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## Babies in the Snow

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# Babies in the Snow

By Abby Current

When our cat had kittens in winter, we didn't know she was pregnant. She adopted us a few months before, living under our porch until we admitted defeat and began feeding her, naming her, picking her up and even letting her inside sometimes. I petted her whenever I saw her, called her silly nicknames, but I didn't know the signs of cat pregnancy, and so when she got a little fatter I just thought that I'd been feeding her more than she was used to.

She mewled at the back door for twenty minutes in the cold night air before we let her inside. My mother saw the blood and put together a cardboard box and shreds of old hand towels within minutes. "She's going to be a mama kitty," she told me, and I transformed into a combination of nurse and proud mother, waiting with bitten lips and wringing hands for one kitten to emerge into the cardboard box to be licked clean by her mother. It wasn't until the next day that we found the other kitten our cat tried to bring into the warmth. He was tiny and curled in on himself like a scared child accidentally locked out of the house, stationed at the front door where she had tried first to get our attention.

The cat died long ago, and the kitten that survived went to a new home long before that, but I keep thinking now of that kitten in the snow. My mother comes over one morning, the annual admission of our mutual guilt and grief, and I ask her, "Do you remember when our cat had those kittens in December? When I was a kid?"

She takes a bite of the chocolate pie she brought, chews very slowly. "I remember."

"And one of them was fine, but one of them died outside before we knew she was having them." I run my hands over my swollen belly, barely beginning to bulge with a son.

My mother puts her hand over mine, and her other hand, almost out of my line of vision, flutters around her own stomach, flattened from the curve of children before I could speak. "We had that cat for a long time, didn't we? She was a good cat, very sweet. She never scratched your brother, even when he pulled her tail or picked her up by her legs." She chuckles low under her breath and lets go of my hand. "I think I knew that cat pretty well. She didn't blame us for what happened to her other kitten."

"She was just a cat, Mom."

"I know, but listen to me." She turns to stare out of the window, out to my front yard, but her eyes go unfocused, looking somewhere else. "She lost a baby. A little baby she didn't have time to know very well. We didn't see the signs she gave us early enough to save him, but one of them, one of them survived. She missed the baby she lost every day, I think, but she loved the one she got to keep." My mother takes a deep breath and stands up, baring her teeth in a smile that is too wide. "I think that cat loved those babies with all her heart. Both of them."

My eyes begin to cloud and I have to turn, stand, take our dishes to the sink. "His sister probably missed him very much. She...it was her fault."

"It wasn't your fault."

"I locked the door when he was outside." I choke on my words and lean against my sink, back curved, staring at the water sinking down the drain.

The chair screams on the tile as my mother stands up and pushes it back, and then she hugs me. When did I get taller than her, stronger than her? She can barely make her short, frail arms wrap around my taller shoulders.

We stand like that for a long time, mother and daughter, remembering the little baby who curled up in the snow outside our front door, left outside for hours before anyone knew he had been forgotten.