

“The Trees”

If you go down the street in the summer, duck behind a small blue house, and run fast so no one can see you, you will reach the woods. It is no one's property, only a slow, silent stream as clear as glass. The houses disappear, and it is just you and the trees. If you are quiet enough, the herons will come to fish in the stream, like perfect one-legged statues in the water. And if you walk along the stream far enough, past the big oak trees and the baby pines, you will come across a mossy oasis, where the dappled sunlight and fragrant flowers make you want to fall asleep. If you visit once, it will be hard to leave and even harder to stay away. Be careful when you go—you don't want to be caught sneaking through the neighbor's yard.

You spend days studying the patterns in the trunks of the trees and following criss-crossing trails of slug slime until you end up where you started, on the mossy beds you are glad are *just* for you. But if you *do* decide to bring someone, your best friend, maybe, show her your favorite places like the grooves in the wood and the tiny strings of silver that span the forest floor. You wade in the stream in your bare feet, looking for special rocks while the sun travels across the sky. Make sure you don't stay there too late, and end up with a flashlight glaring at you from the top of the hill from the neighbor's yard.

Run, run, you screech, all the way home, up the stairs, and shut the door behind you. Chests still heaving, you are already scheming for the next time you return. The thrill of it all calls your name to the woods; there is no not going back.

These woods are a forbidden sanctuary, full of secrets deep in the streambed and high in the tree branches. Bring your Babysitters Club books and your picnic blanket, have a tea party

with your teddy bears, all while the ancient trees watch over you like a mother. They watch you play, watch you sing and dance and love all the things you can't out *there*. They hold you up when you want to lie down and cry after your best friend moves away. They watch you put your roots down somewhere wild, untamed, and free.

So, if you walk down the street in the summer and pass a small blue house, squint hard, and you will see the trees. You might not always see them, but they are always there.