

her calculated azimuth, and the bright carapaces of the rocket launchers out in the field. She wrote down the coordinates, pulled them up on the dining room haptic. She turned and surveyed the landscape with her fingers, swiped it to her watch. At the airport, her husband—her second husband, whose kindness had for years seemed shameful, unalloyed against the violence of the world—said, “Are you sure you want to go alone?”

“Yeah,” she said. “This is for me.”

The war was long over. The veterans were everywhere in Kyiv—a whole generation like an errata inserted back into the real world, limbless and blind in their thousands. The newest prosthetics were styled translucent like pearl and could take a tattoo, so they wore their old unit patches on their cybernetic arms, proudly baring wolfpack sleeves, Saint Javelin, “Російський військовий кораблю, іди нахуй!” The kids gave the old warriors nods, paid their tabs. The city was beautiful; all the ruin had been undone, the pears in blossom, forest every other block, the river blue and gorgeous and ringed with bridges of glass and light. For a while in the ‘40s, people had called it “The Capital of Hope,” but that was falling out of habit. People didn’t need to be reminded so often of hope, anymore. Things come back together.

The train took her north out of the city along the water. The Chornobyl Exclusion Zone had gotten smaller over the years as the half-lives passed, and they’d started to rebuild Bilohorivka (*that* Bilohorivka). The houses were new, solar-roofed, sparkling and ringed in gardens. At the visitor center for the Zone, the clerk was young, beautiful, sunflower in her hair. “Are you sure you’re okay to walk, Ms. Clemson?” She spoke flawless English, barely an accent. “It’s about six kilometers to the spot on your map.”

“Yeah,” she said. “I’ve got good boots.” She didn’t mention her knees. She’d manage.

They had put sunflowers up to the river. The breeze was light and the heads rippled and lolled. Out in the distance a demining robot tended the most remote edge of the Zone, but the clerk had swiped her the restricted areas and a scanner drone floated silently above her—she would never have