

Wilderness House Literary Review 6/1

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Snow

The snow started late Friday afternoon and everyone struggled driving home. Cars moved funereally up the cul-de-sac, turning into driveways, into garage doors opening like mouths. It snowed through the night while the people slept and they woke to ten inches and it was still coming down, drifting and swirling now, up against the north sides of the houses and the fences and you could only see the smoke coming from the chimneys and the muffled, jaundiced light from the windows. Nobody emerged, no garage doors opened, even the children stayed inside and oh the novelty of it, everyone had prepared and bought treats and snacks and brought home stacks of DVDs from the video store and stayed in their pajamas and played board games and the parents said isn't this great, we're spending time together as a family. Patio tables resembled huge, frosted layer cakes and second story windows were blocked from the snow on the roof. Finally on Sunday just before dusk, the snow stopped and the sun shone a weary, sputtery light on the horizon and the people started to come out of their houses, thickly bundled, with their shovels and their snow blowers. They waved to each other from across the cul-de-sac and called, isn't this something? But it's good exercise! And the driveways and the sidewalks were cleared and in the morning the snowplow cleared the roads and every cul-de-sac then had its own private mountain and the children climbed it and tunneled through it and slid down it and they made forts and pummeled each other with snowballs and the brilliant sun shone strong and the people marveled at the pristine beauty of it all, of white snow against a blue china plate sky and then come Friday the clouds rolled in the forecasters broadly smiling said more was on the way and by Friday afternoon it was coming down hard, again, and the people shook their heads in line at the grocery store and at the liquor store and said things like, here we go again! And laughed as they walked away with bottles of wine and expensive liqueurs to warm the blood. Must stock up on essentials, they said. And by ten o'clock the Patterson's front door was completely blocked. Jenny Patterson phoned her neighbor across the cul-de-sac. Look out your window, she said. Can you believe this? They laughed and talked about what they were going to eat and drink that night, trading recipes. Saturday it was still snowing and the children who had siblings were fighting and the children without siblings were crabby from having no one to play with, so the parents bundled their children and told them to go outside, but stay close to the house. All the snowmen now had large, erect penises and rictus smiles on their faces. The snow was drifting as high as ten feet in some places and those who emerged to shovel only nodded to each other grimly through their balaclavas. Margaret Grayson was standing at her kitchen sink when she heard a muffled noise and looked out the window and saw her son Josh up to his neck in snow and screaming. She could not get the window open to yell out to him but sent her older son out to rescue Josh. The older son dragged a toboggan up the snowdrift, the snow coming to above his knees, lifting a leg and plunking it down, lifting plunking doggedly as Josh continued to scream and cry. The older brother stopped and buried his hands into the snow and under Josh's armpits and pulled him straight up and out of the snowdrift. One of Josh's boots came off in the snow, the

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brother couldn't retrieve it. He put Josh on the toboggan and pulled him by its rope down the snowdrift and back around to the front of the house. The weather repeated itself the next weekend and the weekend after that. The parents laughed and poured amber liqueur into their snifters. Let's invite the neighbors, let's feast against the winter and so they put twelve year old Annelise in charge of all the kids. The neighbors came over on snowshoes with poles in their hands and their children strapped to their backs. Inside, they shed their gear and sent all the children to the basement with Annelise, who had never been in charge of anyone besides her little brother, Cal, before. All twelve children sent to the basement and the music was turned up loud and the adults did shots and cursed the snow and Bill Watley pissed out the back door, watching to see if his yellow stream would harden into ice in mid-air. It did not. 33The snow covered the windows and blocked the front door and the adults laughed and danced and paired off while Annelise corralled the children and the babies and the toddlers in the basement. She made them all watch "Oceans Eleven", even the baby, propped up with pillows, and crept upstairs and stole a bottle of spiced rum and took it back down and sat in the flickering light of the big screen and took little sips every time one of the children whined and little Logan crawled on top of her when she passed out and stuck her finger in Annelise's nose and the snow continued to fall for days and they all stayed in the same house. The couples paired and re-paired and the children came up and raided the cupboards and the fridge and ate standing up, at a loss, and after awhile the snowplows didn't bother to come and the newspapers stopped the presses and the mail ceased and the cold moon rose over the wide expanse of frozen, crusted snow every night until seven months later when it had finally melted off, and the light-up Christmas deer and the light-up Christmas angels emerged whole and undamaged and Josh Grayson's boot lay on the cool, frightened grass but nobody looked for it and nobody cared.