

A Gift

By Julia Enthoven

An alarm clock screeched, its cries crashing jagged against my ear drums. I surfaced into the bleary world of consciousness, eyelids blinking away clouds, and indulged in the hush and warmth of morning. A minute passed, then two, when the joyous yelps of a child interrupted my silence.

"Julia!" Alex's footsteps sounded light as a heartbeat outside my room. Barging through the open pine door, my little brother met my sleep-stricken eyes with his palpable ecstasy, "SNOW!"

Alex's excitement launched me out of bed, pasted my nose against the window, sent shivers of elated panic down my spine. Snow twisted through the air, a hurricane of violent, gentle flakes. Through the glass barrier, I saw a world frosted with blank white nothingness, interrupted by trees and houses which rose against the blind horizon. I could breathe it, smell it, feel it: the cold radiating from the window, curling inside my chest, settling frozen in my stomach. With each breath, I released a cloud of warmth, creating opaque puddles of mist that outlined my nostrils.

I pressed my hands against the frozen pane and gently pushed. Blurred shadows of chill surrounded each finger. The world around me dissolved, and I existed only outside that window, where snow would fall and never stop falling.

Alex and I soared down the stairs, our strides in step, short legs pulsating. Heaving open heavy chests and closets, I shimmied into leggings and long sleeves, a fleece and feather jacket, mittens and muff. His skin gossamer under my clothed fingers, I helped my little brother into his makeshift winter clothes, giggling at my own enthusiasm. In minutes we were outside in the snow globe.

The morning sky wrapped in gray, blossoming clouds, Alex and I stomped across an untouched canvas of frosted grass, leaving our footprints outlined in violet light. We plunged into the snow like liquid, rolled in it like mud, wore it like bath suds. Cheeks abloom, noses scarlet with excitement, we started a ferocious game of snow war, a match meant for nothing more than pelting each other with glorious ice. Snow dripped down our backs, seeping into our hoods and galoshes and already soggy mittens. Our faces did nothing but smile.

An hour passed before I collapsed onto the barren earth, the stiff edges of the grass against my back. From my snowy nest, I could see a world faultless under the deceptive curves of snow. Cold crept up my skin, pricking goose bumps along my flesh; the pain was curious, filling, whole.

For a moment I lay motionless, marveling at earth's magnificence, a landscape of white stretching the length of my vision. I had entered a world of perfection, a space that allowed me my temporary existence, a gap in the universe that even I could scar with my footprints. Searching the sky, I looked for a force greater than myself, one that granted this hot, Texas town the gift of snow. I scooped a handful in my palm, watched as it slid through my fingers, as transient as sand. Invading the empty spots inside my jacket, the spirit of winter flooded my chest, carrying me away like an angel.

Eventually the sun gained strength and stole the precious snow. Staring out the window onto a mud-filled, lifeless lawn, I frowned, thinking of monotony, of lost change, of the wonder that had melted, too. Disappointment hid Alex's face, leaving it vacant, as if carved from silence, heavier than the approaching heat.

Ms. Enthoven wrote "A Gift" when she was in the tenth grade at the Hockaday School, in Dallas, Texas. She is currently a junior and aspires to be a teacher.

Later, I sat at the threshold of our fireplace, waiting for my clothes to dry, for the last remains of my snow to melt away. The flames bubbled and leapt, and my fingers coiled around a steaming mug of cocoa. I thought of the frozen elation of that day. Without announcement, without warning, the snow had come and then, in the same way, it fled. I had rolled in it, drenched myself in its bliss. And, although it had vanished, I was not empty; the memory of the day frosted with the hope of another snowfall swelled in my heart, filled me with a purpose almost as complete as the one delivered by the snow itself. I had felt small – awe-inspiringly, curiously small – as if Heaven had mixed with the snow and tumbled to earth, as if I had been swallowed in something greater than myself.

I stared down at my Thermos, and the cocoa's trail of steam curled around my nose, filled my nostrils, and my throat. It was snow, just snow, powerful on my small earth, but perhaps it represented a creation, a genesis, a new existence in the world.