



BRIGHT SILENCE

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A surprisingly, unpredictable early winter snow had Tony's crew shackled in the barn with the leaf blowers and rakes primed for the last hold outs on the mighty oaks. So the crew, led by Mario, the equipment technician (aka the mechanic), headed out with shovels to clear the miles of paths to the old clubhouse. The bright silence that accompanies the first snow of the year fills the crew with thoughts of their days as children, ready to romp!

Meanwhile, up on the hill above town, Tony managed to get his pickup stuck in a snowbank. He sat there for a minute in the same bright silence that captured his crew and thought of his days as a child. He remembered when he was stuck under a tree with his best friend, John, during a sleigh ride on the Locust hill.

"When you're young," he said to himself out loud, "the days seem longer and you never think about losing a friend." The 20th anniversary of John's passing was a few days earlier.

Occupied with these thoughts, Tony walked back toward the house. It was still an hour before the kids would be up. He figured to contact Mario on the cell phone and ask him when he had a chance to come with the dump truck and the tow chain to pull him out. On the one hand, Tony felt like the club member who drove his golf cart into the pond. Still, on the other hand, he saw it as an opportunity to get the porridge started, sit with his coffee, and anticipate the glow on the children's faces when they see the white blanket covering the ground.

Maria hit the snooze button endlessly on a normal day, but today, she immediately listened for the news that schools were closed and, in short order, so were her eyelids! Tony recalled his youth and how a

school closing filled him with excitement; now, he felt a deep calm knowing his children would be down soon.

"Yahoo," little Angelo cried out, "I can't wait to call Troy for a sleigh ride behind Schuyler. Dad, do you think Mom will help get the sleigh hitched up to Schuyler today, so Troy can come with us for a ride?"

"Angelo," Tony replied, "Schuyler will need some more work this season before we can hook him to the sleigh. But, after Mario comes to pull my truck out of the snowbank, we can all go to the park next to the course for some serious downhill sleigh riding."

"Da-a-ad," Clelia creaked out of a deep sleep, "is.....school....closed?"

"It certainly is, and I've made some porridge to warm your belly before we head out romping today," Tony replied.

Just then, with Angelo was sitting down with his porridge, Clelia creeping down the stairs, Maria cozy into that deep morning sleep, the phone rang. Tony's good friend from Rhode

Island called to say that Doc Skogley had passed away last night.

Doc, as we all called him, had been struggling with cancer for the last few years. He was able to attend the 1997 Rhode Island Turfgrass Field Day with the help of his friends at the Allen Seed Company. Tony just chatted with Doc a few months earlier about friends, family, and two of his favorite subjects—velvet bentgrass and sweet vernalgrass.

Tony left the children and their breakfast in the kitchen and headed up to see Maria. He sat on the edge of the bed, staring out at the snow, watching the big flakes drop.

"Who was on the phone?" a groggy Maria asked.

"That was Vicki," Tony replied. "Do you remember when we were at the Wisconsin alumni gathering in Orlando and I introduced you to that older gentleman? I said was my advisor from Rhode Island."

"You mean Doc Skogley?" she recalled.

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"Yeah, well he passed away yesterday."

Just then Maria sat up and leaned over to Tony, who had tears running down his face. "I didn't realize you were that close to him," she said.

Tony had known Doc since 1982, as an undergrad at URI. But it wasn't until much later that Doc was to have a significant influence on his life. It was 1985 and Tony was becoming disillusioned with being an assistant superintendent. He was applying for jobs, but felt undermined by the superintendent at the club where he was working.

Toward the end of his second year as an assistant, he took a day and headed back to URI for the Field Day. He didn't know many people, so he spent time wandering around the plots. While looking over the bent-grass variety trials, he noticed a selection that stood out from the rest in color and pest resistance. Just then Doc came upon him.

"What do you think of this one, Tony?" Doc inquired.

"Sure looks good, Doc. It seems noticeably darker and more upright than Penncross. What height are these at?"

They chatted for about five minutes, which at Field Day with Doc was surely a record! He was often pulled in so many directions that it was rare to have his attention for that long.

"Have you ever thought about graduate school, Tony?" Doc probed.

"I did a few years ago, but after I got turned down at Cornell, I figured I wasn't grad school material," Tony responded.

"Well, I've got a spot for the fall semester, if you're interested." And Doc left it at that.

Tony looked out over the plots on that bright sunny summer day and noticed how quiet the day seemed, a kind of bright silence. Tony would leave the golf course that fall and join Doc to investigate the use of a naturalized species as a turf.

"It wasn't until the end of my time at URI that Doc and I really became close." Tony continued the story with Maria. "I had just started to write my thesis when Carolyn and I separated. You remember me telling you that she moved out while I was at work."

"I remember you saying what a mess you were then," Maria recalled.

"That's putting it mildly," Tony cor-

rected. "My hair was a mess, my life was spinning out of control. Then I went to see Doc to tell him that I would be quitting and heading back to the golf course."

"Listen Tony," Doc said calmly, "go get your things and move in with Jane and me. You must not let this situation ruin all that you have worked for. Try and work things out with Carolyn, but in the meantime—start writing!"

"I remember that day like it was yesterday," Tony reflected. "Doc and Jane were a second set of parents to me."

Maria pulled Tony back onto the bed, holding him in her arms. "You know Tony, that's what I'll always love about you. Everyone who shares a part of themselves with you becomes family."

"I've never felt like I deserved all the good things that have happened to me, because I always had so much support from my family and friends like Doc," Tony explained. "And you know Maria, I feel like I've lost a lot, too."

"I know it seems like that, Tony," Maria said, "but you have SO much, and besides, as long as you have memories of John and Doc, they will live forever."

Just then, they could hear the kids romping up the stairs to jump on the bed. Tony and Maria hid under the covers and braced themselves for the impact. After Angelo and Clelia landed and rolled around for a minute, it was Tony left in bed while Maria and the kids headed down to finish breakfast and their morning chores.

Tony looked out over the hill, into the snow and thought of his friends and family who have passed through his life. He thought of the many still with him today. He noticed that the bright silence of that summer day and this winter snowfall filled him with peace.

He saw Mario pulling into the driveway, so he headed down to greet him and face the music for getting the truck stuck. One could see a little smile making its way onto Tony's face as he made his way down the stairs. ❄️

