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The Birdhouse

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Abstract
In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"Gramma?"

'Yes, Molly?'

'Who lived there?' Molly inquired as she raised herself up upon her tip-toes. She wrapped her small hands around two pickets of the peeling fence, balancing her weight on the cement sidewalk. The extra inch and a half allowed her eyes to hover just above the top beam of the swaying support."

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“Gramma?”
“Yes, Molly?”

“Who lived there?” Molly inquired as she raised herself up upon her tip-toes. She wrapped her small hands around two pickets of the peeling fence, balancing her weight on the cement sidewalk. The extra inch and a half allowed her eyes to hover just above the top beam of the swaying support.

She often wondered if nature was rising up to swallow the house that stood adjacent to her grandmother’s, or if the trees were simply going to continue to wrap their furry arms around and around the rotted framework; engulfing it all at once. She shifted her weight and observed.

The vast yard that separated her from the dilapidated structure waved foot-high grass in the afternoon breeze. Dandelions broke through the cracks of the misplaced walkway and ran rampant on the land. Black-eyed Susans randomly peered through a thicket of brush across the way and Spanish moss dripped from the trees, caressing the lawn and blanketing the porch roof.

“That property belonged to Ms. Josie,” Emma answered her granddaughter matter-of-factly. “When I was a child that ol’ home was a slice of heaven, everyone west of Langden considered it a landmark.”

Emma followed Molly’s gaze, watching the rainbow colored birds swoop through the broken stain glass that flanked the front doors. In and out, their freedom to explore enticed Emma. She inhaled deeply, allowing the sweet orange blossom air to soothe her. The light essence struck a chord of remembrance in her heart and slowly Emma began, “Ms. Josie had lived in Ashton longer than most folks could remember. ‘Had always lived here,’ my mama would say. She knew everyone in this here village and everyone knew Ms. Josie.
“On hazy days in July she looked like a water color painting-clad in pastel smocks with the deep pockets and a straw hat that flopped over her face. She would methodically swing her tin watering can keeping time with her song. Never wore shoes, that woman,” Emma added as if she had remembered that snippet after all these years, Molly concentrated on a yellow finch that caught wind currents above them. “She would make her way from the pink and red sweetheart roses that aligned the stone walk to the moring glories that hugged the lattice archway at her front gate. Ms. Josie tended the gardens and this home all by herself.

“Now, if you were one of the lucky ones in the neighborhood, Ms. Josie would see you passin’ by and invite you up onto her wrap-’round porch for a tall glass of lemonade, not the instant powdered lemonade they have today, but the kind that cools in a silver pitcher while fresh lemon slices float amongst ice.

“Once in her haven you could watch the ivy spread about the spindles and shade her as the birds in their birdbath worshipped her. She would hum softly to the butterflies dancing around her magenta hibiscus before they fluttered off into the fruit trees behind the house,” she paused to again accept the sweet breathe of air into her chest.

“One time, when I was fortunate enough to set with her upon the plush worn cushions of her wicker porch swing, I asked her: ‘Ms. Josie, do you ever get lonely livin’ here all by yourself?’ and my, would my mama have gone white as a ghost if she knew that I had asked such a rude question, but Ms. Josie, well, she just smiled.

‘Why no dear,’ she offered with the warmth of sunshine, ‘each year a few more hear ‘bout this place and come to visit me.’ Then she would go back to rockin’ and hummin’ a soft lullaby, and I would just rest in her majesty.” Molly gently tugged on the hem of Emma’s dress, drawing her attention to the chiming vocal symphony the birds offered. It was sharp, magnified by the thick afternoon haze, and crystal inflections hung on the air like
soprano notes of an ethereal chorus.

"I can remember lingering out along this here fence, hopin’ she would catch me in the corner of her eye and whistle me into her world," Emma paused nostalgically and rested her palms on Molly’s shoulders.

“Well, the years went by and Ms. Josie, she passed on peacefully. Only there were no heirs to her homestead; no one ‘round these parts could imagine anyone but Ms. Josie in those gardens anyway. Some say the property was condemned by the state, others say she had cousins from Alabama who now own it. Personally,” Emma whispered, “I think she willed it to the birds.”

They both squinted their eyes hoping the distortion would allow them to see the gardens as they once were. They were silent for a long while, dreaming with glossy eyes and listening to the music nature provided.

A hummingbird flirted with their silence and slowly Molly turned toward Emma, a hint of sunshine shone in her smile. As easy as the grass was swaying she sighed, “Gramma?”

“Yes, Molly?”

“When you pass on peacefully are you gonna return to Ms. Josie’s birdhouse too?”

Emma squinted across the ancient jungle, watching the hummingbird rejoin the kaleidoscope of others that made their home in that overgrown lot. She couldn’t help but smile.

“Gramma?”

“Yes, Molly?”

“I think Ms. Josie found her way home.”

Emma nodded her head in agreement, “She sure has Molly, sure has.”

--Erin Hopkins