

DISCOVERING ME

Written by Emma L.

Until yesterday, I had never heard of a whomperslooth. Then again, neither had anyone else. In fact, I don't even think it existed until then. Well, not that it exists at all, except for in its natural habitat, my imagination.

When I first showed up here, I had no idea this was possible. You know, the whole, "Use your creativity!" thing my parents kept bugging me about. It was like another galaxy away, and I had no way of reaching it. Basically, all I could think about was the fact that I was being dragged through the dense emerald forest against my own will, without my phone. The fact that I lasted the entire hike up to this deserted dump without it is a serious miracle.

I will tell you, for the trash heap that this place is, the location is impeccable. It's perched right on a cliff, with towering redwoods rooted everywhere, and all of the knotted bark is covered in a thin layer of vines and buds. Even the trampled grass on the hiking trails manages to maintain a nice, crisp, green coloring. These "roads" are the only way to get around camp, which I've grown to love over the past few weeks. At first, this was not at all how I wanted to spend my summer vacation, but the place has grown on me.

I'm not the only one that was sent to Camp Discover, but I'm positive I'm the only Lavette that's ever set foot on this campground. I really don't know what future my parents saw in this name, except for maybe a clown, but I must admit, even that's a bit too normal for it.

Anyway, back to the whole camp deal. My parents told me we were going on a road trip, and they weren't really lying. It took two days to get here! But the whole, "We're going to tour the country," act was a total fib. They were really driving me to this camp called Camp Discover, because apparently, I was on my phone too much at home and needed to use my imagination more. When we finally reached the so-called cabins, my parents handed over my suitcase carrying all my necessities and turned around to walk back to the car.

After they left me, with no goodbyes might I add, I was sent to the cabin and forced to write a story in under thirty minutes. They were then going to read it over, determine my level of creativity, and assign me my own personal guide to help me "discover my abilities." My counselor's name is Denise, and she said that she's for the campers that are "creatively less fortunate." I personally was offended, but I guess that's why my parents sent me here.

A typical day here in the wild involves delicious meals cooked by the one and only Chef John, lots of art and stories, and a few too many interactions with other campers. Although we work on our projects alone, we have to share every addition we make at the end of every working hour. It gets old after a while, and I can tell the others feel the same way. Just because we haven't formed friendships yet doesn't mean we can't make fun of the ridiculous amount of time we're forced to spend together.

Each week at camp has a theme. For example, week one was Coming up with Ideas Week, where we learned good places on the campgrounds to get inspiration, how to generate ideas and how to help others develop ideas. Then, we had Draft Week, which is when we learned basic writing skills, editing and revision skills. Then we had Presentation Week where all the campers present. All of them! And there are a lot more than you think, because it did take all week to finish sharing. For the rest of the weeks, we had a project that we had all week to finish. Last week, we had to draw and paint a portrait of something at camp. It's only at time like these when we get to "be active" and go outside.

I haven't told anyone about my whomperslooth, because I don't want to hurt their feelings over the fact that imaginary friends are way better than real ones.

Although most of my pieces are about the whomperslooth, I don't share them like I'm supposed to. Instead, I make up things on the fly. You get pretty good at that when you spend your summer at a creativity camp.

Besides the whomperslooth, I've made friends with my very own burble, yortle and zerx. The yortle is a mix of a turtle, a yak, a cat and a boar. I know that you're probably thinking about how that's a super weird combo, but aren't good friends supposed to be a little bit quirky? Anyway, a zerx is a calm blend of a zebra and a fox. It's way more normal than the other animals I've concocted, but still more interesting than your average human buddy. Burbles are an incorporation of some eel, fish and bear parts, and finally, a whomperslooth is a basic sloth, but with the tail, snout and speed of an armadillo. Like I said earlier, much cooler than a person.

These past few weeks have taught me a lot about myself, and it's hard to believe that it's almost time for me to go home. I'm definitely looking forward to the nice, clean house I get to go home to, and sleeping in my own bed. However, I will miss all the friends Camp Discover has gained me. And no, of course I'm not talking about people, I'm talking about the animals only I can see, the ones in my head. I still can't get over the fact that only weeks ago the only creativity I had was coming up with faces to make for social media pictures, and now I have all of these imaginary friends that are a real part of my life. I seriously don't know what I'd do without them!

Now the day to go home has arrived, and as soon as I wake up, my stomach sinks faster than a person in quicksand. The realization that I have to leave my whomperslooth, zerx, burble and yortle here at camp sinks in, and it's as if I just took a punch to my gut.

I panic even more as I start to pack up and see all my pals waking up.

"What are you doing Lavette?" they all ask in unison. "What's wrong?"

"Well," I say in a high-pitched voice that sounds nothing like my own. "I have to leave camp, but there's no way all of you could fit in the car, and I couldn't possibly pick favorites!"

Just as I deliver the devastating news, I hear voices coming from outside the door of the cabin. I recognize them, but I haven't heard them in a while.

“Mom! Dad!” I exclaim as they walk through the door, and for a minute I forget about the dilemma I have to deal with.

We exchange hugs and lots of love, and then Denise says we have to leave pretty soon because they’re getting another camper in the cabin any minute now.

As I grab my stuff and reluctantly head out the door, I wave goodbye to the creatures that got me through this summer at Camp Discover.

When we get in the car, my parents ask all of the usual questions.

“How was it? Did you have fun? What did you do? What did you make? Can we see it?” And then there was,” Who were you waving to when we left? We didn’t see anyone.”

That’s when I remember we’re driving away from camp, away from my zerx, yortle, burble and whomperslooth.

“Wait!” I yell in a panicked voice. “We left my friends!”

“Oh, honey, we can arrange playdates sometime, and it’s not like their parents would just let us take their kids away with us,” my parents reply.

“No, not the people, my animals. You know, the whomperslooth, yortle, verx and burble that I wrote to you about.”

“Lavette, we thought you were just joking. Showing us how much creativity you had gained, not being serious. And anyway, it’s too late. We’re already off the property.”

At that, I start to sob. I cry all the way to the highway, sniffle some more, and then just fall asleep on the comfy seat.

“Lavette, you want to paint with us?” my whomperslooth calls from my dreams. “Or maybe direct our play?”

“I’d love to!” I reply, and apparently out loud too, because the next thing I know, my mom reaches back from the front seat and shakes me awake. Maybe she’s concerned because she can’t hear them talking. Oh well, her fault.

After a few grumbles and moans because she disturbed my rest, I ignore her and just stare out the window at the shops and streets and other cars whizzing by. And the last thing I hear before I wander off to Dreamland to be with my friends is my mom saying to my dad, “Maybe we went a little too extreme on the lack of creativity thing.”