



VIGNETTE

“Polar Bears”

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THE BUZZING OF THE ALARM CLOCK suddenly stops and, to my surprise, I am awakened not by the noise but by the silence, rudely jerked from my sleep. Six forty-five, the numbers read. I pull my comforter tighter under my chin and close my eyes, fully intending to get up in a few minutes. I’m sure I’ll wake back up in a few minutes, but not yet. I can’t do it yet.

“Lolo!” someone’s whispering to me, in my dreams I’m sure. “Lolo, get up! Aren’t you coming?” Coming where? One instant of confusion. Only one blissful instant, and then it all makes sense. It’s Saturday.

“Yeah, I’m coming.” The listlessness of my voice surprises me. I groan and fold the thick layers of blankets off of me. The frigid December air pounces. As I watch, thousands of tiny bumps germinate on my arms, and the fine hairs stand alarmingly straight. After getting out of bed and pulling on my bathing suit, I eagerly throw my winter coat around my arms and shoulders. I debate crawling back in my bed. No one said I had to do it.



I look at my cabinmates, and I push that thought from my mind. Although Lucy and Tuna stay nestled in their beds, Cara is pulling a sweatshirt over her head. Emily and Constanza are standing quietly, fully dressed, and Sarah is duct-taping a pair of flip-flops on her bare feet. Shoes. I had almost forgotten. I open the door, and look down at our tiny porch. My tennis shoes are indeed there, frozen solid. I force the unyielding layers of ice around my feet, wincing. The laces crunch, and small crystals of ice fall gently to the floor as I tie a bow on each shoe. Everyone is ready. It's time to go.

I wrap my arm through Constanza's as we step off the last wooden step from the cabin. The air isn't so bad out here--probably a few degrees above zero. My feet begin to tingle and then to burn. We trudge through the snow as quickly as possible, and I'm sure my excitement is visible on my face.

Soon, we can see the water of the Sheepscot River, stained with thin sheets of ice. Most people would say we're out of our minds. My friends back in Atlanta will call me crazy. I grin. Squeezing Constanza's hand on one side and Emily's on the other, I stumble through the mud left by the receding tide.

"One, two, three!" We count together and sprint into the icy water, diving under the surface just for an instant. As we clamber out of the water and toward our chilled towels, our semester-mates cheer wildly. The next threesome heads toward the water.

Later in the morning, the thirty-six students at Maine Coast Semester file into the dining hall for breakfast, about twenty of us dripping wet and beaming. Five of us sport shorts and sunglasses in a foolish attempt to defy the cold. I follow my friends to a table where a large book stands open, and sign my name under the heading "Polar Bears: December 7." As I sit eating my bagel, I catch the eye of a wet-headed polar bear across the room and we smile together.

ANALYSIS

Many students think that their essays need to be about a serious topic such as a current event, revelation about themselves or remarkable achievement. Lauren takes a different route. While she describes an accomplishment, it's not a traditional one that culminates with a trophy or hours of community service and not one with an easy-to-summarize lesson learned. What makes her essay work, rather, is that she