

snow

The snow fell softly that morning. Isaiah looked out at the world and felt as though he were trapped inside a snowglobe. He lay in his bed which was positioned cosily against a wall with a large square window. Well, it wasn't really his bed anymore. He had found himself back in his childhood bedroom at his parent's house. The room had served as a guest room for the past twelve years since he'd left the community college. It still felt like his room though somehow, despite the eucalyptus his mother had tucked into vases on the bookshelf. His posters were gone but his drum set was still present, he wondered when the last time was that someone had actually played them.

He turned his eyes away from the contents of the bedroom and instead moved his gaze out the window again. His parents lived in Vermont. The backyard went forever. Everything was covered in a fine white sheet and was at that point of delicacy, where snow was still perfect and pristine. It hadn't been touched or tampered by footsteps and sleds. He just lay there, wrapped in a flannel blanket and stared at the snow.

A light wind seemed to move across the yard, for a swirl of snow moved and danced suddenly. He felt certain something had moved, like a tail. He sat up a little higher on the bed and looked more closely. There were two tall trees in the distance, sugar maples. He looked intently upon them for that was where he had seen the strange flicker. He scanned the premises for some sign, taking in the large logs that encircled the bonfire spot and the old shed where his brothers had once trapped him. Whatever he had seen was gone now. The scent of bacon suddenly hit his nose. He decided it was time to get out of bed.

He came down stairs with rumpled hair and sleep still stuck to his eyelids, his old grey tee that bore the inscription "Hanks Filling Station" hanging loosely from his pajama pants.

He found his mother as he had come to find her most of his life, her head bent over something she was writing. It was funny now for him to muse on the evolution of the mediums she chose. When he was really little, she had hung her head over the typewriter for hours upon end, pencils stuck in her messy bun. She had moved to a large notebook at some point, but here she was now, working on a tablet. He could even recall a point in time when she had worked in a local diner slinging coffees and eggs at all the regulars and how she had scribbled hurried notes down on her guest check pads throughout her shift. He remembered finding check after check with her notes and once she got published, his father had put them all away into a shoebox.

Isaiah wasn't sure what had ever happened to that shoebox.

His mother was passionate. She sometimes had gotten so lost in her work that she would forget she was cooking or even to make the kids breakfast. Isaiah and his brothers had learned how to cook pretty early. They got tired of waiting for burnt toast. With this in mind, Isaiah decided to check on the bacon. So far, so good.

Isaiah reached for a mug from the cabinet and poured himself some coffee.

He walked over to the large wood table where his mother sat.

"Morning, Mom," he said and he squeezed her shoulder.

"Isaiah!" she proclaimed suddenly, smiling and turning to her son. "Oh honey, its so lovely to have you here in the morning."

Isaiah smiled at her and took a seat at the table where he had eaten countless meals over the course of his lifetime. He ran a hand through his thick, curly hair. It was, in all honesty, nice to be there, however humbling it was simultaneously.

His mother looked at him and smiled again, a sympathetic smile as if she knew what was going through his brain. He smiled back, but he knew his smile was sad.

"It's fine, dear," she started to say. She opened her mouth to say more but Isaiah interjected.

"Mom, I don't want to talk about it." he took a sip of coffee and he looked her in the eyes but then he looked away.

She smiled again, the same sympathetic smile that carried its own touch of sadness.

Neither of them said anything for a long while. Isaiah picked up the newspaper from the floor and opened it to the sports section but he couldn't concentrate. Once the bacon was done, his mother got up and picked up a pair of tongs. She used them to grasp the meaty strips and splayed them on a ceramic plate she pulled from the cabinet. The plate was Mexican blue with little flowers inscribed upon it.

Isaiah thought of a myriad of topics to bring up. Football, flu season, what story she was currently working on, how was Dad's asthma, had she talked to Ben or David. But no words came forth. He walked restlessly into the living room.

The room was just almost exactly as he'd left it, the large leather brown sofa before the fireplace, the coffee table his dad had made. The floor was a dark cherry wood with a large white rug upon it. His mom had been so happy that she could actually keep the rug white since it was just her and Isaiah's father living in the house now. He walked over to the fireplace which was asleep now, dead embers on the hearth. It had been blazing last night when he'd arrived at the house. It had been much a different scene then. His mother had already gone to bed and it was his father whom he'd encountered.

His father had his leg up on the coffeetable and was seated in the sofa, a thick knit grey sweater wrapped around him. His silver hair accentuated the sweater's metallic hue and the firelight danced across his dark eyes. He hadn't been watching television or reading a book or even looking at a phone. He was simply staring into the fire.

Isaiah had felt twelve years old again as he stood on the threshold of the living room, seeking his father's approval or some solace in his presence. He received none. His father's eyes had met his.

"Dad, I--"

"it's late, son," came the deep baritone reply.

He didn't know how his father did it. Isaiah was a thirty four year old man but standing before his father, he was a boy.

"Okay, well, goodnight," he turned to leave but sent one last long look in his father's direction. His father's gaze stayed fixed upon the fire. He seemed larger than ever, like a lion. He sat still in the darkness, regal at the same time, not flinching. Isaiah noticed how the shadows of the fire danced upon his skin and how they seemed so real and how his father seemed so familiar with flames.

He stood now beside the empty fireplace and began to examine the pictures on the mantel. There were pictures from Ben's wedding and pictures from Isaiah's own wedding too. He was surprised his mother hadn't taken that one down. Isaiah didn't want to look at it but he couldn't help himself.

There she stood, her white gown falling from her body like ocean waves, her golden hair in perfect ribbons. Her smile was as wide as ever and Isaiah felt something happening inside his body as he stared at the strange memory trapped in glass. He picked it up now, held it in his hands, traced his fingers along the frame.

A thousand electric jolts erupted inside him at once. He could see her now, so beautiful and fine, atop him, writhing in the night. He could see her misty eyes collecting with tears.

He could feel her fragility erupting from beneath his fingers.

"I love you," she had whispered to him, "I fucking love you. Don't ever leave me."

"I wont . i wont. i wont," he said the words in ragged breaths, tears in his own eyes now. This is what it was like to love another person.

"I think about you all the time, baby," she had said, her hair had fallen upon him so that maybe it was his own hair, he wasn't sure. He had tugged one strand, "When do you think about me?" he had asked in a whisper.

"All the time, all the time, all the time," her voice was interlaced with thick sobs, something coming from deep in her being. "Every night before I go to sleep."

He heard the words now, he heard them so sharp, so close, and the sadness welled up within him from some deep cavern. He couldn't look at the picture anymore. He couldn't look at her. He couldn't look at what he had done, what he had broken, what he had destroyed. He could hear her tears

in his ears, he could hear her orgasm, he could feel her sweat or was it his sweat?

He could remember driving together in the car, the sunlight breaking through the dawn. In the mountains, she had sat in the driver's seat, she had liked to drive. She had grabbed his hand. He could see her hand now, so small, so delicate, so fine.

He would never hold that hand again.

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He put the picture down. He saw another picture, this one was of him and his brothers. There he was in the middle, the chubby one with the curly hair. Ben stood beside him on the left, the oldest, the model husband and father. And David, the young, cocky daredevil with the perfect face. The picture eyeballed him, sized him up for a moment and then said loudly, "YOU ARE A FUCK UP."

He slammed the picture down. He slammed the other one down too from his wedding. He heard glass break.

He decided to go outside.

He found a coat in his mother's mudroom and went out into the yard. Sobs gripped him tightly still and ran through his body like blood in a tube. Maybe the sadness was the only thing keeping him going now, maybe he had made it his new addiction. But what an awful bitch of an addiction because even the high was cruel and cold and cut like a sharp knife.

He started to walk, unsure really of where he was going. He found himself before the sugar maples, his face red and wet with tears, his breath exploding before him in short bursts like exhaust from an old car.

And then he saw it again, the flick of a tail. Something white and shimmery off in the distance.

He decided to follow it, walking steadily through the falling snow. It moved quickly up ahead of him. He could see it had left prints in the snow. He didn't want to run and scare it off but he wanted to keep up. He moved faster. The creature had frisked its way through a small group of white fir trees, their slender cones gleaming with snow.

He stopped suddenly for the creature had stopped. It stood in the center of the small tree grove now, standing about four feet from Isaiah. It was the strangest thing Isaiah had ever seen. It had a small body like a fox, but with a slender tail and its ears were small and pointed like that of a cat. It had pure white fur that seemed to glisten and sparkle and atop its head was a unicorn horn.

The creature's head was turned to the side as it appeared to be licking itself. That was when Isaiah noticed blood spots in the snow, he didn't

know how he had missed them before. He crouched down low and the creature seemed to note his movement as it quickly turned its head back in his direction.

The eyes of the creature were like two perfect violet teardrops, they weren't over large. They were the shape of exquisite jewels, not too big nor too small. It was the shape of the eyes that was so intriguing, they were almost almond but with a full roundness. The look in the eyes took Isaiah someplace else and when he stared into them, he saw other realms and at the same time, he saw moments of his life.

The strangest memories floated over him now. He remembered grade school and lunches with his mom at the museum. He could see his red Converse high tops, he could smell the canvas, he could see his mother's leftover mashed potatoes in his lunch, he could taste them on his tongue, butter and garlic and salt assailing his tastebuds.

He could remember high school and his brother excelling in class and himself discovering music and being in a band and then, he had discovered his first love, drugs.

He took a deep breath. He wanted to close his eyes but the creature's violet eyes stayed steady upon him, forcing him to see. He wanted to look away, the creature did not move nearer. It stayed planted with its miniature hoofs in the snow, a demand in its eyes that Isaiah could not deny.

And he remembered that day suddenly, the day he had chosen to get high instead of coming home. He remembered being in a bar with some friends from work, a girl dancing on a table and then doing lines in the bathroom. He could see the dingy apartment he had wound up in that night because he didn't want the party to stop. Eight years clean and sober. Bob Seger had played on the girl's record player. The rest of the night was strange and blurry, or perhaps he just didn't want to remember every detail.

He had chosen to drive that night. He had hit a pedestrian that night.

The girl had been okay after a brief hospital visit. But he could still hear Frankie's screams echoing in his brain. "I'M PREGNANT WITH YOUR SON! I'M PREGNANT WITH YOUR SON! YOU FUCKING ASSHOLE!"

He could still feel what it had been like to be in jail.

He broke out of his trance, the snow continued to fall softly. His eyes landed upon the trail of red blood in the white earth. The creature gave him a long look and then suddenly disappeared