

Grace

by Wendy Brown-Baez



a story of love and miracles



Fletcher lit the candles all in a line one by one, for those who were gone and those missing from his life. His hand wavered for a split second before he lit the candles for Grace, his ex-wife, and Mikaela, his daughter. He settled into his seat at the head of the table and looked down the row of flames and felt slightly sick. *This was a bad idea*, he thought to himself, *to think of my losses when I am here alone*. He thought lighting the candles would make him feel better but the impulse had become engulfed in regret and sadness. His hope was that it would feel as though they were still with him in spirit, if not in presence. He wanted it to be true, especially for his mom and dad and baby sister. He was pretty sure it was not true for Grace but perhaps Mikaela missed him.

The lower floor of the cabin would be comfortably warm once he got a fire going in the fireplace. He hadn't built a fire yet, because after the long drive he wanted to eat before he made the trek to the shed for wood. And light the candles so his meal would be accompanied by those he missed. There were dozens of candles in a drawer. There always had to be candles on hand in case of a power outage, which happened easily during summer thunderstorms. The last time he was here, three years ago, Mikaela wanted to have candlelight at supper, even though their meals were rudimentary. The whole point of being in the cabin was to relax and not work so hard, so they often heated up cans of soup and made sandwiches, salads and quick pasta dishes. Often they shared a bowl of popcorn or made s'mores during the evening as they sat by the fire in spring or fall. In summer months, sunsets were so late, they fell asleep where they were, on the couch or the hammock outside, stumbling in to brush their teeth and undress without even bothering with putting on pjs before falling into their beds. Cabin life was meant to

be rumpled and lazy and casual. The workweek attire of suits and ties, skirts and scarfs, was replaced by wearing swimsuits most of the day, shorts or leggings, faded flannel shirts (even summer nights could have a chill) and flip-flops.

This far into the fall was not a time to be isolated in a cabin. Too much could go wrong if the long driveway got socked in with snow. It would be hard to drive out and the main road to the highway could turn treacherous. Normally they battened down the cabin before the first snow fell, shut off the water, locked the shed, covered the septic tank, cleaned and turned off the furnace, and made sure no food crumbs were left in any corners that might attract critters. But he needed to get away, far away. Suddenly his life felt too tight around his neck and the grief he had stuffed for years threatened to give him a heart attack. Better to come to the cabin alone and lick his wounds, like a wild animal would, rather than stay another month in the square confines of his new condo. He packed his best boots and down parka, even though so far, winter in the city had been fairly mild, and headed north.