

A Slice of Loneliness



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The rough and oversized hand-me-down jacket folded over itself, creasing at the elbows with thick layers of polyester to protect the sensitive skin it surrounded. The jacket belonged to a young girl named Lauren, who felt defenseless as she stood with both feet locked into her snowboard. She rocked and slid indecisively on the snow, which fell in clumps onto her jacket.

“I can’t do this,” Lauren thought out loud. “It’s too steep.”

She waited a moment, mittened hands brushing the frigid snow off her red, numb cheeks and tucked her hazel hair behind her ear. Then, seeing the twins already halfway to the bottom, she pushed herself off and began sliding down. But only a few moments later, when her knees buckled, and she had fallen awkwardly to the side, Lauren wanted to just give up and lie there, testing how long it would take for someone to notice and help her. Little specks of snow rained from above as she spread her limp arms out with a heavy sigh.

“Why do I always have to be the slowest...”

She could feel the sharpness of the air contrasting with the warm and toasty jacket she had gotten last Christmas, but even during Christmas, there had been problems.

The rest of her family had been so happy and busy, cleaning the house, decorating the stairwell with ribbons, and playing the holiday hymnals. Chatter filled the air, along with the slightly chaotic bustle of her family as they prepared food and drinks in an attempt to “get into the Christmas spirit.”

“Brian, pass over the seasoning,” her mother babbled, “I need to get this chicken in the oven, all right? Brit-um, I mean, Robin, the music’s too loud. Turn it down.”

Lauren had stood beside them, as forgotten as the island in the middle of the kitchen, while her mother and cousins sifted flour and chopped hazelnuts. A hundred “excuse me’s” rang in her ears as her older brothers and sisters moved around and past her, clumsily bumping and spilling, with the every-once-in-a-while high-pitched shriek of “Lauren!” She stood there for a moment, staring at the mess on the floor. But after a minute of watching her family be captivated by their potatoes, pots, and pies, and feeling her stomach rumble in response to the smell of caramelizing onions and some sort of cinnamon dessert, Lauren decided to join in on the excitement and make a treat as well.

“Can we make custard?” She asked, reaching for a packet of jello custard mix in the cupboard, desperately trying to shove it into her mom’s field of vision.

“Later, honey. I’m kinda busy.”

Lauren angrily stuffed the packet into her back pocket and stomped conspicuously to the bottom of the stairwell, where she found the twins arguing over how many wreaths to order. One for the front door, or two?

“Could we buy three?” Lauren asked. “You could always use any extra wreaths to decorate something else, like our back door. Plus, I want one for my room — a mini one. Um, do the wreaths come with a return-service thing?”

One of the twins raised their heads to glance at Lauren but didn’t seem to care.

Lauren opened her mouth to speak up once again, but stopped herself, not wanting to waste her breath. Instead, she had decided to close her eyes and try to relax.

When Lauren opened her eyes, snow was still falling from the sky, icy crystals falling upon her, melting and mingling with

the tears on her cheeks.

This trip was supposed to be different, just the four of them out in the snow, having fun as they skied. Only for some reason, she had been inclined to choose a snowboard. Now there she was, falling and sliding several more times as she slowly managed to move, inch by inch, down the hill. She finally unwrapped herself from her board, helmet, and completely-soaked bandana, only to find her mom and the twins happily relaxing at a table inside the pizza place.

“Mom?”

“Yes?”

“I’m hungry.”

The girl’s mom looked up from her phone and smiled. “We’ve been waiting,” she said as she stood up and grabbed her wallet from her ski coat. “Watch my things, please. I’ll be back in a moment.”

“Us too!” The twins got up from their seat, leaving Lauren by herself once again.

When the girl’s mother had returned, she was carrying a pizza covered in so many green vegetables that the cheese and tomato sauce were hardly visible.

“Mom!” Lauren cried, feeling colder than ever.

“Yes?”

Lauren sighed as she unzipped her coat and grabbed a fistful of napkins.

“I don’t like mushrooms or any of these veggies. Who puts brussel sprouts and asparagus on pizza, anyway? Look me in the eye and tell me this looks appetizing.”

Lauren’s mom shot her the “be grateful” face, saying “there’s nothing wrong with vegetables,” and took a bite out of the pizza, only to spit it out into a napkin and crinkle her nose.

Lauren, observing her mom's facial expressions, laughed out loud.

“What is it?”

“It's too salty.”

Lauren smiled, remembering how she'd wanted to tell her mother the same thing about the chicken last Christmas. She'd kept silent then out of respect for the twins, who had smeared on way too much seasoning. She didn't want her mother to be hungry, but as their stomachs, briefly growled together, she was glad for even this little shared moment.

“Told you so.”