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THROUGH ICE AND SNOW, O'ER BLOCKS WE GO

by Lisa Ann Over

“Mom’s at Grammy and Popsy’s now,” I said. “They’re all okay.”

Dad took the phone and scribbled some notes before hanging up. He grabbed his coat and threw mine to me.

“Let’s go, Zack.”

“Go? Mom said they were okay.”

“We’re walking to the store,” Dad replied. “They need food.”

“They live close to the store. Can’t Mom go?”

“No one knew this storm would be so bad,” Dad said. “We’re taking the sled to get food for Grammy and Popsy’s neighbors, too. They’re all snowbound.” Dad bundled

up my sister, and we ran outside. Ten inches of snow lay over a thick blanket of ice from yesterday's freezing rain. The wind blew into my hood and swirled down my back.

"Brrrrrr!" I wrapped my scarf around my neck. "When will we decorate the Christmas tree? We always decorate it on Christmas Eve."

"It'll be here tomorrow, Zack."

"All we need are presents," Bella said.

Dad settled Bella on the sled and dug through her backpack.

"That's mine!" Bella screamed.

"I just want to see if you have my gloves," Dad pulled out a tiara, a half-eaten cookie, Mom's lipstick, and the puzzle book I thought I'd lost.

"Ah-hah, here they are," Dad said. "Come on!"

"Will the grocery store even be open?" I asked.

"Yes, the night workers can't get home," Dad said. "I wonder if the three kings grumbled so much on their way to Bethlehem."

"They wouldn't have decorated a Christmas tree," I said. "And we don't have gold, frankincense, and myrrh."

"We can buy them at the store," Bella said confidently.

"We're not kings," I said.

"I'm a Princess!" Bella squealed and pulled out her tiara.

"Whatever," I mumbled and rolled my eyes.

We had walked only three blocks, and my legs already burned from the cold. My toes throbbed, and my fingers ached. I looked at Bella on the sled. She dragged her hand

through the snow and flicked it into the air. She giggled when it lit on her nose and eyelashes. Her legs were wrapped tightly in a blanket.

“Why can’t I ride on the sled, Dad?”

“Bella’s small,” he said and just kept walking.

We zigzagged out of our neighborhood around corners and across streets. Thick ice clung to the trees and crackled and popped when the wind blew. Sunlight flashed through the branches and made the ice glisten like stars. I wondered if the Christmas Star sparkled as brightly.

“We’re here,” Dad called.

“Finally.” I took off my gloves and unwound my scarf. The heat from the store soaked into my skin. My cheeks and fingers tingled as they warmed up.

“Hey, look,” Dad said. “*Gold-en Honey Buns.*” We laughed and ran to the canned goods aisle.

“How about Franks-n-Sauce for frankincense?” I asked.

“And *Myrrh-el’s Candied Yams,*” Dad said. We couldn’t stop laughing.

“How much milk do we need?” I asked, after catching my breath.

“Five gallons,” Dad said. “Get three dozen eggs, too.”

“Hot chocolate!” Bella yelled.

“Okay,” Dad said. We met at the checkout. We bought so much food that Bella had to ride on Dad’s shoulders.

I took the rope to the sled and stepped through the snow. CRINKLE! CRACKLE! SNAP! We practiced a song for when we delivered the food. The branches jingled like wind chimes and sparkled like stars. Bella and I pretended to follow the Christmas Star.

We looked for the nativity on Grammy and Popsy's porch. In no time we saw Baby Jesus in the manger.

We climbed the snowy steps—SCRUNCH! CRUNCH! Dad held the *Myrrh-el's* Candied Yams and handed Bella the *Gold-en* Honey Buns. I held the Franks-n-Sauce.

Bella put on her tiara and knocked on the door—RAP! TAP!

Grammy opened the door and motioned for the others. Mom and Popsy and all the neighbors crowded near the door and front window. We sang,

“We three kings of Orient are
Bearing gifts we traverse afar
Through ice and snow
O'er blocks we go
Following yonder star.”

Everyone clapped.

“I'm a princess,” Bella declared.

“Of course,” Grammy said. “You're two kings and a princess. Now come in out of the cold.”

Bella and I snuggled up under Grammy's homemade afghan. Popsy served hot chocolate from a huge pot. Warmth wrapped around me.

“Well, Zack,” Dad said. “After we warm up, we could trudge home and decorate the tree.”

I had forgotten about decorating the tree. “No, let's stay,” I said. “After all, being together is what Christmas is really about.”