

Finding Friendship Amidst the Winter's First Snow

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"Another rainy night," Amanda thought, and sighed to herself as she walked home from the bus-stop. The lady kangaroo pulled her jacket up around her, trying to keep out the damp November chill, but it got to her just the same. The falling raindrops also continued to drench her hair and drooping ears. Her long tail dragged on the wet ground behind her, and she shivered at the sodden feel to it.

She'd been in the States for close to two months now, and the weather, along with everything else it seemed, had taken a turn for the worse. Working as programmer for a small company in Australia, she'd been brought over here to help out with the transition of things when her company had merged with a larger software firm in the US. The job was going okay, but she still felt so out of place over here.

It's not that she didn't like the chance to travel. Traveling was always nice of course, but it really required someone to share it with, and so far she hadn't gotten really close to anyone at work. Being shy, she hadn't met anyone outside of work either, so she was getting quite lonely. What was worse is that she still had a long stretch of her sixth-month stint left to go. Getting to travel was good, but not for such an extended period of time; with her being so busy at work, she hadn't been able to do all that many tourist activities anyway.

She imagined that she'd get even more homesick when the holidays rolled around and she couldn't return back home to see her friends and family. She had little more than a week off for Christmas and New Years, and that wasn't enough time to go home, not to mention that the plane fare was expensive. They were paying her quite well to have gotten her over here, but still, she really needed to save her money.

She'd already been alone for Thanksgiving. Not that it had really mattered, since it wasn't a holiday that she was used to celebrating, but even so, it had been kind of lonely having four days off with no one to spend the time with. She'd done some more exploring of the city, which was fun for awhile, but even that got old soon. Her adventures as a tourist just weren't as fun without someone to share them with. She wished some of her friends from home were here with her.

The weather was another thing that was adding to her lonely mood. She'd left home in the middle of spring, to find herself in autumn in the North, completely missing summer this year. Seeing the leaves change colors had been nice, and for awhile, she'd enjoyed walking in the park and taking in the beauty of the season, but all too soon the weather had changed again.

The days kept on growing shorter and the temperature was dropping as well. Most of October had been nice, with its sunny afternoons, clear blue skies, and just a hint of crispness to the air. However, as November rolled around, the weather grew colder and much of the month saw rainy days, the sun hid behind a gray, cloudy sky. The pretty colors of the leaves had gone too, and all that was left were bare trees or the American evergreens, which weren't as pretty as the ever-present eucalyptus trees she was used to from home.

She wasn't enjoying late autumn at all, and she really missed not having any summer this year. As the days grew shorter and colder, she just felt more lonely. She wasn't used to really cold weather, and she wasn't really looking forward to the coming winter. The seemingly constant rain of late wasn't helping her spirits much either.

The people at work were nice, it's just that she hadn't been able to connect with anyone really closely yet; her quiet nature was making her search for friends go rather slow. She realized that she probably should go out and do something, as it was Friday night after all. She didn't care for bars or clubs much though, and the rainy weather was making her feel kind of tired. She ended up just going home and watching some TV and then heading off to bed. She didn't even bother checking out the weather forecast for the weekend, figuring it would probably just bring more rain.

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Amanda awoke the next morning to a wonderful surprise, the weather had turned cooler and during the night it had snowed. The sky had cleared up too, so when she looked out the window of her apartment to greet the sun, she was met by the few inches of accumulation from the previous night's snowfall. It was the first snow of the season, but there was something even more special about it than that. It never snowed back home, getting just rain in the winter instead; it was the first time in her life that she'd ever seen snow, and she was delighted.

Her mood brightened significantly at seeing the sunny weather and the novelty of the new snow. She whistled happily to herself as she made breakfast, eating it quickly, eager to get outside and go exploring. Afterwards, she donned her coat and specially-designed boots made for her large kangaroo feet, and she headed outdoors.

There was a chill in the air as she opened the door and stepped out into the street, but it didn't bother her as much as the night before. She was still getting used to the colder weather, and knew that she'd need to get a heavier coat soon, but today the air was dry, not damp with the rain like the previous evening. The crisp feeling to the air and the bright sunny weather somehow felt just right. She chuckled slightly to herself at seeing a puff of steam come from her muzzle when she exhaled and her breath condensed in the cold morning air.

Perhaps the coming winter wouldn't be so bad after all, she thought as she walked down the street. The sidewalks had already been cleared, as she'd slept late and it was already mid-morning. The small banks of snow on the sides of the streets and walkways were a new and interesting sight to her, and she wondered how the park would look, with everything blanketed by this fresh coat of snow.

The park was only a short walk from her apartment, one of the things that she really liked about her temporary home here, and she reached it within a few minutes. Walking along the path through the park, she saw that the landscape had taken on quite a different appearance. Even the bare trees looked nicer now that they had a covering of snow upon their branches, and she had to admit that the pines and other evergreens looked just right with their green needles coated with a layer of white.

She walked quickly along the path, going deeper into the park and soon found a quiet corner to better explore the snow in. Walking across the snow, she marveled at the tracks her boots made

in it. Her tail trailed slightly through the snow and it sent a shiver or two through her, but at the same time it was tingle of new sensations. She'd never gone on holiday to any of the snow resorts before, because she hadn't been interested in the thought of skiing; even so, she couldn't believe she'd never gone to experience the wonders of snow.

Now that she was going to be in a winter climate for some time, she not only wanted to make the best of it, but she was also excited at the change of the seasons. The cold gray rains of late autumn had been miserable, but snow provided her with a bunch of new opportunities. Winter looked like it held a lot of new experiences in store for her, and she smiled at that, looking forward to what wonders the season might offer her.

Bending down, she reached out to pick up some snow in her hands. Once again it felt cold against her fur, but not too cold to be really unpleasant. The snow had a consistency of a nice soft powder, and turning her hand over, she watched it fall softly back to the ground. Grabbing another handful of the wonderful winter stuff, she tossed it up into the air, giggling softly as the light bits of snow fell around her. She repeated the process a few more times, laughing more-loudly as she made a little snow storm of her own and the powder swirled around her.

Her merriment was interrupted abruptly when she felt the presence of someone near her. Stopping, she turned around to see a male wolf standing nearby watching her with some amusement. Dropping her hands to her sides, she stared back at him. She'd been acting like a silly schoolgirl, playing out in the snow like that, and he'd seen her. She felt her face heating up with embarrassment, and her ears dropped down against her head.

The wolf didn't laugh at her as she half expected him to though, instead he showed her a warm smile. "Hello, enjoying the first snow I see?" he asked with a friendly tone to his voice.

"Um, yeah," she replied, nodding weakly and feeling pretty foolish.

"It's the first time you've seen snow, isn't it?"

"Yes... but how did you know?"

He let out a little chuckle at that. "Well, we usually don't get too many kangaroos around here... From that and your accent, I assume you're from Australia, right?"

She nodded again, realizing how obvious his deduction had been. She met his smile with a small one of her own though.

"Are you here on vacation?"

"No, I'm here for work, for six months actually."

"Oh, that's a bit long isn't it?" he asked, and seeing her expression sadden, he added "I hope you aren't getting too homesick being away for so long."

"Well, it's kind of tough being so far away from everyone..." she replied, then paused as she realized she was confiding her feelings to complete stranger.

He caught her discomfort, and changed the subject. "Well at least you have the snow to

entertain you now," he said as he smiled at her. "It's fun isn't it?"

"Yes. It's so neat and new to me. Though I probably looked a bit silly when you caught me playing in it..."

"Of course not, you just looked like you were having fun. There's nothing silly about that." Seeing her smile broaden, he held out his hand to her. "By the way, I'm Brian."

"Oh, hello Brian," she replied as she shook his hand, "I'm Amanda."

"Pleased to meet you then, Amanda. It's not everyday that I get to meet someone from halfway across the world..."

She gave him a nervous smirk. He was being quite talkative for the two of them just having met. At first she thought he might be acting a little too forward, but then she decided that he was just being friendly. Looking at him, she noticed that he was a handsome fellow; that was just a passing observation though, even if he was kind of cute, she certainly didn't entertain any serious notions of romance with him just then. It was just nice to meet someone friendly in the city, and she accepted it as that.

"Well thanks Brian. It's nice to meet you too" she said as her ears perked up slightly.

"So now that winter's here what do you think of it?"

"Well I'm not sure if I'll like it when it gets colder, but the snow sure looks fun."

"Oh that it is," he replied with a sparkle in his eyes. "As long as you're not driving in it, which I doubt you'll be doing anyway, the snow is a lot of fun."

Pausing, he then added "of course I love winter because with my thicker fur, I'm better suited to it than summer... You're probably not used to the cold weather are you?" Seeing her shake her head, he continued. "Once you get some warmer clothes though, I think you'll be all set for the cold. It isn't too bad most of the time, and there's lots of things to do. What do you think about trying skiing?"

"I don't know" she answered a little uncertainly.

Glancing downward, he blurted out "hmmm, that might be a problem though. It'd probably be hard to find ski boots in your size and it might be difficult to maneuver with your tail as well." He caught her hurt look and it was then his turn to be embarrassed.

"Oh, I'm sorry for saying that. I didn't mean it that way..." he sputtered out, with his ears dropping back against his head.

She paused for a few moments. "I know," she finally answered as she flashed him a small smirk. "I can say some silly things myself sometimes," She felt a little out of place, but it was also comforting to see someone else who was a little awkward at meeting new people. His little mistake helped make her feel more at ease around him. "So if skiing's out, what else can I do to have fun in the snow?"

"Well there's plenty of things to do" he replied, recovering from his embarrassment. "There's playing on the pond in a few weeks when it gets frozen over. That's nice even if you don't have of skates. There's walking and snow-shoeing too."

"Say," he added after a pause. "You've never built a snowman have you?"

"Nope, I've never done that either" she replied with a smirk.

"Well come on then, I'll show you how to do it. It's a lot of fun"

He smiled at her as she followed his lead, and soon they were both playing in the snow. She lost herself to the pure joy of it as they worked together at rolling up a large ball of the white material. People walking by them as they went through the park smiled as they watched the two of them work on their project. Brian waved to the passersby a couple of times, and then she joined in as well, laughing with him they shared the simple happiness with others. Feeling almost like a cub again, she forgot about her troubles and spent the rest of the morning just having fun with her new friend.