

The little girl in the snow

Pulling my coat around me and adjusting my scarf, I really was the girl in the snow and was glad for my warm woolly hat which was now white and covered in ice. Rosie ran on ahead sniffing, enjoying the evening scents. My surroundings looked like a pretty Christmas card. The chilly breeze cut through me and I looked forward to getting home and warming up. I'm not a fan of snow, it may look nice, but it is cold and turns to ice. Snow is not a friendly substance, it will not greet you with a warm hug like the sun. Though if the sun did come too close then you would be incinerated. Good job it is stuck many thousands of miles away.

Walking along the country path I thought about the years that Rosie and I had been walking down it. During all weather's at least twice a week. We had met many other dogs and their owners. Rosie's paw prints made patterns in the snow. I contemplated purchasing some marshmallows to put with my evening hot chocolate. Thinking of the warm sugar comforted me as I shivered, and the snow started to come down faster.

Coming out of the country track we entered the housing estate and were soon stood in Mrs Briggs little shop. I picked up marshmallows and some chocolate hob nobs. Rosie sniffed next to me. Mrs Briggs was fond of her and did not mind her coming in.

Rosie is a black Labrador, she is old in dog years at 12 years old. We have been together since she was a puppy. A disobedient puppy who liked to eat my slippers, scratch the furniture and urinate on the floor. I was glad for tiles in my kitchen as a carpet would have been disgusting, forever shampooing to wash the smell out.

We were both glad to get home. Rosie ran straight to her water bowl and was soon happily drinking. I took off my cold wellies and went and ran a nice hot bath. After my bath I was happy to find my pyjamas and my warm fluffy slippers. I heated up my milk and was soon sat with my feet up in front of the gas fire drinking my hot chocolate with marshmallows and enjoying my chocolate hob nob. Rosie lay on the rug in front of the fire with her head on her paws. Sitting there watching the fire dancing I had no idea what tomorrow was going to bring. Had I known I would have very anxious and worried.

That morning I was sat on my windowsill watching the snow falling. The whole garden was white, and Rosie went out and then run straight back in again as it is so cold. Sitting and watching I suddenly became aware that something was wrong. Stood in my garden was a little girl in the snow, she looked exactly like the child who vanished in our local town, ten years ago. How? This did not make sense. I jumped off the windowsill and ran outside. I was not surprised to find her gone. What was happening here? Had I really seen her? And how come was she still the same age as she was when she vanished?

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Stood in the police station trying to report what I had seen, they thought I was mad. I knew what I had seen, surely my eyes were not tricking me. She really had been standing there a cold little girl in the snow. The sergeant took down some details but did not appear to believe me, as if I was some loon. I wondered now where her dad was. The police would not tell me and all I knew was his name was David Smith. I thought about it, there must be some news reports from ten years ago. Leaving the police

station, I headed for the library, I then realised that the information would be known by Google. I now ran home and raced to put on my laptop and will it to load windows faster.

Arriving home, Rosie jumped on me whining, she knew something was not right. I was concerned, if she really was the missing child then where was she now? Entering into a Google search 'missing child, Sevenoaks, 2009' The information I needed came up. There looking at me were her two adoring parents and their little girl, Sophie. There were then further reports of the search being called off, then mum shooting herself with a gun that she had acquired. David Smith had been devastated and had had a break down. He had then walked out of his high-flying corporate job. The news trail had ended there, they had become old news, a very sad story.

I made the decision to get to the bottom of this. If Sophie really was back, then her father needed her as much as she needed him. I now looked out to the garden willing her to reappear. There was nothing, the garden was silent and white, there was no little girl in the snow. I sat willing her to appear but nothing, maybe I should go and look for her. Maybe Rosie could sniff her out.

Putting on Rosie's lead I then shut and locked the back door behind me. We walked the perimeter of the garden and found nothing, other than hedgehogs. My heart sank, as if I was really going to find her hiding behind a tree. The snow then started to fall again, and I then noticed something odd, there was a shimmer in the air, I stopped walking and gripped Rosie's lead tighter. The film from a week ago went through my head of a similar tunnel and time travel, no I thought this is a bit far fetched. I made the decision I needed to do this for the sake of the little girl in the snow and her dad. Gripping tight to the dog lead we walked forwards, I was shocked to soon find myself in a completely different world. I was in a busy street and there were horses and carts. It was then I saw the little girl, Sophie. I reached out for her hand and she took mine very trusting.

"it's ok Sophie you can come home now" she thankfully let me lead her back through the tunnel to safety.

She now stood silently looking at me. "what happened? Where's my mummy?" She started to cry. I wondered what I should be doing next. If I phoned the police they would talk to social services and she would be taken away, possibly put into care. They did not need to know, did they? They gave up on her ten years ago, however what was the story with that tunnel leading to another world. Sophie was cold and dirty. I now decided that I was going to find David Smith and if he did not want or was not fit enough to have her then I would try to adopt. Surely not a bad idea, she needed a mum and I had no sperm donor or friend to help me have my own.

Sophie sat in the bath water happily surrounded by bubbles, she was still not really talking but she had had quite an ordeal. My phone then rang,

"Charlotte, oh my god, you are there, where have you been? You have been gone weeks?" I could hear my mum start to cry.

"Weeks? Wow how many?"

"Ok months, the police have been looking for you, we were starting to give up hope."

Looking at Sophie, I said,

"sorry mum I can't talk now, I'm safe, I always was safe, I will talk to you later"

Mum was not amused that I had cut her off, but I needed to talk to Sophie and see if she knew anything, then try and find her Dad. My little girl in the snow had created a mystery now for me and obviously time in the other world was different to time here. I was only there 5 minutes but here I had been gone months. Maybe that explains why Sophie has not really aged, she must have walked through and got lost. However, how come had I not found it before and so close to my house? And how come were other people not missing, just Sophie?

Frustratingly about 30 minutes later there was a knock at my door, it was my parents. They looked older,

"hmm, months you say I was missing?"

Mum saw Sophie and her jaw dropped.

"The missing girl, oh my god, it's what's her name Chris"

Dad now looked stunned, "Charlotte, where the heck have you been? you disappear for months on end and now this child is here?"

Sophie now started to cry, overwhelmed by events and scared. I gave her a hug and one of my teddy bears, giving her a picture book, I then made my parents tea and explained about the tunnel. I had only been in there 5 minutes, but I now know I had been gone five months. So, Sophie had only been in the tunnel 120 minutes, 2 hours. But in our world had been gone ten years.

My parents looked at me in disbelief,

"Well that is quite a story" My dad said, "show me this tunnel"

"Mum, could you please watch Sophie"

We left mum talking to Sophie about the book and I led Dad to the tunnel entrance. It was snowing again now, and the entrance shimmered. We did not enter but dad now believed my story. So, what now?

I telephoned the university and was put through to a Professor Whitby, he was excited to hear my story and said he would come straight over.

Very soon Professor Whitby appeared on the doorstep. He had been investigating similar stories around the UK of tunnels appearing that led back to Victorian times. Other people had disappeared, then reappeared months or years later with bazaar stories not being believed. It also seemed that the tunnel was only open when it was snowing. Hence people might walk through and then not be able to find the way out straight away. What he did not know was how to close these tunnels for good or how to ensure everyone gets home safely. We left the tunnel problem with the professor as we are not experts and set about finding Sophie's dad.

After running some searches, we found a link to his Facebook page where he asked for anyone who had seen his daughter to contact him. He had given his phone number and address. There was also a link to a recent news article that told that he now worked in a local supermarket. He did not want the stress of management and was happy to get his wages at the end of the month. David now lived in a small house

about ten miles away. I phoned him and he did not believe that I had his daughter. I guess he has possibly had a lot of hoax callers since making his details so public. We then made the decision to all take Sophie to see him. She had only been gone 2 hours effectively, in her mind. We had not told her about her mum, that was for her dad to do.

We all got in to my car, then I realised that due to not being a mum I did not have a child seat. My mother then remembered that they had my niece's seat in their car. Very quickly we moved the booster seat and we were soon safely on our way.

Finally arriving at her dad's home, we saw young boys playing on their bikes and a park opposite. It was a two-bed terraced house in a busy street and Sophie was confused,

"This is not home" she started to cry again. I picked her up and consoled her then rang the doorbell. Mr Smith answered, he looked at Sophie and he started to cry, he stood about 6ft, younger than I had expected, maybe late 30s, early 40s with dark hair, quite handsome, relieved to see his daughter.

"Oh my god, it is Sophie" I passed her over to him and they cuddled, both now crying. Sophie still confused as to what was happening. She later explained that she had been walking through a place where there were carts and horses. Everyone had been dressed strangely and she had not been there long.

I explained about the tunnel and the time difference and how my five minutes rescuing Sophie had meant my disappearance of five months. He sat in shock,

"So, what is happening about these tunnels now, surely they are dangerous"?

"There is a Professor at the local University now doing further research on them. However, if it is snowing and the area ahead of you is shimmering then stop walking, you might end up in Victorian times for years" David smiled, grateful to have his daughter back.

"So, what now?" mum said, "Do we now tell the police that she is found?"

"I will do that, the newspaper might be interested to, but maybe the tunnels should be kept secret, nationwide hysteria, hmm on reflection, maybe not tell the newspaper".

I nodded at David in agreement. Sophie was now asking for mummy and her toys. The home was rather sparse. She now started crying again.

"Do you want us to stay and help explain to her what has happened" I offered.

"No, I think it is better that I do this, but could I please have your phone number if I need to talk to you, or if the police need to talk to you"

I gave him my phone number, name and address. Then gave Sophie a hug and said goodbye. I hoped that I would see her again. David seemed to be doing alright now, despite all his heartache. We now left them and drove home.

About an hour after getting home, my phone rang. It was the police wanting to come and visit. When they arrived, they wanted to know where I had found Sophie. David had not mentioned the tunnel, he just said that I had returned her. I explained about the little girl in the snow and how Rosie and I went out to look for her. I then tried to explain about the tunnel and how it only appears when it is snowing.

The police looked at me in disbelief. Thankfully my dad was stood next to me and he reinforced my story. It was also backed up by my own disappearance. We then gave them the Professor's details. Professor Whitby was the expert on the UK tunnels and the numerous other disappearances.

It was no longer snowing so we could not show the police men the tunnel entrance, they left unsure whether to believe us or not. However, we did not hear anymore from them, so we are assuming they spoke with the Professor.

About a week later I had a surprise phone call. It was a young child on the other end, and I found it difficult to hear her. Then I heard a man's voice.

"Hello, this is David Smith, Sophie would like to know if the nice lady can come and play" I was taken aback but very pleased to have this invite.

"Hello David, wow, tell Sophie I would love to"

A few days later I drove back to their home, buying Sophie a teddy bear on the way. We talked and she told me sadly about her mum. For a six-year-old she was coping very well and her daddy had bought her some new toys. She was now going to be attending a new school and her Grandmother had been looking after her whilst her dad was at work. She had been so happy to see her alive and well. So sad at the loss of her daughter but so happy and relieved to see that Sophie was alright.

Since meeting Sophie and her dad, I have visited her numerous times. We have even been to the park and enjoyed the ducks and some country walks. I have purchased a booster seat for my car, so she is safe. She will talk to me about what she sees, the passing rabbits and hedgehogs, the smell of lavender and the crunch that the leaves make as you walk on them. She loves Rosie and she loves her, she is forever stroking her and will ask to hold her lead.

David organised a big party for her 7th birthday, so relieved now to have his daughter back. We counted it as 7 because she is 7, the years lost in the tunnel did not count and she certainly did not think or talk like a seventeen-year-old. Her family and new school friends all came, and it was so lovely to see her happily enjoying her birthday cake.

So, what next? I had to change jobs. Due to being gone five months, they had replaced me. Professor Whitby had kindly found me an administration job at the university. It also meant that he could keep me up to date on his tunnel research. My relationship with Sophie had blossomed and David had become a friend. No talk of anymore than friendship at the moment but I am still single.

Life is good at throwing new things at you. I did not think that seeing the little girl in the snow would evolve into such an adventure. Tunnels, disappearances, new friendships and a new job, quite a story to tell.