

Snowball Effect

February 1st

Last night, my whole family was gathered around our dinner table: Ty and Ruby sat together on one side, Grant and I on the other, and my parents were at each end.

We ate our veggies and mashed potatoes my mom cooked and the pork my dad grilled. We all listened to some crazy story Ty was telling about a kid in his class who could shoot milk out of his nose whenever he wanted to.

Ruby interrupted him, asking, "Isn't that you?" We all laughed, and then my mom told us that the weather channel reported it would probably snow five inches tonight!

We were excited because that much snow would probably lead to a snow day.

Ty and Ruby go to our local elementary school, I'm in middle school, and Grant is in high school, but if we were lucky, all three would cancel classes the next day, and we'd get to sleep in!

My dad would get to work from home, too, meaning he'd probably stay in his pajamas the whole day. And Mom would hang around downstairs with us and do puzzles and board games!

After eating dinner and washing the dishes, my brothers, sister, and I went upstairs to our rooms before bed.

We checked the window that overlooked our backyard: No snow yet. However, the night sky was light...as if it held some great white freezing secret.

When my (sticker-covered) alarm clock rang this morning, I immediately looked outside. The sky was so wondrously bright that it looked like one giant piece of white paper wrapped around the world.

Snow was falling quickly, and thick flakes swam through the air. I looked down on our backyard: I had lived in that house my whole life, but it looked magically unfamiliar with every surface and tree covered in snow.

I slid on my bunny slippers and ran downstairs in my pajamas. My mom was in the kitchen, making coffee, with a puzzle already laid out on the dining table (she liked to start by completing all the edges).

The twins sat at the table, wearing their pajamas and socks and eating numerous cinnamon rolls warm from the oven.

Ruby's face was covered in icing, and her cheeks were full. She paused, blissfully closed her eyes, and said to no one in particular, "This is the life."

My dad and Grant were in the living room, both wearing pajamas and glasses, hunched over a chess game. You could see the snow falling in the window behind them.

"Aha!" My dad exclaimed as he took one of Grant's pawns.

"Nice...but not nice enough," Grant said, taking my dad's queen.

My dad looked at the board in shock, and Ty and Ruby shuffled over to watch the game, even though they had no idea how to play. I sat on the couch beside Grant.

"Snowball effect, Dad," Grant said with a shrug.

Ty asked what that meant. Grant looked up from his game and explained to the twins that if one wrong decision follows another, it gets worse and worse—like if you make a snowball and roll it down a snowy hill, it will grow bigger and bigger.

"Does that really happen? With the snowball?" Ty questioned wide-eyed. But Grant was back in game mode.

My best friend Clare knocked on our front door a little while later. (She goes to a different school, but she got the day off, too!) I opened it and saw her standing in the snow, smiling, with her curly hair puffing out from under her striped snow hat.

Two long tracks in the snow were behind her, leading back to her house. She was holding a giant, bright yellow plastic sled in her arms. I hugged her and ran to grab my sled, too.

But, before I could go out the door, my mom asked if Clare and I would kindly take Ty and Ruby to sled with us. I hesitated because the twins liked to ruin everything.

I turned to the twins: "Will you both be very good, on your absolute best behavior, with no monkey business or problems?" They looked at each other, then back at me, smiling and nodding.

The four of us walked along the snow-covered sidewalks in the footpaths made by our neighbors. The tree branches hung heavily above, bent by the weight of the snow, and there was a soft crunch with each step.

We occasionally passed and said hello to someone bundled up, headed somewhere excitedly, or walking an energetic puppy whose ears flapped as they bound through the snowbanks. Finally, we reached our destination at the top of the hill: Montrose Park.

The air was cold, but the day was bright. The four of us marched to the park's far side, where there was a clearing in the forest with a vast grassy downward slope perfect for sledding.

We saw about fifteen other neighborhood kids there; we recognized most, though you could only see a small circle of anyone's face in their snowsuit. Everyone looked so small, zooming down the hill and trudging back up it.

"What are we waiting for?" Ty yelled, throwing his sled on the ground and himself on top of it. He zoomed off on his tummy, like a penguin, and nearly hit three people on his way down!

Clare, Ruby, and I all piled on Clare's bright yellow sled at the top of the hill: Clare was in the front, then me, and then Ruby, who hugged me very tight so she wouldn't fall off the back.

We used our snow boots to ooch forward, and then we REALLY started gaining speed.

All I could see was the stripes on Clare's hat right in front of me, and the rest of the world was a white blur; I felt cold air rushing past and Ruby squeezing me like a teddy bear.

We were headed right towards someone--little Jasper Knowlins! We all leaned left and toppled off the sled and into the snow.

Jasper is Ty and Ruby's tiny but very mischievous friend. Obviously, the twins were thrilled to see him. The three of them grouped up, and Clare and I kept sledding.

After about an hour, I figured we were all tired and cold and would want to go home. And besides, my mittens were soaked.

Ty, Ruby, and Jasper were at the top of the hill. I was halfway up and turned around to look for Clare, who got distracted near the bottom and was petting a little brown dog.

I couldn't tell what that troublesome trio was doing from so far away, but it looked like they were making something. Then Ty turned, holding a snowball the size of a soccer ball.

And I knew exactly what was about to happen.

I ran to the side of the hill as they released the snowball at the top. Just as Grant had said, it started getting bigger and bigger and rolling faster and faster.

A little girl screamed and dove out of the way! Two more kids in snowsuits yelled and dodged the growing snowball as it barreled down the hill...right toward Clare!

I tried to yell at her, but she couldn't hear. She seemed to still be watching the little dog trot through the snow.

There was nothing I could do, even Ty, Ruby, and Jasper had stopped laughing.

BOOM!

Clare was struck before she even knew it was coming.

We could only see a bright yellow sled and a little striped hat sticking out of a massive pile of snow.

Ty, Ruby, and Jasper were all shocked and guiltily running down the hill to free Clare from a massive snow pile.

Needless to say, Clare was freezing the whole walk home—so I told her we'd make some hot cocoa with extra marshmallows. I also told Ty and Ruby that they were going to get busted for messing with my bestie!

Your Friend,
Joanie