



All my life, I've wanted to see snow.

My name is Jordan Blake. My life has been twelve years of sun, sand, and chlorine. I'd never felt cold, *ever* — unless you count air-conditioned supermarkets. And I don't. It doesn't snow in the supermarket.

I'd never felt cold, that is, until the adventure.

Some people think I'm a lucky guy to live in Pasadena, California, where it's always sunny and warm. It's okay, I guess. But if you've never seen snow, it seems like something out of a science-fiction movie.

Fluffy white frozen water that falls out of the sky? It piles up on the ground, and you can make forts and snowmen and snowballs out of it? You have to admit it sounds weird.

One day, my wish came true. I got to see snow at last. And it turned out to be weirder than I thought.

Way weirder.

“Pay attention, kids. This is going to be cool.”

Dad’s face glowed under the red darkroom light. My sister, Nicole, and I watched him developing film. With a pair of tongs, he dipped a sheet of special paper in a chemical bath.

I’ve watched Dad develop film all my life. He’s a professional photographer. But I’d never seen him so excited about photos before — and that’s saying a lot.

Dad takes nature photos. Well, actually, he takes pictures of *everything*! And he still uses an old camera with film!

He never *stops* taking pictures. My mom says that once when I was a baby I saw Dad and screamed. I didn’t recognize him without a camera in front of his face. I used to think he had a zoom lens for a nose!

Our house is filled with embarrassing pictures of me — me as a baby in baggy diapers, me with food all over my face, me crying after scraping my knee, me hitting my sister . . .

Anyway, Dad had just returned from a trip to the Grand Tetons. That’s a mountain range in Wyoming — part of the Rocky Mountains. He was all worked up about the pictures he took there.

“I wish you kids had seen those bears,” Dad said. “A whole family of them. The cubs reminded me of you two — always teasing each other.”

Teasing. Ha. Dad thinks Nicole and I *tease* each

other. That's putting it mildly. Nicole — Miss Know-It-All — drives me crazy.

Sometimes I wish she'd never been born. I've made it my mission to make *her* feel the same way. I mean, I try to make her wish she'd never been born.

"You should have taken us with you to the Grand Tetons, Dad," I complained.

"It's very cold in Wyoming this time of year," Nicole said.

"How do you know, Brainiac?" I jabbed her in the ribs. "You've never been to Wyoming."

"I read up on it while Dad was away," she explained. Of course. "There's a picture book about it in the library if you want to know more, Jordan. It's just right for you — it's for first graders."

I couldn't think of anything to say back. That's my problem. I'm too slow with the comebacks. So I jabbed her again.

"Hey, hey," Dad murmured. "No jabbing. I'm working here."

Dumb Nicole. Not that she's dumb — she's really smart. But in a dumb way — that's my opinion. She's so smart she skipped fifth grade — and landed in *my* class. She's a year younger than I am and she's in my class — *and* she gets straight A's.

Dad's pictures floated in the chemical bath, slowly becoming clear. "Did it snow in the mountains while you were there, Dad?" I asked.

“Sure, it snowed,” Dad replied. He was concentrating on his work.

“Did you go skiing?” I asked.

Dad shook his head. “I was too busy working.”

“How about ice-skating?” Nicole asked.

Nicole acts as if she knows everything. But like me, she’d never seen snow, either. We’d never left Southern California — and you could tell by looking at us.

We’re both tan all year round. Nicole’s hair is greenish-blond from the chlorine in the community pool, and mine is brown with blond streaks. We’re on the school swim team.

“I’ll bet it’s snowing at Mom’s house right now,” Nicole said.

“Could be,” Dad replied.

Mom and Dad are divorced. Mom just moved to Pennsylvania. We’re going to spend the summer with her. But we stayed in California with Dad to finish out the school year.

Mom sent us some pictures of her new house. It was covered with snow. I stared at the pictures, trying to imagine the cold.

“I wish we stayed at Mom’s house while you were gone,” I said.

“Jordan, we’ve been over this.” Dad sounded a little impatient. “You can visit your mother when she’s settled. She hasn’t even bought furniture yet. Where would you sleep?”

“I’d rather sleep on a bare floor than listen to Mrs. Witchens snoring on the couch,” I grumbled.

Mrs. Witchens stayed with Nicole and me while Dad was away. She was a nightmare. Every morning we had to clean our rooms — she actually inspected them for dust. Every single night she served us liver, brussels sprouts, and fish-head soup with a tall glass of soy milk.

“Her name’s not *Witchens*,” Nicole corrected me. “It’s *Hitchens*.”

“I *know* that, *Sicole*,” I retorted.

Under the red light in the darkroom, the photos grew clearer. I heard excitement in Dad’s voice.

“If these shots come out well, I can publish them in a book,” he said. “I will call it *The Brown Bears of Wyoming*, by Garrison Blake. Yes, that has a nice ring to it.”

He stopped to pull a photo out of the liquid. It dripped as he stared at it.

“That’s weird,” he murmured.

“What’s weird?” Nicole asked.

He set the picture down without saying anything. Nicole and I glanced at it.

“Dad —” Nicole said. “I hate to break it to you, but that looks like a teddy bear.”

It *was* a picture of a teddy bear. A stuffed brown toy bear with a lopsided grin, sitting in the grass. Not the kind of creature you usually find in the Grand Tetons.

“There must be some mistake,” Dad said. “Wait until the rest of the photos develop. You’ll see. They’re amazing.”

He pulled up another picture. He studied it. “Huh?”

I grabbed the photo. Another teddy bear.

Dad picked up a third picture. Then a fourth. He moved faster and faster.

“More teddy bears!” he cried. He was frantic. Even in the darkroom, I could see the panic on his face.

“What’s going on?” he shouted. “Where are the photos I took?”