

Our Snowflake

Lauren Marshall, Berkeley Vale Campus T.L.S.C. – Year 7

Slowly creeping down the stairs, Bethany's small toes hit a weak spot in the wooden planks. *Creeeaaak*. After the creaking laid down, Beth made a mental note to skip that step on the way up. Humming Silent Night in her head quietly, she finally made it to the bottom step. Seeing the TV still left on a Christmas cartoon, she sat eagerly in front of it. Out of the silence, she heard a bump on the roof. The winter snow drifted around the closest window. Beth turned off the TV and sat in the darkness for a few minutes. She listened carefully when she heard a slight noise. It was like a faint ringing of bells. Santa! She jumped up and hid behind the couch. There was another bump and a ruckus down the chimney. Bethany anticipated this moment ever since she was able to understand what her parents were saying. Her love for the dear 'Sandy Claws' was adorable how much she loved the jolly icon.

Out of nowhere, a large looking man in a red suit appeared. *Sandy Claws!* "Ho ho ho, Merry Christmas!" He whispered excitedly. As he carefully placed presents under the glowing tree, Bethany stepped out from behind the couch. "Excuse me, Sandy Claws, but my sister is very sick, and I want you to give all my presents to her to make her better." Santa Clause looked her in the eyes. He knew he couldn't do anything to help her sister. "Beth?" Her father, Harry, called out to her. Santa knew he had to go. He kissed the top of Bethany's head and climbed back up the chimney. As Harry neared the

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last step, Santa's bells rang for the last time that night. Harry was the only parent home, since Isla was in hospital with their premature daughter, Rose. Bethany wanted to save Rose because Rose was dying.

"Beth, what are you doing down here? You should be in bed. Santa won't come." Beth stared him in the eyes. Had he not seen Santa like she had? "But daddy, Santa already came. Didn't you see him?" It was Harry's turn to stare. She was 7 now. Did she still believe in Santa? "No, but that's okay. C'mon. Time for bed, sweetie." As he took her up the flight of stairs once again, his eyes began to water. He hoped Rose would make it. He tucked Bethany into bed and turned off the light. "Daddy?" she called. "Yes, dear?" he replied. "Merry Christmas." He smiled through the tears as he got into bed.

The next morning was Christmas morning. The smell of pancakes and honey filled the whole house. Today was when Beth was going to meet Rose for the first time. "Daddy, will she be beautiful? Like a snowflake?" Harry looked ahead, as if something had wilted inside him. "Even more beautiful." "How is that even possible?" Beth was astonished. Snowflakes were the most beautiful thing she's ever seen. How could a little baby be even more beautiful? Harry didn't answer. They ate breakfast and little Beth sang Christmas carols between bites.

In the car, Beth's little heart was racing. She couldn't wait to meet her little sister. Her dad had brought roses for Isla and Rose. They entered the hospital and after a frustrating 25 minutes eventually found Isla's room.

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"Hi." She looked at Harry. "Hey you two. Merry Christmas beautiful girl." She handed Bethany a small wrapped package. She sat on the bed and opened it. "They say she's got a 30% chance of making it." Harry looked to the floor. "Well, she is only 30 weeks. These are for you. Merry Christmas." He passed her the flowers and kissed her forehead. A nurse came in with a clipboard. "If you would like to see your child, she is fine to see now." Beth put down the box with a barbie doll inside. She held her dad's and mum's hand and they walked down the hallway.

Walking into the room, there were cords and wires hooked up to machines. A sign on the wall said "Don't touch the electrical equipment." Beth looked around in wonder and curiosity. "She's just over here." The nurse said as she dragged a few chairs over to the small crib with a tiny baby inside. Bethany's parents sat and smiled at the small baby while holding hands. They looked at the small, fragile creation. Bethany put her finger inside Rose's tiny hand. Rose's little chest stopped breathing. Bethany panicked. So did her parents. "Nurse!" Harry yelled.

Isla, Harry and Bethany sat in front of the window. The winter snow fogged up the glass, and Beth would draw shapes of reindeer and gumdrop fairies and Santa Clause on it. The nurse knocked on the door. They all eagerly turned around. "I'm sorry, but she didn't make it." Isla turned pale and screamed and cried. Bethany hugged her mother. "What's going on?" Isla cried on her daughter's shoulder and they were engulfed in a large hug from their father.

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The funeral was on New Year's Day and family and friends attended. Bethany couldn't understand what was going on. People were crying, hugging. She didn't understand why Rose never came home. She didn't understand why she was in a pink wooden box. Or why her mother and father were crying. She thought that Rose would make them happy. Everyone sat down and listened to the Eulogy.

*"We know none of you really saw Rose while she was alive. But she was a beautiful little girl. She laughed and cried like everyone else. But it was unfortunate that she died so young. She was our Christmas gift. Our snowflake. We only wish she got to experience life, unhooked from cords and wires and being able to be free. Swing on the swings. Play with dolls like normal little girls. We wish she had her first Christmas at home, not in a hospital having injections. We'd like to thank everyone for coming. The wake will be at our house."*

Every year, they celebrated Rose's death by collecting snowflakes in a jar and placing them on her grave, along with a bouquet of roses.