

*Mutant Winter*

The Wasatch Mountains have made me fall in love with winter. The real winter. My lifelong experience with winter has revealed its mutation into a thing to be shoveled and scooped off sidewalks, scraped off windshields, and salted onto slippery roads. Snowstorms in the city are beautiful for the first hour or two when the world is silent and the ground squeaks as your boots pack down the soft snow, stamping it with your unique boot print. The straining cars stuck in snow banks seem far away, their furiously spinning tires are muted as the sound is absorbed in the enveloping whiteness. It grips every surface and builds up delicate towers onto the tiniest tree branches. Everything transitions into the uniform white, distorting each shape as it expands into a bulky mass. It conceals the beer can in the bushes, now looking like a forgotten soccer ball instead, temporarily disguising the type of tenants within.

Too quickly afterward the snow is turned into hard black mounds along the road. A grey slush is concocted in the gutters made of sooty exhaust, salt, and dirt to make a deliciously polluted Slurpee. The bare tree branches look like skeletal hands reaching up from the dead earth too frozen to move. The air gets heavy and cold, trapped underneath a grey blanket making it seem as if I'm wearing some kind of goggles that distort reality into a nightmare because the Earth doesn't seem to have the capacity to make something so ugly. The occasional two or so hours of enjoyable winter hardly seem worth the transformation into a grey wasteland where depression thrives and the fat keeps adding on around the thighs and the high gas bill still doesn't seem to keep the house warm enough to take off the fleece footie pajamas and accompanying Snuggie, making Netflix the only companion willing to tolerate the new winter me.

With this perception of winter and my resulting hibernation, I've never done the normal Utah thing to do, which is hit the slopes in the Wasatch Mountains. People always seem taken aback when they'd find out I'd never tried any snow sports. So I finally overcame my fear of pain, cold, ridicule, and unflattering snowboard equipment and began taking lessons at Brighton Ski Resort. After all, I'd been wasting the nearby Olympic-worthy snow for far too long. While building new skill, exercising regularly, and lessening my shame it has also reacquainted me with a 'normal winter.'

The snow maintains a consistently pure white, interrupted by the occasional ski lift and all manner of folk of varying background, skill level, and pretentiousness. The lacerations on the mountainside remind me of the forearm of an angsty teenager as the edges of skies and snowboards slice the delicate snow. Some of the trees that inhabit the mountain are hobbled and droopy as if draped underneath a heavy cloak, their dark green branches bowed under the weight of the powder.

They seem to be the sacred guardians of the mountain coming alive at night and lifting lanterns out of their white robes. Other trees look frilly like a lady in a flounced skirt that bounces up at the tips, dusted lightly with a glittery powder for a night out. It reminds me of the powdered sugar my mom would sprinkle over the plastic trees lining her gingerbread house to create a picturesque replica of the one encountered by Hansel and Gretel after a fairy-tale snowstorm.

There's a silence to the whole mountain, just like the one during storms in the city. Even though there are scattered whoops, yells of encouragement or concern, oohs and aahs by the terrain park, or the occasional rude comment from the experienced skier behind me, they seem far away and slightly muted...the snow absorbing the chaos to retain it's reverence and beauty.