



A Place to Dream

Angela Thompson

As the van twists and turns its way along the steep gravel road, fenced in by trees on both sides, I tingle. If the brakes give out or the engine stalls, the van, and my entire family, could crash into a tree or plummet into the lake. When I get out at the top of the hill, I have the strange feeling that if I tripped, I could stumble straight into the water. But the van ride excitement only begins the adventure I'll have this week at the cabin.

Set on Lake Odessa in Iowa, the cabin belongs to my grandparents, and has been a family vacation spot for years. With an atmosphere all its own, the cabin is full of memories of past summers, beckoning towards new places to explore and enjoy — places that are not found in the cabin or the surrounding woods, but in my imagination.

Slowly, I climb the slightly weathered wooden stairs to the outside porch. On the porch rail sits an old, black dinner bell. As children, we found out that pulling the string would make a wonderfully loud, deep sound that you could hear even down at the beach. Standing on the porch, I am no longer a twenty-first century teenager on vacation — I am a nineteenth-century pioneer, calling my family in from the fields for supper. I stand there for a moment, letting the breeze blow my skirt and my sunbonnet.

Opening the door, I enter the long indoor porch that runs the length of the cabin. The oversized chairs and long couches fill it with plenty of corners to curl up in — places to read, think, imagine, pretend. This is the place where I can read all the books I left last year, and maybe find a new one to enjoy. I know they will still be there, in the old wooden dresser in the hallway, on a shelf under a table. Sitting on the squeaky metal porch swing, with its green and white flowered vinyl mattress, I become the daughter of a wealthy plantation owner, fanning and rocking gently as I read. I lean back against the swing and remember last night's ball.

From the airy porch, two doors lead to the kitchen, which is really a combination of rooms. On the left is a sitting room with a chair, a tiny television, and a pull-out couch, which most of us manage to squeeze onto to watch cartoons on a rainy morning. Overhead is a peaked ceiling, made

of mahogany-finished wood and crossed at intervals with heavy-looking timbers. To me, it has the look of an old time log cabin. Sleeping under this ceiling on the pull-out couch, I become a pioneer girl in a cabin on the frontier. I lay awake listening to the wail of the prairie blizzard, hearing the eerie howl of wolves, or waiting for an Indian war whoop. They make an attack at dawn.

On the other side of the room, the atmosphere is different. This side holds the tiny kitchen. The kitchen has everything — the refrigerator, stove, sink, and dishwasher are all there — but no more than two people can work in it at a time without getting in each others' way. Working in the kitchen with my hands in the soapy dishwater, I am in a busy nineteenth-century boardinghouse or a colonial inn, working to get the dishes clean to keep up with the customers. As I wash down the counter, the rush is over, and I smile with satisfaction.

On the other side of the counter sits the tall breakfast bar with five bar stools under it. From here, I have a great view of the walls above the stove and sink, which are lined with an amazing array of plaques and signs, giving anything from proverbs to menu prices. The barstool's top is loose — enough to make really great spins, which Mom and Grandma banned long ago. So I content myself with twirling gently, side to side, as I drink out of the fat plastic cups that display golfing greens, cards, and fishing flies. Now I imagine that I am a Victorian girl dressed in lace and frills, eating a chocolate ice cream cone. Or, I am a customer at an old-fashioned diner, sharing a milkshake with my best friend.

At the end of the day, we pull out our pillows and blankets and head for bed. Some sleep on the pull-out couch in the sitting room, others sleep on the porch. Mom and Dad get the bedroom with the big bed. Tonight, I head for the tiny bunk-room at the very end of the cabin. Blue-carpeted steps lead down to it. It is nearly filled by two sets of bunks, stacked three high. The beds are spread with thin-looking blue or tan blankets, which are surprisingly warm and heavy. After saying goodnights, all is quiet, except for Grandpa's snores. The night is filled with possibilities. I am a nurse in an army hospital during the Civil War, comforting some poor wounded soldier who has just come in. I am a captive on a pirate ship planning my escape. I am a lost hiker, trapped in a downpour or a snowstorm. I curl up tightly under the blankets and smile.

Tomorrow there will be new excitement and possibilities. There will be new things to do, new adventures to have, and new people to become. There are no boundaries to what I can imagine. The cabin is a place where my mind can run free.

It is a place to dream.