

2 December - Tracks in the Snow



Jonathan takes a few steps towards the footprints.

Sam follows him, but suddenly stops.

"Jonathan," says Sam. "We're not just walking into the dark forest."

Jonathan turns around. "We only want to see where the tracks lead."

Sam folds his arms. "That's what you said yesterday."

Jonathan frowns. "That was about ten seconds ago."

"Exactly," replies Sam. "And I still don't believe you."

Jonathan can't help grinning.

He would really like to set off straight away. But when he looks between the dark trees, he has to admit that Sam is right.

"All right," says Jonathan. "Tomorrow, then."

Before the two of them return to their families, Jonathan takes another careful look at the footprints.

He wants to remember where the trail begins.

The next morning, Sam is already waiting outside Jonathan's house.

The snow has stopped falling. A thick white blanket covers Awen Coille, and the morning sun makes the snow sparkle between the trees.

"I hope the tracks are still there," says Jonathan.

"I hope there's breakfast first," replies Sam.

Jonathan points to the piece of bread in Sam's paw.

Sam looks at it. "That's for the journey."

Together, they walk to the village square.

The missing lantern still hasn't turned up.

The pine cone with the red thread is no longer lying in the snow either. One of the adults took it away last night.

But the footprints are still there.

"There!" Jonathan calls.

He runs to the place where they begin.

Sam follows him. "Slow down. If you step all over them, we won't be able to see them at all."

Jonathan stops immediately.

"Right," he says.

The two of them walk carefully alongside the footprints.

At first, it is easy.

One footprint follows the next, leading between the trees.

But before long, a second trail crosses their path.

Then a third.

Jonathan stops.

"Which one was ours?" he asks.

Sam studies the snow. "That one."

"Are you sure?"

Sam nods. "Almost."

Jonathan looks at his friend. "Almost sure isn't sure."

"Then you find it."

Jonathan bends down over the footprints.

After a while, he points to the left. "These ones."

Sam shakes his head. "They're much smaller."

Jonathan looks at them again.

"Right."

The farther they go, the more tracks they discover.

Clearly, lots of animals have been through here over the past few days.

"This is going to be harder than I thought," Jonathan mutters.

Sam grins. "You thought we'd just follow one trail and find the lantern at the end?"

Jonathan doesn't answer.

That is exactly what he thought.

Suddenly, Sam stops.

"Jonathan."

"What?"

Sam points to a tree.

Something is hanging from a low branch.

Jonathan steps closer.

It is only a tiny piece.

But he recognises the colour at once. Red.

Jonathan carefully takes the little piece of wool from the branch.

"It looks exactly like the thread on the pine cone," he says.

Sam nods slowly. "Then maybe we were on the right trail after all."

Jonathan looks down at the ground.

Directly beneath the branch is one more footprint.

After that, there are no more.

Jonathan walks a little farther.

Nothing.

He goes to the left, then to the right.

Still nothing.

"That can't be," says Jonathan.

Sam comes over to him. "What can't be?"

Jonathan points back at the trail.

"Someone walked all the way to here."

Then he points at the untouched snow in front of them.

"But from here, no one went any farther."

Sam looks at the red thread in Jonathan's paw.

Then he looks between the trees.

"Jonathan?"

"Yes?"

Sam's voice is much quieter now.

"Then where did they go?"

