Beyond Sheldon’s Meadow

Susan Koole

My retriever and I wandered down the worn path through Sheldon’s meadow to the place where the sun sinks low each evening into an ocean of billowy clouds and silhouettes.

The fluttering of a flock of pheasants and curious looks from whitetails from behind the old split-rail fence add to the sweet smell of wildflowers and alfalfa grass.

I walk to the stream where as children my sister and I collected minnows and tadpoles – always with the disapproval of a mother who seemed to care too much and a father who didn’t seem to notice.

The rustling of the tall grass I hear behind me is her running to catch up with me. I can hear her yelling, “Wait for me!” I liked to race her to the stream where the tall oak tree stands and be the first one there never thinking I should let her win.

When we reached the stream we would abandon our faded canvas shoes and let the coolness of the water surround our ankles. She would splash through the water to catch slimy frogs and build dams with rocks and twigs with the intent to do nature a favor.

When I look over my shoulder, I realize that now the only sound I hear is Ivan chasing rabbits and birds through the tall, overgrown brush. Sometimes I wonder if he, too, misses her and those warm afternoons that seem so long ago.

As the leaves drift from aged oaks, I understand that winter will be here soon and I won’t be able to hear her follow me through the meadow. When it is cold outside, the beauty of this place exists only in my memory.

Her memory now rests by the stream next to that strong, trustworthy oak that watched over us in the summertime and welcomed us each spring. It continues to protect her all year round.

Michelle

Jennifer Kortjohn

May 10, 1997. The humidity hung in the air from the rain that had sprinkled its presence over West Michigan, but the clouds had passed. Those that lingered were pillows in the evening air; a restful place for the setting sun. We walked down the broken concrete pier, making figure-8s through the catwalk legs. Still 1/4 mile from the lighthouse, we were forced to stop. The waves overtook our path, almost as if they wanted to pull her away. The distance we could not cross was unimportant as we paused to snap mental pictures. This would be the last night we were together, the last time for months we would see each other. The flames burned the pillows and then faded, perhaps from the tears I blinked out of the sky.

Early December, 1852. The cottage was cold and shaking. Four o’clock in the morning was no time for a lighthouse keeper to be awake, but Leo Lillie’s eyes were open as he listened to the icy crashing of the Lake Michigan waves. Little did he know that the sand and seashells beneath his cottage were slowly being called out to the beach. Little did he know, that is, until the north wall of the house, from foundation to roof, disappeared. It was almost as if someone had opened a door for the knocking storm and invited him in.

Boxes were overtaking the house. The couch, table, dresser, and even the bathroom counter. Pink towels, glass vases, pictures of babies, a Christmas tree, chimes from Hawaii, a mixer, the teddy bear they called Mud. I reminded her about the shells on the shelves. All of her life packed for a long journey; half of mine wrapped in cardboard. This was never supposed to happen. This day was never supposed to come. The storm lingered in the forecast, but I refused to believe the meteorologist. For once he was right. A year before there had been a warning, when the one who would take her away had become human to me – a reality I could not escape.