

Playful
by Janel Van Dongen

Tucked hidden away between the rolling, tumbling hills of Spiritwood sat an old, lovingly made log house, constructed from the wise, creaky alders and birch which stood nearby. It was referred to as the Campbell house, named after the builder and current inhabitants. In one of the four windows was visible a tiny yet charming face pressed against the sheet of glass. An incredible observer would see this – a young girl of around six years old with enchanting sky-blue eyes, fitted in a lacy little dress, which was adorned with so many frills and bows the child itself looked like a doily. Daintily, golden locks hung around her head, and painted on her face was a smile, almost wistful, as if longing for something that was long gone. But as quickly as the face was spotted, it vanished, and all that was seen was a flash of blossomy lace.

Inside the home, Elizabeth and Annabella Campbell practically flew to their mother, who sat knitting on an overstuffed velvet chair, and begged her to let them play outside. Warily, their mother answered “Yes, you may. But first...” She was interrupted by the sound of pounding feet, a door slamming, and a muffled “Thank you!” from outside. “Girls,” she sighed, as she continued on with her knitting.

Excitedly, the two young girls bounded through the golden, whispering hay fields, which made up half of Spiritwood, until they reached the fringes of a forest. Stepping into the mossy, cool woods, they listened intently, and their ears noted the joyful, bubbling laugh of a creek. The little churning creek had been their final destination, so they scrambled towards the noise. Once reaching the creek, they found what they had been searching for: a rickety set of table and chairs, built from scraps of wood and a couple of nails. On the table in front of each chair, if they could be called “chairs”, was a cracked cup and saucer, one for each girl and one in the middle, which

was filled with fragrant wild roses and delicate daisies. Formally, the girls curtsied to each other and giggled before sitting down at their assigned seats. The cups laid out before them were each filled with creek water, and beside the plates were two pieces of bark with a leaf wedged between them; this was equal to a dainty tea sandwich.

Since the creek ran right beside the main road, the children were always checked upon by someone walking home, whether it be school children, farmers or the local storekeeper. That day, an older girl named Claire Reid just happened to be coming back from school. She was a fair complexioned girl, with light charcoal eyes, which were framed with smooth, black glasses. Her hair was a deep, dark black and formed into a bun at the back of her neck; the bun was so tightly knotted that it would turn the point of any bobby pin back on itself. She was walking briskly down the lane, her simple, straight, calico dress flying, for in her mind every moment wasted was one step back from getting a scholarship to college. The 12-year-old was known for her intelligent mind and determination, and yet she never thought she was smart enough.

Where the girls were positioned on the side of the road made it possible for them to see a person coming around the bend before they did. Just at that moment, Elizabeth looked around the corner, and spotting Claire coming down the lane, she whispered to Annabella, "Get ready." Like a deer, Elizabeth bounded out into the middle of the road and smiled sweetly at the oncoming girl. Politely, she chirped, "Good day, Miss Reid. How do you do?"

The older girl was so surprised that she almost dropped her school books. "Fine, thank you," she responded curtly, clearly annoyed by the interruption. But before she could speak another word, the small girl pronounced, "You have been cordially invited to tea." With that she grabbed the older girl's hand and whisked her away into the brush. There at the table sat Annabella, her eyes sparkling and joyful; beside her was another place at the table, though the

center piece was missing and a third chair had been made from an old stump. “Oh girls, I really can’t stay,” protested Claire. But the young girls ignored her complaint and insisted that she sit down. Sighing, the girl obeyed, and sat down at her spot.

Promptly, Annabella poured “tea” from a little tea pot that she had uncovered from their cellar, which was a nearby hollow tree. Pretending to sip her tea, she perched herself on a chair and proceeded to politely ask Claire how her folks were and what she had been doing lately. “My folks are fine. Lately, all I’ve been doing is school work,” sniffed Claire. “Don’t you ever play?” asked Elizabeth, fearful that the girl didn’t know what the word meant. “No, I don’t *play*, and I never intend to,” responded Claire sharply. “Playing is a waste of time, and I’d rather be studying.” Annabella looked at her curiously. “Now, that doesn’t make sense,” she countered. “You’re playing with us now, so how could you have never played?”

Claire was so caught off-guard that she found herself speechless. It took a few seconds to get her voice back, and even then, she couldn’t find the answer. Finally, she gave up and sputtered “I don’t know! You’re correct, yes, it doesn’t make sense.” And with that she burst into tears, feeling defeated by the simple logic that had emerged from this child. Suddenly, the twin girls started to giggle, and Claire was astonished to find herself smiling, through tears, along with them.

Claire knew the reason, and she did not like it at all. They thought she was pretending. They were having fun. Could she, of all people in Spiritwood, be having FUN with two six-year olds? Claire couldn’t quite believe it.

After a few more cups of “tea” and a few more giggles, Claire finally got up from her seat. “Girls, I must leave. I have to study for exams *sometime*. But I do hope that I can play with you again soon. Goodbye, now.” And with that, she waved goodbye and started out down the

lane. Instantly, she began to ponder. Not until that moment did she realize that there was more to life than school and good grades. There's a whole world out there, just waiting to be explored. And while strolling over the tumbling, rolling hills of Spirtwood, Claire Reid found the piece of her life that she had been missing – playfulness.