

Black on White

This story has a winter wonderland setting. A safe setting, as long as you stay inside the house, looking out. Looking out, not going out. But do you think I, a preschooler, was content just to stand there and look out? You do need to know that although the blizzard had ended and the snowdrifts now reached the roof on the downwind side of the house, the outside night temperature was -45° F. We didn't have wind-chill factors back then. Minus forty-five was cold enough, as I was soon to find out.

As I gazed out the window unto the crusted, moon-lit snow, at that moment it did not occur to me that it was any colder out there than it was in our cozy house. Nor did it once cross my mind to ask anyone at home: "What is the temperature outside? Do you think it's OK for me to go out there, dressed as I am?" *

Yes, of course, I was wearing only my black burial dress. (Since it was evening, we can call it a nightshirt.) No shoes, no socks, no slippers.

I wanted to be out there; it looked so inviting. So, I ran out and romped around. Tree branches snapped, snow crackled and frost popped. I don't remember feeling anything except the exhilaration of freely running around bare footed, bareheaded and practically bare in general.

I don't know how long I did my impromptu snow dance. Only my guardian angels know for sure and they're not talking. But some member of the family (I don't remember who) felt a draft and noticed an open door and a missing me. Anyway, when called urgently, I ran back into the house. Only my face suffered frostbite and my ears looked like a pair of pears while they were defrosting. (Do you know the distinct, consistent sharp pain of an ear defrosting? Ou-u-u-ch!)

I shiver and shudder whenever I think how close I came to being quick-frozen in my little black burial dress. But, what an arresting figure I would have made, lying motionless out there on that wide expanse of Saskatchewan snow! What a cool picture in black and white! Instead, here I am growing old(er) in Colorful Colorado.

* "Little Black Burial Dress" ◇◇◇