

## My Secret Place

*Brooke Middleton*

I WOULD SPEND every day of my childhood in my tree house. This was my world, my secret place, a world where I made all the rules and where I felt safe. I was alone with my imagination. I would fight evil and single-handedly save the world from monsters and zombies. I am Zenahya and it was my duty to destroy them all.

An eight-foot-tall green monster swung through the window suddenly. As it landed on the floor of the tree house, it rocked, like an earthquake had struck under its weight.

“You’re mine!” It breathed at me. Its breath was so powerful and disgusting I wanted to run, but I knew that the future of Earth was in my hands. It swiped its huge claws at me. I jumped out of the way just in time. The sword was my only option, so I stabbed it, right in the stomach. It yelled out in pain before it fell to the floor, dead. One evil force down, who knew how many more were out there waiting for me.

I slowly moved outside onto the first deck, trying not to make a sound and give up my location. I found a zombie waiting there for me in the shadows. It was a female, with long, messy brown hair and a section of her skull was missing where I could see her brain. Her clothes were all tattered and ripped and she held her arms straight out in front of her. She staggered towards me, moaning as she approached.

*How do you kill the dead?* Before I could think of a way, she attacked, trying to grab me and eat my brain. I used my sword to slash her throat and cut her head off; the smell of her decomposing flesh making me sick. Her head rolled along the floor and stopped just beside my foot.

Knowing it was over, I sighed with relief. I had defeated the zombie. I did it; once again I saved the world, all before my mother called me in for dinner.

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High up in the trees, wooden planks knocked together in the wind, making a dull beat. The tree house, hidden from view by layers of branches and leaves, was open to the elements on its perch at the very top of the pine tree. From here I could see the entire town. To enter the tree house I'd climb a hand-carved staircase. On the branch overhanging the first deck was a sign that said 'Duck'. Farther up there was another sign that said 'Duck Again'. Beneath the irregular cedar-shingled roof were cosy corners for reading and playing games, while a basket attached to a pulley delivered supplies and weapons from the world below to assist me with my battles.

I could taste the fresh air as I breathed, which was a welcome relief from all the pollution of a suburban life. Outside my tree house all I could smell were cars, bonfires and bug spray. My tree house gave me the feeling that I was far away, in an unknown land high up in the canopy where I ruled, and all my people would help me fight off evil. The tranquility did not last long as I never knew when monsters and zombies would appear from nowhere, just like magic. But I was always ready, sword in hand!

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I was happy there, and I thought no one could take that away from me until I was told we had to move. My mother got a new job in the city as a senior architect and it was too far to drive to work from our house; we had to move to an apartment. Before I knew it, everything I owned was in boxes; everything except my tree house. I had to leave my safe place behind and move on to a new adventure. All the boxes were placed in moving trucks and it was time to get in the car and go. Tears flooded down my face as I was forced into the car. I did not want to leave.

As our car drove towards my new life I looked out the window, still crying, and watched as my tree house disappeared into the distance. It was gone but I did not want to look away from the horizon where the tree house used to be. I thought if I did, it would mean it was gone forever.

When we arrived at my new home, I had no choice but to look away and get out of the car. I was hoping there would be a new tree house that I could make my own and continue to save the world. But at my new home there were no high trees, or planks of wood knocked together, there were no layers of branches and leaves and I could not see the entire town from one high perch in the sky. The apartment building was a nine-story structure with forty apartments. The exterior was primarily red brick with limestone on the first two stories. The face of the building was decorated with limestone elements such as balustrades, pediments, and quoins. I felt miserable looking up at this building; it was nothing like my old house. There was nowhere to play; we didn't even have a backyard. All the other children in the building spent all their time reading and studying, locked inside the four walls of their bedrooms.

I was lost. Where could I spend every day, where could I go and fight evil and save the world? I had to find a new secret place but nothing felt the same as my tree house. My parents told me it was time for me to grow up and to stop acting like a child. Only children play in tree houses. But I was a child. I did not want to grow up. I was only eight years old.

I was learning that I would never see my tree house again, that I would never be able to fight crime and save the world from the safety of a pine tree. It was time for me to grow up. I would spend every day like the other children in the building, reading and studying. I turned to books to escape. The books I read were all about adventures undertaken by brave people, but none of this replaced my internal need to be free and play among the trees.

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Eleven years later I was driving through my old neighbourhood and thought I should pass by my old home to see what had happened since I moved away. Was my tree house still there? The memories I had were strong, yet distant. I wanted so badly to feel what I used to feel and as I pulled up to the house, butterflies appeared in my stomach. *Will I feel it again when I see the tree house?*

Above the decorative roof of my old home I could just see my tree house, hidden from view by layers of branches and leaves at the very top of the pine tree. All my childhood memories started flooding back.

I spent my whole childhood in that tree house. A single tear dropped from my eye down my left cheek, not a tear of sadness but of joy, joy of the fond memories I have of this place and the adventures it gave me.

To my surprise, I could see a little girl perched at the very top of the pine tree looking out over at the entire town. She was dressed like a pirate, swinging a sword at imaginary enemies. She noticed me looking and hid away behind a branch. With curiosity, she looked out every few seconds to see if I was still there. I tilted my head to the side for a better view. I heard a little giggle from her as she looked out at me again. That happiness I saw in her face and body language reminded me of the joy I felt in that secret place of mine.

“Hello,” she said as she peaked out at me again.

“Hi there,” I replied as politely as possible.

“What is your name?” she asked as she re-adjusted her pirate hat as it was about to fall off her head.

“My name is Zenahya, and I used to play in that tree house when I was your age,” I replied. “What is your name?”

The little girl climbed down and ran off into her house yelling, “Wait there!” A few minutes passed before she came out the front door. In her hand was a book. She passed it to me. It was an old looking book, with the pages ripped and the back cover missing. It looked familiar, but I did not know why. I opened the front cover and saw the words, ‘This book belongs to Zenahya, age eight’. This was my old book about fighting monsters and zombies. I must have left it here when we moved. I handed it back to the little girl.

“You know what? This book has some good ways to destroy all evil forces, why don’t you keep it?” The little girl was so excited that she snatched the book out of my hands and ran back towards her front door. When she reached it, she turned around and yelled, “Thank you!” at the top of her lungs with a little grin on her face. She waved goodbye and entered her house. I realised then that my secret place had become the secret place for another little girl, so she can fight evil and save the world. This place is hers now.