

Across The Lake

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“What’s do you think’s over there?” asked Bart.

“What do you mean?” said Patsy.

“On the other side of the lake. What do you think is over there?”

Patsy and Bart were sister and brother—twelve and eight years old. They were on vacation, but Patsy was bored out of her mind. Ever since Bart was born, their family had been coming to Lake Wenatchee, a crystal blue sheet which stretched as far as the eye could see. Ever since Bart was born, they had stayed in the same cabin, a musty old wreck just steps from where the water met the gritty beach. And ever since Patsy was 10, she had hated coming here.

The mosquitoes got bigger every year. By now they were larger, it seemed, than her fist. The humidity got worse, and the rain became more constant. If this is what people

meant by climate change, she thought, she was opposed to it. She spent most of the day reading in bed, stretched out on the scratchy blanket on the rock-hard mattress, wishing she was at home with her friends doing normal summer stuff: going to the mall, watching movies, eating popsicles in the park. She wished she was anywhere but Lake Wenatchee.

But there was nowhere else Bart wanted to be. He didn't mind the humidity, he found the constant rain soothing, and thought the giant mosquitoes were the most amazing animals he had ever seen. He didn't have time for reading on a scratchy blanket because he was in love with the lake. As soon as dawn broke, he was on its shore—building gritty sand castles from the gritty sand. He imitated the birds, trying to get their attention. He crept up on geckos, hoping they would want to play. He threw rocks in the water doing everything he could to entertain the fish. Bart loved nature—even if the towering mosquito bites that dotted his arms and legs were proof that nature didn't love him back.

"I bet the other side of the lake is even better than this side," he said.

Trying to act interested, Patsy said, "What makes you say that?"

"It's tough to believe, I know, because this side is so unbelievably super perfect.

There are birds and lizards and mosquitoes and fish. But something in my gut tells me that it's even better over there."

The summer before, Patsy and her mother had driven to the other side of the lake to buy shampoo at the drugstore. The other side of the lake was nothing too exciting: strip malls and gas stations, with a shopping mall in the middle. But before she told Bart the truth, she wanted to know what he was imagining. It would be more fun to burst his bubble that way.

“Describe it to me,” she said. “Tell me everything that’s on the other side of the lake.”

“Fish, obviously. But much bigger ones, I bet. The kind we saw at the natural history museum last year—like the super-underwater kind that have the little lamp hanging in front of their eyes. I bet there’s a whole bunch of those. And birds, too—obviously—but great big huge ones. Not just seagulls and stuff—falcons, hawks, and snowy owls.”

“And bald eagles, too, I bet.”

“Tons of them.”

“Do you know what they call a group of eagles?”

“I don’t know...a flock?”

“A convocation.”

“No way.”

“It’s true! I learned it in science class last year.”

“So if I went to the other side of the lake, I’d see a convocation of eagles?”

“And I bet that’s not all you’d see. What else?”

“Uh...I don’t know.” Bart tossed a rock into the lake and watched the ripples drift slowly to the dock. He was appearing to lose interest.

“Come on, Bart! Let your imagination run wild. Anything in the world could be over there. So what do you want to see?”

“Well, uh...an ice cream store.”

“What *kind* of ice cream store? The best one in the world?”

“Definitely.”

“What makes it the best one in the world?”

“Well, uh—all the ice cream costs 25 cents. And if you ask for a free sample, they give you a whole scoop. And they have all kinds of crazy flavors, like butternut peanut butter walnut, and triple chocolate marshmallow fluff surprise.”

“Triple chocolate marshmallow fluff surprise? What’s the surprise?”

“More marshmallow.”

Patsy felt her stomach give a rumble. “Huh. That actually sounds really good.”

“Of course. And next to the ice cream store is a roller coaster park.”

“And all the roller coasters are free?”

“Yep. And each one has a double loop-the-loop.”

“You’d better ride that before you go to the ice cream store, not after.”

“Good point.” Bart trailed off again, distracted by a snail. Patsy found herself strangely impatient. She wanted to know what else was on the other side of the lake.

“Is there anything that I will like?”

“You like ice cream.”

“Yeah, but what else?”

“Uh, I don’t know. I guess there’s probably a movie theater and stuff.”

“But I can see movies at home. What’s over there that’s special?”

“There’s a clothing store where they give you five free outfits, just for coming in the door. And all the clothes fit you perfectly, and the sales ladies are never mean to us, just because we’re kids.”

“Oh man, that sounds great.”

“Yeah! And...” Bart tried to remember what else his sister liked. “There’s a place where you can get free notebooks for school!”

“Really?”

“The really expensive kind, with the heavy paper and colorful covers and stuff. And you can have all the fancy pens you want!”

“That does sound nice...”

“Wait a minute! Didn’t you and Mom go over there last year? To buy shampoo or something?”

“Yeah.”

“Well, what was it like?”

Patsy remembered the strip malls and gas stations—a lake of concrete, where the humidity was unbearable and the mosquitoes, somehow, even bigger—and she looked at her brother’s hopeful, dreaming face.

“It was exactly like what you said,” she said. “Free ice cream and roller coasters and everything. Exactly like that.”