

Immanence
by Marian Thorpe

I don't know where I was. Arkansas, maybe? A National Wildlife Refuge, a weekday morning in July, no one else around. A flat land, bisected by water. Wide trails, wide enough for a vehicle, thick vegetation on either side.

The air was heavy with moisture and the smell of DEET. Long sleeves, long trousers tucked into socks against ticks. I was walking slowly, birding, and anyhow, it was too humid to do anything else.

What made me turn? Probably I'd stopped to look at a bird. Probably my glasses had steamed up, and I'd lowered my binoculars and moved my head to make a little breeze. I looked behind me, the way I'd come.

The cat emerged from the vegetation, saw me, stopped. My breath caught. We stared at each other. Its golden eyes blinked, muscles tensed for movement. I was the interloper, the one being assessed. The cat belonged here. We watched each other for heartbeats, breaths.

Without hurry, the cat glided across the path and into the grasses. Gone, leaving only its shape in my memory; shape and movement, golden eyes, spotted fur.

And something theoretical had become real, an idea made tangible, a word made flesh. *Bobcat.*