

The Secret Box

by Elizabeth Trach

On rainy days, Juanita liked to climb the attic stairs and play with her stuffed animals under the slanted roof. Here she could hear the drumming sound of the rain. The attic was dim on stormy days, but Juanita thought it was cozy to have only one light bulb to see by.

Today, Juanita was pretending that her stuffed animals were Olympic athletes. The event was the high jump, so Juanita tossed them into the air to see how high they could fly. Tom, her stuffed turkey, flew so high that he hit the ceiling and bounced over into a dark corner.

When Juanita went to find Tom, she saw a box on the floor in the corner. It was flat and dusty, with gold corners and a metal clasp that held it shut. She had never noticed this box before. What could be inside?

Juanita brought the box over to the middle of the attic, beneath the light bulb where she could see better. She opened it carefully and peeked inside.

Inside the box was a stack of black and white photographs. Most of them were of a small girl in a white dress. Her hair was braided and tied with large ribbons.

Juanita was very surprised. The girl looked just like her! This was confusing. "I've never been to that house," she thought as she flipped through the photos. There was a gray farmhouse in the background of each picture. Sometimes there were flowers in bloom. In one photo there was even a horse.

How could Juanita be in pictures of a place she had never been? She ran downstairs with the photo to show her mother.

"When did we visit a farm? And when did you braid my hair? And why don't these pictures have any color?" Juanita breathlessly peppered her mother with questions.

"What are you talking about, Juanita?" Mom asked.

Juanita handed her mother the stack of mysterious photographs.

Mom laughed. "Oh, these are pictures of your grandmother when she was a little girl. This was the farm where she lived in Mexico."

"Wow!" said Juanita. "I guess I really do look just like her!"

Juanita laughed, too. Now everything made sense.

"It's a shame to keep these up in the attic," said Mom. "Let's put them in a frame and hang them in your room."

Juanita smiled. "I'd like that," she said.

Questions

1. What does the word *dim* mean here: "The attic was dim on stormy days"?
2. Where does Juanita find the box?
3. When she first finds the pictures, who does Juanita think the girl is?
4. What do you think Juanita is like as a person?