Gone Now

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wings. We made a bridge with our hands, and the ladybug crawled from hand to hand. "Hi little lady," she whispered, studying it carefully. "Somewhere we'll be ladies too, Boo. We can wear hats and go to lunch together, just like Momma and Auntie do." We go up and postured like ladies, daintily sipping from imaginary cups and affecting delicate chortles.

"Boo," I could tell she was going to ask me some dumb question about bugs or grass or the like.

"Brigid," I corrected. "Ir-rid. Say it." She looked at me for a second and then broke into a huge smile.

"Boo!"

Laughing, I grabbed her, but fell so that she landed on me, rather than the hard, wet ground. There seemed no difference between the long summer days. Tomorrow was sure to be just like yesterday. We spied on the Widow Golebiewski, tried to ride our spaniel, wrangled gumdrops off Momma, and fought, played, giggled and whispered, as sisters do.

As we crawled through the narrow tunnel in the hedge, which lined the edge of our property, the car went by. It was big and shiny and it pulled into the driveway next door. A man with a white suit and hat, and a woman with the roughest hair I've ever seen, and a girl all got out. They looked at the house for awhile, which had been empty for years. Then they started walking around the yard, pointing to the peonies and the little old gazebo visible from the back yard. Me and Molly lay low, so they couldn't catch us peaking.

The man jingled the coins in his pockets as he walked. The girl, as they came closer to our hiding spot, was dressed in a pretty dress of yellow organdy, with a matching ribbon perched atop her head. Every time she licked her piece of stick candy, it rattled the bracelet on her wrist. It was a really pretty bracealt, with lots of little charms dangling off of it. As I stared at it, the girl spotted us. She walked straight over to our leafy hiding spot.

"Come on out." She stood directly in front of us, and I saw that her socks had a lace edging.

"What's your name?" she asked, looking at my handmade jumper.

"Boo!" Molly piped up, hiding behind me.

"Shut up with that Molly!" I stepped in front of her. "My name's Brigid. Where are you from? I didn't want to look stupid in front of her. Everything about her seemed so polished and crisp. I guessed she was about my age, too.

"You talk funny out here in the country, my name is Caroline, and I'm moving here." She pointed to the house. "You can be my friend, if you like."

My heart leapt at such an offer. Here was a friend at last. We could share secrets and borrow clothes. And at last, someone tall enough to hold the other end of the jump rope.

"No little kids, though." She wrinkled her nose as she looked at Molly and her sad little doll. "Take your sister home and then come back. I've got lots of pretty dolls in my car. They're all the way from England. Come rock alone and I'll show you them all."

I looked down at Molly. She was looking up at me.

"I want to see the dolls, Moll. I can't if you're along. Go on home." I nodded my head toward the direction of our yard. She shook her head so hard her ponytail came around to slap each round cheek. "No! I want to stay with you, Boo. Can't I see the Gallies too?" She looked at Caroline for the first time.

Caroline had already started to walk away. "I don't play with babies." She stared at me. "If you don't want to play with me..." Her shiny black shoes made squeaky sounds on the grass as she walked.

I didn't want to lose this chance at having Caroline as a friend. She could make my summers really fun. I gave my little sister a hard shove toward the hedge opening.

"Go! Boat you little pest!"

"Boo," she said with a startled look showing on her smudged face. "Boo, you don't want that mean old girl for your friend." She pulled my skirt up as if to bring me with her.

I slapped her hand away and shoved her, harder this time. She fell on the ground. "If I want her for my friend, it's my business! Now go!"

She stared at me for the longest time and then crawled through the hedge real fast. My cheek felt tight as I saw the old brown shoes finally disappear behind her.

"Brigid!" It was Caroline. It sounded good to be called Brigid, not dumb old Boo. I smoothed my jumper and walked over to where she was waiting.

Gone Now

It was always there in a small gold box on the top of Gramma's dresser. A small ruby that clashed against the maroon velvet lining.

"Someday," she would say, "I'll have this set in a ring for you."

And she would close the lid.

Gramma is gone now.

The ruby is, too, taken by someone else.

I still have the box. It sits empty on my dresser.