

Valley of the Fox

By: Jessica McCahon

“The cookbook room will be turned into your bedroom,” my mother declared on the eve of my sixteenth birthday. Having donated a majority of the ten-thousand cookbooks that once belonged to my great-grandmother to the San Francisco library, ample room was left in the two-room unit attached to our little farmhouse for myself and my belongings. The Glen Ellen property was lush; a span of forty acres, some overrun with native bramble bushes, a pond, and a portion of Calabazas creek. This little cookbook room held many fond memories for me. A childhood filled with searching through endless books, learning how to properly harvest and prepare nature’s bounty.

Having moved to the property following the passing of my great-grandmother, Barbara Gallo, I found myself spending the majority of my time exploring the nearly untouched land. One brisk April afternoon, in the heart of spring, I took my usual stroll down the driveway, a quarter mile stretch, lined with gravel from a nearby quarry. There in the distance, was the fox. Sniffing and riffling around the pear tree Mary Ellen Pleasant had planted over a century before I came into this world. Ears alert, he spotted me. In that instant, he reminded me of his canine friend, the dog. I conducted an experiment, wanting to immerse myself in nature; to see how far I could go.

I gently started at him, in chase, down the driveway a few yards, turned, then ran back to my starting point. To my surprise, he mimicked me, chasing me, and then returning to his spot, crouching, smiling from a safe distance. This exchange went on for a full five minutes

before something caught his eye, drawing him off into the nearby field. The next morning, I spilled out of my room into the morning sun in search of provisions, specifically, French pressed coffee. My mother greets me at the front door and smugly says "I see you made a new friend." "I did?" I mumble, rubbing my eyes. "The fox, the fox that slept outside your door last night." My new friend the fox, I mused. Each spring I fondly recall the fox. The fox that sought out connection, play, and life. I discovered that day, that in finding nature, nature finds you.