

Snow

Fiction • Maddie De Pree

On the third night of the snowstorm, I took Flem's hi-fi speaker and started playing "Midnight, The Stars, and You" from *The Shining* soundtrack. Then I cracked the door to our room just enough for some music to leak into the hallway, in hopes that someone in the dorm would go insane and hack me to pieces. I had been playing the song on repeat for thirty minutes straight.

I looked over at Flem, who was still icing his balls. We had gone outside earlier that day to have a snowball fight, which I had ruined by accidentally nailing him right in the nuts with an especially tightly-packed snowball. He hadn't believed me when I said it was an accident, so he'd hobbled back inside and spent the rest of the day naked in his bed, surrounded in a nest of blankets, with one of those beady blue ice packs draped over his crotch. He was a melodramatic person.

It had been a bad week. We were supposed to be on winter break, but the storm was so bad that it had ruined everyone's travel plans. No flights were going in or out, and the roads were too bad to even drive to the corner store. Everyone had been marooned on campus for days, and it was looking like we would be stuck there through Christmas. I thought this was hilarious, mostly because everyone was so upset, but also because I hadn't wanted to go home anyway. I liked being on campus when there was nothing to do.

Flem and I had been random roommates during our

freshman year, and we had decided to live together again as sophomores. Aside from the incident with his balls, we got along. We watched the same shows, and we went to bed late, and we understood that nobody particularly liked or disliked us. If anyone ever interacted with one of us, it was usually because they had mistaken me for Flem, or vice-versa. We didn't actually look alike. We were both just skinny and pale.

The song had started itself over again. I tried to catch Flem's eye, but he had his headphones on and wouldn't look at me. I couldn't tell if he was actually injured or just pretending. I walked over to the speakers and turned up the volume. Flem glared at me, then went back to staring at his laptop.

A moment later, a girl appeared outside of our cracked door. I walked to the doorway and looked at her. She was short and white and had a perfectly circular face, so circular that I was almost disturbed. To be perfectly frank, she reminded me of something that really ought to live in the water. I had never seen a person look so much like a walking fish.

"Hey," I said.

"Hi," said fish-girl. She put her hands on her hips and tried to peer into our room. "Do you live in there?"

"Yes," I said. I shifted to block Flem's naked body from view.

"Right," said the girl. She pointed in the direction of the music. "Can you turn that down? Some of the residents said they're creeped out."

"No kidding," I said. I looked over my shoulder at Flem's speaker, which had just reached the chorus. "I was going for an Overlook vibe."

She blinked at me.

"I don't know what Overlook is," she said. "Can you turn it down?"

"Who are you, again?"

"I'm your RA," she said.

"Oh," I said. I had never seen her before. "Sorry. I don't have my contacts in."

"He's a liar," Flem called from his nest. "He doesn't wear contacts."

The RA poked her head around my side to see who was talking. Flem tried to whip one of his blankets over his exposed body, but he was too slow—the RA got a full-frontal view of him and leapt backwards, her hands clapped over her face. Both of them screamed.

"God!" yelled the RA. I was laughing. She uncovered her bulging eyes and glared at me. She looked like she was on the verge of tears. "You guys aren't funny, you know. Some people actually want to go home."

"Wow," I said. Now Flem was laughing too.

"I'm leaving," fish-girl said. "Just—turn down your stupid song."

She looked me up and down, then shook her head. The music was still playing.

“Assholes,” she added. Then she left.

I cut the music and I asked Flem what we should play next, but he had remembered his damaged balls and was ignoring me again. I paced around the room a bit and wondered what fish-girl was doing. I decided that she was probably crying. I tried to make myself cry just for something to do, but nothing happened, so I gave up. I hoisted myself onto my bed and stared at Flem.

“Flem,” I said.

He fiddled with his headphones and pretended not to hear me.

“Flem,” I repeated. No reply.

“I think I’m gay,” I said.

I didn’t actually think this. I just wanted to annoy him. Flem looked up at me and narrowed his eyes. Outside, snow was falling.

“Congratulations,” he said.

“Thanks,” I said. Then I hopped off of my bed and started pulling on my snow boots.

This got his attention. He slid off his headphones and propped himself up against his blankets.

“Where are you going?” he asked. His ice pack was slipping off of his crotch. I winced.

“Cover yourself,” I said. “I’m going to a party.”

“With who?”

“With friends,” I said.

“You don’t have any friends,” said Flem.

I couldn’t think of anything to say to that, so I pulled on my coat, gloves, and hat and saluted him.

“Hope your balls get better soon,” I said. Then I left.

I walked downstairs to the dorm’s exit and pushed open the door with one hand. The frozen air flooded in and hit me like a wall. I braced myself against it, then walked outside and looked around. Everything was white and still. Had there been any noise, the snow would’ve absorbed it and turned it to nothing. But the dorms were dead, and the whole courtyard was silent. It was just after midnight. Everyone was inside, sleeping. I pulled my hat down over my ears and headed toward the upperclassmen apartments. I had never been to any parties on campus, so I wasn’t sure how they worked. I figured I would just walk around until I found something.

The snow was falling faster now. The walk across campus was longer than

I had remembered, and my hands were getting cold. I considered turning back, but the thought of hanging out with Flem and his ice pack for the rest of the night was too unappealing. I was about to give up when I heard some music pulsing behind the door of a ground-floor apartment. I tried the handle—unlocked—and walked in. The door swung shut behind me.

There were only about ten people total inside. A few were playing beer pong on the kitchen counter, and another two were crammed into an armchair. Five or so people were sitting on the couches, which had been pushed together into an L shape. Some of them were passing around a cereal bowl filled with different colored pills.

As I stood near the door, someone extracted himself from the armchair and lurched over to me. He had a scented trash bag draped over his shoulders.

“Welcome,” he slurred. “What’s your name?”

“Elvis,” I lied. “Are you the host?”

“Host’s over there,” he said, and pointed at nothing.

“Thanks,” I said.

There were some liquors sitting on the counter, so I mixed three of them together and drank it. It tasted like hell. I finished it, then poured myself another. The beer pong players had given up on their game and decided to occupy themselves with the music. They couldn’t seem to decide on a song—every ten seconds, one of them would grab the phone and switch to a new one, which was supremely annoying. I sipped my drink and looked around. No one else seemed bothered.

I was thinking of leaving when someone else walked up to me. He was swilling something out of an empty Head and Shoulders bottle.

“I see you found the drinks,” he said. He shot a look at my cup, which was giving off fumes. “You a freshman?”

“I don’t go here,” I said.

“Cool,” he said. He reeked of vodka and dip. Other than me, Head and Shoulders was the most sober person there. “I’ll give you the tour.”

He showed me the porch, then the living room, then the fridge, then the living room again. I poured myself another drink. At the end of his tour, he took a swig from his Head and Shoulders bottle and pointed at the bowl of pills, which was nestled between two people on the couch.

“It’s twenty bucks for a handful,” he said.

“Very reasonable,” I said, nodding. This could have been a ripoff, or it could’ve been a great deal. I wouldn’t have known.

“That’s pretty much it,” he said. “I think there’s some coke in the bathroom. You’ll probably have to, like, Venmo somebody, though. I don’t know. It’s not mine.”

I didn't particularly want to do cocaine, so I thanked him and joined the people on the couches. Someone passed me the bowl of pills. I finished my drink, then looked at the people on either side of me. The one on the right was asleep. I turned to the girl on my left.

"Who do I pay?" I asked. I could feel the liquor hitting. She yawned.

"Doesn't matter," she said.

I shrugged, then dumped some pills into my mouth and swallowed them with someone else's drink. Then I leaned into the cushions and watched people. They all looked half-awake. Some minutes went by. I scooped up another handful of pills and stuffed them into my pocket. Every thirty seconds, a stubby blonde girl wandered into the middle of the living room and demanded that someone take a shot off of her navel; her friends, for some reason, emphatically refused. After about five minutes of this, I stood up and told her I would do it. This excited everyone, and the Head and Shoulders guy helped her stretch out on the kitchen counter so I could take the shot. Then he handed me a bottle of vodka and stepped away.

As soon as the girl hiked up her shirt, I saw why no one else had volunteered: she had the most massive outie belly button that I had ever seen. It was nearly two inches in diameter, and stuck outward by nearly an inch. I looked up and saw that the whole room had gathered around us. Head and Shoulders shook his head at me, grim. I looked back down at the belly button. It was so protrusive that any alcohol would dribble right off the sides. It wasn't physically possible for it to hold a shot.

Outie girl was giggling. She seemed blissfully unaware of the tension brewing around her. I stood there, thinking. After almost a minute, I poured some alcohol onto the outie and placed my mouth on it. Everyone threw their hands in the air and cheered.

I regretted it almost instantly. As soon my lips touched the girl's belly button, I had a terrible feeling that it would come unknotted like the end of a balloon and release all of her insides into my mouth, and the possibility of this suddenly seemed so imminent and real that I backed away in horror and puked up everything all over the carpet. The cheering stopped.

I straightened, wiped my mouth, and looked around at everyone. For a moment, it was quiet. I glanced at the floor. I could see some of the pills floating in my puke like little islands. Then they all started cheering again, and the outie girl slid off the counter and kissed me on the cheek, and I thought that I might die, or that maybe I had died, and maybe this was hell.

Eventually the cheering died down, and everyone retreated to their spots on the couch or on the floor. I had gotten some puke on myself, so I walked into the bathroom to clean up. Some guy was standing in front of the sink. I

nudged him to the side and splashed some water onto my face, which sobered me up a bit. I patted my face dry on my t-shirt and watched the guy for a while. He was good-looking in a boring sort of way, with dark brown hair and a gray sweater. I hadn't seen him in the main room. He had probably been in here the whole time. He kept stroking his own reflection and sighing in frustration, as if unable to tell if the surface of the mirror was liquid or solid.

After a moment, I tapped him on the shoulder.

"I think I'm gay," I said. I don't know why I kept telling people this. I think I just wanted something to say. He pulled away from the mirror and regarded me with blurry eyes.

"Gross," he said.

Then we made out. It was unpleasant. He was a bad kisser, but I didn't know how to tell him this, so I just carried on and hoped that he would get bored before anything serious happened. After about ten minutes, he started to paw at my belt, so I sprinted out of the bathroom, grabbed my coat, and fled from the apartment. For some reason, everyone was clapping.

The snow had finally stopped. I looked up and saw some stars peeking through the clouds. Then I remembered the pills in my pocket and swallowed down the rest of them with a handful of snow.

Flem was asleep when I got back, so I flicked on all the lights and threw myself onto my bed.

"Flem," I howled.

Flem covered his head with a pillow and groaned. I laid down and watched the room spin. Everything looked pink. The walls were trying to bend around me.

"I am not doing so well," I said.

"Turn off the lights," Flem groaned. His voice was muffled beneath his pillow.

I obliged. I wanted to sleep, but I knew I wouldn't be able to, so I laid in the dark and thought about emailing my professors to let them know that I had died. I could hear Flem being awake. My heart was moving around in my chest.

"Flem," I said.

My face was wet. I heard him roll over.

"What," he said.

"I had a dream once where you were the only person in the world," I said. I was crying. "Everyone else was gone. Even me."

"That doesn't make any sense," Flem said. "You can't have a dream without you in it."

"But I did," I sobbed. "I really did."

Flem paused. I could feel him looking at me in the dark.

"Tell me about it tomorrow," he said. "I don't want to know about it now."

Then he rolled back toward the wall. I pulled my sheet over my face and slept.