THE YARD ENDS

*Malawi has a wet and a dry season, but it’s nearly always hot… I like to where my bunny sweater when it’s cool. Winter doesn’t come here, it never snows… mommy said it’s white*. Liv’s train of thought tapered as she went, half skipping, half walking through the house. *Daddy says the house looks like a big ‘L’-if you look down on it* *like a bird*, thought Liv.

“Mlungu dalitsani Malawi” Her singing rang loudly down the hall, echoing a bit, which she was pleased to hear.

Liv stopped by a large paper stuck to the wall. It was placed at her eye level and was coloured light green and blue. The top of the map had large clear letters, spelling ‘Europe’. Liv wondered how her dad could always say it right. “ee-u…ou...”, was all she managed. But she had already asked so many times. And she didn’t really know what Europe was, or understand where it existed. It was spelt too strangely. Liv turned away with a sigh.

She finished the rest of her ‘juice-ice-cube-on-a-toothpick’ popsicle, stopped to pull on pink sandals, and padded over to the door. It was unlocked, and she pushed the door open easily. Liv took four steps across the red porch and stepped into the hot sun. Stretched in front of her was a mostly green lawn that had a small tree, little like herself, encircled by long leafed plants that came up to her hip. A rank of bush-like trees stood in shoulder dressing, imitating a fence. They continued in a line, far to her left, to make up a fence there too and disappeared behind the brick garage. Everything around Liv was big and she had not yet found the opposite end of the yard. She thought it was so wonderful it needn’t have an end.

Liv walked past her favourite tree for climbing. It was in bloom with white five-petalled flowers that met gracefully in a yellow center. Exactly like the ones found on a tissue box. Her playground, made up of slide, sandbox and swing hung from an avocado tree, was off limits. So was her tree. It was because of a wasps nest. The wind troubled the trees and their leaves danced in a flourish of green. As if the wind might carry the danger to her, Liv hurried to put more distance between her and the nest.

By a little banana tree, she came to a giant rock. Actually a giant rock and two smaller, but also very large rocks, that seemed to be connected as one. Liv placed both palms on the rock, climbed on and stood up. She held a stick in her right hand, like a mountaineer, only in summer clothes. As she walked across the ancient rocks, she retold herself a story.

“The rocks move. Every hundred years, that’s what Bambo said. He said they get thirsty and go for a drink of water. When they move away you can find treasure in an underground place. You can only get out safe by carrying a four leaf clover. Otherwise when the rocks return the earth will swallow you up!”

Liv jumped down off the rock and continued towards the yard on the right of the house. The ducks were out and running about and Liv said to the wind, “Daddy says he wants a goat too…”

She smiled and wandered into a group of trees. Little banana trees, carrying clumps of bananas like a backpack, mango trees, lemon trees, sour sop trees and custard apple trees. Custard apples were really cute; they had grey-blue tough skin that was contoured to the seeds making it a lumpy ball. *Yum*, the custard apple was even better than mangos. Except for the seeds of course, which were black round and smooth. Each custard apple was filled with seeds individually wrapped in the meat of the fruit.

Liv began not to recognize the area around her, but she was not scared and her curiosity led her on. After passing more trees and encountering a rock or two, she walked out of the trees and stopped in surprise.

The ground below her feet was flat, dusty and dry – which was normal when grass was absent, but as she glanced up, the ground became uneven. She was surprised to see three mounds, from right to left; they appeared to be biggest to smallest. Liv quietly realized what the mounds were. She felt a bit sad, but instead of crying, she smiled to herself. “So that’s where you went,” she breathed.

Liv had just found the graves of her pet dog, Jack, her daddy’s bunny, Snowflake and her bunny’s baby bunny, which had died a few days old. She got a wintery chill but did not step back.

And then it was gone. Liv was glad she had found them and let herself enjoy the warmth, like a hug from the sun.

A new feeling dropped into the tranquillity. It was a feeling that could only be expressed as ‘oh’. She looked up.

Standing in front of Liv was a wooden fence. The boards stood together, like the bush-like trees, only they made a real, solid fence. *This is it, I found the end. Though I thought I’d never find one*. Wheels turned fast in her brain.

It was as if a magical spell had been broken. Liv’s world seemed to shrink, and the sky darkened in agreement even without a cloud in sight. Her world remained small and the whole property of the house shrank with it. She knew there was a world out there, one she didn’t know her way about. Not like she did in this garden, where the trees seemed to sit in quiet content and little things could bring a smile to her face. Liv hadn’t wanted this place to have an end.

Her gaze was drawn up again, this time, to behold the magnificent sky. The sky opened up with a brilliant blue around her. She saw it go far past the fence and the plateau to the west. Liv stretched her arms out wide and felt the vastness of the earth. The world around her began to grow, instead of shrink, and the garden was just a piece of it. The unknown became part of her world.

Word Count: 1053