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## 15-19 Age Group Overall Winner

### To Sleep In the Snow

Megan B.

He had long lost remembrance of what exactly it was that he searched for, but his surroundings gave him a general idea. The wind that pelted his face, and the snow that he sank into with each step told him that he sought warmth. Fire, and shelter, and heat, and relief.

Yes, this is what drove them to walk on, him and...and...where was she? He stopped, breaking the ice off his eyelids as he looked about. Perhaps she had taken a rest. Something felt distinctly wrong about that, but he shrugged it off and continued on. After all, she wouldn't be the first to have stopped for a brief respite.

Even now he could see people sleeping in the snow, all around. Some were blanketed in frozen moisture, as though they thought it would bring them comfort. Of those who were entirely visible, though—some still had hands outstretched, even their dreams not allowing them rest.

He didn't understand why they all had stopped in their search. They were so close! Already the bite of the cold was fading, and he could no longer feel the fridity of the wind as it swept around him, pushing and pulling him about with the gusts of snow.

As he stumbled on, he became convinced that he was mere steps from his destination. A subtle warmth had begun to emanate from the center of his chest; not like the harsh heat of the sun, but more the gentle comfort offered in the most pleasant of moments. He used to feel this warmth often—playing on the rocks with Laura, teaching her to whistle to the marmots...

Laura. His daughter. Panic seized him in a deathly grip, jaws of ice piercing his addled bliss. Where was she? Where was his little girl? He tried to cast his eyes round about, but found that through his now heavily ice-coated eyelids he could see very little. Just white, and the vague outlines of those fast asleep in the snow.

He stopped dead in his tracks, and attempted to open his numb lips to call for her, but they ignored the message from his brain. His legs, unable to shift from the constant motion they'd been subject to for an inestimable amount of time, buckled beneath him. It may have been seconds or minutes before he registered that he lay on the ground. He mustered the energy to roll over and crawl, feeling blindly around a landscape that he couldn't feel, searching for...for...who was she?

His fingers were impeded by something solid, and he ran his hands over the object. It was a person, he thought, although they didn't so much as budge when he feebly shook them with all the strength he had remaining. Perhaps they had the right idea. Rest, and then continue his, his search? His journey? Yes, some sleep would do him good. He found he was already lying in the snow, although his legs still felt like they were carrying him forward. That warmth, it enveloped him from within, shining its rays from his soul with such a quiet intensity that he felt his cracked lips edge ever so slightly upwards.

Straining his ears, he could swear he heard the gentle cackle of fire, even through the ever-lessening howl of the wind. On his skin came the sensation of wonderful heat, the tongues of flame stretching out to welcome him. And with his frostbitten nose he smelled the sweet fragrance of smoke that curled around him in the air, embracing him with ethereal arms.

At last he had arrived, he knew, at the warm place which had so long beckoned. The snow cradled him, a pleasantly firm cushion which lulled him to sleep. Filled with indescribable relief, he let the darkness take him. He only hoped she would arrive at this wondrous place soon after him—although something whispered to his last fragment of consciousness that she was already there waiting.