

Huddling Through Winter

first published January 18, 2018 in Newswest

Karen, Judy and I were congregated at Judy's house, sitting around the kitchen table, listening to the radio and the blustering wind outside. We couldn't think of anything to do. Saturday afternoons were boring after the fun and frantic Christmas season, the weather outside was quite uninviting, and Judy's house was quiet, warm and welcoming. Her little brother Marty wandered into the kitchen to make a peanut butter sandwich.

“What happened to your face?” I asked, noticing a cut on his cheek.

“We had a sword fight” he said, “with icicles.”

“Cut that out, you could have lost an eye,” Judy scolded.

Marty munched his sandwich and rolled his eyes, both still happily in their rightful places.

We had just started a half-hearted card game when Judy's mom came bustling down the hall carrying the vacuum cleaner. “You girls move somewhere else for a while, I want to do the floor” she said.

“Let's get out of here” Judy said with alarm. “Mom's having a cleaning fit. Let's walk down to the store.”

We piled on hats, coats, mitts, boots and scarves and went out into the day, now frigid with Arctic air. Gusts of wind blew snow down the deserted street. We pulled our scarves up to our eyes, but soon the scarves were soggy and cold. Then they froze into wet cardboard.

The corner store was toasty, and cheerful Sam the owner always had a joke for us. Sue Thompson was brokenhearted though, and was singing about “Sad Movies” on the radio. We took our time making our selections of Malted Milk and Sweet Marie chocolate bars, spearmint Life Savers, and peppermint Chiclets. Judy even remembered to buy a treat for her brother. The bell hanging above the shop door jangled merrily as we struck out into the deep freeze and trudged hurriedly back to Judy's house.

We headed to the basement playroom where Marty was sorting through a pile of comics.

“We brought you a box of Smarties.” Judy tossed it over. He caught it with a surprised grin.

“Maybe there's something good on television” Karen suggested, flipping through the TV Guide. No such luck though. “The Hound of the Baskervilles' is on tonight. I think it's pretty creepy. We'll probably like it.”

“Hey, why don't you stay for dinner and we can watch it later? My mom won't mind. We're having chicken à la king,” Judy said. Sure enough her mom didn't mind a bit.

After clearing the table and washing the dishes, we made a big bowl of buttered popcorn and settled in to watch “The Hound of the Baskervilles”. The plight of Sir Henry Baskerville and the eerie sound of the hound howling on the moors made our hair stand on end.

“I'm not walking home by myself. I'll hear hounds howling all the way home.” I told Karen.

“Don't worry, I'll walk with you, but only if you watch me get to my door, so the hounds don't get me either.”

We bundled up in all our winter gear and set off into the freezing night convinced that we could hear faint howling coming from neighbouring backyards. Thankfully the days were gradually getting longer, but spring was still far off on the horizon. With spring would come Easter holidays, a big melt, and the distant promise of summer. Until then, we would race through the cold days and only hope that Valentine's Day would be interesting, romantic, and quick to catch up with us.