

The Snow Man

Hans Christian Andersen

"It's so bitterly cold that my whole body crackles!" said the Snow Man. "This wind can really blow life into you! And how that glaring thing up there glares at me!" He meant the sun; it was just setting. "She won't make *me* blink; I'll hold onto the pieces."

"The pieces" were two large triangular pieces of tile, which he had for eyes. His mouth was part of an old rake, hence he had teeth. He had been born amid the triumphant shouts of the boys, and welcomed by the jingling of sleigh bells and the cracking of whips from the passing sleighs.

The sun went down, and the full moon rose, big and round, bright and beautiful, in the clear blue sky.

"Here she comes again from the other side," said the Snow Man, for he thought it was the sun showing itself again. "Ah, I've cured her of staring, all right. Now let her hang up there and shine so that I can see myself. If I only knew how to move from this place - I'd like so much to move! If I could, I'd slide along there on the ice, the way I see the boys slide, but I don't know how to run."

"Away! Away!" barked the old Watchdog. He was quite hoarse from the time when he was a house dog lying under the stove. "The sun will teach you how to run. I saw your predecessor last winter, and before that *his* predecessor. Away! Away! And away they all go!"

"I don't understand you, friend," said the Snow Man. "Is that thing up there going to teach me to run?" He meant the moon. "Why, she was running the last time I saw her a little while ago, and now she comes sneaking back from the other side."

"You don't know anything at all," replied the Watchdog. "But then, of course, you've just been put together. The one you are looking at now is called the moon, and the one who went away was the sun. She will come again tomorrow, and she will teach you to run down into the ditch. We're going to have a change of weather soon; I can feel it in my left hind leg; I have a pain in it. The weather's going to change."

"I don't understand him," said the Snow Man to himself, "but I have a feeling he's talking about something unpleasant. The one that stared at me and went away, whom he called the sun, is no friend of mine either, I can feel that."

"Away! Away!" barked the Watchdog, and then he walked around three times and crept into his kennel to sleep.

The weather really did change. Early next morning a thick, damp mist lay over the whole countryside. At dawn a wind rose; it was icy cold. The frost set in hard, but when the sun rose, what a beautiful sight it was! The trees and bushes were covered with hoarfrost and looked like a forest of white coral, while every twig seemed smothered with glittering white flowers. The enormously many delicate branches that are concealed by the leaves in summer now appeared, every single one of them, and made a gleaming white lacework, so snowy white that a white radiance seemed to spring from every bough. The birch waved in the wind, as if it had life, like the rest of the trees in the summer. It was all wonderfully beautiful. And when the sun came out, how it all glittered and sparkled, as if everything had been strewn with diamond dust, and big diamonds had been sprinkled on the snowy carpet of the earth; or one could also imagine that countless little lights were gleaming, brighter even than the snow itself.

"It's wonderfully beautiful!" said a young girl, who had come out into the garden with a

young man. They stopped near the Snow Man and gazed at the flashing trees. "Summer can't show us a lovelier sight!" she said, and her eyes sparkled with delight.

"And we can't have a fellow like this in the summertime, either," the young man agreed, as he pointed to the Snow Man. "He's splendid."

The young girl laughed, nodded to the Snow Man, and then danced over the snow with her friend - over snow that crackled under their feet as though they were walking on starch.

"Who were those two?" asked the Snow Man of the Watchdog. "You've been around this yard longer than I have. Do you know them?"

"Of course I know them," said the Watchdog. "She pets me, and he once threw me a meat bone. I don't bite those two."

"But what are they supposed to be?" asked the Snow Man. "Sweethearts!" replied the Watchdog. "They'll go to move into the same kennel someday and gnaw the same bone together. Away! Away!"

"But are they as important as you and I?" asked the Snow Man.

"Why, they are members of the master's family," said the Watchdog. "People certainly don't know very much if they were only born yesterday; I can tell that from you. Now I have age and knowledge. I know everybody here in the house, and I know a time when I didn't have to stand out here in the cold, fastened to a chain. Away! Away!"

"The cold is lovely," said the Snow Man. "But tell me, tell me. Only don't rattle that chain; it makes me shiver inside when you do that."

"Away! Away!" barked the Watchdog. "They used to tell me I was a pretty little puppy, when I lay in a velvet-covered chair, up in the master's house, or sat in the mistress' lap. They used to kiss me on the nose and wipe my paws with an embroidered handkerchief.

"They called me 'the handsomest' and 'little puppsy-wuppsy.' But then I grew too big for them to keep, so they gave me away to the housekeeper. That's how I came to live down in the basement. You can look down into it from where you're standing; you can look right into the room where I was master, for that was what I was to the housekeeper. Of course, the place was inferior to that upstairs, but I was more comfortable there and wasn't constantly grabbed and pulled about by the children as I had been upstairs. I had just as good food as ever, and much more of it. I had my own cushion, and then there was a stove, which is the finest thing in the world at this time of year. I crept right in under it, so that I was out of the way. Ah, I still dream of that stove sometimes. Away! Away!"

"Does a stove look so beautiful?" asked the Stone Man. "Does it look like me?"

"It's just the opposite of you. It's as black as coal and has a long neck and a brass stomach. It eats firewood, so that fire spurts from its mouth. You must keep beside it or underneath it; it's very comfortable there. You must be able to see it through the window from where you're standing."

Then the Snow Man looked, and he really saw a brightly polished thing with a brass stomach and fire glowing from the lower part of it. A very strange feeling swept over the Snow Man; he didn't know what it meant, and couldn't understand it, but all people who aren't snow men know that feeling.

"Why did you leave her?" asked the Snow Man, for it seemed to him that the stove must be a female. "How could you leave a place like that?"

"I was compelled to," replied the Watchdog. "They turned me outside and chained me up here. You see, I had bitten the youngest of the master's children in the leg, because he had kicked away a bone I was gnawing. 'A bone for a bone,' I always say. They didn't like

that at all, and from that time I've been chained out here and have lost my voice. Don't you hear how hoarse I am? Away! Away! And that was the end of that!"

But the Snow Man wasn't listening to him any longer. He kept peering in at the housekeeper's basement room, where the stove stood on its four iron legs, just about the same size as the Snow Man himself.

"What a strange crackling there is inside me!" he cried. "I wonder if I'll ever get in there. That's an innocent wish, and our innocent wishes are sure to be fulfilled. It is my only wish, my biggest wish; it would almost be unfair if it wasn't granted. I must get in and lean against her, even if I have to break a window."

"You'll never get in there," said the Watchdog. "And if you go near that stove you'll melt away! Away!"

"I'm as good as gone, anyway," replied the Snow Man. "I think I'm breaking up."

All day long the Snow Man stood looking in through the window. At twilight the room grew still more inviting; a mild glow came from the stove, not like the moon or the sun either, but just like the glow of a stove when it has been well filled. Every time the room door was opened, the flames leaped out of the stove's mouth; this was a habit it had. The flame fell distinctly on the white face of the Snow Man and glowed ruddy on his breast.

"I can't stand it any longer!" he cried. "How beautiful she looks when she sticks out her tongue!"

The night was very long, but it didn't seem long to the Snow Man; he stood lost in his own pleasant thoughts, and they froze until they crackled.

In the morning the windowpanes of the basement room were covered with ice. They showed the most beautiful ice flowers that any Snow Man could desire, but they hid the stove. The windowpanes wouldn't thaw, so he couldn't see the stove. It creaked, and it crackled.

It was just the sort of weather a Snow Man should most thoroughly enjoy. But he didn't enjoy it; indeed, how could he enjoy anything when he was so stove-sick?

"That's a terrible sickness for a Snow Man," said the Watchdog. "I've also suffered from it myself, but I got over it. Away! Away! There's going to be a change in the weather."

And there was a change in the weather; it began to thaw! The thaw increased, and the Snow Man decreased. He never complained, and that's an infallible sign.

One morning he collapsed. And behold! where he had stood there was something like a broomstick sticking up from the ground.

It was the pole the boys had built him up around.

"Now I can understand why he had such an intense longing for the stove," said the Watchdog. "The Snow Man has had a stove rake in his body; that's what moved inside him. Now he has gotten over that, too. Away! Away!"

And soon the winter was over, too.

"Away! Away!" barked the Watchdog. But the little girls in the house sang:

*Oh, woodruff, spring up, fresh and proud, round about!
And, willow tree, hang your woolen mitts out!
Come, cuckoo and lark, come and sing!
At February's close we already have spring.
Tweet-tweet, cuckoo! I am singing with you.
Come out, dear sun! Come often, skies of blue!*

And nobody thought any more about the Snow Man.