

WT. "Homecoming"

Daniel Chervoniuk

I was stripped naked, standing underneath the arch facing Station Square, facing the dead. To my back was Forest Hills - paradise weather and the gang of adults.

"Tell us who told you about the climate here. Give us a facial description, clothes they were wearing, and a name if you have it. Promise, after you do tell, that you'll abide by the rules of our community - which exists only to ensure our protection - and to immediately start contributing to our gene pool. In exchange, you will be a valued member of Forest Hills, living in sunlight, basking in the warm glows of the day-to-day, and enjoying your life again."

"Or, walk out. Alone and naked, and die on the bricks."

This morning, I woke up in a queen's size bed. I slept sparingly, visiting my wife in my dreams. She was still with me in them, sleeping next to me - a deep breath, in and out, mouth slightly open. Not frozen to death yet.

My newspaper assigned me to write a temperate analysis on the recent weather changes in the city, with interviews to boot.

List of Winter apparels used for assignment January 21st, from top to bottom:

"Trapper" hat, knit insulated ski mask, fleece neck scarf, white compression long-sleeve shirt, wool sweater (festive), hybrid down coat, thermo waterproof gloves, wool mittens, compression leggings, sweat pants, insulated snow pants with belt, high socks, heavyweight synthetic wool socks, traction speed-laced snow boots.

I like my job, I like my job, I like my job, I like my job, I like my job...

My first subject was fixed to the ground. Layered in blankets, dead eyes, arms propped like branches, staggered in the warmth of stillness. No need to call anybody, they'll take care of him like trash on the street.

It's probably too cold in the shelters, too. I could barely get out of bed this morning.

Note to self: Use creative imagery for ~~striking~~—striking intro, and throughout as delicacy.

January 21st:

There are droplets of pink in the sky, smushed and merged with the frost in the air. The sun grimaces in a teasing flinch - unrelenting in her apologies. Ice of every color causes mayhem on every surface of every place, while the poor tires of food delivery cyclers puncture with the pressure of our bitter hell.

This is of course a reflection of how life has been here since the 11th of January.

It's -32 degrees fahrenheit on this New York morning. The heat has been shut off in about 30% of all residential buildings due to lack of sufficient energy sources. The tracks for all routes that go above ground have frozen over and have been rendered unthawable, and public schools across all five boroughs have been shut down for over a week.

It is currently impossible to calculate how many we have lost due to this frigid spell since it began its course, and it will continue to be so indefinitely.

Snifu Coffee is open today. The owner is a friend. Once the heat in his apartment ran out, he started living in his cafe since he has a commercial backup generator for heat and electricity. The trek was a five minute walk from my faux-interview with the street subject.

37 W 18th St.

Take a LEFT from “Moore Hotel” onto WEST 22ND STREET. | Take a LEFT onto 9TH AVENUE. | Take a RIGHT on WEST 17TH STREET. | “Snifu Coffee” is on your RIGHT.

The handle was frozen shut, and had to be pushed open from the inside. The outside let in a sharp stab of air that inconvenienced the three people that helped open the door - the only three people in the cafe:

The owner, his mother, and a woman about my age.

The woman had dark eyes and hair, and a mole on her chin. Her cheeks lifted when she smiled.

I apologized profusely to her, and only her, for letting in the cold the way I did. It was selfish of me. She assured me that it wasn’t, so I interpreted her warmth as a signal of vulnerability and told her I saw a dead man about five minutes ago on the street.

“It’s horrible.” she said, “How everyone is trying to keep the secret.”

“What secret?” I asked.

“Why should I tell you the secret?”

“I’m a journalist.” I said.

She smiled at me, and I fell in love with her.

“Buy me a coffee and I’ll tell you.”

I went to the owner and his mother, opened my mouth, and was suddenly overcome with a brief confusion.

“Just a latte!” she yelled.