

The Cove by Janet Burbidge

The hasp on the old wooden door creaked knowingly when Kathleen lifted it abruptly, entering a porch which in turn lead to a solid wood cream colored door. A house stood on the craggy hill since 1836, an ancestor by the name of Thomas, an Irish Cooper who travelled by steamer from Wexford to Halifax and onto the small village by the sea, had built the first shelter from rough hewn logs on the property. He had received a land grant from the crown for being a soldier to “aid” in the cause and was destined to the new world, savage and unknown to him.

Kathleen wondered how Thomas had felt, standing at the rocky shore, looking at the hill he would soon build his home on. Was it excitement he felt, or dread, leaving all he had known behind and landing there, in the cove looking up into the wilderness. When the home burned within the first 5 years were his thoughts of Erin and leaving this wild place for the dusty streets of Wexford again? Something had made him stay and rebuild another home, much sturdier and closer to the shore. Maybe it was the thought of crossing the ocean again and the sickness and death strewn voyage. Maybe it was the pure beauty of the maritime wilderness and the resources on his plot of land. Fresh water brooks full of trout, maple and birch trees that went on for miles, Deer and rabbits easily hunted. The potato crop was robust, apples and berries were easily picked. They would not be hungry here, not like Wexford...

She knocked lightly on the cream door and could hear the slight melody of an Irish lament and smell the smoky warmth of the fire crackling in the old enterprise stove in the kitchen. Opening the door, a wall of heat enveloped her almost chokingly. The old tea kettle whistled.

Her father, great grandson of Thomas, used to knit headings for his lobster traps from that perch. He was planted in his rocking chair in front of the stove, orange tabby kitten circling and pushing into his legs lovingly. She remembered a time when green twine circled around a nail planted firmly in the cream-colored molding by his chair, he would spin it around knitting while the old grey cat stretched below him. He was a dory fisherman and had lived in the homestead all his years, born in nineteen ought six he would say.

It was early Spring, and she remembered the house being a hive of activity until all the traps were ready to be launched when the lobster fishery opened in May. There wasn't much money to be made in those days and she remembered how she was ridiculed for taking lobster sandwiches to school. Her father, Joseph, had subsidized his income by being a handy man and woodworker, fashioning axe handles and shovel handles from freshly hewn maple and ash. People would travel miles for his craftsmanship. She remembered as a child peeking into his shed where he created, the scent of freshly hewn Maplewood hung in the air. He would push the lathe over the wood, back and forth, ringlets of wood chips curling around his feet like golden tresses. They may have had to eat lobster and fish, but they didn't have to walk the train

tracks and pick coal like the O'Rourke kids did. Mrs. O'Rourke became a widow after their husband went to war and didn't return. Things were even tougher for them.

He had only completed Grade 2, but with the help of his wife, a small woman of Acadian-Scottish descent, Joseph had learned to read, and read he did. He read every book he could get his hands on and then graduated to a subscription of The National Geographic and more locally The Cape Breton Magazine. He had a thirst for knowledge thoroughly immersed himself in the glossy photos and rich stories of lands he would never see.

"How are things today, Dad?", Kathleen asked, eyeing a new bandage on his right hand. She walked towards the kettle on the stove, "Tea"? she asked, pouring herself a cup

"Ok", he answered, petting the softness of the kitten now snuggled in his lap. "Looks like we're gonna get a nor'easter. The barometer is falling". He was now pulling at the little cat's fur, teasingly. Another scratch. Kathleen pulls a blue and white striped mug from the cupboard and pours the tea, leaving enough room for a drop of carnation milk, the way he likes it.

"I'll get you a band-aid", she mutters taking a sip from her tea. She goes to the bathroom and finds a box freshly opened. Sometimes she wonders if he wants her company at all, he is a man of few words. It does make her feel better to check on him though.

He is eighty-five now, wizened with sunken cheeks and thin lips, and often spends his days rocking in the chair and staring out the window. He and "the kitten", found in the old barn, have a love hate relationship. Both left to their own devices most days, together, dusk till dawn. He teased the kitten and the kitten in turn kept going back for more.

Her mother had long been gone, and she wondered if he missed her, he never spoke her name and stopped reading when she passed. Time was spent in the shed crafting for hours on end, piles of shavings covering the floorboards. Lathe working back and forth, left to right, like a metronome.

The books grew dusty, unopened, the subscriptions of The National Geographic and Cape Breton Magazine did keep coming, but each lay in a separate pile, meticulously placed, the top magazine dust covered until a new issue came to cover it.

"Winds picking up, you should head home", he said, scratching the kittens back with his long fingers.

"Ok Dad, call me if you need anything", Kathleen offers, pulling her navy windbreaker from the hook by the door where his green and white plaid jacket has hung for many years.

Knowing he will not call; she gives him a quick pat on the shoulder and departs. She walks down the lane, past the old barn, looking back one more time to see the faint outline of his body, now standing in the window, watching her, as he nuzzles the little kitten in his arms.

Biography- Janet Burbidge is a local writer from Port Hawkesbury, Nova Scotia. In the past, she was a freelance writer both locally and provincially with news media. This will be her third time participating in Ekphrasis. This year, she wrote and produced “The Lantern”, a one act play. She is currently writing the prequel to *The Lantern, Mackerel Sky*, which she hopes to launch by fall.