

## First Place Prize: Grade 7-9

Paige B.

Grade 9

There I was, hidden, unseen by anything except the bugs. Watching and waiting to pounce on the next rabbit or weasel that walked past me. It was hard for a young wolf cub like me to catch anything bigger than myself, especially since there wasn't much grass to hide behind because the elks had eaten the majority of it. There were too many of them and not enough small game for us young cubs to catch, so we could never learn to hunt the way our parents did.

Every time that I went back to my family they were disappointed in me for not bringing what they wanted.

"It's not my fault that nothing came even close to me," was always my excuse.

"Milo, you can't just sit around and expect them to come to you! You have to be a real hunter, like I was," was always my father's response.

He never understood that I was trying to hunt, but I was never any good because he could never teach me. My father was the alpha of the pack, so between that and taking care of my sisters, Kara and Scarlet, he never had time to show me how to be as good of a hunter as he was. I was expected to be the next great alpha leader and follow in my father's footsteps, but how could I when I had no idea what that meant?

And so, every day I lived the same; I went out alone to hunt and came home empty handed, my parents seemed to be more and more disappointed with every sun that set.

Until one day, I was hiding in the grass when one little rabbit about half my size (and I was pretty scrawny) bounced along right in front of me. Knowing that this was my one chance, I pounced on the rabbit and caught its neck in my throat. Still, in shock that I was able to catch something, I pranced home with my head held high and the rabbit body swaying with its head clenched between my jaws.

Soon, I realized that I had either shrunk down to the size of a mouse, or the grass had grown to about five times my size. I thought I might have been hallucinating until I strutted into my cave to see that my father hadn't caught an elk today.

"What's going on?" I asked my parents after I dropped the rabbit on the ground.

"Well, Milo, it's about that time of year again and the elk have gone down south to find a warmer place to live for the winter," my father explained.

"I guess I had just forgotten that they can't survive these cold Canadian winters." He paused and looked at the small rabbit on the ground before me.

"Congratulations on catching your first rabbit, Milo! I'm sorry I couldn't be there to help you along the way."

"Thank you, father, I am glad I was finally able to catch something that we can have for dinner," I was proud of myself, too.

After our small dinner, that we split as equally as we could, I sat on the ledge of our cave to watch the sun go down and the moon rise, while I wondered what happened to the remains of our meals and what happens after we die. Soon, I fell asleep under the

shining stars and what I thought was rain but turned out to be little, white icicles.

The next day, instead of going out to practice hunting, I went out with my father to see what the other animals live like. My father took me to hunt and watch the habits of the other small game. On the way there, I noticed a few mice who went after the bones and few remaining pieces of meat from our meal last night. They soon scurried past us only to get swept away by a large owl that flew past.

I spotted some squirrels and chipmunks as they gathered nuts to store in their homes for the winter, and the frogs by the frozen pond that buried themselves in the remaining mud to hibernate. It was all so much different than the summer and fall I had been used to.

“Does this happen every year?” I curiously asked my father. I had only been born at the beginning of summer, so this had been my first winter.

“Yes, Milo,” my father replied. “Every year we go through this change, and then again in the springtime, when the elk return, we go back to the life you know as ‘summer’.”

“Wow,” I responded, it was all so fantasizing to see how much things change just because the elk go away and it gets a little chillier.

The trees had lost all their leaves, the grass had grown because the elk weren’t eating it, but then it all turned brown because it got cold. It was even starting to turn white because of a powder on it.

“Father, what is this white powder that falls from the sky?” I asked him.

“That’s called ‘snow’, Milo, it comes when it’s too cold to rain,” my father answered.

I bounced into the snow and rolled until my black fur became white and my father didn’t recognize me. I loved that feeling of being free to jump and play with the animals and to live with the changing seasons.

We were all so different, from the small mouse to the great elk, we all need each other to be different to live and fight for what we need. The wolves need the elk and game for food, the mice need those scraps and bones, the owls need the mice, and the chain goes on. A never-ending loop of why all animals need our small differences and our greater differences. Differences like an owl and an elk, or differences like an oak tree and a birch tree. All the different species have different uses, good or bad, it’s all here for a reason, and that reason is survival.