

From “A Blizzard Under Blue Sky” in *Cowboys Are My Weakness* by Pam Houston (W.W. Norton, 1992)

We broke camp and packed up and kicked in the snow cave with something resembling glee. I was five miles down the trail before I realized what had happened. Not once in that fourteen-hour night did I think about deadlines, or bills, or the man in the desert. For the first time in many months I was happy to see a day beginning. The morning sunshine was like a present from the gods. What really happened, of course, is that I remembered about joy.

### **Annotation by Sabrina Kinsey**

While this is a very brief excerpt in what is already a short story, I don't think it lacks powerful meaning. In the beginning of the story, the reader is introduced to a woman who has just been deemed, “clinically depressed” by her doctor. She goes into a list of issues going on in her life that are weighing her down, and eventually comes to the conclusion to spend a night camping, despite the fact that it was winter. Now, we live in Wisconsin, and I think most people would definitely agree that camping in negative 32-degree weather would just be insane, but regardless, she packs up her gear and heads out with her dogs. Upon reaching her destination and successfully building a “snow cave,” she spends the night inside with her two dogs, filled with fear that she was risking not only her life, but her dogs lives as well. She notes how there had been “no doubt that it was the longest and most uncomfortable night of her life.” She didn't sleep, and she wished the night away, and when the sun rose into the sky the next morning, she was grateful.

Going back to the excerpt I chose, I liked this particular piece because it showed how nature had “healed” her. Whereas before in her life, all of those stressors of deadlines and bills and the man whom she loved, being in love with someone else, had weighed her down...the freezing and terrifying night out in the snow, the rising of the sun, all gave her a new sense of appreciation for life. As she mentions, she hadn't been thinking about the issues going on her life, but instead focused on surviving. And with her survival came joy.

It's a beautiful, real, and often underappreciated aspect about nature, I think. The idea of realizing how precious life is, only by being filled with fear of losing it to something as unforgiving and powerful as nature. She embarked into the cold winter day hopeless and unhappy. She emerged hopeful and with the memory of joy.