

#1

Grey clouds were blowing in from the northwest. Everyone was hoping for snow.

Except for Shirley who was propped upon pillows on the living room couch eating chips and watching the boob tube. Shirley was not svelt. She loved Lays Onion Potato Chips and dreaded the idea of having to shovel the white curse from her mini-walkway.

She was sure all her wishing would just bring it on – a bleeding blizzard. But hey, there was a silver – or snowy – lining here: She would be stuck. Sorry, Mom, I can't get there. What a relief to dump the whole family in the snow. She hadn't gone shopping.

No chips, and now, no electricity! No school, and 8 energetic kids at home all day, with no heat, no food, and now, no TV. Fortunately, young Harold was very large. And the 9 year old twins not much smaller. They could certainly shovel. It's not like they had anything else to do what with no TV. They didn't read. They had no hobbies. Shirley heaved herself off the couch and combed the house calling for Harold and the twins. They were not to be found.

Trudging into the grim yellow farmica'd kitchen, Shirley saw a sink piled high with dishes, and a table littered with durdy plates, scraps of bread, and the congealed fat from last night's dinner. In the center was a note from Harold:

Sorry, Mom, I just can't do this anymore – this life is killing me. The lack of motivation and inspiration I feel while living in this house has left me in the position to do one thing. I' leaving – I don't know where exactly – maybe the circul, maybe I'll ride the rails. I don't know but anything will be better than here.

I love you all,

Harold

Shirley sobbed – what will become of her son? What will become of her? He was her Rock. Shirley curled up in a ball on the kitchen floor. Maybe she'll just die.

#2

Grey clouds were blowing in from the northwest. Everyone was hoping for snow. That's because the whole family had gotten skis for Christmas. No one had ever gone, but this was the year to start something new, have some adventure as a family.

They all had heard of the innumerable broken legs and arms that friends had suffered due to a day on the slopes but dad had insisted they all "enjoy" a day together at Windham. No one was very enthusiastic except Mary Jane because she couldn't wait to crash into a tree.

If the Kennedys could go out that way, why couldn't she? The black sheep of the family. They would all get the hang of it p.d.q. Liza, her perfect younger sister would end up wowing the hunk ski instructor & be engaged before New Year's. She, Mary Jane, would break her leg and be taken to the hospital by some smelly peckerwood.

But Mary Jane would show them all. She rode the lift and skidded off to the first black diamond trail she found. As soon as she slipped, literally, below the horizon, she took off her skis and proceeded to limp down the hill. Her ankle was killing her but she was too afraid to keep her skis on. Forget crashing into a tree. It couldn't be worse than slipping down the mountain in great big boots, carrying her skis.

This wasn't what Mary Jane had in mind – no cinematic, glamorous crash, just a sprained ankle and a humiliating, slow, cold hike down an endless hill. "Not a good day," she thought. Then something seemed to echo in the back of her mind, a kind of distant rumble, getting louder and louder. Turning to look behind her, Mary Jane stared in horror watching the peak of the mountain she'd left begin to crumble, its icy boulders gathering momentum, a fog of white and cold and ice descending more and more quickly – until all she could see was an enormous cloud of white.

#3

Grey clouds were blowing in from the northwest. Everyone was hoping for snow. It had been years since the last snowfall and the anticipation of a white Christmas was more than they could contain. Paul, the youngest, had already started gathering supplies for his first snowman. His big brother Andrew was scoping out where to make the forts for the snowball fight of the century.

Drove a snowplow and was looking forward to the overtime so he could buy his poor shoeless kids a pair of galashes. Mom didn't really like snow because she had to trudge out to the woodshed and haul in fire wood to keep the kitchen stove going. The wood was never dry enough. The smoke in the kitchen was at times intense. You could hardly see the porridge she ladled into each one's plate.

Esther was sure this family was written by Dickens. She was the learner, the reader in the family. She lived with all these people and once in a while she had to admit she was related to them. Then she would imagine they were all characters in a classic story of struggle and hope for success.

And sure enough the struggle was about to begin. Through the door walked a man, a tall man, a dark man, a man with an eye patch and a pronounced limp. He stopped just inside the door, looked around and snarled and reached inside his tattered coat for a Mormon Bible. He opened it. "I'm here to bring you some good news. Remember the Utah lottery ticket your Uncle Ernie sent you last summer? Well, we've been trying to track you down for ages. You won!!"

#4

Grey clouds were blowing in from the northwest. Everyone was hoping for snow.

Snow is what they all hoped for but seldom got. They weren't close enough to the mountains and Tennessee wasn't exactly a northern state. Still all the music on the radio made them hope.

White Christmas, Frosty the Snowman – could there actually be a snow day in Tennessee? Sure enough, excited eyes opened to a vast landscape of unbroken white with here and there a rounded bump where old tire planters lay buried. Snow made everything look wonderful! Scrap metal, old tools, rusted small appliances abandoned in the backyard all covered up looked almost regal in their white coat.

Laura couldn't be more pleased if the ground were coated with vanilla ice cream. "This is a good omen," she thought to herself. "Today I meet him and he will be perfect." After years of online dating and bar-hopping and blind dates, Laura had taken a chance on Mike Smythe, a Tennessee songwriter she'd "met" online in London, Laura's home city.

Mike was a swarthy fellow with broad shoulders and a square jaw, a handlebar mustache and a bald head. He was a stud – smart, sexy and talented with all his outside charm seeming to come from deep within. She had arranged to have her kids spend time with their dad in the afternoon so they could meet.

She felt a little guilty going through the motions of Christmas morning with the kids when all she really felt was her heart beating faster and her whole body waiting for the afternoon. Finally, alone in the house, she put on her make-up and changed into a hot sweater-dress. The doorbell rang, and she opened it to...Mike?? Twenty years older than she had pictured and less teeth than a hen!

#5

Grey clouds were blowing in from the northwest. Everyone was hoping for snow. That was not going to happen. Thanks to global f-ing warming, the clouds brought rain and fog. Not the best weather for trying out my new snowshoes thought Kate. She pitched them into the trunk and climbed into the driver's seat.

At 60, Kate still had much of the energy and most of the enthusiasm she'd had as a younger woman, but this tidal wave of things going wrong was getting to her. First, Mike leaving her after 33 years, then her 8 year old poodle dying, and the children cancelling their yearly Xmas visit. All the more reason why Kate needed the snow – it was her escape. The way it muffles the noise both out in the landscape and in her head. Screw it, she said out loud. If the snow isn't going to come to me, I'm going to it!

So she headed north. She didn't know where she was headed, but she would know it when she got there. She cranked up the music and headed to the Northway. Singing along, she barely noticed the rain turn to slush, still really foggy.

The road got more and more slippery. Soon she noticed that the rear end of the car was weaving back and forth. The windshield wipers were barely able to keep the wet, slushy snow from the windshield. All of a sudden she skidded off the road.

Pow! The car stopped against a tree. She was sure it was on fire, but she was too shocked to move.

"You OK in there? Don't move, I'll get you out. The car ain't on fire. That's what they all think when them airbags go off."

The EMT crew got her into the ambulance. When they wheeled her into the emergency room, there was a peel of laughter. A smiling nurse pried her hands loose and said, "Women usually come in here holding a purse. You're the first to come in clutching snowshoes."

#6

Grey clouds were blowing in from the northwest. Everyone was hoping for snow. The kids all wore their pajamas inside out. Teachers lay awake hoping to hear the plows go by. A day without plans, a snow day would be just what Jessa needed. She loved teaching; she loved her class, but please, please let it snow enough to close school. She made her small prayer to the snow god and switched off the light.

Yes! Jessa thought to herself. Yesss! [the phone rings] The phone ringing at 6a.m. That can mean only one thing – a snow day! Sure enough, Dr. McLaughlin, her Department Chair, was at the other end of the line, but he wasn't talking snow or weather. He had "some bad news," actually "some terrible news." Jessa didn't know what to think. Her mind was a mess of early morning fogginess and worst case scenarios.

"Jessa," he said, "it's about Bob, your student teacher. He's been in an accident while driving back late last night from a school wrestling meet in the next town over. He hit some ice and – Jessa – he didn't make it.

"Oh, god," she said. "Thanks for letting me know now so I can tell the kids. See you at school."

That would be the worst day of Jessa's life. How to explain to 7 year olds what had happened. Over a cup of coffee rapidly re-heated in the microwave, Jessa thought about how to say what she had to say. The kids love Bob. They loved Jessa. She knew she would spend many hours in the next few days helping her kids cope with the tragedy. But she was confident that she was exactly what they needed.

#7

Grey clouds were blowing in from the northwest. Everyone was hoping for snow, except for Jason who longed for those balmy Caribbean Christmases he'd enjoyed as a child. Today he knew he needed to embrace the present, this new life in the frigid Northeast.

Those who knew him best tried to comfort Jason when he bristled at the thought of snow, encouraging him to embrace the idea, explaining to him that the snow brightens the night and makes the Northeast a fantasy land when it blankets the hilltowns in white. He wasn't buying it. So far it was just cold and boring. People weren't that friendly and had no idea of what a party should be. He tried to keep it all in and keep smiling.

How was he going to make it through this hell? His job was splitting all the firewood. How did he get himself in this predicament anyway? Palm trees waving in the tropical breeze were all he could think of.

Then the phone rang. "Hi, I'm your new neighbor. We're moved in enough that we can have some people over. Do you think you all can make it through the snow?"

Jason jumped at the chance. Finally some northern hospitality and a chance to make some new friends in this frozen wasteland.

"We'll be there in no time. Can we bring anything?"

Silence and then, "Oh, no, just bring yourselves. I'm sure you will be plenty to go around."

Jason paused. Didn't she mean there would be plenty to go around? No, new locale, new customs. His blood raced in anticipation.