

The Snowman

Hans Christian Andersen

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Easy

11 min read

It is so delightfully cold that it makes my whole body crackle,” said the Snow Man. “This is just the kind of wind to blow life into one. How that great red thing up there is staring at me!” He meant the sun, which was just setting. “It shall not make me wink. I shall manage to keep the pieces.”

He had two triangular pieces of tile in his head instead of eyes, and his mouth, being made of an old broken rake, was therefore furnished with teeth. He had been brought into existence amid the joyous shouts of boys, the jingling of sleigh bells, and the slashing of whips.

The sun went down, and the full moon rose, large, round, and clear, shining in the deep blue.

“There it comes again, from the other side,” said the Snow Man, who supposed the sun was showing itself once more. “Ah, I have cured it of staring. Now it may hang up there and shine, so that I may see myself. If I only knew how to manage to move away from this place—I should so like to move! If I could, I would slide along yonder on the ice, as I have seen the boys do; but I don’t understand how. I don’t even know how to run.”

“Away, away!” barked the old yard dog. He was quite hoarse and could not pronounce “Bow-wow” properly. He had once been an indoor dog and lain by the fire, and he had been hoarse ever since. “The sun will make you run some day. I saw it, last winter, make your predecessor run, and his predecessor before him. Away, away! They all have to go.”

“I don’t understand you, comrade,” said the Snow Man. “Is that thing up yonder to teach me to run? I saw it

running itself, a little while ago, and now it has come creeping up from the other side.”

“You know nothing at all,” replied the yard dog. “But then, you’ve only lately been patched up. What you see yonder is the moon, and what you saw before was the sun. It will come again to-morrow and most likely teach you to run down into the ditch by the well, for I think the weather is going to change. I can feel such pricks and stabs in my left leg that I am sure there is going to be a change.”

“I don’t understand him,” said the Snow Man to himself, “but I have a feeling that he is talking of something very disagreeable. The thing that stared so hard just now, which he calls the sun, is not my friend; I can feel that too.”

“Away, away!” barked the yard dog, and then he turned round three times and crept into his kennel to sleep.

There really was a change in the weather. Toward morning a thick fog covered the whole country and a keen wind arose, so that the cold seemed to freeze one’s bones. But when the sun rose, a splendid sight was to be seen. Trees and bushes were covered with hoarfrost and looked like a forest of white coral, while on every twig glittered frozen dewdrops. The many delicate forms, concealed in summer by luxuriant foliage, were now clearly defined and looked like glittering lacework. A white radiance glistened from every twig. The birches, waving in the wind, looked as full of life as in summer and as wondrously beautiful. Where the sun shone, everything glittered and sparkled as if diamond dust had been strewn about; and the snowy carpet of the earth seemed covered with diamonds from which gleamed countless lights, whiter even than the snow itself.

“This is really beautiful,” said a girl who had come into the garden with a young friend; and they both stood still near the Snow Man, contemplating the glittering scene. “Summer cannot show a more beautiful sight,” she exclaimed, while her eyes sparkled.

“And we can’t have such a fellow as this in the summer-time,” replied the young man, pointing to the Snow Man. “He is capital.”

The girl laughed and nodded at the Snow Man, then tripped away over the snow with her friend. The snow creaked and crackled beneath her feet, as if she had been treading on starch.

“Who are those two?” asked the Snow Man of the yard dog. “You have been here longer than I; do you know

them?”

“Of course I know them,” replied the yard dog; “the girl has stroked my back many times, and the young man has often given me a bone of meat. I never bite those two.”

“But what are they?” asked the Snow Man.

“They are lovers,” he replied. “They will go and live in the same kennel, by and by, and gnaw at the same bone. Away, away!”

“Are they the same kind of beings as you and I?” asked the Snow Man.

“Well, they belong to the master,” retorted the yard dog. “Certainly people know very little who were only born yesterday. I can see that in you. I have age and experience. I know every one here in the house, and I know there was once a time when I did not lie out here in the cold, fastened to a chain. Away, away!”

“The cold is delightful,” said the Snow Man. “But do tell me, tell me; only you must not clank your chain so, for it jars within me when you do that.”

“Away, away!” barked the yard dog. “I’ll tell you: they said I was a pretty little fellow, once; then I used to lie in a velvet-covered chair, up at the master’s house, and sit in the mistress’s lap; they used to kiss my nose, and wipe my paws with an embroidered handkerchief, and I was called ‘Ami, dear Ami, sweet Ami.’ But after a while I grew too big for them, and they sent me away to the housekeeper’s room; so I came to live on the lower story. You can look into the room from where you stand, and see where I was once master—for I was, indeed, master to the housekeeper. It was a much smaller room than those upstairs, but I was more comfortable, for I was not continually being taken hold of and pulled about by the children, as I had been. I received quite as good food and even better. I had my own cushion, and there was a stove—it is the finest thing in the world at this season of the year. I used to go under the stove and lie down. Ah, I still dream of that stove. Away, away!”

“Does a stove look beautiful?” asked the Snow Man. “Is it at all like me?”

“It is just the opposite of you,” said the dog. “It’s as black as a crow and has a long neck and a brass knob; it eats firewood, and that makes fire spurt out of its mouth. One has to keep on one side or under it, to be comfortable. You can see it through the window from where you stand.”

Then the Snow Man looked, and saw a bright polished thing with a brass knob, and fire gleaming from the lower part of it. The sight of this gave the Snow Man a strange sensation; it was very odd, he knew not what it meant, and he could not account for it. But there are people who are not men of snow who understand what the feeling is. “And why did you leave her?” asked the Snow Man, for it seemed to him that the stove must be of the female sex. “How could you give up such a comfortable place?”

“I was obliged to,” replied the yard dog. “They turned me out of doors and chained me up here. I had bitten the youngest of my master’s sons in the leg, because he kicked away the bone I was gnawing. ‘Bone for bone,’ I thought. But they were very angry, and since that time I have been fastened to a chain and have lost my voice. Don’t you hear how hoarse I am? Away, away! I can’t talk like other dogs any more. Away, away! That was the end of it all.”

But the Snow Man was no longer listening. He was looking into the housekeeper’s room on the lower story, where the stove, which was about the same size as the Snow Man himself, stood on its four iron legs. “What a strange crackling I feel within me,” he said. “Shall I ever get in there? It is an innocent wish, and innocent wishes are sure to be fulfilled. I must go in there and lean against her, even if I have to break the window.”

“You must never go in there,” said the yard dog, “for if you approach the stove, you will melt away, away.”

“I might as well go,” said the Snow Man, “for I think I am breaking up as it is.”

During the whole day the Snow Man stood looking in through the window, and in the twilight hour the room became still more inviting, for from the stove came a gentle glow, not like the sun or the moon; it was only the kind of radiance that can come from a stove when it has been well fed. When the door of the stove was opened, the flames darted out of its mouth,—as is customary with all stoves,—and the light of the flames fell with a ruddy gleam directly on the face and breast of the Snow Man. “I can endure it no longer,” said he. “How beautiful it looks when it stretches out its tongue!”

The night was long, but it did not appear so to the Snow Man, who stood there enjoying his own reflections and crackling with the cold. In the morning the window-panes of the housekeeper's room were covered with ice. They were the most beautiful ice flowers any Snow Man could desire, but they concealed the stove. These window-panes would not thaw, and he could see nothing of the stove, which he pictured to himself as if it had been a beautiful human being. The snow crackled and the wind whistled around him; it was just the kind of frosty weather a Snow Man ought to enjoy thoroughly. But he did not enjoy it. How, indeed, could he enjoy anything when he was so stove-sick?

"That is a terrible disease for a Snow Man to have," said the yard dog. "I have suffered from it myself, but I got over it. Away, away!" he barked, and then added, "The weather is going to change."

The weather did change. It began to thaw, and as the warmth increased, the Snow Man decreased. He said nothing and made no complaint, which is a sure sign.

One morning he broke and sank down altogether; and behold! where he had stood, something that looked like a broomstick remained sticking up in the ground. It was the pole round which the boys had built him.

"Ah, now I understand why he had such a great longing for the stove," said the yard dog. "Why, there's the shovel that is used for cleaning out the stove, fastened to the pole. The Snow Man had a stove scraper in his body; that was what moved him so. But it is all over now. Away, away!"

And soon the winter passed. "Away, away!" barked the hoarse yard dog, but the girls in the house sang:

"Come from your fragrant home, green thyme;
Stretch your soft branches, willow tree;
The months are bringing the sweet spring-time,
When the lark in the sky sings joyfully.
Come, gentle sun, while the cuckoo sings,
And I'll mock his note in my wanderings."
And nobody thought any more of the Snow Man.

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