

KAYLA ALLEN

ASPEN TREES AND WINTER

Two hikers walked together, hand in hand. The snow fell gently and steadily, it clung to itself in thick, heavy bunches on the pine trees and weighed down the boughs. The grey sky trapped the travelers in a snow globe of a forest. No birds flew below the clouds. No leaves rustled on the cold white trees. Even the river had come to a stand still.

"I don't want to go on anymore," the girl said to break the silence.

"We can take a break."

"That's not what I meant."

He knew what she meant, but pretended not to. He sat down with her on a rock near the frozen river and admired the beauty of life stuck in the moment by the winter.

"I feel cold when I'm sad," she told him.

"It's snowing," he said. "Maybe you're sad because you're cold. I'll warm you up."

She shrugged off his offer. "Aren't you cold?" Her voice was as isolating as the harsh season.

"I have you."

"You're never cold," she scoffed. "Like a penguin. You're like a penguin."

The sun tried breaking through the clouds.

"Did you know penguins mate for life?" he asked.

"That's a myth; they only mate for the season."

Nearby, the empty branches of a tree cracked under the weight of the snow. The sound echoed around the couple and faded away.

"Poor tree," he said.

"It's just a tree."

"The roots are connected to the other trees. Did you know that?"

"So?"

"If one gets sick, they all get sick."

"But they don't all feel that pain," she insisted.

"Maybe they do."

"Maybe that tree was meant to break; it's not as strong as the other trees."

"That still doesn't mean it doesn't feel pain." The other trees remained motionless, bearing the weight of the snow in their branches.

"I bet they're all cold," she whispered into the silence. She stood up again and the snow fell off her shoulders.

"Come on, I don't want to make you sick."

And they walked away from there, hand in hand.