

A Very Special Place

When Lily needed a place to think, she headed to the old house. It was built back in the 1600s. A guard stood outside the iron fence that separated the wooden house from the apartment buildings around it. He always smiled at Lily when she visited the house. It was a special place to him, and he knew that it was special to her, too.

To the side of the house, there was a huge tree--an oak. People said that the man who built the house had planted it when he arrived in America from Holland. So, the tree was about 400 years old. Or not. (Some people said even an oak wouldn't last that long.) Lily didn't care. Its highest branches danced below a third-story window of the apartment next door. The tree cast a lot of shade. It always took her eyes a few minutes to adjust. Even on hot July city days, the space under the tree was cool.

Lily often brought a book with her. And a flashlight. There, she could read and imagine anything. She could pretend that the ants walking up the bark of the tree were knights marching off to battle. When a breeze blew the branches, she could peek up at the sky. Then she pretended that she was in outer space and that the blue was Earth. Once, a squirrel came right up to her and sat on her backpack. She found a potato chip bag in a pocket and opened it. Then she passed a chip to the squirrel. She thought it would run away. But the squirrel stayed there, holding the chip in its tiny hands, and ate it.