

5-24-2018

Nature's Paths

Chloe Switzer
Linfield College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.linfield.edu/englstud_theses



Part of the [Fiction Commons](#), [Nonfiction Commons](#), and the [Poetry Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Switzer, Chloe, "Nature's Paths" (2018). *Senior Theses*. 24.
https://digitalcommons.linfield.edu/englstud_theses/24

This Thesis (Open Access) is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It is brought to you for free via open access, courtesy of DigitalCommons@Linfield, with permission from the rights-holder(s). Your use of this Thesis (Open Access) must comply with the [Terms of Use](#) for material posted in DigitalCommons@Linfield, or with other stated terms (such as a Creative Commons license) indicated in the record and/or on the work itself. For more information, or if you have questions about permitted uses, please contact digitalcommons@linfield.edu.

Nature's Paths

by Chloe Switzer

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Bachelor of Arts in Creative Writing

Linfield College

5/24/2018

Approved by Signature redacted

THESIS COPYRIGHT PERMISSIONS

Please read this document carefully before signing. If you have questions about any of these permissions, please contact the [DigitalCommons Coordinator](#).

Title of the Thesis:

Nature's Paths

Author's Name: (Last name, first name)

Switzer, Chloe

Advisor's Name

Joe Wilkins

DigitalCommons@Linfield (DC@L) is our web-based, open access-compliant institutional repository for digital content produced by Linfield faculty, students, staff, and their collaborators. It is a permanent archive. By placing your thesis in DC@L, it will be discoverable via Google Scholar and other search engines. Materials that are located in DC@L are freely accessible to the world; however, your copyright protects against unauthorized use of the content. Although you have certain rights and privileges with your copyright, there are also responsibilities. Please review the following statements and identify that you have read them by signing below. Some departments may choose to protect the work of their students because of continuing research. In these cases, the project is still posted in the repository but content will only be accessible by individuals who are part of the Linfield community.

CHOOSE THE STATEMENT BELOW THAT DEFINES HOW YOU WANT TO SHARE YOUR THESIS. THE FIRST STATEMENT PROVIDES THE MOST ACCESS TO YOUR WORK; THE LAST STATEMENT PROVIDES THE LEAST ACCESS. CHOOSE ONLY ONE STATEMENT.

I **agree** to make my thesis available to the Linfield College community and to the larger scholarly community upon its deposit in our permanent digital archive, DigitalCommons@Linfield, or its successor technology. My thesis will also be available in print at Nicholson Library and can be shared via interlibrary loan.

OR

I **agree** to make my thesis available **only** to the Linfield College community upon its deposit in our permanent digital archive, DigitalCommons@Linfield, or its successor technology. My thesis will also be available in print at Nicholson Library and can be shared via interlibrary loan.

OR

I **agree** to make my thesis available in print at Nicholson Library, including access for interlibrary loan.

OR

I **agree** to make my thesis available in print at Nicholson Library only.

NOTICE OF ORIGINAL WORK AND USE OF COPYRIGHT-PROTECTED MATERIALS:

If your work includes images that are not original works by you, you must include permissions from the original content provider or the images will not be included in the repository. If your work includes videos, music, data sets, or other accompanying material that is not original work by you, the same copyright stipulations apply. If your work includes interviews, you must include a statement that you have the permission from the interviewees to make their interviews public. For information about obtaining permissions and sample forms, see <https://copyright.columbia.edu/basics/permissions-and-licensing.html>.

NOTICE OF APPROVAL TO USE HUMAN OR ANIMAL SUBJECTS:

If your research includes human subjects, you must include a letter of approval from the Linfield Institutional Review Board (IRB); see <https://www.linfield.edu/faculty/irb.html> for more information. If your research includes animal subjects, you must include a letter of approval from the Linfield Animal Care & Use Committee.

NOTICE OF SUBMITTED WORK AS POTENTIALLY CONSTITUTING AN EDUCATIONAL RECORD UNDER FERPA:

Under FERPA (20 U.S.C. § 1232g), this work may constitute an educational record. By signing below, you acknowledge this fact and expressly consent to the use of this work according to the terms of this agreement.

BY SIGNING THIS FORM, I ACKNOWLEDGE THAT ALL WORK CONTAINED IN THIS PAPER IS ORIGINAL WORK BY ME OR INCLUDES APPROPRIATE CITATIONS AND/OR PERMISSIONS WHEN CITING OR INCLUDING EXCERPTS OF WORK(S) BY OTHERS.

IF APPLICABLE, I HAVE INCLUDED AN APPROVAL LETTER FROM THE IRB TO USE HUMAN SUBJECTS OR FROM ANIMAL CARE & USE TO USE ANIMAL SUBJECTS.

Signature *Signature redacted*

Date 2018-07-24

Printed Name CHLOE SWITZER

Approved by Faculty Advisor *Signature redacted*

Date 6/25/18

This work has been a long time coming. It deals with relationships, nature, location, identity, future, and the concept of writing itself — all of which are topics I've found myself coming back to again and again in my writing. Finally, they're all in one place.

When I sat down to write this thesis, I envisioned it as a simple contemplation of the nature that I encounter in my every day life. There was a piece I'd written for nonfiction class that contemplated the meanings of various types of trees, and I saw that piece as a good example of what my whole thesis could look like. It was written initially as a response to and emulation of Kathleen Dean Moore's *Wild Comfort*. I imagined that the entire thesis could be written with the same influence in mind.

As I started writing, though, other topics kept creeping in. My relationships with others in and through nature, for example. Paths. Liminal spaces. My thesis was becoming much more widely-scoped than I had imagined it could be. My advisor suggested I rethink what I was trying to do — I had to make room in my idea of my thesis for all of these seemingly-unrelated topics. I say I had to make room in my idea, because there was already room in the thesis itself. The only thing that could have kept them out is my own narrow view of what my piece should be. So I rearranged and decluttered the space in my mind where my thesis lives, and I allowed myself to let all topics in, telling myself I'd worry about the related-ness of them later. This is a good strategy for me to keep in mind in my writing in general. I have a tendency to try to adhere too strictly to my own vision of the end product — in other words, I focus too

much on my own expectations and allow those expectations to keep me from making progress. In working on this project, I learned that it really is valuable to just write without worrying too much about whether or not I'm making "progress" toward what I currently perceive to be the final product. It's a lot easier to make something of something than of nothing. So, with this project, I just wrote, no worries of whether that particular bit would end up in the full thesis.

This acceptance of many topics caused the braided essay form to present itself. Each bit that came to me seemed to be too short to form a whole essay on its own — a paragraph or so often seemed to be all that a specific topic called for. Though the form had emerged through the variety in the subject matter, it also allowed for even more variety.

The challenge, then, was to make sure that the topics would not be too jarring for the reader to switch between. I could have arranged the snippets chronologically or geographically, but I think the randomness and jumping around is necessary to the effect that I want the thesis to have. That effect being a look into my brain and the things that I truly think about on a day-to-day basis.

That being said, the voice that the lyric essay is written in is more tailored than my conversational speech. The differences are minute, but the essay's voice evokes — or attempts to evoke, at the very least — a more whimsical tone. This is done through the references to magic and myth, and through the personifying of the natural elements.

That personifying is, I know, controversial. It deviates from what is strictly true. However, it is genuinely how I think of trees and plants when I see them. When I write

about plants as having personalities, it is not a literary device. It is my honest perception of them. I can acknowledge that it is not a scientific point of view to hold. But it is, I think, a spiritual point of view. I was taught — or somehow came to the conclusion from what I was taught — that everything living has a soul. Now that I'm older, I suppose I'm a little less sure of this, but I definitely still like the idea of it. And why couldn't it be true? If it is true, then it isn't that much of a stretch at all to attribute personalities to plants and animals.

In addition to the whimsical lyric essay, though, my advisor reminded me that I'd written a short story for a different class which was thematically almost identical to my thesis. It deals with relationships, natural elements, paths — all of it. I decided to include this story in my thesis to showcase an even wider variety.

The short story has a voice of its own. It's told from the point of view of the characters, so it takes on her worldview in the voice. The awe that's present in the lyric essay is still there, but it becomes less pronounced and tinged with weariness. This weariness is the most prominent difference in tone.

Because of the inclusion of two different genres of writing, it was logical to also include a poem to truly showcase the diversity of the writing that I had been working on over the past four years. This poem, about a willow tree, brings back the whimsical tone and even amplifies it from the level that it was at in the lyric essay.

I hope the relations between everything become clear with reading!

The question now is where to go from here. Will these past four years of dedication to reading and writing just fall to the wayside as I move on to bigger and better things? If I am being completely honest, sometimes it feels like that will be the case. But it can't be. I chose to do this for a reason — I really do love it.

Despite that love, I am planning to give serious writing a rest for a year or so. After a large project like this, I plan to focus on writing for myself for a while to regain that excitement that comes with it and dispel the feeling of pressure.

Shortly, though, I'm confident that I'll get the itch to write more seriously again, in a way that will push me to write on a regular basis and write well. That's the problem for writing for oneself — it doesn't have to be good. After a while, I'll want to write something that's good. I don't have a plan for what that will be — maybe a blog, which will lend itself to the length and style of writing that I feel most comfortable in.

As a reader, I have grown indescribably in my ability to discuss books and other works with others. This has also changed the way that I read when I read for fun — I notice so much more in books than I ever did before. I am also significantly more interested in classic literature than before, and plan to read many more classic novels after graduation. Maybe I'll join — or even start — a book club. Either way, reading has always been important to me, and that's just as true now as it ever was before.

Table of Contents

Love of Place	7
Cheers: 8	
In-Between: 9	
What's Her's: 10	
Harsh: 11	
A Sign Above the Door: 12	
Droplets of Sunshine: 14	
Suspended in Time: 16	
Vigilante Forester: 17	
Dense Magic: 18	
Serendipity: 19	
Beyond the Picture: 22	
Intuition: 23	
Vivid and Bright: 24	
Benevolence: 25	
Always Around: 26	
Spellbound: 27	
Hail Cannons: 29	
Sage-like: 30	
Truth in Imagination: 31	
Most Fully: 33	
No Sound: 34	
Flames: 35	
Enclosed: 36	
Affinities: 37	
Haus des Meeres: 38	
Immersion: 39	
Reaching: 41	
Reverence: 42	
Diversity: 45	
Pulling: 46	
Why: 47	
Loud but Pretty: 49	
Small Delight: 50	
Humility: 51	
Environmental Club: 52	
Bringing Nature In: 53	
Energies: 54	
Scramble for Security: 55	
Heaven: 56	
Creating Paths: 57	
Distress Call: 58	
Charming: 59	
Spoken-for-fruit: 60	
Ready: 62	
Desire to Explore: 63	
The Crown of the Sky: 65	
Beauty: 66	
Collectivism: 68	
Lost in Venice	71
The Willow's	81

Part One:

Love of Place

Cheers

Last summer I got the chance to see a solar eclipse — a literal once-in a lifetime experience. The last time that a total solar eclipse was visible from coast to coast in North America was 1918, before either of my grandmothers were born, and it won't happen again until 2045, when I'll be 49 years old. In the eclipse's preceding few days, my friend Cameron's family had a huge camp-out on his granddad's property, which just happened to be in the path of totality and include a hill with a perfect view — no trees or anything in the way. Cameron was allowed to invite a handful of friends. The whole weekend was fun — his family hired bands to come play in the evenings and got catering for the whole group — but the eclipse itself was incomparable.

We all trekked up the hill fifteen minutes or so before it was supposed to start, eclipse glasses and jackets in hand. When we got to the top, we plopped ourselves down and settled in. The chatter of 20 or so people surrounded my friends and I as we laughed and joked, waiting for the sun to be blotted out. At some point, we all started trying to take off our glasses, “Nope, not yet”'s being called out every few seconds.

But when totality finally did hit, everyone cheered. It was such a natural response — of course we cheered, it was a rare natural phenomenon. But a few minutes later, I thought about how funny it was to cheer. It's not like the sun and moon could hear us. Who were we cheering for? No one, I guess. Just for ourselves. Just because we couldn't help it. Some experiences are so awe-inspiring that they draw cheers out of us almost without our knowing it.

In-Between

Nature is such a strange topic to try to write about. What in nature can and should be written about? And how much can and should be said about it? It seems so intuitive — everyone has had nature experiences. But which ones are worthy of being written about? At what point does it cross over into complete and utter pretension? Just now, with the phrase “complete and utter pretension?” Maybe. Maybe pretension is inevitable. In a way, all writing is pretense. It’s all pre-thought-out, a sculpted slant on the writer’s true thoughts and feelings. Does that make it any less valuable? If it did, wouldn’t we have stopped writing by now?

But if all experiences are worthy of being written about, how does one write that much? It would fill thousands of pages. Surely some experiences must be better to write about than others. On the other hand, if a writer is too picky about which interactions with nature to write about, there are only a couple of pages’ worth of material. There has to be an in-between.

If you ask me, there always has to be an in-between — in any situation.

What's Hers

In McMinnville City Park, there's a lower area with some picnic tables and a creek running through it. It's a beautiful little area, usually empty of people. Part of the reason for this could be that the picnic tables are on the other side of the creek, and the only way to get to them used to be to go to the edge of the park and cross the creek on the road. Recently, though, a little bridge appeared.

The bridge, made from bright and inviting wood, doesn't detract from the beauty of the creek. It changes it. Before, the creek felt wild. Unruly. The plants surrounding it had the last say, and the concrete picnic tables seemed like they'd been abandoned for years. The whole area was a picture of nature taking back what's hers.

But somehow one little bridge changes all that. The plants are no more trimmed or tame than they were before. The tables are no more inviting. But the bridge shows that someone cares. That someone loves this place and wanted to make it easier for others to enjoy, too. And that's a beauty all its own.

Harsh

I read Edward Abbey's *Desert Solitaire* for class. What fascinated me most about it was how little it fascinated me. It didn't make me any more inclined to spend time in a desert landscape; it didn't convince me that I'd ever be able to love sandstorms. Perhaps if he was in a forest doing and saying all the same exact sorts of things, I'd feel a greater absorption in it.

This isn't fair of me, I realize. Deserts are no less deserving of our awe than any other landscape. I'm just not interested in vast lifeless barrenness. And cacti are okay, but if I had to have a least favorite type of plant, they're probably what I'd choose. Not to mention: green is literally easier on the eyes than tan or orange is. Green is in the middle of the spectrum of visible light, so it causes the least amount of strain on the eyes. I'd much rather look at rolling grassy hills or a far-reaching forest than look at sand that reaches the horizon. I'm not interested in harshness.

A Sign Above the Door

My mom's mom — my Omi — used to live in a house that she rented from George, or Georgie as I call him, who is practically my grandfather. (Omi makes it clear that they are not a couple, but he absolutely fills that role.) The house was in Black Hawk, Colorado, in the mountains. My parents and I lived about an hour from there, so I spent the night with her somewhat often. It was a cute little house — one bedroom with a wood-burning stove in the living room. Instead of a backyard, it had a back-forest.

When I was about ten years old, Georgie decided to build me a little cottage in the back-forest. Following a narrow path through the woods for about a minute led me to the site. Omi's house was still in view, but I was far enough away that I could feel grown up. My cottage was going to be a completely functional house, he promised me, with running water and electricity, and a little loft up top where I could sleep if I wanted to. There was even going to be a little garden on the side of the house. It was a tiny house before the tiny house craze. He set to work building it, with some help from a few friends of his. Each time I came back to Omi's for a visit, my cottage had progressed. It wasn't long before the frame was up, complete with a sign over the door: "Chloe's Cottage." Then a little staircase to the loft appeared, complete with a cubby underneath for reading. I eagerly waited to see what progress had been made, and the anticipation for the completed cottage was almost too much to handle.

Then, Omi told us that a friend of hers was moving out of his large, nice house only a few subdivisions away, and he wanted her to be his tenant. She moved before my

cottage was done. It was so close to completion, they finished it anyway. One of Georgie's friends who helped build it lives there now. According to him, the sign is still hanging above the door.

Droplets of Sunshine

In the neighborhood that I lived in when I was too young to be in school, the streets were lined with thornless honey locust trees. A block from our house was the warm and welcoming main street with its little coffee shop and its handful of local restaurants and stores. My parents walked to the coffee shop every evening around the same time, pushing me along in my stroller. I'd look up toward the sky as we'd pass by honey locust tree after honey locust tree.

Honey locust leaves are tiny, but they grow in clusters on a stem, so that where just one leaf might be on any other type of tree, a honey locust has several. When a cluster would fall off, I'd pick it up from the ground, strip its leaves off, and sprinkle them across the grass. My mom told me that the leaves still on the tree had feelings — after that, I never tore leaves directly off the trees, if I ever had at all.

But honey locusts also grow little seed pods shaped like flat bananas. When they fall off, it's one of the most satisfying feelings to step on one and feel it crunch under your feet. Sometimes, of course, they don't crunch. But sometimes, they curl up so that the crunch is layered and therefore even more satisfying, and that more than makes up for the non-crunchy ones.

The second house I lived in had no honey locust, but our next — and current — house does. And there was a honey locust tree right outside my dormitory during freshman and sophomore year. My friends and I sat under it sometimes — the leaves make the sun fall through in droplets — and I could never help but think how nice it was

to have a piece of my childhood with me, over a thousand miles from home. If that sort of comfort could always follow us like this, I think the world would be a happier place.

Suspended in Time

Freshman year, my friend Sophia and I would often talk outside at night. We'd sit in the academic quad on some concrete backless benches in front of one of the buildings, TJ Day. The benches are placed perpendicular to the quad, so we couldn't see much of it because it was mostly to our sides.

One night, we decided to climb the little ledge on the side of the building, so we'd be facing out toward the quad. This might not have been our main reason for climbing it — we might have just been feeling adventurous and wanting to climb things. Either way, we hoisted ourselves up onto the railing that lines the ramp to the bottom floor of the building, and from there crawled along the concrete wall until it widened enough for us to sit comfortably, leaning back against the building.

The campus somehow looked quite different from that angle. It might have just been the adrenaline of the adventure — I don't usually climb onto ledges — but the lamplight seemed to glow warmer than usual. I turned on some music on my phone and we chatted lightheartedly. After a while, fog started rolling in. It wrapped itself around the trees and hung just under the globes of the lamps. The fog seemed to stop time, and even when the cold started to seep through our clothes, we stayed.

Vigilante Forester

One of the first chapter book series I read when I was little was the the *Magic Tree House* series. The main characters Jack and Annie, who are siblings, stumble upon this treehouse on this wooded path near their house. Annie, the reckless one, climbs up into it without a second's hesitation, and Jack follows to make sure she's okay. It turns out to be a time traveling treehouse, and the two go on many adventures back in time to save precious artifacts from being destroyed.

I started reading these books in either kindergarten or early first grade, and I wanted to be just like Jack and Annie. A combination of the two of them. I wanted Annie's spirit with Jack's wisdom to temper it. And more than that, I wanted to find a treehouse in a wooded area near my house.

Unfortunately, there was no wooded area by my house. Just a field of tall, dead grasses. My dream was to one day get rid of those grasses and replace them with trees. I imagined myself as a vigilante forester, pulling up the grasses when no one was looking and planting my trees a week or so later. Consciously, there was no connection between my dream-forest and *Magic Tree House*, but it must have been an influence.

Dense Magic

My aunt used to live in Golden, Colorado. On Sundays, we'd often go to her house for coffee and desert. Her house backed onto a park — we used to go over there after dessert. A statue of a dragon stood, wings spread, at one corner of the park. He and I made friends — we went on many adventures, me on his back. The other side of the park dropped down to a riverbed; a set of stairs and a tube slide provided passage. The path along the riverside went for over a mile, and after a bit, the sidewalk gave way to dirt paths through a wooded area. The further from the sidewalk the path goes, the denser the woods become. I imagined myself exploring off the paths, perhaps finding my own magic deeper in the woods. Even on the paths with my family, though, there was a certain magic. The river bubbled along beside us and my family indulged my fantasies of fairies hiding in the brush.

Serendipity

I visited Linfield my senior year of high school. As my dad and I exited the jetway from the plane, the sounds of a guitar engulfed us. I looked down the terminal and found the source: a man playing live music. We went through the usual airport motions and got in our rental car to find our way to the college. Portland seemed like just another city as we drove through, but as soon as we got on the highway to leave the city I was enchanted. The trees and other plants lining the highway were greener than any I'd seen in a long time. We wound our way past vineyards and nurseries, through a bunch of small towns. I found myself gasping at every house we saw. "That's so cute!"

Eventually, we turned onto a charming main street. I repeated my "this is adorable" refrain, but that couldn't convey how completely delighted I was. Every storefront, every tree, every lamppost and flower pot added to the welcoming energy of the street. A few blocks later, we found ourselves at Linfield. The large grove of trees at the entrance ushered us in, and the brick buildings looked sophisticated but accommodating.

I was signed up to spend the night with a student on campus, and my dad and I followed the cheerful signs which directed us to the lunge where I would meet her. She showed me her dorm so I could drop off my things, and then showed me around campus. "Do you like to garden?"

"In theory." I laughed a bit. "It's usually too hot out for me, but maybe that would be different here."

“Well, we have a community vegetable garden here. Do you like Harry Potter?”

“Yeah,” I answered, for some reason surprised that she could tell.

“We have a Harry Potter club, too! They play Quidditch on this field. Do you like theater?”

“Yes.” At this point, I reassessed my appearance: was I really that easy to read?

“There’s a play going on right now, *The Importance of Being Earnest*. We might be able to make it if we go right now.”

We made it to the theater just as intermission was ending. My host knew the head usher. “Can we sneak in? I have a prospie,” she told him.

He looked at me. “Yeah, I think we have some open seats.” He lowered his voice to a stage whisper. “But we don't say prospie around them.”

“Sorry. Prospective student.”

We watched the second half of the play — it was very good — and then she asked me if I wanted to go to Starbucks.

I looked at my watch. Ten pm. Starbucks was still open? “Sure.”

When we got there, it was surprisingly busy. My host immediately waved at a few people as soon as we walked in, and someone got up and came over to greet her. She introduced me and he asked if I liked singing. I nodded enthusiastically. He told me about the choir program.

My dad and I missed the scheduled official tour of the campus the next day, so someone gave us a private tour. As we were crossing a street, I asked our tour guide if there were any a cappella groups on campus — even if I wasn’t going to be in one, I

wanted to at least be able to go to the concerts. The tour guide was starting to answer when a girl who was passing by the other direction turned around. “Did you ask about a cappella groups? My friend and I are starting one next year!”

After the tour, all official visit activities were through. My dad and I decided to go eat lunch at one of the restaurants we’d passed on our way to campus. Once there, we ran into one of the admissions counselors we had just met.

Back at home after my trip, I cried because I knew that Colorado was no longer my home. I told a friend of mine that I was worried I’d fall in love and not come back. I didn’t mean with a person, I meant with the place. What I failed to acknowledge was that I already had.

Beyond the Picture

I have small collection of surrealist art. What draws me to it is the idea of a whole different kind of landscape, a landscape that we can't see anywhere else. Most surrealist art that I've seen is of scenery of some kind. Possibly the most famous surrealist painting, Salvador Dali's "The Persistence of Memory" with the melting watches in the desert, is essentially the imagining of an environment that gets hot enough to melt clocks. In this imagined world, it is also likely that physics work differently. If such a place existed, it would be tempting to visit. And that temptation, I think, is why I'm so drawn to surrealism.

One picture I have in my bedroom depicts kitchenware making a pathway from a large house to a small watering hole, which has a bucket hovering above it. The bucket is being filled from an opening in the sky above it. Also coming out of the sky are tornadoes made from hedges. The tornadoes force their way into the windows of the house from which the kitchenware is coming. I tend to stare at this piece of art when I'm sitting in my bed. I try to imagine the world in which it's taking place — is the kitchenware sentient? Why are there hedge-tornadoes? Or is it hedge-smoke? What lies outside the bounds of the picture, behind the house? It's an entirely different landscape, and entirely different everything. And while I love our earth as it is, sometimes it can get to be too much of the same, or the parts that interest me are too far away. Surrealist landscapes can be reached with just a bit of musing.

Intuition

There's an oak tree in McMinnville City Park with a bend in its trunk that shouldn't be possible. Its trunk runs parallel to the ground. I don't mean that the tree has fallen over. No, it's alive and well. Very well, actually, to hold that kind of weight. It must have strong roots, a strong sense of what it needs to do to survive. If it grew straight up, it would run into another tree. That wouldn't turn out well, so it grew sideways. And its branches — they've adapted too. They only grow upward from the trunk, not down. They wouldn't be able to get light down there.

It makes me wonder if we all have that sort of intuition, but we just don't know it, don't use it, don't listen to it. What if something inside each of us knows how to reach the sun, but we get too distracted? We think we're supposed to grow perpendicular to the ground, so that's what we do, never stopping to wonder — to assess — if that will work for us. We can all get our share of light if we just work around what's already there.

Vivid and Bright

Sometimes I'm baffled at how unobservant I am. At how unobservant we all are, as a culture. But I don't believe in expecting a cultural change that I can't even implement in my own life, so I'm much more focused on my own unobservant tendencies. And there are times, periodically, that I walk somewhere I've walked every day and suddenly I notice something I never noticed before. Today, for example, I noticed a manhole cover in the grass right by the sidewalk and I thought to myself "that's weird, why would there be a manhole cover in the grass next to the sidewalk?" But then I realized: it must have been there all along. Manholes don't appear overnight, and there was no construction of any sort being done in that spot. And I'd walked right by it countless times over the course of the last four years. Or yesterday, I was in Incahoots, a coffee shop and flower store that I've been to numerous times before. I was ordering my drink, and I looked up and for the first time noticed that the lights hanging there at the drink counter are made from old kettles! I love repurposed lighting like that, but I'd somehow managed never to notice. If I could just pay attention to the world around me more often instead of getting caught up in less important things, I can hardly imagine how much more vivid and bright my life would be.

Benevolence

The summer after seventh grade, I went on a school trip to Washington D.C., Williamsburg, Mount Vernon, and other historical sites. I did pay attention to and appreciate the history of the places we went, but the catalpa trees lining the Palace Green lawn in Williamsburg stuck with me the most. They had the biggest leaves I'd ever seen. The lawn they bordered was long and well manicured, the houses around them radiating nostalgia, the sky above them blue and only blue. The air that I shared with the trees was too hot and too humid, but I accepted the gift of their shade.

I felt out of place: a modern day not-yet-eighth-grader who'd gotten there with technology not yet imagined at the time the town was flourishing. The buildings and the sky seemed to welcome tourists, but the trees seemed luxurious in a way that I could not understand or touch. They were benevolent, and they were generous, but they were regal, untouchable.

When I came home to Colorado from that trip, catalpa trees were my new favorite. But I forgot their name no more than a month later. They were just too majestic, too grand. Trees should be reachable and friendly — the stately ones belong in places of history.

Always Around

My dad seems to be less into plants and nature than the rest of my family. It's not that he's uninterested, he just shows it differently and perhaps less frequently. He and I will hike on occasion — just light and un-strenuous hikes. But when I stop to appreciate the scenery, I can tell that he's taking all in, too. I can't put my finger now on how I can tell. He just seems at peace. Content.

I asked him on the phone today if he likes plants.

“Do I like them? Yeah!”

“Yeah? Just maybe less, or you just don't show it as much?”

He paused. “I've never really had to think about it. Living with your mom, plants have always just been around. My mom always had them when I was growing up, too.”

I hadn't considered that as a factor before. That sometimes the presence of something can make it seem so ordinary that it becomes almost unnoticable. I don't want to say that he takes them for granted, but don't we all, at times? Not just with plants, but with everything.

He went on to tell me that he does notice when a house is lacking plants. That's a phenomenon that's been commented on many times: it's easier to appreciate something once it's gone. It's easier to notice lack than abundance.

That's why gratitude is so important — and why it's something that takes practice. I would like to reach a stage where I always notice when a house does have plants.

Spellbound

In the fall of my junior year, I studied abroad in Austria. The first week of my experience was spent in a town in the Alps called Dorfgastein. The Austro-American Institute of Education, the school we studied at, has all of their programs start off in this little Alpine town, to practice the language before being dropped in the big city. Even after the entire semester, this first week is still one of my favorites. If you imagine an idyllic Austrian village with wooden flower boxes under every window and mountain views that make your heart ache, you're imagining Dorfgastein. All the businesses there are family owned and while they're used to visitors — largely thanks to AAIE, probably — they haven't acquired the distaste for them that some of the people in Vienna seemed to have.

While there, we did a lot of hiking. Minor hiking — it was slightly difficult for me but I can recognize that as hikes go, these were pretty light. One place we went was more of an uphill walk than a hike, because the pathway was largely manmade, with wooden planks for traction and a railing to hold onto that continued even on the natural parts of the path. We were in a small canyon called Liechtensteinklamm, and this place's beauty is nearly beyond what can be captured in words. The water that runs along the bottom of the gorge is bright turquoise but at the same time clear enough to see the rocks in the stream bed. And the trees growing out of the cliffside are so green I was nearly convinced I was dreaming — they must be amazingly healthy from the moisture trapped by the steep canyon walls. I could have just stared at that stream and those trees for

hours, days even, but I kept making my way to the end of the path, not wanting to keep anyone waiting.

And as I came around a bend, I was rewarded with an even more beautiful sight: a waterfall. Not a gigantic one, but big enough to warrant awe in the most apathetic of tourists. In someone already spellbound, like me, it made me stop in my tracks. I leaned against the railing, content to stay there and watch the water crash onto the rocks below. But I still wasn't at the end. So after a while, I continued again, hoping to catch another glimpse of the waterfall. There were a couple more times I could see it a bit, but not from a very good angle, until I reached the end of the path.

A good number of my classmates were already there, gathered on a smaller hill to the left. I waved cheerfully to them, but my attention was directed to my right, where the waterfall was almost within reach. I made my way over to the railing again and leaned against it. The sounds of laughter and joyful chatter mixed with the sound of the cascading water, and I closed my eyes for a moment. I got to spend the next four months seeing beautiful places with cool people. A wave of complete and total gratitude washed over me, and I promised myself that I would do my best to hold onto it.

Hail Cannons

I've always loved the rain. When I would hear it start to fall on the roof as a kid, I would run outside barefoot and turn my face to the sky, savoring the feeling of the droplets on my skin. But I loved umbrellas, too. I used to take my little umbrella out in the rain just to use it, even if we weren't going anywhere. Eventually, my parents explained to me that umbrellas can be conductors for lightning. I didn't love them quite so much anymore. But I continued loving the rain. We never got much of it in Colorado. Even less so in my town, in Brighton. Brighton's a farm town — the kind where tractors hold up traffic — and the farmers have hail cannons to break up clouds. They shoot them off as soon as storm clouds start forming. I understand not wanting hail to ruin their crops — our hail in Colorado is much bigger than any I've seen in Oregon. Still, that doesn't mean they should prevent all precipitation. It usually has to rain before hail can start forming, in my experience. So it would be nice if they could let it rain every once in a while.

Sage-like

Since childhood, I've felt an affinity with the weeping willow. We had a wise old willow in my front yard when I was in elementary school. Its green was soft, sage-like, and in the fall the leaves would turn a yellow that glowed against the stark white of the house. I would play under my willow, the branches making a natural curtain to shield me from the impurity of the cars passing by. That way, I could pretend that I was surrounded by nothing but nature, and that maybe there was a lovely stream nearby — willow trees are drawn to water. I had considered building a treehouse, but at the same time, those gorgeous hanging branches were already my home.

I am not the only one in love with willows. There is a Japanese legend about a man who lived near a willow tree. The willow was beloved by all the people in the town, but none loved it as much he. He would look to it every morning when he awoke and every evening as he returned home from work.

One day, when an elder from the village asked to cut down the willow and use its lumber to build a bridge, the man offered several of the trees from his own land instead, in order to preserve the willow. Later on, the man was sitting under the willow, and a beautiful lady appeared seemingly out of nowhere. Though she was shy at first, she soon opened up to him and they sat and talked night after night. Eventually, when he fell in love with her, he asked her to be his wife. She said yes, and added that he was not to ask any questions of her past. He agreed, and they soon married and had a child.

After a while, a temple was to be built for the goddess of mercy, and timber from all the villages was needed. This time, the man could not convince the villagers not to cut down the willow. He reconciled himself with this — at least he had his wife and child. But, that night as the willow was being chopped down, his wife cried out in pain. The man went to her, and she explained that as the tree was injured, so was she, as she was the soul of the willow. And when the tree fell to the ground with a crash, the man's wife disappeared.

When I was in third or fourth grade, my willow became diseased. I don't know now exactly what was wrong with it, but whatever it was, it was incurable. We had to cut our willow down. We had to cut it down, and we couldn't plant anything else in its place because the sickness stayed in the ground where it had been and would infect any other tree that was planted there.

Was I there when they cut it down? Maybe it was a school day, maybe my parents and I had something else to do, or maybe I just chose not to watch. I imagine that as my willow fell, its soul cried out in pain, too. I imagine that this is why I couldn't bear to watch it happen. I couldn't bear to be there as it howled in agony.

I don't live in that house anymore, but my family does drive by it on occasion. It has been painted a sage-like green.

Truth in Imagination

In class this semester we've talked a lot about the writer's obligation to the natural world and to their reader. This is particularly interesting for me to think about, considering what I'm doing here. And of course, I wouldn't be writing this if I hadn't thought at all about the dilemma before, but I hadn't thought about it as deeply as I might have previously claimed to.

I am doing my best to be as truthful as I can, but I don't believe truth excludes exaggeration. I don't believe it excludes imagination, either. Sometimes, I think exaggeration and imagination are the only ways to convey truth. It might not be objective truth, but I don't think I've ever claimed to be objective. Not only do I find objectivity an impossible standard to reach, I take issue with it being seen as somehow better than subjectivity. If you don't care about what you're saying, then why say it? And if you do care, why would you leave that out? Isn't it relevant? And sure, letting emotion into an observation automatically makes the statement subjective — but if people were subjective thinkers, we would already be on the same page. We'd have no reason to communicate.

Most Fully

The moon's been hovering around half-full for the past few nights. This is the most underrated phase of the moon. The crescent is idealized in children's drawings and visual art in general. The full moon gets to be praised for making the nights brighter. But the half-full moon is always overlooked. Even though this is the time when it looks the most like it's popping out of the sky, three-dimensional. This is the time when it's bright but still uniquely shaped. The time when I can imagine it most fully.

No Sound

I remember sitting with two of my friends as a seventh grader who thought she already had it all figured out. We were camping out in one of our backyards. The tent awaited us, but we were taking our time enjoying the city's great outdoors. As the sun's rays slowly faded and purple began to creep into the sky's blue, I looked up and was suddenly taken with the silhouettes the trees made against the dusky canvas. I had somehow made it twelve years of my life without ever noticing silhouettes before. I could hardly believe the beauty: the way the evergreens were still unmistakably evergreens even though they now looked black. And the contrast! The color of the sky behind the darkness of the trees was so heartstoppingly, painfully vivid. My memory plays this moment back to me with no sound; I know I said something to my friends about it, and they said something slightly dismissive and misunderstanding back, but the only sound in my memory is my own heartbeat.

Flames

The frost is beginning to form on the grass in the mornings — our breath is beginning to form visible puffs of mist at night. And the trees are all starting to change. Even some of the evergreens. I guess it's flu season for them, too. But the deciduous trees -- they're not sick. They're like phoenixes: engulfed in flames. It's the sort of display you'd think fit only for a grand finale. But then they come back even stronger for it. Sure, the trees take a bit longer to come back than a phoenix would, but they are just as beautiful to watch.

More and more trees have changed each day. They either change from the top down or bottom up. I was speculating about the possible reasons for this the other day. I thought it might be related to photosynthesis. That the ones on bottom get less light so they start changing sooner. But that wouldn't explain the ones that change from the top down. Different sources say different things about why leaves change. The most common explanation is that the ones that get the least sunlight change first, because they think it's fall before the other leaves do. The idea here is that leaves change when the days start getting shorter, and the ones that get more sunlight would detect this change later. The other main theory is that leaves change when it gets colder. The roots slow down their production of nutrients, and the leaves at the top stop receiving said nutrients earlier than the ones at the bottom. This still doesn't fully explain why some trees do one thing and some do the other, but I suppose that's just how things go.

Enclosed

I want to see the wisteria-lined streets of Greece. My mom has wanted to go to Greece for as long as I can remember. I can't say exactly how I first came to know this — it's just a fundamental part of her. She loves looking at pictures of the white buildings of Santorini against the bright blue cloudless sky. We used to have a coffee table book called *Cats in the Sun*, which was a compilation of gorgeous pictures of cats all across Greece. This book, in fact, might have been my first clue as to my mom's love for the aesthetic of that country. I never disagreed — it's strikingly picturesque. But it didn't capture my heart like it did hers.

Part of this, I think, is that I saw no pictures of tree-lined streets or grassy parks. Then, one day, I came across a picture online of a street with a canopy of purple flowers that reach as far as the eye can see. There are some people sitting outside in the picture, and it looks like they're in front of a cafe of some sort. The building fronts are colorful and inviting. I immediately wanted to be wherever that picture had been taken, so I looked it up. Mylovos, Losvos, Greece. Suddenly, the beauty of Greece did entice me.

Affinities

In middle school, I read the *Young Wizards* series by Diane Duane. Nita, a thirteen year old girl, discovers a book which bestows on her an ability to influence plants and living things. She meets Kit, a boy of about the same age, whose affinity is mechanical and inanimate objects. They become best friends and use their combined abilities to do good.

Not only was I intrigued by the fantasy aspect of the books, I felt a connection with Nita. I was already quite in love with plants by this point. If anything, reading them reinforced my feelings.

Haus des Meeres

The most underrated part of Vienna is its aquarium. It's called Haus des Meeres, which means "house of the sea." The aquarium is in a converted anti-aircraft tower from WWII, so it's ten stories high. At first, the thought of going through such a tall building just to see fish seems like it would not be worth it. Then, just past the ticket counter, you see a sign that invites you to pet the koi fish. A couple of stories up, you can enter into a glass addition on the side of the tower. This glass addition is my favorite part of the whole aquarium — it's the rainforest portion. There are some turtles and an alligator which I guess is what qualifies the section to be in an aquarium. But there are also huge rainforest trees with tropical birds gliding through them and little tamarin monkeys climbing around. It would truly feel like a rainforest, except that through the glass, the city is clearly visible. Standing in this glass forest is the closest a human can get to being two places at once.

The next few stories display exotic animals from mantis shrimp to sharks to chameleons, and on the top is a balcony where you can look out across the whole city. Standing up there, you can see the landmarks — the churches, the museums, the Ferris wheel — but you can also see evidence of every day Viennese life. Clothes hanging out to dry on balconies. Little gardens. Red-shingled roofs.

Standing on the roof of Haus des Meeres, I fully believed for the first time that I was in Vienna. I wished I could have stayed up there all day.

Immersion

I was obsessed with the idea of rainforests when I was younger. For a bit, I thought I'd study them for a living. I had this vision of myself: a young adult living in a little tent or hut in the forests of South America, studying the plants and animals around me, getting as close as I could without disturbing anything. I wanted to live in Brazil so I could research the Amazon. The idea of living surrounded by trees in a place where it rained all the time? It sounded perfect! I remember teaching myself all about the Amazon rainforest. It wasn't until I learned how hot it gets there that I reconsidered and soon abandoned the plan entirely.

I think that was around the time that I started liking the idea of Oregon. To my knowledge, it had everything I liked about rainforests without the ridiculous temperatures. Yes, I did know even then that the types of plants were very different in the two places, but my obsession with rainforests was never truly about that. It was about the idea of being immersed in nature. I've since realized that I like people too much to seclude myself like that, anyway, no matter the temperatures.

Sure, it might be cool to experience the world in such a new way — especially somewhere like a rainforest, which is completely different from where I grew up. But “it might be cool” isn't quite enough. Almost everything *might* be cool — and no one can do it all. You'd have to be superhuman, able to split yourself up or add hours to your day or go without ever sleeping. I clearly don't have those abilities; I have to choose what I want

to do. And right now, when choosing what jobs to apply for after graduation, this is more pertinent than ever.

Do I try to do something with my love of plants? I didn't study biology, unless you count the class I took in high school that I got a C in. So do I rely on my writing? What do I do what that? Journalism or marketing? I haven't studied those, either. Do I teach, and grade papers? Do I try to write novels? That income isn't guaranteed, and again it requires a certain amount of seclusion. But all these options pros as well as their cons — most of them are still somewhat viable. The cons just keep me from choosing one.

Reaching

The plants in Oregon are somehow the same as the ones back home in Colorado, and very different from them at the same time. I'll see if I can explain what I mean.

Take evergreens, for example. We have them in Colorado, and they're here in Oregon. But they're different here. They grow differently, like they're reaching for something — they seem to have a purpose, a direction. The ones back home are just there.

And the deciduous trees? There are ones here that I've never seen before, like the Katsura tree with its tiny heart-shaped leaves, but even the oaks seem new. Even the honey locust, which have followed me from home to home all my life, took me months to recognize. Of course, I know this says infinitely more about me than it does about the plants. It doesn't say anything about the plants at all — an oak is an oak, no matter where you are. And Oregon's climate is close enough to Colorado's that many of the same plants thrive here as do there. The only real difference is that they get a bit greener, and perhaps are green a bit longer, in Oregon. Plants like water, who knew? And I suppose we have a few high-altituders back home that I haven't seen here.

For the most part, though, the only notable difference is me.

Reverence

Last night, my roommate, Corissa, mentioned that she had to write a short reflection for class on a nature experience she had. She hadn't had a nature experience she wanted to use, and told me she was thinking of going outside close to midnight and writing about the cold.

"Can I come with? That actually sounds like fun, and I could use a homework break anyway," I told her.

"Sure!"

We bundled up an hour or so later and stepped out of our apartment, telling our other roommate that we were going for "a short walk." When we got downstairs, I suggested standing in a grassy area and pointed out a couple of options. We went to the less lamp-lit one. It's fairly close to our apartment, so the experience wasn't exactly an immersive one, but that can be for the best sometimes.

Across the street from the field, a streetlight stood in front of a bare tree, so that its branches seemed to glow from underneath. It was like a fantasy painting against the cloudy sky. The wind was at my back as I looked at the tree, and I turned to feel the chill on my face. As the breeze turned my nose red, I thought of all the times in high school I was outside in the dead of winter for band. Besides playing pep music at football games, we were in the local Parade of Lights every year at Christmastime, for which we waited outside for two or three hours as the sun went down and the temperature dropped into single digits. That sort of cold has a certain nostalgia for me now. And as I let the

nostalgia wash over me, I noticed another tree thrown into relief against the night sky. This one wasn't directly lit up by anything, but still stood out clearly, especially in comparison to the silhouetted evergreens on either side of it. Its white bark — possibly a birch — simply caught any source of light around it. This gave the tree a different kind of fantastical air. Where the other one had been warmly glowing yellow, inviting me on a fairytale adventure, this one shone a warning white, telling of goblins and ghosts. The clouds drifted above and between the two, purple on black.

“I'm going to go over to the vegetable garden,” Corissa told me after a while. Only a few steps away, we nearly tripped over a fallen evergreen branch. It nearly blended into the grass in the dark, but once we saw it, it was hard to fathom how we hadn't noticed it before. We stopped for a moment to contemplate the phenomenon, only to find another branch a few more steps away. This happened a couple more times before we looked for the source: the evergreens silhouetted next to the maybe-birch. It fascinates me how something that's nearly invisible can become so clear so suddenly. Yet, there was no way we could have seen it any sooner.

Corissa took a few pictures of the garden before we decided it was about time to head home. On the way to our apartment, we were going to pass by the courtyard between the mailroom and the observatory. “Oh hey,” I said, “I want to look at a tree over here before we go back in. Can we stop for a sec?” She agreed, but when we got there, I noticed instead a small bush with fully grown leaves. In February. Had it leafed out early or stayed green all winter? I used an app that identifies plants, and found out that it's a Japanese Spindle. I did some searching online later and found out that Japanese Spindles

are in fact evergreen. But the amazing part of it is that the bush has leaves instead of needles!

I've said for years that I wish a plant existed which has evergreen leaves, but it was a mystical organism in my mind — I thought it was scientifically impossible. This proves that I'm not a scientist. But not only does the bush exist, it's been right in front of me for the past three and a half years, and I've never noticed it. I've gotten my mail countless times during the winter months, but I must have been so caught up in my own thoughts that I paid no attention to the world around me. If I had just taken a moment to look and appreciate the beauty of the campus, I would have had this revelation years ago. I stared at the Spindle plant for a while in awe, then remembered that the whole world can ignite that same feeling in me when I let it.

I turned and looked down the path that leads to the library. The path I walk every day. But it held so much more magic last night than usual. The lamps lined up in the perfect way so that I could see each of them from where I was standing, and they shimmered invitingly. Next to them, a small grove of six or so trees seemed to almost giggle in the breeze. An evergreen huddled, using a building as shelter from any incoming weather — an evergreen I'd never noticed at all before. I took a deep breath in, trying to capture my sense of wonder. When I'd tucked my reverence deep in my pocket for later, I let Corissa know that I was ready to go when she was. Even as we made our way up the stairs and into the apartment, a sense of peace had settled in me.

Diversity

Most people are able to identify maple trees just by looking at their leaves. But recently, as I was walking around my college to see if I could identify the trees, I noticed that two trees which both looked like maples to me were actually not the same. They were turning different colors, for one thing, and their leaves were ever so slightly different shapes. I wondered if maybe maple trees weren't as common as I thought — maybe it was a term that was often misapplied. Maybe I was calling some other tree a maple in the same way that people call all tissues Kleenex. I began to question all my knowledge of tree identification. That is, until I came across a book called “Maples of the World.” As it turns out, there are one hundred and twenty-eight different kinds of maple trees. That's almost as many kinds of maple as there are countries in the entire world.

A hundred types of trees that are so similar without being the same! The differences between, say, a red maple and a sugar maple are so minute that unless you're really looking, you'd never even notice. You might just see that the leaves have five points (the distinct characteristic that would let you know it's a maple at all), and overlook that the lobes on one leaf dig in deeper than the other. But, in the fall, you might not even notice that they are both maples, because one turns red and the other yellow.

How many other things are so diverse without us realizing it? So similar yet so different? We might never be able to recognize and appreciate all the diversity in the world, but that shouldn't stop us from trying.

Pulling

Braided essays just don't gain traction and momentum the way that stories do. Fiction in particular, but even nonfiction can gain momentum if it's structured as a single story. As a story reaches its climax, it gets easier and easier to write because the anticipation pulls its writer along. And once that big critical moment has passed, all that's left to do is let it roll to its conclusion. Plus, with fiction, the attachment to the characters can pull the writer along. What's pulling me along now?

Why

The question is, what is it about plants that I'm so drawn to? First of all, they're gorgeous. All of them. They're all beautiful, from the typically-recognized beauty of roses and tulips to the grass that covers everyone's lawns and is such a part of every day life we barely notice it, to the exotic corpse flower, which grows in South America and literally smells like rotting flesh. Okay, so that last one is harder to see the beauty in, but it does look pretty — if you look at a picture of it or look at it through glass, where you can't smell it. So, of course, that's one thing that draws me to plants: beauty. But everyone, I think, notices the beauty of plants to some extent, and they don't all decide to write a whole bunch of stuff basically just gushing about them. There must be something more.

Part of that something more, I think, is science. Now, I am far from a scientist. I don't fully understand the science of plants; I'm sure there are millions of things I don't know about them. But what I do know, I find fascinating. For example, trees are so tall because they're fighting each other for sunlight. Evolutionarily, one tree (or species of tree) would grow taller and block the sun from the others, so then they would grow taller too, and so on until they got to the heights that they are now. It's incredible! And grass? I don't know how it has people walking on it all the time without dying! And there are so many different kinds of plants! I am also not mathematician. But I am still very intrigued by the fact that so many plants somehow follow the Fibonacci sequence! How do they all make these same patterns? And why? I'm not sure I'll ever fully understand, but that's

okay, because that lets me keep being amazed. So, yes, science is part of why I am drawn to plants.

I also think that they're simply important. They're part of earth's ecosystem, and a terribly underrated and under-thought-of part, at that. We need them — for food, to breathe, to help us heal, for countless other reasons — and I think it's important to appreciate the things that you need. Not to get too environmentally-minded here, but how could I help but mention it? We need to take care of our nature. The idea that we might lose all of that beauty, all of that complexity, is absolutely a contributing factor to my overwhelming love for plants.

Loud but Pretty

The house I lived in growing up was three driveway-widths away from the neighborhood railroad tracks. This meant that every time a train would go by, we'd have to shout to be heard and pause the tv. The house would shake as trains passed.

When we first moved there, the space that occupied the width of the third driveway was just dirt. It looked kind of like a track for racing dirt bikes or four wheelers. Omi wanted to go walking there a few times, but I never understood. Why would you walk somewhere that isn't pretty?

After a few years, though, they developed it into a park. When you first walk toward the park from the street, there's a parking lot, but then you get to the good part. There's a playground first, and then a big open area with a slightly curvy walking path around it. My dad and I tossed a frisbee back and forth a few times in the grassy area. In middle school, my friends and I would hang out in the park after school — and after my mom gave us our snack, of course.

I loved hanging out there — it was a nice, pretty outdoor space that wasn't overrun by weeds like my backyard. The only problem was that the park is even closer to the train tracks than my house. I blame my time spent there for any hearing problems I have now. Yet, I didn't let that stop me from going there.

Small Delight

It's interesting how much a person's hometown affects their opinions on the natural world. It makes sense — what a person is used to will surely dictate how they feel about things, at least to some extent. So of course someone who grows up somewhere where it snows every year will be less excited by but also less irritated by snow than someone who grew up in a place where snow is a rarity. Yes, this is all perfectly sensible. But it's also interesting to think a little more deeply about. That same person who is largely unaffected by snow could just as easily be excited about it if they'd grown up one state over in some cases. Even if every single other aspect of their childhood was exactly the same. But how different would this make them as a person? This one small change? I happen to believe that it would make a greater difference than we can imagine. They'd get to experience an excitement that's otherwise absent from their life — and every small delight changes a person.

Humility

My mom adores Russian Olive trees. When I first learned that this was her favorite type of tree, I didn't understand. Russian olive trees are the softest shade of green you can imagine — so soft their leaves are almost gray. Their branches don't sweep toward the ground like the curtain of a willow, there's nothing special about their leaves' shapes... it made no sense.

A couple of friends of mine had a Russian olive tree in their backyard. It's been there since they moved in, when we were all nine or ten, and I spent countless hours in that backyard with that tree. I sat on a porch swing underneath that tree, sharing my earbuds with a friend, or complaining with a friend, or simply being. I had arguments and reconciliations in the presence of that tree. And the tree itself became a companion. The softness of its leaves became a comfort — they don't have to shout their greenness, they are just what they are and they will let you notice on your own. Russian olives do not impose. They are humble. They wait quietly, and are there for you. This, I decided, is why Russian olives are my mother's favorite type of tree.

And it is, in fact, the reason. Or, it's one of three reasons. She also loves them because they're sturdy and resilient and reliable. They stand as if they mean it. And the other reason is that they seem to spring from places of water. If there's a Russian olive tree, my mother says, you can be sure there's water near by.

Maybe my mother's favorite tree and my favorite tree are more alike than I thought.

Environmental Club

In elementary school, I noticed that a sapling had been planted in the school playground behind some concrete picnic tables. I felt an immediate responsibility toward helping it grow and thrive. It was, after all, on my playground, and I didn't see anyone else taking care of it. I got together some friends and created a club to watch over this little tree. If there were ever puddles at recess, we would cup our hands and try to carry the water over to the tree. Of course, that seems completely ridiculous to me now — if there were puddles on the ground, that means that it had rained recently, but I didn't think of it that way back then. I saw the puddles as a means to help the tree. Cupping our little elementary-schooler hands didn't work very well, though, and we soon found another way to get the water to the plant. For some reason, I have two competing memories of how we did that. I remember taking our milk cartons from lunch and using those, but I also remember using plastic cups. I don't know where we would have gotten plastic cups, maybe we picked them up from the ground. But I know that we found a better way to transport the water.

I was only dedicated to saving the baby tree for a little while, but my tiny environmental club lasted a solid few months, which I think is quite impressive for elementary school.

Bringing Nature In

The street I lived on in Vienna had no trees on it. Many streets in Vienna, in fact, have no trees on them. But somehow, this never bothered me. Cities have their own kind of beauty, and old cities have it more so than newer ones. The old buildings speak to a time when there was enough nature outside of cities that it was less important to bring it in. But they did bring it in — some streets do have trees, and there are many public parks which are very easy to get to. Vienna does a good job of bringing things — old and new, industry and nature — together and finding a middle ground.

Energies

I'm starting to think about where I'm going to live after college. That's a lie: I've been thinking about it for at least a year. But I've recently been letting myself think about it more seriously. I've been looking online at apartments in Portland.

But that's just one possible future. I don't know where I'll end up. Physical place has always held so much meaning for me. Every place seems to be imbued with the energies of the people who frequent it. That's why it's so important for me to find places I belong. And right now I don't have anywhere to ground my ideas of what lies ahead. I don't even know who I'll be around — I don't even have anyone who's up in the air with me.

I'm just hoping that soon, I can place myself in a physical location.

Scramble for Security

The first time I picked up *A Wrinkle in Time*, I couldn't get through it. The same thing happened with *Harry Potter*. They both start off so normally, I found them boring. But the second time I picked them both up, I was hooked.

A Wrinkle in Time follows a girl named Meg whose father was a scientist who went missing years ago. She, her genius little brother, and a boy from her class find out that Meg's father is in a parallel dimension, and they go on a quest to find him.

I found a quote recently from Madeleine L'Engle, the author of *Wrinkle*, about the book, which I think explains perfectly why I loved it so much once I got into it. She said, "...if I have something I want to say that is too difficult for adults to swallow, then I will write it in a book for children... Children still haven't closed themselves off with fear of the unknown, fear of revolution, or the scramble for security. They are still familiar with the inborn vocabulary of myth." I was so in tune with that vocabulary when I was little, the book seemed to have been written just for me.

But as I've gotten older, I think those fears, that scramble that L'Engle described have encroached. They're exactly what I struggle with now as I'm transitioning out of college life into the "real world."

Maybe I need to reread some of her books.

Heaven

My dad's mom — my Nana — lives a block away from the Denver Botanical Gardens. Naturally — no pun intended — she holds a membership there, so when I'd visit, we'd often walk over there. The Botanical Gardens are a world of their own — they encompass the desert, the tropics, alpine landscape, and everything in between. There are fountains and hidden paths, trellises and pergolas, anything an outdoorsy-but-not-athletic kid could dream of. I was in heaven there.

In fact, there's one particular spot that I nicknamed "heaven." It's possibly the shortest little trail in the whole Garden, spanning maybe the length of a pickup truck. But it feels removed from the city in a way that the rest of the garden doesn't quite reach. It's on a little hill with some paving stones as steps — set into the dirt at irregular intervals, of course, so it doesn't look or feel manmade. At the almost-top is a bench, from which you can see a pond where the occasional duck swims by. Surrounding the bench are pine trees, ferns, and other plants you'd see in a woodland forest. And somehow, those plants and that pond are enough to melt the city away and transport anyone on that bench to a mountainside.

Not that the rest of the Garden doesn't have its own magic. There's a Japanese Garden portion with a river rock path, half-moon gates, and a massive koi pond. There's a huge conservatory with tropical plants the likes of which I've yet to see anywhere else. The trees in this greenhouse are colossal, and they have vines that look like hand-spun rope. And there are those trees with the giant leaves, too — the leaves that pharos are

depicted being fanned with. It's ridiculously hot in there, of course, but it was always worth it to me.

Creating Paths

My friend Soli and I created a scavenger hunt for our friends at the end of our first semester. We went all out, hiding clues under desks and behind doors that were always open. Unfortunately, our motivation for creating a scavenger hunt turned out to be the reason that none of our friends had time to complete it: it was the week before finals week. We had thought people would want a fun excuse to take a break from studying. We had been wrong. Still, we enjoyed creating a path for others to follow.

Distress Call

Today I heard a squirrel make a sound I've never heard a squirrel make before. It sounded like a strange mixture of a child crying and a car alarm. What I mean is, it somehow called to mind every sound that says danger, every sound that rouses my instincts to fight or fly. I had been admiring the beauty around me, thinking about how great spring is with the flowers blooming and the birds chirping. There was a particular bird sound that I thought might be from a little family, because there were chirps of two different pitches.

And then, from somewhere slightly farther away, this distress call. I was fairly certain from the start that that was what it was, but there had recently been these children running by making noises, and I wondered if it was maybe them again. But it kept going. And the children were no longer in sight. It sounded like a danger call, like a warning. After some contemplation, I decided it must be a bird — nothing else seemed capable of making such a sound. We sat there another few minutes, and each reiteration of the sound made my nerves stand on end more and more.

After not too long, I decided to go. As I was walking away, a squirrel came scuttling down a tree trunk a bit away, and I mock-accusingly said to it, "hey little guy, what did you do?" He jumped a couple of times to reach a closer tree trunk, ran up it a couple of feet, and froze, staring at me. He said, "Ech." A moment passed. Then he made the sound. The warning, danger, hair-raising sound. I watched his mouth as he made it. We apologized and picked up our pace. I hope he was okay.

Charming

The house my family moved into when I was fourteen is across the street from the high school. We moved into it around Christmas time, so I'd already been at the school for a few months, and I'd walked by this house every time we had fire drill. It has a hedge in place of a fence, mint-colored trim, and a screened-in porch, and each time I passed it, I wondered what kind of people lived there.

When my parents told me we were moving, and we went out looking at potential places to rent, I felt an extra pull when we walked up the driveway of this house. The hedges endeared me to it, and a honey locust in the front yard marked it as home. We walked in and it had all the same charming qualities as on the outside. Warm natural light shone in through the large picture window at the front of the house, and a wide sill in front of it provided a place to sit. The cubbyholes above the kitchen cabinets had been painted an eggplant purple — the same color as we had in our kitchen. The bedrooms were cozy, and there was a garage, which we didn't have before.

After renting for six years, my parents were able to buy the house, and now it feels even more like home.

Spoken-for Fruit

My mom has told me that her dad taught her how to go mushroom picking. We've talked about it a few times, and she always says that her mouth is watering as she tells me that her dad would make the best mushroom sauces when they got home. I can just imagine her as a preteen picking her way through the forests of Bavaria, inspecting every mushroom to see if it's the kind they want, gathering the good ones out of the ground eagerly in hopes that they'd find enough for a good dinner.

Some part of this penchant is still in her, I think — whenever my parents fly out to Oregon to visit me, my mom makes my dad pull over on the side of the highway so she can pick berries. She always knows which ones are which, but we don't have the climate for natural-growing ones back home.

It seems like my mom's whole side of the family has this instinct. When I was little, I'd go on walks with my grandma on that side, Omi. Any time we'd pass someone's yard that had a fruit tree, she'd stop to pick some — even if she had to walk on their lawn to get there. One path that we'd walk on fairly often went behind this row of houses. It was a cute little path with a creek — probably a ditch, honestly, but I saw it as a creek — running alongside it. It reminded me of the path Jack and Annie would walk to get to the Magic Treehouse. But instead of a treehouse at the end of the path, there was a grove of apple trees barred from us by a post and rail fence. Even to child me, it was obvious that those apples were not ours. But Omi would always cajole me into sliding through the fence and picking one for each of us. Sometimes she'd even have me pick some to bring

back to my parents. I was uncomfortable with it at first, but after we'd walked the trail a few times, I began to expect it. And it was worth it, after all — I realized that I actually do like apples, I just prefer smaller and more natural ones.

I haven't fully picked up on the habit of picking other people's fruit. In fact, I realize now that I haven't seen Omi pick any spoken-for fruit in a long time, either. There's a distinct possibility that she just thought my dismay was cute — and it probably was. But I digress. The pull to pick food is present in her, no matter the reason she's pulled. But I just don't seem to have it. I don't know what's safe to pick, and I haven't exactly wanted to take the time to learn. I guess I just appreciate plants in a different way.

Ready

I noticed some daffodils blooming this past weekend. I love how they show up the same time of year no matter what. Daffodils just decide that it's spring, whether it feels like it to the rest of us or not. I admire that about them. I think we should all take a cue from them on this: don't wait around for anyone else. Bloom when you're ready.

Desire to Explore

I loved the Botanic Gardens so much as a kid, and was so comfortable there, that I wandered off on my own when I was ten. I was there with Gary, my practically-grandfather on my dad's side. He was chatting with a woman who was there with her son. The young boy — I can't remember his name; I probably forgot it within a week, but we'll call him James — was a few years younger than me, but I was still at the age where I'd become immediate friends with any other kid who was old enough to walk and talk. So, James and I had started talking, forcing our guardians to talk too.

After a while, I got bored with the desert area we were in, and I turned to him and said something like, "Let's go explore! We won't get lost, I come here all the time." And it was true — I did know my way around. I wasn't the least bit worried; it didn't occur to me what thoughts would go through Gary's head when he turned around and I was gone.

James nodded. I was older than him, so he trusted me. His mom and Gary were deep in conversation, they wouldn't miss us too much. I don't remember now where I led James first, but we wandered for a bit before heading to the conservatory. As I mentioned before, that part of the Gardens has always felt otherworldly to me. But when I went there on my own, everything became even more fascinatingly foreign. It's two or three stories high, and James and I took the elevator, which is disguised as part of a tree, to the top. That day was the first time I'd gone in an elevator without an adult. It wasn't that I was afraid of elevators, but somehow it felt like going in the elevator unsupervised was the sneakiest thing I was doing. When we made it to the top, I was feeling invincible. I could

do anything on my own, I was so independent! Gliding on this feeling, I led James down the path.

After a short time, though, someone stopped us and told us that our “parents” were looking for us. I still didn’t think too terribly much of it, but we left the greenhouse and met James’ mom and Gary outside. When we met up with them, it hit me all at once how worried they must have been. The invincibility I had felt only a handful of minutes before shattered and my heart sunk to my toes.

I have a vivid memory of watching from a few feet away as James’ mother hugged him tight, then held him at arm’s length to scold him. They were standing in front of a desert juniper near the Garden’s entrance. It seems surreal — maybe I’ve created this image in my mind after the fact, mashing together reality and scenes I’d seen in movies when parents are reunited with lost children. Either way, I remember being able to tell that she was really angry.

Gary, on the other hand, was just glad I was okay. Part of this, I’m sure, is the difference between parent and grandparent. The grandparent isn’t in charge of discipline. Still, I felt so guilty that I hid in Nana’s guest bedroom until my dad came to pick me up. The guilt completely overrode any positive feelings I’d had from going off on my own. It’s a shame, in hindsight — all desire I had to explore and be independent vanished. Most of it came back eventually, but I don’t think it’s ever been quite as strong as it was before.

The Crown of the Sky

When the sun has just set but its rays are still keeping the sky from going entirely black, and street lamps are just beginning to glow, I like to go outside and just be. I don't do it often. Honestly, it's pretty rare that I do. But on the few occasions that I've happened to be outside at this time of day, I've noticed my gait slow down and my breath deepen. I like to look up to where the blue turns to purple and the purple comes together to a point of black at the very crown of the sky. Way up there, I can usually see a star or two flickering into visibility. Then I look back at the lamps inviting me back down to earth. Somehow, the two don't seem to be pulling me in different directions. At this time of day, it's much easier than usual to live in the space between.

Beauty

I noticed some tiny purple flowers blooming the other day. The ones that grow naturally and spread like weeds. They probably are weeds, to be perfectly honest. They're probably an invasive species, and they should probably be removed. And I should probably care a whole lot more than I do. I recently learned that Portland has the Backyard Habitat program where people have a consultant visit their land and tell them which plants are native and which are invasive, and how to fix it. This is such a great idea, in my opinion. I definitely support helping land to do what is healthy for it to do in its particular climate. If we could all have Backyard Habitats, the world would be a much healthier place.

But I have my selfish moments, too. When I look at a beautiful invasive species of plant, I tend to want to keep it around even if I know it's not good for the land in the long run. Now, I don't actually know for sure if the cute little purple flowers are invasive plants or not. They could absolutely be native to Oregon — plants that belong elsewhere were likely brought long ago at this point, and now seem normal to the people that live in any particular place. I certainly have no way of differentiating between native and non-native plants; it's something that has to be studied, I think.

Either way, these flowers spread in a way that I'm sure must classify them as a weed. But I have the same problem with weeds — sometimes they're just pretty and I want to keep them. I know this is no good. And if I ever own land, I'll make sure to be a good environmentalist and try my best to have only native plants which won't damage

any others. But until then, I'm going to allow myself to have some sympathy for the weeds, and to let their beauty be reason enough for their existence.

Collectivism

I'll venture to say that most Coloradans take aspen trees for granted. They're one of the most common types of trees in the state, and very possibly the most common deciduous tree. They're beautiful — no one has ever argued with that. In the fall, their leaves are a darker golden on top than on bottom, so that they seem to ripple when the breeze hits them. Their bark is a beautiful cream color which goes beautifully with their leaves, no matter the season. Still, as a Coloradan, you kind of get used to it. Aspens are seen as a cliché backdrop for high school graduation pictures, and that's about it.

But they should be seen as so much more. Most aspen groves are connected by their root systems and are actually just one organism. In fact, the largest living organism on earth is a grove of aspen trees located in Utah, spanning one hundred and six acres, which is about eighty football fields. It is fondly nicknamed "Pando," which means "to spread" in Latin.

How amazing is it that these trees can spread to over one hundred acres on a single root system without losing momentum? Going on like that, no matter what, covering more and more ground. What if we had that sort of determination? That sort of collectivism? What looks to be hundreds of individual trees are just one organism — what if we had that sort of faith in ourselves? The faith that even though we might each be just one person, we can keep growing and improving? These trees all draw on the same source of energy to keep moving forward, and in a very real sense, that energy is

each other. Shouldn't we be able to help each other like that? Rely on each other like that? Trust each other like that?

Part Two:

Lost in Venice

The lagoon hardly looks liquid at all. It moves like rubber, in one smooth sheet — no waves break its calm. Sunlight is glinting off the deep teal surface as Tasha leans on the retaining wall. This is the first rest she and Grant have had — Venice isn't exactly easy to navigate and they're only there for a day. They'd spent at least an hour trying to find St. Mark's Square, the one tourist attraction they knew of, which they weren't even all that impressed by. The water seemed much more appealing. "It looks kind of unnatural," she says to him.

"What do you mean?"

She shrugs. "Just the way the water's moving. Like there's something over it."

He laughs and kisses her forehead.

The water stretches almost as far as she can see, though she can just make out the shore on the horizon. Off to the side are some islands that can't be more than five minutes away. They have some intriguing architecture on them: one building's domed roof makes her think it must be a cathedral, and there's a tower next to it which is probably a bell tower. It must be gorgeous inside, but she doesn't want to hassle with trying to get over there. In fact, she'd be content just standing and staring at the water the rest of the day.

Grant hugs her from behind and she leans her head back, but he pulls away again. He grabs her hand. "Should we keep exploring?" he asks, stepping back from the wall and starting to walk down the path.

She doesn't really want to, but nods anyway.

They're walking along the shore away from St. Mark's. She asks him if he has a destination in mind.

"No. Do you?"

She doesn't know if it's in his tone or his face or her imagination, but something about the question feels accusatory. "Well, no. I was just wondering. I didn't mean anything by it."

"I didn't say you did."

"Okay." She closes her eyes. Just for a second. He squeezes her hand quickly and she glances at him. He's smiling at her. She smiles back — everything's fine. They're both just tired. Why they ever thought it was a good idea to go to Italy for only a day is beyond her. They spent a third of the past forty-eight hours on either a bus or a train, and they're about to do it all again. She looks back at him. He doesn't look all that tired, though she knows he is. But he looks happy, taking in the sights. He says something about a building and she nods.

She just has to remember why they're there in the first place. When he suggested the trip, she'd been reminded of what she loved most about him. They'd been sitting in her kitchen, each focused on their own work. He had looked up at her from across the table and asked if she wanted to go to Venice. Her only response was to hmm and mumble something along the lines of "that would be nice someday."

"What about tomorrow?"

She looked up at him then. "Tomorrow? I have a test on Monday."

“That’s right, I’m sorry. Maybe we can go another time.” He turned back to his work.

She watched him for a moment as he bit the end of his pen and scribbled something out on the tour speech in front of him. It was such a mundane lifestyle, walking the same route every day, saying the same things over and over, the faces of the people changing but too fast for any of them to matter. She knew he needed some excitement in his life; even the face of Big Ben must be duller to Grant by now than his own fingertips. And it wasn’t his fault he had no excitement. He didn’t have a set career path yet — she wouldn’t either if it weren’t for her parents.

Tasha glanced at the open law book in front of her, then back at Grant. He was tapping the end of his pen on the table. “You know what? You’re right. Let’s go to Italy.”

He paused, his pen hovering. “What about your test?”

“I’ll study on the train — they say new environments help you remember things better, anyway.”

“You’re sure?”

“Yeah, we should do it.”

He scraped his chair back. “I’ll start packing!”

They’ve been winding through the twisting paths for a while, paying mind only to which ways looked like they would lead somewhere interesting. The water lapping against the foundations of the unfathomably old buildings is their constant reminder that

they're somewhere new. Somewhere grand, and important, and celebrated. Their awe at everything has been so all-encompassing that they haven't stopped walking for hours.

Tasha's stomach rumbles. "Should we stop for food soon?"

He checks his watch and nods. "We have a few hours till our train leaves, so we could eat now, then slowly start making our way back?"

"Sounds good."

He points to a nearby restaurant as he turns toward it. "We'll eat here," he says, already opening the door.

They order a ham and mushroom pizza, Grant's favorite. As they wait for it to arrive, Tasha feels herself beginning to slump in her seat. She doesn't know how long they were walking, but it feels like an eternity. She should have ordered coffee.

The pizza comes right as she thinks she might actually fall asleep. "Thank god," she says. She feels a little bit bad for not having talked before, while they were waiting, but Grant hadn't been talking either. She puts a slice of pizza on her plate. "It's nice to be sitting."

He nods. "Nice to be eating."

Clouds have rolled in by the time they leave the restaurant and the sun is starting to set. The few people in sight are zipping up their coats. Tasha follows a pace behind Grant. "Do you know where we're going?"

“For the most part. We’ve still got a while, so we’ll make it.” He turns left and leads her confidently through an underpass. “We need to be going in this direction,” he adds, turning to look at her as he walks.

She smiles at his absolute confidence. Everything he does is with such conviction that she finds it hard to doubt him. She looks ahead, expecting to see a long path, maybe a bridge at the end.

Instead, there’s a canal only a couple of feet in front of them, no bridge to be seen. He’s about to step off the path, but she grabs his arm, sucking in air between her teeth.

He laughs. “Okay, maybe not this exact direction.”

She admires his being able to brush it off, but she can’t do the same. The image of him falling had played across her vision in the second it took her to reach for him. The water splashing up, losing its mesmerizing qualities as it comes crashing back down over him. His head just centimeters from hitting a boat. Her complete inability to do anything to help. She slips her hand into his. “Please be careful. You don’t know your way around as well as you usually do.”

“Okay,” he answers. “I will.”

“Do you think we’ve gotten any closer? We’ve been walking for like an hour.” She tries to sound concerned rather than whiny; she’s not sure if she succeeds. They’ve found more dead ends than bridges, and she’s fairly certain they’ve passed the same restaurant at least twice.

“We’ve gotten closer,” he assures her. “We’re almost there.”

“Okay,” he says for the umpteenth time in the past ten minutes. “We just turn here and follow this sign, and then we’ll get there.”

“Can we at least ask someone? Please? It’s not as easy as you’re making it out to be.” She refrains from adding that they should have just paid the extra money to keep their data for their two day trip. Then they wouldn’t have to ask anyone, they could just look at a map on one of their phones.

“Alright, we’ll ask the next person we see,” he concedes, continuing at a brisk pace toward yet another dead end.

They’re practically running now, though neither of them wants to admit that they’re worried. “It’s fine,” he keeps saying. “We just follow the Grand Canal like they told us.”

“Okay, if you really think that will work,” she keeps answering, sounding gradually more and more skeptical.

They come to the Grand Canal in the same spot for at least the third time. The reflections of the streetlights look distorted and taunting. Tasha moves to block Grant’s dogged trek along the winding path. “Grant, stop.”

He tries to go around her. “It’s getting late.”

“No, wait. We can’t just follow the Grand Canal, there’s no path along it. We need to ask someone else!”

“We don’t have time to stop and chat with people. We need to just keep going.” He sounds like he’s talking to a wild animal. She can just see him with his hands out in a pacifying manner, walking slowly toward a wounded bear or deer.

“Chat with people? We’d be asking one question.”

“You know what I meant. Anyway, we’re going to make it back with plenty of time.”

“Even if we made it back right at this very second, we wouldn’t make it back with plenty of time! Our train is leaving in half an hour! It could be pulling into the station right now!”

“Tasha, believe me,” he says, enunciating every word, “we are going to find our way. Just follow me. We’re so close, I can feel it.”

She squeezes her eyes shut, but nods. There’s no time to waste arguing.

They’ve dropped all pretense of calmness at this point; they’re running top-speed. Most of the time, all that Tasha can see are Grant’s heels kicking up in front of her, but every once in a while a stationary person will come into focus and she’ll have to use all her strength to run past them instead of begging them for directions. After a bit, she can’t take it anymore and skids to a halt. “Grant, I’m asking for help!” She sloppily explains that they’re trying to get to the train station in less than half an hour and the person’s eyes widen. They tell her it’s half an hour away by foot, and that’s only if you really know

your way around; a water taxi is the best way to get there in time and there's one straight ahead. She pants out a "thank you" and turns back to Grant, who is jogging in place.

"Water taxi," she tells him, and starts running in that direction.

"No!"

She slows and turns, but keeps walking backward. "What?"

"I said no, I'm not taking a water taxi. I'm not paying for that when I can get there just fine on my own."

Tasha stops. "Grant, come on. We don't have time for this. Just get in the damn taxi with me — I'll pay for it."

"I told you I don't need that, Tasha! I can fix this, I can get us out of here!"

"No, Grant, you can't! You've been trying for the past two and a half hours!"

He stops jogging. "What?"

"Let's go," Tasha says.

"No, I just — "

"I'm going."

"What? No, Tasha, just —"

"I'm taking the taxi, whether you come with me or not. I'm not going to run around anymore. Are you coming with me?"

He only hesitates for a second. "No."

She only hesitates for two before going the other way.

In the shelter of the taxi, Tasha takes a deep breath. The water is still strangely calm on either side of her. She looks down a path and sees Grant come to the canal's edge. He pauses. She looks away.

Part Three:

The Willow's

branches wend downward,
brush the grass fondly,
befriend the pond's fish.

Leaves, themselves pixie branches,
let their paths be guided,
leisurely trailing behind.

I imagine I hear them
inviting any passers-by
in, calling

'Here is your escape, your
haven from chaos, your
home.'

They do not tangle when the wind blows,
though it may look like
they will.

As droplets of water move together,
all joining in one waterfall,
a synchronized leap,

so moves the willow,
softly,
soothing.

Works Consulted

“August 21, 2017 - Great American Eclipse (Total Solar Eclipse).” Timeanddate.com, www.timeanddate.com/eclipse/solar/2017-august-21.

Cook, Brent. “How a Tree Grows.” How A Tree Grows, dendro.cnre.vt.edu/forsite/2004presentations/Brent/LightLeavesAutumnColors.htm.

Henderson, Bruce. “When Is the next Total Solar Eclipse?” Charlotteobserver, Charlotte Observer, 21 Aug. 2017, www.charlotteobserver.com/news/local/article168338217.html.

Jimison, Robert. “What It Really Means to See Green.” CNN, Cable News Network, 5 June 2017, www.cnn.com/2017/06/05/health/colorscope-green-environment-calm/index.html.

“Madeleine L'Engle.” Madeleine L'Engle - Wikiquote, en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Madeleine_L'Engle.

Means, Tiffany. "Autumn Leaf Color: What's Elevation Got to Do with It?" ThoughtCo, Oct. 12, 2016, thoughtco.com/how-elevation-affects-autumn-leaf-color-3443651.

ENGL 485 Thesis Project

Certification of Authorship

The wording below asserts your ownership of copyright of your thesis project, certifying that it represents your own work and that it does not include words written by others except as noted in relevant citations. Such an assertion of originality, hence ownership, is a standard element in any book publication contract. Please print out, fill in, and sign **two copies** of this form; they will be included at the back of the bound copies for the library and the department. A thesis submitted without these signed copies cannot be graded – so don't forget this form!

I Chloe Switzer (print your name)

do hereby certify that the work entitled

Nature's Paths (print your thesis title)

is original, that I hold exclusive copyright of this material, and that the direct quotation or use of the words of others (wherever necessary) has been indicated according to standard academic citation rules as dictated by the Modern Language Association. Other than such cited material, the wording of this work is mine alone.

Signature redacted

your signature

5/24/18 date