



PIONEERING SPIRIT

EJOYSHORTSTORIES

Joy Williams

The house had a wall fronting the footpath, making the garden safe for a growing family.

Kate looked through the archway towards the house. It was old, neglected and yet inviting. The pathway was covered with cinders from bygone winter fires. A beautiful smell of lavender surrounded her. The key was large; she had trouble fitting it into the lock, before she could turn it, the door swung open.

“You found your way then”. Kate jumped looking around quickly. “Oh! You did give me a fright. You know the baby is due any time now”. She looked at the Estate Agent with a frown, knowing it had been made clear that she wanted to see this house on her own.

“I thought you might need some help,” replied Jane Cooper. “It’s been empty for over a year and needed checking out. Thought I would kill two birds with one stone,” she chuckled. “You nearly did,” Kate replied.

A large kitchen was the focal point, with room for a dining table in front of the fire. Kate’s mind raced as she pictured a place for their furniture. The smell of lavender was strong and she looked out of the window to see where it was growing, but could not see through the dirty glass.

“Where is the studio?”

“Just outside the back door. It’s nearly as large as the house. Do you have many paintings?” asked Jane.

“Enough”. Her voice sounded harsh, she was tired and wanted to be alone. “I’ll come back tomorrow. Will you please leave the key with your receptionist?” She brushed past Jane, nearly running as she made her way to the car.

“I must see it again before I tell Tony,” she told herself, but knew it would be hard not to show her excitement. She liked it very much.

“Well, how did the house hunting go?” Tony Fullbright lived up to his name. His laughter could brighten up the dullest day, and there were plenty of them during winter. “Come on, I can see by your face you found something”.

“Well, yes I did, but I need to go back in the morning for another look.”

“Want me to come? I have two hours between clients.”

Kate hesitated. She needed to be on her own but did not want to hurt Tony.

“If you would rather go by yourself, that’s fine with me”. He understood; no explanation necessary. Kate put her arms around him. They kissed holding each other closely, with the bump of baby Fullbright between them. Tony patted the bump gently. “It’s alright little one you will have a proper home when you arrive.”

In the morning she collected the house keys as soon as the estate office opened. Slowly she walked around the house and studio. The smell of lavender was beautiful.

This is it. Some hard work required, but her heart knew it would be right for the three of them.

Together they looked at the house just before dusk. Walking around with their torches and laughing as they jumped onto the bare floorboards to make sure they were sound. “We have to get it checked over Kate, but it has something going for it. I like it”. They held each other close whilst they finished their inspection. “Nice smell,” said Tony.

Three weeks later they moved in, friends and family making sure that Kate did not overdo things.

It was more than a feeling. Kate knew something or someone came near to her, and each time she smelled lavender. She actually put her hand out in front of her little bump to see if she could touch it. There was a feeling of love. It was rather nice. She was being looked after.

Kate went through the legal paperwork for the purchase of the house. It listed all the six previous owners over the past 97 years. She wrote the names down and headed for the local church. Within two hours she found their gravestones and the subsequent history of family members.

Feeling content, she headed home. Tonight she would light the fire for the first time. They had received a delivery of coal and timber. Tony had chopped the wood all ready for when he came home, but she would surprise him.

Dinner was in the oven and the fire had a beautiful red glow when Kate saw her house visitor for the first time. Sitting in the chair by the fire, she was wearing a lavender dress with an attached cape draped around her. The familiar smell of lavender filled the room.

Kate automatically put both of her hands over the baby bulge as if giving protection. The visitor smiled, indicating with her hand that Kate should sit down; which she did very quickly.

“Who are you?” Again she used her hand to communicate, showing three fingers. “Do you mean number three on my list?” asked Kate. The lavender lady nodded her head.

“Eliza Rowntree, spinster,” Kate read out. “Have you always been here?” The head nodded once more, and she slowly vanished like a drifting cloud.

Two weeks later the baby was born in the local hospital. There had been the usual hurried moments, but Tony was with her when their son Paul Fullbright was born.

The history of the house fascinated Kate; she acquired a thirst for information not only about the house, but the whole surrounding area. During her visit to the graveyard she realised the historical significance of the locality. The graves of early settlers indicated the hardship they endured. But little did she realise how the house would change her life.

A chance meeting at the library with Laura Smith gave her an opportunity to quickly extend her knowledge. Laura had taken early retirement to pursue her love of aboriginal and early settlers' history. She had recovered many artefacts and evidence with organised digs. It was not long before Kate and baby Paul joined her small team of helpers. Laura was also a Medium.

Since the baby's arrival, Eliza had not shown her presence, and Kate had never mentioned her to Tony. Even though they closely shared their lives and thoughts, she needed time to understand her own feelings.

Kate set up her easel in the studio, she felt so happy to be back with her beloved paintings. Paul was asleep in his pram as she worked. The picture in her mind seemed to jump onto the canvas without her thinking. The background was the garden and, standing under the archway was a young woman tall and slender, dressed in a long lavender gown with an attached cape.

For months they both worked hard in the house, their second child was on the way. "Laura is coming for dinner tonight. I thought it might be interesting for you to hear about our latest Dig," said Kate.

"Great, what's for dinner?" aid the ever hungry Tony.

"Lamb stew and dumplings from an original recipe I found in the library."

I have never known you to be so interested in history. This house has somehow changed you my darling.

"Just opened my mind. I love our home; it has characted".

That's not all it's got, is it?" Tony looked into Kate's eyes as he spoke. "Have you seen her?" she whispered.

"Yes, and with the beautiful smell," he replied.

"Why didn't you tell me," her arms were around him and he cradled her head as he replied.

"Why did you keep it a secret my darling?"

At that moment Laura Smith knocked on the door, with a bottle of red wine under her arm. The dinner, wine and fire made for good conversation into the night.

“You’d better sleep over, no driving for you,” laughed Tony. “The sofa is comfortable.”

The meeting of Laura Smith and Eliza Rowntree was destined.

Kate awoke early to feed Paul. Looking out of the window she saw Laura in the garden. She busied herself in the kitchen and called Tony and Laura to join her.

“Sleep well?” asked Tony.

“I had a visitor, but you would have guessed that. We had an interesting time. She is not ready to leave you yet; there is something on her mind.”

Kate was preparing her painting for the art competition. She had not named it and was in deep concentration when she felt that Eliza was near. She was standing and looking at her portrait and smiling, she turned, waved her hand and drifted away. Well, she likes it Kate thought.

“I got it Tony,” Kate excitedly waved and envelope.

“The government grant?” asked Tony.

“Yes! I can write the history of our area and get it published”.

Some weeks later both Tony and Laura were in the audience when Kate was presented with first prize for her picture titled “Eliza Rowntree.”

Eliza’s wish had been granted.