

## SNO-MO DAYS

3947 words

Preston walked through the waist deep snow, across the yard to the garage. No one had shoveled the snow yet, so it wasn't entirely clear as to where to walk. He had moved here with his mom in the summer, and had never seen a Canadian winter. The snow had come down hard in the night, over two feet of soft, fluffy white snow laid upon the roof, the trees and the yard.

His mom Jessica watched as he trudged through the deep snow, at first in awe of the magical white gold that covered the landscape. Her look turned to a quizzical one, as it suddenly appeared that he was getting shorter as he was walking. He was descending as he walked across the flat yard and it made no sense to her. As she stared more intently at him, to understand what she was seeing, a red streak appeared in the snow behind him as he was walking. Worried, she ran to the door and swung it open.

"Preston, are you ok?", she half yelled, still not sure if she needed to be worried or was just not used to the illusion of walking through deep snow. He turned to face her, his mouth open, but frozen in place, with no sounds coming from him.

"Preston! What are you doing?" She was panicked now, her heart racing as he continued to shrink straight down into the snow, the pool of red spreading out around him where he now no longer moved horizontally from. By the time his waist was under the surface of the blood red snow, he was no longer looking at her, his eyes locked in place. What was left of Preston slowly tipped over and was swallowed up by the sea of fluffy red snow. Soon just a hole in the surface remained, with no sound to be heard, other than the screams of his mother.

When the Mounties arrived about fifteen minutes later, they came back from the hole in the snow, to comfort his mother with the bad news.

"I'm sorry", officer Sherwood said to her, in as much of a consoling voice as he could muster. "How long have you folks lived here?"

"We moved in this past July. We moved up from the southern U.S. when my husband found work here. We were really impressed with the jobs, the healthcare and how cheap this property was. And it's only a short drive over to the refinery where my husband got his job."

"So you knew about the, um, special conditions in this neighbourhood when you bought it?" the officer asked as politely as he could.

"Special conditions? What are you talking about? Is there pollution or something here that the agent didn't tell us about?"

"Not exactly," Officer Sherwood replied. "But the pollution from the nineteen fifties, the atomic pollution, lead to a unique species growing in this part of the country. Did your agent tell you about the Snow Moles?"

"Snow moles? What are you talking about? Is that what killed my son? Moles?"

“Well, Snow Moles to be precise. They have eyesight that is exactly opposite from regular moles, they can see in extreme bright, like snowpack. They also have much more of their muscles located in their head and jaws, than say their arms and legs, so they prefer to burrow through the snow, which is much less effort than dirt. They tend to hibernate in the warm months, and venture out when the snow falls. This area is known to have many of them. Did your agent not tell you any of this?”

“Well he did tell us that there were lots of moles in this area and this property, but we didn’t think much of it. He didn’t tell us that they could kill us!”

“Well, to be honest, it was a very long summer and fall and they have been in hiding waiting for the first good snow to fall. These moles, again, kind of opposite to their dirt cousins, work in groups to find food, kind of like piranhas. They are carnivorous so it’s good to be aware of the local conditions. Again, I’m so very sorry for your loss.”

“I don’t know what to say. I don’t know what to think right now,” she answered. “Can we get his body out of the snow?”

“We will retrieve him for you ma’am, once the animal control people arrive with their gear.”

In the following days and weeks after Preston’s funeral, Jessica grew an obsession, a passionate hatred of these creatures and she needed to know how to deal with them, and her rage. She found a book in the local library, under the local history section, titled “Sno-Mo Days.” It was a celebration that the local town had held in nineteen seventy five, following what they thought was the total eradication of the snow moles. She approached the librarian, who appeared to be busy drawing pictures for a children’s book.

“Excuse me, could I ask you a question?”

“Yes of course, how can I help you?”

“I’m sorry to interrupt, but I wanted to know if you could tell me anything about these snow moles?”

“I think I can, I’m just working on a children’s picture book of them, to help let our kids know when it’s safe to play in the snow. Did you hear about the attack a few months ago? Frightening. “

She ignored the question. She glanced at the drawing, of a white mole with blood around its mouth.

“Are there any books here on how to deal with them, or kill them? All I could find was this old book from the nineteen seventies.”

“No, I’m afraid that’s all we have. Back then, the town used poisons to kill them that we aren’t allowed to use anymore. Too dangerous for everyone else. At one point it poisoned all the ground and well water in town and it took over two years for the water to be clean enough to drink again. Those were some thirsty days let me tell you.” She chuckled slightly. “Also, they are a protected species now, so there is likely no literature about how to kill them anyway.”

“Protected species?” she spit slightly as she said it. “How, why are they a protected species! They killed my son in my own yard!”

The librarian was caught unprepared by Jessica’s admission that the latest victim was in fact her son.

"I'm so sorry I didn't realize," her voice drifting off and unsure of what to say.

"Never mind," Jessica retorted. "I'll check this book out anyway."

With the old book she headed home and read through the great triumph of seventy five, the year they had exterminated the bloody creatures. With little else to go on, Jessica went online and researched into how these vile snow moles came back to town.

It turned out that in the early nineties, a local couple started breeding them, finding two of them from different parts of the world, in the hopes of having them on display for locals and visitors to see. They had great plans and great intentions, and had built a small building to house a caged exhibit and small gift shop. They had opened the small mole zoo and it ran safely for a couple of years until some teenagers broke in one night and freed the snow moles, in the name of animal liberation and freedom. Since then, that breeding couple had repopulated the whole county, and even further. They spread even further, thanks to a government biologist who had them declared as an endangered species, making the killing of them illegal.

Jessica finished her research and was even more furious than before, if that was possible. Her beautiful son Preston had his life cut short by human stupidity and ignorance.

Through the next months she stared out at the red spot in the yard and continued to read and research her revenge. It turned out that they could not be killed like a regular mole, their DNA and genetic makeup being almost opposite. Sure you shoot them, if you could find them. They moved so quickly through the snowpack that you would likely never see them. They were likened to sharks, as they passed so effortlessly through the snowbanks. But even if you did manage to line one up and shoot it, they bred fairly quickly. They mated in the spring, before the snow melted and were pregnant through the summer months when they hibernated. In the fall, with the mother still asleep, she would give birth to a litter of two to five young carnivores. But unlike their cousins, these moles could see.

Jessica had a plan in place for the following winter. Though distraught at the loss of their oldest son, the couple and their other son Eric stayed on their property. That summer she bought a pair of Rottweilers, teaching them to chase rabbits and other small animals. When the snow fell, she felt prepared to take on the moles.

It was an early snow that came in November that year. It was the first weekend when it started to float down from the heavy grey clouds above. At first, there wasn't enough snow for the moles to come out, with just a light covering across the ground. It had been a good warm summer and fall, but now the bloody season was approaching.

Jessica was ready that morning. When she got up and opened the curtains in the living room, she could see the deep white powder that surrounded her home. But she was ready.

She stepped out of her back door, just to the edge of the stairs and threw the bucket of meat scraps out into the middle of the lawn. Then she waited. She knew that if she was patient, and focused that she would be able to see the snow move. She sat patiently for almost an hour when she first noticed the movement in the snow. It was subtle at first, a spot here and there. Soon she was able to connect all the small movements into a direction, a line heading towards the new red spot out in the middle. When she saw the snow caving in around the meat, she knew the time was right.

“Zeus! Apollo! Get the moles! Go get them!” She called the dogs and they lept from the end of the stairs into the snow, at first becoming fully submerged but then popping up and leaping towards the middle of the yard. The two dogs were barking loudly as they jumped into the quickly opening space in the snow. Their barks quickly turned to growls and sounds of fighting. Jessica was thrilled when she saw one of the moles tossed into the air. It was much bigger than she had imagined, its two large front teeth already dripping with blood. It quickly fell back into the fray and soon the sounds of the dogs turned from attack to retreat. There must have been too many of them as the yelps from the two dogs quickly faded.

Now worried and frightened for her dogs, she was frantically calling them back but to no avail. The spot in the yard continued to move and the color of blood soon mixed freely with the snow. Then it stopped. There was no sound, no movement, everything just froze. She stood there, transfixed by the stillness and no longer calling for dogs that were no longer alive.

Suddenly, without warning, one of the moles started to climb the stairs in front of her, the blood of Zeus and Apollo dripping from its hideously large front teeth. She screamed and quickly ran back in the door, slamming it shut and turning the deadbolt, as if the mole would try the handle. She dropped down, with her back resting against the door, terrified. She felt a bang against the door as the mole threw itself against it. This was followed by a sharp piercing pain in her back, and she lept forwards onto her hands and knees. She jumped up and looked at the hole in the door, where the snow mole had rammed its front teeth through it and into her back.

She staggered to the bathroom, raised her shirt and turned her back towards the mirror, so she could see. It wasn't a deep wound, just into her soft flesh on her back, but it hurt and it was bleeding. She grabbed the first aid kit from under the sink and did her best to cover it with gauze and tape it.

She left the bathroom and went to the kitchen, where their house phone was located. She dialed nine-one-one and held the phone to her ear. Nothing. The phone was dead. She checked it for power and it was charged, but there was no dial tone. With pain now radiating through her back, Jessica went to the living room to get her cell phone out of her purse. As she pulled her phone out of her purse the power in the house went out. This had happened in the past down south, when heavy snow had brought down some of the power lines so she didn't think too much about it.

“Hello this is nine-one-one, what is the nature of your emergency?”

“Hi, I've been attacked by a snow mole. A bunch of them just killed my dogs and one bit me, I'm bleeding.” she was half yelling as she spoke.

“Just stay calm, Ma'am, and we'll get help to you as soon as we can. How bad is the bleeding?”

“I'm not sure, its tooth went into my back, but I put gauze on it and taped it, but it's still bleeding. And my dogs are dead! You need to send someone over here to kill these things, they're dangerous!”

“Ma'am it's just a mole bite, so I need you to calm down. Can you drive yourself to the hospital?”

“I can't, my husband has our truck at work and I'm snowed in. And I'm not going out with those creatures hiding out there! Are you crazy?”

“Alright ma’am, I need you to calm down. I will put your call into priority sequence and we will send someone out for you as soon as the streets are cleared. They are working on them right now.”

“Well how long will that be?” She was becoming more and more panicked, despite the operators instructions to do otherwise. “What do I do if these things come in my house?”

“Ma’am, they’re moles, not bears. Just keep your doors locked and I’m sure you’ll be fine until someone gets there. I have other calls to take so I have to let you go now. You should probably call your husband and let him know what’s happening. Good bye.” With that, the call ended.

She tried to calm herself, they were just moles, right? But they killed Preston, and now the dogs. What were these things? She started to dial her husband’s phone when there was another loud bang on the door. She jumped and screamed, nowhere near being calm. She peered around the corner at the door and it was still closed and locked. There was now a second hole in it, slightly higher than the first. She crept slowly towards it, hoping to peer out the top window pane and see if it was still on the back steps.

As she approached the door a third bang had her screaming again. She kicked the door back in frustration. She looked down and saw another puncture in the door, but they had left the porch. She looked out into the yard and saw them climbing the telephone pole like large furry ants. The first ones that reached the top grabbed the wire and, hanging from under it with all four feet, slowly started sliding towards the house.

She ran to the basement and got her husband’s shotgun out of the gun cabinet. It was a double barrel and she cracked it open and loaded it as she went back up the stairs.

A loud thud on the roof caught her attention and she froze. Then another, then two more in rapid succession. They were landing on the roof. She ran up the stairs then, first into one bedroom, then another and began checking the windows to make sure they were locked and closed. When she reached her bedroom, she saw as one of them was trying to get in one of her windows. She leveled the gun at the large, white rodent and fired. The noise was deafening, like thunder inside a small room, and soon the cold winter wind was gusting into her room. The mole was gone, with a small red stain on the sill the only remainder of it. Soon another one slowly peeked around and in the now open window. She leveled the gun and fired again, watching with some pleasure as the remains of the mole flew through the air and out of sight.

With her adrenaline now at full throttle, she quickly cracked open the gun and was reloading it when her cell phone rang. Hoping it was her husband or someone to help her, she quickly answered.

“Hello?” she answered, almost out of breath.

“Hello, is this Jessica?” He continued talking without waiting for her reply. “My name is Cody and I’m with the Department of Sustainable Environment. I got your name and number from the emergency call centre. They reported that you have threatened to hurt or kill a protected species and I need to let you know the penalties.” She cut him off before he could finish.

“Are you out of your mind? These snow moles are attacking me right now in my house! They’re trying to kill me! Call the police!” With that she dropped the phone and let loose another round of

buckshot into the window, blowing the arm off of one of them who had been reaching in, its maimed body falling into the yard below.

She cracked the gun open and was loading another shell when three of them fell through the open window into the room. She quickly backed out of the room and slammed the door shut. A pair of mole fangs quickly banged a hole in the door. Soon, three sets of long, sharp teeth were loudly banging holes in the door. As the hole got large enough to see their faces, she fired both barrels into it.

She was starting to lose her hearing, but there was a noticeable silence this time. The room was still and there was no further noise from the bedroom. After reloading the gun, she slowly pushed the door open with the barrel of the gun. The room was covered in blood spatter and mole bits, but there were no more coming in. Had she got them all?

Shivering, she slowly approached the window. There were no more to be seen. The remains of several of them were scattered liberally across their yard, like a large Jackson Pollack painting. She caught her breath. She turned and got her phone off the floor, trying to dial her husband while keeping a firm grip on the gun. The phone was dead, a large hole in the middle from either buckshot or a fang. She dropped it, and left the room, heading back downstairs.

Reaching the kitchen, she pulled a bottle of her favorite wine from the fridge, opened it and sat down and drank right from the bottle. It was a pleasant zinfandel. Too sweet for her husband's liking, she felt no guilt in chugging it down. Collecting her thoughts for a moment, and letting the wine reach her, she was brought back by the sound of a weird siren coming closer. It wasn't a police or ambulance siren, she knew those. It wasn't a fire truck either. It sounded like a high, nasally whining. She looked out the window as a small, official looking min van pulled into their drive, its tinny siren wailing and green lights flashing.

Two men got out, dressed halfway between an old forest ranger and a mall cop. One raised a megaphone.

"We know and can see you have violated the endangered species act. The police are on their way and you will be arrested. We advise you to drop your weapons and come out peacefully!"

Jessica couldn't believe what she was hearing. They were coming after her? For protecting herself? She opened the door and yelled out at them.

"Are you out of your mind? These things were attacking me!"

"Ma'am they are moles, they don't attack people!" his voicing bellowing from the megaphone. "Drop the gun and come out peacefully. You have read too many old fables about the snow moles."

She had already set the gun on the table and walked through the open door to yell back.

"Come on inside and I will show you where they broke in. I've put the gun down already!"

Seeing she was unarmed, the two men waded through the waist deep snow towards the porch. She stood in plain view, so they would see that she posed no threat.

As they pushed through the snow, two distinct bulges in the snow started moving towards the two men, one from each side of them. The first man saw the movement, smiled and turned to his partner.

“Look Barry! They are coming to say hi to us! To thank us for rescuing them!” With that, he reached out, as if to pat it once it got to him. His hand was fully extended when the mole broke up and out of the snow, taking off his entire hand with a single gash. He fell back into the snow, screaming, blood spraying from his bureaucratic stump. Barry, stunned by this unforeseen and unimagined turn of events, stood watching. The two moles quickly pounced upon the downed man, and quickly tore his face and chest to shreds.

Barry, coming to his senses, quickly turned and plowed through the snow towards the porch. Jessica stood, but made no motion to reach out and help him. He climbed the first stair and as he brought his back leg up a mole quickly put its teeth into his calf muscle. He hopped up onto the porch, the mole working its way through his leg. Without thinking, Jessica quickly kicked him in the chest, knocking him back into the snow, the mole firmly attached. Realizing a small window of opportunity, she ran back towards the first man, her feet jumping through the broken snow. She vaulted over the now blood covered mole, its attention on its downed prey, and ran to the van. She jumped in, the keys still in the ignition and turned it on. She put the van into drive and floored the gas pedal. As she broke through the snow, the first mole looked up in time to see the grill hit it. The second mole, also caught unaware, was also smashed into the front porch of the house by the van.

Jessica opened the van door and stumbled back to the drive way. The van was on fire and had set the porch on fire. Looking up at the house, she could see at least twenty more moles on the roof, trapped, as the flames rose. It must have been the entire colony.

She yelled up at them, as the flames licked up around them.

“Happy Sno-Mo day you furry bastards!”