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*In the bleak mid-winter
Frosty wind made moan;
Earth stood hard as iron.
Water like a stone;
Snow had fallen, snow on snow,
Snow on snow,
In the bleak mid-winter
Long ago.*

— Christina Rossetti

“Snow Upon Snow”... February, 2021

Well past midnight, as if in a dream, I hear the scrape of a shovel on the sidewalk outside my window, muffled voices, young and old as the scraping continues. I turn in half-sleep, peer out the window above my bed to see shadow figures, Natalio, his wife, and preteen kids working energetically and faithfully in below zero temperatures. My long gravel driveway is next and a challenge to clear. I roll over, grateful, their distant scraping sounds comforting me back to sleep.



I love snow. And this morning I awake to many inches of the softest, fluffiest, freshest new layer that has come in the night to grace the towering oaks, the remaining deck furniture, a distant roof, all of which I can see from my bedroom perch.

As if this beauty is not enough, the sky, a pearly blue, contains a rising sun casting shadow-ribbons of gold upon it all.

I climb out of bed, grab my phone to capture what I see on film. I know it will only be a mere reminder of what is real before my eyes, an iPhone frame. But it *will* be enough to bring back this morning, and the splendor I am seeing. I try to pry the sliding glass bedroom door open to get a clearer view, but it is frozen shut. I'll have to settle for a window shot.



Now I'm downstairs at the front door, standing in my nightgown, bare footed, hair askew, snapping away. The scene is pure. No footprints have tracked the virgin lawn. Perhaps an errant deer, a brave rabbit or squirrel have yet to venture forth. This winter with so much snow the wild turkey bunch that tend to walk across my lawn in the early morning hours of each day have been missing in action. I have a love-hate relationship with them, part intimidation, part fascination, and do not miss their pre-dawn trek.

Snow, and the love of it reminds me so much of Bob, my one and only love who departed these earthly environs nearly five years ago. We shared the excitement of a day to cross country ski out into the forest preserve just beyond our property. No need to shlep gear to another venue. We ready ourselves in the comfort of our garage and take off a short 100 yards to the end of our street, to a seemingly vast and wild wilderness

where hawks circle above us. This is a place where coyotes roam and where at night we hear their eery howls. If we're blessed, we may catch sight of a deer, though forest rangers cull them in winter.

It is a different world out here in this forest preserve. It is a place of tufted grasses, shriveled milk weed pods, nearly indistinct trails, oak savannas and a distant river destination. The winter colors are soft; muted grays and taupes and wheat tones against the snow. Nothing jarring. We know the terrain well, have hiked it together with our young children and then grandchildren of all ages. Our daughters often rode their buckskin horse, Sunny, bareback in this territory. Here we feel alone, apart, alive in the complex simplicity of Nature. Our skis do not disturb the tranquility, make a soothing shushing sound. Cross country skiing is a strenuous sport, and it doesn't take long before we shed hats and gloves, and tie our jackets around our waists. Once I remember, tired, we lie down and make angels in the snow.

I know that acceptance is a key to peace. I know that gratitude makes for the ability to appreciate what one *does* have, not what is missing. I know that loss and sadness and unexpected bittersweet memories lurk around many corners on a given day. The times past, "olden days," what's gone before, when bodies were young and lithe, when someone I loved was my dearest companion and cross country skiing down the road and out into the wild blue yonder of a perfect snowy morning was a possibility, those days, those times, are over for me.

Now I am a snow observer. I gave away my cross country gear, my downhill skis and boots. I am a careful walker now, a woman who captures entrancing snow scenes from a front door, a deck, a drive to a road where I come upon red barns, silhouetted against the white, and where an ornate gate guards a deserted lane. I can still relish much that is available, possible and that gives life and energy and beauty to each day.

And I know, that even as I age, until I join my husband in a place where the glories of this earthly loveliness will be compounded beyond my comprehension, snow upon snow will always give me joy. 🌿