

Skiing at Tahoe

By Emily Cameron

Flurries of intricate snowflakes fell from the steel-gray sky as a sharp wind ripped through the air. The frosty breeze tingled on my skin, numbing my exposed face with its icy touch. My bulky waterproof jacket shielded my body from the biting cold and my oversized gray pants protected my legs from the breeze. But despite the major part of my body being relatively warm, my fingertips, toes, and face were freezing. My stiff gloves and loose snow boots did nothing to protect me from the numbing chill.

I stared up at the sloping hill of glittering snow. The soft white powder glittered with miniature particles of ice that reflected the faint glow of the sun behind the thick gray clouds. I felt a tingle of excitement at the prospect of sledding down this smooth hill. My family had decided to spend four days and three nights of our winter break by traveling to Reno and skiing at the mountains there. It was an excruciating four hour drive to our hotel, and along the way we had stopped at this hill to sled on.

Now, my father was groping around in the trunk of our minivan, attempting to pull out several sleds that we had buried underneath the various heavy suitcases that we brought along. When he eventually managed to tug one out, I seized it from him and scrambled onto the base of the hill. Grasping the loop of string attached to the sled in one hand, I proceeded to clamber up the slope. There were many other people sledding on the hill also, and I scooted out of the way as impressive sleds came skidding down the hill. My younger brother, Alexander, trudged up the slope behind me, his sled scraping across the snow as he lugged it along behind him. After a painful hike up the slope in my heavy, bulky snow gear, I finally reached the crest of the hill. I placed my sled in front of me and my father helped me settle on the sled without it sliding down the hill. Then I jerked my body forward and the sled tipped forward, off the top of the hill.

The sled hardly managed to travel a few feet before whirling around and slowing to an unimpressive stop. Irritated at the sled for not being able to go very far, I tumbled off and snatched it up, dragging it back to the top. It was my brother, Alexander's, turn. His sledding ride ended in the same embarrassing failure mine had,

traveling several feet and slowing to a finish. “Why don’t we ride on the same sled?” I suggested.

“No!” Alexander protested, glancing at me doubtfully.

“Come on,” I pressed. “There’s nothing to be afraid of. You won’t get hurt.”

“Fine,” he agreed hesitantly.

I clambered onto the sled first and stretched my legs out in front of me. Alexander plunked down on my legs and curled his legs so they wouldn’t come out of the sled. My father shoved the back of the sled and it bumped down the hill, bouncing off the uneven lumps of snow. Wind ripped at my exposed face and I clenched my hands and toes in an attempt to prevent the chill. The sled was skidding in a diagonal line, and I realized with a jolt it was heading straight toward a group of unsuspecting people. Using Alexander’s body for protection, I grabbed his shoulders and cowered behind him, imagining a dramatic crash and fearing the worst. But before we could reach the group of people, our sled slammed into a loose pile of snow and cold white flakes fluttered everywhere. Alexander and I tumbled off in a flurry of white and lay flattened on the snow with the sled on top of us.

I had been somewhat protected by Alexander’s body, so I wasn’t particularly covered in snow. But since Alexander had been in the front, he had received the worst of the shower of snowflakes. His whole face was covered in frosty white particles, and little chunks of ice and snow clung onto the tips of his long eyelashes. His hair was sprinkled with white and he squinted up at me through his snow-covered lashes in annoyance.

“I’m so cold!” he complained, while our parents scabbled down the mountain to meet us as my mother snapped pictures. “My face is cold!” he bawled and my dad attempted to brush off the clumps of snow with his hands, but since his gloves were covered in snow it only made the situation worse.

“Let’s go again!” I urged my brother, satisfied with our sledding ride down the slope despite the failed ending.

“No,” he refused through his snow-frosted lips, glaring up at me defiantly and furiously blinking his eyelashes in an attempt to get the clinging snowflakes off. He had obviously not enjoyed the sledding ride.

“Fine then,” I snapped, snatching up the neon blue, plastic sled and dragging it up the slope. I realized with a tingle of nervousness that it was very difficult for my gloved hands to properly clutch the string attached to the sled. My fingers were completely numb and my hands felt as though there was ice packed around them,

stifling their movement. I experimentally dug my thumbnail into my index finger and I didn't feel a thing. My hands were so freezing that they trembled with pain, despite my thick gloves.

It was the same situation for my feet. When I tried to curl my toes, such a small movement proved to be difficult for me. My toes were so cold that they tingled with a dull, persistent ache that made me wince with pain.

I tried my best to ignore the numbing cold gnawing at my fingers and toes. When I reached the top of the hill, I scraped my sled across the snow to face down the white slope and settled down on the sled. I stretched my legs to be straight out in front of me and attempted to position my body in such a way that my body weight was even on both the left and right so that the sled wouldn't turn to a particular side. Then I shifted the sled forward and it skidded down the hill.

It was a long ride. The sled scraped across the slope, bouncing off uneven lumps of snow and sliding in random directions. I squinted my eyes against the sharp, frosty wind that tingled on my face. Blurry images ripped past me on either side and drifting snowflakes sprayed into my face and eyes. I could see my mother waving at me and frantically snapping pictures. Eventually, my bumpy sledding ride skidded to a stop as it tumbled into a slight dip in the ground. Clumps of snow splattered my face and hair. I clambered off the sled and groped my fingers to pick it up, but I couldn't. They were so stiff with cold that any mobility was extremely limited.

After that final, somewhat successful ride, my family lugged our sleds back across the bumpy snow to our car. My mother halted us every few seconds to snap picture after picture of us. I could barely manage a false grin at the camera because pain was gnawing on my fingers and toes. Imagining blackened hands and feet from frostbite and amputated limbs, my stomach curdled and I clenched my fingers and curled my toes, wiggling them so they wouldn't freeze.

I clambered inside the minivan. Preparing to face my frozen, blackened fingers, I yanked off my thick blue gloves to reveal my freezing, but still perfectly normal hands. My trembling fingers fumbled as I cautiously eased off my bulky snow boots. Peeling off my knee-high socks, I found that my toes were also appeared to be normal.

I slumped back in the seat and stuffed my hands into my waterproof jacket pocket. I had the sensation that thousands of sharp icicles were digging into my fingers, but it was only the painful cold. Wincing at the gnawing pain, I tucked my freezing feet into my bent knee and attempted to ignore my aching limbs. Dad backed

the car out of the parking lot and cautiously drove along the icy, snow-coated road. I stared out the foggy window at the blurred scene of trees covered with a frosting of fine, white powder.

When we finally reached our hotel after what seemed like an eternity, I stuffed my bare feet back inside the thick snow boot, recoiling at the cold that pressed against my feet. Clambering out of the minivan, my father and mother tugged out several heavy, overstuffed suitcases and dragged them across the icy road toward the hotel entrance. As I snatched open the door, I sighed with relief at the welcoming sensation of heated air. My parents checked in at the front desk and I eagerly pounded up the carpeted staircase, excited to see what our room looked like.

When we reached our room number, my mother inserted the plastic card into a slot on our door and pressed on the handle. “Wow!” I gasped. It was a spacious hotel suite with a mini kitchen and one bathroom. There was a wooden desk against the wall with a sofa next to it. A comfortable king-sized bed was opposite the sofa. I shoved my way into the suite and flung myself onto the bed, rumpling the smooth white sheets.

“There’s only one bed?” Alexander protested, staring at the single bed in the room with horrified expression on his face as though he was imagining the entire family squeezed into it.

“No, that sofa folds out. It’s a sofa bed,” my father explained.

“Will we—” I pointed out, but I never finished my sentence because at that moment a young boy barged out of the room next to us. He glared sharply at me with furious brown eyes and snapped accusingly, “Can you be quiet?”

I stared at him, too startled to utter a single word. His childish face was squinting at me in annoyance. He was behaving like he was my mother, but he couldn’t be more than eight years old. A twinge of annoyance sparked inside me, but I forced it back. My family and I had hardly been making a single noise, and here he was accusing us as though we had committed a crime.

“Sorry, kid,” I muttered, my tone of voice making it very clear I wasn’t sorry at all. Sweeping one last glare at me and the rest of my surprised family members, he whipped around and jerked the door closed behind him.

“I can’t believe him!” I complained loudly. “Oops!” Slapping a hand over my mouth, I hastily lowered my voice. “We weren’t even talking very loud.”

“Hi!”

A cheery greeting broke into my hushed complaints. Glancing up, my eyes flared in excitement when I saw my friend Maria pounding down the hallway. “Hi!” I whispered. Pressing a finger to my lips, I proceeded to inform her about the boy next door.

“Wow!” Maria gasped, flashing a disgusted glance at the boy’s door. “That’s so rude.” A mischievous grin sparked on her lips. “La la!” she sang with her voice purposely loud. She leaned closer to the boy’s door and sang even louder.

I giggled and cupped my hands against the door. “Make sure that you’re *really* quiet,” I said exaggeratedly, emphasizing each word, “or else the *boy next door* will get mad at you!” I stifled my laughter.

“Come on,” Maria whispered, “let’s go eat dinner!”

With Maria’s and my family following, we scampered down the hall. Glancing behind my shoulder, I could see the boy’s door being snatched open again and his young face glaring down the hall at us. We ducked inside the elevator and quickly jabbed the “close door” button before he could confront us.

After a satisfying dinner at a buffet, my family and I bounded up the stairs, and my father shoved open the door to our room. As I kicked off my dirty white sneakers and clambered into the sofa bed, I rewound the exciting events of the day in my head. A jolt of eagerness twisted in my stomach when I thought about the next day. Tomorrow we would be going skiing at Mount Rose! I fell asleep with images in my head of me zigzagging expertly down a steep, snowy slope.

The next morning, I was awoken by the blaring noise of an alarm blasting on my cell phone. I tumbled over and jabbed at the screen to shut off the alarm. Still half-asleep, I clambered over to my parent’s bed and poked at their faces until they woke up. “Come on!” I hissed. “Let’s go eat breakfast!”

I tugged on my clothes and jammed my feet into my sneakers. My fingers fumbled as I attempted to tie the fraying white laces. Jerking open the door, I waited impatiently on the threshold while my family dragged themselves out of bed. Casting a mischievous glance at the door of the boy’s room next to ours, I thumped down the hall, slamming my sneakers down on the threadbare, patterned carpet with exaggerated force. “Emily,” my mother admonished sharply. “Don’t stomp around like that; you’ll annoy the boy next door.”

“That’s the whole *point*,” I retorted gleefully as I pressed the down button for the elevator.

Downstairs, the lobby was crammed with chattering people and the scents of fresh food mingled in the air. I immediately spotted Maria with her distinctive, flaming golden hair and squeezed onto the couch next to her with the rest of her family. After gobbling down several bowls of cereal and a plateful of eggs on toast, I pounded back upstairs with my family to change our clothes and prepare for the skiing trip at Mount Rose. Tugging my bulky, gray pants over my jeans and jamming my arms into my puffy, waterproof jacket, I jerked a comb through my tangled hair and pulled it back into a ponytail. Stuffing my hands inside my thick, waterproof gloves and slipping my feet into my snow boots, I glanced in the mirror. I appeared to be some sort of oversized pea bundled up in my thick gear, but at least it would keep me warm.

My family and I trudged downstairs to the parking lot. When I staggered stiffly down the hallway, my clothes made a squeaking sound with each uncomfortable step as my pants legs rubbed together. Waddling across the parking lot, I nearly slipped twice on the slippery, icy ground. Our minivan was coated in a thick layer of freshly fallen snow. Scooping up a handful of it in my gloves, I shaped it into a ball and flung it at my brother's back. The snowball splattered against his dark blue jacket in a cloud of white powder. Whipping around, he glared at me and protested, "Hey!" as he struggled to brush off the snow covering his jacket.

My father stared in dismay at the front window of the car, which was coated in clumps of white snow. When he attempted to brush off the snow by rubbing the window with his jacket sleeve, the fine powder smeared across the glass, making the situation worse.

"How are you supposed to see?" I questioned anxiously as I scooted inside the car with Alexander. I squinted through the snow-smeared glass, imagining canceled ski trips.

"Maybe you could melt the snow off," my mother suggested, reaching over to turn up the heat in the car. The flecks of white snow transformed into droplets of water that slid off the glass.

"Great idea!" my father remarked, impressed, as my mother grinned broadly, looking pleased with herself.

As my father backed the car out of the parking lot, he peered nervously out the window at the slippery, snowy roads. "Dad, be careful," I pleaded, glancing fearfully at the ice.

As the minivan rumbled along the roads, my father gripped the steering wheel and maneuvered cautiously along the winding streets. When we began driving along a twisting path up a mountain that was barely visible beneath the blanket of snow, I stared fretfully at the steep drop off one side of the path. “What if we skid off the mountain and *die*?” Alexander piped up.

“We won’t,” my father retorted, but his voice quavered with uncertainty.

“Do we need to put on chains?” my mother questioned, frowning in concern. “They haven’t even cleared this road yet; it’s dangerous.”

“Someone will tell us if we need to,” my father replied.

“Look!” Alexander squealed, jabbing a stubby finger at the window to point at a flashing sign that announced we had to put on chains. My father maneuvered the car and parked along the side of the road. Clambering out of the driver’s seat, he rifled around in the trunk of our minivan and grabbed a tangle of wires which I assumed were the chains. He crouched down in the mud-streaked snow and I stared out the window as he fumbled to wrap the wires around the front tire. When he had secured the first set of chains, he squatted down next to the other front tire and repeated the process. After a while, he opened the car door and scrambled inside, letting in a blast of freezing air. His soaking snow boots created muddy footprints on the car floor.

“All done?” my mother said.

My father nodded breathlessly, tugging off his wet gloves and flinging them into the trunk.

My father drove back onto the snowy road. I relaxed my tensed muscles, feeling a lot safer now that we had chains to prevent the car from skidding. The whole car trembled and vibrated as we rumbled along. “We have to go slowly when the car has chains on,” my father explained, catching the perplexed look on my face in the rearview mirror.

“Are we there yet?” Alexander complained, staring out the window at the frozen white landscape.

My father maneuvered around a sharp turn on the icy road and the minivan rattled into a parking lot. “Yes,” he replied as he parked the car between two mud-splattered trucks.

I tugged open the car door eagerly, straining my eyes for a glance at Mount Rose, but I recoiled at the blast of frosty air that numbed my skin with its icy touch. “I’m cold!” I protested, huddling inside my oversized jacket.

My father placed a set of bulky, plastic ski boots on the car floor next to me, scattering clumps of snow all over the carpet. “These are mine?” I questioned, eyeing the uncomfortable plastic uncertainly.

“Yes,” my father replied, “but don’t worry, they’re not as uncomfortable as they look.”

He stretched open the tongue of the boot and I doubtfully jammed my foot in. Inside the boot it was padded and covered in soft black cloth, but it felt as though something was crushing my foot. I stuffed my foot in harder, and after a moment of forceful struggling it slipped into place.

My father fumbled to buckle the boots and as each buckle snapped into place, my boot became tighter and tighter. When he was done, I had the sensation that iron fists were clenching my legs and my mobility was extremely limited. My father repeated this process on my other foot and when each boot was buckled up, I clambered out of the car, my boots crunching through the fresh snow.

“Here you go.” My mother plopped a heavy, dark gray helmet on my head and adjusted my neon orange goggles over my eyes.

When the rest of my family had finished putting on all their gear, we wobbled stiffly down the stairs to a wooden building where we bought our tickets. A tingle of cold nibbled at my fingertips and toes as I attached the ticket to my jacket zipper. Trying to ignore it, I placed my pair of long, flat skis on the snow and jammed my boots onto them, making sure they clicked into place so they were secure.

Gripping my ski poles in my gloves, I dug them into the snow and shoved hard. I slid forward a few feet on my skis before slowing to a halt. I pushed again harder and managed to scoot several meters up a gentle hill of snow. My father and brother slid along behind me while my mother pranced around, snapping pictures on her camera. She wasn’t going to be skiing with us this year since she recently had surgery. I struggled up to the crest of the hill and stared at the steep, smooth slopes surrounding me.

My father scooted up behind me. Catching the doubtful expression on my face, he remarked, “We won’t be going on those steep slopes, just easy ones like that one.” He gestured to a hill nearby that was practically flat.

“Come on!” Alexander squealed, wobbling forward with his oversized helmet about to tip off his head. He slid toward the easy slope, his floppy waterproof jacket trailing out behind him.

As I pushed off after him, a twinge of pain jolted through my head. Pausing for a moment, I blinked as my vision became blurry. What was going on? I squinted at the professional snowboarders and skiers as they glided past me, who were no more than colorful blobs. Numbing pain gnawing at my fingers and toes through my splitting headache.

My father scooted up behind me. "Go on," he prompted. "Don't stop."

"I'm not feeling well," I muttered as the world swayed before my eyes in a blur.

"What do you mean?" my father inquired, staring at me through his goggles.

"My head . . . why is everything so blurry?" I mumbled. The snow was a blinding white color and I pressed my sleeve against my eyes, trying to block out the light.

"Nothing's wrong with your head," my father remarked sharply. "Come on now, stop making excuses."

"I'm *not* making excuses; I really want to ski, but I'm feeling dizzy," I protested.

"Hi, Emily!" Maria and her mother glided over to us. "Come on; let's go to that slope over there." She pointed to the easy slope.

"Okay," I mumbled, shuffling forward. As I skidded toward the hill, my legs twisted and I toppled over, sprawling in the snow. I closed my eyes, ignoring the freezing cold that seeped into my gloves and ski boots. I was too tired to care.

"That's alright, get on up now," Maria's mother prompted, clutching my jacket sleeve and jerking me up into a standing position.

"Emily!" My mother appeared, frantically snapping pictures like there was no tomorrow. She peered at my confused face. "What's wrong with her?" she demanded, glancing questioningly at my father.

"She's making up some story about being dizzy," he scoffed in annoyance.

"I'm not lying," I retorted. "My head feels fuzzy and I don't feel well."

"Just take her to the café," my father snapped in exasperation to my mother, gesturing to the large wooden building nearby.

I removed my boots from the skis and followed my mother. Clutching my pair of skis and poles, I trudged up toward the café, wobbling unsteadily with my stiff boots sinking into the soft snow with every step. Outside the wooden building, there were metal poles for skiers and snowboarders to store their equipment while they rested inside. My mother grabbed my skiing equipment and placed it against a pole.

I clambered up the slippery, metal stairs after my mother and followed her inside the restaurant. The stuffy, warm air heated my freezing face but it did nothing

to improve the numbing cold that chewed at my fingers and toes. My mother glanced around the crowded restaurant and her dark eyes flared with satisfaction when she spotted an empty table nearby. She pounced on it and I tumbled into the plastic booth, slumping in the seat and squeezing my eyes shut. I felt strangely sleepy.

After a while, a familiar voice squealed, “Are you feeling better now?” Twisting my head, I spotted Alexander waddle into the restaurant toward us, his squeaking clothes matching his high-pitched voice. My father followed him and they plunked down next to my mother and I, scattering powdery white snowflakes across the table.

“Yeah, I guess,” I muttered, shoving my face back inside the comforting darkness of my folded arms on the table.

“Why were you feeling dizzy?” Alexander demanded.

It was a question I had pondered, too. “Maybe because of the sudden temperature change?” I suggested. I tugged off my snow-splattered blue gloves and attempted to bend each numbed finger.

“Oh.”

“So what did you do while we were resting here?” my mother questioned.

“We went on the easy slope a couple of times,” my father replied. Excitement flared in his gray eyes. “Let’s go onto the next slope after this, called the *Ponderosa*.” I glanced doubtfully out the window at the steeper slope labeled with a glinting sign that bore the words *Ponderosa*. Skiers and snowboarders glided with practiced ease down the slope, throwing up powdery clouds of white snow.

“That looks hard,” I protested uncertainly.

“Well, it’s still a beginner level,” my father pointed out.

“I don’t want to go,” Alexander squealed, his oversized helmet wobbling as he shook his head.

“Why don’t *I* try it out first?” my father suggested. “Then I’ll come back and tell you two if it’s too hard or easy. Okay?”

“Okay,” I agreed, flashing a doubtful look at the *Ponderosa*. My father wobbled out of the building, his heavy ski boots limiting his movements in each step.

Thirty minutes later, my father lumbered back into the restaurant and plopped down on the plastic seat next to my mother. Flinging off his solid gray helmet, he reported, “It’s really easy!” Catching the uncertain look on my face, he added, “I *promise* it is!”

“Fine,” I said hesitantly, “I’ll give it a try. I’m not cold anymore.”

“I’ll go, too!” Alexander squealed.

We wobbled out of the restaurant, awkwardly aware that our clothes were rustling in a high-pitched squeaky noise. My mother would occupy the table while we were out. We grabbed our equipment from the rack and I snapped my boots onto each ski, gripping my poles in each gloved hand. With tremendous effort, I heaved myself over to the Ponderosa line, using my poles to drag myself across the flat snow. When it was our turn to mount the chairlift, we scooted forward and the chair swung around, speeding toward us. I plunked down in the seat and we were lifted up in the air as the chair swayed back and forth. "There's no turning back now," I muttered, staring tentatively at the Ponderosa slope. It looked rather steep.

"Well, you see," my father explained, "there are several different paths branching off from the main Ponderosa slope. We'll take the easier path."

After a while, I spotted the end of the chairlift where we would get off. My stomach churned with the plateful of eggs I had that morning. I had a tendency to fall down whenever I was getting off the chairlift. My father raised the bar and I scooted onto the tip of my seat, preparing to get off. When it was time, I flung myself forward and crouched down low as I flew off the chair and safely onto the hill. "I didn't fall," I announced gleefully. Neither my father nor brother had fallen, either.

I stuffed my bulky gloves through the straps on each of my poles and scooted after my father as he glided down the hill. Suddenly I lost control and I flew down the hill, skidding over the lumpy snow and desperately attempting to regain my balance before I crashed into anyone. I pressed down hard on one of my skis and I jerked to the left. Leaning on my other ski, I flew to the right. "That's it," my father remarked, struggling to keep up with my uncontrollable speed. "That's how you slow down!"

Up ahead there was a branch. One path twisted away into a forest, and the other wound down a steep hill. My father whizzed past me, gesturing to the forest path, and I followed him into the cluster of pine trees, glancing back over my shoulder to make sure Alexander was close behind. The wind tingled sharply on my face and stung my cracked, dry lips. But it was a wonderful feeling, as the powdery white trees whizzed past on either side. I weaved along the twisting trail, gliding across the sloping hill. The sleepiness and dizziness that I had felt a mere half an hour ago had vanished, and now I felt wide awake.

"Alright," my father remarked, skidding to a halt and spraying up a cloud of snow. I forced my skis into a wedge shape and paused, too. Alexander followed behind me. "This part is a little steep, so be careful. Don't forget to zigzag across the hill. Push on your left leg to—"

“I already know,” I broke in sharply, glancing eagerly at the sudden steep part of the slope. “I’m already an expert,” I bragged. “Did you *see* how fast I was going back there?”

“Uh-huh,” my father replied uninterestedly. “Well, make sure you don’t get too overconfident.”

I snorted. “Don’t worry. I’m *already* a pro.”

My father cast me a doubtful glance and scooted himself forward with his poles. Staring over the edge at the steep part, he questioned, “Are you sure? It looks pretty steep.”

“Yeah, yeah,” I retorted, and shoved myself forward with my poles. I glided straight down the steep part. The icy wind clawed at my eyes as I skidded down the hill, the pine trees passing in a blur. I spotted a cluster of children who were wobbling unimpressively down the slope, attempting to catch up with their skiing teacher, who was coaxing them down the hill. *I’ll show them what a real skier looks like*, I thought. Gathering my speed, I whizzed straight past them, flinging up clumps of snow behind me. But just as I was sure I had their awed attention, I lost control of my speed and my skis slammed into a lump of snow, dumping me unceremoniously onto my stomach in the freezing snow. “Oomph!” White powder sprayed across my face, splattering my glasses with icy chunks. Blind, I reached up and wiped my face, but I only succeeded in smearing the snow until all I could see was a world of white. The young ski students flashed me amused glances as I dragged myself into a sitting position with snow down my shirt.

As I awkwardly snatched my glasses from my face to clear the snow off, I spotted a familiar face streaking effortlessly down the hill nearby. A surge of envy, embarrassment, and annoyance tingled in my stomach as I realized who it was: the boy in the hotel room next to us! He glanced at me, and his face glowed with triumph as he too recognized who I was. Gathering his speed, he glided closer to me and when he was less than a foot away, he turned sharply, spraying up a cloud of snow that splattered all over me. Then, he gleefully skidded away, rocketing straight down the slope. I cast him a look of jealousy and hatred, a mixture of humiliation and irritation welling up inside me.

“What happened there?” my father demanded, gliding over to me and jerking me to my feet, completely unaware of the embarrassing encounter with the boy next door.

“I hit a stupid lump of snow,” I muttered bitterly, jamming my ski boot back onto the ski and snatching up my scattered poles.

My brother wobbled over. “Wow, what a *pro* you are,” he taunted, snorting as he stared at my snow-coated face and clothes.

“Shut *up*,” I snapped. “I’m fine now.”

As I skidded down the rest of the way on the hill, I made sure I didn’t get too overconfident and crash again. Once I successfully reached the bottom of the slope, I glided smoothly back into the Ponderosa line, attempting to look a lot better than I really was. As my brother, my father, and I plunked down on the chairlift and we floated up to the top of the slope, my father suggested, “Why don’t we try the harder path this time?”

I stared dubiously at the steeper, wider slope branching off from the Ponderosa. Skiers and snowboarders slid effortlessly across the snow, streaking down the slope at a startlingly fast pace. “Are you sure?”

“Of course I am,” my father assured me. “You were so *wonderful* on the easy slope . . . surely you’ll be able to handle this one,” he added.

My eyes flared with pride behind my snow-streaked glasses. “Fine, let’s go on the hard slope, since I’m so wonderful.”

“But it looks so *hard*,” Alexander protested, his expression uncertain behind his bulky, neon blue goggles.

“No, you’ll be fine,” I promised. “Oh look, we’re about to get off the chairlift now.” I shifted forward in the plastic seat and raised the tips of my skis. When it was our turn, I slid off the chairlift and down the hill, managing not to crash into anyone. Alexander, however, staggered and tumbled to the snow on his bottom while still sliding down the hill. I grabbed his oversized jacket sleeve and tugged him into a standing position.

“Let’s go!” my father prompted, propelling himself down the hill. Alexander and I streaked alongside him. The stinging wind blew chunks of snow into my face and tangled ponytail as I slid down the slope. At the fork, we skidded onto the harder slope and I glided down the mountain, dodging the fallen skiers and snowboarders. When I reached the bottom of the slope, I clambered back into the line with my father and Alexander. We went on the Ponderosa several more times until Alexander and I began to complain of the chill and that we were starving from the effort of skiing.

Placing our load of skis and poles alongside the other tangled heaps of people's equipment, we trudged back inside the restaurant and wobbled over to our table, where my mother was immersed in a heavy paperback book. "How was it?" she questioned, with a concerned glance at me.

"Did you get too cold again?"

"No, I'm okay," I assured her, plunking down in the seat and scattering powdery white flakes across the plate of French fries on the table.

"Here, take some," my mother offered, shoving the fries across the table, which I gratefully accepted.

"Emily fell down," Alexander announced gleefully, flashing me a triumphant glance as he sat down next to me.

"I'm okay, though," I promised. Casting Alexander a stony glare, I added, "And it's not like *you* didn't fall down multiple times, either."

"Can we go now?" Alexander demanded. "I'm *so* tired."

Tugging back my jacket sleeve, I checked my battered watch. "It's almost three thirty!" I pointed out.

"Alright," my father agreed. We waddled down back to the equipment rack, with my mother strutting effortlessly in her comfortable snow boots whereas my father, my brother, and I had stiff, plastic ski boots that limited our mobility. With our arms loaded with skis and poles, we struggled back to the car, which seemed miles away but was really quite close. Dumping my load of equipment into the trunk of our minivan, I clambered inside the car and turned on the heater, welcoming the warm sensation on my icy fingers and toes.

As I clambered into the tight sofa bed that night, I attempted to ignore the aching of my limbs. My muscles burned from the effort of skiing. But as I slipped into the comforting blackness of sleep, I could not wait for tomorrow.

"Where are we going today for skiing?" Alexander piped up as the minivan rumbled along the icy, narrow path between the frosted white pine trees. It was the second day of our skiing trip, and Alexander and I were slumped in the backseat in our uncomfortable clothing as the car skidded up the mountain.

My father squinted through the accumulating fog on the front window of the car. "We're going to a new skiing mountain called Diamond Peak," he replied, smearing his waterproof jacket sleeve across the window in an attempt to clear the fog.

“Oh.” Alexander cast an uninterested glance at the snow-coated scene outside, then returned his gaze to his thick, puffy gloves in his lap.

I stared at the fog as it crept across the mountains on its little cat feet, then paused to sit on silent haunches as it overlooked the frozen world from its perch on the mountaintops. “Are we there yet?” I demanded.

“Yes,” my father replied as our minivan skidded inside an icy parking lot crammed with cars. Once we had found a parking spot, I scrambled out of the car, but shrank away from the frosty air as it tingled on my exposed skin. I shoved my feet inside my heavy ski boots and buckled them up tightly, then stuffed my arms into my puffy jacket as my brother and father put on their gear, too.

We hobbled toward the slopes with our stiff ski boots while juggling a heavy load of equipment. Once we were at the slopes, my mother left us to go to the wooden restaurant called the Lodge.

“Which slope do you want to go on first?” my father inquired as he fumbled to attach my ticket to my jacket zipper.

I swept a thoughtful glance around the unfamiliar slopes and remarked, “Let’s go on ‘The Lodgepole.’” The Lodgepole appeared to have similar steepness and length as the Ponderosa slope at Mount Rose.

We clambered onto the ski lift and we sailed through the air, gliding over pine trees and other skiers and snowboarders. When it was time to get off the lift, I flung myself forward and skidded down the gentle hill that led to the beginning of the Lodgepole. Stuffing my bulky gloves into the straps on my poles, I shoved my poles into the snow and streaked down the hill with my father and brother zigzagging effortlessly behind me. The frosty wind tingled on my numb face and blasted chunks of snow and ice into my hair as it stung my eyes.

I glided down the steep, icy chunk of the hill and skidded into the Lodgepole line at the bottom of the slope. After several more runs on the Lodgepole, we streaked to the wooden restaurant, dumped our ski equipment on the rack, and thumped inside the building where I immediately spotted my mother in her neon red waterproof jacket. “How was it?” she questioned, shoving her worn paperback book aside and scooting over on the seat so I could sit.

“It was great!” I responded as I unclipped my bulky helmet and placed it on the table. “I was *awesome!* Did you *see* me back there? I was so—”

“—slow,” Alexander broke in. “I was *way* faster than you.”

“You were *not!*” I protested. “I was always way ahead of you, slowpoke!”

“No—”

“Stop arguing,” my father admonished. “Do you want to ski more, or are you done for the day?”

“I’m done,” Alexander announced, slumping back in the seat.

“Are you sure?” my mother inquired. “This is the last day of skiing!”

I couldn’t help agreeing with Alexander. My muscles were screaming from the effort of skiing and my legs were sore where the rim of my tight plastic ski boot had been gripping my calf. “Let’s go back to our hotel.”

I waddled back to the car, clutching a painful armload of poles while the others carried the rest of the equipment behind me. Once I had dumped the poles in the trunk, I slumped in the car seat and flung off my uncomfortable plastic ski boots. I was exhausted

The next morning, I was awoken by my parents and my brother scrabbling frantically through the hotel room. Dragging myself into a sitting position on the rumpled comforter, I groped for my glasses on the wooden bedside table and demanded, “What’s going on?”

“We’re packing up!” my brother reported, looking pleased to know something I didn’t.

“What? Why?”

“Because we’re *leaving* today, stupid! We’re driving back home,” Alexander retorted as he rifled through a crammed drawer in the bathroom and flung its contents into an empty suitcase.

“Home?” I felt a jolt of relief and regret at the same time. The trip had been fun, but all the same I longed to return the welcoming comfort and warmth of our house where I didn’t have to fret about frostbite or clumps of snow on our car or the slippery ice on the road.

“Yes, *home*, you dummy,” Alexander snapped, pausing in his task of dumping all the manual toothbrushes into the suitcase to cast me an exasperated glare. “Ever heard of it?”

“Alexander,” my mother said sharply, “don’t be rude to your sister.”

I flung back the heavy comforter and clambered out of bed. Jerking open a wooden drawer, I snatched out all the clothes and stuffed them into a suitcase. “Yeah, Alexander,” I said, glancing triumphantly at my brother, “don’t be rude to me.”

Several minutes later, we checked out of our hotel and dragged the overstuffed suitcases to our minivan. My father shoved them into the trunk on top of our ski

equipment and we scrambled inside the car, the freezing air nipping at our skin through our thin clothes. As my father backed out of the parking lot and onto the slippery roads, I glanced regretfully behind me at the glistening white mountains and our comfortable hotel. I would miss the carefree sensation of skidding down the snow-coated slopes and the white snowflakes that speckled our pale skin and clothes. I would miss gliding over the frosted pine treetops on the ski lift and the bitter wind that whipped back my tangled hair. I would miss everything about our skiing experience, and I would never forget our trip to Reno.