

Andy slammed his door shut. He deliberately disregarded the indistinct squalls of his parents. The antediluvian corridor, the only thing that separated Andy from his parents' pure asperity, reverberated with raucous bellows. "*I can't have one thing,*" Andy thought to himself, "*not one thing!*" Andy had hankered for a cell phone more than anything. "Not even a prepaid phone," Andy managed a muffled speech with his head buried in his indigo quilt; which was now moistened with tears of anger, frustration and melancholy. "Andy?" Lillian, Andy's little sister, asked guardedly.

Andy's neck strained as he upheaved his head, "Go away, Lillian."

Lillian overlooked his statement and continued, "Andy, Mom and Dad just-"

"Go away!" Andy abruptly interrupted. He heard the nimble and exigent dart of his five-year-old sister, the sound quickly allaying down the corridor. Andy sighed. He looked up at the starry night sky and the misty wisps of the Milky Way galaxy, and wondered if he would ever have a cell phone to call his own.

Andy woke up from his remarkably tranquil sleep. "Shoot," he exclaimed in annoyance. It was the third of January. Andy and his family lived in Minnedosa, a negligible town in southwest Manitoba. They owned a trifling house hidden within a secluded, leafy bosk; but Andy's father was dissatisfied. He found a judiciously priced quantity of land with a frozen pond, up in Nunavut, and decided to buy it. Two acres of pure snow, ice and consistent subzero temperatures. But Andy's mother saw the purchase as ludicrous, and a hasty squander of money. They both knew that they couldn't waste the investment spent on the area, so they found a happy medium. They agreed to visit the frozen pond once a year, the anniversary of the purchase; which Andy happened to loathe. Andy forced himself out of his hoary, fetid bed. With his eyes still somewhat cerise, Andy stuck on his cheap glasses, which did nothing but make his vision worse due to the abundance of smudges, cracks and imperfections. Andy layered up his petite body and prepared himself for a lengthy and stark drive. He tentatively walked down the hallway; awaiting the people he couldn't face: his parents.

Andy smelt the sweet scent of crispy bacon and scrambled eggs, his favorite. The smell began to wheedle him toward the kitchen, which his parents and sister were occupying. "Hello, Andy," Mrs. Nickol, Andy's mother, greeted, her face frozen in a wide smile, but her eyes were stone cold and furious. She was expecting an apology for the night before, but Andy was not going to appease her demands so easily. There was an awkward hesitation of reticence. "Andy, if

you want a phone, you're going to have to buy it with your own money," Andy's father, Mr. Nickol, said, breaking the silence and cutting to the chase. "Clearly, your mother and I highly object of the purchase, and simply can't afford it in this economy."

"You buy two acres of useless, freezing land in the middle of nowhere, but not a cell phone for your own son?" Andy muttered under his breath.

"What was that?" Andy's mother asked with her trademark pseudo smile still plastered on her face.

"Nothing," Andy replied with his eyes just as cold as his mother's.

Another awkward pause. "Well," Mr. Nickol said as casually as he could, making an effort to break up Andy's intense staredown with his mom, "we'll be leaving soon. Half an hour?" Andy neglected his plate of food, for he had lost his appetite; not knowing that his actions would soon leave him feeling nostalgic.

After a stiff three-hour ride, they finally arrived at their frozen pond. Mr. Nickol alighted out of the car, and opened the trunk. Ice skates and sandwiches had been packed, but Andy could care less for skating, or eating. Andy needed to figure out a way to make money, fast. He sat on a vast pile of snow that barricaded the left side of the pond, the side of the pond that led into unknown and unclaimed woods. Andy strained his brain until he had a headache; he needed to find an ideal way to make money. But, he was unable to yield the perfect idea. Making enough money wasn't just to get a cell; now it was for his pride as well. Andy's uneasiness caused him to lose track of time. He tilted his head backward to look up at the sky. The sky was a deep orange and just on the brink of red, but there was a thick, translucent fog blocking the appearance of the sky's true vivaciousness. "*Orange?Red?*" Andy questioned himself as he displayed a face of bewilderment. "*How long was I thinking?*" He peered down at his wristwatch. "*7:54!*" Andy thought in shock.

"Time to go!" Mr. and Mrs. Nickol shouted simultaneously, waving their arms in the air.

"Finally," Andy mumbled to himself.

Andy toiled to get out of the depression he had embedded into the snow. He ambled his way over to their car. Just as he was about to pull open the car door of their ruby red Hybrid, he looked back at the frozen pond. He smiled as he watched Lillian stride and stumble, stride and stumble. Andy's eyes widened in eureka. His smile went from sincere and content to gleefully mischievous. Andy had descried the most negligible of things. It was insignificantly protruding

from a stark white mound of snow, and was Benjamin Franklin green. “*Could it be?*” Andy asked, trying to stymie his hopes from rising. His family was approaching. He could never make it there without being caught and ordered back to the car. Andy finally saw the perfect way to make his money. A short crescent of snow bordered the pond and next to it sat a dirt pathway lightly covered with snow, and for once, Andy was glad to have his small structure. The crescent was just tall enough to keep him hidden as long as he crouched down. Andy needed to move quickly and with guile; and that’s exactly what he did.

Andy crouched down and waddled as fast as he could to the opposite side of the pond; where his prize awaited. Enervated, Andy paused in his crouched position, and looked back. Everyone sat inside of the car. Lillian stared intently at the empty seat, that Andy should have been filling, as if confused and trying to figure out why the seat remained barren; but seconds after, shrugged it off. Andy turned back to the route and waddled as fast as his stick-like legs could carry him. Andy could here the starting of an engine in the distance. He stood and began to sprint. The thick fog had fallen and Andy could barely see five feet in front of him. “*Finally,*” Andy thought to himself as he arrived at his destination. He tugged at the piece of green. Andy heard the struggling of wheels in the distance. He pulled faster, harder and more urgently. At last, Andy’s prize emerged. He had never felt more jubilant. But, Andy’s triumphant and happy smile quickly faded as he realized what he had worked for. The supposedly “hundred-dollar bill” turned out to be one of Lillian’s old scribbles, that endured the extreme weather of Rankin Inlet. He kicked the snow in anger and began to walk briskly toward the car. Andy stopped unanticipatedly. He wasn’t walking toward the car; he was walking toward where the car *was*.

“Shoot!” Andy exclaimed. His eyes were red and watery with tears of nostalgia. The temperature was declining rapidly and Andy needed a way to keep warm. He had neither a lighter nor a flint but he did have a sheet of construction paper, which was astonishingly dry. “*I need to make a spark. If only had some dry rocks...*,” Andy thought. He stared at the dark woods with curiosity and then looked at his wristwatch, “8:23,” Andy said aloud. Dangerous and unknown. Running into the woods was straight down the rabbit hole; no going back. But, there was a possibility of warmth, a fire.

Andy took that possibility. Like a fishing net cast into a hopeful sea, he barreled straight into the woods.

“8:23,” Andy’s mother exclaimed, “we must have skated so much, we lost track of the time!”

“Andy,” Andy’s father said tenderly, “I know you don’t enjoy the pond, and we’re-”

“Dad,” Lillian spoke softly, “Andy isn’t-”

“Later, honey,” Mr. Nickol interrupted, “As I was saying, Andy we’re sorry-”

“Dad,” Lillian spoke louder, “he’s-”

“Don’t interrupt me Lillian,” Mr. Nickol harshly ejaculated. “Now, Andy we’re sorry that we can’t grant your every wish, but maybe when we’re stable we can get you your phone.” Andy didn’t speak a word, and neither did Lillian as she rolled her eyes and shook her head in resentment.

“Andy?” Mrs. Nickol asked worriedly, not bothering to turn around to witness his empty seat.

“Andy,” Mr. Nickol remarked angrily. Still, no response came. Andy’s father suddenly turned the rearview mirror so that he could see Andy, but he saw no one; an empty seat. Andy’s father unexpectedly swerved to the side of the highway, receiving many honks and dirty words in exchange. He hopped out of the their red car and rested his head on the hood. “What’s wrong honey?” Andy’s mother asked with more curiosity than concern.

“We left Andy,” he muttered inaudibly.

“What?” Mrs. Nickol replied.

“We left Andy!” Andy’s father yelled. Mrs. Nickol exhibited a face of pure shock and horror. She slid over from the passenger’s seat and positioned herself on the driver’s. She started up the engine, Mr. Nickol’s cue to get into the car. They turned around and headed back to the pond.

By the time Andy had reached the dark and eerie entrance to the woods, he was exhausted for he hadn’t eaten in several hours. “*Why didn’t I eat?*” Andy whined to himself. He was bleary; however, he managed to walk quite swiftly and vigilantly as he scoured the snow enveloped ground for dry rocks; to ignite the spark that would give him warmth, life and hope. Andy searched deeper into the uncanny and stygian woods, each and every step leading him to more wet rocks, more failures; which were all slowly snuffing out his hope of survival. Andy felt despondent and pessimistic, and began to fatigue. He strained his eyes to read the time on his watch. “9:38,” Andy managed to squeak out of shock. Twilight, crepuscule, nightfall; it was getting late. He needed to rest.

Half an hour later, Andy's family arrived at the frozen pond, again. "Andy," they all called out in unison. "Andy. Andy!" Mrs. Nickol began to choke up, but Mr. Nickol was quick to console her. Andy's father whipped out his mangled flip cell phone and dialed for the police; then they waited. In thirty long minutes, the police came. A short and pudgy man waddled over to Andy's mother, undoubtedly uninterested. "How can I help you, ma'am?" he said with a dull and tired voice.

"My s-s-son di-disappeared," Mrs. Nickol said shakily.

"We came here to ice skate, but on our way back to Minnedosa we discovered that our son wasn't there," Mr. Nickol took over.

"Wasn't where?" the police officer callously asked.

"H-he-he wasn't in the c-car," Andy's mother managed to reply.

"What is his name? How old is he? Height? Hair color?" the officer asked, not making an effort to solace Mrs. Nickol.

"Andy. Tha-that's his name. He-he turned thirteen y-yesterday," Mrs. Nickol completely broke down. "My son i-is out there," she mourned, "in this freezing cold. H-he could d-d," Mrs. Nickol couldn't bear to speak that last word. Mr. Nickol brushed through her hair, whispering words of alleviation to her. He looked back up at the officer.

"He's thirteen. He is 4'3" and has dark brown hair," Andy's father spoke.

"Mmm, okay. We'll keep an eye out for him," the man replied.

Andy could've sworn he'd heard his family shouting his name. "*I'm so tired, I'm hearing things,*" Andy pitifully thought. He continued to walk. Enduringly, he found a tree to support him. He flounced down next to the base of the tree and leaned against the trunk, kaput and unable to move. The cold started to seep through Andy's layers, and he began to shiver and twitch. No fire, no warmth, no energy; he was out of resources. All Andy could do was close his eyes. It was so easy; it almost seemed wrong. But, it was so easy. Andy completely left his guard down, shut his eyes and dozed off.

*Shh, shh.* Andy heard the rustle of dead leaves. He popped open one eyelid, which was as heavy as lead, to see what had made the noise. He saw nothing. *Shh, shh.* Andy heard again. Vexed, he

opened both his eyes and pivoted his head to see if anything was there. He squinted, his pupils trying to let in all the light they could in the pitch black night of the new moon. Andy closed his

eyes once again and let his glasses slip down his nose. *Shh, shh*. Andy heard the sound, but this time, closer. Andy opened his eyes, but as he did, his awry glasses slipped down his face and Andy heard them shatter. He only saw a glimpse of what was in front of him, and he only needed a glimpse to see what was. A pack of hungry wolves bared their fangs, some foaming in the mouth. “*Shoot*,” Andy thought to himself.

Their rib cages were visible and they were clearly famished. They stared at Andy like a meal, and he probably was, due to his paltry stature. He propped himself on his cold, wet palms. Using the support of the tree, Andy pulled himself up so he was standing upright. The wolves barked, as if warning him not to make another move. Andy twisted his torso; he was preparing to sprint. Andy heard the low growls deriving from the pack of ravenous wolves, as he cast fearful, furtive glance in their direction. Andy abruptly darted; he sprinted as fast as he could. He had neither energy nor potency, but he didn’t need that anymore. Andy was running on his pure adrenaline and yearn for survival. Andy heard a fierce howl from the patriarch of the pack and turned around to see daunting sight. All of the wolves were charging at full speed and they, too, were running on adrenaline. Andy sprinted as fast as his scrawny legs could. The wolves were impending; the leader of the pack was much closer and much more adamant about having Andy devoured. “*There’s no way I can outrun them,*” Andy thought, “*I need a place to go...*” He looked at his surroundings; the answer had been in front of him the whole time, and he had just ran away from it. “*I need to find a sturdy tree,*” Andy concluded.

The Nickol’s waited near the frozen pond in their red Hybrid. The police patrolled everywhere near the pond, except the woods. Mrs. Nickol sobbed in the car. “It’s negative twenty-one degrees out,” Mr. Nickol said louder than he should have. Andy’s mother started crying, again.

“Why are they checking everywhere e-except for the woods?” Mrs. Nickol managed to sniffle.

“I don’t know, honey. I’ll ask,” Mr. Nickol replied and stepped out of the car. “Excuse me, why aren’t you checking the woods?” Andy’s father asked an arbitrary officer standing near the edge of the throng of investigators and policemen.

“Oh, those woods,” the police officer responded with a country accent, “no one has been in there for decades. Some rumor went around ‘bout wolves with a bad case ‘o rabies.”

“Well, could you just check for our son,” Andy’s father put out.

“I’ll see what I can do, sir,” the officer spoke.

Mr. Nickol sat back in the driver’s seat. He observed the police officer trying to convey the chief. The officer walked over to the car and knocked on the window, which Mr. Nickol was quick to roll down. “Chief said we can check those woods in the mornin’,” the officer said. “Thank you,” Andy’s father remarked.

Andy sprinted through the woods, but he was quickly tiring. The wolves had stamina and Andy couldn’t find a potent tree; a terrible combination for survival. The leader clamped his teeth on Andy’s left calf, but thanks to his three layers of pants, it remained untouched. But now, his calf was exposed to the bitter cold, which was rapidly numbing it. Andy’s face and calf burned from being clawed at by the icy wind; he began to slow. He felt like life was slowly slipping away from him. Just before he could pass out, Andy looked up. Even in the dusking night, what he saw was clear. The nondescript silhouette of a broad and sturdy tree. Andy used all of his power to pull himself forward. When he arrived at the tree, the first limb was well above his height. He could hear the close growls of the irate wolves. Andy urgently and fearfully began to jump for the limb. His first jump missed, by far. The wolves were at his feet but they didn’t pounce, as if they found his failing efforts amusing. Andy began to tear up. Hot tears tumbled down his cheeks. He jumped with all of his might, and miraculously he made the jump. Angered that the show was over, the leader of the wolves jumped and bit Andy’s exposed calf.

“Ahh!” Andy yelled in agony. The weight of the wolf began to drag him down. His fingertips were slowly slipping off the limb, and so was his chance of survival. Andy could no longer stifle his emotions. He cried as he tried to shake off the wolf. The wolf stood its ground and bit even harder. Andy shrieked in pain. Andy couldn’t worry about the leader of the wolves now; he had to get up the tree. Andy had never performed a full pull-up before. His feeble and meager arms never had the strength to lift his body. But now, this wasn’t to pass some gym test; this was to survive. Andy grunted with determination. Sweat dribbled down his forehead. He couldn’t care less about the wolf who had injected its fangs into his calf. Andy lifted himself slowly upward. Inch by inch, inch by inch. Surprisingly, Andy reached the top of the tree. He grabbed the wolf by the scruff, and threw it as hard as he could; but when he ripped the wolf off of his calf, a pang of excruciating pain went through his left leg. Andy sat on the limb of the tree and examined his calf, or where his calf was. There was a gaping hole where his calf used to be, and it was oozing out blood. Andy leaned against the trunk of the tree. His parents could never

see this.

*“They’ll never let me out of their sight if they see this,”* Andy stressfully thought. He closed his eyes. The wolves had promptly left after seeing their exec thrown; Andy was safe.

Andy heard the rustle of dead leaves and immediately opened his eyes. He had been traumatized ever since the incident the night before. It was morning; and the sun shone in the pale azure sky. Andy looked down. Next to the tree stood the police officer with the accent. “It’s okay. You can come down now. Your family is very worried ‘bout ya,” he coaxed. Andy hugged the trunk and slowly released his grip, so he could slide down. He drowsily followed the police officer, which appeared to Andy as a blur of blue. In forty grueling minutes, they were at the entrance of the woods. Andy slowly stepped out, giving his eyes time to adjust to the light. His family rushed toward him, and they all shared a family hug. Andy’s appearance sent into motion a frenzy of questions shot like bullets from the mouths of his perturbed parents. “Are you hurt? Where are your glasses? What happened? Why did you go in there? Are you hurt?”

“Can we just go home?” Andy croaked in reply.

Andy was sure not to let anyone see his calf. He purposely lagged behind and made odd stances to keep everyone from seeing his appalling wound. “Are you sure you’re okay?” Andy’s mother asked, thankfully not bothering to turn around.

“I’m okay mom. You don’t need to ask me anymore,” Andy fibbed, trying to sound as natural as possible. The rest of the drive home was silent. Mr. Nickol didn’t bother to break the silence.

The Nickol’s arrived back at their home. Now, Andy just needed to get to his room and put on a new pair of pants. Just as he was entering the corridor, he heard his mother, “Andy, come here.” Andy walked into their living room and sat on the gashed sofa. “Andy, are you sure you’re okay? Don’t lie to me. You looked pretty beat up when you walked out of those woods,” Mrs. Nickol said concerningly.

“I’m fine mom,” Andy lied. His temperature escalated. She seemed suspicious.

“Well, your father and I are going to check, just to make sure,” Mrs. Nickol said sincerely. Andy’s father walked over to where Andy was sitting.

“I’m starting with your legs, so I am going to need you to lift your left leg up,” Mr. Nickol stated.

“Okay,” Andy answered nervously. He must have been sweating profusely. Andy elevated



his left leg and Mr. Nickol began to roll up his pant leg. "*Shoot,*" Andy thought.