

Not a Chicken

Jack books an afternoon dinner cruise and hopes for a waterfront walk to fill the day. He wants a retirement that doesn't look back. Instead, he trails Lily darting through antique stores in a seaside town dressed up for tourists. Old items that fill space and gather dust hold no attraction.

The Olde Treasure Store window features a large metal rooster. Jack stares at the burgundy crown and red wattle. No one would have cut up tin and wasted it like that. Especially not on his parents' farm, once known as the estate of Abram and Annette Peters. Jack could still hear the auctioneers gavel hit the table. He will not buy someone else's life.

"Oh, look at the chicken, Jack. Let's check this place out."

"Okay," Jack concedes "but that's not a chicken it's a rooster." Holding the door open for Lily, he catches the scent of roses, not the usual musty store aroma that makes his nose itch.

A wooden woman, roughly chiseled but smoothly finished greets them. "We never carved people from wood either," says Jack as he studies the life size figure.

Lily is well into the store by now and beckons to Jack with a cupped hand digging the air, held high to get his attention. A pole lamp wobbles as he hurries by it to catch up. She points to a homemade pine bench with a pullout bed. "Didn't you sleep in one of these?"

"How would I remember?" Jack counters. A mattress of straw in the corner of his room is the only rest Jack recalls. His parents' farm conjures up memories of dry dust and suppers fried in black pan. Jack and Abram labored to make the land productive after his mother died. Jack was twelve when the bank took charge. They moved to a boarding house, repairing fences to survive.

Lily moves through the store like a hummingbird, not stopping for long but examining any piece of interest along the way. She turns over the bottom plate, "Jack, look at this butter dish."

"Hmmm."

“It’s called reminiscent rose.” Lily announces as she hovers.

“Would you really use that?” Jack’s lips barely move. The colour evokes a handkerchief, in a lighter shade, that his father carried but never used. It belonged to his mother Annette.

“I’m getting it,” Lily announces, heading toward the till.

At the counter Jack’s eyes return to the wooden woman. He touches the shoulder of her dress and his fingers glide down her arm. The pinkness of her outfit creates a lump in his throat.

Jack steadies himself and stares down into the glass display case as Lily heads toward the door. Regaining focus, he scans a mosaic of pocket watches, tie clips, penknives and other metal memorabilia. Jack calls the clerk over.

Outside, Lily notices Jack carrying a small paper bag.

“What’s that?”

“A spoon. My mother’s name was on it.”

Jack takes Lily’s hand and sets the pace for the next store.