

SFPL Writers Sprint  
Honorable Mention  
Yasmin S

“Night Walk”

4:00 AM is the most beautiful time

The cool air bites my cheeks  
keeping the monsters away  
With its bared teeth,  
Welcoming me to be devoured by  
The beauty in its frost

The dark air lets me be unseen,  
Anonymous,  
Freeing me.

I am

Free from the shackles of society  
Free from those who want to lock me in a room  
Filled with books I am to read  
And words I am to write  
And ideas I am to think.

In the darkness,

I am

Nothing of importance,  
Just another shadow hidden away

The hollow air belongs to me.  
It belongs to the vaporization of *my* breath  
It exists to carry the sound of *my* footsteps  
It exists to carry the light to guide *my* way.

They don't turn the streetlights off at night  
Their incandescent yellow bounces off the ground,  
Cutting through the dark,  
In a surprisingly comforting way.

I walk along a four-lane road

Alone

The passing of a car or two every few minutes

Is the only thing telling me that this is indeed *real*  
It's as real as the sound of the beating of my heart  
Against an empty night.

I like watching my streets during the witching hour,  
They keep me safe,  
Allowing me to observe every simple detail,  
Allowing me to discover the beauty in places I wouldn't see during the day

It's time to wander  
Tonight's a night to go west,  
Back to the old park  
Where we used to  
Walk in the creek,  
Mystified at the summer days when it wasn't filled with water,  
At the days when it was a forbidden path to follow.  
That wonder we had is gone.  
It's never filled with water anymore.

Still, I have not seen that creek  
Through the lens of the night,  
The lens that restores the wonder to everything  
So I continue my journey,  
Knowing it will come to a fruitful end

I walk through the creek,  
Passing over compacted dirt and pebbles.  
I was right.  
The night has restored this place,  
Not to what it once was:  
A path whose wonder came from its exclusivity,  
But instead, the wonder was restored  
With a feeling of comfort,  
With a knowledge that this was a place  
That I could sit in without being known,  
That I could pass through without a trace.

And so, surrounded by the foliage around the creek's edges,  
I become one with the dirt below me  
And just take it all in.

Suddenly,  
A sound travels a distance to my ear  
A sound I know does not belong here  
A sound that is not safe,  
A human voice.

A whisper that broke the near-silence of the night  
“Hey, Joey, did you bring the paint?”

This had never happened before.  
This is not supposed to happen.  
This is not a part of my plan,  
But because it is not my plan,  
It must be the plan of the night.

So I peeked through the foliage surrounding the creek,  
And I spotted a group of teenagers,  
All dressed in black  
Like me.

They took their paint cans  
And they created art  
Upon the walls of the Rotary building.

I watched as their phone flashlights moved,  
Illuminating different parts of the walls,  
Clearing the space for spray paint to color them

Among the static of the night,  
And the hiss of spray cans,  
I heard a wonderful sound,  
The sound of carefree laughter.

And I realized that this was their night too.  
It freed and protected them too.

Because it was the night's bidding,  
I climbed through the foliage,  
Towards the group.

I did not utter a sound,  
Yet the crackling of leaves revealed my presence.

Their lights blinded my eyes,  
Dropping my cloak of invisibility.  
“It’s okay Joey, it’s not the police. Who are you?”

I am a secret.

“Can you keep a secret?”

Yes. The night wants me to.

“okay. Want to join us?”

I have been told that I must be perfect  
That painting walls is wrong,  
That this is not art,  
But vandalism.  
... If they say that, then I will choose to be a vandal.

Yeah. How do you paint?

“You’ll figure it out.”

And that’s how I met my best friends.