

On Cannon Beach

by Marta Randall

For the students of Haystack '83

Toleman found me slumped near my equipment, said he couldn't afford to lose me, too, and gave me a week's leave. Typical of him; a week was not long enough to catch a transport out of the Rainier Ice Station and back again, and not long enough to go anywhere on foot - he wanted me close by, where his generosity could be easily interrupted by the unfortunate press of work. So sorry, my dear. Unavoidable. Here's your cryometer - go.

Of the original fourteen on the crew, only seven of us remained and we knew Toleman well enough to anticipate his acts of generosity and work around them. That night Marti accidentally misplaced the keys to Toleman's LandCat, Jerry accidentally forgot to lock the transport pool door, and Gretch accidentally left two full cans of gas strapped in place. I took off well before dawn. A week of being short-handed would cool Toleman's anger at the theft - it always did.

The drive south was depressing. Small, sad towns littered the sides of the collapsing highway, their empty buildings and icy streets interrupting blasted brown fields or the skeletons of forests. Neither roads nor habitations had been built to withstand great cold and the ice had come quickly: increasing cloudiness had given us progressively colder summers, until one hard winter laid down the first ice, and the next cool summer had not melted the pack. A second hard winter deflected more of the sun's heat; the next summer the nascent glaciers bounced even more sunlight back to space. The pattern established itself: a colder winter, a colder summer, and now glaciers marched down the sides of mountains linking one to the other and freezing the northern latitudes. For all our observing and metering and evacuating, this sudden, speedy ice age was upon us and no one, least of all the beleaguered scientists, could tell when, or if, it would end. Hard winters were now a foregone conclusion; cold destroyed the work of hands and by next January this land, too, would be under the ice.

I slept that night in a schoolhouse amid the detritus of evacuation. **MY GREAT-GRANDFATHER BUILT THIS TOWN** read a spray-painted message on the wooden door. I put my fingertips to the words. Salvage crews had been through the area already, taking whatever they found necessary and important and removing it to the increasingly crowded south. But who would save the real memories, the important, mundane trivia of the world before the ice? Not me. My job was to monitor the glaciers, measure the progress of the hungry ice, observe the rubble of broken homes and broken lives swept tidily before the glaciers' skirts. I touched the faded words again, wriggled into my

