

Winter Sanctuary

The snow crunches under my boot-clad feet. I breathe in the frigid clean air, reveling in the freshness of my lungs. Twisted fingers of mist intertwine in the distance, meeting over the gleaming steel tracks. Looking down the railroad, I feel as though I'm in a corridor fashioned of gnarled trees and clouds. The wet, chilled air penetrates my winter clothes, but I feel renewed in the power of nature.

It was a weekend in early spring of last year. Just moments before my parents were for the hundredth time, fighting with my brother over the same old things. There wasn't a problem with me until everyone else's anger spilled over. All of a sudden both of my parents and my brother were furious with me. I couldn't stand it.

I walked out of the house yelling "I'm going to the woods!" not caring if I was heard.

The door slammed behind me and finally everything was still. I stalked along the path to my safe haven. The muffled silence surrounding me was broken by nothing other than my feet. I stepped out from between the tracks to cross frozen ground to a tree. With familiarity, I swung myself up, and in a matter of seconds I'm nestled in the highest branches of the barren skeleton. Its arms reach skyward, struggling to break free from the icy restraints. My back to the railroad tracks, I look out across the frosty landscape.

The stark white birch trees are clustered together. They seem to be huddling, to shield from the unrelenting Minnesota winter. Past them lies a blank and desolate marsh, frozen in the sub-zero temperatures. The stalks of dead reeds pierce the blanket of snow, despite being battered by days of unstoppable arctic wind. From my perch, I feel the ridged surface beneath me

through my gloves. The tree sways gently with the slightest breeze. My warm breath fogs in the air. Undeterred by the barren wasteland before me, this is my place of thought and solitude.

I sit high in the branches, thinking. Here I'm free from the swirling whirlwind of chaos engulfing my house. I let the tension from the day drain away. Without warning, a feeling of intense joys sweeps me up. I forget about all of my problems, worries, and insecurities. In silence my mind can wander without the distraction. There are no chains fashioned by others to hold back my contemplation. Here, I am alone. The motionless white landscape before me is a blank canvas, upon which any thought can be projected. After daydreaming for a bit, the lonely call of a distant train brings me back to the present.

Within minutes I can see it. The forlorn cry pierces the air, somehow shaking free the muffling effect of the snow covered landscape. The train comforts me, in its steadiness and power. Just as quickly as it appears, the train is gone, leaving only a rumbling in the ground and thoughts in my head.

This single tree standing strong beside a railway, on the edge of a marsh, is an amplifier for my thoughts. There I can think freely without distraction. It is a source of inspiration. My safe haven may be unique, twenty-some feet in the air, alone, but the tree is a part of me.

Word Count: 553