

Chapter 11

A Stitch in Time

The brilliant sun seemed to bounce off the ice at the foot of the glacier. Piles of snow melted into rivulets that joined the stream running beneath the giant sheet of ice.

In the distance, Silver Sky could see the wreckage of the sled he had so recently fallen from. Bits and pieces were scattered amongst the rocks and sand. In a tidy pile, almost as if she had been deliberately placed there, Rebecca lay next to a large rock.

Silver Sky galloped over to her. He assumed from the broken sled that she must have fallen from the glacier and might be hurt. Nudging her with his nose, he whispered in her ear, "Time to wake up, dearest."

Rebecca groaned, but smiled as she opened her eyes to see her friend above her.

"Why didn't you hold on to the rope, you silly horse," she said, trying to straighten herself up against the rock.

"I didn't mean..." he started but trailed off. If possible, his gray face became even paler and his mouth hung open.

"What's wrong?" asked Rebecca.

"Your arm, dear," he replied, simply.

Rebecca looked down to see a large, nasty tear running down the length of her right arm. Tattered threads hung down and bits of wood from the sled poked through her cotton stuffed arm.

"Does it hurt?" asked Silver Sky, concern etched into his plastic features.

"Don't be silly. I'm a doll," she said, trying to look brave. "It may not look pretty, but it doesn't hurt," she added, picking slivers out of her fabric.

The model horse looked on sadly. He could not help but feel responsible. Maybe if he had held on tighter to the rope, this would not have happened. "The rope!" he thought aloud.

"Wait here," he added. "I have an idea."

Silver Sky began hunting through the rocks and broken wood. It had to be around here somewhere. As he neared the stream, he began to worry that he might never find it. At the stream's edge, he could see one of the metal runners protruding from the water. The rope was still firmly knotted to it. He pulled it back to where Rebecca was sitting.

Between his teeth and her good hand, they managed to untie the knot, releasing the rope from the runner. Together they pulled strands of fiber from the rope, using them to tie a series of knots around the fabric of Rebecca's arm.

"That should keep the stuffing from falling out," said Silver Sky with a smile.

Rebecca finally stood up, hugging Silver Sky around the neck.

"Thanks," she said quietly. Coming face to face with her frailty was not a pleasant experience. Determined to put this quickly behind her, she reached into her pocket for the compass. It was time to figure out their next move, she decided.

What she pulled out was not at all what she expected. Bits of plastic and glass, the remains of the now shattered compass, fell out of her pocket. Rebecca looked at the mess in disbelief.

"How could things get any..."

“Don’t finish that! It’s bad luck,” Silver Sky shushed her. “No matter what happens, we have each other and that,” he added with a wink, “is an awful lot. We’ll work this out.”

Rebecca sat down, trying to figure out what to do next. With no compass, they couldn’t be sure which direction they were going. Mostly, she just wanted to put as much distance between them and that horrid glacier as possible.

Silver Sky scratched his chin with a hoof. Since they were on the south side of the mountain now, if they walked away from it, keeping the mountain directly behind them, they would be walking south, he thought. That might get them near the city they had seen from the top of Denali.

Rebecca agreed. Checking her other pocket, she found the notebook and pencil, both of which had survived the fall. She wound the rope, and using a spare thread, tied it to Silver Sky, who agreed that it would be handy to keep.

“Without the compass, we should keep careful track of things from now on,” Rebecca instructed. “The sun and the stars can tell us a lot about direction and time,” she added. With that, she made a quick sketch in the notebook of their surroundings. It was hard to do with her arm not working very well, but she determinedly jotted down as much detail as she could.

Soon, they began walking. By now the sun was high in the sky. Overhead and also very high, they occasionally caught glimpses of birds, wings outstretched and gliding on the warm air.

The stream gradually grew in size, becoming a swiftly moving river, brown and laden with silt from the rocky glaciers that fed it. It seemed to etch out their path, descending from the mountains that slowly receded behind them.

Over the course of several days, Rebecca faithfully recorded the rising and setting of the sun in her notebook. At this time of year, days were long and nights were short, but with each day they were better able to pinpoint their direction. The sun would not only help them tell what time it was, it would serve as their compass.

Slowly, both they and the river headed southwest. As they traveled, the number of side streams increased, pouring into the river, filling and widening it. These they crossed over fallen trees, or in the rare shallow patch. Vast beds of gravel cut with glistening threads of water sloped down from the roots of the mountains and stretched into the distance.

Loose rocks made walking slow. Occasionally, one of the threads on Rebecca’s arm would pop and they would have to stop and make a new knot. The northern mountains still seemed uncomfortably close after nearly a week of walking.

“At least the weather has been beautiful, dearest,” Silver Sky said one afternoon after replacing the seventh knot that day.

“I thought you were superstitious,” Rebecca chuckled, picking her way around a particularly difficult rock.

Silver Sky looked up to the sky, nervously, but dark clouds failed to appear. He smiled to himself, content that he had escaped fate.

The ground, however, began to give way to more mud and muck than stones as they got farther south. Mosquitoes, upset that these travelers had no blood to donate, buzzed around their ears in fierce protest. Clouds of the ferocious beasts moved about

over ponds of stagnant water, dive-bombing the pair of toys at every opportunity. Only the occasionally breeze would send the bugs flitting for shelter.

Still, they slogged on through the mud as best they could. After two days of torturous wondering through the smelly sludge, the river found its way to firmer ground. The river seemed headed for a dense forest.

In the distance, near the first stand of tall trees, they could make out two shapes, which seemed to be hunched over a tall stump. On the light breeze they could catch snippets of conversation and laughter.

“Who do you think they are?” asked Silver Sky, anxiously.

“Only one way to find out,” Rebecca whispered in reply.