

SNOW DAY

by Priscilla Cummings

“Blood!” Digger called out. “Brady! J.T.! Come quick!” 1

My friend and I looked at each other. Our mouths dropped and we 2
took off through the snow-covered field. It wasn’t easy running in our
boots. We must’ve looked like two turkey buzzards the way we lifted our
feet up and down out of the snow and flapped our arms to get some
momentum going.

Just under a foot of powdery white flakes had fallen overnight, but it 3
was enough to cancel school. A snow day! We three called each other as
soon as we were up. We had to wait for J.T. to get some chores done on the
chicken farm where he lives. But then my mom made blueberry pancakes
so that gave me time to eat. I even got to thinking that Digger would like
some of those pancakes, too. Over at his house, the kids all just got up and
ate whatever was there. One time it was Goldfish crackers! Almost never
pancakes or eggs, so I knew he’d love an invite—and he did.

“Stop right there,” my mom ordered, holding our empty plates as we 4
opened the door to go. “Digger, where are your gloves?”

He lifted his shoulders and let them drop. “I don’t know,” he said. 5

I hadn’t noticed he wasn’t wearing gloves. But half the time we 6
were outside in winter, Digger didn’t have a hat or gloves on. He never
complained, though. I’ve always thought that Digger was pretty tough. We
were only in sixth grade and already he talked about how he was going to
be a Marine someday.

“Here,” my mom said. She set down the plates and fetched a pair of 7
leather gloves I’d just gotten for Christmas. I hoped Digger didn’t lose
them.

“Brady,” Mom said when we were halfway out the door. “I know 8
this is a snow day and you boys want to have some fun. But it’s also
your opportunity to get that science report done, so save part of your
afternoon, okay?”

I nodded, but no way was I going to write about dolphins on a snow 9
day!

Finally, we were out of there, closing the door quickly because my yellow lab, Tilly, wanted to come, too, and this was one time when we had to leave her home. 10

"Come on!" I shouted to Digger, not wanting to suffer Tilly's whining. 11

We plunged into the snow and raced each other over across our yard, onto the street, and finally up the long, curvy driveway, already plowed, to Digger's grandfather's farm. It was maybe our favorite place on the face of this earth. In warm weather, we made tree forts in the woods, rode the hay bailer, slept in the barn with bats, and sucked on raw, sour rhubarb from the garden. Winters, with a fresh snow, we liked to go tracking, guessing which animals had come through, trying to figure out where they came from and where they went. If you wanted to track animals you had to do it first thing while the tracks were fresh, and before the sun started melting everything. 12

Right off, behind the barn, I saw what looked like fox paw prints, evenly spaced because of the way the animal trotted. I'd been seeing a fox lately, a big, bushy-tailed red one, and I was eager to know where it slept overnight. J.T. wanted to find the fox, too, so we started following its tracks. Digger picked up on two deer and went in the other direction until we heard him holler, "Blood!" 13

When we met up we saw right off the bright red splotches on white snow. 14

"Think it got shot?" I asked. 15

"Better not have!" Digger exclaimed. "This land's posted. No one's supposed to hunt here, not ever!" 16

Even though Digger's grandfather didn't have milking cows on the farm anymore, he still had a few heifers. No way were hunters allowed on his property. 17

"Still, it doesn't stop some people," I told him. 18

J.T. snorted, agreeing with me. 19

"If it did get shot, maybe we can find it and help," Digger said, surprising me a little because I didn't normally think of him as soft on animals. 20

So we set off following the blood trail. Weird, but a feeling of dread, a kind of queasiness in the pit of my stomach, came over me. I've often wondered since then: Can a person sense something bad is about to happen? 21

The deer tracks took us all the way across the pasture and down a hill to the cow pond. It's a pretty big pond and what happened is that the wind blew some of the snow off the pond before it piled up, so there were patches of bare ice. Where there was snow, however, we saw an interesting crisscross of tracks. Maybe a lot of animals had already come seeking a drink. 22

"Look!" I exclaimed to J.T. "The fox tracks again!" I followed them, walking fast and sliding some on the bare ice while J.T. and Digger pursued that wounded deer. 23

Suddenly, about halfway across the pond, I heard a heavy *crack!* It was so loud it echoed in the hollow. 24

I stopped immediately. I knew it was the ice. But there wasn't time to change course. The next crack tore through the frozen water like a giant zipper, the ice giving way beneath my feet. I sunk in fast and was sucked up to my armpits in cold, icy water. 25

"Guys! Help!" I shouted. It was all I could get out before I was gasping and struggling just to keep my head above that frigid water. My boots, my lined jeans, my parka, they all weighed a ton. I slapped at the water and chunks of ice with my heavy, mittened hands but already I felt my limbs going numb. 26

Seemed like a long time, but I know now it was mere seconds before my friends rushed toward me. 27

"We're here!" Digger shouted. 28

"Hold on!" J.T. called out. 29

But the ice opened up in front of them and they had to backtrack fast. 30

Digger circled swiftly around the growing hole in the ice. "Brady, can you get over to the edge here?" 31

I tried to look at him. "I can't . . ." I mumbled because an amazing sleepiness was setting in and I could barely speak. 32

"I'll get a branch!" J.T. shouted to Digger. 33

“No time!” Digger yelled back to him. “Come here and grab my feet!” 34

I didn’t get what they were doing then. I was already fading out, I think. 35

In one swift movement, Digger dove over the ice and stretched out his bare hands toward me. J.T. kneeled behind, holding his feet. 36

“Grab ahold!” Digger yelled at me. 37

Weakly, I flailed in the water. The cold was paralyzing my arms and hands. 38

“Do it *now!*” Digger hollered at the top of his lungs. 39

I hated it when he yelled at me. I forced my arms and hands with everything I had and felt Digger’s hands grab my own. 40

Next thing I knew he was hauling me out of that icy pond. Digger peeled off my soaking wet parka while J.T. pushed my arms into his dry one. 41

My feet felt like a ton of cold, wet cement had been plastered to them, but those two guys walked me across the pond, halfway lifting me, up the hill, across the field, and all the way back to Digger’s grandfather’s house. 42

It was kind of a blur after that. Digger’s grampa drew a warm bath and I was stripped down and put in the water while phone calls were made. Next thing I knew my mom and dad were there wrapping me in towels and warm blankets and then dry clothes. It was later, sitting in Digger’s grandfather’s living room, all of us sipping on hot chocolate, shaking our heads and being thankful—even laughing some—that I noticed the chip in Digger’s front tooth. 43

An hour later, J.T. and I went home with Digger. We wanted to see him get praised for being the hero, I guess. But that’s not what happened. At Digger’s house, his truck driver dad was still asleep and Digger’s brother and sister had just spilled grape juice on the kitchen table, which had Digger’s mom peeved. 44

I knew Digger wasn’t going to make a big deal out of what he’d done, so in a loud voice I told his mom right there, “You won’t believe this, but Digger just saved my life! Pulled me out of the frozen cow pond!” 45

“It was amazing!” J.T. chimed in. 46

But maybe we didn’t look like we just escaped death. Not with 47
our clean, dry clothes and all.

Digger’s mom paused in her cleanup task and looked up. 48

“That so?”

“Absolutely!” I assured her. 49

J.T. nodded like his head was going to fall off. 50

The corners of her mouth lifted, but she didn’t have time to say 51
anything more because just then, Digger’s dad came into the kitchen
rubbing his eyes and asked what all the commotion was about,
didn’t we know he needed his sleep?

“Digger just saved my life!” I repeated. 52

“Yeah?” Digger’s father squinted and scratched his bald head. 53

“Yeah. It was pretty incredible,” Digger admitted. He smiled big, 54
the way he deserved to smile.

And just like that the expression on Digger’s dad’s face changed. 55

“What the heck?” he demanded. He walked over to Digger and
roughly lifted his son’s chin. “You chip your front tooth?”

Digger felt it with his index finger. “Must have,” he said, although 56
I’m pretty sure he already knew. “Huh. I guess ‘cause I threw myself
on the ice.”

“You knucklehead!” His father held his hands up like what was he 57
going to do with Digger and went to pour himself a cup of coffee.
“I ain’t payin’ to have that fixed. You do something stupid like that,
you pay for it.”

The three of us stood there, silent—and stunned. 58

His dad took a sip of coffee and threw us a look. 59

“What?” 60

But no one spoke. The air seemed to have gone out of the room. 61

“Go on,” his father said with a scowl. “You boys beat it! Digger, go 62
to your room.”

J.T. and I got out of there fast. We knew better than to stick 63
around when Digger’s dad got going. J.T. went on home and so did I.

I told my parents what happened and then went into the living 64
room, where I picked up the remote and sprawled on the couch.
My dad had an errand to run and my mom went back to cooking a

special meal for me, including my all-time favorite dessert, which is apple pie.

After a while, I turned off the TV because I couldn't get into it. 65
Instead, I went to my room to work on that dolphin report. I was looking through my notes, some I took from Wikipedia, when I reread how dolphins establish such strong social bonds that they will stay with other injured or ill dolphins, even helping them to breathe by bringing them to the surface if needed.

At first, it made me daydream about the wounded deer we'd been 66
following. Like what happened to it? And was another deer helping it? Then I got to thinking about Digger and I couldn't get it out of my head. I knew I had to do something.

Both Mom and Dad thought my idea was a good one. As soon 67
as that apple pie was done, we put it in a box, got in the car, and drove over to Digger's house.

Digger's mom let us in and there was Digger's dad, sitting in his big 68
chair watching a wrestling show on TV.

"We brought Digger a pie," I told them. 69

Digger's little sister and brother, LeeAnn and Hank, ran up to peer 70
in the box.

Hank's eyes grew large. 71

"It says his name!" LeeAnn exclaimed. "In frosting!" 72

I smiled because she didn't know how to read yet. "No," I told her 73
gently. "It says 'hero.' Your big brother saved my life today. I want to thank him."

"I'll go get him!" LeeAnn offered. And no one stopped her as she 74
rushed off to fetch Digger.

That's when my dad said to Mr. Griswald, "Look, we'd like to pay 75
to have that front tooth fixed."

Mr. Griswald finally got up out of his chair and Mrs. Griswald 76
turned off the TV.

"Y'all don't need to do that," he mumbled. 77

"Really, we'd like to," my mom said. "It's the least we can do." 78

"It's my fault Digger chipped his tooth," I added. 79

"Yeah, well, we'll see," said Digger's dad. He scratched his bald 80
head again and looked over at the pie.

Mom handed the box to Mrs. Griswald and I was giving her a carton of vanilla ice cream in a plastic bag when Digger came in, leaning back but pulled with both hands by LeeAnn and Hank.	81
I smiled at him. "How you doin'?"	82
"Okay," he said with a slight shrug, uncertain what was happening.	83
"They brung you a pie!" LeeAnn said excitedly. "Can we eat it now?"	84
We didn't stay long. I knew Mr. Griswald was eager to get a fork in that pie. I could only hope we'd made things a little bit better—if only for a while.	85
"Don't slip on the ice," Mom said as we left.	86
I glanced at her because it seemed like a funny thing to say to me after what had happened <i>and</i> because just then I was thinking about a pod of dolphins jumping through tropical water.	87
"Brady!" Digger called as we picked our way down the front steps.	88
When I turned he was handing me my gloves. "I forgot to give them back."	89
I waved him off.	90
"Keep 'em," I said. "Hey—and thanks again for saving my life."	91
Digger dropped his hand and squeezed the gloves. He took in and let out a deep breath. A few seconds passed.	92
"See you tomorrow," I said.	93

Source: Courtesy of Priscilla Cummings.