Legind, Italy . . . . . frontispiece
Collage, Helene de Winter, The Netherlands 4–5
Collage, Susan Legind, Italy 14–15
Collage, Flore Kunst, France. 18–19
Collage, Nikki Soppelsa, U.S.A. 16–27
Collage, Filipa Sottomayor, Portugal 32–33

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I didn't know anything about Duluth. If someone were to have asked me about it I could only have said two things: it's in Minnesota and it's cold. If pressed, I might have said that I knew there was once a professional football team there called the Eskimos—early '20s, I think—that had to travel most of the time because the club's home turf was so cold and remote. That was back in the day when there was pro football in cities like Canton, Ohio; Frankford, Pennsylvania; Rock Island, Illinois and even Milwaukee. How do I know that? Well, I have a mind like a steel trap—for worthless information. I'm exceptional for my focus...on the wrong things. Suffice it to say that as far as I could tell, Duluth might still have been a trading outpost for fur trappers. It simply didn't exist in my world.





Do you remember that song from the '70s called, "The Most Beautiful Girl in the World?" My dad loved that song and often said it was written about my mom. He used to say that when he first heard it, he assumed the song was referencing an actual woman that was known by all, objectively, as "the most beautiful woman in the world." He used to say that until he met my mom, he wondered whether he had missed the boat. Beauty, as it turns out of course, is bountiful. There's the sort of beauty you appreciate, like a great painting. There's the kind that drives you, like a passion for a profession. Then there's the kind that startles you, like the kind that makes you cry. And so it was that I thought of my father's favorite song when I first saw Winona.



The old hotel lobby was overly ornate. I remember thinking that it smelled a little bit like moth balls and that reminded me of my grandmother's coat closet. I rubbed my palms slowly up and down the legs of my jeans, trying to brush away a bit of sweat, and with it, my nerves. Scanning the room, my eyes had landed on an old stuffed pheasant when I first heard that lilting voice in person.

"You look good," she said. There was a pause. "This is weird."

I stood up and we embraced. I remember thinking how small she felt in my arms. I remember the supple curve of her back against me. There was the faintest scent of lavender on her neck. She was...fresh. I think of that word now as I remember the scene. She is vivid.



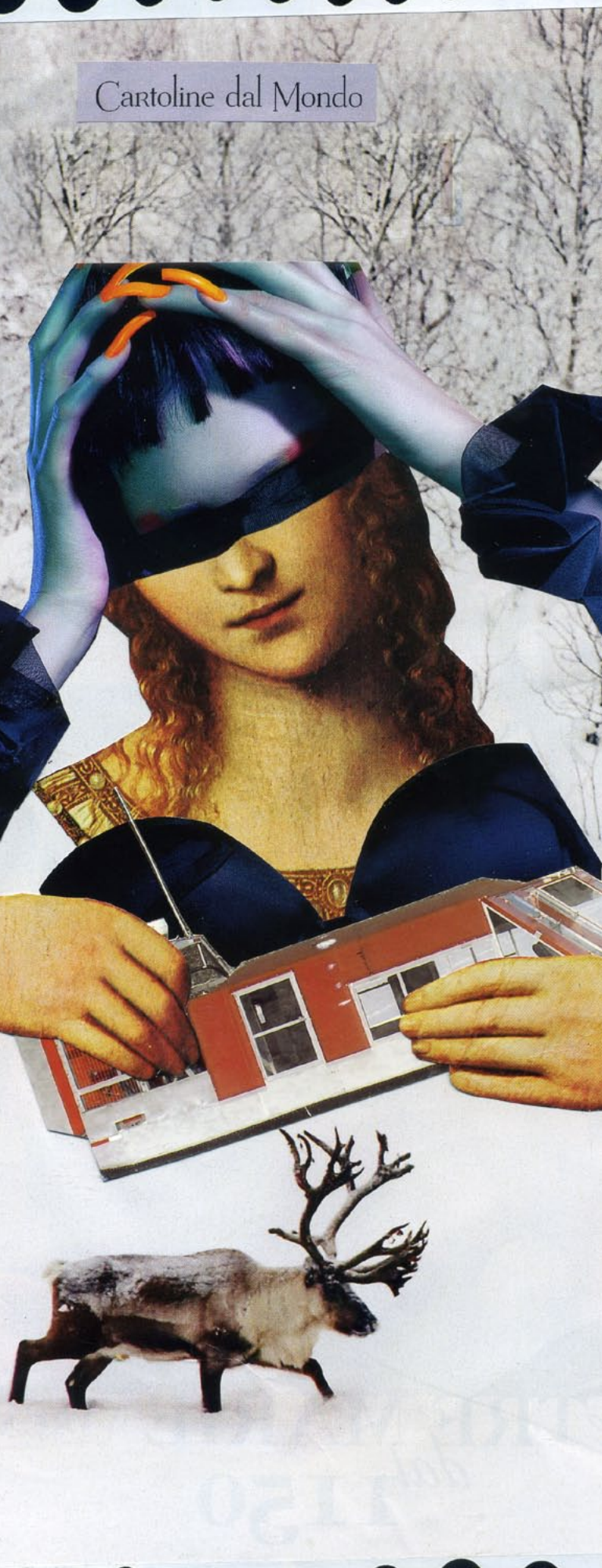
Where in the world was love? During telephone conversations, Winona and I had often wondered about the logistics of love. What percentage of people, we wondered, ended up meeting and marrying people in their immediate circle? Within the city limits in which they grew up? Was it supposed to be that way, or was that simply what people did? If the idea of everyone having a “soulmate” were real, how likely would it be that those two individuals would usually end up living near each other? It seemed far more likely to us both that the search for love was supposed to be far-flung and, well, hard. The inherent difficulty of identifying and connecting with that cosmic “other” is what made the final fulfillment of the quest that much more romantic. While the three states between us was challenging at times, we knew it was irrelevant in the grander scheme of things.



Winona was taller than I thought. She was shorter than me, though, and wore her long brown hair in a tight ponytail. Her eyes...oh her eyes! Me telling you they were “light and green” do them no justice, I assure you. When she looked at me, she saw me. She saw into me. Her eyes almost seemed to smile on their own with their brightness. That day, they were what most captivated me about her. That is not to say I didn’t appreciate the black off-the-shoulder sweater she wore, or the gray skirt that fell maybe four of five delightful inches above her knees. A nearby grandfather clock announced the 2 p.m. hour as we sat down there in the lobby, and she smiled. I responded in kind.

“You look amazing,” I said. Her smile lasted.

Cartoline dal Mondo





Winona and I met online. It was in a chatroom, to be specific. I've never been one for those dating sites, and preferred the openness of conversation. In just a few exchanges, a stranger could become less so; indeed, there was a certain safety in distance. When you didn't really know the person to whom you were speaking, it was easier to be honest, to be open, and to be free. Winona fully embraced the medium and its potential, as well. Like me, she was excited to share her thoughts, her opinions and her observations. I will admit that we, on occasion, shared our desires, too. We were good at it, and relished the creativity. Connection can recharge a person, even reorient them. As we talked, we learned about each other in every way that mattered.





"Thank you for agreeing to come all this way," she said. As she did, she brushed a bit of hair back over her right ear. It reminded me of so many girls I had known in college who did the same thing when feeling pretty… and watched.

"It's not a problem," I said. "Not at all."

"I can't believe you're here," she said. "I close my eyes and I hear your voice and I know you. Now I hear you and I see you, and you're here. It's wild."

There was poetry in her messy words.

How could I not feel the same way?



I'm a good listener. I take pride in that. The longer we sat there in those uncomfortable sofas, though, the more I found myself talking. She sat across from me, leaning forward with arms crossed and her elbows on her lap. I talked about the train ride up from Indiana and about the odd man across from me on the Amtrak who I was certain was probably a terrorist. I talked about the old Trans Am I was trying to refurbish on my own and how expensive an endeavor it was turning out to be. I talked about my work. All the while, I just kept looking at her. There she was, sitting across from me. Real. Pretty. When I remember it now, I think about her eyes still. Their color first. Then, I think about them occasionally looking past me at the other people in the lobby. Three times.







After our online courtship had finally moved to the telephone, I suppose we both knew that making our relationship real was the next logical step. We would be on the phone for hours. We shared everything that meant anything to us. When I wrote to Winona last summer and suggested we meet finally, she told me how happy she was to hear me say that. In the last few months before embracing her at the hotel, we exchanged correspondences several times a day.

"I want what I want," she wrote. "And I want to see you move."



Winona asked me if I had any plans for the weekend. I hadn't made any, because it made more sense to me to discuss them with her first. We were closer to her hometown anyway; she knew the area and its attractions better than me. Truth be told, I suppose there was a part of me that suspected we might be spending the entire weekend inside the hotel. After an hour of me talking far too much, Winona rose from the ornate couch and asked to excuse herself for just a moment. When she came back, I would invite her upstairs. I was all checked in.

She didn't come back. I see now how obvious it was, though at the time I was a bit confused. She had her reasons, I'm sure. The world may be cold sometimes, and we may be frozen by it, but there is always a thaw.

I still think of her now and again. In my mind, I can still see her. Hear her. Smell her. I can still forgive her…up there in Duluth.

My ice angel.





Colophon

The Ice Angel closes out this series of seasonal collaborations.

Keeping with the established formula, with subzero temps on Lake Superior's south shore, I scanned the post card rack in the lobby of the Hotel Chequamegon for a card to send to the usual contributors. It was impossible not to choose the strange image of The Madeline Ice Angel. Having already tapped Brandon and Bill for *B(l)eached* and *Autumn(Hymn)al*, I felt I needed to find an alternate to provide the text for this final collaboration. I had recently reconnected with an old classmate from grade school through Facebook, and found out he became a writer, just like he said he wanted to be in our 8th grade yearbook—the same yearbook where I said I wanted to be a "commercial artist." So I asked him if he'd like to play along with me and my new friends, and I'm glad he obliged. Four years ago, this series of collaborations was established with a small group of artists I met through the internet and social media. If there ever was a general theme, I thought it was about opening oneself up to new people and new experiences, and the rewards that come from the surprises collaboration springs on us. Wrapping it all up with the help of a friend I have been reacquainted with after a lapse of more than 30 years, thanks again to the internet and social media, is an unexpected surprise in itself, and another lesson (re)learned: *Remember to look both ways.*

Set entirely in Open Sans Light, and printed on acid free paper, 26 copies of this limited edition were hand-stitched prior to the spring equinox, just in time to welcome the next thaw.