

A Moment to Remember

Alexander was with his father, Steven, and his grandfather as they sat around the campfire. The two older men told stories as the younger Alex gazed up at the stars and half-listened to the two older men talk about the “family business” and how someday, Steven would take it over from his dad. The conversation kept a fairly calm tone, once in a while getting a bit louder but nothing more, and the two grown-ups did not want to upset the eight-year old that sat across the fire from them.

Alex was used to these camping trips by now, he had gone with the men of the house on them ever since he was four. He loved to look at the stars and listen to the call of the night creatures. Soon, everyone turned in for the night, going to their huge, single tent and crawling into their sleeping bags. The older men were fast asleep quiet quickly, but Alex stayed up a bit longer, listening to the sounds of the woods at night. The last thing he heard before he fell asleep was the hoot of an owl.

The next morning, Alex awoke to a smell that he had come to recognize as coffee. Steven and his grandfather were drinking it as some part of a morning ritual, but to Alex they did it because they were grown-ups. He wasn't allowed to drink it, his dad always saying it was bad for him. He always thought that if it was so bad, why was his dad drinking it? It didn't make sense to him, but then again he wasn't old enough to make much sense of things. This morning, however, as the tin container warmed up over the fire, his dad motioned for Alex to take a seat next to him. As he did so, his father poured him a cup of the dark brown liquid, offering it to him.

“Today, son” He started to say in a stern voice, but he quickly changed back to his regular voice. It had softness to it, but it was also firm and comforting at the same time.

Everyone liked his father's voice, at least that's what everyone said to him when they heard it. "How would you like some coffee, son?" Alex nodded, and Steven handed the cup to him. He took a sip, and almost immediately afterward spit it back out. This "coffee" had a very bitter and unpleasant taste to it, and Alex handed the cup back to his father.

"It's an acquired taste, son." His father said, pouring the rest back into the pitcher with the rest of the coffee. After Steven and his dad had finished their own cups, they took down camp and got ready to continue checking traps. This was Alex's least favorite part of the day. He loved nature and animals, so seeing them caught in the traps made his heart hurt and his stomach sink. He didn't remember much about that part of the day, the only thing that stayed clear in his mind was a raccoon that had somehow gotten its head stuck in one of the traps, its neck broken from the force of the steel coming together around it.

The trapping business wouldn't keep going at a steady rate, however. Sadly, the price of furs from animals dropped steadily over the next three years. Having no other way to support his family, Steven's father, who lived with Steven and his wife of six years, began to drink heavily. The thought of failing his son, as well as the family that came before him, was a thought that was hard for him to bear. At first it started out slow, he would drink just enough for the pain to go away, but as time went on he drank more and more.

Alex's grandfather wasn't a violent drunk, but he did raise his voice and get quite angry from time to time, especially when someone talked about the family business. He believed that Steven would take over the business when the time came, but unknown to him, Steven hated nature. He felt alone and isolated when they were out camping and checking traps, and he wanted no part of it. He wanted to be around people, and never have to worry about going out in nature at all. Steven's father found this out when he got into an argument on Alex's eleventh

birthday. The conversation started out quiet, the two men talking while Alex was having some cake and his mom, Clara, had stepped out to check on the laundry. However, it quickly escalated, and soon they were yelling back and forth at each other.

“The family business is dying out, dad!” cried Steven as he and his father argued about Steven going into the trapping business. “Besides, I want to go into town and open a shop, I’ve wanted to for a long time now and Clara and I finally have the money! We are only thinking about what’s best for Alexander, dad!” In truth, he was really only thinking about wanting to stay out of nature and be around people.

“Our family has been trappers for generations, son!” His father retorted, scoffing at the idea of his son becoming a businessman. “This cabin was built for that purpose, not so that you could throw it all away for your silly dream! You might not even be able to make it in town! Besides, where do you think that money came from?! It came from me trapping animals and selling their hides!”

“I helped you do that, dad!” Steven cried back, his eyes appearing to be on fire in a strange way. “Half of that money belongs to me, and I want to use it to open a business!”

Alex’s grandfather became angrier than he had ever been before. He picked up his favorite glass, nowadays only used for whiskey, and threw it against the back wall, just as Clara came back into the cabin. It shattered on impact, the sound of broken glass reverberating throughout the living space. “You need to open your eyes, son! Don’t give all the family has worked towards up for this foolish nonsense!”

Clara calmed the two men down, asking them why they were doing this on Alex’s birthday. This quickly ended the argument between them, but as they searched they couldn’t find Alex anywhere. Alex had taken cover under the table as soon as his grandfather and father had

started arguing. He was plugging his ears as his dad and grandpa fought yet again about the destiny of the family.

Alex felt as though he couldn't side with either of them. He loved animals and nature. He loved going out with his grandfather and seeing all of the beautiful animals and nature, but at the same time, the thought of hurting an animal made him sick to his stomach. He loved his grandfather a lot, but he couldn't understand how he could trap and kill innocent creatures. His father was the opposite of his grandfather, wanting to stay out of nature as much as possible. He was happy with his father for not wanting to hurt animals, but he didn't want to be in the nearby town, where there were only tall buildings and people. Sure, there were pets in town, and a few brave birds who ventured in to find food at times. There were none of the wild animals that Alex loved to watch.

As much as he didn't want to be like his grandfather, he also didn't want to be like his father. Feeling confused and suddenly very alone, He slowly backed out from under the table and made a run for his room, getting inside and pulling the door shut. He slid down the smooth oak that made up the door, hearing the creaking of the rusty hinges as he leaned against it. Even if his father did break down and go into the trapping business, he would never do it.

As the days went by, Alex's grandfather became very ill. He stayed in his bed more and more, and some days they didn't even see him. One morning, as his grandfather was coming to breakfast, he suddenly stopped. Just as Steven asked his dad if he was feeling alright, Alex watched his grandfather fall to the floor and shake violently. Clara ran over and checked on him, telling Steven to call 9-1-1. An ambulance came and picked up Steven's father. He was taken to a nearby hospital, where X-Rays were performed as well as cat-scans. It was determined that Grandfather was a victim of a seizure, and it had caused bleeding in his brain. Though it was a

slow bleed, it would not stop for a few days. He would remain hospitalized, as he slipped in and out of a coma, and Steven knew it was only a matter of time before his dad would pass away.

He wanted to show his dad that he could make it in the big city, and he felt that it was the perfect time to try. A small building had recently come up for sale, and Steven had enough to get it. He did so, setting up a small pub and restaurant in the building. He started to get customers almost immediately and soon it was the hot spot for the men to relax and knock a few back after work on Fridays. He didn't have an age restriction on his restaurant, and families would often come for the good food and the chance to get together with friends and family. Soon, Clara started to work there as well, and the food became even better.

Steven and Alex went to visit Grandfather often. Sometimes he was doing well, and he could even nod his head to what his son and grandson were saying. Other days, he would lay with his eyes closed, non-responsive and Steven told his father about his restaurant and all of the people he had met. His father was interested in the things that Steven would say, but he wasn't able to talk much and would just nod or smile as his son talked about how happy he was that his dream was finally coming true.

However, on some days, Grandfather would be bitter and angry. He would be furious about the fact that though his family was doing all right; while he was stuck in the hospital instead of being able to help them out by continuing to trap. He missed the sights and sounds of nature, though he didn't talk about this with his son and grandson. Some days, he would pull himself into a wheelchair, wheel it to the window, and stare off into the forest that bordered the town, wishing that he could be out in it.

One day, the two stayed at the hospital for a while longer than they usually did. When it was getting late, Clara came by and told Steven that he was needed to help close the restaurant

that night. They told Alex to stay with his grandfather, and told him that they would be back as soon as they could. Alex just sat in the chair next to his grandfather's bed and told him all about his own dreams. He told his grandfather that he loved nature and that he wanted to be around it all the time. He loved animals and he could close his eyes and imagine how it would feel to touch their fur, to hug them, and even play with them as though they were pets. His grandfather smiled as his grandson continued to regale him with stories about the dreams he had at night. Then, holding his finger up to Alex's lips, he started to speak.

"I know, boy, I know. There is great beauty in nature. I love her just like you do. It's the whole reason I followed in our ancestors footsteps and became a trapper. I'm glad you feel the same way about it as I do. I know you dad is happy, but it pains my heart to see that he doesn't have the same respect for nature as I do..."

Alex, who had kept silent the whole time his grandfather was talking, spoke up.

"I hate trapping, Grandpa. I hate it! How can you hurt nature if you love it so much? It doesn't make sense..."

"You see, boy, I have to do something to make money. Besides... it's what our family has done for generations..."

His grandfather's hands, which had been placed under and on top of one of his own, went limp. Alex knew that this usually meant his grandfather fell asleep, but he felt as though something was wrong. Being so young, however, he couldn't quite figure out why he felt this way. So, he just stood there and stroked his grandfather's hand with his free hand, smiling gently as he looked up at his grandfather's face. His eyes were closed, and he had a look on his face that seemed very calm. Alex continued to rub his grandfather's hand, not stopping until his

parents came back and found him, sitting there, and still rubbing the hand of the man who had passed away two hours ago, sharing one final moment with his grandson.

The funeral was held a few days later. Alex was there, and he cried when he saw his grandfather lying in the pine coffin, with his eyes closed and the same look on his face. He looked peaceful, almost serene. Still unable to grasp that his grandfather was dead, Alex thought it was a bit weird for his grandfather to be sleeping in such a strange bed. He smiled as he looked into the coffin, still thinking that his grandfather was asleep, and wished him good night.

His parents didn't tell him that his grandfather had died until a couple more years after it happened, when he would be old enough to understand what had happened. But for the time being, there was no more camping. There were no more seeing animals trapped. There was no more going with his father and grandfather and seeing the animals in pain before his grandfather shot them dead. Sometimes, they were already dead, lying limp on the forest floor. Sometimes their legs would be partially separated from their hips, the result of the pained animal trying to get free of the trap by any means necessary.

Still, he missed his grandfather, but he didn't realize he would never get to see him smile again. He didn't realize he would never get to hear him laugh again. He had a new respect for his grandfather, but was still upset with the fact that he had hurt so many innocent creatures. The night that he was told that his grandfather was dead and wouldn't be coming back, Alex cried himself to sleep.

As the months went by, things became different. Most of the traps Alex's grandfather had lain out were tripped, and then taken back to the cabin to be cleaned before they were sold at the town trading post for whatever someone happened to have for barter that day. There were some traps that had been unaccounted for, but then again there was no way for anyone to know where

his grandfather had set every single one out at, as there were times when just his grandfather would go out and work with them.

Alex started to go on daily walks, sometimes being gone for several days at a time, just to enjoy nature and take in all the sights and sounds of the wilderness that surrounded him. Knowing that Alex always came back, Alex's parents wouldn't worry about him until after a week went by, knowing that Alex would, at times, be gone for that long period of time.

Today was no different. It was a beautiful autumn day in the mid-western United States. The majority of the leaves had fallen off of the trees, blanketing the ground in a rich tapestry of colors. The oranges, the reds, the gold and yellow hues, all of it stretched as far as the eye could see, and bare trees reached up, as if to touch the sky with their barren branches. It was the day before the start of winter, but the weather was very pleasant.

It was a quaint place to live. Right now, he saw the leaves dance as the wind picked them up and carried them, making miniature twisters of leaves. The small wind gusts posed no danger, and the leaves that swirled around gave the whole thing its own beauty. Alex had a jacket lightly draped over his shoulders, which he now stuck his arms in to keep him warm. The wind was a little chilly and he wanted to be sure that he was nice and warm. Alex walked through the forest, leaves crunching under his feet with every step he took. This was barely audible, however, as the sounds of the forest were all around him. Birds were singing in their melodious voices, squirrels were chattering back and forth as they collected nuts for the winter, and many other animals were busy making preparations for the coming season.

The sunlight shone through the trees and instead of the normal, random pattern of light on the ground due to the leaves being on the trees, there was warmth that permeated the air in the forest. He picked up a thick branch and took out a small knife, which was a gift from his

grandfather, and began whittling away at the top and bottom, rounding out the ends and making them as smooth as possible. Having finished this task, he started to use the branch as a walking stick, helping to keep a steady pace as he walked through the trees and foliage.

Alex looked at his watch, which had been his grandfather's, checking to make sure the alarm function was on and set for a couple hours later. His parents didn't know when to expect him home, but he was planning to head back later that day, so that he could be inside just in case the snow came early this year, as it did from time to time. He also wanted to be back for dinner, which was one of his favorites.

Right now, as he looked back up, he saw the leaves dance as they spiraled and fluttered to the ground, making a soft crunching noise under the shoes of the young boy as he walked through the forest. Alex let his mind wander and his eyes surveyed the land as he traveled down the trail, smiling both inwardly and on the outside as he saw deer, rabbits, and other creatures who called this habitat their home.

It took Alex a while to realize that he had lost the trail, and by the time he had, the way home was impossible to discern. He was not able to find the trail nor was he able to find anything he recognized. The only technology he brought on his daily hike was the watch he carried with him. It was a nice pocket watch, with a silver casing and a beautiful tree design on the case that protected the clock itself.

Alex looked for high ground to begin searching for a trail or even the smoke of the cabin's chimney as they burned logs to make the stew that his parents had planned to make for dinner that night. Thinking of food, Alex's stomach growled, letting him know that it was hungry to be fed. Frowning gently, Alex realized that he was lost in the forest with no idea how to get home. He rubbed his stomach ruefully, feeling hungry and wishing desperately that he was

back home, pouring stew from the wooden spoon into a carved wooden bowl. He would take a spoonful out of the bowl, blowing on it softly to cool it down before putting it into his mouth. He would savor the flavor of the beef and vegetables as they danced across his taste buds before he swallowed it down and picked up another.

A snap pierced his ears and shattered his thoughts, bringing him back to the forest and the situation he was in. The food and the comforts of home had been just an illusion, his imagination playing tricks on him. He wasn't enjoying supper; he was lost in the woods with no knowledge of how to get back home.

He felt a sharp pain in his ankle as he slowly came back to reality, and as he looked down he saw why. A small raccoon trap had been triggered as he walked, causing it to close on his leg. He cried out in pain, and looked for a way to get it to release. A thought came to his mind, and he pushed his walking stick between the teeth and put enough force on the teeth, separating them just enough to get his foot out. The trap clacked shut again as soon as the stick was taken out, but now Alex had a problem. He was injured and lost, and he had no idea how to get home. He started to walk through the woods again, and after a little while, he found a small hill with a cave about three-fourths of the way up. Steeling his resolve, he started to climb, using the stick as a crutch to support his now hurt leg.

After what felt like hours, and with a few close calls due to the stick not being steady while he was trying to go forward, Alex eventually made it to the cave. He had to crawl the last few inches to the mouth, dragging the stick next to him. It was not hurting too badly anymore, it just throbbed in pain. The cave was a lot smaller than it looked from below, but peering inside he could see that it was unoccupied. Inhaling through his nose, he checked the air to see if there was any scent of a wild animal nearby. All he could smell was the sap of the trees and the pleasant

aroma of flowers. Shivering gently as a soft, cool breeze brushed passed him; Alex made his way towards the back of the cave. It wasn't a five-star hotel, of course, but the air was a decent temperature at the moment and it seemed able to block out the wind.

Alex came up with an idea. He set back out and picked up a lot of sticks, which actually took a bit longer than it seemed it would. The grass was dry due to the season, so Alex gathered some of it as well. Setting his jaw, he started once again to climb the hill. He made it back to the cave, and started to set the grass down inside of a dip in the rocks. He nodded and laid the sticks out in a triangular pattern, creating a neat little pile to start a fire. Taking out his knife and pocket watch, he struck the flat of the blade against the watch, creating sparks which he directed onto the grass. He blew on it a few times as soon as he started to see smoke, and soon there was a nice-sized fire.

Alex sat by the fire for a good time, staring into it and thinking to himself. He would be reminded every once in a while of his situation by a sharp pain in his ankle. Alex was worried that if he didn't do something, his ankle would get infected and might even lead him to needing it to be amputated. Remembering something his grandfather told him, Alex began to heat up the blade on the fire, and after a while the knife was bright orange. Grimacing, Alex put the blade to each gash in his ankle, crying out in pain each time, but knowing that it would stop any bleeding and prevent infection in the wounds. Nodding to himself, he sat back down and looked at his cauterizing. It was crude, but it would work.

Soon, Alex could feel a much colder wind than the one that had blown while he was collecting the fuel for the fire. He had failed to notice that the sky was becoming dark with clouds, and while he was busy with his injury, it had started to snow. It was light at first, but

soon became a blizzard, blowing snow all around. Thick flakes swirled through the air, and fell to the ground to create a blanket on the earth in a matter of a half-an-hour.

Alex's stomach rumbled as he watched the snow, and once again he was reminded of home. This time, he imagined that he was safe in bed. The covers were pulled up snugly over his body, and his pillow was cool to the touch. He had a pleasantly firm twin-size mattress, and it was a perfect fit for him. He listened as the crickets chirped and the owls hooted; these noises being usual sounds of the night in the wilderness. Then, he slowly closed his eyes and drifted off to sleep, both in his mind and in the cave.

Something caused Alex to wake up, though he didn't know what as he rubbed at his eyes. Just then, he heard it again: A loud snarling noise came from near the entrance of the cave. He couldn't see much; it was nighttime, the darkness so thick that aside from the light of the fire, nothing was visible. As he was looking around, Alex's eyes were drawn to the front of the cave. What he saw made his heart stop. There were twin orbs of yellow shining in the darkness. A small space in the clouds allowed light to filter through, showing the silhouette of the mystery animal. It was some sort of large cat, which snarled again. Alex, who had been reaching for his walking stick, froze and held his breath. He was unsure of what was going to happen.

Unfortunately for him, the large animal started to walk into the cave, seeking shelter from the storm that was wreaking havoc outside of the cave. Alex let his instinct take over, and he reached for a burning stick. A loud snarl stopped him, but only for a second as he snatched up the makeshift torch and held it in front of him, slowly walking towards the animal. The cat snarled, but backed away. It didn't know what the mysterious light that the boy held was, but it didn't want any part of it. He backed up a bit, then jumped back and ran down the hill, away from the cave. Letting out a sigh of relief, Alex dropped the burning stick and sat down,

breathing heavily as his heart beat quickly in his chest. Never before had he been so scared of an animal. He knew that he was close to being seriously hurt or killed by the cat, and if he wouldn't have had the fire next to him he might have very well been food for the hungry predator.

Calming his mind and body and pushing these thoughts away, Alex laid down on the smooth stone floor. Getting as relaxed as possible, Alex let himself quietly drift off to sleep.

Before he knew it, Alex was once again aroused from his sleep. This time, birds were chirping and the forest was a bit brighter than it had when the big cat had awoken him. Yawning and stretching his sore body, he stood up and walked outside. He thought about what he should do now. He glanced up at the top of the hill, and then a thought hit him. Rubbing his shoulder, which had knotted up from sleeping on the stone floor, he started to climb the rest of the way to the top and see if he couldn't make out his home. He almost slipped a time or two, but he continued upwards, knowing that if he gave up now he might be lost in the wilderness for longer than a day. After about a half hour of climbing, Alex put a hand on the top of the hill.

Pulling himself up, he sat on the edge for a minute and just looked out over the scenery that he was surrounded by. It really was a beautiful scene. He could see all the trees changing colors and the birds flying around. The ground glistened with freshly fallen snow, causing his heart to skip a beat. He could see a lake nearby, frozen solid and shining like a crystal would if the light hit it just right.

"It's really all very beautiful." He said to himself as he stood up and scanned the area for his cabin home. He shivered gently as the cold air of winter filled his lungs with each breath that he took. At first, he couldn't see anything, but as he turned to look to his left, he could see a column of white, puffy smoke rising from a chimney.

“There it is!” He said to himself again, a tone of happiness in his voice. He would be glad to see his parents and get some food in his stomach, and he had quite the tale to tell as he started to make his way down the hill. It took him a little longer than it had climbing up; as if he slipped and fell he risked more injury, and quite possibly a broken bone or two. After a good two hours, his feet touched the ground and he started off towards his left, determined to get home.

He found the trail again as he walked through the woods, and he started following it back to his house. However, just as he was about to round the corner that would give him a straight shot to home, he heard a soft whining noise, followed by a yelping noise. Curious, he headed off towards the sound, wondering what could be making the sounds. He soon found out, coming upon a small fox kit with its leg caught in a hunter’s trap. Alex knew where it came from, as his father had warned him that his grandfather had never found all of his traps, and that some were bound to be near the cabin still. Unfortunately, the poor fox kit had not seen the trap that was covered in leaves, and had sprung it by accident.

Alex was now determined to help the animal get free from the prison it had found itself stuck in. He thought back to when he himself had been caught in the trap and felt as though he and the fox kit were the same. Alone somewhere they didn’t know, trying desperately to be free in spite of being trapped. He tried to approach, but when he got closer the fox growled at him and bared its teeth, warning him. He didn’t want to upset the kit, but he knew that if he didn’t help him there was a good chance that he wouldn’t be able to get free. He took his jacket and tossed it on top of the kit, causing him to snarl and bite at the jacket, but keeping him from being able to see the human that was trying to help him. Steeling his courage once again, he quickly grabbed both sides of the steel teeth that had clamped down on the fox’s leg. The cloying scent

of blood wafted from the fox's leg and into Alex's nose, almost making him gag and the horrible scent. Despite this, he pulled the teeth apart as hard as he could, and freed the fox from the trap.

Immediately, the fox started to limp off, and Alex wondered where it would go. It wouldn't be a mystery for long; Alex could see the mother of the kit just up a nearby rise. She waited for her son to come to her, and began licking his wound clean. She was very careful, making sure not to hurt her young as she tended to its wound. Once she was satisfied that it was good for now, the two stood at the top of the hill and looked down at Alex. The sun shone off of their fur in such a way it almost seemed like they were burning. "Wow..." Alex muttered under his breath, only able to watch them as they both headed down the opposite side of the rise they had been standing on. Alex was in awe. Out of everything he had seen in his entire life, there was nothing more beautiful to him than the moment that he saw the two foxes as the crest of the rise, standing tall and looking simply stunning.