

## Minneapolis

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Christmas Day at Gramma's, all the cousins are there. They all playing football, but I stay in the kitchen with Gramma, because she needs me to help her out. When the cousins get done, we start to eat, and we don't finish until it's dark. I help gramma bring out the food. Then everybody opens presents from under the tree. Gramma's tree always goes to the ceiling.

Before Auntie Esme, Mom's oldest sister, and Uncle Lars moved to Minneapolis the tree was even better. Uncle Lars brought it, and he sawed the branches off and moved them around until the tree was a perfect Christmas-tree shape.

At the end of thanksgiving dinner, that's when I start thinking about Christmas Day at Grandma's. I look over at gramma Kate's chair, and she's not in it. All of a sudden I remember gramma's still in Minneapolis with auntie Esme, uncle Lars, and cousins Josefina and Thor. Is gramma going to be home for Christmas?

I make Mom call her, but we have to wait until tomorrow because it's already bedtime in Minneapolis. Gramma says she's coming home in the spring. Wait a minute. Spring is after Christmas. "But, but—." Ma takes the phone out of my hand because I'm all can't talk or maybe I'll cry. What's she staying there for? Thor and Josefina are big, they don't need gramma, I need her. Gramma and ma talk for a long time, ma is speaking Tagalog so I know it's about me. When I get back on the phone, gramma asks me if I want to come to Minneapolis for Christmas. I do. They're gonna send me a ticket, but I gotta be "prepared." For what? "For the cold. Minneapolis is colder than the freezer."

I get prepared for Minneapolis. I get a chair so I can reach the freezer part of the refrigerator. I stick my hand on the ice tray, and I think my hand is going to die right then. I tell mom she has to buy me gloves. She says, your cousins will buy you gloves in Minneapolis, there aren't good gloves here. Yeah, they'll probably take me shopping for gloves. But I should know how fat in advance. I wrap my hand in one of Dad's socks and stick it back in the freezer. My hand is okay for a second, then it starts to freeze. I get another sock, stick my hand in freezer...no good. My sister, she's got a long blue scarf from when she played the ocean in a play in school; I wrap my hand up in that, my hand looks now like a catcher's mitt, but it is finally not too cold in the freezer. The scarf and the socks are very wet. I go wrap a ziplock freezer bag on top of the two socks and one long blue scarf, and tie it off with a rubber band. I stand on the chair in front of the freezer testing my glove and it's working pretty good when Dad comes in and screams "what're you doing?" What, I'm not doing anything, what? He's looking down at the floor. It's flooded in melted freezer water. Uh ho.

Minneapolis is one big freezer. They give me new gloves right away in the airport. My face freezes so I can't even talk. My teeth start to go claikity. Auntie Esme says, it's cold, but it's a dry cold so you don't notice. Oh, I notice, I notice alright. Gramma says, this is nothing. Wait until it snows.

Gramma unpacks for me and I stay in her room in a little bed. Gramma's got her Hawai'i Christmas stuff set up. The manger and baby Jesus, Mary and Joseph, and all the animals, the whole thing surrounded with cotton. "Put it in the living room, Gramma. Let everybody see." She tells me to look in the backyard. Aunt Esme and Uncle Lars have a huge baby Jesus and Mary and Joseph all carved out of wood. Life size. But they don't have any cotton around it. Maybe they forgot. I ask Auntie Esme is the Baby Jesus and Joseph and Mary finished, or if she forget something. She says "What's to

forget?” So I know what to get them for a present. Cotton balls. I tell grandma I gotta go to Long’s. They don’t have. They take me to Walmart. It’s big. Uncle Lars says, “yes, Lad, the other side of the store is in Canada. You need to rent a dog sled.” I think he’s joking. Some sales guy shows me where is the cotton balls and I buy all the bags of them because I am remembering how big is the Baby Jesus in the yard. The sales guy hides the cotton in plastic bags.

Nobody talks on the way home in the car. Not even Grandma.

When we get into Grandma’s room she rips open my Walmart shopping bags. “What is this?! Why did you buy all the cotton balls in America?” “Grandma, I got it for the Baby Jesus. They have no cotton around. It takes a lot because it’s so big.” Grandma is quiet for a whole minute, her mouth hangs open. “They don’t need cotton. They got snow here.”

“Snow?”

“Yeah, the cotton is supposed to be snow.”

I never knew cotton was snow. I thought it was cotton, to make soft for Baby Jesus. I shove my cotton balls under her bed and tell her not to tell. She tells me we can take them back, for refund. I want to sneak the cotton balls into the garbage.

Nobody says anything about my big bags from Walmart store. Uncle Lars says, “give me a hand, will you, Lad?” We go outside and rake leaves. “I was so hoping we would have a white Christmas for you, Lad. You can’t believe how good the Baby Jesus and Joseph and Mary look when they’re surrounded by snow.” Cousin Thor brings a rake and is helping. He says, “yeah, it’s too bad. It’s really my favorite thing, to see Baby Jesus and Joseph and Mary all surrounded by snow. It’s not going to be the same.”

I go under Grandma’s bed and get my bags of cotton from the Walmart store. I take them out and spread the cotton balls around the Baby Jesus. Everybody is watching. “What a good idea, lad. Look, Thor, isn’t that the good idea? We’ll be the only house on the block that’s having a white Christmas.” Thor says, we’ll be the only house in Minneapolis that’s having a white Christmas. This is the best present I ever got.” (Smile)