

Friends?

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## Friends?

Philip glared at the house sitting across the street. He had watched his best friend, James, pack boxes into U-hauls, and currently watching his new neighbors unpack boxes from U-hauls. He missed James, and all the adventures they had in the woods behind their yards. He remembered the creaky floorboard in the tree house they had built together quite vividly. Life would be boring without his best friend so close.

“Philip!” his mother yelled, interrupting his thoughts, “Are you coming?” Philip snorted. He didn’t want to go meet his new neighbors. However, he finished tying his shoes and met his mother at the doorway. Together they walked across the street to the house. Philip had been watching the house ever since it went up for sale. As far as he could tell, it was a family of four moving in. First off, there was the Mother, a short, stocky woman. She wore ridiculous high heels in all weather. Philip also saw the Father helping move boxes. He was tall, with dark wavy hair. They had a three or four year old daughter. Sometimes he could hear her shrill little voice, saying things like, “Look Mummy! Butterfly!” or “Daddy! Daddy! Watch me!” However, the figure that held Philip’s attention the best was the boy. He looked to be his age, with blonde curly hair. Now he was finally going to meet them. But the street wouldn’t be the same without James.

His mother sighed when she looked at his face.

“Honey, I know you miss James. But be nice to the new family, OK?” she asked. When she got no answer, she walked up to the bright blue door and knocked. After a few long moments, they heard footsteps and, finally, the door opened.

“Oh, Hello!” says the mother “I’m Mrs. D’Grate.”

“I’m Mrs. Morison, and this is my son Philip. We live across the street in the brown house,” said my mother. Just then, the toddler came running to see who was at the door.

“This is Lillian, my daughter,” Mrs. D’Grate continued, “She’s three, and quite the little explorer!”

“And somewhere is my son, Alexander.” She remarked. “Come in while I find him! He shouldn’t be too far.” Philip and his mother walked inside and sat down. Philip drank in the details. The previously blank walls had colorful pictures plastered over them. The bookshelf in the corner had been replaced with a lamp illuminating the room.

“Hello.” said a quiet voice from hallway after a while, “I’m Alexander.” Philip’s mom stood up and shook his hand.

“How old are you?” she inquired.

“Ten, eleven this June,” Alexander replied.

“Wonderful!” She exclaimed before continuing the introductions “ This is my son, Philip. He’s ten too!” the two mothers started talking, like two old friends catching up on the times. Philip and Alexander looked at each other. Both boys had blond hair, though Philip’s hair was straight and Alexander’s hair was curly. Philip also stood a few inches taller than Alexander. He looks nothing like James, thought Philip bitterly.

“Alexander!” Mrs. D’Grate called, “Did you here that? Philip has a tree house!” Philip glared at his mother. He was hoping that the tree house would not have been mentioned to Alexander so soon. He hardly knew him!

“He sure does! In fact, why don’t you go show him?” Mrs. Morison continued, oblivious to the distress she was causing her son.

“If it’s OK with you, of course,” she said, looking to Mrs. D’Grate for permission.

“Definitely!” cried Mrs. D’Grate, “Just don’t go to far and be back before dark!”

There was no arguing with either mother. So, ten minutes after officially meeting each other, both boys set out into the forest.

Delicate rays of sunlight lit the path before them, trickling through the tree’s leafy tops. The path they were following ran beside a small creek, dashing merrily through the forest. Philip broke the silence.

“Did your mother really name you Alexander D’Grate?” He questioned, unbelieving.

“Yeah, Dad tried to talk her out of it, but she wouldn’t budge.” He paused for a moment.

“You can call me Alex,” he stated. Both boys smiled at each other. Suddenly, Philip stopped and pointed up at a seemingly random tree. Looking up you could see the bottom of a wooden floor.

“There it is,” said Philip. He walked around the trunk to the wooden steps that had been nailed in. He climbed up, with Alex following a second after him.

When Philip reached the top he was overwhelmed with memories of James. He remembered having picnic lunches, often PBJ sandwiches because that was all they could make. When they had nailed in the wooden steps, James had almost nailed his finger to the trunk! Here was the creaky plank- they had tried to get it to stop creaking, but nothing worked. When Alex finally reached the top, Philip whirled around, fully expecting to see James climbing up the ladder. He would burst up, a wide smile on his face, his bright

green eyes glowing with excitement. It took him a few moments to remember James was miles away, that it was Alex behind him in the tree house.

“Wow...” breathed Alex as he studied the tree house. After all, it was an amazing view. Below was the creek, flowing over small river rocks. Above, you could see the bright blue of the sky through the vivid green of the leaves. The tree house had no roof; both Philip and James had agreed it was worth the occasional spider dropping on your head to see the sky. The tree trunk came up through the center of the tree house and continued upward. On one side was a small wooden table with two matching wooden chairs.

“This is the coolest tree house I’ve ever seen,” remarked Alex, still looking around.

“Thanks. Me and James built it ourselves,” replied Philip, thinking maybe Alex wasn’t so bad if he could appreciate the tree house.

“Wow. Who’s James?” asked Alex, looking at Philip for the first time since he entered the tree house.

“He used to live where you are now before he moved. He was my best friend. We did everything together,” answered Philip. After a moment of silence, Philip walked to the edge of the tree house and pointed.

“If you look hard in that direction, you can see the roof of your house. My mom would fly a red blanket from that pole when she wanted us to come home, and a yellow blanket when she was leaving the house. That way we would know where she was when we got back,” said Philip.

Philip glanced at the creaky step again after a few long, silence filled seconds. One day, James had decided that they had put up with it enough. This started one of the longest battles they had ever fought- the battle of the floorboard. They brought in grease first, hoping that it would solve the problem. It didn't. However, it did leave a nice trail of grease all over their houses. Next they had tried using Play-Doh, hoping that that would keep the floorboards together and not creaking. It worked for about a day, and then it dried and got all over the bottom of their shoes. After several more failed attempts, they both surrendered. Looking at it, you could still see odd stains from their attempts to fix it.

Philip looked up at Alex, who was still staring out side. Alex looked back, and then walked over. Half way across the floor, he stepped on the floorboard Philip had been thinking about seconds before. Its loud creak broke the silence of the forest. Alex looked down in alarm.

“Did I break it?” he asked, his face a mask of worry.

“No!” laughed Philip, “it’s been that way since we built it. We tried to fix it, but we couldn’t find anything that worked.”

“Well...” started Alex uncertainly. He looked up at Philip before continuing, “ I once heard that rubbing cornstarch into the floorboards works.”

“Really! We haven’t tried that yet...” said Philip, “I would try it right now, but we don’t have any cornstarch at home. My mom used it all in a chocolate pudding and hasn’t bought more yet.”

“You know, I remember unpacking some cornstarch this morning,” said Alex. Both boys smiled at each other, ideas racing unseen between them.

“Mom wouldn’t notice if we borrowed some...” Alex continued.

“Let’s go get it now!” interjected Philip, “that is, if you don’t have anything else you are doing today.” he added, suddenly shy.

“Well,” said Alex slowly, “only unpacking boxes, but that can wait!”

“Awesome! Race you back to your house!” shouted Philip, halfway down the steps already. As he ran back along the trail, he thought of James once more. True, Alex was no replacement for James, but that was OK now. After all, why can’t you have more than one best friend?