

The Last Season

Strangers. They often arrived like blossoms in springtime, but mostly they breezed in throughout the hot months of summer. Most were transient, except our regular few, who often lagged until Autumn threatened to come and bring Winter with her. I was a regular I suppose, because I had lived here for what seemed like forever. I knew everyone in town, and made friends of tourists, and I began to grow especially fond of the young families who stayed on to buy the small coastal cottages, which inevitably made them café regulars.

I thought I was happy in our tiny town, where sea birds met blue sky at the edge of the bluffs, but in one summer it all seemed to change, and as if that were not bad enough, the change would alter not only my life, but also my mind indefinitely.

I was to turn 50 when Samuel passed away, and his death had been quite unexpected. He had been my childhood sweetheart, my teenage love, and more precisely my lifelong friend and companion. Sam and I had planned to grow old on our island, and we'd often imagined expanding the café into a series of small chained eateries, servicing the tourist folks throughout the county. We had been taking business classes off and on, and we had made so many updates to the cafe interior that it barely resembled its original self. We'd stood with beer in hand, clanking glasses as we stared.

"Our handiwork is going to transform us," he'd said.

"Do you really think so, Sam?"

"Now don't go worrying about money well spent Fiona," he'd said.

I distinctly recall how sure he had been, but then again Sam was always the calm one and I was always the one to fret. In spite of his reassurance I was certain something was in the air that day, making me feel peculiarly ill at ease. I tried to keep smiling, and I avoided his direct

gaze, as I bustled about the café. We'd gotten through the lunch crowd, and had maybe five tables, about fifteen guests left when Sam called out from beyond the kitchen door, "Fin, we are running out of the special. I am running downstairs for more fish."

I'd felt him lose his footing on the solitary piece of flooring, not properly nailed down, long before I heard him tumbling downward beyond the cellar stairs, and into the abyss, but I still couldn't reach his side in time to save him as he smashed his head on the concrete. I had raced to him, but the lighting was not completed and I hadn't seen the tacky liquid until I too found myself falling. As I landed, I slammed my head against the stone of the cellar stairs, and just as I was losing consciousness I realized I had slipped on Sam's blood as it seeped into the steps.

The last thing I remembered had been the thickness of the blood as it formed into a pool, and I knew something had happened, gone terribly wrong. I called and I called to everyone I knew, but they were just standing there staring as if time stood frozen and I couldn't escape the silence—my God, it was so unnerving, so uncomfortably still. I tried to speak and nothing happened, but then I knew what was going to happen.

Today many tourists and local inhabitants alike are gathering in the café. Tea and biscuits will be served, but later after they've stopped in at the cemetery. I can't escape Father Gerard's sad words, and my nose itches from the flowers sprayed atop the coffins like blankets. I stand back, afraid to come forward, and worried that even if I did, it'd make them afraid, and I am searching, searching for any sign of Sam, but then I remember he has gone onward, and I...and I...and I am left standing, transient; It is then that I realize that I too, instantly died.

Like Autumn alone I stand there in the shadow of Sam's body, cursing him for leaving and wondering why the café and I remain. As I watch our former neighbors, I wonder why my mind clings to this life, but Sam simply closed his eyes and allowed our dreams to fade away.