

Hot Chocolate

To me, hot chocolate will always be after trudging in snow,
dragging my sled, its metal blades cutting two lines.
I'd climb what I thought was a dangerous hill
because it ended at ongoing traffic. After several slides,
I'd triumphantly return, more ice than snow.
It seemed forever to exit the snowsuit mother
zipped me into, all the way to my neck. My clothes soaked,
nose running, snowflakes still on my lashes.
After changing into dry clothes, I'd rush to the kitchen table
to find a can with Ovaltine, pry it open, spoon out
the powder into a cup with hot water. I'd plop in
marshmallows, trying to make them *ka-splash*.
Those marshmallows swirled on top as white icebergs,
or clouds, or top hats. I'd try to dunk them, soften them up,
make them gooey. But they'd plop back up, unsinkable.
If I waited long enough, the heat would soften them
like first snowflakes. I'd regale my daring deeds
of sledding to my horrified mother,
who feared identifying my body under a speeding car,
gripping the rope that guided the sled. I never knew
she faked it, trying to strike fear into me
and my self-preservation.

It was a simple life then, where life melted and blended
the darkness of winter like chocolate, the hot furnace
filled of coals that had rumbled down the coal chute.
I've gone back as an adult, found the sled
with its metal runners stacked where the coal furnace
used to be. All gone. My mother dead.
The hill not as steep as I remembered,

the traffic not as fierce and flowing. I had to return,
had to glance one last time at my childhood,
realize I could not return. This fact was driven into me
when I could not find Ovaltine or a bag of marshmallows.

And, it seems to snow less now. The days of packing
snowforts and tossing snowballs seem over.
Every moment has stirred too fast, blended too fast.
I am no longer the daredevil, speeding on a sled,
unzipping a snowsuit of mostly snow.
Most of all, my mother cannot hear my tales of terror
while I waited for the hot chocolate and marshmallows to blend.

—Martin Willitts Jr.



image info