

# Crossroad Heartache

My mother stomped her foot and threw a knife into the sink, her eyes filled with tears and rage. She screamed at my father who yelled back, the veins sticking out from his neck and forehead.

At five years old, I sat in the living room, watching my parents through a tiny, dusty window that gave onto the kitchen. I watched my parents, like so many times before, fight about things I was too young to comprehend. My sisters were trying to block out the sounds by withdrawing to our bedroom. I don't know why I did it, but I stayed and watched, trying to understand.

Thirty minutes passed, my father lowered his arms, and their voices died. Finally, I cautiously entered the kitchen only to find a heart-crushing scene. My parents' arms were around each other; my father's jaw was clenched and his eyes were closed, his chin was over my mother's head, which was buried in his chest. She tried hard not to sound like she was crying, but it didn't do much good. She hated him, and he hated her, but they needed each other's support, or this family of five would not survive....

I remember our front yard, littered with trash and scraps of metal—some we would keep. My mother pushed an old stove in a rusty wheelbarrow, eager to install it in what would be our new home. There were dozens of spiders in every room and abundant mice for the cat to grow fat on. There were holes in the non-insulated walls. When there was tension in the air, my sisters and I were often sent to take a walk.

But I also remember lovely things. I remember being steps away from the ocean where I would sit and listen to what beauty sounds like. There were Easter egg hunts in the trees and under cracked stairs, there were giant bonfires on Halloween, ice cream cake on birthdays, and turkey on Christmas and Thanksgiving. Every second Sunday my sister and I would race across the field to my grandparents' house for an exciting family dinner with all my cousins, aunts and uncles.

One crisp morning, Camille came running into our room. "It's snowing! It's snowing! The ground is covered in snow!" she screamed excitedly.

"Haha, very funny, Camille," Gabriella said with skeptical sarcasm.

"No, I'm serious!" urged Camille, pulling my sister's arm.

I wasn't sure which sister I should take sides with. "You're just trying to get us out of bed. It's not working, you know," I yawned.

"Fine, Gab. If you won't go check it out, at least Marika, you come."

I was her last hope and it worked. I got out of bed and Camille's face brightened dramatically. We ran up the stairs hand in hand, climbed onto the couch and pressed our noses to the foggy window. She was right! The field was covered with a thick layer of even snow, growing ever thicker as chunky snowflakes poured galore.

My sister and I laughed—this would mean hours of fun.

"Gabiella!" Camille called in clumsy French, racing past me into the bedroom.

"Gabie, Gabie, Gabie! It's really snowing! Get over here!" I was ecstatic.

Together, we pulled my skeptical sibling out of bed and forced her up the stairs where she'd have to swallow her pride. I remember seeing my mother laugh in my father's arms that day; they were amused that their daughters were so affected by the sudden snow. I have a picture of that moment. My sisters and I stood chronologically, staring out the window, our eyes and mouths wide open in awe, and then that single, perfect moment was gone.

Camille and I raced to see who could get our coat and boots on faster. She won—as usual. We burst outside and Camille pushed me face first into the snow where I grabbed a handful, threw it at her, and missed—as usual. She tackled me, sitting on my legs, pinning my hand to the cold ground with her knees. She faced washed me without mercy and tickled me till I was jelly. That's the way it used to be with my sister and me. We'd compete at everything and I'd always lose. We were the best of friends...until my parents split up.

All three of us took it differently; Gabriella was older and could handle it, Camille grew cold, and I was lost. I knew my parents were unhappy, but I never thought that perhaps the only reason for them being together was because of us. It drove them mad, so they gave up.

I thought things were bad when my parents lived on either side of town and I didn't get to see my dad for days at a time. Then my mum told me she was going to Montreal—the other side of the continent and that she would go to court—in three weeks. If she won, I'd have to go with her...and leave my father and sisters behind.

She won. The house was packed up and so were we. The first two weeks before leaving, I was excited because I had lived in Montreal and loved it there. When the last minute came, I realized it was all a huge mistake, but I didn't know how huge. I left what had been my home for half my life; I left my father and my sisters not knowing exactly when I'd see them again.

For a little girl, time doesn't mean anything: if you're separated from your family on a large scale, even for a short period of time, it's like the end of the world. I'm not sure if this is a good thing, but after a while I got used to it. I stayed with my mother, unpacking our things and decorating what would be our new home. I was happy there, but inside, I knew it felt wrong.

I forced myself never to think about it, but it came out anyway, in my relationship with my mother. We started to disagree, then to argue, then to fight. My dad calls it cabin fever. It could be, but it was more than that. I made friends in my new school. Good friends. Friends I would regret leaving. But I wanted to leave, to be away and to be with my family again. But I would miss my mother.

After three and a half years, I came back. I was happy the first few months, but then things got rough with my father. Though I was delighted about being with my sister again, things got rough with her, too. I found myself in the same situation I so utterly despised—always longing for the other parent, the other home, the other sister, the other school, the other friends no matter where I was or who I was with. I realized I was stuck. That I would always be stuck, and there was nothing I could do about it. When I left with my mother that day five years ago, I cemented the fact that I would never again live a life without longing. A life where I'd have to be happy with half of the one single thing I wanted most in the world.

I was a small child, unaware, naïve, an innocent being walking down a crooked path. When I reached the crossroads, I looked back, far away, and saw where my heart had broken. And it was now that I felt the ache.

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