

The Thief of Snow

Carl Sason

I have three days to make things right in my life. 72 hours or 4,320 seconds. In terms of seconds, it seems like an incredible awful lot. In terms of days, it seems, of course, like far too few. So, of course, I'm completely overwhelmed. So, of course, I make myself a peanut and butter jelly sandwich with jelly on both slices of bread and some chopped peanuts sprinkled on top for crunch, and, of course, I feel much better after I do that. I make myself a list of the 7,638 things I'm going to have to accomplish in the next three days in order to change my life. Then I realize that big goals are great, but, this is pushing it and I'm kind of an idiot, so, of course, I narrow the list down a little. A lot. I narrow it down to three things. The three things I'm going to accomplish in the next three days or 72 hours or 4,320 seconds. You're welcome to come along, if you like. The back seat of my Camry is a little messy. Hold on. Okay, that should be enough room. Wait. I'm an idiot. I didn't pack anything.

So, in the quest of making things right, it's important to pack light. So, I bring along my lucky Dodgers cap and my favorite pair of jeans. I consider bringing Archibald, my turtle, but Archibald looks at me with that "don't even think about it" look of his and, I say my goodbyes, fill his bowl with nutra-food and hope for the best.

I've never been a very good freeway driver. I get nervous, I start driving a little erratically, everybody around me gets a little nervous, somebody calls Highway Patrol, they show up, arrest me, and forbid me from ever getting on a state highway again. Okay, so, maybe not, but I still don't like freeway driving. But when you have to change your life, and you have to do it in three days, you've got to make some compromises, so, Interstate 360, here I come. Today, we have to drive to my sister's. And, as you probably know, my sister lives in the Big City- hence the interstate. So, today, Day 1, my home in the desert gives way to a mess of green pastures and cows and little towns with long names and roadside fruit stands and cows and burger stands and more cows and then there's lots of pavement, miles and miles of pavement and skyscrapers and billboards and high-rises and apartment complexes and more billboards and this is the Big City.

And, for being, as inexperienced as I am with Big City ways, I find my sister's apartment complex without a single fender-bender and only eight honks and only getting hopelessly lost three times. Okay, so four, but who's counting? And, this, this is nothing like the desert. And at the air-phone at my sister's apartment building, I start to get a little scared. I mean, after all, I haven't seen her in...a long time and I wonder if we should hurry as fast as possible back to the Camry and drive back home to the desert. And I would if I could, but I can't so I won't...and I don't. Instead I push the button and suddenly, I'm talking to my little sister, and, suddenly, I'm in my little sister's apartment, and I realize, that she hasn't changed at all. My little sister is a painter and the walls of her apartment are covered with her canvasses, huge oil portraits of unicorns and flying men and beautiful monsters. We spend time catching up, she tells me about everything that's happened with her- so much, and I tell her what's gone on with me- not very much at all. And then, I hold her hand, and I tell her, I'm sorry. I explain how long I've been waiting to say that, and that even though it doesn't really help matters at all, I'm sorry. I tell her, I would change everything if I could, if I could then I would, but I can't so I won't...and I don't. And she says, what in the hell are you talking about? And she points to one of the paintings on her wall, it's this portrait of a pretty good-looking guy in a cape and a mask and he's standing on the top of a skyscraper with his hands held out over his head, lightning bolts all around him. And I say, who's that, and she says, You dummy, that's my super-hero. That's you. Some things never change. And she reminds me of the tree house I built for her when she was six and I was fifteen, the tree house we used to go hide in to make the world go away, eat PB and J's and I'd read Peter Pan to her. And well, I'm not the best with all of this emotional stuff, but I'm trying, and I've said what I needed to say and we walk around the streets of the Big City together until night-fall and then, without much warning of any sort, I realize I'm gonna fall behind schedule and so, I hug my little sister, hold on to her for dear life, and she says I'm going to see her sooner than I realize. And then it's time to get back on the road.

I probably should have explained how much driving there would be before-hand, so, thanks for bearing with me. So, today, Day 2, we have to drive into the mountains. And so, we're on winding turns and the road is climbing and climbing and climbing, like we're heading up to the sky or something, until I find the house where my Best Friend lives. And it's a house built right into the mountains, with glass walls

and panoramic views of the wilderness outside, and, at first, I'm a little concerned that he won't even be willing to talk to me, and for a minute I wish I had brought Archibald along, he'd know what to do in a situation like this. But, it's my best friend that answers the door and he says, "Thanks for coming" and I feel a lot better. He lives with a lot of people. Boys with long hair and dark eyes and really tall women who wear lots of makeup. And they all wear a lot of black. But we find a quiet room and he mixes up a pitcher of mojitos and sits down across from me, our knees almost touching and I say, "I'm sort of an ass" and he says, "Yeah, sort of" and I say, "I don't mean to be" and he says, "I know." And, like time has suddenly been side-swiped, I'm back to that night where he and I, we're sitting in his bedroom and he told me that he loved me- not loved me like a best friend loves a best friend, but loved me more than that, and I said, no you don't, and he said, but I do, and I said, this isn't happening, and he said, but it is, and I said, just get me the hell out of here because this is way too much for me to handle and I left his house and never spoke to him again. And now, I'm back in the clear glass house in the mountains and I say, "I was so afraid. I loved you so much, I just couldn't love you like that" and he says, "You didn't have to to. I just had to tell you. I needed you to know." And I say, "I know that now" and he says, "Thank you for coming back." And I would take all of this back. I would. If I could then I would but I can't so I won't, and I don't. And he puts two concert ticket stubs in the palm of my hand. We saw Journey together when we were fourteen. And he says, "Our journey didn't end. We just got sidetracked." And he rests his head on my shoulder and we drink mojitos.

But not too many because Day two has strangely bled into Day three and I have to leave, and I say, "Let's not wait this long again." And my best friend says, "Don't worry. We won't." And I leave. I apologize, I should have offered you a mojito. Today we drive to the Seaside. And I haven't been to the seaside since I was a kid. We stop on the way for saltwater taffy and the cold air nips at my nose and my ears and I wish I had brought a jacket. I pull my dodger's cap down and we keep driving, and I watch the sea as we drive, blue and green and vast and beautiful. And after many hours we get to a tiny cottage on the beach, a tiny cottage where my love lives. And she answers the door with her two Siamese cats, one on either side of her, and, almost immediately her eyes are moist, and I think, I don't know if I can do this, and then I think, Archibald would say, you must, and so, I say to my love, "I know you said you never wanted to see me again, and so, you don't have to look me, but will you listen?" and without a sound, her body still in the sea air, she turns and we go to her sitting room, and she sits, her eyes gazing off in the distance, ocean blue, and I don't know exactly what to say, and when I don't know exactly what to say, I either talk things over with Archibald or I just say everything really, really fast, and Archibald's not here, so I look at my love and I say, "You gave everything and I gave nothing. You sacrificed and I took. I took advantage and you continued to compromise. You loved and you loved and you loved and I hurt you over and over again. And every time I felt worse and worse and worse until I felt like I was the most pathetic thing in the world because how can you continue to hurt the one person, the only person they will ever truly love. I was kind of a nobody and then the universe tapped my shoulder and offered a gift. That gift was you. And I love you, my love." And then my love, she does look at me, and she says, "Just because two people love each other more than anything doesn't always mean they can be together. Sometimes they just can't. And I love you. And I can't be with you." And I say, I wish I was a perfect person. I do. If I could then I would but I can't so I won't...but she puts her finger to my lips and then she puts her hand to her neck, and hanging there, is the tiny silver shamrock I gave her. And I worry that I'm going to cry like a big baby and then I worry that it doesn't even matter. And she says, "We may never see each other again." And I say, "I know." And she says, "But it's okay, because we both know." And I have to leave my love.

And I'm driving again, here in the early evening of Day 3, the third day of making things right and sometimes you just have to go where the cold is to clear your head. I've always wanted to see the snow, and this might be my last chance. And so, together, just you and I, we're driving as high up as we can go, away from the Big City, much higher than the forests where my best friend lives, light years from the seaside of my love, we're just driving and driving and driving and I don't even know much anymore and maybe that doesn't matter because maybe no one does, and maybe if I didn't do so many stupid stuff and wasn't such a retard in general and then...then, everything around me is just covered in snow. And for something so simple, it is just frozen water after all, I am just really, really in awe. And we should just leave the car running and so we do, and we get out and I just immerse myself in the stuff, feeling it in my hands, cold and dry and clean and real and this, this is my life, and I realize, I may never see snow again, and I want to just steal it and take it home with me to the desert, but how do you keep something so fragile alive? How do I steal the snow and keep it with me forever? How do we keep everyone alive and with us forever? How?

And then, without much warning, the walls are back up around me, and all of the snow is piled up still, but, here I am, the physical part of me, the part of me that's in a hospital bed, the part of me that's like an octopus with so many tubes and machines are making little noises all over, and why isn't there anyone else in the room with me? Nobody's gonna be here at all? I guess, the thing this, that was my biggest fear, I just didn't want to do this alone. I mean, I didn't want to do this without making right with the three people I had to make right with. I don't want to be all alone, though. But then, there's my sister, she's in a snow-suit, and I realize I haven't seen her since she was six and I was fifteen and we were in the whitewater rapids and she got sucked in and I reached for her hand but I couldn't save her, but here she is, and she hands me my lucky Dodger's cap and she smiles and there's my best friend, who died of a terrible lonely disease when we were both twenty, died by himself, but I was so afraid of love, here he is, because he's not afraid like I was, and he's holding Archibald in a traveling case, and Archibald looks happy. And I realize my love isn't here, that she's not going to be here, that I'm not going to see her again, at least for now, and then I think if I had known all of this, I would have been more thankful about everything we have in life. And I hope she knows that, and loves- loves with everything she has for everyday she's given. And here we are, me, my little sister and my best friend and we're making snow angels, moving our arms and legs in the soft beautiful snow, and, the thing is, I'm not cold at all. I am so warm. And the sunshine above it getting brighter and brighter and brighter and...I know...I know that I am loved. And if I could, then I would, and I can, so I will...and I do.