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Hello! My name is Rachel Garnett and I currently attend Lynchburg College, recently renamed University of Lynchburg, as a first-year student. I am currently pursuing a major in some realm of environmental science, and I am interested in environmental subdivisions ranging from forestry and animal conservation to sustainable engineering. My future goals include campaigning for the conservation of natural resources and endangered animal populations. I want to share with the world the importance of the natural landscape and the great losses we will all suffer if our planet continues to be treated in this unfair manner. One hope I have for myself is to share my message through art in some capacity, whether through photography or acrylic and watercolor mediums. Interwoven with my love for the natural environment, is my love for my beautiful dog Missy, who loves going on “nature walks” just as much as I do! After college, I am considering attending graduate school, hopefully having narrowed my interests by then. I am excited to increase my knowledge of our natural world through my education, and positively influence this same environment I have admired for so long.

Maine Free

The cacophony of marbled rocks clinging and bouncing to and fro on the edge of the worn path, the tread of my sneakers meeting the ground in staccato rhythm of threes. The feel of textured bark beneath my hand, each knob and wooden valley offering a distinct sensation to my fingertips. As I continue down the trail, sunlight bursts through the canopy layer, collecting in fragments along the forest floor, disrupted in terraced spheres as she passes through a mesh of leaves and branches. Below me, rich soil and debris dislodge and travel upwards as I step; me: a total stranger amidst the plant life. The air smells wild and sweet. Such a strange and nostalgic sweetness it takes me aback, my nose accustomed to the scents of the man-made. It is almost as if this forest, ever so slightly, is tinged with honey. A slow, powerful, and ever-present force. The heartbeat of the forest syncopates with mine. The shrill call of the birds match the length of my strides. I pause and close my eyes, my eyelashes resting in the periphery. The forest is filled with the melody of conversation. The wind whistles softly between the trees, as their leaves rustle and wink in response. The birds sing to their seeds as if they were the most beautiful jewels in the world, while butterflies perch quietly in skinny

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slats of sunshine, warming their wings. The cool air soothes my skin; as I rest, a dew drop plummets towards the surface of a quiet, soft stream. The glass surface of the pond shatters and ripples outwards as the dew drop disrupts its previously untouched face. The sun sings the long-dormant buds and roots out of the shadows, caressing them with light and nourishment. The scene displayed before me is perfectly vibrant, each object of my fancy more fascinating than the last; a forest so green it seems imagined. Thorny tendrils of vines perch high above my head, dangling tempting yellow wildflowers just out of reach. Gazing ahead, I take note of the water's edge. The repetitious reverberance of the lake echoes my steps, the energy and movement of the waves growing in strength as I near my canoe. Once inside, the cadence of the waves urge me inward to the island: a speck in my field of vision, a magnet drawing me in to uncover her secrets. The mound in the distance is illuminated as the sun generates a halo of light-pink iridescence; the island and the sun dance in semi-spheric harmony with the lake as I paddle. With the waves come incredibly diverse and surreptitious microorganisms: the backbone of every nature walk and canoe trip are those who constitute the humblest sector of all aquatic life. Nature, so demanding, chaotic, powerful, and microscopic, all at once. To be a true proponent of nature is to appreciate

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the macro view of a sunset, while experiencing the same awe-struck sensation upon discovering the science behind its creation. The sun reddens my blood-orange canoe as the undersides of the tree leaves encircling the lake tinge navy blue. In my canoe I ease around the island, in wondrous admiration of the clear blue water, shallow ends filled with spiraling mosses and green strings prompting spiky spores. The shore is sandy, and littered with dark chocolate rocks by the roots of trees. The gravelly surface protests my arrival as I propel my canoe ashore. A quiet smile breaches my lips as I happen upon a native plant, the meadowsweet, who announces her presence in a brilliant lavender-pink. I continue onto the base of the island, and find myself in a clearing off-center left: looking upwards, nature calls herself forward: the tips of tree branches tickle a red-fringed skyline, tinted by the setting sun. The warming rays bestow a surreal feeling on my sanctuary as the sun gazes favorably upon me...and for a moment - silence. The scene laid out before my eyes is frozen in time, carefully tucked away in free recall memory. The leaves pause and still as they float towards the ground, suspended in mid-air. The birds cease to chirp, the careful slapping of the water against the shore ends, the heads of worms just begin to emerge from the earth - but just for a moment. Time refuses to acquiesce another minute and the scene unfolds to

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the second act, beautiful and magical, glorious and celestial. The grainy sand pebbles scatter and grind as I pull my canoe towards me for my reluctant departure. A ray of sunshine prevails through a gap in the darkening clouds and lands softly on my eyelids, a goodnight kiss. In Maine, I feel whole. Maine, the unparalleled destination of wild, untamed earth and its creations.

Although her gifts are abundant and easily acquired, nature's pace is one which few abide by. To stop, rest, ponder, and appreciate is a rarity. To cease work and see and smell the bountiful hidden from our day-to-day lives. To be Maine free is to lay down atop a bed of crisp leaves, small twigs nudging your back as they wrestle with each other and become tangled in your hair.

Sunshine warming you with a tickle on your cheek. Mischievous squirrels chattering and chattering away about the weather.

To be Maine free is a glorious gift.