

Adams County Library SHORT STORY CONTEST ENTRY

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Opportunity's Meadows

SNAP!

A scorched Crabapple tree plummets down towards me, skimming my leg as I crawl away. Quickly, I turn over and brush off the ashes. Everything is just as it was moments ago. Crows caw in the distance, mockingbirds sing a somber tune, leading the predators closer. An injured fawn, helpless under the fallen Crabapple is soon the crow's newest victim. "Go, get away from there!" I shout at the crows, standing to remove my slipper. I fling the slipper at the crows with all my might, missing terribly. They carry on dismembering the fawn like it's an everyday task. Which I suppose it is for crows. The sight is unbearable, I shut my eyes and fall back to the ground. Teardrops begin to stain my nightgown, pooling at my now-bare foot. "Curse you *Opportunity!*" I scream at my meadow.

"Shoo, go on now!" My head spins toward the noise. Startled, I take in the boy fending off the crows, looking strangely attractive in his night clothes. The crows scatter, but the boy swats after them long after they're gone. Then, after taking care of the crows, he approaches me cautiously. I watch him hesitantly, I've always been alone on Opportunity, especially in my meadow.

"Thank you," I mumble politely. He nods, extending a fair, ash-covered hand. I take it with my own, and am swiftly brought off the ground. "I'm Moira," I announce in an effort to find out more about this strange boy. He doesn't respond. He doesn't even shake my hand, only *stares* with breathtakingly-bright blue eyes. "I've never seen you before," I say, prompting answers. Again, no response. I wonder if he's a mute and I only imagined him speaking to the crows. Or maybe he's like Portia and communicates telepathically. Before I can come to a conclusion he tugs my hand, urging me to follow him.

We walk for a long while before stopping at a towering stone wall, identical to the one that appeared across the meadow. I observe the boy, taking in his long dark hair and fair skin, his beautiful eyes, narrowed in concentration. Also his tall, firm build against battered night clothes. I notice how similar they are to my own, gray cotton with fleece lining. Then, suddenly, his hand is drawn from mine and placed on the wall. I ignore the gesture and go back to observing, his eyes have hardened into a look of concern.

"Don't you speak? I swear I heard you yelling at the crows," I say, breaking the silence. He doesn't respond, just goes on searching the wall. "Alright then," I mutter. Instead of standing around awkwardly, I decide to help him search the wall, and, after searching far too long for who-knows-what, I stop and approach him again. Instead of speaking, I touch his shoulder and try to communicate with my mind, like I do with Portia. Finally, he acknowledges me, he turns around, confusion clear on his face. Then, he laughs. Startled, I jump, then glare to cover my embarrassment. "How dare you!" I exclaim. He laughs even harder, causing my face to flush. "I don't see what could possibly be so funny about this situation-" I'm cut off when finally, he speaks.

"I'm Peter," he says. *That's it?* I exhale in disbelief, turn, and march away from him and his stupid wall. "Wait, I'm sorry about your meadow!" he calls. I keep marching. "Please stop, you'll lose your way. I'll never find you again!" I ignore him, like he did me. His footsteps increase in speed and volume, so I run. I've ran in my meadow hundreds of times, but this is unlike any of those. Mostly, because my meadow is now a field of ashes. Soon, I sprint as fast as I can, breathing heavily and pumping my arms as hard as possible. I'm hardly tired when the Crabapple tree brings me to a halt. The crows are back at the fawn. "I thought you'd never stop," Peter pants. I turn to find him doubled over. Even worn out he looks attractive.

"Well, there aren't many places to run and running in circles won't get me anywhere so I suppose I'll just sit here and wait for the crows to take me too!" I exclaim. The tears make their way back, I beg them to stop but they persevere nonetheless. "Lovely." I breathe, then find a seat on the Crabapple's stump, as far away ^{from} everything as possible. Not catching on, Peter plops down beside me.

"You know, I was trying to get us out of here before you ran off," he says. I shake my head, but instead of words an ugly sob breaks out. "Oh, don't cry," he says softly, queuing more sobs. "Moirra, I really am sorry." Peter places his hand on mine, somehow making me feel a bit better. I look up, meeting his eyes, which are full of sincerity. "Won't you come back with me? I think I found the place I entered from, maybe we can use it to get out." I nod and sniffle back the sobs. Gently, he takes my hand and leads me back to the wall.

"It was right here," he says to himself. I try to find whatever we're looking for, but the place on the wall he seems to believe is our escape looks just like every other bit of the wall. Down a ways, though, a bit of green stands out of the charred meadow. I make my way over to it quickly, grateful something escaped the fire. Beside the miracle grass, a rectangular crack hardly an inch wide lines the wall. Looking back at Peter, he's still searching his section, shoving it occasionally. I try the same thing, pushing against the wall next to the crack. Something moves. I push with all my might, but it's too heavy.

"Peter, I've found it!" I exclaim. He observes my struggle and quickly takes action. Exerting most of our energy, we open the wall. Past us lies Peace Creek, hiding from the fire. I nearly topple over into the water, luckily Peter grabs me before I get too far. Hysterical laughs of relief escape my mouth, and soon Peter's laughing too. Eventually, we find ourselves on the ground, laughing like the children we are. "My goodness was that exciting," I say through our fit.

"That's one way to put it," Peter acknowledges. We roll onto our sides, facing each other and soon, we've gotten ourselves under control. "There's one thing I don't understand, what started the fire?" Peter asks. I think back to when I arrived. Recalling the events before then, I remember falling asleep, waking at Opportunity's Gates. All of this... *No, it can't be.*

"Oh Peter, it was all just a dream," I say disbelievingly.

"That's the last thing you remember too, huh. We both dreamt all this up?" I ponder his question, is this just part of my imagination?

"Where are you from, Peter?" I ask, realizing our time together may be limited.

"I can't remember, I can't remember much honestly. Just Portia bringing me to my meadow on the other side of Peace Creek, right after I fell asleep. Just like any other night." He pauses, reads my face, and continues. "Then, I noticed Portia flying away into a cloud of smoke. I ran after her, worried, and discovered this wall. I searched for an opening and found that crack. On the other side I heard yelling, never had there been another person on Opportunity besides

myself. So, I ran towards the voice, and there you were crying by the Crabapple tree," Peter says definitively.

"Portia, that's my Dreamcatcher," I respond. "She brings me to my meadow each and every night, and it's just like you said. There's never been another person. Until now-"

Suddenly a familiar smell sweeps between us, grabbing our attention. Then a loud *THUD!* Following the noise, recognition hits. As quickly as possible I spring to my feet, running straight through Peace Creek, forgetting about Peter running beside me. I reach Portia shortly after him, wrapping my arms a quarter of the way around her neck. My mind reaches out to her. "It's alright child, I am here," coos her soothing motherly voice telepathically.

I climb onto her petalled wings so she can push me to her back. Once mounted, I situate myself like always, but upon scooting back I remember we are not alone. My back hits a solid mass. *Peter.* I look back to see him relieved as I am. He scoots back, leaving me plenty of room. I smile, closing the space between us.

Before we take off, something tickles my leg. I glance down to see Portia's tail batting my ankles. I listen carefully to what she has to say, but all is silent. *Strange.* I find her emerald green saucers looking straight through me. Looking back towards Peter, who appears to be rolling his eyes, finally I comprehend. "What's she saying?" I ask.

"She's saying that I need to hold on to you, in case you fall asleep since you can't really sit like normal with me here," he says. I roll my eyes too, Portia knows as well as I do that I'd never fall off. But, I wouldn't mind being a little safer. Portia jolts abruptly up onto her hind legs, flinging me backwards into Peter, who unnecessarily wraps his arms around my waist.

"It doesn't look like we have a choice," I remark after Portia's cheap move. She must've been reading my thoughts.

"No, I don't think we do," Peter agrees. His arms tighten some as Portia leaps up into the sky. I lean a little more against him. "If you want, you can come to my meadow while yours is under the mend," Peter whispers into my ear.

"Deal," I whisper back, uncontrollable warmth flooding my face.

It doesn't take long for sleep to take over, my efforts towards staying awake are helpless. In my dreams, I recall tonight's events in vivid detail. Each time, I forgive the fire a little more. Sometimes, I even wonder if the fire was meant to happen. Perhaps Portia caused the fire to bring me to Peter, or rather, Peter to me.

Promptly, I'm jolted awake, my eyes open to the real world.

"Good morning dear!" a round, bright-eyed nurse shouts down at me, like I can't understand what she's saying. Then, "how was your sleep Miss. White?"

"Wonderful," I reply, smiling.

"Anything exciting happen in Opportunity?" She asks. I nod my head and reach for my journal, where I recall last night's adventure. "Here's your medicine dear," the nurse interrupts. I thank her and pretend to swallow it down. I'm not crazy, no matter how many doctors say I am.

Once she's left, I hide the pills in the same place I've been storing them for the last three and a half years, deep inside my mattress. I dress and make my way to the cafeteria, where the insane and mentally ill have their breakfasts and argue with their doctors. A dark-haired, lean doctor sits at a table with two full trays, inviting me over.

As I take my seat, pleasant conversation begins. Routine questions and the regular answers follow. This time though, after we finish, instead of just wishing me a great day he adds

in a, "I'm glad to see you're getting better!" My eyes follow him all the way to Dr. Baldwin. Today, instead of ignoring my diagnosis, I listen to them.

"These dreams of hers are changing, I'm starting to believe them myself, George," says the dark-haired doctor. "Interestingly, this one lined up perfectly with another patient's downstairs, same diagnosis. The way she described her dream it sounds just like him, and *his* description resembled her completely."

"Which patient would that be?" asks Dr. Baldwin.

"Peter Mason," answers the dark-haired doctor.