

# Shoveling Like a Man

I fall back onto the mantle of snow that encompasses my lawn. My shovel clatters onto a bit of bare ground beside me

“Crap,” I stutter. Why is it still awkward for me to say that? All men do it. Duh. Daddy—I mean Dad—says stuff like that every day. Especially when he plays golf. Big bro says that stuff too when he does math. Mom and I laugh at him when he says it.

A cloud of snow blows straight into my face, but I don’t feel the sting. Too sweaty and tired. My arms don’t even work anymore. My new blue mittens aren’t helping, either.

I rub the front of my jacket. A large Pikachu covers the front, backed by a couple of other different Pokemon. It’s a cool jacket. I picked it out myself, at Wal-Mart. I’m wearing my new boots, too. They’re shiny and blue.

The sky looks cool today. It’s kind of grayish, with plumes of white here and there. I can’t hear anything but wind whistling in my ear. My hat nearly flies off. As I pull it down tighter, I catch a whiff of cinnamon and nutmeg. The smell is sweet, and my stomach feels empty. Must be Mom making cookies in the kitchen. I think my brother smells it too, because he stops assaulting his pile of snow and glances at the door.

Dad isn’t fazed a bit, though. He just keeps on plowing away. He takes medium sized chunks and tosses them away like a rapid-fire snow machine. I wonder if I looked like that when I was shoveling a few moments ago. I must have, I was working so hard. My brother, on the other hand, looks like a sluggish, fat ogre, wrenching up mountains of snow too heavy for both himself and the shovel, and then dumping them over the side.

A snowball pounds the side of my face, and I jerk up. My bigger sister and her eight year old classmate from the house next door run away giggling. I jump up, but then I remember a lesson that Dad taught me last year, when I got into a fight with Katie Michaels over a cookie. It was the day before Christmas vacation, and we were having a party at snacktime. Katie spilled milk all over my shirt, so I took her cookie, and then we were rolling around on the floor until the teacher picked me up.

Dad sat me down and looked me in the eye, and told me that fighting a girl never had a good outcome, because if I lost, then I was a wimp, and if I won, then I wasn't a man.

*I'm a man*, I tell myself. My sister and her friend point and giggle, but I assume a haughty expression, like those guys on TV who tell the bad guy that they're not even worth fighting. I glance over at Dad to see if he saw me, but he's facing away from me, and he's got his hand over his mouth. Is he laughing? I shrug. I just plop back down onto the snow.

"Hey Jimmy," Dad's voice rings out. "I thought you were going to shovel your part four times faster than your brother?"

I jump up, embarrassed. I glance over at Bro's sidewalk. It's already half done. I'm barely even started. I quickly grab my small shovel and attack the fluff in front of me.

I tire after about a minute. Snow is heavy. I set my shovel down to rest a bit. A loud crack slices the air. I look over at my bro, who's holding half of a shovel.

My dad doubles over in laughter, and my brother chucks his handle onto the ground. Mom walks out the door with a cup of steaming eggnog, and looks at the two

sticks in front of my brother. She covers her mouth with her hand, trying to hold the beverage in before she starts laughing, too. Mom turns to me.

“Nice job, Jimbo. You just won your bet.”

I yelp in glee. I turn back toward my brother and prepare to rub it in. As I open my mouth, he draws his arm back.

I see a spot of white fly toward me, and then the chunk of snow knocks me back into the snow bank. I don't say anything for a bit; my face hurts too much. After a few seconds I sit up.

“I'm telling!”