Losing my Sanctuary Kimberley Lambert

As I am walking to my spot down by the Skeena River, sketchbook clutched tightly in my sweaty hands. I notice two bald eagles flying above me. Though I have seen many eagles around this area. 1 never tire of looking at them. So I stand and watch as the beautiful, majestic creatures circle one another. I am about to sketch the eagles, but think better of it. It is only morning but it is already very hot, and getting increasingly hotter. The sun burns bright and red. high in the cloudless sky. I glance at the eagles one last time, but my eyes quickly water from the intense brightness. I continue on my way down the dry, dusty path.

It is almost noon by the time I reach the river. I have packed a lunch, but I am not hungry yet. I have still not reached my favorite spot. I still have about a ten-minute walk to go. My spot has a little grassy overhang that juts out over the riverbank. A small shady forest surrounds the area providing relief from the summers scorching sun. It is off the main path and well- hidden by the thickness of the woods around it. I like the way the sun comes through the thickness of the trees, lighting up the darkness with little pools of light. This place is particularly special because not only is it by the river, but there is also a small bubbly creek flowing into it. There are logs that stretch across the creek, and sometimes I sit on them and sketch the small fish beneath me. This sketching doesn't usually last long, because I almost always accidentally move my feet and scare the fish away. It is hard to stay still in such breathtaking beauty. Everywhere I look there is something wonderful and enchanting just waiting to be seen.

Once I have reached my spot. I sit down on the mossy forest floor, and rest my back against an oak tree. With the cheerful, trickling melody of the creek as my soundtrack. I start to sketch my surroundings. There is a woodpecker scaling a tree not far from my own. His brilliant head bobs up and down in a blur of red as he starts to tap at the wood. I lean back into the tree. The bark scrapes my skin, and the uneven wood jabs into my back. And yet, I couldn't be more comfortable or content. I sigh with pleasure. This is my favorite place on earth.

I have lived in Terrace all my life, and have been visiting my sanctuary for three years now. I will visit my spot in any season, and in almost any weather. I have been there countless times, and yet. every time it feels like the first time. Every passing day, minute, or even second, there are changes that occur in this wondrous place. I will go there often if I am seeking solitude. I am happy that my place seems to have gone undiscovered by anyone else. It remains my oasis in life.

I am awoken from sleep by the sound of distant voices. My back aches, and there is a light patter of rain falling on my head. I shake my head vigorously to shake off the sleep and the rain water. My first real coherent thought is that I must have been sleeping for awhile, as there wasn't a single cloud in the sky when I started to doze off. And then

my fuzzy, sleep filled brain picks up something else. *There were voices*, I suddenly remember. I listen hard, and pick them up almost instantly. I stand up quickly, only half conscious of the bits of moss clinging to my body like a green sweater. Quickly, I back up and head deeper into the forest. I hide behind a huge cotton wood, and steal quick glances at the place I have just left. It is not long before I see who is making the voices. Two children, walk hand in hand with a young woman I can only presume to be their mother. They are smiling and laughing. One of the young girl's rushes to the creek, and the other girl, under her mother's watchful gaze, starts to clime the tree I had been sitting under. My skin is cold and clammy, but my insides are hot and churning with anger. *This is my sanctuary, what do they think there doing?* Over by the creeks edge, the little girls hug there mother. "Isn't this pace beautiful mama?" one of them asks. I do not hear the mother's response. I have turned away from the scene, and am walking further into the woods. I am calm now, and ready to go home. Watching that scene has made me feel like an intruder, and I have just realized something. I can't believe I have been blind to it for so long. This place does not belong to me, and I have no claim over it. The beauty of this earth belongs to everyone, and my spot is no exception. *No, it is not my spot. Not anymore.* I walk through the woods aimlessly, not paying attention to where I am going. I am lost in thought, but somehow I come across the main trail. My feet take me along the same worn dusty path I have walked for over three years. It *is not my spot anymore, I have lost my sanctuary.* The trees of the woods are starting to thin, I am close to home. *No, I have not lost my sanctuary, not really. I simply have to share it that's all.* Maybe in time, too many people will come down to the river and the spot will lose its beauty. Maybe in time, this forest won't even exist. I stand and turn to face the woods. *But, maybe it will last.* The sun has come back out, and it has stopped raining. Water continues to fall from overhead trees. I look up at the sky, and there is a faint rainbow. I smile and continue towards home.