

*Barbara
Taylor
Bradford*

*Love in
Another Town*



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*For my dearest husband, Bob,
to whom I owe so much*

Jake Cantrell slowed his pickup truck as he approached Lake Waramaug near the Boulders Inn, braked to a standstill, and gazed out the window.

The lake was still, calm with a glassy sheen that looked almost silver in the late afternoon light of this cool April day. He lifted his eyes to the etiolated sky, so bleached out it, too, seemed as pale and as unmoving as the water. In stark contrast were the rolling hills rising up around the lake, darkly green and lush with trees.

Jake could not help thinking yet again how beautiful the view was from this angle of vision, a dreamy landscape of water and sky. To Jake, it was somehow evocative, reminded him of another place, yet he was not sure of where . . . someplace somewhere he had never been, except in his imagination perhaps . . . England, France, Italy, or Germany, maybe even Africa. Someplace he would like to go one day. If he ever got the chance. He had always wanted to travel, dreamed about going to exotic lands, but thus far in his twenty-eight years of life on this planet he had only been to New York City a few times, and twice to Atlanta where his sister Patty was now living.

Shading his eyes with one hand, Jake scanned the vistas of land, water, and sky once more, then nodded to himself. How incredible the light is today, almost otherworldly, he thought, as he continued to stare ahead.

He had always been fascinated by light, both natural and artificial. The latter he worked with on a daily basis, the former he frequently endeavored to capture on canvas, when he had time to pick up a paintbrush and indulge himself. He loved to paint whenever he could, even though he wasn't very good at it. It gave him a great sense of satisfaction, just as did creating special lighting effects. He was working on a big lighting job now, one that was tough, tested his talent and imagination, and fired his creativity. He loved the challenge.

The car behind him honked him forward, and, rousing himself from his thoughts, he pushed his boot down on the accelerator and drove on.

Jake headed along Route 45 North, which would take him up to Route 341 and all the way to Kent. And as he drove he kept noticing the unusual clarity of the light today; it echoed the light over the lake and seemed to get even brighter the farther north he drove.

Lately he had come to realize that this clear bright light was endemic to this part of the state, called the northwestern highlands by some, the Litchfield Hills by

others. He did not care what people called the area. All he knew was that it was beautiful, so breathtaking he thought of it as God's own country. And the extraordinary, incandescent skies, which were almost uncanny at times, very frequently inspired awe in him.

This particular area was relatively new to him, even though he had been born in Hartford, had grown up there, and had lived in Connecticut all his life. For the past four and a half years he had been a resident of New Milford, but he had rarely, if ever, ventured beyond the town's boundaries. That is until a year ago, just after he had finally separated from his wife, Amy.

He had stayed on in New Milford, living alone in a small studio on Bank Street for almost a year. It was around then that he had started driving into the countryside, going farther afield, looking for a new place to live, something a bit better than the studio, an apartment or, preferably, a small house.

It was on Route 341, near Kent, that he found the little white clapboard three months ago. It had taken him a few weeks to get it cleaned up, painted, and made reasonably habitable, then he had scoured the local junk shops and tag sales looking for furniture. He was surprised at the things he managed to find, and at the prices, which he considered reasonable. In no time at all he had managed to make the little clapboard fresh look-

ing and comfortable. His final purchases were a brand new bed, a good rug, and a television set, all bought in one of the big stores in Danbury. He had finally moved in three weeks ago and had felt like a king in his castle ever since.

Jake drove on at a steady speed, not thinking about anything in particular except getting home. *Home*. He found himself contemplating that word all of a sudden.

It hovered there in this mind. "Home," he said out loud. And yes, he *was* going home. Home to his house. He savored this thought, liking it. A smile lingered on his sensitive mouth. *Home. Home. Home*. The word suddenly had a very special meaning to him. It signified so much.

It struck him then that never in nine years of marriage to Amy had he ever called their various apartments home; usually, whenever he referred to them, he would say *our place*, or *back at the ranch*, or some such thing.

Now he realized that until today the word *home* had always meant the house in Hartford where he had been raised by his parents, John and Annie Cantrell, both dead for several years.

But the little white clapboard on Route 341, with its picket fence and neat garden, was indeed home, and it had become his haven, his place of refuge. There were

several adjoining fields with a large barn standing in one of them, and this he had turned into a workshop and studio. Currently, he was renting the property, but he liked it so much he was seriously thinking of buying it. *If* he could get a mortgage from the bank in New Milford. *If* the owner would sell. Jake wasn't sure about either possibility at this moment. He could only hope.

Apart from being the right size, the house was close enough to Northville, where he had moved his electrical business a few weeks ago. He had wanted to be out of New Milford altogether because Amy still lived and worked there. Not that there was any animosity between them; in fact, they were quite good friends in spite of their breakup.

Their separation had been reasonably amicable, although initially she had not wanted to let him go. Eventually she had agreed. What option did she have? He had been long gone from her emotionally and physically, even when they still shared the same apartment in New Milford. The day he had finally packed his bags and made his intentions clear for the last time, she had exclaimed, "Okay, Jake, I agree to a separation. But let's stay friends. *Please.*"

Long absent in spirit, and with one foot already out the door, he had willingly agreed. What harm could it do? And anyway if it mollified her to a certain extent so

much the better. Anything to make his escape easier, to get away from her at long last, in a peaceful way and without another row.

Jake's thoughts centered entirely on Amy for a moment or two. In many ways he felt sorry for her. She wasn't a bad person. Just dull, unimaginative, and something of a killjoy. Over the years she had become an albatross around his neck, dragging him down, and inducing in him an unfamiliar state of depression.

He knew that he was smart and quick and clever. He always had been, even as a child. And he was good at his job. His former boss at Bolton Electric had constantly told him he was a genius with lighting and special effects. And because of his drive, hard work, and talent he had moved up in life; he had wanted to move even farther, but she had held him back.

Amy was always afraid, afraid things would go wrong if they did anything out of the ordinary, or if he made a move to better himself and them and their existence. She had fought him two years ago when he had left Bolton Electric and started his own business.

"It's not going to work, it'll fail and then where will we be?" she had wailed. "Anyway, what do you know about being a contractor?" she had gone on nervously, her face pinched and white and tight around the mouth. When he hadn't answered her, she had added,

"You're a good electrician, Jake, I know that. But you're not good at business."

He had been infuriated by her remark. Glaring at her, he had shot back, "How do you know what I'm good at? You haven't been interested in me or anything I do for years."

She had gaped at him, obviously shocked by his words, but he was speaking the truth. It seemed to him now, as he remembered those words, that Amy had lost interest in him during the second year of their marriage.

Jake sighed under his breath. It had all become so sad and discouraging, and he wondered, for the umpteenth time, how it could have gone so wrong. They had grown up together in Hartford, had been childhood sweethearts, and had married right out of school. Well, almost. In those days the future had glittered brightly for him, had been full of promise.

He had his dreams and ambitions. Unfortunately Amy had neither. Within a few years he had come to realize that she not only fought change with great tenacity but actually feared it.

Whatever plans he had to grow, to make things better for them, she threw cold water on. Five years into the marriage he had begun to feel that he was drowning in all that cold water of hers.

The future with Amy had begun to look so bleak, so without promise or happiness he had eventually begun to drift away from her.

Content to plod along, following her usual routine, she had never even noticed when he was gone from her in body and spirit. He might have lived in the same apartment, but he was no longer really there.

Inevitably, he strayed and had a couple of affairs with other women and discovered he didn't even feel guilty. He had also realized at the time—over two years ago now—that the game was up between them. Jake was not a promiscuous man, and the very act of infidelity told him that there was nothing left of their relationship, nothing left to salvage. At least for him.

Through her apathy and fear, her lack of trust in him and in his ability, Amy had killed their marriage. Also, she had taken hope away from him.

Everyone needed hope . . . everyone needed dreams. What did a man have, for God's sake, if not his dreams? Amy had trampled on his.

And yet he did not blame her; he felt sorry for her, perhaps because he had known her for so long, nearly all of his life. Then again, he was aware that she had never meant to hurt him in any way.

He sighed under his breath. Amy gave so little of herself she therefore had so little. She was missing out on life.

Amy was still pretty in a pale blonde way, but she did nothing to help her delicate coloring, so she appeared faded and drab.

She'll never get married again, Jake thought with a sudden flash of insight, and groaned inwardly. He would probably end up paying her alimony forever, until the day she died. Or he did. But what the hell, he didn't care. He knew he could always make money. He had an unfailing self-confidence.

Jake slowed the pickup when he came to his white clapboard house, pulled into the yard, and parked in front of the garage. Walking around to the back, he let himself into the kitchen.

Home, he thought, and glanced around the kitchen. Then he grinned. He *was* home. He *was* free. He had his own business now, and it was doing well. He had a bright future again. His dreams were intact after all. Nobody could take them away. He was at peace with himself. And with the world at large. He was even at peace with Amy, in his own way. Eventually they would divorce and truly go their separate ways.

And if he was lucky he would meet another woman one day and fall in love. He would get married again. And hopefully there would be a child. Maybe even children. A wife, a home, a family, and his own business. Those were the things he wanted and it seemed to him that they were simple, fundamental things. Certainly

there was nothing complicated about them. Yet Amy had made them seem unattainable because she had not wanted them. She hadn't even wanted to have a child. She'd been afraid of that too.

"What if there's something wrong with the baby?" she had said to him once, just after he had told her he wanted to have a child. "What if the baby's born defective in some way? What would we do, Jake? I wouldn't want a defective baby."

Startled, he had stared at her in complete bafflement, frowning, not understanding how she could mouth such things. It was then that he had felt a spurt of anger inside, and that anger had stayed with him for a very long time.

Just over a year ago he had suddenly realized that Amy had cheated him of life for the entire time they had been married. To him that was a crime. But then he had allowed her to do it, hadn't he? You were only a victim if you permitted yourself to be one, his mother had told him once. He reminded himself not to forget that.

He had tried to help Amy change, but she had looked at him blankly, obviously not understanding what he was getting at.

Suddenly impatient with himself, he pushed away thoughts of Amy. After all, she was on her own now. As was he.

Opening the fridge door, Jake took out a beer, pried off the cap with the opener on the counter, then stood leaning against the sink, drinking the cold beer from the bottle, enjoying it; beer always tasted better from the bottle.

The phone began to ring. He reached for it. "Hello?"
"Jake, is that you?"

He straightened slightly on hearing the voice. "Yes, it is. How're you, Samantha?"

"I'm fine, Jake, thanks. You haven't forgotten the meeting tonight, have you?"

"No, I haven't. But I'm running late. Just got in from work. I'll be there soon. Real soon."

"Don't kill yourself. I'm late myself today. I'll see you at the theater."

"Okay." He glanced at the kitchen clock. It was just turning five-thirty. "In about an hour?"

"That's good for me. 'Bye."

"See you later," Jake said, and hung up.

He finished the beer and went through into the bedroom. After pulling off his boots and jeans he stripped off his heavy sweater and underwear, then strode into the bathroom to take a shower.

Five minutes later he was toweling himself dry, and after putting on a terrycloth robe he padded through into the small living room.

Standing in front of his CD player, his eyes scanned the shelf of discs next to it. He had inherited his love of music from his mother, especially classical music and opera. She had had a beautiful voice, and he had been reared on Verdi and Puccini, as well as Mozart, Rachmaninoff, Tchaikovsky, and other great composers. He'd always thought it a pity his mother had not been able to have the proper musical education and training, since in his opinion she'd had a voice worthy of the Metropolitan Opera in New York City.

Automatically, his hand reached for one of her favorites, Puccini's *Tosca*, but after looking at the Maria Callas disc for a moment he put it back, pulled out another one, a selection of Puccini and Verdi arias sung by Kiri Te Kanawa, whose voice he loved and who was his preferred opera star. After turning the volume up, he went back to the bathroom, leaving all of the doors open so that he could enjoy the music.

Staring at himself in the bathroom mirror, Jake ran a hand over his chin. No two ways about it, he needed a shave. He lathered himself with soap and scraped the razor over his chin, rinsed his face, combed back his damp black hair, and then went back into the bedroom, all the while listening to Te Kanawa singing arias from Verdi's *Don Carlos*, *Il trovatore*, and *La traviata*.