

Gold medal essay – descriptive autumnal essay

The sun's slow progression has reached its end, a painter's pallet spilled across the horizon. Plum skies meld into persimmon clouds, a lonely hawk wheels amongst the colours. A lazy spiral of smoke drifts from the campfire, lilac-lit in the evening light. A pot of cast-iron, bubbling with fragrant broth, rocks gently o'er the heat. A chill breeze winds its way through the area, gently rustling the melange of colours atop the trees. I huddle into my jacket, sealed against the encroaching cold. A woollen hat crowns my head, snug to my ears. My hands curl around a steaming earthen mug, filled to the brim with rich warming coffee. The heat radiates through my gloves into my fingers, unpicking the knotted muscles, still cold-cramped from the hike.

The clouds are close here, the ceiling of the world seemingly within reach. I rise, stretching my cramped legs, and amble over to the campfire. I catch a glimpse of my face in the surface of the broth, a drawn white mask save the carmine glow that blushes across my nose and cheekbones. My exhalation sends curling strands of pale mist adrift, reflecting gentle rays of sunlight. I inhale the savoury steam, and move off to admire my surroundings. Climbing a short way up a nearby rise, each step bringing a muted crunch from the carpet of leaves beneath my feet

I sit atop a rough stump, and try absorb the grandeur before me. A valley, primal in its beauty, untouched by the disease of industry. Seemingly fluid, the seamless layer of cinnabar and sienna atop the trees ripples slowly in the evening light. This flawless blanket entrances me, swaying to an unknown rhythm only heeded by those of the wilds.

A winding ribbon of quicksilver, tumbling and tossing with vigour, peeks through the canopy. A herd of red deer abide there, lining the bank with russet. One stands apart from the herd, his head wreathed in a crown of antler bone. His coat is mottled with grey, but he stands tall and strong.

As I admire his majesty, I hear a flapping of wings behind me. A small bird, the colour of burnt chocolate, alights atop a nearby tree. I freeze, not wanting to frighten this apparition. Preening in the evenings light, the small avian lets out a haunting, lowing cry. The mourning dove, for that's what I recognise it to be now, continues its sonorous dirge. The thrumming cry fills the air, drowning the quiet hum of the world around me.

I am transported to time and place far away, half faded memories of autumn walks with my parents resurfacing. Something startles the bird, shaking me out of my reverie. It launches into the air, flying for its life. I see a blue-grey blur miss it by inches, pulling up before it touches the ground with a snap of its wings. The graceful raptor, a peregrine prince of the sky, glides off, having lost sight of its prey among the snarl of bare branches. I watch it as it leaves, its regal form silhouetted against the brazen sky.

I begin to make the trek back to my camp, savouring every step I take. The air itself has a smell of cold, burning the sinuses as I breathe it in. I stumble the last few steps down the hill, tripping on an errant root. I catch myself, and slow down as I see my campfire ahead. The heady scent of my meal fills the air, and I am glad to see it untouched by animals. I open the lid, and am greeted with a blast of heat and steam. I am not quick enough, and my vision is obstructed by the fogging of my glasses.

I take them off, the world blending into a soup of colour without texture. I use the knitted edge of my hat to clean them, and enjoy the clarity of the pristine lenses. I return my attention to the bubbling broth, and ladle myself a bowl. The food is hearty, chunks of beef and carrot floating in a sea of savoury soup. I sit and rest, enjoying the tranquil silence of a world at rest. The sun descends fully, the moon sitting on a bed of black velvet- alone at last.

With the retreat of the sun, jewels begin to shine in the sky, glinting dots of cold light. The previously chill evening is now freezing, and every exhalation now sends heavy breaths of mist through the air. The sounds of the forest are all around, crackles and rustles, creaks and snaps. I catch a flash of russet fur in my peripheral vision, the fox gone long before my reflexes catch up. My tent stands nearby, a monolith of man in this realm of the wild. The wind sends ripples across its surface, fabric shaking and jumping in tune with the gusts.

My fire has died down to embers now, slowly smouldering. I care not, for I am transfixed by the stars. What were previously slight dots of light are now pearls spilled on black silk, treasures of the sky. My eyes flit from star to star, forming patterns as fast as they are forgotten, seeking the answer to a puzzle that does not exist. Eventually, my eyelids grow heavy, and the night too cold, and I am forced to retire to the safety of my tent. As I lie there, I am lulled to slumber by the sounds of the wild.