

A Crime of Passion

Nicola Kearns

The spate of burglaries in their quiet Leitrim village was the topic of conversation everywhere. Mary revelled in the fact that she could leave things like gardening tools outside overnight and not have them stolen, not like what would have happened in the house she once owned in the city suburbs.

Moving here meant she had enough money to buy her cottage outright and still have a hefty balance after selling their marital home. Since Pat died and the children left for college, she had no need of a large house anymore. It was always her dream to move to the place that held great memories of family holidays when the kids were younger. Mary had built up many friendships over the years in the village and when she moved here permanently was inundated with offers to dinner and other activities. Over that first summer she was out almost every night. Now however, she was quickly discovering how it was to live here in the winter months, when most of the lively restaurants and coffee shops were closed for the season. The canals, once swarmed with foreigners and townies were empty and she now spent every night ensconced in her cottage, alone. Neighbours burrowed like rabbits into their holes and as she passed their lit up windows while walking her dog in the evening. She would see the families huddled together around fireplaces watching television. Knocks on her door became less and less and now the only time she saw people was at mass or in the only shop left opened for the winter.

Unfortunately, there were no single men in the village, except for the aging widowed doctor and a local Garda who was stationed temporarily during the summer season in the small barracks. Sadly like most services in the quiet season, the barracks had closed up and its lone occupant was moved to the

nearest big town. Garda O'Grady was a handsome man, who also owned a small farm. However, as a Pioneer, who didn't touch a drop, he never frequented the bars or any of the village parties except to clear them after closing. He was known as the 'last order'!

He had called to see Mary a few days after her arrival to welcome her to the village and over a coffee had filled her in on the people in the neighbourhood. It wasn't until he had left that she discovered he was a bachelor and she regretted not having 'made a move' beforehand.

The recent burglaries however had now brought him back to the village to re-open the barracks. During his house to house investigations, Mary invited him indoors for a bowl of homemade soup and some of her freshly baked bread. He marvelled at how it tasted just like his mother used to make and she lavishly spread butter on yet another slice while he continued with his questions.

She agreed with him that it was a shocking thing to have a burglar in their midst. She shook her head when he told her about Mrs Prior from next door having her new plastic plant pots stolen. In fact, it was Mrs Prior's insistence for him to come around immediately that brought him here in the first place.

Mary had been informed directly by her elderly neighbour who had indeed called to her house the morning of the burglary to let her know that the good Garda had promised to open the Barracks, if there were any more reports of thieving.

Finding the plant pots rolled under her car that evening, obviously by the strong gale from the storm last night, Mary's first instinct

was to take them next door, but then she hesitated, as an idea formed in her mind.

Garda O'Grady returned to the village after Mrs Prior rang him in hysterics to say her birdbath was now also victim to theft. By the time he had arrived the village population was at his door, with complaints of items stolen from gardens and sheds. He eagerly accepted the offer of daily lunch at Mary's invitation, while he was back in the village. He admitted there was no kitchen in the old barracks, except for a small cubby-hole with a kettle. It would be hard to get a homemade meal in the village due to all the restaurants being shut.

Mary also accepted his offer of repairing the roof of her lean-to which had a gaping hole in it and agreed with the Garda that it couldn't be left like that with all the burglaries about. He was very welcome to call after his rounds and she would make a start on an apple crumble for him to have afterwards. Firstly, however, she needed to just get rid of a few items from the shed. It wouldn't do for the Garda to see what she had been collecting. But what else was a woman to do?

Nicola Kearns, in her own words, was born in Armagh, bred in Dundalk and buttered in Leitrim. A mother of two sons who have now flown the nest, she works part-time in Fenagh Heritage Centre and is a writer. Her first novel 'Under

a Maltese Sky' is set against the Siege of Malta in World War Two. A historically accurate novel it also includes a love affair spanning sixty decades, with the book beginning not long after the Irish Civil War. Nicola is currently working on her second novel 'The Azure Window' which is also set in Malta, Ireland and England. This book follows three women, whose lives are intertwined in a story of how family secrets can have far-reaching consequences generations later. Nicola also writes short stories and book reviews for Woman's Way magazine and various radio stations. Her book can be purchased online at: <http://nicolakearnswriter.com/>

