**OfBirds and Blooms**

"Don’t be ridiculous, Molly!”

"No, no, I saw it! I really, really saw it!"

"Oh, boo— do hummingbirds even live in Florida?"

Two girls, the bright ages of six and ten, stumble through the dry grass and sharp

palmettos. There's an excitement in the air that buzzes just as loud as the cicadas, the

sparkle in the youngest's eyes like fresh dew upon the leaves of their evergreen forest. The scrapes and cuts that litter her thin, pale legs go completely unnoticed as she drags her sister along behind her. Her tiny fingers clench in what could almost be described as a vice grip if it weren’t for the weakness of her youth.

"I don't know, but you've gotta believe me! I saw it! I thought it was a fairy!"

Katie’s nose wrinkles. "Fairies aren't real, silly, and they wouldn't live in Florida even if they were. It's too hot! They'd choose somewhere much nicer."

It may not look it with the way she lags behind, but the older of the two has walked this path many times before. She subtly guides them to avoid the thickest of the underbrush, her watchful eyes scanning the ground ahead of them for any potential danger that might be lying in wait. Beach-blonde hair and a rich tan skin, it's clear from one glance alone that she's born and raised Floridian. . . which is why she doubts her younger sister's tale so openly.

In all nine years of her life, she's never seen a hummingbird outside of textbooks and videos. What are the chances that Molly would get to see one first?

"Of course fairies are real! You're just too busy playing ‘grown-up’ to believe me."

It's a huff of pure annoyance, and Kate can't help but frown. Playing grown-up? She is practically a grown-up! She's almost 11 now, after all. That's why they're allowed outside now without Mom or Dad watching them. She's far too old for fairy-tales. She almost opens her mouth to say so, too, but before she can get the chance Molly is cutting her off with a gasp.

"Look! There it is!"

Just up ahead, there's a bush. One speckled with tiny bunches of orange flowers — a

landscape plant, she can remember Mom having told her once. An invasive species that

had seeped into the wilderness and made itself at home. They happened to be a magnet for butterflies . . . and apparently hummingbirds too.

The two girls come to a halt, neither of them daring to breathe, much less move. Not when such delicate wings flutter from flower to flower. Katie swears her heart may just break free from her chest to join it.

"See, I told you that I saw one!" Molly hisses in triumph. Even her bragging is done quietly, under her breath, so as not to disturb the little bird. Each beat of its tiny wings continues to pump its little heart — a very important task, one not to be disrupted. At least, that's what Katie learned in science class, anyway.

"What is it doing here? Shouldn't it be somewhere cooler?"

"Who cares! It's so stinkin’ cute!"

There's a moment of silence, where the two of them continue to watch in awe and wonder. Then, a faint whisper, as Katie is unable to help her own curiosity any longer.

“… Do you think it has a rider around?"

A giggle, as high and sweet as the nectar of the flowers the little bird drinks, as two little hands intertwine.

"Let's go see!"