

First Place Prose – Middle School

“Beneath the Cherry Blossom”

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6th Grade

St. Francis Xavier

The bare moon drew over the sky like a dove made of pure light, ready to swoop through the trees and bring the totality of darkness before the gentle light of dawn. Thick driven fir trees sloped across the landscape blanketing the forest floor with fir cones. A singular cherry blossom tree sat in a clearing in the woods. It was unusual to have a cherry tree in a conifer forest. Near impossible. Yet this tree didn't seem to care. As it sat in the moss-covered clearing, a singular petal floated down to land on the tree's roots. Something stirred near its trunk, like a ripple of movement. A vixen slipped out of the brush, her amber-furred head bristled with fine fur and her green eyes happy. The fox trotted a couple of paw-steps before stopping to tip its head back towards the bracken from which it had ascended. An old woman hobbled out. Her eyes were a milky hazel and she held a cane. Her silver hair was braided with care, yet a few stray hairs framed her wizened face. She panted and hobbled along to the great roots, sitting down with an aged sigh. The amber vixen followed her with ease and as she began to sit the fox guided her muzzle against her cane as if to help her sit down against the cherry blossom tree's roots. The old woman closed her eyes for a moment, moving only to slightly pet the fox's bristle-furred russet-amber back. As she sat, a clearer view of the tree seemed to form. Beneath its pink-flowered boughs, a bundle of purple-speckled lavender plants rested, their gentle sweet scent mixing with the cherry blossom's own. Once the older woman had sat down, the fox darted to her side to rest its head on her leg. She smiled softly and called out in her warm, cracked, gentle voice. "I'll tell you a story, zorro rojo." She spoke in Spanish, for she had learned the language when she had been young from her father who was Mexican. The young vixen raised its head from her lap in its own elegant way and flicked an ear curiously towards her. "In the early spring times when cherry blossoms like this were blooming, I came here with my father and my family, to this very same conifer forest." The vixen tipped its head imploringly and nosed her cane-hand to continue. "We came here because this fir tree forest had stood since my grandmother's father had come. On his way with his family to search for land, he came to this wood. They trekked through the wood, searching for a place in the forest to camp that wasn't as densely packed with trees. After hours they came upon this clearing deep in the woods. They called it 'refuge dans le noir' refuge in the dark. When they awoke in the morning, they discovered a spring and traveled on to find a plot of land of their own. They knew without this clearing they most likely wouldn't survive with limited water and no shelter. So, they began the tradition of visiting every spring time." She went on, "Every year we came to this very spot and my brothers and sisters and I would play in the stream that lies just beyond that rise." She motioned to the rise of earth. "Of course this cherry blossom tree wasn't there yet but I remember..." she trailed off. The red fox nudged her again and she nodded, "The spring was warm and fresh, I remember it like yesterday. Of course this very same conifer forest was much bigger but that was before they began to cut it down..." her face fell slightly at the mention of

the deed. "That day we had just laid out our picnic when my father almost sat on this very same cherry tree sprout!" She paused, lost in a cascade of memories she once more was quiet and the small vixen nosed her hand gently, almost bidding her to go on. She shook herself, clearing her mind. "Yes... he yelled like no tomorrow; he was so surprised. Of course he wouldn't hurt a fly so he had us redo our picnic on the other side of the clearing. It was odd enough to find this tree and everyone had their own thoughts on how it had ended up there but none exactly fit until my father gave his bid." The fox blinked softly, seemingly wondering about the story. "He said, 'It's a cherry blossom, that's what it is. It means that we are sure to have a full springtime by God. I haven't seen one of these since I was just a child. I remember my own father telling me it was a sign that even though it is hard to see, someone's watching over us.' Then he knelt down and beckoned to us, and he said, clear as day I remember it... 'look at that,' he said with a proud sigh 'it's against all odds. Growing in a conifer forest filled with fir cones and shadows! Who woulda thought?'" She smiled warmly. "Every year we came back as it grew. I'm still here and you have to think, we're just like the cherry blossoms. Against all odds we're here. You're a fox by god. I'm not but an old woman. Yet we're very much alike, me, you and the cherry blossom. You see, the cherry blossom only blooms for a short time. After that it hides its beauty from the world." she smiled blissfully, "I myself doubt I have much time left here. Days are ticking away. But even if this is the last time I come here. I'm glad to have come, I might be the only one to have ever seen it as it truly is. Beauty given to only those who take the time to slow down and take a look."