

Second Place Prose – High School

Moonlit Fox

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I took a deep breath and watched the air around me form a small cloud of ice. I looked down at my feet, buried beneath snow that shimmered in the evening light. It was so deep I had to heave my leg high in the air before I could advance a single step. The bitter cold kept brushing against my face, turning my pink nose a bright shade of red. It was too cold for anyone to be outside, yet here I was, in the middle of the woods without anyone to keep me company. I took a few more steps, my arms slightly spread to the side to provide balance. I didn't know what was under the snow, but I knew the area well enough to know there were fallen trees and plenty of uneven ground that could cause a sprained ankle. A wisp of air sailed by, sending the freshly fallen snow to spiral around me in a flurry. I balled my hands into fists to keep my fingers a little bit warmer and tensed up my shoulders so my hands could be tucked under my coat sleeves.

No birds were singing, and almost every animal had gone into hibernation, leaving me alone. Truly alone. I stopped walking and looked up at the sky, where a light snowfall had started. It fluttered to the ground like glitter, shining as it reflected off the sun. The clouds had rolled aside to reveal the sun streaking the skies with hues of scarlet and marigold. The color slipped in between the dense evergreen trees to meet my eyes. A soft smile formed on the corners of my lips and I let out long sigh at the beauty. The sunset streamed past the snow, covering the trees and reflecting through the icicles that dangled in place of maple leaves.

I wandered through the trees for the longest time, watching as the sun slowly sank beneath the horizon and was replaced with a full moon that towered over the trees. It had gotten so dark I had to squint as I walked, each step becoming heavier than the last. The coldness had spread through my whole body, my toes becoming so frigid it hurt to even bend them. I couldn't even see my destination, and I didn't know if I was going in the right direction. I looked back up past the trees, training my eyes to stare at the pinpricks of light that freckled the dark sky. Before long I was mesmerized at the vast sea of stars that told of other worlds and stories. For a brief second I was distracted by the lights, and felt my leg slide out from under me. I hit the ground, expecting a crunch or thud, but none came. Instead I found myself resting on a snowbank, the fresh powder sprinkling across my face and melting down the side of my wool hat. I took a few ragged breaths, trying to comprehend what had happened, and shifted on the ground to get myself more comfortable.

I had tripped on a small pond that was encased in a sheet of ice. The ice was flawless without a single tremor or ripple. The trees draped over the pond with icicles bending the branches to their breaking point. The moonlight encased the pond in a shimmering silver that reflected off of the icicles and snow.

The whole area seemed to dance with light despite the darkened sky and raw cold. I glanced down at the snowbank I rested on and then around the lake, wishing I had someone to share the peace with. Even though I knew no one was coming. I was too deep in the woods, and no one even knew I was here. I leaned back against the snowbank, focusing on the cold and trying to dismiss it and return to a state of comfort and enjoyment that I longed for. I returned my gaze to the blanket of stars, watching as each one pulsed with light and bathed the sky in a glow that would never be replicated exactly as it was.

A star suddenly began to glow and catch my eye. The glow was a gradient, slowly becoming more intense than I had ever witnessed. My mouth gaped in beauty and my eyes glazed watching as the light continued to grow. The iced pond was illuminated by the radiance, the ice becoming rich with drops of light that seemed to fall from the stars. In a brief instant, I had forgotten the cold and being lost, and the show of the light seemed to overpower everything in the deafened forest.

The star suddenly began to drip a strand of silver light that seemed to fall from the heavens. A single shooting star, that headed down instead of across the night sky. I slid back on the snowbank trying to understand what was going on, feeling my heart start to beat rapidly and without warning. It felt like hours had passed before the light touched the ground in the center of the iced pond. I felt my breath as it started to take shape, and a final burst of light left a fox in its place. The fox was not flesh and blood and seemed to be here without consequence. Its fur was lined with silver drops of light falling off its flank like it had finished swimming in a sea of stars. Its marble eyes stared with a sense of wisdom, piercing emotions into any who beheld them. I was in awe. I couldn't remember when I stopped holding my breath, or even if I was still breathing, but everything just seemed so right. The cold had stopped bothering me, and even the pain in my toes from walking has ceased.

I smiled. A wisp of air left my mouth as I sighed in relief, knowing this moonlit fox was there to guide me, and there to bring me home.