

Snow Proud

By: Leslie Little

Snowmaggedon, a one-hundred-year-old tradition that had become the object of my obsession. Rules for the contest were simple, random people were paired together to build a winning igloo, and twelve hours was the allotted time. The previous winners got their picture in the town community center, an igloo trophy, and five-hundred dollars.

I heard my name followed by a name I had not thought about in a while, Lily Parker."

I rolled my eyes because I knew being paired with Lily would be difficult. Lily and I have known each other all our lives. She never cared much about winning Snowmaggedon, not as I did. I wanted to make my father proud. His health prevented him from participating this year, so I was extra determined to win.

After spending the first hour scouting the mountain, Lily found a spot close to an old white pine tree. "How about here? Is it level enough?" She asked.

I stepped over to where she stood, examining the area. The ground was frozen solid. Freshly fallen snow surrounded the area, enough to get a good start. "This looks good. Let's clear out this pile of brush."

We began to work together, clearing out the area and creating the base of the igloo. Hours pass as our creation begins to take form.

I admired Lily's look of accomplishment expressed each time she completed a block. I noticed she still wore the tiny gold locket I gave her on her sixteenth birthday. I wondered if it still contained the same picture of us next to the falls.

I stayed on Lily and ensured she was constantly working, pushing her to work harder. But, I criticized her choice of pace and noticed her look of accomplishment no longer existed.

The snow came down heavily as we created a window for the igloo. Lily worked in silence, only replying to me by nodding her head. Her pace had become slower and less meticulous.

"We need to finish to win."

"I'm working as fast as I can," Lily shouted, threw a snowball in my direction, and then laughed.

"I'm not playing, Lily. This year I'm going to win."

She looked down, continuing to work. I worked from the inside to create the dome while Lily handed me blocks from overhead. I saw the look she was giving, and I'm not sure she was as determined as I was, but I let it go.

Snow becomes sleet as the igloo comes together flawlessly. Winds pick up the fresh powder from the ground creating tiny snownados. Finally, it dropped to a bitter cold temperature causing me to push Lily to work harder and faster. We had less than six hours to complete our prize-winning igloo, and the weather needed to cooperate. *We needed to save time.*

Lily shivered in her oversized yellow parka, "Do you want to head to the lodge to warm up? I can barely feel my fingers."

"Not yet Lily. Let's wait."

She paused and stared at me silently. Then, after a minute, she says, "We've been out here for hours. I'm cold and hungry. Besides, the igloo is coming along well, and we have time."

"I said not yet, Lily. It can't be left unfinished."

Lily huffed and stormed down the hill and towards the center of the town. I ignored her and continued to work. I watched as she stumbled through the snow. She pulled her toboggan down over her ears, then rubbed her hands together. When she didn't look back, I decided to go after her.

I caught up to her halfway down. "Lily, wait!"

"You are unbearable, Drew Willis!"

I trudged behind her silently towards the town center as the snow deepened. *How am I unbearable? She's the one being irrational.*

"Lily, please, stop." I pled as I realized she was standing in front of the large oak door decorated in holiday décor.

"I'm done, Drew," She said, "I can't take anymore."

Lily quietly entered the door, leaving me standing alone. I sat on a nearby bench and placed my elbows on my knees, tucking my head between them.

What have I done? Lily had been working hard, but I kept pushing her.

I stepped inside the same door and was reminded of what was at stake. The walls of the community center were lined with photos of previous year's champions. However, the desire to

win was immediately forgotten when I spotted Lily standing by the garland-decorated fireplace. She held a Styrofoam cup of steaming hot chocolate. Her attention was focused on the roaring fire.

"I'm sorry, Lil. I shouldn't have been so hard on you." I said as I approached her.

She didn't look my way, which told me she had been crying.

"Please, Lily," I begged. "You don't know how much this means to me."

She bowed her head and stared at the floor. "I do understand, Drew," she said as I noticed fresh tears formed in the corner of her eyes. "I've been trying to make you proud to be my partner all day. But you weren't ecstatic about being paired up with me. I could tell."

"Ah, shit Lil, I was being a jerk," I replied as I brushed my hand through my hair.

"You were being pushy, so I tried harder." She turned towards me, and tears trailed down her cheeks. "I have always rooted for you, Drew. I've known you my whole life. So, I do know how much this means to you. It's about proving something to your father."

After all this time, she still remembered how hard I struggled to fulfill my father's expectations. "For what it's worth... I am truly sorry about pushing you to work harder. We make a great team."

She sat her hot chocolate on a nearby table with a Santa statue carrying his bag of presents, then stepped toward me. "I'm trying the best I can. I really wish you could see that."

"I know you are," I assured her. "The pressure to win overtook me."

She nudged my shoulder playfully and laughed, "Jekyll and Hyde... Let's go. We only have a few hours to finish. We still have time to win." She grabbed my hand and pulled me toward the door.

We plodded through freshly packed snow back up the mountain to the masterpiece. Lily began packing snow around the base, where the winds swept away while I worked on enforcing the king block.

I occasionally looked her way and smiled. She's still the girl I remembered, dimples and all, only more mature. Her locket slid across the chain as she leaned from side to side to compare the symmetry. Again, I wondered if the picture inside was still the same.

"We're almost finished," she began, "It looks amazing. I really think we have a shot at winning."

I watched Lily pack handfuls of snow onto the igloo and admired her meticulousness. Each block was the same. She worked quickly but diligently as the snow fell.

"She does look amazing," I said.

She stopped patting the icy pile, grinned, and said, "Did you refer to our igloo as she?"

I laugh. "I did."

She rushed forward and jumped onto me. I stumbled along, trying to watch where I stepped to avoid the almost complete igloo, but I failed. Lily and I tumbled to the ground, crashing into the entrance to the igloo. As the entrance collapsed, snow dust flew into the air showering us on its way back down.

"I'm so sorry, Drew," she began to cry while she grabbed handfuls of snow to rebuild the entrance.

I realized our prize-winning igloo had been damaged but noticed Lily in a manic. First, she grabbed chunks of the fallen entrance and packed fresh powder. Then, she panicked, repeatedly pleading, "I'm sorry."

I rushed over to her, wrapped my hands around her waist, and pulled her close. "It's alright, Lily," I said while I comforted her, "it's alright. I'm not worried about the damn igloo." I used my thumb to wipe the tears from her cheeks. "I'm sorry I've been hard on you. I realized what matters. You, Lil, you matter."

She hesitated before saying, "I love you, Drew Willis."

"About damn time," I said. "I've been waiting a long time for you to say it. I've always loved you, Lily Parker." I kissed her as if it was the first time.

Lily then grabbed a handful of snow and smashed it in my face. "Better late than never, now let's win this!"

We finished the entrance just in time to submit our creation, then headed to the community center to eat and wait for the judges to determine the winner. After dinner, we sat near my father on the leather sofa in front of the fireplace while he told us how proud he was. I placed one arm around her. "We finished, Lil. Even after we damaged it, we still finished in time."

"I told you I was trying my best."

I turned towards the fire and pondered the one question that had been on my mind all day.

"I see you still have your locket."

She looked at me and admired I noticed her wearing it. "I've never taken it off, except when my tonsils were taken out. They made me take it off." She laughed.

"Same pict-"

"Yes. Same one."

I grabbed her hand and gave it a good squeeze. "I've missed you, Lily."

"I've missed you too."

A cold breeze entered the room as the mayor, and three judges stepped into the lodge. The mayor walked over to a podium in the center. He grabbed a bell, *ding, ding*, "We have declared the winners for the one-hundredth annual Snowmagedon contest."

Everyone focused their attention on the mayor and judges and became silent. "The winners of this year's Snowmagedon contest are...."

Lily gripped my hand tight.

"Drew Willis and Lily Parker with their Winter Wonderland igloo."

Lily hugged me tightly before we headed to the mayor to collect our well-deserved prize.

I could see the excitement in her eyes, "You did it, Drew!"

"No, Lil, we did it."

