

Real Estate

by Bonnie ZoBell

He drove down there in his truck the second time. Didn't want to get anywhere near that snooty car of hers.

Why he needed a real estate agent was beyond him. Just wanted to pick up the '66 Airstream as cheap as possible. All he had left was a small chunk of change, now that Lydia and the kids were gone and they'd finally sold the run-down place they'd called home for fifteen years.

He lived there a year by himself afterward, tried like hell to make it his own private cave despite agents traipsing in and out until he finally unloaded it. The mortgage was too high anyway, once he sent Lydia her half and the child support. Mostly, though, he could no longer stand the poltergeists from his previous life, the kids knocking into walls, their piercing screams and laughter. Did they ever love him, or was he just the guy their mother married? Did they remember planting the tomatoes, the ice cream runs, the time he spent scrubbing the grease out from under his nails before attending their schools' open houses?

If he didn't have to buy the bitty piece of land this trailer sat on, he could have done it through the newspaper, no real estate agent, nothing personal.

"You hop right in," Mrs. Seeger had said last week when she'd shown him the first place, a little dump he couldn't afford. What to make of a mature gal like this who made herself smell like flowers? His ex-wife, Lydia, would have rolled her eyes at the silly display of femininity.

Once the putrid new-car smell in her Chevy Impala had rushed him and he realized it was a 2008, he was careful about where to put his dusty work boots inside the luxury vehicle. His plaid shirt was probably leaving oil stains all over her leather-appointed seating. She must have had heaters in her bucket seats for his butt to sweat so. And then he spilled his Orange Crush all over everything.

"It's nothing," Mrs. Seeger had told him, a girlish smile. "That's why I have these." She produced some packets that said "Shout" from her glove box and, leaning close to him, completely erased the mark he'd left.

Like he seemed to have been erased from his family. They'd left him while he was at the shop one day. Got home and all but his corduroy easy chair, clothes, and high school football were gone. Food cabinets empty. Toilet paper missing.

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"I want to show you what you like best," Mrs. Seeger said today, glancing at him out of the corner of her eye. He was the one who saw the For Sale sign for the trailer, but the owner insisted it be handled through an agent.

"Cheapest is best, Mrs. S."

"Eleanor," she said softly. The arm holding her pocketbook was spotted with age, yet she'd taken the trouble to paint small flowers on her fingernails. Her feminine touches were a nice contrast to Lydia.

"What about your wife, Mr. Raymond? Won't she have an opinion?"

"I make my own decisions," he said.

"I'm sure you do, Mr. Raymond. I appreciate that in a man."

She giggled. The broad was at least his age, fifties. She ought to act it. Though why, he didn't know.

"My husband, may he rest in peace, never made a decision on his own. It used to bother me, but after you're by yourself a while, you wonder why such things ever mattered. I'm sure you know how lonely it becomes, after spending so much time with someone."

"My wife left me," he heard himself say.

"A horrible thing."

Alarmed by the tears forming at the crooks of his eyes, he turned away.

The aluminum trailer looked like a spaceship squatting in a field of greenery, its shiny silverness alien. He should have just bought the place unseen. He didn't care what was on the inside anymore. Being an alien in a spaceship suited him fine.

He held out his hand to help Mrs. Seeger as she climbed the steps with a key for the lockbox. Her round bottom switched under a silk skirt, and she wore some kind of matching sweater getup, turquoise blue, cut to show her cleavage. Lydia would have called the woman a loser for caring about things matching. Still, the woman's hair was fresh-looking and cared for, a pretty auburn color. He supposed caring for herself wasn't so bad, no matter what Lydia would have said. Mrs. S was OK, except for being a real estate lady.

He'd never hurt Lydia. Didn't he get points for the births, Little League games, barbecuing? Since her leaving, he'd decided maybe

comfortable wasn't enough. Maybe you had to get out of your cave now and then. Sometimes he'd wanted to ask Lydia what they would do once the children were gone. What did she think happened after this life? Was she happy? But there never seemed to be time.

He didn't know if he'd ever see Lydia and their children again. She'd whisked them to Alaska for a new life. There wasn't even another man. She was just that tired of him.

Inside the trailer, a soiled blue couch with cushions made into a bed. Matching soiled blue curtains. Worn linoleum bent to the contours of the walls. Bathroom wallpaper made to look like wood paneling. He needed nothing else.

Mrs. S sat on the bed as if she were home, then rose and said, "I'm going to powder my nose," her eyes shimmering as she closed the cardboard-like door to the john. Imagine that, he thought, still caring enough to powder herself.

He stepped outside to buffer himself from her tinkling. When he returned, she'd already disrobed, her delicate clothes strewn over the dinette, her bobby pins scattered, her pantyhose set neatly on the soap indentation of the stainless steel sink.

He wouldn't have been surprised if she'd done a little dance for him, but she seemed to sense his trepidation and instead lay on the thin cushions and patted the space beside her. Her thighs were those of a woman's, her waist still curved where it was supposed to, her face was pretty, and he found she was incredibly soft when he reached out and touched her neck.

As he lay beside her after removing his clothes, she palmed what little hair he had left and said, "You're going to be okay, Tony."

