

## Chapter 8

### Highs and Lows

Rebecca clung to the flag-pole desperately fighting the winds at the top of the mountain. She looked on miserably as Silver Sky crashed and bounded through the soft snow piles, seemingly oblivious to the squall.

“How can you play like that?” she shouted into the air.

Silver Sky bounced up to her. “It feels like ages since I’ve seen snow, dear. My Timothy used to always take me out to play in it. We’d be adventurers, hunting dragons through the great northern mountains!” he beamed.

“Sounds unhealthy,” huffed Rebecca. Her Samantha hadn’t played with her in the snow. She might have gotten soggy, and that, most assuredly, was not healthy for a doll.

Rebecca looked over to Tula Ulari. The ravens were huddled close together, their streamlined forms allowing the wind to blow harmlessly around them.

“Why is this here?” she asked, pointing to the flag-pole.

Tula Ulari shrugged his wings. “The humans seem to be very pleased with themselves when they make it up here. They spend days coming up here, plant a flag, and then walk down the way they came.”

“So why did you bring us up here?” Rebecca asked grumpily as Silver Sky pelted her with snow balls.

“As soon as this wind dies down, you’ll see,” the raven replied.

Rebecca slumped down against the pole, occasionally brushing off the snow that seemed determined to cover her up. She could only see a few feet in any direction, the clouds and snow were so thick.

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Rebecca felt a wet nose pushing against her head. “Drat!” she thought, “I must have fallen asleep.”

“Wake up, dearest. You’ve got to see this!” urged Silver Sky, pushing so hard he almost tipped the sleepy doll over.

Rebecca opened her eyes, instantly shutting them again as the sun glared into her view. Squinting, she used the flag pole to pull herself free of the snow that had piled up around her like a blanket. Slowly her eyes adjusted to the bright light. What she saw shocked her into silence.

The clouds and wind were gone. Below, the mountain dropped steeply into craggy shadow on either side. Mountains continued to the east and west as far as the eye could see. Carving deeply into the rock, blue-iced glaciers wove patterns through stone. Deep crevasses disappeared into darkness.

Back the way they came, to the north, a wide valley stretched off into the distance, rivers and lakes twisting and intertwining. One big city and lots of smaller ones dotted the landscape here and there. Beyond that, deep in haze, another range of mountains rose in the distance.

The southerly view, however, was awe inspiring. More mountains, forests and wide rivers stretched into the distance. Beyond that; water, as far as she could see. The

ocean, she realized. Near the shores another city gleamed in the distance. Small fishing villages dotted the land near the surf. The sun cast an orange glow to the distant water.

Rebecca slumped against the flag-pole. "We have so far to go," she said in a whisper, suddenly feeling very small. Faintly, she swore she could hear the waves.

Tula Ulari turned towards the two toys. "You are at the top of Denali, the largest mountain in this land. From here you can plot out the next steps of your journey. We can not take you any further."

Rebecca and Silver Sky looked sadly at one another. "Why not?" they asked together.

"Our territory ends here. Beyond these mountains, there are others that look over the lands. I doubt very much that you will ever be alone on this adventure of yours," replied the raven. "And now, begging your leave, we must return to our families. We wish you the best of luck and a safe journey."

After many goodbyes and hugs, the ravens took flight, slowly disappearing as they flew north, leaving the two travelers standing quietly atop the snow-capped mountain.

Rebecca sat in the snow, pondering their next move. Using the compass, she figured out the direction to the city. "I think that's where we should head next," she said.

Silver Sky looked dubious. "Too many people," he said, simply.

"Maybe they can help us figure out where to go from there," she suggested.

"We're toys, silly. Can't just walk up to someone and ask for directions," Silver Sky pointed out.

"True," Rebecca conceded. "But there are planes and cars and boats."

"I think we need to get down from this mountain, first," said the model horse.

Quickly agreeing, Rebecca put the compass in her pocket and stood up. Together, they made their first tentative steps away from the flag-pole. The snow was deep and made walking a slow process as they slogged through it. Steadily, they progressed down the side of the mountain.

They had traveled for several hours, winding around sheer cliffs and sheets of ice, carefully picking their path, when they rounded an outcrop of rock to an unexpected sight.

Half buried in the snow peeked out the tops of three bright orange, but wind-worn, tents.

"People!" said Silver Sky in a hushed breath.

Rebecca didn't seem so sure. "Those tents look like they've been here for a very long time," she said.

Slowly they crept out from their hiding spot. Nearly on tiptoe, a tough task for a horse, they quietly walked past the first tent. It was in tatters, strands of fabric billowing softly in the breeze.

As they approached the second, Rebecca stopped suddenly, staring past the tent.

"A sled!" she exclaimed, pointing. The sled was poking out of the snow and a rope on the front flapped around with the wind. "We can use that to get down the mountain faster," she explained.

Silver Sky thought the idea of a sled ride sounded fun, and they quickly went to work tugging it out of the snow. It was slow business. As they dug, the snow seemed to

flow back into the hole they made around the sled. Slowly, though, they made progress and eventually freed it.

Silver Sky sat on the sled as Rebecca pushed it past the tent. The sled picked up speed as they headed down hill and away from the camp.