

Last Snow

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I remember that cold January morning when snow was expected, in fact, seven inches were predicted. I imagined a snow globe to form around the town. At 6:30 a.m., the phone rang, and in my half-awake state, I could hear the voicemail saying that school would be closed for the day. I laid in bed thinking about what I should do. Do I go back to bed and get more sleep, or get up and have a good time playing in the snow? I knew I had completed my homework assignments. Then I remembered that Monday was a holiday and snow *is* the best when it's fresh, so I decided to put off getting more sleep. I got up and put on my grey sweater with white polka-dots that always reminded me of the falling snow, my snow pants, and boots. As I put on my big, long, black coat, leopard print hat, and gloves, I noticed my mom in the kitchen.

I saw a stunning mom. Her forest green bathrobe gave her a big bear hug, now showing off her amazing curves. I always wanted to look just like her. Her brown skin and dark black hair seemed to make her look even younger despite her actual age. She caught my eyes going into her soul and asked if anything was wrong. I told her “no, I am just waiting to go out in the snow with you”. She finished her coffee, cleaned her cup, and put on her winter gear. It took her longer than usual just to lift her arms to get them into her coat. Finally, we went out into the snow.

The extremely cold temperature got to mom more quickly than I did because only after 10 minutes, she was saying she was ready to go back inside the house. I was working on building a snowman dreaming it was an additional member of the family, imagining what it would be like to have a sister. When I had turned around to show it off to her, I realized she was gone. I looked into the dark windows facing the street. I thought maybe she was just in her bedroom or the

bathroom, so I went back to my work of creating more things out of the snow, smelling it, tasting it, and breathing it in.

Normally I would have said that summertime was my favorite season. But the snow had a certain magic that made it so special that no other season could beat winter. As I walked over the sheet of snow-covered pavement, my ears focused on the crunch of my boots sinking deeper into the snow. I dropped right down and laid flat on my back to make snow angels. Just the motion of spreading my arms as my "wings" made me feel powerful. I grabbed my sled and tried to run to the top of the driveway. But the dense snow dragged me down with it as I slowly trudged up the hill. It must have taken me an hour to pave a channel inch by inch that would allow me to fly down on my sled. Time seemed to slow down, and even though I was caught up in repetitive motion every time I fell onto the sled, I noticed how hard and how strangely soft it also felt. Was I loud, or was I quiet? Was I moving quickly or slowly? The snow impacted everything I did. Everything was satisfying in its own special way. There was a playful essence in the air that reminded me of how good it felt to be a child, no matter how independent I thought I was. I knew the animals were in hibernation. I listened closely and imagined I could hear them sleeping away.

I realized that I needed to go in as the sun was beginning to hide between the white fluffy clouds. I could no longer shake my hands as they were so heavy, fragile, and ice cold. The warmth of the cozy house welcomed me as I walked through the door, covered head to toe with heavy gear. Before I could take off any of my clothes, I noticed the zesty aroma of lemon peppermint essential oils. I called mom, but there was no answer. I instantly needed to take off at least one layer, so I did not pass out. I ended up removing my coat, boots, gloves, and hat and felt 10-pounds lighter.

I went to look for mom in her bedroom, and I saw that her bathroom light was on. All of a sudden, I felt like I was in a bad dream. Mom was hunched up over the vanity with a terrified look in her eyes. They were completely red, and she looked like a different person. She said, “Scarlet, I have a fever, please go call Grandma”. I felt my heart racing, and yet time seemed to stand still. I knew I had to do exactly what my mom was telling me to do, but all I desired was to help my mom feel better and wake us up from this terrible dream. I could hear my heart beating and my breath beginning to quicken. I ran to get the phone and brought it into the bathroom with one hand holding the phone and the other holding my mom’s burning hand. The minute I tried to explain everything to grandma, my voice cracked, words were hard to form, and tears flooded down my face. She could not really understand what I was saying but told me “Scarlet, stay with your mom, stay by her side, and I will be there as soon as I can”.

Grandma only lived 15 minutes away, but it seemed like it took forever. As I waited, I tried to whisper to mom that everything would be okay. I had no idea if she could understand me, as she was drifting in and out of consciousness. When grandma got to the house, I ran to the foyer and grabbed her by the hand. I showed her where my mom was in the bathroom, lying on the floor.

Without even saying any words, we both looked at each other and knew, exactly what to do next. We had to get mom to the hospital, and we tried but could not lift her ourselves, so we called 911. As we waited for the ambulance, grandma called one of the neighbors and told her we have an emergency. Grandma asked her if she could come over and stay with me. I remember crying and asking grandma, “can I please come with you to the hospital?”

“Honey, I know you want to, but I don’t think we will both be able to ride in the ambulance, and I don’t want to leave your mom even for a minute. I know this is hard for you, but I promise I will come back to get you as soon as I can.

“Why, I am not a crying needy child!

“It is not that. I think it would be best if you stayed home, the hospital is no place for kids, and you will be even more terrified there. I won’t have anyone to watch you if I have to stay with your mom, I am sorry Scarlet.”

I remember screaming and crying into my hands with snot and tears gathering around my fingers. My head was pounding, and my throat was sore as my world was slipping away. When the ambulance and neighbor arrived, grandma told us she would call us as soon as she had any news.

The hospital was far away. I knew that it would be a long wait. I turned on the TV and began to watch “House Hunters on the Beach”. I felt paralyzed, and all I could hear was the beating of my heart and fell asleep on the sofa.

Around dinner time, Grandma called. The neighbor handed me the phone and with barely any voice left, told me that she would be coming to pick me up and we would be going back to her place for dinner. “What about mom, how is she?” Grandma hesitated and said, that she would tell me all about it when we meet. She did not arrive back home for a long time. Grandma looked exhausted, and I knew that there was bad news just by the look in her eyes. She said that my mom is in the intensive care unit. She said she did not feel like talking about it now but would tell me more in the morning. She brought pizza and we ate in a strange silence. On one hand, I

knew that she was right, we were exhausted, and our minds filled with worry and fear. But at that moment like this, I wanted my needs to be addressed. I was furious with my grandmother for not talking to me about my mom.

The next day we both slept late from all the stress and emotion of the day before. I woke up angry and wanting to know everything that had happened. Millions of questions were racing in my mind, when would mom come home, would she be okay? I got up first before grandma was awake and nervously waited at the kitchen table. I was still processing everything that happened. My mind was jumping all over the place, and fear was taking over again. I was thinking about how my life might drastically change. I daydreamed about all the major events that make a girl become a woman. I thought about the process that a girl's body goes through and all the changes. For me, this would probably be coming soon. I was looking forward to womanhood, having the power to take care of others, and ultimately giving birth to a child. I had always dreamt about doing all of this with the person who knew me best by my side. Now, I was not sure if I would be able to do any of these things with the person I had depended upon. More and more tissues filled the trash can. I should have realized that I was making things much worse and that all these predictions could be wrong. But there was a feeling that things with my mom were never going to be the same. Just then I heard grandma getting up and the bedroom and bathroom doors opening and closing, so I walked out of the kitchen and waited for her to come out. When she did, she looked much older, like she had just been through hell. I noticed the smell of her rose perfume, and it made me feel slightly hopeful.

“Grandma, what happened yesterday, how is mom?”

“Honey. Let me just make some breakfast, and we will talk.” As she tried to smile, she could not force her mouth to make the shape. She made herself mom’s favorites, a cup of green tea and oatmeal topped with fruit and yogurt. After she ate a couple of bites, she looked up at me. “Scarlet, I do not know how to tell you this, but your mom is not coming back home.”

I looked deep into her eyes and could not believe what she was saying. My ears started ringing, and I could not breathe. She stood up and hugged me, and we did not say another word. We sat back down at the table, and she said that mom had passed away overnight. She had had a massive heart attack. I said, “can you please tell me everything that happened right after you dropped me off.”

The spoon hit the side of the bowl, and I drifted off in my thoughts. Before she could speak, I closed my eyes, and all I could see was red. A memory of skipping across the red-hot lava sand as I hoped not to become a human version of the shining sun. With my hands plugging my nose, I hoped my lips and teeth would not allow any sand or salt into my system. My feet sank into the crusty, gooey sand. Soaking up the intense heat of the sun, I landed on the bluish-green water that gave me a giant hug. Now I was not a victim of the sun. I was one with the cool, blue ocean, with lime green seaweed, alone and free. It was like coming out of my mom’s body all over again, with my dark black hair shaking off the slimy green leaves. I was every girl's dream, a mermaid. But like taking a shower, the ocean water would clean it all up. I kicked the water, creating my own crashing waves as I moved inch by inch deeper and deeper in. I began to float and let the water control my day. My mom, the beautiful bigger version of me, was probably somewhere off in the distance, taking a long nap in the sun. Suddenly woken from my dream state, a rude young boy badgered me, “Hey move!!” so that he could grab his wandering beach ball. I shrugged it off and saw my mom approaching the border between white

sand with the crashing waves. After a while, there was a nonstop smile plastered on my face despite how much saltwater I was ingesting. Being in the sea, light and weightless, I danced around and moved in ways new and unknown to me. The ocean allowed me to take risks along with its help. When I lifted my head up and out of the water, I noticed how much darker the sky has become, and my mom was gone, lost to me again was all time. I walked to the edge of the water in a seaweed mermaid transformation.

Another mother-daughter moment appeared in my mind. It was the summertime, and I was about 8 years old. I wanted to go to a park that was near The Reddy's Thrift Shop. My mom insisted that we do something more special. I did not whine and was excited for the adventure. She took me to a nearby beach that we had never been to before. I remembered when we got out of the car, and instead of walking through the main entrance, mom had another idea. We went in through a side gate, and it was covered with the most beautiful bright red flowers. She told me, that she had found this spot when she was exploring as a kid. She had chosen my name there because of the brilliant color of those flowers.

This happened to me all the time when I stayed in nature, completely absorbed and lost; sucked into all the unique elements that make up the earth. This was the only major difference between me and mom. Everyone always told me I was just like her. But she preferred spring when the weather was not so extreme, while I preferred the more drastic temperatures of the hot dazzling summer sun and the icy cold crystals sparkling in the frozen white snow. I needed to eat the sand to really know what it was to feel what it was like.

As I drifted back from being far, far away in thought, grandma knew that I had not been listening. I put my head in her lap and said Grandma let's take a walk on the beach.