



SNOW

(1)

Standing on the front walk I watch the boys chase the girls to wash their faces with snow, the girls shrieking and giggling except for the little ones who cry. The one with the dark hair laughing like bells tinkling. Afraid to throw a snowball at her because then she'd notice me.

A snowball bounces against the door window. Glass splintering. Teacher strides out, glares, all motion ceasing as the rings of his presence lap into sudden petrification, rocks back and forth on the balls of his feet, surveys the chaos which his Godgiven destiny is to interject Order upon. A stern yet impartial voice:

"Who threw that snowball?"

Nobody wanting to be a ratfink. His Adam's apple hobs.

"I believe I asked a question. Doesn't anyone want to own up? Very well then it so happens I personally saw who threw it. You."

Pointing at me. Accusing me of some heinous crime, like murdering Jews or burning down churches.

"No I didn't."

"No I didn't what."

By now knowing the rules enough to get by: "No I didn't sir."

"So, You lie on top of it." Starting to shiver in his suit, his voice coming in spasmodic jerks with white steam like an engine. "You stand there to my face and lie. Come inside please."

Closing the door so we are alone. I can hear the others gather outside in little groups whispering. Will he get the strap? Will he cry when he gets it? Like Stephen suddenly whining like a tortured cat as the heavy dull whhaapp whhaapp echoed through the school and his whining car sounds going up and up so anguished we all were stricken silent and trembling.

My palms sweating. Not believing it is happening. Any moment somebody will come in and confess. Looking out the window at the birches thin like tangled barbedwire. A dead fly on the sill. His hands folded over his chest like he is praying.

"Now. Ah yes you are the troublemaker. The sullen filthytongued one. I knew from the first day we'd have trouble with you."

"I didn't throw it."

"What?"

"Sir."

Coming closer staring down, breathing hard, his face red, his eyes popping under bushy eyebrows. Frowning, tapping his ruler in his hand.

"We'll see about that. I could strap you you know. But that would be over too quick. It would only make you rebell. You see I know how minds like yours function. Or shall we say malfunction. Don't you have any respect for authority boy? I've lived a bit longer than you and I can smell a rotten apple when I see one. Pay attention."

Barking. Bent rocking back and forth suddenly seeming a tottering old man who needs a cane. Hair sticking out of his left nostril like a centipede.

"You must learn to knuckle down boy or you'll be a lost cause. Discipline is what you need discipline. So. After school for a week. You must write on the blackboard. I SHALL NOT THROW SNOWBALLS AT THE PROPERTY OF OTHERS. I SHALL NOT LIE TO MY TEACHER. 500 times each day. Will suffice for now."

All afternoon huddled in my seat afraid to look at anybody. Afterwards writing the words my head shrieks "No" while my hand makes the lie. The evidence there before my eyes and theirs heavy and damning. Beginning to wonder if maybe I had indeed thrown it but can't remember. The memory confused. Sad for my hand crumpled like some pale creature under a rock. Leaving a hate deep and pure and steelhard dwelling in the pit of my belly. As I leave his face looks at me, waiting for humble contriteness, the breakdown and fatherly counsel, but I pretend he isn't there.

Creeping up behind me, scaring me how she forms out of nebulous air: the darkhaired girl waiting at the door. Her face screwed up all anxious.

"Hi."

"Hi."

"I waited for you."

"O."

"Did he hurt you?"

I pretended to laugh bravely. The wind blew the snow like whitecapped waves, making a soft southing. As we walk down the sidewalk matching our steps.

"You didn't throw it! I saw who did--Peter. So why did he punish you?"

"I don't know. Maybe he hates me."

"But why?"

"Maybe. Because I'm different."

Confiding to me in a stage whisper: "The fat old phony. He looked so funny. Standing there with his belly stuck out pretending to be shocked. Don't worry about him he's not worth it."

Silence hanging between us a secret illegal home we share. Wondering if I should say anything or if that would break it like the window. Looking down instead at her black shiny boots. And above, her red leotarded legs the smooth long muscles twinkling in and out.

Suddenly exploding a nova inside me out: "I hate his guts. All of them. They're all the same."

"You shouldn't be that way," she admonishes wisely.

"Why not?"

"It's wrong that's all."

The wind blowing strands of hair over her eyes and into her mouth so she has to brush it away. Impatiently, as if it were a dreadful bother to have to be a girl and grow long hair.

"I have to turn here. Daddy's waiting for me at the hospital. He's a doctor. That's why teacher never punishes me. Daddy's head of the school committee."

"O. Well. Goodbye."

"Goodbye."

Forcing my legs to walk away. The threat between us lengthening almost snapping. A sudden franticness that it must not end; stopping, calling back:

"I forgot--what's your name?"

"Jennifer."

"Would you like" (swallowing) "to go skating tomorrow after school? On the lake?"

She considers gravely. "Ok."

"Well. Goodbye."

She laughs and waves a blue mitten like a bird.