

Wilderness

by Tawnysha Greene

After Daddy's job interview, he stays home, sleeps during the day, and Momma takes us to the park on these days where the playgrounds are empty, the kids still in school. My sister and I create obstacle courses through the playground, run across the moving bridge, hurl ourselves down the slide, swing across the monkey bars, and Momma times us on her watch, always tells us that we tied.

One day she doesn't watch us, sits alone on a picnic bench, her Bible open, hunched over the pages, a hand over her mouth, clenched in a fist. Her brows are furrowed, eyes full, and I know that Daddy didn't get the job.

We stay at the park for hours, until it's long past cold, and Momma's coat is dusty with snow, her hair speckled in white. She reads the Bible when she needs alone time, and we leave her be, play in the cold, a new game today, one in which we are in the wilderness, that we are lost, must forage for shelter, food. We call this game the end of the world.

We find fallen logs in the forest by the playground, long, smooth sticks covered in snow, drag them by the picnic benches, stack them big enough to hold Momma, my sister, me. The houses don't have doors, roofs, but the walls are strong.

When we're done, my sister and I lay in the snow, look up at the sky, watch as our breaths leaves our mouths, drift up past the trees, and I pray the way Momma does when she's scared, repeat the same words, so that God can hear me.

