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My Perfect Weekend

by Victoria Cooper

My dear friend stands smiling in the floodlit doorway and we are pulled in from the night. The dusk is fading and there is a misty chill lingering above the bracken, but the house-lights entice and beckon us in. The hugs and smiles are around us and children run off to the far corners of this farmhouse on the hill. Explorers of their new environment full of pent up energy and excitement. Their shy looks dissipate and are replaced with giggles and the sound of Lego from an overhead bedroom. We adults congregate in the kitchen for wine and grumble over traffic as slowly the aches of the long drive start to unravel from our bones.

This house is warm in spirit but arctic in temperature and the darkness of my childhood pokes me with a bony pointed finger.

Hushed whispers in the hall, bare feet running along the hard floor. The warm body of a Labrador leans in and the familiarity of family life in another house is both easy and thrilling in its mundane routines.

I like it.

The house begins to bulge and pulsate with young life and our dead beat TV screen world a blurred memory from urban life.

This new family peels itself away from base camp and stamps off through mud and wet grass to woodlands. I am transported to halcyon days of camps, sticks and mud. This is group therapy for the digitally switched off and we actually laugh and talk to one another. Oh there are moody silences, tears and dark shadows under tired eyes. But this is tangible life full of grit, dirt and bloody noses. We all shout and run and our faces are pink with cold and exertion.

I love it.

I want to swallow this up and bring it home.

We eat like ravenous dogs and the ideals of what is correct, nutritional, fair trade, vegan, organic, sustainable or nut free are gobbled up as just what it should be: fuel for play, fuel for fun.

My feet maybe dead and my fingers numb, but vibrant faces pull me on; they want more.

Like the feral children they have become their ruthlessness is refreshing and brutal. They hunt in packs and steal sweets. Adults are over caffeinated and under slept; living off sleep from a week ago but it somehow feels great in this woozy unbalanced world of family.

Then just like that the sleeping bags are rolled up and we return to the gridlocked roads that dazzle. Another HGV looms into view but I doff my cap to the mountains that have nursed me back to life. Real life with real feelings, pure dirt, true food and utter chaos. Back to my roots and further to a place I always wanted to come from. I see the slideshow of sunny skies and funny smiles and while the cold stone floors maybe what I remember the warmth in their faces look back at me.