

Preston Wilcox looked out over the snowy hills of Atlanta, Georgia as he began driving his way out of town. He'd never seen so much snow in his life. The new intern at their office had told him it was because of global warming, but he knew the real reason: Christmas magic. So, in celebration of their children's first white Christmas, the Wilcox family had decided to celebrate the holiday in a rather special way this year. They were on their way to the small town of NotThatStonewall to reenact the American Civil War; holiday style.

Preston looked over to his wife, asleep in the passenger seat, Abilene Wilcox. He liked to watch her sleep because it reminded him that she was, in fact, a thirty-six year old heterosexual human female.

"Haha, yup, still human" he remarked, relieved that he was safe for at least one more day.

He then looked back at his three children staring out the window in awe of the mounds of snow they were passing. Harper-Grace was sitting right behind him, and the other two were there as well. Preston didn't have favorites among his children because he loved them all equally. But if he did have a favorite it would be Harper-Grace because she had red hair and two tattoos, and Preston thought that was cool because he'd never met someone with red hair before.

It was at this point Preston realized he should probably look back at the road because he hit a patch of ice that made the car slide uncontrollably. After slamming on the brakes the car shifted ninety degrees and the wheels began lifting off the road. The children began screaming as the car flipped once, twice, thrice before settling back on its wheels again in the center of the highway. The family sat in stunned silence for a moment.

"Good thing Mom's asleep," piped up Harper-Grace from the back, "She would've had a cow if she saw that!"

The second child also said something noted Preston.

"Yes. Thank you Santa and Jesus!" cheered Preston as they all shared a hearty laugh and continued down the road towards NotThatStonewall.

It wasn't long before they started to see fields of parked cars outside the city gates and Abilene began rousing from her slumber.

"Welcome back to the waking world my 100% human wife."

Abilene responded with a stretching yawn from her tiny corner of the minivan, "Did I miss anything?"

"Not much. Just lots of snow and a near fatal car crash."

"What?!?"

"I suppose it wasn't our time to die quite yet."

As they parked the car and started making their way towards town Abilene wouldn't let the car crash go. "Just as Harper-Grace predicted" thought Preston to himself, "But, then again, I suppose her fear of death is another sign that she's human, and that's why I love her."

The closer they got to NotThatStonewall the clearer they were able to make out the thirty foot tall stone wall that surrounded the city itself.

"Welcome to NotThatStonewall!" A tiny old man began hobbling his way towards the family through the snow. He had on a small red vest and carried a stack of papers with him. "I assume you're here for the celebration. I'm Gibley, the Gate Greeter. This map here is for you,"

he said handing Preston a scarlet map with a list of store names off to the side. It seemed the town was a big circle divided down the middle by a large river. "You're running a tad late, so you'll need to hurry your way right here," he pointed to a small island in the center of the river. "That's God's Revenge Mountain, or, as it's known today, Peppermint Peak. Here are some red coats as you will be fighting on the Northern Pole side." That's a relief, thought Preston. "Now go! Fly! There isn't time!" \ Gibleet caught sight of another family making their way in and slowly began shuffling towards them. "Welcome to NotThatStonewall!-"

The sun was beginning to set as they passed through the large, wooden gateway and into the town. Even with the sky was nearly dark, the holiday lights hanging on every home kept the city in a perpetual state of holiday cheer. They also noticed electric heating lamps that hung from the lamp posts lining Main Street that kept both the winter chill and the heavy snowfall at bay.

"At least we won't die of hypothermia." remarked Preston.

"Haha, I'm sure there's *plenty* of other things that could kill us here dad." responded Harper-Grace. It seemed she was beginning to enter that stage of life where you realize death is a reality you can't avoid. It is around every corner and your parents can neither save you from it or avoid it themselves. At this thought, Preston felt proud of the woman his daughter was becoming, and that one day, he too might be killed by his child the same way he had killed his own father to receive the blessing of the night.

Preston chuckled, "How right you are my daughter. How right you are..."

Abilene also said something.

Upon reaching Bobby's Bridge in the center of town they noticed hundreds of human beings clambering their way towards the island. The Wilcox family packed themselves onto the bridge and slowly began pushing their way to the front. It was slow going, but eventually they made their way to the center of the bridge and turned left around the last bend to look up at Peppermint Peak. The island was nearly a half-mile across with a large hill right in the center. It was dotted with pine trees, but at the very top was a large factory lit up with red and green spotlights. Where the town itself had heating lamps that largely controlled the accumulating snow, Peppermint Peak was left alone and had amounted at least 12 inches of the white stuff. The snow on the northern side of the island had been mixed with red food dye while the southern half was mixed with green. And it smelled curiously of sinister Christmas cheer.

"-it will be up to you to eliminate the enemy combatants. Hit them with a snow bullet marking their coat with your snow color and they will fall." A man atop the mountain was giving instructions using a megaphone. He was too far away to fully see, but something about his voice sounded familiar to Preston. "The battle ends only when the enemy army has fallen."

"I've been awaiting this moment my whole life." Harper-Grace whispered as she began wringing her hands together.

Preston stepped in close to her and whispered in her ear, "Do not be too eager. They can smell weakness."

"What are you whispering about?" asked his wife.

"Do not concern yourself Abilene."

"Preston, I swear to god-"

Their youngest child then said something about being cold. So he was not the chosen one after all.

The megaphoned voice cut through the crowd, "TAKE YOUR POSITIONS! FIGHT WITH GLORY! DIE WITH HONOR!"

"Die-?" someone around them echoed.

"AND LET THOSE SLAY BELLS RING!!"

Carol of the Bells began playing somewhere in the wind as the armies took their respective positions on the northern red and southern green halves of the island. As the song came to a close, the combatants in position, there was a moment of silence. Twelve chimes rang in the distant, the chimes of war. The Wilcox had taken position near an embankment and watched their northern allies, spread out on Peppermint Peak, roll bloody, red snowballs and begin charging forward.

Harper-Grace began to do the same but felt a firm hand on her shoulder. "No, let them cull the weak first." Preston advised. They watched as their allies charged forward through the trees, disappeared near the top of the hill. "Now we ready ourselves."

As the family began forming their snowy balls they began hearing bone chilling screams coming from the front lines.

"What the fuck?!?" questioned Abilene.

"DO NOT CONCERN YOURSELF ABIL-" Preston didn't even get to finish his sentence before he saw a green clad Christmas battalion emerge from the trees surrounding them. They must have hidden themselves behind enemy lines before the battle began. "SCATTER!!!" he shouted as they threw their green balls of holiday death towards them.

Preston blindly charged forward and pushed his way through their ranks. He continued his way up the mountain and turned back for just a moment to witness Harper-Grace dive behind a tree. If she was the chosen one then she would make it. He trudged forward, covering his tracks in the snow by singing Sleigh Ride quietly under his breath. His footprints seemed to disappear the moment he vacated their physical space.

He could have been walking for hours or days. Time had been lost to Preston Wilcox long ago, and the only thing that remained was the beat of his heart, once every 10 seconds. He lived his life by that beat. 10 seconds at a time.

Eventually he came upon a grove. There was a single man in a red coat standing in the center and mumbling, "Deck the halls with-, Deck the halls with-, Deck the halls with-" over and over again. It was a terrible sight and Preston knew he had to put him out of his misery. He hardened his red snowball into ice, stepped out into the grove for a better view, and took aim at the man's head. Immediately, the man turned toward Preston and began charging towards him wildly.

"GOD REST YE MERRY-" the man shouted half-mindfully before his skull was driven through with an icy, red snowball.

"Yes, God rest ye merry gentleman." Preston leaned down to bid him a proper farewell when two more green soldiers began rushing out from the trees beyond the grove. It was a trap. However, just as they were almost upon him they froze in place and fell to the ground dead.

Harper-Grace emerged from a tree behind her father. "God bless us, everyone."

Just then, a confused Abilene stumbled out of the forest. "Preston, I'm going to kill you!"

"Yes, I truly wish you luck with that. Trust me, it is more difficult than you'd think."

"Wha-I can't-did you just kill them?" she stammered.

"They were already dead."

"...NO THEY WEREN'T!"

"Trust me, I know the living from the dead. I've been preparing for this moment our entire marriage." Preston looked out towards the distant darkness.

As Abilene attempted to process what that meant, she decided to let it go and take a breath to focus on more important matters. "Where's Billy?" she said as she began centering herself.

"Who?"

"YOUR SON!!!"

"Ohhh, haha, for a moment I thought you meant Billy from the office, and I was like, 'why would he be here?'" Preston said with a reassuring smile.

Abilene, wide-eyed with fury, made her way back into the forest.

"She deserves better." Preston mumbled to himself.

"Dad, you did the right thing." reassured Harper-Grace as she grabbed ahold of her father's hand. "Now come, we have a job to do."

They made their way towards the factory's entrance, hiding from sight amidst the trees. There were four Christmas zombies guarding the doors, all clad in a festive green coat.

"I'll take care of them." Harper-Grace said calmly as she summoned a spike of ice in her right hand and walked into the clearing. All four zombies were immediately dispatched, but, just as she chopped off the head from the last zombie, six hands reached up from the snow to grab ahold of Harper-Grace.

"My Angel-Sweet!!!" cried Preston as fifty more zombies in green coats rose from beneath the snow and began wrestling Harper-Grace inside the factory. He was alone now. The clearing was empty, and the door to the factory where his daughter was being held captive had been left wide open. It was a trap. He knew it this time and he didn't care.

Preston slammed open the door of Santa's festive workshop. Or, what was supposed to be Santa's workshop. Everything lined up, and Preston knew this factory belonged to someone else.

"So kind of you to join us for Christmas, Preston." A jolly voice rang out from a stage on the other side of the factory.

"Let her go Father!" shouted Preston, "I've killed you once before, don't make me do it again."

"She's beginning to realize her power, but she doesn't realize her destiny." sneered the rotund, cheerful man with a thick white beard as he held the red hair Harper-Grace vice-like in his hand.

"What does he mean dad?" Harper-Grace stopped struggling in his grip at this moment. She was searching for truth in her father's eyes.

"This girl has the magic of our people, and the hair of theirs. She is the chosen one isn't she?" The mysterious grandfather grasped her hair tighter and pulled her in close.

“STOP!” screamed Preston before looking his daughter in the eyes.. “...I am Preston Wilcox, emperor of the Southern Elves and Guardian of Christmas Night...and you, Harper-Grace, are my heir. The next in line to take the throne.”

“But Dad...” she answered. “The story is written in my tattoos.”

Preston smiled. She was always smarter than he gave her credit for.

“Now, can we deck the halls with some motherfucking elves?” asked Harper-Grace angrily. “I’m feeling bloodthirsty.” She froze her grandfather’s hand solid and shattered it without missing a beat. Then they went to town slaughtering dozens of zombie-fied southern elves in green coats with their wintery magics.

Within minutes the two had subdued the threat and had Grandfather St. Wesley on his knees. “You can’t kill me. I’m Father Christmas.” he whimpered.

Harper-Grace looked him in the eye. “No, he’s father Christmas.” she answered, gesturing to her dad. “And I’m daughter Christmas, and NOT EVERYONE CELEBRATES CHRISTMAS!!!” She thrust her spike of ice through his head, ending his final Christmas before it had even begun.

The two stood there in silence for a moment before hearing twelve chimes off in the distance.

“Merry Christmas Dad.”

“And Happy Holidays kiddo.” Preston smiled and gave his daughter a hug. She was ready. And he hoped the world would be too...