

## Abby Turner

### Things you might find during a day in Hoosier National Forest

You might wake up on Sunday morning with an itch to go exploring. It's late January, and the cold weather has made you feel housebound for months. But this particular Sunday, it is slightly warmer than it has been, 40 degrees and comfortably cloudy.

You might push the comforter off your legs and drag yourself to the kitchen to make your coffee, thinking about which trailhead you might park your car at and wondering if the rain from the night before will have made the paths too muddy. But you shrug it off and put your bagels into the toaster. You remind yourself there is no time like the present.

You might put on two layers of shirts underneath your jacket and uncover your least favorite pair of pants from your very bottom dresser drawer, ones you won't mind getting dirty. You might struggle over which shoes to wear but you will settle on your brown converse, because you figure, they're already brown.

You might pack your bag with a journal, binoculars and a seaweed snack. You only plan on hiking for two or so hours, but you want to be prepared.

You might drive 25 minutes down a winding road and park in an empty lot. You might shiver when you step out of your car, but you will yourself that once you get going, you will warm up.

You might step onto the path and smell the first real fresh air you've smelled since autumn,



feeling comforted by the skeletons of trees forming a roof over your head. You might hear the crunch of brown leaves under your feet and become overwhelmed by the urge to smile because you decided to get out of bed today. You might feel your cheekbones raise.

You might look to your left at a tree marked with pink plastic tape and see that the tree bark has grown over the corner of a yellow aluminum sign. It reads, "Bearing Tree," which you will later find out means the tree has been marked by surveyors. The date on the sign reads March 1994.



You might choose to go straight after you come to a fork in the path, and after walking a few paces you may notice a sign on your right that warns against riding a bicycle and riding a horse through the path ahead. It might make you wish you had a horse to ride, because it suddenly sounds like fun.

You might stop dead in your tracks because just ahead of you, there is a small door with hinges stuck onto the outside of a tree. You might run up to it and crouch on your tip-toes to examine it. And, you might open it.

If you open it, you might find an assortment of small items seemingly left behind by other hikers. Rusty pennies, decapitated acorns, a few blue and red legos and other small knick knacks take up space next to the rocks and branches inside. You might instead like to think they are items

collected by forest fairies, because the small door reminds you of the stories your grandmother used to tell you about the fairies who live inside trees.



You might move to the side of the narrow path to let a woman in a neon yellow jacket jog past you. Her clothes stand out among the sea of brown and gray, and you wonder if you were supposed to wear bright colors in case people hunt in these woods. You might make a mental note of it for next time.

You might gasp as the silence of the forest breaks into a loud roar and you realize the trees around you are swaying, waving at each other with their bare branches. You might look up and become mesmerized by the way the branches separate the sky into tiny fragments of gray light. You have always loved that about the trees. You wished you had such power.



You might realize the path is sloping downward, and become perplexed at the thought of climbing back up once you turn around. The sight of a large footprint in the mood reminiscent of the stories about Bigfoot may break your concentration. You begin to feel silly thinking of things such as Bigfoot and fairies, but then you think it's a nice break for your brain after concentrating on such serious things lately.



You might reach the bottom of the hill and realize your path is blocked by a small stream that continues as far as you can see in either direction. You may stare at it for a while, listening to the gurgle of the water and the whistling of the trees. You might then skip across the large rocks as fast as you can to avoid getting your feet wet.



You might walk for a while until the wilderness changes around you. Brown graveyards of branches become leafy green flags, waving in the wind and beckoning you closer. You might notice sap spilling out of a few trunks, presumably from a woodpecker or a windy storm or a lightning strike. You might want to touch it, and you should.

When you reach a crossroads, you might see a sign pointing to the left. Atop the sign, you might see a pair of plastic red eyeglasses, only slightly worn down by the elements.



You might turn left and immediately get thwacked in the head by an eye-level bush, which by closer inspection you notice is growing wildberries. You might try and recall if they are poisonous because you suddenly feel the urge to eat one, but you figure you should probably eat your seaweed snack before you take things to the extreme.



You might pull your binoculars out of your bag and hold them over your eyes, adjusting them until you can clearly see far into the woods ahead. You see no deer or even squirrels, but you do see green moss growing splotchy among the trees.



You might walk five more miles, if you can even call it walking. You move slowly, looking in all directions at the beauty of the forest, being careful not to miss anything. You might even pull your headphones over your beanie and listen to Simon & Garfunkel on repeat until you wander back into the parking lot, back into reality.

*I am just a poor boy  
Though my story's seldom told  
I have squandered my resistance  
For a pocketful of mumbles  
Such are promises  
All lies and jest  
Still a man hears what he wants to hear  
And disregards the rest.*