Kathleen Wall

The Stuga

When I was about two and a half, my family and I moved to Stockholm, Sweden because my father was currently working for Microsoft and my family was willing to have an adventure. We stayed in an apartment in the city and all the walls on the inside were marble. Actually, everything was marble with gold touches here and there and we even had fire places in our bedrooms; it truly was luxurious. On the other hand, we rented out this small brown cottage during the summers that we called the “Stuga.” I do not know why we called it the Stuga, I am sure it is Swedish for something. I unfortunately never learned the language (or did not even try to) but Stuga is now the safety word for my family. By the time we went there, I was probably closer to three and my sister was around five.

The Stuga was this tiny brown cottage right next to the lake in the Swedish forests. We had a small beach right in front and a mini boathouse to tie up boats. The Stuga had a kitchen the size of an airplane bathroom with yellow walls and a brown outhouse with a yellow interior in the backyard that was constantly covered with daddy long legs (inside and out). I never liked to use the outhouse because there was not even an inch on the inside that was not covered with those long stringy black legs. Because I complained about the spiders so much and refused to pee in the outhouse, I had my own “little blue potty” (that is what my mom called it) that I brought in the house so I did not have to experience fear every time I had to go to the bathroom. I probably only went five times to the outhouse and every time I had to go with my father and even with him, I would still run away in fear.

When we first arrived to the Stuga, there was a mother swan and her three little babies that followed behind her in a straight and evenly spaced line. They still were fresh little newborn babies with grey fluffy feathers but their mother was a long, graceful, smooth, magical creature. Lucie, my sister, and I fell in love with them at first sight and were fascinated by them. We had never seen this before and I’ve never seen anything like ever again; they were truly magical. About every day we would see them swim by calmly and collected, following their mother and never straying off or fragmenting their even line.

My sister and I were constantly in the water. We were with either our father or both of our parents. My mother enjoyed spending her days on the hammock soaking up the Swedish sun and reading another romance novel. We had a babysitter who was about sixteen at the time named Anya. She was a family friend who babysat us in Stockholm and we welcomed her to our lovely Stuga for a week or two. She would also come in the water with us and I have many photographs of us together on the hammock. My aunt Duncan, also visited for a few weeks and we have photographs with her as well.

Lucie and I would attempt to go fishing with my parents every day but we only successfully caught seaweed (even my parents). At first, we were disappointed but it soon became a situation that we laughed about every day and we were convinced that there were no fish in the water, or at least I was. My parents had regular sized fishing rods and my sister and I had plastic kid sized ones. Mine was even smaller than Lucie’s (maybe that’s why I never caught anything) and it was red and yellow with a blue handle. Lucie and I would float on our blowup floats out in the water and watched the swans from close up. Every day the swans grew a little bit more. I remember the coolness of the water and how calm it was. It was dark blue and clear. I was fearless because I did not think there were many sea creatures underneath me because we could only catch seaweed (as a child I had a strange fear of fish underneath me for some odd reason).

We had a small rowboat, which was a pale brown and was owned by the owner of our Stuga, and a sailboat that my dad was in love with. The rowboat was perfect to get as close as we could to the swans without scaring them. The sailboat, on the other hand, was enormous to me at the time (I was a super tiny child so it probably was not truly large at all) and had a pit with a bed, a desk, chairs, and a bathroom. All of the wood was a rich brown and polished and the deck was spotless and white. I remember the dark blue water and my dad’s curly dark hair blowing in the wind and the beautiful clear light blue sky above us.

My sister and I shared a room, and for some reason I got the top bunk even though I was much younger. I like to think that Lucie was honestly either scared of heights or just being lazy (probably just lazy). We had light blue comforters with light pink hearts and pale-yellow stars. The walls in that room were also light blue and we dreamed in pastel. Sometimes Lucie’s friend Charlie would sleep over on his sleeping bag but he would always sleep in Lucie’s bed and I would always make fun of her. We talked every night about the swans and the water and what we were going to do the next morning.

My dad had a garden, which he was extremely proud of, and built his own fence out of branches and sticks which he found around the Stuga and tied together with twine. That fence is probably one of his proudest accomplishments and he still talks about it to this day. He planted sunflowers and carrots, tomatoes, wildflowers, and attempted to grow other vegetables. That garden surrounded by his fence was his pride and glory. I love to look at photos of him in the garden because he looks his happiest.

There was only one neighbor next door who was the owner of our cottage and also owned two other cottages nearby. We never got to know him well at all, actually I only remember waving to him but I do recall my parents talking about what a sweet little old man he is. He lived in a little bright yellow house to the left of us and wore a straw hat and had a long grey beard.

The swans were changing day after day and starting to lose their grey feathers but still followed their mother whatever they did. My family and I would sit out on the screen porch or the hammock outside by the weeping willows and water every day to see if they would swim by us with their calmness and elegance. Seeing them was like I was being kissed by an angel.

Although I was only three, I still remember the highlights of the Stuga; the laughs, the accomplishments, the fears, and the amazing moments. The memories are fuzzy because I was so young but the memories of the swans are as clear as the water underneath our sailboat. Every day the swans got a little bigger until they were fully grown. When we left, the babies had finally grown up and left their mother.

Even though I was young, to this day I still think about those swans and that magical place and all the happiness it brought my parents, sister and me. My sister and I eventually grew up and left my parents to go start our own lives. We are all like the swans. Everyone grows up and eventually leaves. This can be taken in as a sad thought but I admire the swans and they bring me happiness. They always obeyed their mother until they were finally ready to have lives of their own. I left home to go to boarding school when I was 14. I had always obeyed and followed my mother until I went there. It was a great experience to live at boarding school at such a young age. Being there taught me a lot of things that other people my age wouldn’t have learned while staying at home. I left the safety and comfort of my own home and I grew up and started a life of my own. I became who I am today from all the bittersweet experiences I had living there but it was home to me. Home is not where you’re from, it’s where you find light when all grows dark.