

# Hidden Away

by Dan C. Rinnert

I know that the false window on the face of my grandparents' home serves only decorative purposes. As a child, however, I could not fathom the concept that a window would not have a corresponding room. But, try as I might, I could never find the secret room that belonged to it.

I stared at that window for several minutes. The house had stood empty for the past ten years, as the family could not agree on what to do with it. Finally, everyone decided to put it on the market. Each of us took our turns in the house, saying our final good-byes and taking our last mementos before the auction.

Walking through the old place felt surreal. Things remained almost exactly as they had been when my grandparents last lived there. It seemed as though I had taken a step backward in time, but everyone had already moved forward, leaving only stillness behind.

I walked through each room, pausing to relive memories. At last, I had come to the final place to reflect, the basement. I had never much cared to go down there alone, but this being my last opportunity, I went down the stairs.

The basement seemed smaller and better lit than I remembered. A thin layer of dust offered the only indication that no one had been there for quite some time. At the far end of the basement, I saw the

white door, with a small window, covered by a curtain on its opposing side. I had never before dared to open that door, and could not recall anyone ever going into that room in all the times I had visited.



Cautiously, I entered the room, which turned out to be a small hallway. A wooden chair stood in the corner with a pink pillow for a seat. Two doors at opposite ends of the wall faced me. Instinctively I knew they both opened into the same room, though I could not recall ever having been in this room or the other.

I opened the door to my left and stepped into a sun porch. Diffused daylight entered the

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room through hazed windows. In the corner nearest me, I saw the old red wagon I had played with as a child. A stack of old, unfamiliar books rested in its hold. Atop the books sat a teddy bear—my teddy bear. Its eyes simple buttons lovingly sewn on by my grandmother after the originals had been lost. He wore an old shirt that had no longer fit me. *How could he be here?* Last I remembered, I had him stored in a box in my closet at home.

An old wooden plane, battle-scarred from years of play, sat on the window shelf. I recognized it as the plane my father had built as a child, though I can not explain how I knew that.

A nearby box contained Christmas ornaments my mother had used to decorate her first Christmas tree away from home.

I explored this priceless treasure trove of memories until I came to the realization that the house had no basement windows. *Where did the light come from?*

I walked across the room to a door that led outside, opened it, and stepped outside into a backyard that I had never seen before. Trees scattered everywhere the eye could see. Grass stretched across the horizon. I turned to look at the room I had just left. I saw an aged sun porch of white wood and old aluminum windows that looked like something built in the 1940's. I followed a sidewalk around the porch to the front of the house.

Nothing looked familiar—it didn't look like my grandparents' home at all. *Where could I be?* The sidewalk led into a driveway and to the street. To the right, a winding gravel road faded into the hills, where a castle appeared in the distance. To the left, a paved road carried on into a small town.

I chose to go left. After about a mile's walk, I came into the center of town. Friendly people greeted me as I strolled curiously past the stores and shops. Men wore suits and hats and women wore hats and pretty dresses. They curtsied while the men tipped their hats. I found that, I too, wore a hat and a suit. Kids whisked by on bicycles, scooters and skateboards. The cars, what few I saw, were old models from the 1950's.

Curiously, when people wished me a good day, they frequently addressed me as "Mayor." I later learned that my grandfather had served as the prior mayor, and that, unbeknownst to me, I had been elected to the office.

*Where is this place? What is this place?* I stopped asking those questions long ago. I could not let this place fall into anyone else's hands, so I bought my grandparents' home. Sometimes, I go outside and look at that false window. Though it does not belong to a secret room, it is a reminder to me that there are false windows that lead to nowhere, and real windows that lead to somewhere. A few of us know that secret. We live false lives, and no one else realizes it. While others fear imaginary monsters in their basements, we enter our basements to escape the real monsters outside.

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