

July 18, 2016

I had let him go. I saw him leave but my heart did not. It turned away before he limped off into the cold, dark, fogged-up night filled with flurries. His right front leg, blood red and swollen, which I had whipped in alarm, hovered inches off the ground. It was not his fault that I gave him sun-dried salmon that food poisoned him, or that he came to attack me after feeling sick and disoriented. Caesar was his name. He was my best sled dog, no, my best friend, since I was 21. Even though I have moved on, I have to go back for him. I will not let my beloved friend freeze and die out there in the cold, icy darkness. I will go back for him soon, but no one should know except Amanda. I will pack my bag right away and go back for him, even if I might not return.

- James Houser

I shut down my solar-powered laptop and thought about the past seven months. Caesar is a Chinook so he was allowed to be one of my sled dogs. I had come to the Arctic, with him, after one and a half years of hard and torturous training, to be a researcher in Antarctica. One of the things I had learned the painful way was to never go to the outer ring of the Arctic because that is where the freezing water and thin ice are. Sadly, Caesar does not know that, and that is the path he took. Now here I am, sleeping on ice, looking up at the stars, and thinking of the past; but I'm not being able to change it.

I thought of Caesar, how hungry and cold he would be, with no campfire to warm up his night and comfort his pain. I gave my other sled dogs to Amanda Williams, my assistant that I am supposed to train and my fiancé; she will cover up for me.

"James," she whispered, "will I ever hear your sweet voice again?"

"Maybe not, I might never be back, you know," I replied with a nervous laugh.

She punched me in the arm, then kissed me on the cheek. I thought they evened each other out, so I didn't say a word and just held her in my arms.

"Do you remember the song we danced to when we first met?" she asked.

"Sweet, sweet river of laughter and love. You lift me up, flying above," we both cooed.

“I better be on my way,” I murmured, breaking the precious moment of silence.

She let go of me in a push, closing her eyes, not wanting to see me leave. I gave her a kiss and started my way through the freshly fallen snow. Trudging in it, not looking back, staring at the white path that lay ahead for me, to a place I should have never even have thought about going.

July 20, 2016

It was a good thing I had brought my laptop with me or I would have been a goner. I cannot feel my hands or feet due to the frostbite I have on two of my toes and one of my fingers, but that will not stop me from getting to my Caesar. It has only been two days since he left me, and he is also wounded, so finding him should not be my main problem. I have put stakes with red flags on the places I've checked; the marker is what I think is the center of a three-mile diameter. The ice is getting thinner with each step. The cracking sound the ice makes when I walk on it is making me start to think about falling in or even if Caesar fell in. What lay ahead of me is fate's choice, but I am praying for a better future, with everyone I love in it.

- James Houser

I carefully look at the ground for thin spots that might affect me. Just then my luck had struck! Paw prints, the size of Caesar's, were imprinted in the snow, leaving me a trail to what I have been so desperately looking for! Walking swiftly, I reach where the trail ends very quickly. Brushing away little ice bits that land on my eyelids, I see a small shadow sitting in the distance. Not being able to help myself, I break out into a run, stop inches before crashing into him, and take small baby steps toward my friend. I wasn't sure if Caesar would react by jumping and then clawing at me. Suddenly with a spring and a shriek, the creature arose from the ground, but it was not Caesar. What I thought was my long lost friend was actually a baby polar bear.

Not believing what I see is not my friend I stand there for a minute. I feel a sudden movement behind me, and then a gentle shove on my back. One of my favorite subjects, related to Antarctica, is about the wildlife and how they react to certain movements and speech, so I have read a lot about penguins, seals, and the most helpful to me right now, polar bears. In the training area I was in they had a polar bear named

Susan, but they always told me that she was much sweeter and kinder than her mother, who they had tamed, from the wild. I have learned that polar bears do not like sudden movements, and what makes my situation worse, I was between a mother and her cub.

I have no idea what I should do. Moving would be the worst thing, but staying here would result in the same. I feel my watch ticking in my pocket, counting down my last seconds. *My musical watch!* I think. Maybe if I show it to the mama polar bear its music and beat will soothe it and it will not notice me slip away. I slowly put my hand into my pocket and pull out the gold-crested musical watch I got for my twentieth birthday. In five years, my watch and I had so many sweet memories, but now it is going to save my life.

Kneeling down slowly I open the watch with a *click* and put it down on the dry ice. The song that Amanda and I danced to when we first met filled up the empty space, and my head, with glories memories of my family who are far away from me now. When the mama polar bear sat down with a huge *thud*, I started taking baby steps away from the two ice-white bears. Seeing an ice mound, big enough to serve as a hiding place, I walked backwards toward it, but I still kept an eye on the bears.

Suddenly I trip over something, fall on my back, hit my head, and the area around me turned shades of purple till they were black. When I woke up, I saw the polar bear mother still listening to music, so I knew I didn't black out for a long time. Looking around, to see what I tripped on, I spy a brown leg, covered with snow, peeking out from behind the ice mound. Looking at it closely I saw that it was Caesar!

"CAESAR!" I screamed out in joy. Then remembering that the polar bears were still there, I called out to him a little softer, "Caesar, buddy, is that you"

Picking up his paw I confirmed that it was Caesar, but he was hurt and hungry. I reached for my back pack and from it pulled a bag full of food for him, then lay it on the ground. Since he hasn't eaten for the past two days he gobbled it up so fast the food was gone in a minute. An eerie silence followed our reunion. I felt as if something was missing. A piercing noise, almost like fingernails on a chalkboard, filled my head. This time I had heard the mother bear scream.

I crawled behind the ice mound as fast as I could but it was not fast enough. In a white flash the polar bear picked me up and flung me onto the dry ice, and I blacked out. Pictures of Amanda, Caesar, and my family flashed inside my head. "I am going wake up, and this whole Arctic drama is going to be a dream." I said to myself, "I am not in Antarctica. I'm not at Antarctica. I am not in." A voice called me, followed by a bark. In the distance I saw a door open to a house as festive as Christmas. The one who had opened the door looked like Amanda but a little younger. At her feet bounded a Chinook puppy that had a smile plastered on his face. With long legs, a fat white belly, dark brown feet, ears, and nose, he looked a lot like Caesar. Scanning my surroundings I saw that I was sitting on snow. Shivering, I picked myself up and dusted myself off. I walked toward the light for a minute then realized I was still far away from the door. I panicked and started running, but the house kept on getting farther and farther away, but I heard the puppy barking along with another sound, the loud sound of a fight and gushing blood, along with a squeal of terror.

"Don't leave me!" I screamed when I woke up from the fall. All the blood drains out of my face when the aching pain takes over my body. I try to get up but end up smashing my face on the ice. My left shoulder throbbed to my heart beat; I couldn't move it. For a second I just lay there thinking of what I should do with my dislocated arm and myself, when I heard Caesar whimper lightly, his voice filled with pain.

I jerk up, not minding the pain in my arm, to see Caesar, the mother polar bear, a pool of blood, and a laughing polar bear cub. After I had fainted, Caesar had run to my aid but the mother polar bear was right behind him. Like a bull ready to charge, Caesar had stood in front of the giant white beast, stopping it from tearing me into shreds. The mother polar bear had flung him to the side like an old rag, but Caesar was back up in a flash, threatening to kill her chuckling cub.

Staring into each other's eyes they slowly turned in a circle so that Caesar was back in front of me and the mother with her sweet little darling, but the savage beast did not want to let her prey go just yet. She broke into a run, aiming for Caesar. He, smartly, moved a few feet out of the way making her trip over a rock, crash forward jaw first,

and knock herself out. For the next half-an-hour Caesar put his head on my stomach and whimpered softly. If he was human, he would have broken out into a pool of tears.

After he found out that I was not dead, he wanted to finish off the mother polar bear, maybe, even her cub. At the speed of light he was next to her, pushing her toward the rigid edges of ice and the Arctic Ocean. He was about to push her off the “cliff” when she woke up at the scream of her cub. What terrifying thing happened next I cannot describe without people laughing at me. The mother polar bears eyes had flashed from brown to black, to a deep shade of blood red, then back to brown again. It might have been a trick of the light or, maybe, the blizzard which was starting, but what even Caesar knew for sure then was that much more blood would be lost.

I looked at the polar bear cub who was laughing at the sight of her mother dancing with a dog. Then I realized this was all her fault. If she wasn't here, the mother polar bear would not want to kill me. “No use of trying to change the past,” I told myself, but I just wanted to rewind my life back to the day where I had bought Caesar for my birthday. That was the second happiest moment of my life, next to when I met Amanda, which was the happiest moment of my life.

Although I would never kill a baby of any sort, I walked toward the cub with a knife in my hand. It was the only thing I could do to distract the mother until Caesar pushed her into the icy ocean. Nearing the cub I called out to the mother in a shaky but firm voice. For the most part, I didn't even know what I was saying.

“Hey you big white oaf! Stop fightin' and get away from the dog, or ya cub gets it!” I screamed at the top of my lungs.

I don't know if she understood me or just saw the knife I was holding, but she backed away from Caesar, whose head was badly bleeding, and closer to the icy sea. I clapped my hands, as loud as I could, and screamed, “GO, CAESAR, GO”. He knew what this meant because that's what I screamed when he had to push something to me at the training center, but this time, instead of pushing the bear *to* me, he pushed the bear to the edge of the ice. When I had screamed, Caesar had once more taken his mad-bull

position, took some steps back, and then ran toward the bear. When Caesar hit the bear it stumbled backward ... then fell to its doom.

I was happy that my worst problem was over but when I felt that something was missing and looked around to see that the baby polar bear had a shocked face and was looking at the spot where her mother had fallen. I didn't know what to do, so I went toward it, hugged it, picked it up, and then wanted name it Suzie after the trainer polar bear, Susan.

"Hey, wittle girl," I said in baby talk, "would you wike me to call you Suzie? It's a good name."

Suzie growled in satisfaction, so I looked at the sunset and started walking toward it.

"So, Suzie, you should be hungry, what would you like?" I said like a waiter at a gourmet restaurant. "A ham sandwich, a PBJ sandwich, or both."

She growled back in a confused tone so I just gave her both. The sun was setting and I hadn't slept in two days, thus I picked up my watch, set up camp, made a fire, and had a good night's rest.

I woke up to see that all that was left of my shelter was fire ashes. The blizzard had increased at a rapid pace last night. I could not see most things... including Caesar and Suzie.

"Caesar, Suzie" I called.

I heard a bark and a growl confirming that they were still there. The air was pretty dense and it was getting harder to breath. Checking my watch, I see that it is almost 9 A.M., but the problem was, I couldn't see a ray of sunlight. I didn't know what to do, all my food, shelter, and warmth got swept away by the wind. All that I had left now was my computer, watch, clothes, and friends.

I didn't want to give up after coming so far. I got up and started walking, to wherever my instincts told me to go, with Caesar and Suzie right behind me. I looked up, but all I saw was white and grey. Suddenly it felt like a bullet had hit me right above my

ear, the pain was unbearable, making me fall on to my knees. All my bones went numb as the pain shot throughout my body. My vision blurred and all I could see now was... a blinding whiteness.

What I thought were my last minutes ticked away to my heartbeat. *I can't die now* I thought *I just can't*. There were so many things I wanted to do, go skydiving, get married, have children. I needed a way to tell someone how and why I died. I lay there thinking when my laptop buzzed, telling me that it was almost out of charge. *MY LAPTOP!* I excitedly thought. I army-crawled to my bag and pulled it out.

July 23, 2016

All I see is a blinding whiteness, plus Caesar and Suzie. I don't know where I am. I think that my last minutes are ticking away. I'm probably

Going to die I thought, but shaking my head I delete the line. I know it's true, but I don't know how to put it. I scan the screen for an idea when I almost jumped up and screamed, "WHOOHOO" but I knew there was no time for that. What I had seen, which had filled me up with joy, was that there was almost enough internet connection for me to send an emergency email, so I started typing what I was going to send.

SOS! Don't know where I am help needed!!!!!!

I pressed send as hard as I could then collapsed back down. Looking up at the morning stars, I see that the sun that was supposed to rise was actually setting very quickly. My surroundings turned darker and darker shades till all I could see was black.

BEEP! BEEP! BEEP! BEEP! BEEP! BEEP! BEEP! BEEP! BEEP! BEEP!

July 26, 2016

This is Amanda- it took almost 12 hours for the emergency mail to get to the research center, but right after I had heard about it, a search party of six and I. My heart was pounding out of my chest until we found

him more than a day later. He was collapsed and half-dead in a pile of snow guarded by Caesar and the polar bear cub he had called Suzie. We had picked him up and rushed him to the research center's main hospital. Now here I am, outside of the room he is held captive in, with Caesar by my side. I can hear from here that the Electrocardiogram (ECG) is beeping off the charts. I don't know what tomorrow will bring us, but I just hope that we all live happily ever after.

- Amanda Williams