

White Christmas

I suppose I have no real way of knowing when the first time was. It started slowly. Slow enough that I only realized what was happening once I was already up the river without a paddle. My tolerance for accepting weird shit, what is or isn't 'ordinary', is a bit higher than most. Maybe I just didn't want to notice what was happening around me, maybe I never would have noticed until it became personally inconvenient.

The first time, or the first time I remember, the snow being like... well, *that*, was in mid November.

We'd had an early snowfall. Not the first of the year, but early enough to take notice. The street was covered two feet deep. That wonderful sort of snow where it feels like you're the only one left alive in the world. Quiet. Pristine.

You get that right? The muted feeling of snow stretching out in every direction, sticking to the houses and the trees. There's a blankness to it, like someone came around and painted over all the dirt and garbage. Uniform, colorless and smooth.

Well, I *think* that was the first time. At any rate, it happened again the week after, and I remember thinking how strange it was to get this much snow so early in the year.

I usually get home late. My job, my past three jobs actually, had me working second shift or later, and honestly, I enjoy being out after dark. There's a bus by my house that runs almost all night, and I like it better than crowding into a rush hour bus and fighting traffic all the way home. I don't really get to go out with friends, unless I make a point of it, but that's fine. It's always suited me just fine.

It got a little weird the first time it happened *without* a heavy snowfall. That's when I should have started caring, should have worried.

I turned onto my street from the sidewalk and there was just... pristine white stretching down the block. I rent a little place out in the burbs, too close to the highway and too far from anything else to be as overpriced as the rest of the city. Not busy, per-say, but not dead either.

The street I'd just come from had been speckled with snow, sure. Grey slush left over from last week, and a new thin layer of white not quite capable of covering the overgrown patch of grass between the road and the sidewalk.

But on my street it was gorgeous, sparkling. Dimly lit street lamps against a murky, light polluted sky. Grey on grey, but so damn peaceful.

I noticed that time, maybe because I was already a little surprised, a little wary, that all the lights were out in every house.

Every single one. It was an impossibility, of course. My first thought was that the power had gone out, but all the street lights were still on. There were no footprints and no tire tracks, but

that was normal enough. The snow had just disappeared any evidence of people passing quicker than any new pedestrians could come along. No sign of anyone else, it was all painted over in beautiful lonely white.

I didn't care honestly, or I made myself try very hard not to care. I only really pass five or six houses on my way down the street as it is. A lot of them are split levels, more than one family per-place just like mine, but it wasn't all that strange that no one was home right now, or at least not awake. It was late after all. Or maybe it was a power outage and the street lights were just running on a different system? Damned if I knew for *sure* how it worked.

Of course it wasn't the power. I still had power when I got inside and checked my own hallway light, but by then I was already forgetting about it. I think I just wanted it to be fine.

The next time it happened I couldn't ignore it.

This time there wasn't even the pretense of snow on the streets other than my own. All the lights were out, every house was quiet. I went up to one of the windows just to make sure the lights were really off, propriety be damned. They weren't just dimmed, or the neighbors weren't just in for the evening watching their TVs with the lights turned way down. I went to one window, then a second and a third, and I didn't see anyone.

It was really just, like that. A silent world, and I was it's only inhabitant. I won't pretend I wasn't a little scared, or that I didn't run home to make sure my roommate was still around. She was, and when I looked back outside all the houses had their lights on. Though the snow was still there.

It was snowing properly now, on both the main street, and on the side-street I live on. It had started to cover the main thoroughfare when I went back outside to check. Of course it was, our street wasn't some weird anomaly. I had no proof that anything was wrong.

It stuck in my head though, whether I had tangible proof or not, and the next time it happened I didn't go home right away. I knew there was something messed up about what was happening, but I still thought it was beautiful. I wanted to keep it for myself. Silent. Empty. Mine.

I had no idea what 'it' was, but it kept happening.

I didn't tell another soul. Just enjoyed this lonely little communion whenever it happened. I relished the chance to be alone for even just a few minutes of the day. A few minutes turned into a few hours after the fifth or sixth time it happened. I got more comfortable staying out there every time.

It was December 22 the first time I saw footprints.

They were animal footprints, less alarming then human footprints might have been. I spent a few nights following them after that, but I never found anything. I had never seen anything, animal or otherwise, in there with me. It made me paranoid, but I had almost managed to accepted it, a quirk of this already impossible pocket of space time, when I found the little guy.

I'm going to call it a... creature. Because, to this day, I'm not really sure what it was. When I first saw it, I thought it was a rabbit. A bundle of dark brown fur that was sitting in the iced over bushes.

On closer inspection I could have told you it wasn't a rabbit. My next thought had been a reptile of some sort. The fur should have made it impossible, but there was something about the shape of its legs and feet, the way it was crouched. When I got closer I could see it was visibly trembling.

I was terrified, of course. I had accepted that this place was supernatural, but it had been a safe haven for me so far, a miracle. I say that like it hadn't only started a month and change ago. I don't know why I warmed up to it so quickly. Maybe it warmed up to me.

I left immediately the first time I encountered the creature. By then I knew that going home would end the... Well, whatever it was.

When I saw it a second time I was more curious. Wary, sure, but still curious. I went right up to it.

It was rounder, and more featureless than I had thought it was. It was huddled in the bush again. I circled all the way around it, but it looked the same from all sides. I was almost relieved I couldn't see a face on the thing. I didn't know that I'd want to see one, didn't like the way its little body inflated with a shudder and a strain whenever it inhaled. I hurried home again.

From then on I tried to ignore it. Leave the creature be, whenever I found myself alone on the snowy street. I started going there in my dreams. I'm still not convinced that that part wasn't anything more than a genuine, normal dream, but it had felt real.

It started keeping me there not long after that. It was alarming, and before long I started looking for another route home to avoid that street altogether. It seems silly now. I suppose most people would have started avoiding it much sooner than I did, or at least told someone else about it, but I had enjoyed the solitude, once. It made me feel special.

When it would trap me there, it mostly tried keeping me away from my own door. I could get right up to the door, but it would be locked. My key would be on the road a little ways back, or it made it so that my key wouldn't work at all until it was ready to let me leave. One time near the end, I even tried to break into my own window to no avail. Maybe it's just harder to break a window than I thought it would be, but I couldn't force the window open or break through it.

When I tried to leave by heading far enough away in either direction I'd find myself looping back to the opposite end of the street.

There was one time that I didn't loop; instead I found myself on a sheer white plane. The horizon was a distant curve, and I couldn't hear my footsteps anymore. I freaked out and turned back towards the street which was, mercifully, still there. When I looked back at where the white plane was, it was normal again. Just the other end of the street, covered in snow. I didn't try to leave very much after that.

The other houses were just like mine, I couldn't find any way into them no matter what I tried, I was trapped out in the cold. Eventually my own door would start working again, at increasingly longer intervals each time, and I'd be allowed to go inside.

It wasn't until late February that it got to a tipping point. I wonder what would have happened if I'd just left well enough alone. When the snow melted in spring, would my nightly wanderings

into that place have stopped? I doubt it, honestly. After all, it had already shown that it could suck me in on snow-less days without needing the outside world to reflect its state of being.

The time that I was trapped there was getting longer every time. When it allowed me to leave, I always found that no more time had passed than was appropriate for a walk from the bus stop to my house, but obviously it was still a very... stressful experience.

That night, I'd had enough. I tried yelling at it, pounding on my own windows, demanding to be let go. I knew there was a shovel in my neighbors driveway, leaning against their garage. There was always a shovel in that same spot on the street, even if it wasn't there in my normal world. As I crossed their yard to grab it to use against the windows, I kicked up a bit of snow, and the snow landed in soft puffs on that furry brown thing.

I realized what had happened nearly as soon as I'd done it, but nothing changed for a second. I thought, maybe, that nothing had happened at all, and I'd just started to allow myself to come down from the adrenaline high when it began.

The creature started to hum. It vibrated the snow all around it. I could feel a fierce cold coming off of it and jumped back. The snow swirled around it. It wasn't doing anything else, just humming. But the circle of swirling snow was growing, and I found myself moving backwards away from the vortex. I fell over, hands first into the bushes that lined the wall beneath my neighbor's windows.

I passed through the plants like they were dust. They crumbled into snow with the slightest pressure. Dark green powder mixed with the white, as they fell apart and blew away across the snow drifts.

This shocked me even more than the vortex, and I scrambled away from them. My hand connected with the wooden divider between the lawn and the garden and it crumbled as well. I got back up to my feet, and found myself sinking deeper into the snow on the lawn. Deeper than should have been possible.

Panic rising, I waded through the knee deep snow to the road. It was stable there, thankfully, but slippery. I lost my balance and reached for a dark blue truck parked on the side of the road out of instinct. The powdery side of the truck slid away from the rest of the vehicle, and I hit the road hard.

There was something visible holding up the structure of the truck, beneath the top layer of snow, and the second layer of blue. As I'd fallen, my hand had connected with something cold and solid, what I'd assumed to be ice. I swept more of the powder away.

Beneath the snow was a solid translucent surface. I might have still called it ice if not for the color, and how it acted. It wasn't wet, it took none of my own body heat, it didn't melt, or change in any way. It just stayed one solid immovable surface, and inside it were swirling clouds of deep mud red. Not like blood, like rust.

The street lights shone through it, and as I moved away from it on my hands and knees, more snow fell away. It painted the usually static grey of the street a soft orange red. The snow began to slide away from other large objects, then the street itself, until more and more of the glassy surface was exposed, and the world was practically glowing.

And then I was home. In front of my door, standing in the hallway with my feet dripping melting snow onto the door mat. The door was open and on instinct I locked it behind me.

After that day I tried to find help. Psychiatric support yes, but honestly, I don't hold out much hope for that avenue. I've started getting in touch with anyone and everyone I can who claims to have had an experience with the occult or the strange. I'd say that they were a bunch of juvenile crackpots, that I've found no leads and only crazy stories, except, I'm completely aware that most of them would say the same about me.

I worry for myself now. For my safety, or maybe for my sanity? I refuse to walk alone anymore, whenever I can, at least. It's a nuisance, and I really hate making a burden out of myself. I hate imposing on my roommate, or one of the few friends I have, but for now it's better than walking home alone.

I haven't been back to the quiet street since that day, and it's starting to warm up now, but I worry. The other day, as I was heading home, I saw dark fur peeking out from under the newly green bushes of my neighbors garden.