Snow Angels

by Lady_Saddlebred

Summary

Memories are shared on a snowy night

Title: Snow Angels

Author: Lady_Saddlebred (cdelapin@yahoo.com)

Archive: Yes, please

Category: Q/O, Alternate Reality, Romance, Hurt/Comfort

Rating: R

Series: Lessons They Never Taught Me in School

DISCLAIMER: George Lucas owned everything, until he sold it to Disney. We own nothing, just playing in his playground.

Special thanks to Katbear and Merry Amelie, betas par excellence! Any mistakes are mine.

Previous fics in series: all on AO3 website:
Early Admission
Lessons They Never Taught Me in School
Lessons That Were Never on the Syllabus
That Which Does Not Go to School
Rainy Day Recess
Of Popcorn and Pine Trees
Fit to Print
Daffodils
Spring Cotillion
Is That a Lightsaber I See Before Me
A Pen for Your Thoughts
When I Was Your Age
Partners
Mum’s the Word
Best Laid Plans
An Apple for Teacher
What’s for Supper
Pacifier

~*~*~*~

Snow began falling in the mid-afternoon. The forecast called for a foot or more by morning.

Quinn served a hearty beef stew, then he and Ben enjoyed a nightcap in front of the fire. Even as Bernini hastily did his business and rushed back inside, Quinn remained at the back door, staring out into the garden. It was almost as if he’d never seen snow before.

After a shared hot shower, they lay in bed under a thick down comforter. Ben's head was comfortably pillowed on Quinn's broad chest. Traffic noise outside was muted, and the light from the street lamps had a misty, dreamlike quality. It felt as if they were the only two alive in the world.

“Looks like it’ll likely go on all night,” Quinn said softly, turning to look out the window. “Good thing it’s the weekend, eh, lad?”

“Mm hmm,” Ben murmured, snuggling into his lover’s warmth.

“Bit early this year, isn’t it?” Quinn continued.

“I guess so,” Ben answered noncommittally. He personally didn’t much care for snow.

“Hardly ever snows back home,” Quinn remarked. “Except in the higher elevations, and not much then. Too temperate a climate. Lots of rain, though.”

“Uh huh.”

“I remember the first time I actually saw it snow,” Quinn mused. “I was a freshman at the Academy, and green as the hills. Woke up to about six inches on the ground, and still coming down. Forecasters had *never* mentioned it, can you believe it? So beautiful, all clean and white and pure, like the whole world had been wrapped up in cotton batting. Made me wish I could draw, or paint.”

“You would have been, what, about eighteen?” Ben murmured, interested in spite of himself.

“Aye,” Quinn affirmed. “There was this bonny lass living in my building, and she and I had become… rather friendly. Anyway, we bundled up and walked over to the athletic field, where she
showed me how to make snow angels. I can still see her lying in a drift, cheeks rosy with the cold, mouth open, catching snowflakes on her tongue. I reached down to help her up and she hit me in the face with a snowball.” He chuckled. “What about you? What’s your earliest snow memory?”

Ben yawned. “I grew up here, so snow’s been around pretty much all my life.” Quinn was about 17 years older than he, something about which Ben tried not to think too often. “I’m used to it.”

“Tell me about growing up with snow,” Quinn urged.

Weird pillow talk, Ben thought. “My dad used to pull us on the toboggan behind the car,” he began. Then, predictably, the other memory came to mind, and he lay back on his own pillow. Quinn released him, recognizing the unspoken need for personal space. “And Owen and I would go sledding. It was… fun.” It rang hollow, even to his own ears.

“You don’t sound so sure.”

Crap, the man was too insightful by half. Ben drew a deep breath. “When I was seven years old, we had a real big snow around the first of December. Owen got a new sled for his birthday, and was dying to try it out. There was this huge hill a few blocks from the house. It was a long climb, and pretty steep. I remember the sound of the snow crunching underfoot, and thinking we’d never get to the top.” Ben felt the warmth leeching out of him, and fought the urge to wrap his arms around himself, to push away the gathering shadows. “It was cold as hell, and the wind ate right through my clothes. Owen went down first, whooping and yelling like a crazy man, all the way to the bottom. I wanted to go, too, but I… I was scared, you know? I had his old sled, and the runners were kind of worn. And it was a *long* way down.” He heard the tremor in his voice and hated himself for sounding like a wimp.

“I can imagine,” Quinn said, squeezing Ben’s near hand. There was no censure in his voice.

“Anyway, Owen climbed back up to the top, and wanted to know why I hadn’t followed him down. He… he called me a fraidy-cat. A coward.”

Quinn’s grip tightened. “How old was he?”

“He’d just turned thirteen. He’s six years older than me.”

“He was your big brother,” Quinn commented. “You looked up to him.”

“Yeah, I did,” Ben admitted. “He wasn’t afraid of anything, or anyone. I wanted to be just like him.”

“What happened?” The accented voice was calming, and Ben drew strength from it.

“He kept taunting me, saying I was chicken, a baby. ‘Course I said I wasn’t, and he told me to prove it. He grabbed me and pushed me onto his sled, then booted it down the hill. I- I was a lot smaller than him, and the sled was *so* big.” Ben gave an involuntary shudder, but resisted when Quinn tried to pull him back into his arms. “All I could do was hang on and pray I made it to the bottom in one piece.” He drew a shaky breath. “About two-thirds of the way down, I hit a patch of ice, and the sled skidded. I went airborne and landed about six feet away.”

Quinn gasped. “Jesus, Mary and Joseph. Were ye hurt?”

Ben nodded miserably. “Busted my chin open.” He touched the crooked scar, vividly recalling his childish terror at the rapidly spreading pool of blood on the drift. “I remember lying face-down in the snow, just wanting to throw up. I couldn’t even breathe.”
“And the pissant just let you lay there like that?” Quinn exclaimed. “Your own brother?”

“He kept yelling at me to get up, but I couldn’t move. Then he came down the hill and picked up the sled. The strut was busted, and he gave me hell for it.”

“The feckin’ gobshite,” Quinn growled. “Couldna he see tha’ ye were hurt?”

Ben sighed, torn between the painful memory and the inherent need to defend his only sibling. “I think he was pretty scared, and trying to convince both of us I wasn’t really hurt. I started crying, and he kept yelling at me to grow up. He finally hauled me onto the sled and got us back to the house. The whole way, he kept saying I was okay, and to take it like a man. By the time we got home, I was numb from the cold and probably going into shock. Dad took one look at all the blood and rushed me to the Emergency Room. Owen swore he’d tried to stop me from going down the hill, but that I’d done it anyway.”

Quinn turned on his side and pulled Ben into his arms. “The rat bastard,” he snarled. “I’d hae taken me belt to him. First he puts you in danger, then *lies* about it to your parents! Ye be naught but a child! Ye could hae been killed! The feckin’ son of a bitch.”

Despite his inner turmoil, Ben had to laugh. “Rude much? I’ll have you know, my folks were married for three years before Owen was born, and don’t you go calling my mom a bitch. You haven’t even met her.”

Quinn snorted. “Apologies to your mum, lad; I’m sure she’s a lovely lady. But your brother *is* a jizz bucket, and no mistake. All of seven years old, and the little piece of shite tells ye that ye canna cry when ye’re bleedin’ out? I’d have torn him a new one.”

Even through tightly closed eyes, Ben could still hear Owen warning him not to say anything as they trudged home, or he’d be in for it. The memory had stuck with him ever since. “It was a long time ago,” he mumbled into Quinn’s chest, trying to convince himself as much as his angry lover.

“Maybe so,” Quinn agreed. “But it’s sorry I am for havin’ resurrected it.” He tugged Ben’s chin up and kissed the thin scar. “I always wondered where ye got this. Figured it was a bar fight, or worse.” He shook his head. “Remind me to kick your brother’s arse when I meet him.”

“Okay,” Ben agreed, burrowing back into the warmth of Quinn’s embrace. The voice in his head told him he was showing weakness again, but Quinn’s arms were an irresistible warm cocoon. His emotions warred within him, and he knew he’d probably have the old nightmare again. Too bad the brandy was downstairs…

“And your dad punished both o’ ye?” Quinn was still fuming. “What’d *you* do wrong?”

Ben sighed. “I think he knew there was more to it, but I wouldn’t tell him anything. I- I was scared to. Owen was a lot bigger than me.” He shifted in Quinn’s embrace. “I heard Mom and Dad talking that night, after they thought we were asleep. Mom was going on about how brave I’d been, not crying or anything in the hospital, even when they were stitching me up. Dad said it was a really stupid thing for me to have done down that hill on Owen’s sled in the first place, and that Owen should have stopped me. He said the only fair thing was to ground both of us. Mom thought I’d been punished enough, but Dad insisted.” He shrugged. “I think even if I’d told them the truth, he’d have still done it. And Owen probably would’ve busted a cap in my ass for snitching on him.”

After a few quiet moments, Quinn spoke. “Ye hae absolutely nothing for which to apologize, Ben. Yer brother was a bloody cretin, a feckin’ moron. It was nae yer fault, any of it, ye ken? But it’s glad
I am ye told me. It explains a lot.” His voice was soft, but Ben clearly heard the angry indignation underneath. Quinn’s arm around his waist felt like steel.

Ben looked up. “What do you mean?” he asked.

“Ye hide it when you’re hurtin’. Ye just swallow it down,” Quinn said slowly. “And ye dinna stick up for yourself when someone lights into ye. Ye just… take it.” The deep voice was troubled now. “Ye need to be standin’ up for yerself when ye’re right and they’re wrong, lad. Because no one else will.” He cupped Ben’s chin in his hand. “But dinna ever feel ye hae to hide from me. If something’s botherin’ ye, share it, y’hear? It’s nae a weakness.”

“I’m not a baby,” Ben protested, but Quinn silenced him with a finger over his lips.

“No, you’re not, thanks be to God,” he said, with a smile. “Ye’re a man, and a fine one. But I’m thinkin’ your eejit brother damaged more than just your chin. He left a scar on your soul.”

Ben wanted to argue, but he knew Quinn was right. The trauma *had* followed him into adulthood, though he’d never allowed himself to consider its emotional impact. He *did* tend to pull his head in like a turtle when he came under fire, whether from Dean Winters, a faculty member, even a student. He flashed on the confrontation with Xandra Criton the previous semester, when she’d actually *slapped* him for refusing to help her cheat on her mid-terms. Ironically, he’d had his first real interaction with Quinn moments later, and the rest, as they say, was history. Maybe he should send her a thank-you note.

Wimp, Owen’s voice taunted in his head.

Am not, Ben retorted. I kept your secret. I didn’t tell Mom and Dad you pushed me down that hill. I took it on the chin for you. Literally.

You’re just the hired help, Xandra jeered. What makes you think you could ever be good enough for Quinn Donovan? Watch your step, little man; I can make things real bad for you, if you cross me.

Shut up, you self-centered bitch. God, how he’d have loved to have said that to her face the night of the Dean’s Halloween party. Then he flushed, remembering how Quinn had come to his rescue, ejecting one of his own seniors for Ben’s sake. And gave him a ride home, and-

“Asleep, love?” Quinn asked softly.

“Not quite,” Ben mumbled, struggling to refocus. “You?”

“Not if you need me awake.”

Simply stated, with no hint of condescension. Quinn always put others’ needs above his own. But he’d had a crusher of a week, and he needed a good night’s rest. Ben kissed the Adam’s apple a few inches above his head. “We’re good. I love you. Go to sleep.”

“I love you, too, my Benjamin.”

Sturdy arms drew him upward, and warm lips closed over his. Ben pressed himself against the strong chest, nuzzling for the sensitive spot on his lover’s neck, just below where the beard stopped. He was rewarded with a gasp, then a surging against him, as Quinn groaned and pulled him nearer. Ben wrapped his arms around the broad shoulders, then rolled, bringing a willing Quinn with him. He smiled up at the man supporting himself on his elbows above him, committing every feature to memory: the deep-set eyes, the slightly misshapen nose (also a childhood injury, he knew), the mouth that could set his senses on fire. It was tempting to ignite their banked desires, but he could
also see the fatigue in the beloved face.

He leaned up and they shared a kiss. Passion could wait. Tonight, it was enough to simply bask in Quinn’s unconditional love.

~end~

Happy birthday, Helen. :D

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!