

A Native Haven
Patricia Charpentier
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Towering laurel oaks, silvery sweet bays,
thick cinnamon and royal ferns at their feet.
Creamy white blooms of the southern magnolia,
musky scent of rich earth mingling with an early morning mist.
Prehistoric stillness.

Home for the old box turtle,
hunting grounds for the regal red fox,
a nesting place for generations of Carolina chickadees, red-headed
woodpeckers, and barred owls.

In a pond adjacent to the woods,
Seven wood storks wading in shallow water.
Snowy white with black wing tips and tails, balancing on long, pencil-thin legs,
bald and wrinkled heads slung forward,
well-dressed, little old men out fishing in the early morning.

The bulldozer came yesterday,
filling in the old box turtle's favorite mud hole,
crushing delicate ferns under its massive caterpillar tracks.
By day's end, only neat piles of broken trees, uprooted cabbage
palms, their thick root balls, dried and lifeless.
Space made for another Central Florida parking lot.

