

Subdivided Wilderness

After my mother gets off work, we go on a walk. It is on these walks that I am able to observe what my street really looks like. The aging houses of assorted color and material stick out like broken teeth crammed between tiny lawns: some manicured and some with tall, grassy brush. At the beginning of the street, the yards are littered with bicycles and plastic toy trucks, but there are no signs of children at the dead end.

We traverse down the street. When we come to the stop sign, we take a left. We have to be careful, because mothers in minivans like to speed through our neighborhood, convinced that the mass of their cars will save them from death.

After about ten paces, we come to the lake. We usually walk at sunset or night time, and the lake is beautiful in either. At sunset, the sky is mirrored on the waters' rippling surface. The colors are forms of pink, orange and violet, but the colors are so specific to the area that they lack names.

The lake at night is equally beautiful, but completely different. The deep blue of the sky shimmers and is fragmented upon the liquid body. Aquatic flora sticks up and breaks, more gracefully than could ever be arranged by human hand. The lake at night will own you.

A big, gold harvest moon tugs at me. When I pass the lake, I breathe, and I'm glad to be alive in a world with moons, lakes, and pond reeds.

The night-time does something else to the lake. It disguises the bordering houses and their fertilized lawns; the discarded chip bags and Natty Light cans; the dead, gray concrete bridge. In daylight, you can sprinkle crumbs on the water and turtles will swarm around like desperate refugees. In the night-time, they are regal. They spend their lives

winding through the moonlight.

We walk until the road ends. You can either take a left or a right. We usually go right. At this corner, an animal musk hits you in the face. If you were inexperienced with animal odors, you might automatically assume "skunk." For our particular region, however, it is more likely a fox.

I take a moment to examine a nearby garden. The lawn is heavily carpeted with flowers. We are entering "Richville," where everyone must compete for the most appealing yard on the block. Someone worked very hard on this, and somewhere in the thick shrubbery, a fox has made its den.

I have seen the fox in question a few times, a silvery ghost bounding from headlights. When I see him, I imagine being him. I wonder what language his thoughts are in, whether he thinks frogs or mice are tastier, and how long it's been since he caught something.

I wonder how the fox views the nearby golf course. The grass is foggy and dewy at morning and at night. The area is wide and open.

What a terrible place to be chased or followed.

The subdivision I live in sends out a magazine to its residents. It's mostly useless garbage, but the cover of the last edition features photos of foxes on the golf course. They are silver and crafty looking. One picture shows a fox sprinting away after noticing the photographer.

The road curves upwards. If you are not wearing good shoes, the bits of sticks and acorns may be uncomfortable underfoot. Alternately, occasional fallen clumps of damp moss are soft, cushiony.

Our turn-around point is the glowing convenience store sign at the roundabout. We go in and each buy a beverage, a treat.

On the way home, the trees creak and moths play in the street lights. Idiot drivers rocket down the road.

Sometimes as I walk, I believe when there are no cars, there is no sound. The reality is I am bombarded with so many sounds I forget I am hearing them. I practice listening: first, the crickets, who have one rhythm. Then the frogs, who have another. Their beats interlock. Then the owls, who are harder to detect. Surely, they must be in there, somewhere--yes, I hear one.

There is an animal on the sidewalk up ahead. He prances into the road, and I point at him. A fox!

The fox scratches around excitedly. He is probably chasing frogs or toads, which are plentiful here. My mother and I watch the fox; we're filled with a combination of girlish wonder and love.

It takes a while for him to spot us. We eye each other for a moment. Then he hears a car and scuttles back to his den in the hedges of the flowerbed, right where we knew he must live.

Although I love being a part of moments like these, I wish my neighborhood had never been built. These woods deserves better than the nitrate-laden super weeds and foreign grass that choke out the plants that should be here. These animals deserve better food than the scraps they sneak from our trash. They deserve more honorable deaths than being hit by expensive cars.

I know what my neighborhood would have looked like if it had never been developed. It would look like a forest, like the trails in the nearby state park. So many pieces of the equation are still here—long armed oak trees, palmettos, hawks, owls, box turtles, gopher tortoises, blue-bellied garter snakes that only live in North Florida. Egrets, great blue herons, and Canadian geese flock to our lakes. I even saw a bald eagle here, once. The memory of that moment is now so bizarre, it feels like a dream.

All this flora and fauna, but it's not a forest.

My mother and I return to our house. As my mother jangles her keys, trying to find the right one, I look back into the darkness. I see nothing but I still hear the many sounds. The crickets, the frogs, an owl. Again, their beats interlock.

Isabella Folmar is a student at SAIL High School in Tallahassee, Florida. She's also an accomplished songwriter and vocalist.