

The Mirages of Winter

By Vivien Zeinar

Why didn't we listen to her? She had warned us but we ignored it. And now, now it's happened, even though we had the chance to prevent it. I will regret that forever.

Winter Holidays, the first thing to look forward to in the new year. Especially when it started snowing weeks before. Madison, my best friend, my boyfriend Marco and I want to enjoy the meter-high snow outside today. We let Marco guide us through a small forest. All we can see is white, the ground covered in snow and the branches frozen. But suddenly a new color stands out. A bright yellow. We have arrived at a barrier marked with several warning signs. "You want to go through that now?" asked Madison. "I don't think that's a good idea." "These signs show no valid reason why we shouldn't go in there." With that, Marco turned to the grid with an grin.

Even if there were a hundred more signs like that on the fence, he wouldn't have any scruples about going in there. The lock on the grate is already quite rusted, but still strong enough to withstand our attempts to open it. Whereby Madison, with her almost anxious expression, doesn't even try to open the lock for the given reasons. Basically, I agree with her. The signs and the fence are enough to tell you not to go in here and yet we are trying, or at least Marco is trying. If my boyfriend wasn't here, I'd probably be more cautious too, but I don't want to come off as a coward in his eyes. Suddenly the rattling of the fence stops. I look at Marco in surprise. He realized that we can't get through it, we have to get over it. At that moment he goes to the fence and starts to climb it. In fact, he's not afraid to do something rash. After a few seconds he jumps down on the other side, but he is visibly amazed that he made it. "Come on", he says a little out of breath.

With a somewhat queasy feeling, I do the same. Madison, on the other hand, is still very insecure. With a slightly shaky voice, she confirms again that she doesn't want to go over there. I don't want to go without her either, and she doesn't want to be left behind either, so she decides to climb over anyway. "Well finally. Are you coming now girls?" With that Marco goes ahead and I pull Madison with me.

The forest we are walking through now resembles more and more a magical icy winter landscape. An end of the path on which we are walking is beginning to appear. Light reflections are reflected back from there. "That must be a lake!", shouts Marco enthusiastically. Barely a second later he starts running. I immediately rush after, and so does Madison. And in fact, Marco is right. Here is a huge lake that is completely frozen. The bright sun shines down on it from above, making it look like it's made of nothing but ice. "Well, if it's not perfect for skating, then I don't know what it's good for", says Marco with a big smile on his face.

He and I are about to set foot on the ice when Madison's voice rings out, "Wait! This is too dangerous! We don't know how deep the lake is or how thick the ice sheet is. You could fall through!" We had turned to her in the meantime. "Are you serious? Take a look at the surface. Does a thin layer of ice look like that?", Marco is explaining. "Maddie", I say to her calmly, "Nothing will happen to us. There have been heavily negative degrees for weeks. The ice will be thick enough." My best friend looks at me blankly and takes a step back. "Seriously? Are you taking his side? Why aren't you listening to me? I know I sound a little overprotective at times. But now it is justified. A lot of people have been in a situation like this and it didn't end well. Why do you think it will be different for you?" Her tears slowly come and I begin to empathize with her when Marco stops me. "What do you mean 'you'? Are you leaving us alone now? How can you be so selfish?!", Marco soon starts screaming, but Madison stays calm, explaining that she's doing it because she doesn't want to risk her life. So she stays at the edge of the lake when Marco and I dare to step on the ice holding hands.

It's very slippery, but everything goes smoothly for the first few meters until Marco steps on a slightly thinner spot and it collapses a bit. Instead of turning back, the adrenaline keeps us going. We are almost in the middle of the lake when suddenly the ice starts to crack under our feet. We stop. It's like we're frozen. We look fearfully at each other's. Time stands still between us, but the ice keeps breaking. That's the last thing I can remember. The rest is blurry. It was as if I could already see Marco and me falling in, but suddenly I felt someone pulling us backwards. Maddie. Where we were a second ago, she was now. The next thing I noticed was the ice. It cracked and broke, but this time much louder than before.