

**Colin Zic**  
*a short story*  
*written by Jerry Auld*

It was a clear, suddenly warm, night at the door to the pub when the bouncer bulldogged into us.

– Mr. Padaso?

I shook my head.

– Do you think it's warm because we're drunk? Ben had been saying, after wondering what routes would still be in shape.

The bouncer turned to him with the cautious courtesy that stupid people use for manners. He held a credit card out like he was reading his lines.

– Stuart?

Ben shrugged. He was a good shrugger, smooth, practiced.

– No, I said. It's definite high-pressure.

The bouncer moved over to a crowd on the balcony. Smokers.

– Stuart Padaso? he asked, peering close into faces. Stu Padaso? A pause, then shrieks of laughter. I looked at Ben accusingly. He shrugged.

– Joke names on credit cards?

– Serves him right if he can't figure that one out.

– But that's a credit card. That's a felony.

– I never signed anything, He shrugged. You drank off it too.

Ben believed credit companies were ripping off the public which meant fair game to rip back.

– Order exists so we can all live together and enjoy fine nights in peace, I said, waving out at the empty, clean street.

– So someone can make money, he said. Ben thought everyone was ripping us off. Ben was at war.

– Ignorance is bliss, I said, walking off home, across the train bridge and the river, sparkling cold. I thought what a waste it was to see this Chinook blow in now when I was drunk and working in the morning.

I was barely asleep when the phone rang. I sat up thinking of police lights and grabbed the phone before it woke my girlfriend, cradling it, breathing.

– Hello?

– Colin Zic?

I recognized the voice right way. Terror pressed me. How did this happen? My imagination a blend of questions and speculation. How serious was this? Could I pull it off without losing my job? My girlfriend was angry at me for staying out already.

I spoke quietly, looking at the bright stars over the peaks, certain the chain of commitment would die before they got back to me.

– Colin Zic? He repeated.

– Yeah, that's me, I said.

I heard his smile on the other end. He hung up.

I slipped downstairs and dialed the next number. It rang. He's still at the bar I thought. A surge of relief. It rang again. He'll break the chain, then:

– Hello? A sleepy voice, female. I winced.

– Colin Zic? I asked.

I heard her wake her boyfriend. I heard the exasperation in her voice, the accusation of juvenile joke-names and missing work. It made me feel awkward. Men gather gangs to validate their fantasies. Laid bare it looked stupid. Only by obscuring our aims with codes did we imagine respect. My friend came on the line.

– Colin Zic? I asked.

A pause, disbelieving, looking at the clock, at his girlfriend, at his imagination. Finally,

– Yeah, okay, that's me, he said.

I hung up, went to the garage and pulled out my backpack and boots. I had it all spread out when the next call came.

- The Sentinel, Sky Ladder, Mt. Bell: East Ridge, Stanley: North Face, Cavell: East Ridge.
- Snow might not be good, I said, looking at my gear, visualizing approaches and slopes.
- Make the call, he said, and hung up.

I hit redial.

- Yeah? Much more awake. I heard the clink of gear on concrete.
- Stanley: North Face, Cavell: East Ridge, I said and hung up.

I looked at the rack. I was still drunk enough to think that carrying a big rack would be fun. But I would want to go light. Something long, something fun.

When the phone rang for the last time I didn't even speak.

- Cavell, he said. Ten minutes. Colin Zic.

I crept upstairs and knelt beside my sleeping girlfriend. She stirred. I winced.

- Call in for me? I asked quietly. Call in sick?

She collapsed her head into the pillow, sleep muffled, annoyed.

- Again?

I saw the flash of headlights through the garage windows. The bang of car doors.

- Colin Zic? a dark figured asked me.

- Yeah. You?

- Yeah.

We drove in shifts, sleeping against rattling windows, cramping legs. In the parking lot the mountain was just where the spilling stars cut out.

We woke up as dawn was spearing the pitchy sky, rents in a coal shawl. Our headlights up the moraine to the little col seemed human-sized against the vast puddling blackness.

In the frigid air below Edith Cavell's tiny glacier we wondered aloud about the high pressure. Dawn showed us clear blue, so clear it was hard to focus in the distance, so endless. Almost timeless. Only the remains of the Angel glacier made it feel like time could pass.

It was one of those days when it felt like God had the same size stride as you when he built the route. Cavell's East ridge was a staircase. A quartzite church, we bowed and knelt to step up. Stairway to heaven, Ben said. At the summit we sat marveling at the long East Ridge and the view and the stillness and Ben chipped small flecks of summit ice into a blue Nalgene cap.

– We're not the first to climb up here hung over, he said, tipping a small flask into the cap.

– Who had that honour?

– Whom. He corrected, raising a toast. Why it was Scott Shawn LeRoques.

He spread his arms out, grinning deep. – If we're not makin' war, we're findin' peace.

Home, bone tired, burnt, collapsed in bed. Like a disorienting dream of swirling blending colour, before I had a chance to really sleep I was up, trying to stretch and wake up behind the concierge desk of the grand hotel.

In the bustle of the late season crowds, I could see the sunlight and beautiful weather holding. The tourists were impatient, as ever, but smiling at their luck to have caught what they were told was an unusual autumn. Beside my desk, an Interpreter was giving a tour of the hotel, standing beside a display of stuffed animals and trees and cliffs and glaciers. A miniature slice in time.

These days the questions were all about global warming.

– Is it true that the glaciers will all be gone in 50 years?

My desk phone rang, one of a hundred calls that morning.

– Hugo Cendit?

I knew the voice but it took me a second to say it aloud in my head to understand the question. I shook my head, hung up. Feeling sick.

I rubbed my face. I needed work. I was overhearing the jokes people made about my priorities in the staff café. I had never been so truant before. I was a hard worker. I was dependable.

An hour later the doorman walked up with a note in his white gloved hand. A check-in card. He waved back at a rusted Oldsmobile under the marquee, as if disgusted that it might scare away the newer sports rentals. His look said – take care of it, fast.

I saw the sun heliographing off the front windshield, still dirty from our jaunt up the parkway.

Inside, three men, dark glasses, looking at me.

I knew what was in the trunk, I knew what would be on their feet. Light summer shirts over micro-mesh, all a disguise.

– Bryce's Suite, the card said. I looked down at the guest names.

Sadie Worts and Shane Joproffeson, it read.

The boys were really working hard for this one.

Mt. Bryce. The triple crowned monarch on the far side of the Columbia icefield that was rarely climbed. Yes, that would be sweet. The clock on my computer screen ticked away. Even when I slept, it ticked away. I thought of the glaciers.

I pulled my bundle of keys from my pocket and handed them to my shift mate.

- Say, Enora? I said.