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Neverland

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Their house was a brilliant deep red with long, cream colored stairs leading up to the front door, and a wrap-around porch up high, looking over the entire neighborhood. The inside was warm, cozy and tidy, until the bedrooms were reached. I always liked going to their house. It felt lived in and friendly. The best part about their house was the backyard. It did not look like all of the other yards in the neighborhood, where not a single blade of grass was out of place. Their backyard was secluded, with huge fir trees guarding it like some sacred shrine. Because of the trees, there was no grass in their backyard, just a soft bed of pine needles littering the ground. In one huge fir tree was a makeshift tree house, hand-built of course. The creaky boards were moss covered and old. Even though it was weathered, the tree house beckoned with every trip. Next to the tree house sat a trampoline. Since I did not have one, every visit to the Lewis’ was an opportunity to work on my acrobatic skills.

Years ago I had the best neighbors a girl could ask for. They were not the picture perfect family that had two kids and a dog; they had nine kids and maybe a hamster at one point in time. Meredith and I spent every waking moment together and were very close in age and would take turns going to each other’s houses. I always liked their house the best. When I was little I felt I had two homes: one with my parents and brother and one with the Lewis’. Both places were special. They were vastly different, but in some ways the same.

One steamy summer day, when the shade of the trees was calling our names, Meredith and I went to her house to play. “What do you want to do?” I asked listlessly.

“I don’t know. How about we go play outside?” Meredith said.

When we stepped outside onto the back porch we were transported to a place where time stood still. We could be out there all day and it would only seem like five minutes had passed.

Everything was magical; the way the sun shone through the limbs of the fir trees and bathed the back yard in an indescent light, and the way the big evergreen trees looked the same no matter what time of day or year it was. We quickly rushed down the stairs and ran to our favorite spot, the tree house. “Let’s play house,” I said. “We can be sisters living together.”

“Oh,” Meredith said.

‘House’ was our favorite game. We made up this elaborate game by watching our own mothers. We wanted to be just like them, so, naturally, we would do everything that they did. We cleaned, swept the floor, and just like in real life, it never seemed to get clean. We made our own food, weeds from the back yard mostly (we did not actually eat them - we were not that crazy!) and we made sure everything was in working order. There were two levels to the tree house and we had to make sure that every room in the house was sparkling clean. The first level was a piece of cake- it was getting to the second floor that created hazards. Moms are not real keen on tree sap on new play clothes.

Sometimes in our games we would have our own rooms and we would have to be responsible for them, just like real life. One person would stay upstairs, the other down and we would continue on with our game. We would talk to each other just like our mothers talked to us. We would say, “I am going to get some food for dinner,” and then go pick the weeds a short distance away from the tree house. We had salad for dinner a lot. It was the most abundant. My all-time favorite was the chef’s special salad, featuring a bunch of dandelions all mashed together mixed with clover. Yum!

Most days the two of us would have ‘house-guests’ in the form of our siblings. They seemed to always ruin our game, never understanding what it was like to play house. I was responsible and felt like I had a sense of purpose in the world. I was still a carefree kid playing with my best friend, but at the same time I was a responsible adult, taking on the world. Our siblings would enter our house without knocking and mess our rooms up. Their favorite thing to do was to jump on to the trampoline from the second level. That was what always brought us crashing back to the reality of being a kid. It looked
like so much fun that we just had to try it. If our siblings' goal was to distract us from our game, they succeeded every time. The game usually ended after they arrived. They would get us so distracted, we forgot about cleaning the tree house and playing our game. We would give in and just jump on the trampoline. The house could always wait for another day.

The best part about this game was it had no rules. All we had to do was act like grown ups. It was easy. There were no winners and no losers, just work to be done. Looking back, the funny part is how both Meredith and I hated cleaning our rooms in real life, but when it came time to play 'house,' that was basically all we did. Through our games we would talk about what needed to be done and then do it. In real life we did anything to get out of cleaning. It might have taken all day to clean my room when I was little but when we played 'house' it only took a couple hours.

Those long summer days of playing house in that tree house bring back fond memories. I can still remember its grayish green boards all ramshackle, somehow surviving all those years. Meredith and her family moved away later in my childhood. We could no longer run down the street and play 'house' together. Our neighborhood water fights ceased and our sleepovers slowly dwindled to nothing. We had to be driven to get to each other's house and real life slowly took over our pretend households. We didn't realize then that those innocent days spent pretending to be adults would swiftly become distant memories. Now, I can't seem to get away from adult responsibilities. I no longer can just pretend, they are reality; no more can I pretend to play house, I live in one. The days of smashed dandelions for dinner are over; I actually have to make something edible to eat. The sweeping and the cleaning are perhaps the only thing that has truly stayed the same. Those tasks never end, even though I want them to. The reality of it is that pretending is just practice for real life. As a kid, that was all I ever did. I did so much pretending that when real life came, it still felt like I was pretending. Now, I cannot escape real life. The world of pretend has left me. Unlike Peter Pan, I have to grow up; Neverland only exists in my dreams when I long for childhood and childhood friends. This is where my pretend world lives on.

VOYEUR

Donnie Drohny

Looking through your window
Watching your sweet, subtle moves
A tear almost falls from my eyes.

You look at me, but I can't move
And I can see inside your eyes.
I see through your body's window,

Your heart and soul, shining from cerulean eyes.
And you don't see me, outside your window,
Still, you don't move and I don't move.

My dreams drift to inside the window
To a time, a place, where nothing moves
But the lights that dance in our eyes

To a time found in dreaming eyes
Where I don't have to sit by your window
Waiting for that one single move

When you call me inside the window
Like Peter Pan through a child's eyes
And together we both move,

And dance, and dance, and move
And watch the lights in each other's eyes
And someone else watches us from the window

With eyes that wait at window panes, afraid to move.