

*Chippewa Publishing*

# Remembering



*Lane Whitfield*

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# **REMEMBERING**

by

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## Remembering

The windshield wipers cleared away another covering of sleet. Gaby wiped her hair out of her eyes and peered through the foggy glass. The tires started to skid on the ice and snow. She hated driving in such conditions. With a sigh, she turned off the engine and opened the door. A blast of cold air hit her face—a deep bone chilling one of midwinter on the moors. The sky hung low and grey, heavily burdened with its load. Gaby pulled her coat tighter, lifting its hood over her head. The crunching of the snow underfoot was the only sound to fill the air. The bleak moors were devoid of wildlife and human presence—save her own.

The shepherd's hut stood alone on the rise, braving the harsh weather like it had done for years. How was it still standing after all this time? She trudged up the slope looking neither right nor left. Her whole attention was on the shelter. It had aged, she noticed. Yet in her heart and mind, it remained the same as it had been the day she had run from it, twelve years ago.

The door was not locked, only jammed shut with age and snow covered hinges. Gaby hesitated. It was the final barrier. Should she take the final step and enter? Inside were memories that haunted her, saddened her. With the slightest of shrugs, she put her shoulder to the door and pushed. The door squeaked open and she stood teetering on the threshold, just as she had stood teetering on the threshold of adulthood so long ago. Gingerly, she stepped into the dim interior, pausing to let her eyes adjust to the gloom.

Grime covered the two small windows, filtering out most of the daylight. Mustiness tickled her nose. Thick coatings of dust covered every surface and in the corners of the roof hung fine necklaces of cobwebs. From the holes in the roof, rainwater stains created a patchwork on the walls and floor. Beside the black pot-bellied stove, a cardboard box held sticks and short thick logs. A yellowing old newspaper sat on a wooden shelf built along one wall. Gaby grinned. It hadn't changed. She reached up and her fingers felt a box of

matches on top of the newspaper.

It wasn't long before the flames caught. The cheery crackling of the fire consuming the wood made her feel better. She held her hands out to the warmth, refusing to let her eyes wander to the iron bed in the corner. She had been able to dismiss the large object while busy lighting the fire, but now it drew her to images she wished to forget. Telling herself not to be silly, that it was only an iron bed, Gaby firmly turned her head to stare at it in accusation. Her shoulders sagged. Its mattress was gone and the springs bent and rusty, but once it had held soft pillows and warm woollen blankets.

She made a step towards it when suddenly she heard the sound of crunching snow. Someone was here. Mesmerised, she watched as the long door handle turned downwards and the door slowly opened. A man in a huge blue coat, blue jeans, and black boots stood silhouetted in the doorframe. She searched his face. Her stomach clenched. Her throat constricted when she looked into his pale blue eyes. Deep in her heart, she knew he would come.

"I saw the smoke. I knew you were here," his voice was deep, sombre.

"How did you know I was in town?"

"You know what this town is like. People saw you at the service station; you were remembered."

"I bet I was!" She sighed, going back to the fire, turning her back on him.

The tall man seemed to dwarf the hut's small interior. He shut the door and came to stand beside her. "It is cold in here."

"Yes."

"You haven't changed, Gaby."

"Yes, I have."

"Not to me. To me you will always be sixteen, young and carefree." His smile was a little shaky.

"I cannot remember being young and carefree. All I remember is the last twelve years of struggle."

"I tried to find you, but I couldn't. They never told me where you went. No one spoke of your family again." His eyes bored into hers with hidden pain.

"Why would they? The whole town was glad to see the back of us."

"Life for me was unbearable without you. My parents despaired of me ever being normal again. How could they understand that they had broken my heart by forcing your family to leave the village?" His voice was harsh and she gazed up at him. "I hated them for phoning the police."

Gently, she placed her hand on his arm. Heart full of emotion, she swallowed back her tears. "They were protecting you. My father was a petty criminal, my brother a fool. They didn't want you mixed up in such a family."

“I cared nothing about that! It was you who I wanted!”

Gaby bent over the cardboard box and picked up another log, throwing it into the embers of the fire. She didn't look up, couldn't trust herself to be calm if she saw his gorgeous eyes linger on her lips like they used to just before he kissed her. “Did you become a lawyer?”

He let out a breath and pulled off his gloves. “No, a doctor.”

“I'm glad.”

“And you? What happened to you?”

“I am a social worker. After leaving here, I went to live in Manchester with Mum. She divorced Dad when he went to jail. I went to college.” She stood and steeled herself to look at him.

He smiled. “Are you hungry? I have a thermos of coffee in the car and we can share my sandwiches. I was on my way to do house calls, so I packed my lunch and brought it with me.”

She nodded.

He left the hut and Gaby shivered as the opened door let in more cold air. Closing her eyes, she tried to shut out the memories that wanted to crowd her mind. For twelve years, she had successfully blotted out the happy memories of a dry hot summer when she had fallen in love for the first and only time. This hut had been their haven, the one place they could meet away from prying eyes. She should never have come back here. She was mad to think that she could come back to a place that had meant so much to her and not feel anything. She was a fool.

While sitting on a blanket, brought from his car and placed over the bedsprings, they ate half a sandwich each and drank hot coffee. The hours ticked by as they talked about all sorts of events, mostly of things that were happening in the world today. Not once did they talk about their past or the love they had shared, at least not until they were down to the last log in the box, which Gaby put onto the fire with an ache in her heart.

“Why did you take so long to come back?” he asked, from the bed.

“Life doesn't always turn out as you plan,” she murmured, watching the flames.

“So, you had planned to return?”

“No, not until last week.” She turned to him and hesitated before speaking again. “My mum died two weeks ago. It was an impulsive thing to do, coming here, but I found myself alone for the first time in my life.”

“You have never married?”

“No. I...I was content to have Emily and Mum.”

“Who is Emily?” He frowned in confusion.

“She was my daughter.”

“You had a daughter?” He looked incredulous.

“Yes. She died two years ago. She...she had suffered from leukaemia since she was two.”

He stood and went to her. Placing his hands on her shoulders, he gazed into her eyes. “I am so sorry, Gaby.”

Gaby shrugged off his hands and went back to sit on the bed. “I don’t know how I’ll go on without her. She was my life.”

“I don’t know what to say. It must have been awful for you.”

“It was, still is.”

They were silent for a while before Gaby spoke again. “What about you? Are you married?”

“No. I was too full of anger at my parents and the world in general to attract anyone to me.” He chuckled at himself. “My parents wanted me to be a lawyer. I wanted to backpack around the world and live as a hippy on some South Pacific Island.” He laughed. “In the end, we compromised. I told father I would become a professional something, as long as I moved out of home and had no allowance from him.”

“And you picked to be a doctor,” Gaby stated, pleased that he had used intelligence to good use.

“Yes.”

“Do you see your parents much now?”

“Once a month or so. We get along better now that they are old and I am wiser,” he chuckled again. Then his smile disappeared as he gazed at her sitting on the bed. “I can’t believe that we are here in this hut again after all this time. It’s a little eerie.”

“It’s hard to believe,” she agreed, suddenly nervous. She did not want the conversation to stray into hurtful territory.

“I never thought I would see you again. I so wanted to find you. I wish I had,” he said softly.

“It would not have worked. We were too young. Too much had happened.”

“Maybe, but there was no need for it to turn so...so ugly!”

Gaby played with her empty coffee cup. “Our parents were doing what they thought was right,” she defended. “I couldn’t hurt my mum any more. She had enough to cope with in Dad and my brother.”

“I thought your father was going to kill me when he found out about us.” He shook his head in amazement at the memory.

“He would have if your father had not called the police. My dad was more worried about the police finally catching him than he was worried about us. They had wanted him for a while.”

"I will never forget that last day, when I came here after searching the whole village for you. I found you crying on this bed. The very same bed we had made love in so many times. I never wanted you to leave me."

"It was hard for me, too."

"I thought I would die."

Gaby averted her gaze. She did not want to see the same longing in his beautiful blue eyes that had made her wild with desire all those years ago.

"We were so young," she muttered.

"Our love wasn't. It was as old as time."

She looked at him, grinning at his eloquent way of words. "You always made me weak with the things you used to say to me."

"Did you know, on that last day, that your father was taking you away from here?" he asked with an edge to his voice. He wanted her to know the pain he had suffered. He had thought his life to be over.

"Yes."

"But yet you didn't tell me. You went away; knowing we would not see each other again."

"I had to."

"Why?"

Gaby stood up and walked to the dirty window. She stared sightlessly out of it; her throat thick with emotion and her eyes blurring with unshed tears. "I couldn't say goodbye to you. I wouldn't have been able to leave if I had."

"We could have gone away together, Gaby!"

"How would we have survived?"

"I would have found work!"

"I was sixteen. You were eighteen."

"So, what did that matter? We would have been together!"

"I was pregnant," she whispered.

He stared at her in shock. His mind trying to absorb her words, but he was having trouble believing them. "Pregnant?"

"Yes, three months."

"Why didn't you tell me? Why didn't you write to me and let me know?" he cried in agony. "You shouldn't have kept it from me."

"You had your whole life ahead of you. You were going to be a lawyer or a barrister, or something great. Your family was wealthy and powerful. I was the daughter of a petty thief and sister to a thug. It was made very clear to me that I was not welcome in your family and that I was leading you astray."

"But to have a baby without me? How could you do that when you knew how much I loved you?" His pain made her wince.

"It was because I loved you that I didn't tell you. You would never have



become anything if I had asked you to take care of the baby and me.”

“As if I cared about that!” He paced the hut. “I can’t believe you’ve kept this from me!”

“I’m sorry!”

“Christ, Gaby! I was a father-” He suddenly stopped talking and looked strangely at her. “Your daughter, the one who died, was she—?”

“Yes, she was yours.”

“Oh, Gaby!” His face revealed his inner torment. Anger and loss fought for control. “You shouldn’t have kept it from me. I had a right to know.”

“I’m sorry, really I am.” She gulped back a sob. “I didn’t know what to do. Suddenly, I was a mother and it freaked me out.”

He ran his fingers through his hair. “I can’t believe you didn’t tell me.”

Tears trickled down her cheeks. Guilt raked her body. “I’m sorry.”

He strode to her and pulled her tight against his chest.

Together they cried for their lost daughter and their lost love. All their pent up emotions and buried feelings surfaced and engulfed them. Through her tears, Gaby told him of the hard years she had spent studying and looking after a baby. She told him how they had lived off her mother’s meagre wages, who had become a night cleaner to support them. She told him of the days and nights she had cried for him, especially when the doctors diagnosed Emily with leukaemia.

Finally, she pulled out of her pocket a creased photo of their daughter sitting on Santa’s knee when she had been about five years old. The image that smiled back at them was the double of her father.

“You see? I still had a part you.” She cast him a teary smile. “I had you in my heart and in our daughter.”

“Look at her!” His eyes widened in wonder. “She’s just like me! That’s how I looked as a child.”

Gaby squeezed his hand. “I was wrong in what I did. I should have written and told you about her. I was selfish, but also afraid. I now realise that both you and Emily missed out on so much. I’m sorry. Please forgive me, though I doubt I’ll ever be able to forgive myself.”

“It’s all been such a shock to me.” He shook his head as though to clear his mind. “First, you turning up here after all these years, and now you tell me I was a father. I had a daughter. It’s unbelievable.”

“I did what I did because, at the time, I thought it was for the best. Do you believe me?”

“Yes.”

She sighed deeply; glad that he finally knew and that he understood her reasons. “I wish I could change the past, but I can’t.” She gazed down at her

boots. “So, what do we do now?”

“I don’t know.”

“I feel like I’m sixteen again, all undecided and lost.”

He placed his finger under her chin and raised her face to stare into her eyes. “I will not let you disappear from my life again, Gaby.”

Her heart pounded as she gazed at him. “I don’t feel like running any more.”

The fire died out and the air resumed its cold mustiness. They left hand in hand, walking away from the special place that had once been a sanctuary for them to be together, to take refuge from the world. Now, it featured once again in their lives as a simple hut that had drawn them back, given them the chance to heal their wounds, and look to the future—together.

**THE END**

## **About the Author**

### **Ann Whitfield**

Anne Whitfield is an Australian author, married with three children. Her passions, apart from writing historical fiction novels and contemporary short stories, are reading medieval novels, collecting Victorian diaries, roaming historical sites, buying books, and gardening.

Our authors love to hear from their readers!

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