

Alaskan Mane - Indiana, Year 6, NSW

I was unfurling barbed wire when my autumnal, copper-irised eyes fixed themselves on the bright blue void above, the beautiful sky. Leaves threw their fragile bodies upwards, but an enormous gust pounded them back down to earth.

Autumn is nestling upon the breathtaking landscape, but although the bejeweled amber and crimson willows are a dazzling sight to see, icy air is soaring up through my canvas jacket making me quiver and pointy goosebumps form. Serene autumn is my absolute favourite season by far. A cheerful grin sneaks out from under me, and I laugh with joy. Another tumbling wave of breeze jolts in between strands of my hair and stylishly weaves it into a mohawk. My eyes are smiling; everything is blissful and radiating sunlight.

My mum always spoke of how autumn brought happiness and magic, as if a dreamy wish was granted a millennia ago, but still enchanting glittering grains of dust fly with the wind today, fulfilling dreams. She always excitedly told me, with shimmering diamond eyes, how wistful spirits take the magical form of a thriving animal, to glimpse their treasured families once more.

I glance back down at my awkwardly twisted wire. I was supposed to be crafting a brand-new fence for the farm, to keep the monstrous lions at bay. Our frail old chickens live in scaring fear, but I'll rescue them.

We live in South Africa, planted on the dry doorstep of the Botswana border. I adore this place. The only devastating downside, however, are the pouncing lions, fearsome cheetahs, leopards, hyenas, and – believe it or not – the unforgivably cheeky Cape Brown squirrel, who ransack our supply shed, home to large barrels of 'delicious' wheat grounds and chicken grain. Behind the boulder-sized hill in front of our fire-warmed cobblestone cabin, I spot a pale white plume of fur.

I harshly rub my eyes and attempt to glare back up at the mysterious shape, but it's gone. Snatched from existence like it was swallowed by a black hole.

"Dianna! Come inside now, Dad wants to speak with you!" shrieked a tiny bear-cub boy called Elijah, who unfortunately happened to be my nagging and whiny younger sibling.

"Tell him I'm coming, I've just got to check on the shed, because I think those pesky squirrels have broken in!" I screech just as pitchily.

I'm honoured to have an older brother, Ronan, who proudly demonstrates the knack of how to hunt a 'feral' beast efficiently so I can fend for myself, wielding braveness. He believes all creatures are dangerous or untrustworthy. He doesn't understand.

I've also been graciously gifted with a thoughtful, courageous father, that's by my side clutching my ordinary palm through every sort of rough and mountainous terrain.

I cherish my family like the distant, forgotten relics buried high up in the massive steeps arranged perfectly around me. I shoot an eager stare towards the boulder-hill once more, but as expected the vague snow-white tuft has vanished. I wonder what its story holds?

A daring smirk dents into my lightly toned cheek and my eyes dart to the cobblestone shed. I was given my white complexion, swirly black forest hair, copper almond eyes, and berry painted lips from my mother. I often get people, left and right, commenting on how I'm a perfect image of my caring mother. She was the heavenly angel of our miniature town. Everybody desperately misses her hardworking and graceful touch, radiant smile, and uplifting golden eyes that sought for a split moment to spring to someone's need. She died two extremely long years ago when I had just become 11. Although I love her with every single fragment of my heart, I've learned to treasure every precious second with my wonderful family and spectacular home.

I turn to our sturdy cabin, "Coming, Dad! I shooed those sneaky rat bags off, Eli," I deliberately add, even though it mightn't be the whole complete truth.

I scurry towards our homely front door embodied with coarse metal strips, kick my filthy boots off, ice skate around the freezing breeze-filled corridor, and plonk myself down onto our rattan thrones, meeting eye-to-eye with my father.

"Good morning Dad, Eli said you wanted to talk to me? I was wondering if I should restock the farm supplies today? Or feed the horses?" A cheerful twirl pirouetted through my lips.

"Good morning Dianna." His monotone straight-lined smirk transforms into one of his signature grins. He's always had a charming and unique smile. "No need to work yourself to pieces today Anna, just relax. The sky's bright and that's worth a celebration. I was wondering if you've noticed anything unordinary?"

My mind teleports back to the split second my eyes spotted the elegant, mysterious white tendril.

"No? Did something happen?" I say with a dash of reluctance.

"Nothing to concern you, just a bit of trouble with a pest around the valley. Have you finished the fence? We need those chickens to be safe, Anna." His signature grin appears, channeling beauty across the bland kitchen.

"Not yet, I'll get to it soon." I leap out of my comfy handmade chair, glancing out the enormously framed window, when curiosity sings in me.

After that, the beautiful day cartwheeled by. I spent my time twining intricate lengths of barbed wire once again, bickering with my idiotic nuisance of a brother, and staring into the cornflower blue heart of the incredible sky.

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Steaming luxurious pots of multicoloured veggies are happily resting on the table. I feel saliva aching in my starving mouth when I capture the sight of delectable, irresistible chicken salsa wraps.

“This looks fantastic! Did you cook this? I’ve never seen the table so bright,” I ask my worn-out looking dad. In between delicate dusty rose bowls lay bright wax candles, golden sunflower garlands, and colourfully tasseled placemats. It’s magnificent.

“Yes, I thought we’d feast tonight, in honour of our anniversary.” I notice cherry red tones filtering his droopy face and glistening rock pools swirling in his brown eyes. I start to catch his sorrow, like a devastating cold inflicted by the pouring rain.

I blink past raging rivulets of tears; I’ve enclosed my sadness under a heavy mound of damp soil for years. I stare at my frozen brothers, their unmoving statues, the cozy shadow of light ripples of their still faces. They aren’t even phased by the heart splitting words spoken. My heart however is being chipped painfully away by a serrated iron chisel.

My family quietly continues nibbling lumps of chickpea carefully. I launch my chair backwards, sounding a screeching creak. Everyone shoots death stares directly at me, mouths gaping widely.

I tumble upstairs to my lonely bedroom, slamming my spindly heels down. I fiercely throw the flimsy door. It almost explodes off its weary hinges. I can just barely glimpse Ronan’s wavering eyebrows welded together, it forces my already gurgling stomach to brew uncontrollably as if it were a despicable witch’s cauldron.

The colourless, ominous, picture enclosed in my mysterious window is completely pitch black. Only a moonlight sliver is curiously peering from behind the endless shadowed horizon. Another solemn tear rages down my face in a single gigantic *swoosh*. I focus my hopelessly lost gaze upon the illuminating moon fractal. A nighttime kingdom.

When suddenly a mysteriously familiar silhouette, translucent in the stygian ink-traced night, sways gracefully just below me.

My longing heart is persuading me to follow it, and my mind is agreeing eagerly. A smile caresses my rosy sketched cheeks, and I sprint excitedly down the bounding labyrinth of steps. The blissful aura of the chilling night breeze swaddles me after I throw forwards the front door.

My legs are controlling my half-asleep body, as I dash through the endless night. Stars are twinkling in harmony, as inspiring as an incredible choir. I'm chasing after the porcelain silhouette, until it abruptly falls to a stop. I'm just near enough to vaguely notice that this roaming creature is a white-furred animal with a slinky snowflake tail, twitching tufted ears, and shimmering, pointed teeth. She's a beautiful white lion, as vivid as the picturesque summits of Alaska.

Fear strikes me like an electric lightning bolt, as the lion steadies her balance to pounce – directly at me. I submissively cower in fear, the snowy lion springs at me. A raspy screeching sound escapes my mouth, whilst I glimpse her bared teeth. Just as I think I'm terribly doomed, she bolts into me, her cheerful face shimmering with familiarity.

She embraces me.

At first I don't understand. But in my seeking heart I know, she is a radiant spirit watching over her cherished family, she is my mother. I have no exact proof, but I'm undoubtedly certain.

I lovingly press my nose against her satiny muzzle, and her damp tongue swipes over my cheek. A hot, flooding tear rumbles down. And Mum's eyes sparkle like the wondrous constellation tapestry around us.