

Blush of Lilac

The best vacation of my youth? The best so far?

No contest.

That summer my family and I went to Brok, a quiet village with a name that sounded kind of like a frog croaking. On the banks of the River Bug, surrounded by an ancient pine forest that smelled of sun-warmed sap and mushrooms. *Bucolic*, my parents said.

We stayed in a tiny cabin that looked like it might blow over if you were allergic to those smells and sneezed too hard. Plywood walls, four squeaky bunk beds, and not much else. Hardly anyone had a car in those days, and “camping furniture” was a distant dream, something from magazines we didn’t even have. If you wanted a table or a bench, you had to scavenge for wood and build it yourself. The mattresses, too, were makeshift, sack-like ticks stuffed with straw. There was no plumbing, just an outhouse deep in the woods that made you pray you’d never get constipated. Cooking, eating, washing—everything was done *al fresco*. Like some survival challenge.

But none of that mattered.

There were dozens of families, and the place was a perfect mess for teenage friendships to take root. Maybe more than friendship?

That’s what I was after anyway.

Some of the kids had been coming for years—the regulars. They knew every secret spot: the best blueberry patches, the hidden swimming holes, the places where parents wouldn’t find you. It was that blend of lazy days and bursts of wild fun. It was perfect. Absolute magic.

One night there was a party. That's where I met Lilac.

Her real name was Liliana Bez, but I made some dumb joke about "Lila Bez," which basically meant Lilac Lilac in Polish. She rolled her eyes like she'd heard it a thousand times before. Or as if she were silently commenting on her parents' naming choice. But then she smiled.

I'd seen her before. On the beach, at the market. We'd trade glances, a slight nod, then look away with the kind of slow blinks that kept everything mysterious yet intimate. Not exactly flirting. More like acknowledgment. Her eyes were gray with this flicker of blue. And what are the odds? They were exactly like mine, making us instant "eyemates," like members of some exclusive club.

But at this party, there was no mystery, just intimacy. Suddenly, getting closer felt like the only thing that made sense.

"Hi. Like it?" I asked, nodding at the music. She nodded back in time with the strumming of a guitar. The song was Scott McKenzie's "San Francisco," and it seemed as if it was written just for her. She wore this long white dress, her head crowned with meadow flowers. She wasn't just listening or swaying to the music; she was the music.

The party stretched late into the night. Lilac and I didn't talk much. We didn't have to. We danced. We smiled at each other and let the music carry us.

When I walked her back to her cabin, I didn't kiss her the way everyone else would have, as expected. Instead, we hugged, and it was clumsy. But sweet. More like an unspoken promise than just a good night.