

It was a dark and lonely night when he walked into the cabin and saw the bear. But the party was going strong. When the bear ate one of the party guests, he felt bad.

He didn't know why he thought about it while the train was rounding the curve. He had recalled that night many times over the years.

There was lots of work to do when he reached the cabin. Wood needed to be brought down for the fireplace. Snow had started to fall so there wasn't much time.

The large oak near the out-house had fallen over last spring and that provided enough wood to last most of two winters. There was some wood still left from when they had cleared the back lot three years ago.

Since she had left there wasn't much hurry to enclose the sun porch. In fact, it might just be easier to remove the framing.

As the sun was setting, he made a fire and was sat down to his dinner of venison stew.

Several hours passed before there was a knock at the door. It was the sheriff. He just wanted to check and make sure he was okay. He was on the way out to the Jenkins and had noticed the fire.

By the time he woke sun filled the upstairs bedroom. When he looked out at the snow-covered fields, he cried. He was very lonely in a beautiful place.

Later the cars started to arrive.

As the guests left they all thanked him for a wonderful evening and he was alone again. It was eerily peaceful hearing the wolves howling at the full moon.

After he banked the fire, he went to bed.

As he was riding the train back to the city, he had time to reflect on how fortunate it was he had kept the cabin. His friends enjoyed their weekend get-aways and for reasons he didn't understand he found returning to the cabin was oddly calming.

Back in the city he found the apartment pretty much like he had left. She was very good about that. Once she left her hairbrush and he had mailed it to her. Mostly what he noticed was the kitchen seemed cleaner.

Back in the city, he resumed his job as head chef at Chez Lousie. The holiday season was always especially busy. He normally left the catering up to his assistant. But Pierre had asked to spend the holidays with his parents in Quebec and he had agreed to tend to the catering as well as his normal duties. Each night he would return to the apartment and literally fall into bed from exhaustion.

It was a real blessing the restaurant was closed on Mondays. Some days he spent in the apartment, but on special days he would get up early and take the ferry and visit his brother and sister-in-law. He especially enjoyed sitting on the porch in the afternoon and watching his two nieces coming down the street from school. When they saw him on the porch their faces would light up and they would run in on the porch. They both knew tonight special.

It was July when he decided to hang up his check hat and relocate permanently to the cabin. Pierre was probably the most upset. But he knew Pierre would be fine. Somehow the spark had gone out of his cooking and he knew it was time to take a different path.

The first few months at the cabin he kept himself busy rearranging furniture, painting and getting the place ready for winter. He split two more cords of wood just in case the winter was more severe than forecast. He even fixed the leaky faucet in the guest bedroom.

It was just before Thanksgiving when she came back. It was awkward at first. He stayed in the guest bedroom for several weeks. There were long talks into the night. One night his brother came out and they all three spent until the wee hours talking over shared experiences.

He knew she could never forgive him for her sister's death, but she still loved him. Maybe the grieving period was over. They sat on the sun porch watching sun rise and set for many months.

When Andrew arrived they were quite surprised. They had known Andrew in school. They weren't particularly close, but it seemed Andrew was always in the group and over the years they had come to like him. They had even spent that one summer on the boat on the ocean.

It seemed Andrew was going through a tough spell and he needed a place to decompress for a while.

At first they didn't interact much, but after a couple of weeks all three began to talk more and share significant life events. Strangely it wasn't until the week before Andrew was supposed to leave that they talked about the party. He stayed for another month!

He didn't cry often, but the last few months he found it somehow comforting to walk into the woods alone, sit under the forest canopy and cry. Sometimes only for a minute or so, but there was one occasion where tears streamed down his face for more than five minutes. After each of these incidents he would stand up and return to the cabin.

She knew he had been crying but they never discussed it. In his mind, she was just about perfect.