

Snowman

It crackles inside me! What a fine frost! said the snowman. The wind, oh the wind, it bites so! Simply delightful! And why are you staring so hard, bug-eyed? He was speaking of the sun, which was just setting. Still, go ahead, go ahead! I shan't blink! We shall stand firm!

Instead of eyes, two shards of roofing tile stuck out from him; instead of a mouth, a broken piece of an old rake adorned his face; thus, he even had teeth.

He came into the world amidst joyful "hurrahs" from the boys, to the ringing of sleigh bells, the creaking of runners, and the cracking of cabmen's whips.

The sun set, and onto the blue sky floated the moon, full and clear!

Look, it crawls out from the other side! said the snowman. He thought it was the sun appearing again. I have finally taught it not to gape at me! Let it hang there and shine softly, so that I may see myself!... Ah, if only I could somehow manage to move! How I would run over there onto the ice to skate, just like the boys did earlier! Trouble is—I cannot budge from my spot!

Gone! Gone! barked the old chained dog; he was somewhat hoarse—for once he had been a house dog and lay by the stove. The sun will teach you to move! I saw what happened last year to one like you, and the year before that too! Gone! Gone! They all cleared out!

What are you talking about, my friend? said the snowman. Will that bug-eyed thing teach me to move? The snowman was speaking of the moon. It ran away from me earlier itself; I looked at it so fixedly, straight in the face! And now look, it has crawled out again from the other side!

You think too much! said the chained dog. Well yes, you were only just molded! The one looking now is the moon, and the one that left was the sun; it will return again tomorrow. It will push you—straight into the ditch! The weather will change! I feel it—my left leg has started to ache! It will change, it will change!

I don't quite understand you! said the snowman. But it seems you promise me no good! That red-eyed thing they call the sun is no friend of mine either, I can feel it!

Gone! Gone! barked the chained dog, turning three times around itself and lying down in its kennel to sleep.

The weather indeed changed. By morning, the entire countryside was enveloped in a thick, clinging fog; then a sharp, freezing wind blew up and the frost crackled. And what beauty when the sun rose!

The trees and bushes in the garden stood all covered in hoarfrost, like a forest of white coral! Every branch seemed dressed in shining white blossoms! The tiniest twigs, invisible in summer beneath the dense foliage, now clearly outlined themselves in the finest lace pattern of dazzling whiteness; from every branch radiance seemed to flow! The weeping birch, swayed by the wind, seemed come alive; its long branches with their fluffy fringe moved gently—exactly as in summer! What magnificence! The sun rose... Ah, how everything suddenly sparkled and ignited with tiny, blindingly white sparks! Everything seemed sprinkled with diamond dust, and upon the snow large diamonds shimmered!

What a delight! said a young girl who had come out into the garden with a young man. They stopped right beside the snowman and gazed at the glittering trees. One never sees such splendor in summer! she said, radiant with pleasure.

Nor such a fine fellow either! said the young man, pointing at the snowman. He is incomparable!

The young girl laughed, nodded her head to the snowman, and set off with the young man hopping across the snow; under their feet it crackled as though they were running over starch.

Who are those two? asked the snowman of the chained dog. You have lived here longer than I; do you know them?

I do! said the dog. She stroked me, and he threw me bones; such ones I do not bite.

But what do they represent? asked the snowman.

A pair! said the chained dog. Soon they will settle in the kennel and gnaw bones together! Gone! Gone!

Well, do they signify something, like you and I?

Why, they are masters! said the dog. How little sense has one who only yesterday emerged into the light of day! I see it by you! As for me, I am rich in years and knowledge! I know everyone, everyone here! Yes, I have known better times!... Not freezing here in the cold on a chain! Gone! Gone!

What a fine frost! said the snowman. Come, come, tell us! Only do not rattle your chain, it makes me shudder!

Gone! Gone! barked the chained dog. I was a puppy, a tiny, pretty puppy, and lay on velvet armchairs there inside the house, lay upon the laps of noble masters! They kissed my snout and wiped my paws with embroidered handkerchiefs! They called me Milka, Kroshka!... Then I grew up, became too big for them, and they gave me to the housekeeper; I ended up in the basement floor. You can peek in there; from your spot it is perfectly visible. So there in that little room I lived like a lord! Though it was lower down, it was calmer than upstairs: children did not drag me about or squeeze me. I ate no worse, if not better! I had my own pillow, and there was also a stove, the most wonderful thing in the world in such cold! I even crept underneath it!... Oh, even now I dream of that stove! Gone! Gone!

Is it really so wonderful, this stove? asked the snowman. Does it resemble me?

Not in the least! What an idea! The stove is black as coal: it has a long neck and a copper belly! It devours firewood; fire breathes from its mouth! Beside it, beneath it—true bliss! One can see it through the window, look!

The snowman looked and indeed saw a black, shiny object with a copper belly; within the belly glowed a fire. Suddenly the snowman was seized by such a terrible longing—something stirred within him... What had come over him, he himself neither knew nor understood, though any human would have understood it, provided, of course, he was not a snowman.

Then why did you leave her? asked the snowman of the dog; he felt that the stove was a female being. How could you leave that place?

I had to, willy-nilly! said the chained dog. They threw me out and put me on a chain. I bit the youngest master on the leg—he wanted to take my bone from me! Bone for bone! I thought to myself... But they grew angry, and I found myself on a chain! I lost my voice... Do you hear how I croak? Gone! Gone! That is the whole story!

The snowman no longer listened; he did not take his eyes off the basement floor, off the housekeeper's little room, where stood on four legs an iron stove the size of the snowman himself.

Something stirs strangely within me! he said. Can it be that I shall never get in there? It is such an innocent desire; why should it not come true? It is my dearest, my only wish! Where is justice if it does not come true? I must go there, there to her... Press against her at any cost, even if I must break the window!

You cannot get in there! said the chained dog. And even if you reached the stove, it would be your end! Gone! Gone!

My end approaches anyway; any moment now I shall collapse!

All day long the snowman stood and gazed through the window; at twilight the little room looked even more welcoming; the stove shone so softly, as neither sun nor moon can shine! Never mind them! Only a stove shines so when its little belly is stuffed full. When the door was opened, flame darted from the stove and played with a bright reflection upon the snowman's white face. Within his chest too a flame burned.

I cannot bear it! he said. How sweetly she sticks out her tongue! How becoming it is to her!

The night was long, long, yet not for the snowman; he sank entirely into wonderful dreams—they crackled within him from the frost.

By morning all the windows of the basement floor were covered with beautiful icy patterns, flowers; the snowman could wish for nothing better, yet they hid the stove! The frost crackled fiercely, the snow crunched; the snowman ought to have rejoiced and rejoiced, but no! He languished for the stove! He was positively ill.

Well, that is a dangerous sickness for a snowman! said the dog. I suffered from it too, but recovered. Gone! Gone! The weather will change!

And the weather did change; a thaw began.

Dripping water began to tinkle, and the snowman melted before their eyes, yet he said nothing, complained not—and that is a bad sign. One fine morning he collapsed. In his place stood only something like a bent iron rod; it was upon this that the boys had secured him.

Now I understand his longing! said the chained dog. Inside him was a poker! That is what stirred within him! Now it is all over! Gone! Gone!

Soon winter passed as well.

Gone! Gone! barked the chained dog, while girls in the street sang:

Little forest flower, bloom quickly!

You, willow, soft

Dress up quickly!

Cuckoos, starlings, fly here,

Sing to us of the beautiful spring!

And we'll join in: ay, lyuli-lyuli,
Our beautiful days have come again!