

The Winter Journey

Day 1 – Departure.

The wind whipped with an urgency that had been absent the past few weeks. The cold worked its way through the air, seeking any exposed skin it could find. The winter had been long and surprisingly fierce, bringing with it a yardstick of snow. School had been out for what felt like months, giving the small town of Anson Cove a seemingly permanent air of celebration. As the breeze stirred a final, powerful gust, the tall traveler turned and gazed sadly at the small town that had been his home. Away in the distance, the enthusiastic voices of children ebbed and flowed in song. They were singing to him. It was their goodbye – their farewell and well wishes for his journey north. He hesitated, attempting to convince himself that he did not have to go. Pushing those thoughts aside, he put his back to the voices and began to walk.

Day 2 – A new beginning.

The first day had been hard. Every step had been a battle. He knew it was the right decision. He knew he really had no other choice. That knowledge didn't make it any easier though.

After a full day of walking, he rose early and had put many miles behind him before the sun had made its bright and happy appearance. The day had dawned golden and clear. The air was still cold, but that was no problem. In truth, he loved the cold and could have lived in this chill forever. Today would be better, he thought. He lowered the bill of his hat to shield his eyes from the wind, and plowed ahead through the mounds of snow that lay before him.

Day 6 – Music in the night.

Winter's end was imminent. He could feel the warmth working through his limbs as he made his way along the forest path. Even now, in the dead of night, the cold was less than it had been a few days ago in the full heat of the sun. His options were few. He had no choice but to press on and make it north. He had no choice but to keep going. He sang that night, trying to push away the fears and the doubts that filled his mind. His friends from Anson Cove had taught him a beautiful song, so he sang it loud. His lonely voice filling the woods with melody.

Day 14 – The harsh truth.

Winter was dead. He knew that could only mean one thing. The realization that he would not make it north filled him with a sadness so deep he struggled to keep moving. As far as his eyes could see, the snow was melting. Little green shoots of grass poked their way through the blanket of white, reaching desperately for the sun. The forest animals were busy now. They flitted and crawled, jumped and chattered in, around, and on the trees. It was everything he could do to keep moving. He felt tired and weak. His hat kept sliding down his head, moving with the moisture on his brow. This trip had taken its toll and he had lost so much weight. Desperate for rest and shade from the sun, he crawled beneath the canopy of a giant, weathered oak tree. The bark was rough against his back, but the sun did not reach him here and for that he was thankful.

Day 22 – Despair.

It was over. His trip, which had begun with so much hope and

promise, was nearing its end. He would never make it north. The last week had been the most difficult of his life. He was deathly thin and pale beyond words. His face was white; whiter than the snow that sat in small little clumps that dotted the landscape around him. The plan had been a good one: Head north. Stay ahead of the spring. He had hoped the winter would last a few weeks longer than usual, seeing how strong it had been. Instead, the seasons had changed early this year, and that had made the journey north impossibly difficult. He had never planned a trip such as this and mistakes had been made from the very beginning. His friends in Anson Cove had done all they could to encourage him. Especially the children. But it had all been in vain. These would be his final days. He knew the truth of that deep down. With a final, stubborn surge of energy, he quickened his pace.

Day 23 – The end.

He had found a small outcrop of rocks the previous night that offered a cool respite from the heat. The view from his final resting place was breathtaking. The leaves on the trees were a brighter shade of green he had ever seen. The birds, in joyful abandon, chirped out to everyone who could hear. The grass swayed playfully in the gentle southern wind. The sun, in all its life-giving glory, beamed warmth and light in every direction. If this was the end, it was as good of an ending as he could imagine. That made him smile.

His body was spent and wasting away. It would not be long now. He sensed the final moments peeking around the corner, yet he was at peace, knowing that he had been blessed with a good life. He had made so many friends during his days in Anson Cove. Those children had welcomed him into their lives completely. He was their friend. Their tears as he had said his goodbyes broke his heart yet filled him with such courage and strength. He would miss them all terribly.

He could feel the tug of death and knew he had only moments left. He chose to greet it with a song. A song he had learned from the children who were his dearest friends in the world. A song they had written about him. Summoning the last stores of willpower he possessed, he raised his head and sang with all the joy and love he could muster, "Frosty the snowman was a jolly happy soul!"