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Mr. Palshaw

English IV

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The Ascent

 The cool, afternoon breeze wound its way through the branches and wide trunks of the tall, green pine trees lining the side of the mountain. Finding its way to the face of a man traversing the side of the mountain, the firm wind continued to do its work, turning the smooth nose and ears of the man to a bright red color and causing tears to form at the base of the man's eyes.

 The man walked step by step, following the narrow, zigzagging trail that curved and bent through the trees. The trail was not well-trodden, and brush poked out at the man; he felt the constant prodding of tiny branches sliding against and tickling his worn khaki cargo pants and new navy blue Northface jacket. Every other step, a twig would snap and crunch under the man’s brown boots, and he continued to walk, his short, dirty blonde hair whipping in the wind and at times flashing across his eyes.

Nearing the top of the mountain, his pace sped as the anticipation of reaching the summit heightened. His black Osprey backpack filled with his essentials felt heavier with each step, and the man’s back began to feel sweaty and slimy under it. To distract himself from his tiring legs, he listened to the wind lapping at the branches of the trees and the constant singing and tweeting of the birds. In the distance, he heard the wild cry of a hawk echo throughout the valley which lay sandwiched between the ridges of green mountains and peaks.

Up ahead of him, the man saw a brown squirrel scuttling up the side of a tree, pause for a moment, and continue, seconds later followed by another smaller squirrel trying to keep up. As the man continued, the treeline became visible and he pushed on towards the edge of the trees.

The man emerged from the cover of the trees, and as he did, the warm rays of the sun cut through the crisp air and landed upon his face, warming his eyes and cheeks. His recently mudded and worn boots finally came into contact with the firm, grassy dirt at the tip of the mountain, and now with the granite mountain-top less than 75 yards away, his feet fell into a rhythmic pattern over the loose gravel topping the soil.

The higher he got, the more of the expansive valley he was able to see, until finally, he could go no higher. As his head turned, he gazed from the right to left side of the valley, and he stepped onto a rock protruding from the ground covered in green and rust-colored moss.

Finally, he was able to see the snow-covered peaks of the mountains in the distance, and after meeting the gaze of the horizon, his eyes searched through the blue skies, passing over thin wispy clouds and momentarily finding the remnants of the trail of a jet plane that had passed earlier.

As he stood, the warming sun soaked into his tanning skin, and the wind that had previously caused him to shiver fought against the heat of the sun on his face and hands. He remained motionless and felt the 14-24mm f/2.8 lens of his Nikon Z6 camera that was in the bottom of his backpack digging into the base of his spine.

Beginning to turn back towards where he had previously come from, a flash of brown at the edge of the treeline caught his attention. He stopped; his relaxed body became tense, his muscles tightening and his eyebrows furrowing. Seeing the flash of brown yet again, he lowered himself slowly from the rock, moving himself low to the ground and maneuvering his way to the side of the rock, the fleeting sight of the color brown transforming into an enormous shadow.

As he crouched in the shadow of the big rock, he stayed as still as the rock itself, and as the figures emerged from the line of the trees, he stopped breathing completely. Stumbling into sight came two bear cubs, and as the mother of the bear appeared, the man’s eyes bulged and looked as if they would pop out of his head. At the size of a small minivan, the bear towered over the cubs and stood just as tall as the man when it was on all fours.

The cubs continued to circle each other playfully, bouncing on top of one another, and moving as fast as their short legs could carry them, which was just as fast as the mother of the cubs could walk. The sun glistened off of the thick hair of the bears, and the wind rustled through their fur like long grass in a prairie.

The man continued to watch as the bears made their way along their path parallel to the line of trees. As he watched them, he slowly took off his backpack, bringing it around to the front of his body and setting it down on the grass. In doing this, his eyes never left the trio of bears, and he began to slowly and quietly unzip his backpack. Extending his arm deep into the backpack, he pulled out his Nikon camera, bringing it out using the strap covered in stickers including a yellow National Geographic sticker.

He slowly raised the camera, pointing it towards the bears who would shortly retract into the trees that they had only just come out of. As he brought it to his face, he flipped the switch on the top of the camera to “On”.

As he looked at the black LED touchscreen of the camera, he stared, unmoving, opening his eyes and closing them shortly after, not wanting to open them. He looked down, holding his camera losely and moving his hands up to cover his tearing eyes.

On the screen of the camera there was a bright red message flashing : “Missing SD card.”