Honors Project
ID 499

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May, 1975
Encantada

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Illustrated by the author
The girl hesitated momentarily as she leaned on the gate. Then she crept noiselessly past the splintered, unpainted gate into the barnyard.

Few friends were left to greet her—only a pair of pigeons and the weathered barn itself. Tall weeded grass in patches made stepping stones for her as she crunched cautiously into the barn.
She entered into a wide hallway, bare and silent in its awesome expanse except for the brown earth keeping the only reminders of its past friends - hoofprints.
She peeped through a dusty windowpane of the hall, delighted to still see the chickens' abandoned nests, the straw yellow and musky and obligingly fitting right into the feeling of oldness.
Walking farther and ducking into a doorway, her eyes gazed longingly on the empty stalls of the cows as she tried to remember each Guernsey's and Jersey's name.

The swat of a tail going to its owner's rescue during the fly season was a bit painful to recall as it swiped by a human eye in the effort.

Her grandpa used to say that if she sang to the cows they would give more milk, so every summer morning and evening those two would sing their hearts out, having special tunes dedicated to each cow.
A certain smell carried her feet over the full length of the room into a high, rounded cement tower. Hodder was still sticking to the sides and bottom of the silo! She sucked in all that sweet, ancient smell as she could, then she anxiously ran over to the largest part of the barn, the haymow.
She could feel that she was looking for something, but it remained in the corner of her mind, as if that thought was trying to imitate the dust and cobwebs of the barn.
She started searching for that forgotten thought. Was it something about the barn itself? The old, huge timbers that powerful held up the barn gave her no clue.

The sunlight that squeezed itself through the many cracks in the boards finally enticed her outside. At once the newness of the day hit her as she blinked at its brightness and warmth. Maybe what she was searching for was only a big tree to climb, one in which she could peer out on beautiful meadows.
She ran breathlessly to the most stunning tree on the farm, a large oak whose skin was hard and wrinkled. Its shape was perfectly symmetrical, for it stood alone near a field. She accepted one low limb's invitation to climb aboard, and from a higher perch amidst the green leaves the rolling hills of the farm land opened up to her.

It was beautiful. The nearby forest contained hundreds of animals she would never see. A stand of sassafras trees along a fence row could only remind her of another year's wait before she could go digging for tender sassafras roots. What delicious homemade tea it was!
The smell of hay, like fresh-burst watermelon, was all around her. This hayfield used to be the cows' pasture, where in the morning her sneakers and jeans would get soaking wet from the dew as she helped her grandpa bring the cows in to be milked.
One more thing caught her eye, the big lilac bush clinging next to one side of the barn. She and her sisters used to play "house" under it especially in the springtime, when one could boast of an entire household full of sweet-smelling flowers.
As she jumped down and wandered back to the barn she walked past a fenced-in depression of the ground, a garden now where pigs had once wallowed. The grateful grunt of a corncob-scratched pig cheerfully came back to her. Some hollyhocks had popped up at the side of the garden, and she remembered making little women out of them with only a hairpin. She took a hairpin out of her hair to do the same now.
Inside the barn again, she noticed a wooden ramp making a bridge between two levels of the barn. She couldn't begin to count the times a mother cat had hidden her kittens under it! As she had done so many times before, she knelt down, bending her head over to see under the ramp better. Then she put her hand underneath, and it felt something rough and crackly. Carefully, she pulled her hand out.

It was just a plain brown paper bag, but on the inside was candy corn. Now, she thought in amazement, could something like this be here? Candy corn from the county farm Co-op building was always a special treat that her grandparents bought her each time they visited there.

A slight shuffling noise from the barn door drew her attention upward.
Here came an old man, with eyes as blue as the sky outside, to look over once more the former homestead, a place where he felt a certain kinship.

He smiled.

The girl did not hesitate this time to reach out and hold on to the trusted hand of a faithful friend, and whom she had been looking for all this time — her grandpa.