



Alphonse Mucha,
'Spring', 1896.

The Meeting of Winter and Spring

Amelia Brown

Frost littered the ground like tiny specks of metal, while the trees seemed to have huddled their branches in tightly as though they could keep out the cold. And that was the way Winter liked it. In fact, one might say he thrived on it. Too, one could also say that it was the only way he could survive.

Each night he strode out into the world and froze it. Gently, at times. Delicately, with the finesse necessary to paint a thousand designs of brittle ice. And, too, there were times of harsh strokes, where ice and snow poured out frozen death – though Winter would call it naught but art. In any manner, he made the world over in crystal, and gave it cold, stark beauty. And if it were up to him, the world would never be any other way.

But it was not up to him.

It was the Sun that stood master over Winter's fate. And as it grew, each year, hanging longer about the sky, Winter's stride turned to creeping, and then to crawling, until he could bear the brunt of brightness no longer.

So it went, a routine to which he never became accustomed. And he grew angry in his bitterness, taking it out upon the land where he displayed his might brutally with storms and sleet and hoarfrost. He was beautiful in his splendour, glorious in the marvels he created. But there were few to see him in his element. Indeed, it was only the Moon as yet who was free to watch Winter work – and, having become enamoured, claimed him a wonder among wonders.

Spring herself had never seen Winter's face, but she felt the chill of his cold ebbing at the fringes of her season. The power of Winter beat against her each year, pushing at her own hand, making her early tasks joyless in their difficulty. There was little she could do against the forceful depths of Winter's deep frustration, save to persist, and make small touches where she could, and say a prayer that the Sun would shine all the stronger to break Winter's late frosts with an eye toward making him weak. But each year, Winter's hold seemed longer, more unbearable. And that which she sowed produced less and less until her yield grew small. Thus, resentment grew in Spring's breast against Winter.

It came to pass one day that Spring walked the land at nightfall. Her time was waning gently, as was the result of Summer's lethargic way. It was none too soon for Spring, for she was weary with much toil and longed to sink deep into the dank soil and sleep. Looking up, she saw the Moon. It dawned on her then that the Moon was there regardless of season, and thus bore witness to Winter's work. Perhaps, with careful cunning, Spring could cultivate an ally in subduing Winter's long-lasting torment.

'Oh Moon,' she called, a subtle plan and longer plot unravelling in her mind, 'Tell me of Winter. How does he work his craft? Tell me all you know.'

At the question, the Moon surprised Spring. Light poured out and lit the sky like a million candles flaring into being all at once. And then the Moon said, 'I say to you, Spring, there is nothing like Winter's work, or Winter himself. He is dark and broad and strong, yet can work gentle art, as he covers the world in strokes of pure white so masterful, the gods weep to see them. He is deft and clever, and in his rages, his work is all the more wondrous.'

On and on the Moon waxed, extolling Winter's artistic virtues, as Spring seethed with a growing fury that could well match that of Winter's. And as her anger grew, so did her plan.

'Moon,' she said, 'he sounds more incredible than a view of a thousand stars and as fair as the white frost he creates.'

'Ah, but as I have told you, Spring,' returned the Moon with a voice clipped beneath pursed lips, 'he is not fair. He is dark. And all the more beautiful for it.'

A mistake, thought Spring. She would have to pay close attention. For she knew now that the Moon would hear nothing bad nor wrong of Winter. And for that she would need to tread all the lighter.

'Indeed, I meant to say as wondrous as the frost he creates,' Spring said.

'Truly, Spring, he is so.' And in awe of memory, the Moon's annoyance faded as quickly as it had come.

'I would that I could see him in all his glory,' Spring said with wistful tones, as though it were a thing impossible.

'So you would, so you would,' agreed the Moon, 'For there is no spectacle more incredible.'

'I wonder,' said Spring, as though she had just thought of the idea, 'could you find a way that I might see him as he performs his great feats?'

The Moon was delighted that someone else could see Winter work, and together the Moon and Spring could provide an appreciative audience to his craftsmanship.

'I shall make a mirror of moonlight, and you may carry it with you. That way you will see him when you wake, when the tips of his work reaches the fringes of your own. It is not his glory, but it is well enough, for even his small touches are a sight to behold.'

'How kind you are, Moon,' Spring said, and her heart leapt within her at the vengeful plot she had in store for her dark foe.

Thus, with the mirror of moonlight in her hand, she settled down to rest.

Time passed, and soon Winter set out in his season, his wrath swelling as the days grew dark. He came as early as he could and set the world to ice. Nightly he strode over his work with perfect tweaks, an artist as always in the surety of his craft. And as the Sun reached higher in the sky, his bitter heart grew colder, and he took the night for his own.

But as he took possession of only night, Spring had awoken and took over the day. And she had the advantage of him, for she could see him working in the mirror of moonlight that had lasted in her hand through her long sleep. Where he spread his ice, she pushed up hardy shoots to crack it. Where he let late snow fall, she filled early blooms with sunlight to keep them warm and melt the snow as soon as it touched the earth. And where he carved his designs in frost, she touched the windows with gentle breezes and withered them away.

As her work filled his with needles of destruction, Winter's fury grew. There was little he could do, for his power waned, and soon he was forced to retreat. But vengeance burned ice-cold in his heart as he felt his prison of rest overtake him.

Spring delighted in her victories. And in her joy, she made the merriest season that had yet been seen, filled with floral beauty and foliage the likes of which transformed the earth into bowers fit for gods. Those that saw her work marvelled at the artistry – and none could look on her craftsmanship without thinking that Spring had fully come into her own.

The Moon looked on Spring's work and saw that it, too, was wondrous – as wondrous as Winter's labours. But so much did the Moon delight in Winter that regret filled the cold white face for having given Spring a mirror of moonlight. And anger bloomed within the orb at Spring's defiant ways.

When Winter returned, the ice-fire raging in his breast had not cooled with the passage of time. His anger burned white and filled the season with hoarfrost and snowstorms. For the first time, his rage did not suit his purpose – for his work no longer had the grace or delicacy that had once made him a master. And by the time Spring had woken, and planted her steady traps, Winter was steeped in a weariness he had never felt before. Bitter and saddened at the loss of his season, he turned to the Moon. 'Moon,' he asked, 'What know you of this Spring that shortens my time, heats my cold vengeance, and drives me to despair?'

'Ah,' spoke the Moon tentatively, feeling a heavy burden of guilt for the part the mirror of moonlight played – and, for all that, a reluctance to confess. 'She is a crafty one.'

'But how does she spoil my plans, Moon? How does she know the intricacies of my handiwork? It is as though she watches me. I must know and I must make her pay.'

The Moon agreed this must be so. Thus, the white face crafted a mirror of moonlight for Winter as well. 'Look into it as your power wanes when I am in the sky, though it is light, and you will see her work through my eyes.'

And so, the Moon was satisfied that Winter would conquer Spring.

Winter would have done so, indeed his mind eagerly awaited the prospect of planning his revenge. But his body's power was gone, his strength ebbed by the Sun. And so another season passed, and he rested in seething fury.

But when he woke, strong and ready to begin his careful artistry, his simmering anger had worked its way into a passion, and it drove him through his season, as he waited eagerly to catch his foe.

After the breaking of the first frost, when the first time came where the Sun and the Moon took to the sky together, he looked into his mirror of moonlight, with eager abandon, keen to see what there would be, come nightfall, to destroy.

But instead of the flushing heat of rage and anger, or the plotting hardness of his revenge, his breath caught.

There was Spring reflected in Winter's eyes, planting bulbs and sowing hardy seeds about the melted snow, its designs so delicate that it would cause almost all who looked upon her work to admire each moment of growth with delighted anticipation. But this is not why Winter's breath caught, at least, perhaps, not wholly.

What made his fury cease, Winter would not allow himself to say. But he found he had no will to rage. No desire to send the hoarfrost down in waves upon Spring's bulbs until they burst, nor to let ice encase buds pushed up out of shoots. Nor did he want to cover the ground she tilled with snow so that she would have to labour longer. Instead, he began to cover her work in the lightest snow. He carved intrinsic patterns about the frost in an artistry he hoped that she would see and admire, with the lightest ice only to be seen in the briefest of glances of the morning. He blew soft winter wind upon her brow when he saw her tire from great toil under the sun. And as his power waned, and he laid down to rest, he found that he would miss her.

Spring did not notice the change in Winter, so intent was she on sabotage. But when Winter was no more that year, she thought of the gentle snows whose melt helped to water her newly sown seeds, of the carved beauty of the frost ever-fleeting in the morning light that had greeted her each day. She thought of the soft winter wind that cooled her brow and was no more as the Sun beat down all the hotter. And she found her heart grow strangely heavy. There was sadness in the fact that she could do no more to antagonise Winter; that she could no longer see his dark, handsome face toiling in his final days. She felt as though her time of play had passed far too quickly. And as she fell asleep to the balmy winds of Summer, she longed for the moment again when she would wake up.

Winter woke again in his season and relished his growing strength. He brought about frost and snow in abundance, but no longer did he rage and decorate the world with bitter hoarfrost. For hidden within his thoughts was a longing for the moment he would witness the beginning of Spring's work. Thus, he strewed patterned ice and scattered crisp chills with a lightness of heart that had not been since the beginning of his age.

The Moon took note that Winter no longer passed his season in destructive rage, and thought it done, perhaps, to better let an orb's light reflect, so lovely did it glitter. It did not dawn on the pale-white face that he should perform his craft bearing love for someone else.

Spring eagerly woke with unusual vigour when her season came. She went to her mirror of moonlight eager to see Winter's craft and where she might begin her work. In his diminished strength, Winter had taken to staring into the mirror of moonlight for long stretches, awaiting a sight of enchanting Spring. And so it was that they looked into their mirrors and caught the eye of the other – and in that look, they loved.

But they were not the only eyes seeing by moonlight, for the Moon saw the look that passed between them and found sudden understanding. A jealous anger began to burn, for the orb could not bear the thought that it had no part of Winter's heart – and that all his passion stemmed from Spring. Thus, in a burst of rage, the Moon shattered the mirrors of moonlight and sent the shards scattering to the Four Winds.

So it was that Winter and Spring would know no more than a single glance. A great sadness fell upon them both. But their tears did not end their love; indeed it grew all the stronger. And their seasons grew all the more wondrous. For there is no greater craftsmanship than that done in the hinge between sorrow and love.

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