

The Quietude of Horror

mk zariel

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a review of

Snow Day by Willow Page Delp. The Amazine, 2023 theamazine.com

You stare at oblivion or maybe just at your social life—a sky darkening from blue to black, a group of college students fighting over foraged meals, a building decaying—and wonder what to believe. This is a snow day, but something more, too, a bonding experience that can only shatter and release you. When you belong somewhere, or maybe more often when you don't, "things [have] to erupt."

This vignette, seemingly just an exaggeration of teenage awkwardness and isolation, is the concept behind Willow Page Delp's short story published by the independent literary magazine *The Amazine*, *Snow Day* is half friendship story and half horror, exploring the way interpersonal dynamics bend and break under duress.

Delp frames it as "an unsettling short story about a sudden snowstorm hitting a reclusive boarding school for gifted students, and the two female friends at the heart of the mystery," a description that also elucidates the rest of their body of work, mainly short stories centering on marginality, embodiment, and external horror symbolizing internal pain.

While lacking the gore of traditional horror, *Snow Day* is arguably even more chilling, showing the way that human beings have the most to fear—and embrace—from one another.

The story begins with an idyllic yet chilling scene in which Piper, the protagonist, wakes up in the cold despite generally running warm, reflecting on the extreme nature of the weather. Meanwhile, her friend Opal simply denies the reality of the situation, with her head "tilted in a slight defiance, as if daring the sky to have the audacity to argue."

This subtle antithesis sets up the character foil between the two young women, with Piper taking an observant stance toward the world and Opal opting for a more confrontational way of living. However, in its centering on these characters, this story subtly dismantles relationship hierarchy. Rather than a romantic partnership or family, Piper and Opal find the most profound kinship in their platonic friendship.

Thus, Delp's portrayal of these characters echoes Swedish author Andie Norgren's theory of relationship anarchy, showing that the most unbounded forms of care are the most meaningful.

After a while, their community devolves into a perfect storm—shouting matches, inclement weather, darkened skies, and occasional physical aggression. When a fellow student of hers grows aggressive, Opal reflects dramatically on the situation: "There was no time when Lila had thrown Daisy out of the window, into a bed of snow, there was a before and after. It was their own equivalent of BCE—Before Daisy. It was a storm of chaos, lightning splitting the dorms."

As the conflict escalates and Piper and Opal are forced to escape together, the weather becomes almost secondary. The real horror show is not the snow, but the coldness of their peers' relationships. Thus, Delp makes the point that care, not physical comfort, is the objective measure of safety and meaning.

The shortest story I've ever reviewed, *Snow Day* is also the text that's stuck with me the longest, thanks to its simple grace and wholesome form of horror. Delp's words are a reminder of the power that platonic kinship holds, even in the face of unimaginable terrors (or bad weather or fascism, as the case may be).

As the protagonists end the story with a declaration that "[they] jumped together, into the dark," so, too, can readers, hurtling toward the unknown of life while still feeling safe, not due to any artificial conception of normalcy, but solely due to belonging.

mk zariel (it/its + masc terms) is a transmasculine neuroqueer poet, movement journalist, and BashBack aligned anarchist translocally rooted in the Great Lakes region. The author of *Voidgazing* (2026, Whittle Micropress). Its offerings, commissions, and chaotic love letters to the world are at [**mkzariel.carrd.co**](https://mkzariel.carrd.co).

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