

## Decisions Already Made

She knew she would go before she made the decision. Really aren't these two different mental operations, she thought. You can know something in your gut, but until it's said out loud for your world to hear, it's only stuck in your head and muted by the anxiety. It's not a decision, not yet.

Her youngest daughter was such an enigma to her, always had been. The child who appeared not to have it together but was usually the one who eventually pulled everything and everyone else together, as if she had the luxury by birth order to stand back long enough for those who needed to act their roles, herself choosing to be the petulant, defiant or alternative-thinker in the scene, then at the best moment stepped into the chaos with a special rational tone to sort it all out. This third daughter was not a scene-stealer, though, it was her way of being as powerful a part of the family as any other, and showed us she must be respected for her independent view and values.

This was a delight to her mother, as she was a voyeur herself at times, so curious about how people are in the world and content to often stop and watch and learn. She would have been a Social Psychologist, she mused, if that had ever been offered in her college.

This big decision of a Christmas trip would involve travel from her home on the coast, six hours to her brothers home in Portland, then a rendezvous a few days later with her daughter and her partner and their big dog, maybe changing cars from her SUV to his little white car, then travel four or five hours along the Columbia Gorge to his parents' home in Joseph and staying through Christmas. Roads were icy and temperature variations would change from 60's where she lived into the teens at the lovely warm home at their destination.

Why she knew she would already make the trip was not about the distance. Although her back would be reminding her how it did not like long travel trips so much anymore, and she now had some quirky effects of aging that she could not ignore. No it wasn't the fuss about knowing she would eat too much, and knew she didn't have the stamina all the others did for winter weather activities, or that she couldn't keep a conversation going or contribute to the making or celebrating of the season.

No, the knowing was more than that.

She had realized when her daughter was presenting this to her as an option for Christmas this year, the most important part: Her youngest daughter *wanted* her to be there with her at Christmas. So much in fact, that her daughter described every bit of what potentially would occur, including making certain to let her mother have a blanket on the trip on the frigid Eastern Oregon leg of the journey.

She already saw what this was. It was a gift. A present wrapped in the usual way her daughter wrapped her gifts. Uniquely, highly original, with thoughtful consideration, personal and for some reason her daughter sometimes apologized to her mother for this. How could she? Her mother loved her gifts deeply. She did not know the numerous scraps of notes from this little girl that she had kept and savored, all the “I love you mommies” that had kept her heart beating through the sorrowful times.

The thing about life as I know it, she proposed aloud, is there are too many moments I have had when I know there is No Turning Back: my Moments of Truth, my Regrets. The bends in the path when I was pressing on and others did not approve, not one bit! I made demands for the truth and healing for me and my daughters and while stumbling, did find other precious souls who nourished and guided me. Still do. Oh yes, and golly gee whiz, Life is not in any way perfect! She laughed and shook her head at how often she tried to trick herself about *that* notion.

So she began to pack her bag, and ready herself for this next journey into the next state of wonder, packing into her kit more than winter garments, more than the gifts that were not real offerings, the socks, the cards, and the candy.

She had to choose carefully, thinking of those she would encounter and those she might. What can she bring to this Christmas gathering? Knowing there were important loved ones whose precious presence will *not* be there this year and there will be gladness and sorrow, and special moments and laughter with and without tears. What is the real Story of Christmas if it doesn't have Hope hanging around like a Christmas stocking? How does one bring Hope and put it in a suitcase? Hope is prettiest when it holds what is most impossible anyway, like that mile long wish list we wrote to Santa, when you didn't even let yourself think how *unreal* it was. That list just floated out there in the dark, wintery, starry sky where Santa Claus will soon appear and where there will always be a full moon for him to see the whole world from up so high so he won't get lost finding your house.

This Season is so muddled up! She thought, you get a grip on it, girl, and make it yours.

And so she did. Methodically, like the Little Red Hen. Deliberately like Mrs. Mooley. Wishfully, like Opus' wish for wings that work. She read these stories to the children but took the Hope inside her heart to be carried as a package. The day to begin travel arrived, the car was packed and met the wet road with a burst, just like the Joy in her Heart.

Just like she knew it would happen.