

Chapter 3 - A Fly in the Ointment

The Glowing Lantern was full of life and good craic. It was hard to talk above the level of the noise without contributing to making more noise. The fire was roaring and indeed was a comfort. It was early spring and the evenings were still quite cool made more so by the stiff breeze blowing in off the bay. Seamus O'Byrne, a singer and pianist of some note, led the singing which often filled the night. He was on break at the moment.

Katie and Shane shared a roast beef sandwich and each had a pint of Guinness. Friends stopped by and chatted. The hour was growing late and they were both really tired from the session with Fr. O'Malley. They drifted out of the Lantern and slowly walked over to Shane's cottage on the edge of the grounds occupied by the Glowing Lantern. It was formerly the gate house for the estate that subsequently became the Glowing Lantern. Shane offered Katie the bedroom saying that he would take the couch. "Not on your life," she said. "I just want to lie close to you and feel you next to me when I wake up."

When Katie woke up, Shane wasn't next to her, but she heard rustling in the kitchen and the overwhelming smell of cooking headlined by the aroma of bacon. She threw on one of Shane's oversized sweatshirts, quietly crept up behind him, wrapped her arms around him and hugged his back. As she released her grip, he turned around and kissed her tenderly.

"Is this what mornings for the next fifty years will be like," she asked.

"I hope so," he answered. "I'll try my best to do my part."

As they ate breakfast, Shane asked if there was anything further they had to discuss about their relationship. "I don't think so," Katie said. "The whole discussion was about my complaints about you. You have done a marvelous about face. The only thing that concerns me is that you have no complaints about me. I know I am not perfect and I don't want you letting me think so. I presume a lot of what we have already discussed will come up again with the other topics. I hope you are not disappointed that we did not make love last night. I don't believe it would have been sinful but in some respects, I think I am an old fashioned type of girl. At this point and time of my life, I want to wait until we are married."

Shane smiled and said, "I'm glad you have those values. They make me love you even more. I loved being close to you and falling asleep in each other's arms. I can wait. Making love with you will be a big part of our wedding celebration."

"Our next project is God, our belief system, commitment to the church and service to the world, prayer, and spirituality, said Shane."

“A formidable task indeed,” responded Katie.

They cleaned up the kitchen together. Shane had to go to work at the Lantern and Katie had to get back to the University.

The ten minute drive into Galway City was uneventful. When she entered her apartment on the campus her attention immediately was drawn to the blinking light on her telephone answering machine. The first call was from her Department Chairman, Dr. McDermott. The other was from a guardai officer at Leveegee. She returned McDermott’s call first. He wanted to meet with her on Monday morning to discuss publishing. It was one of her responsibilities as an assistant professor and something to which she has already been giving some thought. The second call was to her old friend Tom Donnolly, the Captain of the Leveegee Guards and it was disturbing.

“Hello Katie.” said Tom but the usual “I’m glad to talk to you” lightness was not in his voice.

“Tom, is anything wrong? You sound terrible.”

“Katie, some thugs broke into your mother’s home last night, said Tom. “She is alright; they roughed her up a bit but nothing is broken and she’ll be alright. She is frightened out of her mind, though. She was treated by Dr. Madison and he recommended that she stay in the hospital overnight.”

Katie was stunned. “I’m coming right over. Tom. I’ll go to the hospital first but I’ll talk with you later this afternoon. I want to hear the full report and get your advice about what we should do.”

She called Shane to let him know of this development.

A little more than an hour later, Katie pulled into the parking lot at St. Mary’s Hospital. When she asked for her mother at the information desk, she was told that she is alright and that they were awaiting her arrival so they could discharge her.

She went up to her mother’s room and her mother ran into her arms crying. “Why did they do this?” she kept saying over and over. Katie was stunned by the way she looked. Both her eyes were blackened. One of thugs must have punched her in the nose. She had a cut on her forehead and a deep bruise on her arm and hip where they threw her to the floor.

Katie just held her mom and stroked her hair. Her comfort would be to be resting safely in her daughter’s arms. The ordeal was over. The problem is how to live with the fact that it happened at all.

Katie and her mom arrived at their family home just before noon. It was only a few minutes later that Tom Donnelly and three fellow officers also arrived. Tom hugged Katie and Mrs. O’Bierne and introduced his colleagues. Katie’s mom wanted to make a pot of tea and everyone followed her into the kitchen. She was still a little shaky on her feet but Katie thought that keeping her busy would be a help to her. Tom explained that the investigation was well under way but that he needed to ask some questions.

“What could they possibly be after?” he asked. The O’Bierne home was on the edge of town and there was a little bit of distance between the residences. Mrs. O’Bierne responded that she had no idea about what they could possibly be after. There was nothing of value in the house. The only money she had was her state pension plus some money that Katie sent her every month. She had no jewelry, no art, no treasures except those things to which she was emotionally attached and had value only to her. The house was a mess from being ransacked.

Katie said that they would have to straighten the place up to determine if anything was stolen. Tom explained that other small rural communities had similar problems with wilding teenagers rampaging vulnerable people and stealing whatever they thought was valuable. If anything was stolen, he wanted a list. He explained that there were suspects from one of the neighboring towns and that the guards were watching to see if they would try to sell anything that they had stolen.

“It is the curse of the new Ireland,” said Tom. “We were far better off when we were poor. These young vandals are just looking for money to buy drugs. We never had that kind of problem when we were all poor. You are lucky you weren’t hurt more than you were Mrs. O’Bierne. These people have no regard for life or limb.”

Katie told Tom that she would bring her mother to her apartment in Galway City. The house would be closed and locked but she wanted the guards to keep an eye on it in case the vandals came back. An empty house might attract them and that would be a way of catching them.

After the guards left, Katie and her mom relaxed over a cup of tea. They chatted until Katie started to see a glimmer of restored confidence in her mom and then, together they set about the task of straightening up the house and inventorying anything that was missing.

Katie then phoned Shane at the Lantern and filled him in on the events of the day and that the immediate plan was to bring her mom back to her apartment at the university.

To be continued

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