

# WINE OR CANDY

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The night is windy. Storm clouds gather to the West and glow an eerie orange-green over the bay just moments before the Lindgrens leave their two-story home and set off to their neighbors' house down the road. It's New Year's Eve and the Du Mauriers have invited the Lindgrens for festivities: drinks and firecrackers. Sharon and Harald Lindgren start out on the ten minute walk along Eaglecliff. There are no street lights, but the path is familiar and the couple speaks in low, intimate murmurs as they make their way through the dark woods. They are not alone. A crouched figure watches them from the ferns. She follows the couple at a safe distance, skirting the side of the road and keeping to the shadows. The brush is drenched – Oh hell! She shivers with disgust at the touch of the sopping grass and leaves. She hates getting wet almost as much as she hates the cold.

It's the early 1990s, and the Island's population is a mere 3,000. Growth is imminent, however, with the hous-

ing boom of the 2000s just around the corner. Soon the population will soar by more than 500%. Microsoft has just launched Microsoft Suite with its first version of Word and Excel, attracting much speculative interest including that of Jeff Bezos. The sound of chainsaws and construction begins to disrupt quiet island life. Whole new cul-de-sacs pop up with names like Stonecress or Wintergreen full of identical houses – a ‘bedroom community’ in the works. Yet, these are still the days of small town gossip, neighborly gestures, a time when the ferry crew knows everyone’s name.

The Du Mauriers first moved to the Island with their two daughters in the 70s. Back then, they lived in a small beach house at Yeomalt. After many mudslides, the house no longer stood. The bluff has since been reinforced and a stone bulkhead meets the lapping waves of the bay. Newly built homes crowd the cliff, which the young family are unable to afford. Aside from rising real estate prices, not much had changed on the Island in the last two decades. Slightly more people than the 70s, yes, but many of the neighborhoods and much of the town remain the same. There is still only one high school and one movie theater. The old Thriftway and hardware store are unchanged, even the same people work there. By the 2000s, the Thriftway will be renamed Town & Country, suddenly becoming a much more upscale enterprise with prices to match. The quaint town center and its new multiplex movie theater, restaurants and bars will begin to attract even mainlanders. The Big Star Diner, originally built in 1948 and featured on the first season of Guy Fieri’s *Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives*, will arrive in parts from Pennsylvania, drawing

diner lovers from across the nation to its doors. These are exciting prospects for Gwen's daughters, who will grow up playing on construction sites, carving their names into the wooden frames of houses and lighting fires in their freshly poured foundations. The buildings are haunted before they are even finished. Here, in fact, lies the main difference between the generations.

Moonlight plays tricks on the swaying trees and casts looming shapes on the wet pavement. The Lindgrens' movements are slow, dreamlike. They have already enjoyed some pre-dinner drinks to ward off the chill and are in high spirits. Harald is laughing at something Sharon just said. Curious, their watcher edges closer through the dank undergrowth. Sharon is wondering if Lorelei will make crab again – the Lindgrens have ordered oysters from Mystery Bay and packed them up in a basket of seaweed together with the shucking knife. It does seem rather barbaric really, to pry them open and present them naked in their own beds. They should serve them right away with the California champagne. Harald glances about, "Did you hear that?" "It's just the wind," Sharon says. Nevertheless, the Lindgrens move to the center of the road, where the moon shines brightest. Their dark shadows stretch ahead like a pair of compass needles.

The neighborly New Year's Eve dinner is a tradition in the Du Maurier household, and despite the predictably wet weather this promised to be a special one. For one, the Du Maurier's home currently houses four generations: Lorelei and her husband John, her mother Betty Watson, their daughter Gwen and their three grand-children Elizabeth, Alexandra and the youngest, Claire. What's more,

the recent discovery of a fault zone running from Issaquah through the Island's own Restoration Point and up the Hood Canal had shaken the whole community, adding a doomsday feel to the upcoming New Year. Scientists are now certain that the fault possesses catastrophic seismic potential. There had been tremors before, though nothing above 5.0. Lorelei remembers waking from her sleep once to a strange, rocking sensation as if she were on a sailboat. The air around her felt different, electrically charged, and the cup on her bedside table jerked as if possessed. It took her a moment to realize what was happening and by then it was already over. When the Nisqually earthquake hit the region with a moment magnitude of 6.8, in February 2001, it would last for a full minute, interrupting Bill Gates' demonstration of the newest Windows XP operating system as chandeliers shake and parts of the ceiling rain onto the stage.

She sniffs the air gingerly – salty with a hint of musk. For several months now, she has been camped out in the Lindgrens' basement – a dark, warm space full of strange pings and creaks. Periodically, she would sneak upstairs in search of food – whatever is left out on the counter, or in the pantry. With some luck, her presence has gone unnoticed. Yet, as she grows stronger and stronger, she knows it is time to leave. By now she is constantly hungry, her stomach growling so loud on her trips upstairs, she fears it will give her away. There is no plan really. It's more a gut feeling that tonight is the night.

Up ahead her hosts turn into a driveway marked by a single post overgrown with vines. It seems too risky to follow, so she scrambles under the hedge bordering the

property, almost landing in the deep ditch along the road. Just in time to catch a last glance of the Lindgrens' silhouettes standing in the open front door. Lorelei Du Maurier's voice calls out in greeting – so friendly, so inviting – then they are swallowed inside.

The yard is spacious with a copse of ferns at its center. She can make out a large vacant lot to her left. The house's floor-to-ceiling windows illuminate its long, wooden structure from within. The low-pitched roof is barely sloped – just enough to let off the rain, which spills from the drain pipes. She hides beneath a low shrub and peers inside. The wide, open room is softly lit. Abstract paintings and landscapes decorate the wood paneled walls, a collection of framed drawings and photographs adorn the piano. A fire blazes in the wood stove. The family and their guests sit on low sofas and chairs. Red wine is served in elegant glasses and the children drink Martinelli's sparkling cider from champagne flutes. She longs to join the convivial group. It's Alexandra who first spots the small, black cat, and surreptitiously slides the patio glass door open. "How did it get in?" Gwen exclaims. They will never find out and Chloë is there to stay.