

CHAPTER THREE

“Are you ready, Jonathan?” Eileen demanded of her son. “Come here and let me look at you. Oh, Jonathan! Look at your face! What have you been doing? Here!” She licked her handkerchief and administered it firmly around his mouth, prompting him to grimace and turn his head this way and that. “And your hands? Oh, go up and wash them straight away.” As he bustled away, coughing as he went up the stairs, she looked at the kitchen clock which had appeared to have stopped. Of course it had not and there was still quite some time to go before it would be time to go.

Outside the snow was falling gently. She had listened to the previous night's weather forecast and prayed that it might be for wrong. When she had opened her eyes that morning and been dazzled by the light she knew her prayers had not been answered but, then, they never were. She got up as she would have on any other day. The kitchen was cold and deserted when she went down. The boiler clock had stopped for some reason and there was no-one to fix it, nor to put on the kettle. The boiler reacted when she pushed the switch. “It's probably something to do with the wiring” she thought as she looked out into the garden. It looked desolate.

Jonathan did not understand, did he? She had told him the truth this time, just as she had before. Owen was not coming back, but she could see in his face that he either did not understand her, or did not believe her. There were moments when she did not believe it herself, but there were also the terrible, darker, periods when she was pervaded by a sense of overwhelming doom. She would try and tell herself that she should have expected something like this, given that it was clear that her life was blighted right from the beginning. It was now something of an obsession for her to think back and dwell on the ample evidence from their past problems. Nothing had ever gone right for her, and nothing ever would. She could not espouse Owen's often declared view on optimism, that things could not possibly get worse. They would get worse and it was her fate to live out her existence in misery.

There was no longer any future, nothing beyond the ceremony that day, nothing to look forward to. She wondered if there had ever been a future, even an uncertain one, or had it all been a cruel illusion? When she thought of all the things Owen had talked about doing, all the promises he had made her, she realised she had known at the time that they would never achieve them but simply would not admit as much to herself. And even that illusion, that one slender thing that she could cling to, had been taken from her with Owen.

Was everything ready? Almost in panic she looked around her as if she expected to find the answer there in the kitchen. There had been so much to do, so much to think about, yet she could never recall a time in her life when her mind was so paralysed, by dread, by fear, and by despair. She asked herself again how many people would brave the weather and go. And then there was the question of how many would come back. Would Megan be able to make it? For all she knew, her sister-in-law might not have even left her house in North Wales.

Her house! “I bet it is not like this,” she thought. “I bet it is warm and comfortable, with wall plates and flowers in the hall. I bet everything works and that she does not have half of the house ostensibly without electricity!” Megan would not put up with this, not the Megan who had occasionally written to her brother. Of course she was married now, to her Gwillam! They should have gone to the wedding! They would have gone had it not been for the troubles. From what Megan had told her, they would have got on, Owen and Gwillam. They were kindred spirits and in the same line of business. They would have got on! Perhaps they could even have worked together?

That was something she was stuck with, the house. She should never have agreed to the purchase. She should never have agreed to go to live there once they were married, although did she ever have a choice? Her parents had abandoned her, telling her as they went just how things would turn out. What else could she have done? She asked to move, but Owen had been against it. Perhaps now she could consider seeing if she could sell it and move

somewhere else, anywhere really. Perhaps just as far away as they could possibly get? Perhaps she could go to live in Rhyl? Yet there was Jonathan to think about. He had his friends and he seemed settled at his school. Would it be fair on him to move now? In truth, there probably was little chance of her finding the energy to go about finding somewhere else to live. And there were still so many things to sort out! No, it did not appear, what ever way she looked at it, that she would be able to escape from her prison, not in the foreseeable future. She was stuck with it, this house, and stuck in it.

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