

Before The Light



Imogen Sloane

Before the Light by Imogen Sloane

There are moments in life that seem ordinary while they're happening. Moments that live in our memories forever. It began like any other winter day in Montreal.

Standing in the bedroom of her third-floor condominium, Libby watched out the window as delicate snowflakes drifted down from the sky like tiny flakes of frozen lace. The storm had started three days earlier. It began with a few white puffs against the grey sky, so harmless that most people would barely notice. By morning, the gentle snowfall had intensified, leaving a thick mantle of snow. This type of weather system wasn't new to Montreal, and residents were accustomed to hunkering in their homes until it was safe to dig themselves out. Libby wished she had sidewalks to clear; that would be a good reason to brave the weather.

Severe restlessness had happened to her once or twice before; after only a few days of isolation, her calm mindset quickly vanished. It was a side effect of needing to stay busy. Once she decided she could no longer stay inside because of her growing disquiet, she was determined to venture out.

Usually, this wasn't an issue. Libby worked as a costume designer for a busy theatre company, responsible for the creative wardrobe direction of each production. Her job was to bring entire wardrobes to life on stage. In winter, when many people struggled to cope with indoor isolation, her work kept her hands and mind busy.

This particular February, she had just completed an eight-month production that had consumed nearly every waking hour. The show she was working on required dozens of elaborate Victorian-era costumes, each stitched together piece by piece.

The production had been a huge success. Even now, sitting quietly in her condo, Libby could still feel the audience's energy from the final performance. But now it was over, and there was nothing left to do. Boredom crept in, and no amount of pacing could calm her.

The thick layer of snow muffled the usual roar of traffic below her window. Libby noticed the silence and shifted her gaze from the swirling snowflakes to the kitchen. She hadn't eaten since breakfast, and a hollow ache of hunger was beginning to settle in.

Normally, she wouldn't hesitate to make herself something to eat or bundle up and walk to one of the cozy restaurants scattered throughout the neighbourhood. Montreal offers plenty of warm spots to escape the cold—small cafés, busy bistros, and the Italian place Joel loves, just two blocks away. Joel always said winter meals tasted better when the snow was falling outside and she was sitting beside him.

But today, hunger was only part of her complaint. Libby looked out at the weather and smiled.

Joel will be home soon.

For the past few months, she'd worked long hours with little time off, and more than anything, she wanted to spend time with her parents and Joel. She missed their conversations and the laughter that always followed.

Libby also missed her two best friends, Martine and Danica. The three of them had grown up together, inseparable from kindergarten through Grade 12. To Libby, time with them always felt like a recharge. Martine was the practical one, always thinking two steps ahead, while Danica had a knack for turning even the worst day into something funny.

Like many Montrealers escaping the harsh February winter, Martine and Danica had flown south for a warm, sunny vacation. They weren't expected back for another two weeks. Libby was eager for their return, but at the moment, she was going stir-crazy. Above all, she needed to get out of what she felt was her confinement.

"I'm home!" Joel called from the doorway.

Snow clung to his red curls and shoulders as he stepped inside. Libby hurried to the door and threw her arms around his neck. He smelled faintly of wet wool, and his cheeks were cold against her lips as she kissed him.

"Are you hungry?" Libby asked.

"I could eat," Joel said. "But I'm more tired than anything. And I could really use a hot shower." He shrugged off his coat, and drops of melting snow scattered across the floor.

“I’m glad you’re home. Go take a shower, and I’ll see if my mom and dad can meet us at Moishes,” she said.

“Moishes? Joel raised his brows. “What’s the occasion?”

“No, occasion,” Libby said with a grin. “Other than, I’m bored and want a night out with my family.”

“Have you seen it outside?” Joel said, nodding toward the window. “It’s a mess.”

“Please,” Libby said with a soft laugh. “I’ve done nothing but work since Christmas.”

“I know.”

“Now, I’m stuck here, going crazy. The walls are closing in.”

“Well, we can’t have that,” Joel said, slipping his arm around her waist and drawing her into a slow kiss. After a moment, he added, “So, I’ll shower, then we’ll meet your parents at their place. There’s no point in taking two cars. They’ve agreed to go, haven’t they?”

“Not yet,” Libby said, biting her lower lip. “But they will.”

At about 7:30 that evening, the family arrived at Moishes, a restaurant in Old Montreal known for its steaks. Because of the storm, Libby and her family were not surprised to find street parking available near the restaurant. Most evenings, they would circle the block several times in search of a spot, but tonight the street was unusually quiet.

“It looks like not many people are willing to venture out in this weather,” Libby’s dad, David, said.

Even though Libby had dined here many times before, she always looked around, admiring the elegant décor. Warm light spilled from a series of sparkling chandeliers set against ornate metal ceiling tiles. The glow cast an elegant shimmer across the dark wood panelling and crisp white linen tablecloths.

The smoky aroma of charbroiled steaks drifted around them, sparking childhood memories of roaring campfires. Libby looked through the tall front windows and saw the snow falling in blurred streaks under the streetlights.

The family settled into deep-red velvet high-backed chairs. They sipped cocktails as they chatted. When no one was looking, Libby's foot lightly brushed the back of Joel's leg under the table. He lifted his head and winked at her sideways.

I love this man. I'm happy that bringing everyone together here tonight worked out.

Nights like this felt simple and perfect, so ordinary, exactly the kind of evening she had hoped for.

Looking down at her plate with delight as the server set it in front of her, Libby covered her mouth with her hands.

Joel leaned against her, whispering in her ear. "If you need help with that, I've got your back."

Libby picked up her fork and steak knife, arched her brows at him, and said, "That won't be necessary, honey." Then she plunged into her meal like an Olympic diver.

They took their time eating, savouring every bite. For a while, the clinking of cutlery dominated the table. After their server checked in, Diane began filling Libby in on family news, while David grumbled about the economy, particularly the stock market.

Some things never change.

When their entrées were finished, everyone except Libby ordered cherry cheesecake for dessert. “I’m stuffed. I couldn’t eat another bite. But those cheesecakes look amazing,” she said.

Bright red cherries and thick, glossy syrup drip down the sides of each slice. Joel chewed his first few bites with exaggerated pleasure, letting out a theatrical moan.

Their conversations continued long after the plates were cleared. On this peaceful night, several staff members stopped by the family's table to thank them for their years of loyal support. Eventually, realizing how late it was, Libby and her family made their way to the host stand.

David insisted on paying the bill, saying, “You two do so many nice things for us. Now let us do this for you.”

Once the transaction was finished, David held the door open so everyone could leave the restaurant. Outside, the wind had picked up again, sending fine snowflakes swirling across the sidewalk and down the quiet street. Libby leaned in to hug her father as she walked past him at the doorway.

“Thanks for dinner and for the ride, Dad. It’s been a wonderful night.”

“My pleasure,” David said, wrapping his arms firmly around her and kissing the top of her head. Then he extended his arm for Diane to take.

Pulling Libby’s black hand-knit hat from his pocket, Joel passed it to her. She had given it to him earlier because there was no room in her small crossbody purse, and she didn’t want her coat pocket to bulge. She pulled it over her long, dark hair and smiled at him. “Thanks, honey,” she said, then slipped her arm around Joel’s.

“Aren’t you glad we came out tonight?” Libby said, gazing up at him.

“Even in this weather, it’s a good night if you’re there,” he said.

“Thanks, honey. I love you,” she whispered, leaning against him. “A night like this can really keep those walls from closing in.”

Joel pulled her a little closer and said, “I’m glad, my love.”

“I’ve waited so long to do this simple thing with my family. Now I can hardly wait to get home and soak in a hot bath. I’m going to use the last bath bomb you gave me for Christmas. I’ve been saving it.”

Joel smiled. “Hmm... will there be room for two?” he asked as they reached David’s car.

“Absolutely,” Libby said, slipping into the car.

Once they were on the road, heading home, they remarked again on how few cars were out that night. Moments later, Libby and Joel snuggled in the backseat, giggling like teenagers on their first date. Diane cleared her throat and began searching the radio for a local weather report.

Up ahead, the traffic light turned red. The cars travelling along the street came to a slow stop at the intersection. The rhythmic clicking of the windshield wipers, brushing away snowflakes, caught Libby's attention. The wind suddenly pushed more snow against the windshield, making it difficult for the wipers to clear it. At the intersection, David and Diane raved about the restaurant's cuisine. The charbroiled lamb and beef are among their favourites. They were already planning their next visit.

"Perhaps next time for lunch," Diane said, her voice rising with enthusiasm.

Casually, Libby turned to look at Joel as he slid a glove off his hand. He then did the same with one of hers, and a smile spread across her face. Joel covered her hand with his, and Libby instantly felt the warmth of his touch seep beneath her skin as his fingers curled tightly around her tiny hand.

Joel smiled back at Libby, and she giggled. He had a knack for making her laugh with his crooked grin. It was more of a lopsided, playful smile, and the way his eyes seemed to cross always made her laugh. She glanced down at their hands, still tightly intertwined. In that moment, she felt utterly content.

When she slowly raised her head again, a trace of that crooked smile still lingered on Joel's face. But it wasn't the smile that caught her attention this time. Just beside him, a light as bright as the sun shone through the car's door window.

At first, it was small, but the intensity stayed the same. It was hypnotic and unexpected, growing rapidly. Libby blinked, confused. Within seconds, the light was so enormous that it was all she could see. The brilliance flooded the world around her—swallowing everything whole.

What began as an ordinary night became the moment when Libby's life was divided in two.

Everything before the light—and everything after.



Continue this story in

The Flip Side of Broken

Some nights feel so ordinary while they are happening that we don't realize they are quietly changing everything.

In The Flip Side of Broken, Libby must learn to move forward after loss reshapes her world. As buried truths surface, she discovers that healing doesn't mean forgetting the past; it means learning to build a new life with the truth she uncovers.

Imogen Sloane

Writes women's fiction about love, shattered lives, and the quiet journey back to wholeness.

Thank you for reading

Thank you for spending time with Libby before the moment that changed everything.

*If you enjoyed this short story, Libby's journey continues in my upcoming novel,
The Flipside of Broken.*

Bye for now 💖

—Imogen Sloane

imogen@imogensloane.ca

<https://www.instagram.com/?hl=en>

<https://www.facebook.com/ImogenSloaneAuthor/>

