

## **The Last Snowstorm of the Year**

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In August 2005, a hurricane hit New Orleans. In December 2004, Maddy and I hit the city first.

We arrived on December 22. The temperature was typical for New Orleans in late December. According to the Farmer's Almanac, the high was 73.4°F, the low was 59.0°F and the mean was 64.7°F. There was a brief, seasonally appropriate thunderstorm that evening, but otherwise it was pleasant.

On December 23 the mercury started to slide and a wind kicked in. The high temperature was 69.1°F, the low was 35.1°F and the mean was 44°F.

Despite the chilliness, it was a wonderful day. We had beignets for breakfast, then spent much of the morning and afternoon exploring the cemeteries and shops in and around the Garden District. That evening, our friend Poppy and her husband Chris took us to dinner at their favorite restaurant, Commander's Palace. It's considered one of the best restaurants in New Orleans, which means it's one of the best restaurants in the world.

I had the best meal of my life, with caviar and *foie gras* and sweetbreads and many other indescribably yummy things I'd never had before and will probably never have again. And it was all Poppy's treat, her belated wedding present to Maddy and I. We'd gotten married in February during the mad rush of same-sex matrimony, and Poppy couldn't have been happier for us.

After dinner Poppy and Chris took us back to their house. We smoked grass in their bedroom and played with a few of their many cats before heading back out into the world. We stopped first at a drive-through daiquiri stand, which alone is evidence that New Orleans is the height of Western Civilization, and then they took us into the expensive part of town to see the rich peoples' elaborate decorations. It was a glorious evening.

Overnight, things changed. On December 24, Christmas Eve, the high temperature was 37.4°F, the low was 30.2°F, and the mean was 33.6°F. For most of the day it was literally freezing, give or take a degree.

We had simply not prepared for this. Poppy told us to expect mild winter conditions, similar to San Francisco, and historically that's been the case with New Orleans. The best we could do now was put on every single piece of clothing we'd brought with us, layering on the skirts and the blouses and sweaters against the arctic cold front sweeping the Gulf of Mexico.

The other option, staying in the relative warmth of our room in the Avenue Garden Hotel on St. Charles Avenue, was not an option at all.

Maddy and I spent most of the day poking around the French Quarter, which was gray and deserted. It wasn't such a good day foodwise, either. Anything would be a letdown after the orgasmic meal at Commander's Palace the night before—and, truth be told, I wouldn't want to eat like that on daily basis--but still, we were in New Orleans, where even the affordable food should be yummy. Instead, everything tasted flat and uninspiring, as gray as the light. It was like the city was dying from hypothermia.

After a bland dinner, we decided to ride the Canal Street Line all the way, both to see the cemeteries at the end and to look at as much of the city as we could.

Unfortunately, on the return trip, the driver ignored our stop request and kept on barreling past St. Charles Avenue, not stopping until he reached the foot of Canal Street.

The cold was beyond bitter now. This was a cold which harbored a grudge against us. Maddy had back problems which were exacerbated by the chill of even a mild winter, and the longer she was outside the more it hurt.

During our power-stride back to St. Charles Avenue, she was livid, cursing a blue streak and wishing all sorts of harm on the driver. When we reached the streetcar stop, Maddy huddled into a doorway. I approached and tried to put my arm around, hoping to give her whatever warmth I could spare. To my surprise, she pushed me away, snarling: “I’m mad at you, too!”

I was flummoxed. Where did *this* come from? I asked her: “What? What’s wrong? What did I do?”

She replied: “Just don’t talk to me! You’re going to start seeing her again next week, so don’t talk to me!”

The streetcar arrived, and we didn’t speak on the ride back to our hotel. *You’re going to start seeing her again next week.* So that’s what this was all about.

We hadn’t talked about our relationship problems while in New Orleans, since the ostensible point of a vacation is to get away from your troubles for a little while. Until now, it had been working splendidly.

In the five years we’d been together our relationship had never *not* been troubled, but the latest problem was an evergreen in the annals of dysfunctional couples: we’d

started seeing other people. The non-monogamy experiment began at my insistence this past September, seven months after we got married and right around the time that the our marriage was ruled legally null and void. My timing, as always, was stellar.

It went well enough for the first couple of weeks, for the only reason that anything ever went well between us: Maddy was enjoying herself. She spent spending much of the Folsom Street Fair and her birthday in early October making out with a boy. When I got involved with a girl named Collette, however, Maddy decided she'd had enough. She dropped the boy, and asked me to stop seeing Collette, who'd been nursing a crush on me for years and was thrilled that I was comparatively available.

By Halloween, after much processing and fighting and negotiating and a tantrum which resulted in Maddy breaking our medicine cabinet mirror, I agreed to go monogamous until the end of the year. On New Year's Day, the relationship would open back up.

Maddy quietly simmered on the train, waiting until we were back in our hotel room to melt down. Through copious tears and wracking sobs, she begged me to reconsider, to not re-open the relationship. I refused. She begged me again. I refused again. The world spun.

I knew I could end her suffering, even if it was by lying and telling her what she wanted to hear. But I was tired of it all, tired of being held responsible for her near-constant emotional trauma whether it was my fault or not. No longer. I would not concede.

We finally went to sleep around four in the morning, and awoke at noon to find ourselves in a winter fucking wonderland. To people accustomed to snow it was

probably just a smattering, but to me, it looked like a wet, cold, Armageddon. And it was still coming down.

Our original plan for Christmas morning was to have breakfast at a certain restaurant in the French Quarter recommended by a friend. Since we got up a few hours too late, we quickly devised Plan B: go into the Quarter for lunch instead.

Plan B was derailed when the hotel staff informed us that the streetcars and the taxis were about to shut down because of the weather. Not only did this mean we were limited to wherever we could go on foot, if we *had* left the hotel in the morning as planned, there's a very real chance we would have been stranded. Poppy was out of town visiting her mother, and even if she had been in town, we wouldn't have bothered her on Christmas. Though only a mile away, under the best of circumstances the walk back to our hotel would have been difficult for Maddy, and in this weather it was impossible. I was conscious of the fact that if not for our Christmas Eve fracas, we might have been totally screwed. Instead, we were just slightly screwed.

Plan C was brunch at the St. Charles Café, conveniently located a few doors down from our hotel, and even more conveniently open twenty-four hours a day, 365 days a year. It was neither the pinnacle of New Orleans dining, nor the nadir, because it didn't feel like New Orleans dining at all. It was the sort of café I would have expected to find in Fresno, with admittedly better decor. But Plan C was all we had, so that's where we went.

Now, San Francisco is an insidiously small town, so insidious that even when you're in New Orleans, there's a risk of running into someone you might not care to see. And so it was that a table in the St. Charles Café sat a woman we knew from San

Francisco. For reasons I never understood, she'd gotten it into her head that I was responsible for her boyfriend breaking up with her the year before, and she'd never forgiven me. Maddy and I were nonplussed to see her. It was snowing in New Orleans on Christmas Day. Nothing seemed surprising anymore.

After a bad meal, we decided to spend the rest of the afternoon in the only other open establishment in walking distance: Lucky's Bar and Grill. It also had a laundromat inside, as many New Orleans bars do. Since we didn't want to face the rest of the day straight, we brought the pot brownies we'd stashed in our luggage.

So, we spent the rest of Christmas day in the back room at Lucky's, stoned out of our gourds, doing laundry and playing pool. Thankfully, there was nobody there from San Francisco harboring a grudge against me, and the regulars ignored us.

It was cold and dark and sludgy as we made our way back to the hotel. Unaware of a snow-covered pothole as I stepped off a curb, my boot submerged into icy, snowy water, chilling and soaking my foot. I didn't hurt myself, thankfully, and as I pulled my boot back up all I could think of was how much I hate Christmas.

Maddy and I went isolationist for the rest of the evening, getting food to go from the St. Charles Café—we got one of everything deep-fried on the menu—and holing up in our hotel room, cuddling and watching *Futurama* on our laptop. We fell sleep well before midnight.

When the new year began a week later, our relationship did not re-open.

Three months later, our relationship ended.



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