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WILDE RUHE

ANNA WEISHAAR

The shadows grew long and the potential buyers short. The cabin was put on the market weeks ago, and over those two weeks people had come to check the place out. No offers had been given. Mrs. Brown sat in a chipped white deck chair, and looked out at Georgetown Lake. Dinnertime left it empty and calm, save for the smart fish that hadn't been caught by retired old men in rickety metal boats fishing from dawn until dinner.

She took a bite from one of the cookies she'd made for prospective clients. They'd grown hard in the summer sun, but nevertheless had sugary appeal.

Mrs. Brown looked at her watch. It was six twenty on Friday. She wished she had a place to go after this. She was going to drive back to Butte and repeat the same things she did week after week. Each week, she hoped her friends would call her out for a couple of beers, or her husband would sweep her off her feet and take her on an impromptu vacation. Every week, neither happened. She'd go home, hear her husband complain about working overtime and see pictures of her friends living their own lives on Facebook.

This week was different. Her whole week had practically been spent at Georgetown, sitting on the deck, baking cookies that hardened in the sun, and finding new and interesting ways to catch the attention of couples and families that took tours of the cabin. She'd grown quite fond of the tiny place, as she'd searched for an owner for it, and in return, it gave her shade beneath the roof's overhanging.

People didn't want the place because it was old. The mass of wood was built in the twenties, and according to the information

she'd gotten in order to sell, had been given additions and been remodeled over the years. In the walls were old electric heaters with knobs to select the desired warmth. The water had to be turned on underneath the cabin, where any normal sized adult could break their backs due to it being a tiny crawlspace that smelled of mildew and moist. The cabin was a cream color, but the paint endlessly chipped and peeled away showing traces of many layers of colors. Written dates in the cement of the boat garage indicated traces of past owners.

The place was lived in and worn, but Mrs. Brown figured it would sell because it was waterfront property and had two acres. It'd been years and years since the beetles attacked the trees and now the property was properly shaded.

Mrs. Brown heard the purring of a car slowly descending down the pine-needled, dirt driveway. She flattened the skirt of her dress and stood up, a forced red smile etching its way across her face. She cleared her throat and ran her tongue across her teeth for any signs of stray cookie.

The owner of the green Subaru Outback slid out and stretched. She was an older woman, perhaps in her seventies. She had white hair and wrinkles all over her tanned and freckled face. She wore a crew-neck sweatshirt displaying "Jingle Bell Run," from the 1990s. The woman grinned from ear to ear as she stared at the lake, wrinkles crinkling at the edge of her eyes.

Mrs. Brown didn't know whether to speak up or not. The woman appeared almost reminiscent as she stared at the blue water lapping against the rocks. Her eyes were on the water, but also on so much more. She seemed somewhere distant in her thoughts. The woman finally turned on her heel and politely nodded at Mrs. Brown.

"Hello, ma'am!" Mrs. Brown said, ready to repeat the mantra she'd been saying all week to people she'd never see again. "Are you here to take a look at the cabin?"

The woman ran her sharp blue eyes over the cream-colored structure. Her lip quirked up at the side, but the semi-smile did not give off the same meaningful feeling it had when the woman had devoted her attention to the lake. If Mrs. Brown wasn't mistaken,

the smile almost felt sad.

The woman shook her head. “No,” she said, her voice croaking with age. “I think not. Much has changed, much has changed.”

Mrs. Brown furrowed her brows and pursed her lips at the woman. If she didn’t want to look at the cabin, then her job was done. She wasn’t going to press an old woman into buying it either. She’d die soon and Mrs. Brown would be back again, struggling to find a buyer of the old structure once more.

Mrs. Brown took her seat again, frowning, as the old woman grinned at the flat rocks used as makeshift stairs which then led to the real wooden stairs.

“Surprised these old things are still here,” the woman muttered. She walked up the rocks and then took the wooden stairs one by one, slowly, like the breeze that blew through her white curls.

Mrs. Brown stood up to help the woman onto the deck. The old lady had obviously seen this place before, but Mrs. Brown wasn’t interested in its past. She only needed someone to buy it to create a future.

The old woman took her arm and reached the top. She thanked Mrs. Brown and then shuffled over to the front of the deck which looked out onto the unkempt lawn, and the navy and purple waters. The water erupted with many rings of waves as fish jumped out to catch pesky gnats for dinner.

“Much has changed,” the woman muttered again and Mrs. Brown sighed, chewing on her cheek as she stared at the back of the woman. “But much is still beautiful.”

The old woman nestled her body against a beam of wood and turned her head to the left, staring at fishermen in the distance. Bonfires were coming to life across the way and clacking loons echoed across the lake.

Mrs. Brown checked her watch. Six forty. Twenty minutes to go. She wasn’t necessarily ecstatic to leave. Her destination was her own house- a place that hadn’t felt like home for a while.

“That smell is nostalgic,” the woman said, cutting up the silence of nature. “I remember it well. Pines, dead fish, and the

smell of gasoline on wood. Oh, it's been years."

Mrs. Brown wanted to roll her eyes at this woman, but for some reason she couldn't. The woman wasn't doing anything wrong, and Mrs. Brown had twenty minutes until she was done. She supposed she could afford to sit down and talk to this woman who obviously wanted to be heard.

She snatched a cookie and walked up to the woman, leaning her hip into the beam next to her. The woman turned her head and stared at Mrs. Brown, her blue eyes warm and full of experience.

"Was this your cabin?" Mrs. Brown finally asked.

The old woman smiled, tight lipped, and the crinkles in her eyes became more prominent.

"No, no, definitely not mine," she replied, looking up at the pink sky. "It was my father's cabin. He bought it with mother in the fifties. Us seven kids grew up in it, and after we became adults, our children were raised in it. It's seen many little hands."

She chuckled as she watched a hawk land on one of the scraggly tree branches. "I remember every single detail about this place before dad sold it. I know all the changes it went through, the ins and outs. I have memories so vivid that even age won't stop them from resurfacing."

The old woman's gaze met Mrs. Brown's. She ran a chubby finger against the soft wood and looked back at the little cabin.

"I won't bore you with my stories, though. I came here to say goodbye for the last time."

Mrs. Brown didn't respond. The woman seemed too young to be put into a home, and she didn't want to know the alternative for a woman her age.

"You won't bore me, ma'am. I suppose if I'm selling this place, I should know a little bit about it," Mrs. Brown replied. "However, I'm going to need another cookie. Would you like one?"

The old woman smiled and nodded.

Mrs. Brown snatched the plate off the table and brought it over to the beam, balancing it in between them. The woman took a bite of the cookie and squeaked in pleasure.

"These are quite good. I've somehow managed to burn all the batches I've made recently. I forget I put them in!" She chuckled

and pointed out at the fishermen, who had just caught a fish.

“They’ll eat well tonight,” she said.

Mrs. Brown nodded.

“Where was I? I guess nowhere. Lost in my thoughts, as usual,” the old woman said. “I guess I could tell you a bit about the specifics of the cabin, but, to be honest, those are not what make the place.”

Mrs. Brown watched the woman, who was observing the fishermen. The hawk that had left its perch in search of prey.

“The cabin began with whoever had built it in the early 1900’s. When my father bought it, he painted it this ugly, yet memorable, mint green color. Slowly, my parents had more and more children, and by the late sixties, nine of us ran around this place. My brothers and sisters have left their marks all over. That outhouse—goodness gracious I can’t believe it’s still there—has mine and my two younger siblings’ signatures with dates from the seventies on it. And, I don’t know if they’re still up there, but the attic has some of my brother Dan’s stickers on it.”

Mrs. Brown grinned. A couple who had been viewing the cabin the other day had asked why there were stickers on the slab of wood in the attic and, she was sure, had said no to purchasing it because of the stickers.

“When I look out at the bunk house, I can still smell the musky scent of the moth-eaten blankets and the flowers painted around the walls. My sister first told me about her love for John Travolta in there. My daughters hated sleeping in the bunk house because thousands of gnats joined us, but their cousins would join them in there to play house and practice plays. The good thing was that it was right next to the charcoal burner, which never went a night unused and gave off a smell that clung to your clothes for days. Meat was a necessity up here, and I’m pretty sure my fingers are chubby because of all the salt dad used on them.”

The old woman turned so that her hunched back was leaning against the beam. She took another cookie and picked it apart, pieces falling onto the ground.

“Those are for the ants,” she said, shoving a piece into her mouth. “I always thought that if you were going to immerse

yourself with the nature up here, you should appreciate all that it brings. I can't tell you how many spiders became my roommates. Colleen would kill them, but until then, they were left alone."

She smiled and pointed to the left where a hot tub sat unused and half of the porch remained unfinished.

"See that window right there?"

Mrs. Brown nodded.

"There are three bedrooms back there. The one in the very back doesn't have a door. My daughters loved that room. It had one of those heaters that makes the room warm in two minutes. They loved that thing. After going tubing, or jumping in the lake before dinner, they'd run for the heater. I much preferred air-drying on this porch after going skiing. Believe it or not, but I used to ski, easy."

Mrs. Brown chuckled and the old woman placed her warm hand on hers.

"When I was about your age, my daughters and I would come up here all the time.

I married late, so all of my brothers and sisters were married, and many of them had kids. Those floorboards have seen so many dirty little feet. We were lucky the place got to see generations of kids. But we considered this place home. You never felt unwelcome here. It was a congregation where my family members, cousins, aunts, and uncles could come and be reunited. The heart of this place was dad though. He always seemed to be here. He ran the place. He was respected, and that's how this place was treated.

"When my dad turned ninety, things changed. The inhabitants of the cabin started to dwindle. Everyone's lives became more complicated, and their jobs became more time consuming. Children became adults with other things in mind. The last days seemed to hang in the air that final summer. Dad was aging, and only a couple of people came up. Everything was still the same in terms of home, but there was a sadness that seemed to settle throughout Salmon Lane. I remembered a lot of things that summer: my brother Tom and his jokes at the dinner table, Dad falling asleep while watching the news, kids and their cousins starting a game of Monopoly, only to leave it some hours later,

forgetting it completely.” She pointed to the cream-colored cabin.

“This cabin is filled with all of those memories. It lives within the walls and it remains within the old musk it gives off inside. I can feel the memories as whispers in the wind. The imprint my family gave off swims in the deepest part of the lake with the fish and flies in the sky with the birds. So many memories were made up here. It seems as though this cabin could never forget us.”

She sighed and shook her head, letting out a squeak to break her thoughts. “Oh, I sound like a lunatic,” she said, stuffing the last of the cookie in her mouth.

Mrs. Brown shook her head.

“You don’t sound crazy, ma’am. You’ve captivated me.” The woman patted Mrs. Brown on the shoulder and returned to her thoughts before continuing the way that old people sometimes do.

“Dan made and put up a sign in those last years we were here. It said ‘Wilde Ruhe’. It meant ‘Wild Calm’. That’s exactly what this place was. With seven kids and their own families coming and going all summer, this place was used, loud, and wild. Kids were here and there, families went their separate ways during the day—sometimes using the boat for skiing or for trips to Philipsburg to get candy from the Sweet Palace, but, at the end of the day, everyone came back together for dinner and a relaxing time around the fire. Even if kids were outside playing and adults were working on outdoor projects, like chopping up wood, or fixing the dock, we were all immersed in the calmness Georgetown had, and still has, to offer.”

The old woman sighed and watched as the ants started showing up to take her cookie crumbs.

“Wilde Ruhe,” she muttered, as if reminiscing. “Those memories. I don’t care what family takes this house and which families have lived in it. This cabin provides a home and becomes a home. It’s always a Wilde Ruhe, even if the commotions are different from our family’s.”

Mrs. Brown pointed at the structure.

“Well, the last family who was here sold this place because they were moving to the East Coast. They told me when they were leaving that they had the best years of their lives up here. I have to

believe you when you tell me that this place brings good memories to people.”

The old woman chuckled and gripped Mrs. Brown’s arm tightly.

“I could spend days telling you all my memories from when I was a young girl to a middle-aged woman up here, but the only reason this place was special was because family made it special. When family is mixed with nature, somehow that makes it even more spectacular. You wouldn’t even have to be religious to find God up here. Everything makes this place a home, from the people next door, to the simple embers that die after a fire that has heard stories from families in their own separate lives.”

Mrs. Brown nodded. The place was beautiful. She’d spent all week here with a lack of potential buyers, so she’d had time to revel in the peace and quiet of the Montana nature. She understood exactly what the old woman was saying, but she wished she could feel the sense of home that the old woman felt as she recollected her memories of this cabin. Emotions could be seen through the woman’s aged eyes, and Mrs. Brown wished she could recall a time where she could feel that sense of memory and family and home.

“How do you make a place a home? I can’t afford a place up here in Georgetown and I live in Butte, which doesn’t exactly have much nature in the suburbs.” The old woman seemed to ponder Mrs. Brown’s question for a while. She looked back up at the sky, which started to turn into a pale purple color.

“I can’t tell you, Miss,” the woman finally answered, and Mrs. Brown frowned. “Your family is different than mine and we are different ages and have different ideas of a home. We lead different lives and are mere passersby on this day. I guess, as I’m nearing my last days and keep recalling my memories, I would suggest one thing.”

Mrs. Brown looked up at the woman longingly.

“You find the people you love and you live the life you want. Find a place, no matter how little or big, where you can make memories.”

The old woman turned back to the lake and waved at the fisherman. They waved back, their tiny faces beaming smiles at

their catch.

The old woman smiled at Georgetown Lake, stained pink and purple from the sky with the loons ringing out, and small, orange fires lighting up around the bend.

“Miss, find your Wilde Ruhe.”