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Autumn With the Elk

By Lauren M. Smith

The following story was written by Lauren M. Smith of Greer, South Carolina. Lauren is currently in fifth grade. We encourage all young writers to let their imaginations soar! Try to practice your writing skills every day.



There was a girl whose name was Michelle. She was eleven years old. Her family lived in the woods of the Colorado Mountains in the summer and fall. In the winter and spring, they lived in Florida. It was interesting for Michelle to be in the middle of the woods with the animals, including coyotes, elk, mule deer, rabbits, chipmunks, and various birds. In the fall, the aspen leaves turned bright yellow and the mule deer and elk began their rut.

So one fall day, Michelle was out in the woods,

listening to all the birds, and watching all the aspen leaves float to the ground. The air was cool, dry, and smelled like pine trees. Michelle sat on a log and listened to the wind and to the birds.

Suddenly, there was a CLASH, CRASH! Michelle was so startled she jumped up! What was that?

She saw it. Several cow elk were heading towards her, with a bull in the back. She wasn't too close to them. Still, she knew she should leave. She quietly walked away. The elk stopped walking, turned around, and walked away.

Michelle was still excited about what had just happened. She began wondering, "Why did they come towards me?"

Then she realized that while she had been silently sitting and enjoying the nature, the elk had not realized she was there. Moreover, the wind was going in the wrong direction for them to smell her.

When she got back to her house, she told her mother and father what had happened.

"That's interesting," her Mom said. "I wonder if they will come near our house."

What Mom said made Michelle remember what had happened last year in fall. They had heard elk bugles deeper in the woods. About an hour after they had heard the bugling, the elk surrounded their house for 15 minutes. The bull of the 12-cow harem had seven points on each antler.



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"Michelle, listen!" Mom's sudden voice interrupted Michelle's thoughts. Outside the house, the same bull and harem she had seen earlier were eating grass. "This is just like it was last year," Michelle said. The bull elk bugled loud and clear. This was so neat! This had happened before, but this was the first time this season.

The bull bugled again, and one cow came wandering from the woods. Michelle looked at the bull. What would it do? It went behind the new cow and urged her into his little group. By this time, all the cows were lying down. Michelle grabbed her camera and took a photo of the bull elk with the cows.

CLOMP! CLOMP! Another bull came out of the woods. He had obviously heard the other bulls bugling. Now, he came to challenge him.

The first bull was large, but the second bull was even larger. The first bull bugled the loudest so far, and the second bull slowly retreated.

Everything was exciting. Would the second bull change his mind and challenge?

That didn't happen, though. The second bull went off, while the first bull watched.

A few minutes afterward, the bull went behind his cows and herded them into the woods.

"That was neat!" Michelle exclaimed.

That night, Michelle lay in her bed, listening to all the sounds of night. Once, a coyote howled. She heard rustling before she fell asleep.

She woke the next morning to hear the door shut and Mom say, "Yes, I think so."

"What? What do you mean?" Michelle asked.

"We found that something ate some of our little aspen trees. Mom checked it out and it appears that elk have been eating them," Dad replied.

"But how? How did you know they were elk?" Michelle asked.

"Put on your shoes and I'll show you," said Mom.

Mom led Michelle outside to their little aspen trees they had planted. "Look on the ground," Mom said.

Michelle looked. There were footprints, elk footprints. "Oh, I see," Michelle said.

"They're elk tracks. When do you suppose they came?"

"Oh, around dusk, maybe, or while we were sleeping. Maybe it was even that herd that was here yesterday," Mom replied.

Michelle remembered the rustling sound she had heard last night. Maybe it was an elk, Michelle thought.

After breakfast, Michelle went down to a river on their property, which was about 1/4 mile away. When she got to the river, she thought it was nice to hear its rushing sound.

In the sand, there were some mule deer tracks. She watched aspen leaves rush down the river in highly flowing areas.

As Michelle sat there, she thought it was so nice to be in Colorado in fall. She was able to see elk and aspens and birds and deer and other animals.

Some days later, after the weather had gotten cooler, Michelle woke up to find a tiny dusting of snow on the front porch. All around, there was the slightest layer of snow. That meant that colder weather was coming. And that meant they would be leaving soon. Michelle and her parents began packing up to go back to Florida. As Michelle was helping pack, she heard more bugling. The elk were out again. Michelle stopped for a moment to watch them.



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The bull elk, an eight-point, stood in the woods nearby. Michelle knew eight-point males were very rare, so she called Mom and Dad. "Wow!" Michelle said. "We almost never see eight-pointers!"

The bull looked into the woods. "What's up there?" wondered Mom aloud.

Right then they saw another bull with seven points. He stared at the other bull and bugled loudly. The eight-point bull bugled back. Neither withdrew, and after a few bugles, the seven-point bull charged the other. They locked horns, and pushed each other around the yard. They fought for about ten minutes, until the seven-point bull walked away.

"The first time this season we've seen bulls lock antlers!" Michelle remarked.

Michelle and her parents went back to their packing, but not all did they pack. Some things they left at the house, including *A Guide to the Wildlife of the Colorado Rocky Mountains* because they would not need that back in Florida.

About a week later, more snow lay on the ground. The nights got colder. Fall was slowly leaving. Another week later, Michelle and her family left. They locked the doors of the house after packing everything in the car. "Goodbye, Colorado," Michelle whispered. She was a little sad about leaving, but she knew they would be coming back next summer.

The End

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