

Going Home

By Macy Copithorne

The cool breeze of early fall nips at my cheeks as I start to slide out of my bedroom window. With the closest branch of the oak tree just barely out of reach, I contemplate going back in for a sweater. But it's too late, my feet are already planted on the sturdy branch. I wouldn't be out for long anyway. I climb up the oak, branch by branch until I reach my spot. I settle into the fork in the tree and rest my head against the trunk. I had sat here night after night, through winter, spring and summer just to escape the vacant halls and empty rooms of the mansion. It takes all I have to spend my days within the walls, trying to keep track of the unused rooms lining the halls. I could not be inside for the night too. The light evening breeze blows easily through the fabric of my thin shirt sending chills down my spine. I wrap my frail arms around myself in a failing attempt to ward off the cold. It must be warmer inside. I could wrap myself in my sheets and watch the sky through my closed window. I push the thought away, deep into my stomach where I leave it every night. A small part of me wants to leave my spot, climb down the tree and through my window, and spend forever in the emptiness of the mansion. Although it sounds nice and far more comfortable than the rough tree trunk on my back and the chill of the night, I can't let myself be inside much longer. I already force myself to stay indoors during the day. I can't let the emptiness of the mansion take my nights away from me too.

I spend the next while staring blankly up at the night sky soaking up the great feeling of freedom that I can only get from the outdoors. It's sometimes hard to believe that I spent my days like this back when I lived far from this miserable place in a house the size of my huge room in the mansion with my entire family, just a short walk from the beach. Now it is all of us in the mansion. I can't remember why I chose to leave that life behind to spend my days cooped up in a giant house, not wanting to see, feel, or even think about the outdoors. It would just make me miss my old life even more. I only allow myself the night.

The edges of my vision start to blur and my eyes are heavy with the hope of sleep. I have been sitting in the fork of the tree for much longer than usual reminiscing my past and that small part of me is begging for sleep and the warmth of my bed. Still I fight off the urge to curl up and fall asleep in the crook of the tree as I have done many times before. I just want to stay here in my spot and wait for the sun. Just as I finally give in to sleep and my eyes start to drift closed, I am jolted to my feet by a strange sensation. I could have sworn I had felt it. The soft brush of something across my bare arm. I fumble around in the almost total darkness of the early morning, searching for a low hanging leaf or a lock of hair straying from my braid. Nothing. Uneasily I make my way down the oak to my window. I find it wide open, curtains blowing easily in the breeze. I groan, frustrated with myself for leaving it open. Now it surely will be freezing inside. Slumping to the branch below me I cup my face in my ice cold hands and let my legs dangle off the edge, swinging free.

I barely see it. Just out of the corner of my eye a dark shape darts away just like a disappearing shadow. I knew something had brushed up against me earlier, but what? I slowly rise to my feet as quietly as possible as to leave whatever is hidden on the other side of the tree undisturbed. I take careful step after careful step, barely moving a few inches at a time. I shuffle around the outside of the trunk clutching each branch that comes into reach. My breath catches in my throat. The shadow moves and I focus my unblinking eyes on it as it moves sluggishly out of the shadows and into the slight rays of the rising sun. I recognize him first by the way he moves, briskly and alert. I watch him slink towards me, his light brown fur blending to the oak bark. Excitedly I close the space between us, scooping him up in my arms. Hudson came tonight. My beautiful brown cat from my old home. The one thing I brought with me. He had lived in the mansion for a while until I stopped going outside during the day. I had banished him to the outdoors in fear of him reminding me of the past. He still occasionally shows up when I'm out at night although he hasn't recently. I am so overcome with joy at this small event. I hug him to my neck feeling the softness of his fur against my face. After a minute, my happiness falters and I realize what

this means. This small piece of my old life makes me so joyful that I know I have to do whatever it takes to sustain that joy. This means going back. I have been putting it off for years now, constantly trying to convince myself that this is the better choice. The truth is that I am lonely and unhappy here but I just couldn't find it in myself to admit it until now. I miss the beach and the outdoors. I miss my real home.

I retreat to the opposite side of the tree and up across the branch below my window still clutching Hudson in my shaking arms. I push him through my open window onto my bed where he immediately settles down. I hoist myself up off the branch and through the window after him. With the window closed behind me the room seems warmer, more inviting. The cold trapped in the fibers of my sheets seeps into my skin but I feel warm inside. Hudson is curled happily at my feet. The weight of his sleeping body on my ankles feels so much like home. For the first time in years I let myself miss home and I let my mind wander. I could go back. I could once again remember the feeling of the warm sand beneath my feet and between my toes. I could spend my days outside in the sun instead of the dark halls. I wouldn't need to try to forget anymore, I could just live contently in my real home. The home with no metal gates guarding the perimeter. Where the grass is bright green and soft, nothing like the dead brown grass in our front yard. I could really go back.

I am decided. I will leave when the sun has fully risen and I will go back. Back to the warm nights and the crashing waves of salt water. It is certain now. I will not rethink it and I will not doubt this new found ambition. I find myself trying to stay but I know that staying could be impossible. Surely I would go insane continuing to live this way. It shouldn't be too difficult to leave. I will talk to my father and he will understand. I feel as though they are similar to me, longing and hoping for a better place but yet not wanting to admit it to themselves out of fear. Perhaps they will even come with me. We could sell this terrible mansion that has taken everything from us and just leave. We could go home.