

One sleepless night, I found myself twisting and turning, this way and that. I dreaded that I would have to wake up early tomorrow and drag myself through another day. I knew that it would be much worse if I did not fall asleep soon. Even so, I could not for the life of me figure out how to fall asleep because the seams of my shorts dug into my leg or one nostril kept stuffing up and I'd sleep on the other side until it cleared up but then the other one would stuff up instead. Something or another would wake me up after I had just nearly fallen asleep. Perhaps the worst of all was that little TV in my head that wouldn't turn off no matter how many times I tried as if the remote had run out of battery. It played reruns of shows that I had already watched a million times. Either ones that aired many years ago or ones that had yet to and never would. Sometimes it played newer episodes from recent days. These distracted me the most.

I turned to Snowy, my stuffed polar bear, and explained to him:

"I don't see myself in all these people around me. They look so foreign to me nowadays. Or maybe it's the other way around. Sometimes, I'll sit down and try to explain to someone something that's really hard to explain but that I really mean deeply, but then they'll look at me like I'm speaking tongues. To finally build up the courage to let myself speak my mind, and I'll get all caught up forcing these words to come out of my mouth, but then I'll choke on a sentence and look up and see a face looking back at me, searching but failing to find anything in common. Just why oh why do all the thoughts that mean the most to me have to be the most difficult ones to put

into words? But then when I hear other people speak, it seems that nothing they say ever surprises me. I can't help but feel as if I've already thought or heard everything that people tell me. Even the grown-ups who seem to think they've seen so much more than me seem like little children now, children that refuse to consider the possibility that somebody else might know something they don't. God, why can't they even hear me?"

I choked up and clutched the edge of my blanket. When I finally stopped, it was deafeningly still. I listened to the heater vents faintly hum. The red numbers on my clock radio began to look blurry. I felt a chill spread down my back. When I tried to turn over, my cheek clung to the damp pillowcase.

"I don't want to die alone," I confessed to Snowy in between sniffs, "I want to know before I die that at least someone, somewhere knows how I feel at a moment like this."

Snowy looked back at me with that gently sympathetic smile of his. That smile said more than I could ever put into words.

"Oh Snowy, why can't anybody else understand me like you do? If only I could show them the things that you've seen, tell them the things that I've told you."

I regathered myself, wiped the tears from my face. The pipes in the walls rattled now and then. Somewhere in the rafters, a beam creaked. I prayed that this house would let me fall asleep. Only after listening a while to the house sway, the TV changed to a different channel, one that I had nearly forgotten even existed. It was playing an old movie from many years ago, the scenes of which came flooding back to me in vivid detail.

I closed my eyes and took a deep breath. My mind still lingered. “I wonder how it became this way. We were all born the same way, so what happened?”

Snowy didn’t respond, though not because he didn’t know the answer. The wind whistled against my window pane and rustled the forest outside. I watched a leaf sail by and I let my thoughts get carried along with it.

“You know, Snowy, I didn’t used to be like this. When I was younger, I’d lie wide awake some nights too. Nights like on Christmas Eve, and everything looked so different in that moment. Do you remember? The way the moonlight filtered through the shutters and made long rectangles on the wall that moved so slowly across the room. That night was a lot like this one. I couldn’t sleep, I’m not sure why. It had been hours since mother had kissed me good night and I was still tossing around. Maybe it was because I was so excited about Christmas tomorrow. I had dreamt of getting a sled so that I could ride down the hill at school with my friends. Maybe it was because I had stayed up late that night watching my favourite team win in overtime, and I kept imagining that I had scored that goal. The crowd erupting as the goal horn sounded and the announcer yelled my name. What a goal that was.”

I opened my eyes and saw that the room around me had been transported back through all those diminished years. Not that anything actually changed; my old quartz alarm, my hockey posters, my wind-up toys, my colourful bedsheets, none of that actually came back. What changed instead was something indescribable. The air had a different quality to it, everything looked larger and farther away. Every shadow and

ounce of light carried with it some spectacular quality that inclined me to wonder where it came from. At the center of it all, Snowy was still watching me patiently, just as he had been that night, and every sleepless one since.

“I think I remember now why I could not sleep that night. Really, it was a mix of everything. The hockey game, tomorrow’s festivities, the moon and the stars, somehow it all made me think of things I don’t think of often enough. I cried that night too, I remember now how my damp pillowcase stuck to my face in the same way as I turned to face you and I thought about what I, an ungrateful child, did to deserve all the kind things people did for me.

“Kids never hesitated to give me their lunch when I had spilled mine. Mere apologies were enough to mend anything. Best friends were made by stomping in puddles together. Sometimes I wondered if the other kids thought the same things I did when they couldn’t fall asleep at night, but then I’d get distracted thinking about cartoons and sleds.

“More than the innocent and unknowing kindness of other children, I remembered the deliberate warmth of grown-ups whose subtle gestures betrayed how much more of the world they’d seen. Back then, their faces would brighten when they saw me. They’d go out of their way to do all sorts of nice things for me. I remember how anything I said would make them laugh merrily, even when I didn’t mean it to be funny. They pinched my cheek, offered me many toys and sweets that I timidly refused. Their big toothy smiles when I showed them where my baby teeth had fallen out.

“But the memories that really moved me were of those that looked at me in that strange way, as if into a mirror. Those that had the remarkable ability of being able to see in me something that reminded them of themselves. Then, when they did something nice for me, I’d know that they really meant it.”

Snowy tilted his head slightly. I looked back at him, stared into those beady eyes of his and saw the moonlit image of what he had wanted me to see all this time.