

# What She Heard

She stopped at the corner market for a loaf of bread, just like he had asked, and picked up a jug of orange juice at the same time. He didn't drink nearly enough juice, as she knew well; gallons of soda, certainly, but never juice, unless grape soda counted, which it didn't. She bundled up before leaving the market. Winter that year, with gusting winds at sub-zero temperatures, dictated her Arctic wardrobe: thick woolen mittens, clomping boots, and a colorful scarf tied skillfully around her head. She didn't look fashionable but would certainly stay toasty warm. At the same time, she couldn't even get him to wear a stocking cap.

While only a dusting of snow had fallen that day, she was still leaving waffle-footprints on the sidewalk. He lived a few blocks away, just across the river. She trudged over the footbridge and into the wind, holding the bundle of groceries close to her chest.

The footbridge was well-traveled. She saw two guys shivering along, walking the opposite direction. They said nothing, and then a third fellow made eye contact and smiled.

"There's a new message on the river," the fellow said. He wore a stocking cap. "Check it out."

She looked over the railing at the river. The surface had frozen solid, like an ice-skating rink, while a steady stream invisibly gurgled below. She knew about that; the river had

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been frozen for weeks.

"You gotta be crazy to write something out there," said Stocking Cap. "The ice could crack any time."

A few yards downstream, a daredevil had ventured onto the ice and shuffled through the fallen snow, spelling a strange message with his trail: *LEGALIZE GOD*.

"Crazy," said Stocking Cap, shaking his head. He said goodbye to her and went on his way.

She started back across the river, staying on the left side of the bridge so she could get a good look at the message. The space between the two words was fairly wide. Could the message-writer have jumped the gap? She had read articles in the newspaper about the dangers of thin ice; one told a story from several years earlier when a student heard the unmistakable sound of a crying baby echoing from a garbage can left in the middle of the cold hard river. The would-be hero screamed for assistance before trudging across the ice to save the abandoned baby, and then screamed again when the ice cracked under his feet and sent him into the freezing water. His body was found days later. It turned out that a prankster with a dark sense of humor had recorded a crying baby on a cassette and left a boombox in the trash can. In retrospect, not a very funny joke.

The door was unlocked when she got to his apartment, so she didn't have to use her copy of his key.

"How are you feeling?" she asked.

"I'm still suffering, even after taking medicine," he said. "I