

Agony in the wilderness Bu Elan Boreal

I wake up out of breath as if I just had the scariest nightmare but no images have been saved in my memory. I unbury my nose out of the pile of blankets to instantly feel my skin getting burn by the cold. It is still dark out and the new moon does not create much light through the window of the cabin. How long has the fire been out for? Who knows, in January the clock can be pointing anywhere close to noon and the sky still looks like it is the middle of the night.

I reach the box of matches on the shelf with my left hand and light a candle. By the time I put my arm back under the blanket I no longer feel my fingers. I am used to waking up in the cold, but this morning something feels out of place. I tucked myself in so well that I did not wake up to feed the fire. Another one of those nights, but for the first time I woke up scared for my life.

I run to the woodstove and as soon as I light the fire return to bed, the only place that is somewhere close to warmth. My feet hurt badly as if I just smashed them with an axe and my whole body is shivering. All the water I have is now a thick block of ice as well as all bits of food I have on the shelves and miles are separating my home to the closest town without any road other than the river. No tea and no calories can help me warm up, there is not much I can do besides waiting until I stop seeing my breath in the cold air.

I am just about to fill up the stove for the third time and still nothing seems to want to defrost, it must be a real harsh temperature out. With my body in pain and a suffering mind, to stay still crying and screaming in agony is not going to make my situation any better. The cold is getting to me, I need to calm down and think rationally of a plan in a matter of life or death. Moving! Moving is what I need to do. It will increase my blood circulation and help me warm up. Nearly hypothermic I pack my bag and start walking towards town knowing the walk could be fatal as much as it could save my life, the thermometer shows 44 below but I have faith. I don't think I could go through this all alone in the wilderness miles apart from anyone. At this point I need emotional support more than anything else. I must visit friends for a few days to clear my mind.

Here I am standing on the Klondike River a torch in my hand and my dog who does not seem to mind the cold too much on my side. The wind blows hard enough to bring powdered snow on the trail so every step I make necessitates extra energy. Luckily though it pushes me in the back rather than in my face. I cannot see clearly in front of me, it is nearly a blizzard making it impossible to see any of the usual scenery and I am starting to question if either it is a good idea to keep going or if I should turn around. I look at my dog and together we make the decision to go farther in the adventure. Suddenly the wind stops blowing and dawn slowly turns the darkness into a pink wonderland. I love winter in the North, every day brings magical lighting which for someone coming from a southern city would look like colors from a foreign universe.

The walk is so far challenging but very therapeutic. It reconnects me to the nature of the love I feel for this place and strengthens my mind. A strong mind can take you way beyond what you imagine your physical capacities can take you.

I am now warm enough to feel alive, it is about time to have a short break and prepare some hot water that I haven't yet got the chance to drink a single sip of. I walk away from the iced river to enter the forest, put down my bag and start wood hunting. A few pieces of birch bark and a few dry branches later I get a match out of my pocket and in less than a minute the heat reaches my face making me feel like I am in heaven. I melt some snow in which I infuse spruce needles making myself a nice tea to stay warm and energized along the way, change my socks for some fresh dry ones then carry on.

I notice the trail is still clear on this part of the river. It seems like the wind storm did not make it through here which makes it easier to walk and keeps my motivation up. I am now half way to town, another 10 miles and I'll be able to get a good rest. This is the raven's home. As usual he is proudly standing on the top branch of the spruce looking at us and as soon as my dog reaches the highland the raven comes flying above him, both of them playing around like two brothers who have not seen each other in a while. What a beautiful life I think, watching the whole scene with white mountains behind them.

I finally make it to town which after what I had to face today feels like a different planet on Earth. The extreme cold does not seem to affect people too much around here, the stores, the school and the restaurants are all open and cars are in motion in every street as if it was just another day. I am still out of breath from my adventure but here nobody has a clue of what has just happened to me in the past twenty four hours, smiling at me and carrying on with their day. People here live in metal buildings in which the action of pressing a button keeps the place warm regardless of what nature brings and transport themselves in four wheeled boxes which move in a very unhuman speed without having to step a foot in front of the other. Clearly the challenges of life aren't the same for people in town.

I make it to my friend's house where I found him sitting on the couch watching a movie and his wife is in the bathtub relaxing in bubbly water. In their lives nothing has changed, the electricity hasn't stopped heating the house overnight and the running water still provides hot water from the tank. I sit with them for the day sipping coffee and playing music. What a relief it is to feel the warmth of friendship. Even though it feels great to have the chance to finally catch my breath and recharge I can't tell which of both survivals to be more proud of between having made it through what has been so far the hardest day of my life or to be part of the rare individuals of the human race who still live primitively among the wilderness. Beyond that, I love the daily challenges that living in harmony with the heartbeat of nature brings and it will remain precious to me regardless of how often I need to risk my life.