**59.**

‘Say you’ll come.’ Carmel begged her friend.

‘I will think about it.’

‘Let me know as soon as you’ve made up your mind.’

Carmel released a long sigh as usual having been on the phone to her infuriating but lovely friend, Maureen. They both lived in Inis Beag, Galway, in the West of Ireland. Inis Beag is close to the sea, the first love of Carmel’s life. She was addicted to the salty smell, the sound of the crashing waves against the rocks, and the light that was never quite the same at any time of day or night. From indigo to gold, she loved the transient spectrum of sky-changing colours and the endless shades of sea-blue-green she had witnessed throughout her forty years living in Inis Beag.

She had been married to Paul for twenty years. They had twin teenage sons, Finn and Sean, who disappeared either together or with their friends at every opportunity. Apart from being in love with the sea, Carmel also loved going to the theatre but Paul said what were actors only the Great Pretenders. Carmel could have quoted Shakespeare about all of life being a stage and everyone a player but she had tired of attempting to persuade him to accompany her to any of the local performances.

Carmel befriended Maureen after several weeks working together in the post office. At first she was concerned that they might not click. Carmel was the

manager and Maureen was her assistant, although Maureen was ten years older. Maureen questioned her at length about their differences in job content and

pay.

Maureen wore her hair in a bun, her tweed costume spelling out 1950 rather than the fashionable, more flamboyant, flowing styles of the new millennium. But Carmel had given Maureen the benefit of the doubt as there was something about her that insisted she observe the woman beneath the tweed. She noticed the way Maureen moved her hips when Steve, the postman, tipped his cap at her,

‘Hiya Gorgeous, you get better lookin’ by the day.’

She observed the way she settled her shirt cuffs into place, purring in response, ‘Oh Stephen, you are terrible.’

Maureen had never married.

‘Oh, I had my chances’ she would say when Carmel teased her about her swagger whenever Steve came in. Maureen confided that her parents had always expected her to look after them in old age. As an only child she had felt duty-bound to do so. She never imagined her youth would roll away as swiftly as a hat in the wind. She had turned down two serious offers of marriage.

‘Who were these potential husbands?’ Carmel was curious.

Maureen raised her index finger and placed it firmly over tight lips. Carmel withdrew, defeated. She knew Maureen’s parents had died in the recent past, leaving her, a fifty year old orphan, in need of a job. That was when she applied to the advertisement and here she was with her bun and her swagger.

Maureen arrived at work in a flurry.

‘Carmel, you would not believe my life!’

Carmel allowed her to bumble on about her faulty boiler and her recent discovery of a hairline crack in her ceiling that she was certain would destroy her entire dwelling.

‘Have you decided about the play?’ Carmel cut through the waffle. She really wanted to see Brian Friel’s famous play *Dancing at Lughnasadh*.

‘What’s it about?’ Maureen asked

‘It tells the story of five unmarried sisters who are transformed by dance music that spills into their kitchen from the Marconi radio set.’ Carmel enthused.

‘I’ll take a chance on it although I would much rather an Agatha Christie.’

Carmel was on the phone in an instant. Having booked the tickets she boiled the kettle to celebrate.

On arrival they had a glass of white wine. Maureen rambled on about her house troubles while Carmel watched the crowd in the bar, her own eyes mirroring their excitement as the time for the commencement of the performance drew near.

From the moment the curtain rose, Carmel barely noticed that Maureen was there. As the story unfolded, Maggie, one of the sisters had been baking bread in the quiet of the kitchen when suddenly the radio music filled the room. Maggie let out a yelp, threw handfuls of flour in the air, joined hands with her sisters and soon everyone was laughing and whooping and stomping around the stage until they were out of breath and it was only then that Carmel became aware of Maureen’s sniffles and felt her own emotions bubbling up to the surface. Soon they were clapping in time with the music, weeping openly and smiling at each other between sobs.

When the curtain came down at the end of the performance they left the theatre in silence. As Carmel dropped Maureen off to her cottage she said,

‘Maureen, what do you say we go for beach picnic on Sunday?

‘Ok,’ Maureen agreed.

‘I’ll pick you up at two. Pack a bottle of something bubbly. I’ll see to the food and the music.’

On Sunday morning the rain poured down the windows, forming little rivulets to the sea. Maureen had managed to buy two bottles of mock champagne at a bargain rate. The clock struck two. When Carmel revved up in her sports car and honked the horn, Maureen pulled on her raincoat and braved the elements.

Carmel was flushed as they arrived at the beach in the rain. It should worsen. The weatherman has forecast thunder and lightning.

Sam Keating, aged eighty six, looked through his binoculars from the attic window of his home. Every Sunday he retired to that room having had Sunday lunch with his elderly wife, Jane. Like Carmel, Sam loved the changing colours of the light on the sea whatever the weather.

He hollered to Jane, ‘Don’t look now but…’

Jane struggled upstairs with her arthritic knees. She took the binoculars and gasped.

Down on the sand, on the Lord’s Day, were two hussies, naked as newborns. A bottle of something suspicious in one hand each. Jane thought they must have escaped from the nearby mental hospital. She was stunned as the lightening electrified their dance movements so that they were framed in blue light. The silver hair of the older woman fell to the sand. As the lightening subsided she noticed how their skin glistened in the rain.

‘Disgusting’ she spat and handed the binoculars back to her husband.

He didn’t reply as he struggled to squash his rising excitement.

*The End*