

*The Sale*

Janet became aware of knocking from the front door. Brimming red wine called after her like a songbird, pleading lonely ignorance as she reluctantly answered the foyer. She opened the black door and peered around curiously.

A handsome man sporting a gray coat with a pink undershirt and dragging khakis stood in the shadow of the porch. He was tall and sturdy, a full head of hair just starting to recede. At his side, a young boy in a navy Cub Scout uniform and blue and yellow hat bearing a wolf came up to the man's waist. The eager child's camping backpack silhouetted him.

A transient plume of cigarette smoke wafting from a flowerpot on the porch stair invaded her home.

"Hello?"

"Yes, hi. Daniel Terry, Terry's Air and Heating out of Pennington. I noticed the 'For Sale' sign as I was driving by." He extended a firm handshake. "I wanted to ask about it."

"It's for sale."

"Looks like a real nice property you got here. It's a lovely front porch, ma'am."

"Thank you."

"Can I speak to the man of the house about it?"

Janet froze at his glance toward her wedding ring. "You can not. What may I help you with?"

“I just wanted to take a walk through and ask some questions and look around.”

“I wasn’t expecting to show it right now.”

“Its fine, ma’am. Houses are meant for living!” The man flashed his first hint of a grin. “I just wanted to see what its like-- I don’t come this way so often.”

“Oh, well what brought you out here today?”

“Micah here had a baseball game at the elementary over there. We have a little time to kill before his Scout meeting.”

“I see. My son loves baseball and Scouting, too.” She bent to address Micah. “What position do you play?”

“Pitcher!”

Janet stood again, smiling. “Well, I guess I could show you around briefly. You’ll have to come back for something more official. But I can let you see the house.” She widened the door and let the two enter.

Micah immediately ran to the black cat sprawled in a square of sunlight. After a few forceful strokes, the cat flicked its tail in scorn and slipped away. Micah trailed, undeterred.

“Hey, Micah--” Daniel turned to Janet, “Sorry about him. Little guy’s got a lot of energy since school’s out.”

“I think my cat could use the exercise.”

Daniel walked into the darker room where she had been sitting earlier. Thin cream curtains filtered the waning sunlight into the clay room. A dated flat screen

illuminated a quilt of New York Times articles covering a soft pink marble table.

Lonely furniture and paintings of old farms adorned the room.

“Fan of Andrew Wyeth, I see.”

“My husband loved farms. I love art.”

Daniel weighed the authentic wooden frame with his hand, and then continued about the room. He stopped when he noticed the Model 71 Winchester rifle hanging over a love seat.

“Husband hunts too, I take it?”

“He did.”

“He quit hunting but not hanging up guns?”

“Two trespassing Texan gas workers hunting our farm poached him with a stray shot. Five months ago.”

A moment passed.

Daniel nodded slowly with an unpleasant curl in his lip. “Well, sorry to hear that. The man knew a good gun. I just took Micah out his first time.”

Daniel turned his attention back to the room at large. Micah stood at the room’s threshold watching him closely. A tall corner cabinet showcasing burgundy pottery raised a framed American flag and letter from the United States.

“Does that come with the house?”

Janet laughed nervously. “No, no...those will come with me.”

“They sure are nice.” He paused. “This room seems like a great place to kick back.” He glanced at the reading strewn about the table and the afghan heaped on the love seat. “And read.”

“It is. It gets just the right light.” Janet hesitated at each word. “Let me show you the kitchen.”

They passed Micah, now occupied with fitting the black cat into his backpack, and crossed the foyer to the kitchen. She remembered her wine glass and turned, embarrassed, to face Daniel.

The ochre kitchen’s tall window revealed patches of dirt around the mouth of Daniel’s shadowed face. He slid his fingers along the bright wooden bar over the sink, and Janet noticed a stained yellow in his cracked and dirty palms. Suddenly he struck Janet as seven years older than she originally took him for—maybe 36 years old. His jacket hung off his shoulders, giving him a wolfish hunch.

“The house seems old. Used to be a farm?”

“Built by his great-great relatives. His mom had to sell the farm to support seven children.”

“And you’re giving up the house.”

“It’s just too big--I can’t keep up with it.”

She felt a little light headed and weak, suddenly. Daniel’s olive green eyes dug at her core. The sun seemed to fall behind the trees, and the color of the room sank.

“Well the age gives it character, and you guys sure kept the place looking good.” He studied the stainless kitchen appliances and navy-gray marble counter tops with intrigue. “You been to New Mexico?”

Janet followed his gaze to a mirror decorated with teal-blue stained glass shards. Her glazed eyes and lined face summarized sixty-four long years. “Yes. The boys and I went out there years ago. That teal is my favorite.”

“I noticed.” Daniel eyed the pendant, earrings, and charm Janet adorned. He lifted a plate off the wall to inspect its fade from a light purple to a deep sea blue-green. “You love pottery, too.”

He replaced the plate.

“Say, what are the neighbors like?”

“On the side there’s Mormons.”

“I see.”

“They keep to themselves though.”

“Of course.” Daniel gazed about the room, intermittently peeking into the foyer toward Micah.

“Behind the yard is all families.”

“Any of them give you any trouble? They friendly?”

“Never any trouble. I hardly talk to any of them, honestly.”

Daniel chewed the words thoughtfully. “They have nice houses too.”

“It’s a good neighborhood. Micah might like it,” Janet offered.

A nervous moment ticked. Her children stared down from a Christmas present calendar on the wall.

Daniel pulled out a flimsy flip phone and checked the time. “Christ. I’ve kept you too long.” He looked up at Janet. “We’ll get out of your hair now.”

“Oh, it’s no problem” Janet replied tiredly, leading the way back into the foyer.

The front door was left open. She swore she had shut it behind them.

“Micah!” Daniel hollered for the kid, who came bounding up the stone walk way and back through the door.

“I was practicing my sheet bend,” Micah explained, raising a knotted rope from his side.

Janet smiled.

“The house is beautiful. Sorry to bother you, I hope we didn’t keep you too long.” Daniel spoke quickly but with pace. Then to Micah—“We’re going to come back here with mommy, bud”

“You mean Michele?”

“You know what I mean.” His cheeks burned. “Well, thank you. I’ll be in touch.”

“Have fun at your meeting.” Janet closed the door behind them, and breathed. The two boys ran to their van, laughing at their own game.

She turned about, the barren opposing wall in the dark living room widening her eyes. She crossed into the shadowy space feeling as though she didn’t recognize it. She struggled about in a slow circle, taking in the void cabinet, the deserted gun rack, the blank walls and tables—and a few *Times* pages that now littered the room. Janet sat down on the edge of the love seat, hands clasped in loose disbelief.

Through the curtains, she watched the navy work van running over the curb.

