

minutes, the pain would let up, he hoped.

Wilson looked past Harry and out the window. "Sure is heavy," he said. "I can just see my kids dragging out their sleds." He chuckled. "That little Albie is a demon in the snow. He takes a running start and does a real belly flop. But not Freddie. He's the older one. Freddie takes after the wife more. Kind of conservative, if you know what I mean. Have you got any kids?"

"One," Harry said. "A girl. She's ten." "She like the snow?"

"I guess she does." Harry was surprised that he didn't really know. All children loved the snow—or did they? Eileen was like other kids—but did she ever do a belly flop?

Harry looked over at the couple and the little girl. The girl was talking in an animated way to her parents, pressing her face against the window, then quickly turning to her mother and father, and back again to the window—as excited as only a young child can be at the wonders of the world. Where had he seen her before, though?

Harry glanced at his watch. Getting into Manhattan from the airport would be brutal if New York got much of this storm. The parkways would be treacherous. There would be further delay. And Evans Lawrence would be boiling.

Harry stared out the window, but couldn't see a thing. The pain stabbed at him again. It hadn't subsided.

He wondered what his daughter Eileen was doing right this minute. Studying, watching television, chattering on the telephone with one of her chums, or belly flopping on her sled? Harry suddenly felt an overwhelming, aching hunger to know precisely what she was doing now—to know what she would be doing tomorrow, and next week, and next month. But next week he'd be on another plane on behalf of another client. And Eileen would be one week older, and he would know even less about her.

Harry glanced over at the man and wife and little girl. The parents were checking their watches as other passengers were doing, and staring at the dark, sullen skies. The couple seemed more nervous than ever now. Harry wished he could reassure them somehow.

"That little girl sure seems to be getting a kick out of the snow," Mr. Wilson said. "Reminds me of Albie. He's the same way when it comes to snow."

"Funny thing about that little girl," Mr. Wilson said. "She sure reminds me of someone."

"Yes," Harry said, "she does look kind of familiar."

FIFTEEN MINUTES later they were approaching the field—a half hour behind schedule. The plane began its descent, then abruptly pulled up and passed over the field. An uneasiness rippled through the plane, like a wave racing into shore.

Harry looked at the couple and their

young daughter. The parents were pale and tense, and Harry thought: "They'll panic if anything happens. I'll have to help the girl."

Once more the plane made its approach, and once more it had to pull up. Someone let out an involuntary "My God," and the girl turned a frightened face toward the voice. For the first time, it seemed, she was aware of danger. But her father smiled at her, and took her quietly into his arms. Her face relaxed, and Harry knew he'd been wrong about this man. He would never panic.

On the third try, the plane touched down, and taxied to a gentle stop. There was no skid; the runways, despite the thick snow, had been kept fairly clear, and ice had not yet formed.

The passengers began leaving. Harry found himself directly behind the couple with the little girl. The child clung tightly to her father's hand as they walked down the aisle of the plane toward the exit. There was something about the way the girl clung to her father's hand.

Harry suddenly remembered. He had seen their pictures in the papers. They were from California, and were taking their daughter to specialists in the East.

The little girl was practically blind. Cancer. Remove her eyes, or she would die. The disease had spread so fast that the little girl could only distinguish light from dark, nothing else. But her parents hadn't given up hope. Perhaps a miracle could be worked. Perhaps part of her sight could be saved. But it was hopeless. Everyone knew it—everyone, that is, but the parents.

As the girl and her father stepped out of the plane and directly into the swirling flakes, the child stopped. She lifted her face upward, and let the snow fall upon her and melt so that the flakes glistened on her cheeks like tiny sparkling jewels.

"It feels white," she exclaimed. "Daddy, is it really and truly white?"

"Yes, honey, it's really and truly white."

"Daddy, let's live here in New York. If we go back to California, I'll never see the snow again."

Something glistened on her father's cheek, and Harry was certain it wasn't a snowflake. The man stooped and hugged his daughter. "Sweetie," he said, "we'll stay here forever if you want to."

He picked her up and carried her down the steps. The mother waited at the bottom, and then the three of them made their way to the terminal through the heavy, twisting flakes.

Mr. Wilson followed Harry out. "Pleasant trip," he said, "even with all this white stuff. You know what I'm going to do? I'm going to call Albie and Freddie and tell 'em to have a sled ready for their pop. We're going belly flopping."

"You know something?" Harry said. "That's what I'm going to do, too."

Evans Lawrence would never understand. Not for the life of him would he understand, or approve. But Harry didn't care about Evans Lawrence any more.

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