

# THE HOUSE OF LIGHT

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BOUNCING ALONG, the four occupants sit forward and watch malignant shadows prance along the hedge, as the jeep headlights catch the uneven surface of the narrow coast road. The peninsula has thinned to the point where they can see the graze of moonlight on the white wave caps of both sides. All eyes are pulled towards a light on the horizon that grows bright every few seconds.

“Is that it? Is that the lighthouse?” two voices chorus from the back, united for once in excitement.

“Yes, we’re almost there. I wonder, can we climb to the top?” Jane asks no one in particular. Will smiles as he watches his wife lean forward to take in the scene. It has been a long time since she has shown any interest in her surroundings. His shoulders lose some of their rigidity as he turns to smile at Bella and Scott in the back seat. For the full 3-hour journey, they sat in silence, each propping up their own windows, eyes open but unseeing as the different counties slid past them. Now, they were straining against their seatbelts and squabbling good naturedly with each other. The rain splatting on the windscreen and din of the wind wasn’t dimming their new-found enthusiasm either.

The road winds around the rocks and halts abruptly at a cattle grid flanked by two whitewashed walls that mold to the rising earth of the headland sitting neat and squat into the ground giving off an air of stability and self-confidence. The driveway to the buildings is tarred and speckled with white granite chips, and lies like a runway before them. When the light flashes its warning, the speckles glow softly and remove the severity of the darkness. Their eyes adjust slowly, mesmerised by the light and nobody

notices the man until he is standing in front of the jeep.

The light circles again and there he is, tall with a woollen cap, waterproof jacket, trousers and a handlebar moustache that frightens the children.

Bella yelps and Scott trembles but manages to whisper “Is it a ghost?”

Will momentarily stunned into silence, opens the jeep door.

“No, Daddy, please don’t go, he’s not real.” Scott leans forward and grabs Will’s elbow, his knuckles white against Will’s navy jacket.

“It’s fine Scott, he’s not a ghost, he must be the lighthouse caretaker.” He pries the little fingers loose and opens the door allowing the noisy weather in. Moments later, he jumps back in, rain beading on his jacket and his hair windswept into a quiff.

He looks to Jane for her to console her son, but she has turned her head and body away from them, her hand in that familiar position, nibbling at the raw skin at her cuticles.

“Right, Mr. Faul has given me the key, the fire is lit and the kettle is on the stove.” He sounds upbeat and determined. He looks around at his family and smiles, though his eyes plead for something else. The kids are curious enough to want to continue, despite the antique look of their host. Jane is still nibbling away at her fingers, red and swollen from worrying.

Will puts the jeep into gear and Scott squeals in delight as he eases it over the cattle grid and up towards the front door. They spill inside the round house and once the door is shut, the incessant needle pricks of the rain and the howling of the wind cease to a low hum. They take a moment to look around the small room, the range with its matching

rockers side by side and the floral settee under the window. A bookcase and a Carnegie Chest take up the remaining space. Uneven red tiles underfoot are broken up by two large mismatched rugs with tatty fringing. Bella heads towards the staircase winding upwards towards the next floor.

“Kitchen and bathroom are on the next floor, two bedrooms above that. No fighting over who sleeps where.” Will calls to her. She rolls her eyes in true preteen fashion and says “what’s the WIFI password?”

Will looks at Jane and smiles conspiratorially in vain; she is not even looking at him.

“There’s no TV or WIFI here Bell, you’ll just have to talk to us instead.” He winks at his daughter, retreating back as she stomps up the stairs.

“O.K. she’s gone now,” Scott whispers, as he pulls his iPod out of his pocket, “what’s the password?”

“No! Seriously, there is no WIFI!” Will exclaims, “we are here as a family, no distractions!”

Open mouthed Scott runs to the stairs to find consolation with Bella.

“Well that went well.” Will goes to put his arm around Jane but she moves fluidly away.

“I’ll go unpack.” She murmurs.

He tries not to let his expression change, but finds it too difficult and looks away.

That night in the narrow bed, the homemade quilt pulled up to his chin to keep him warm, Will feels a trembling beside him.

“Are you cold?” He whispers, his hand tentatively reaching out for Jane’s. She doesn’t squeeze it like she used to, but at least she doesn’t snatch it away. He falls into a light sleep.

Will awakes the next morning

to two things. One is the noise of laughter from the bedroom above and the other is the warm body of his wife curled up against him. He has no wish to move and break this delicate spell, so he closes his eyes and listens to the kids upstairs. There's a thud, then heavy footfall, and more laughter. Bedsprings creak as somebody bounces and announces themselves the winner. He must have chuckled out loud, as Jane wakes and finds herself in his embrace. He is afraid she will retreat again, so he doesn't want to move and startle her.

She can hear the laughter too and smiles for a moment. Then he feels her stiffen again as she remembers and the tears flow soundlessly onto his chest. He doesn't say a word, just holds her and strokes her hair gently.

A loud thud rattles the light fitting and Will reluctantly leaves the warmth to investigate. Upstairs he finds Scott on the floor, sheets and quilts tangled at his feet. Bella is on her bed, pillow in hand laughing so hard at the sight of her brother, who has fallen backwards off his own bed and managed to lose his pyjama bottoms in the process. Mortified he is scrambling around in the fabric mess trying to retrieve them. Bella, with tears of laughter streaming down her face, points at him and says "he's wearing Fireman Sam underpants," before collapsing to her knees and rolling around with mirth.

Will tries to right the upside-down Scott and untangle him, tickling his son as he goes and giving him a mock lecture on the perils of pillow fights. Nobody sees or notices Jane come into the room and stare transfixed at the mess in front of her. She opens her mouth as if to speak but doesn't continue. Her fists are by her side and her chest is heaving. Blotches of red bloom on her neck, where her veins are pulsing visibly. She seems just about to give herself a voice, when she is distracted. Something soft and white floats gently on its own little current, right in front of her. Her attention locks on this little white

feather while her body stands down and her breathing calms. She plucks it from the air and her own breath makes the fluffy down ripple.

She looks over at Will and holds it out to him, "look, do you think it's a sign?" He doesn't know what to say. "I think it's a sign," she says as she turns and walks back down the stairs.

Breakfast turns out to be a raucous affair. Jane makes strong coffee in the cafetière while Will attempts to flip pancakes. Three fall on the floor and one accidentally hits the ceiling. Bella sighs at her father's lack of coordination and begs to take over.

"Here, take it!" He exclaims delightedly, "take my prying fan," as he tries to fan himself with it.

Bella laughs, "what are you on about? What's a prying fan? Give me that, we're starving."

"He means frying pan, it's a spoonerism." Jane replies, using the tea towel to swat at her husband. "You swap the letters between words to make funny sayings; we used to have a lot of fun with them." She looks directly at Will as she speaks, and he hears what she doesn't say.

"Another one Daddy," Scott shouts, "I want to know them all."

Laughing Will replies, "OK, I'm off the fight the liar, leave some pancakes for me!"

The wind and rain of the previous evening has blown away and the morning is surprisingly bright. The headland stretches out in front of the family, beckoning them forward. Bundled up in coats and hats, they leave the compound and walk over the farmland towards the cliffs. The grass is nibbled short by sheep and the gulls' wheel and call above them. Bella and Scott dart ahead, playing tag and trying to pull off each other's hats, while Will and Jane walk side by side watching them play.

Jane is silent, her eyes are clear and watching the kids with a hopeful interest. They walk as far as they dare, to the edge of the cliff. The grass is soft underfoot and golden lichen grows on the stones, making a warm

contrast against the turquoise sea below. Jane gasps as she sees the sea crashing against the rocks with such violence. The white foam sizzles as the water moves back for another assault. Water leaps up in lacy spray and falls with a clap into the sea again. It is relentless, wild and beautiful. Jane hugs herself against the wind and licks the salt from her lips. Will can see how this replenishes her, how she seems to be returning to herself again. The anxiety that usually gnaws at him is slowly receding. He looks to Jane and sees the bright light behind her eyes and feels that tiny drop of hope bloom, like ink in water.

Scott and Bella are still running about. "Flutter by," Scott shouts against the breeze and Bella shouts back "lack of pies."

Will throws caution to the wind and puts his arm around Jane; she doesn't look at him, but nestles in closer and watches the waves crash again and again.

When they arrive back at the lighthouse for lunch, there is a note on the door and a basket covered in an old tea towel. Scott tries to read the note, on his tippy toes, fingers pressed against the flaky paint of the door.

"It's from Fat Paul!" he announces grinning. Bella snorts with laughter and Will hurriedly pulls the note from its tack.

"It doesn't say Fat Paul, where on earth did you get that from?" he surveys it with a puzzled expression, but Jane leaning over his shoulder to get a better look suddenly explodes with laughter. Will, shocked at the foreign noise, still can't fathom what Scott was after reading. He looks at Jane, but the tears are rolling down her cheeks and she is holding her sides. She can't stop laughing, and it's infectious. Soon they are all guffawing, their sides and jaws aching. Wiping her eyes, she looks at Will and reads out the note.

"Dear Will, Jane and children, I have left a basket with some freshly caught fish, for your tea. Regards, Pat Faul."

She waits for Will to catch up. He doesn't.

“It’s a spoonerism you eejit. Pat Fat...Fat Paul.” She picks up the basket and peeps under the cloth with satisfaction and puts her arm around Scott who is grinning proudly at his own quick wit. Squeezing him tightly, they all go inside.

They spend the rest of the afternoon together, discover a box of scrabble under the bookshelf and play two games, both of which Jane wins. Will guts the gifted mackerel and smiles to himself, even though it is a job

he hates. He hears Jane humming to herself as she chops the carrots and onions.

“I miss the baby too.” Will thinks he is saying it in his head, but realises when her knife stops moving that he has in fact said it out loud. He freezes.

Jane takes a breath, closes her eyes for a moment and whispers, “I know, me too.”

The knife continues to slice, but the air is still and calm. Releasing his

breath, Will nods and continues with his fish.

They are hardly in the door at home, before Bella switches on the WIFI and disappears into her bedroom, Scott pulls out his iPod and curls up on the sofa.

“The spell is broken,” Jane laughs, “it didn’t take long, did it?” She looks across at Will, who is smiling.

“Oh, I don’t know, I don’t think it’s broken at all.”

**TULLAGHAN** is a small village on the Wild Atlantic Way, and is located on Leitrim’s four kilometre coastline, the shortest coastline of any county in Ireland.

The village is also the site of an ancient High Cross discovered on the shore after a storm and erected in 1778 by the local landlord. It is now located at the edge of the village, facing the N15 and is thought have originated in a long-vanished monastery near the seashore. It was erected in 1778 in the village by the local landlord, Major Dickson.

There is a strong heritage embedded in village, built up over the centuries. Tynte Lodge is a local landmark and Tullaghan House is a popular community feature. A number of traditional thatched cottages are situated in the village area and the village history can be traced back to the Famine period.

The Community Association was formed in 1970s but by mid-1990s was no longer in operation, and a new committee leadership formed from local members of the community to drive the association to the next level. In recent years, the community have pulled together to develop good initiative in support of the development of the village.

In 2018, a community survey was undertaken and 95% of the community participated. A key observation from the survey considered the potential for development of access to the ocean/beach area, a children’s play area, and the development of Cross Field as part of the Wild Atlantic Way Initiative.

The association were successfully granted €92,000 for the development of the y, in the 2018 Town and Village renewal scheme. The project when complete will include parking, footpaths, accessible walkways, seating, garden beds, hedge rows, paths and lighting. The project aims to have finished its work by December 2019.

Tullaghan Development Association are working very hard. Currently nine community groups are involved with the community centre. In 2018, Tullaghan represented Leitrim Pride of Place, were winners of the Endeavour award for Tidy Towns Leitrim and were also winners of the The Love Leitrim awards. Wild Atlantic Way status for the village was also secured. The village also had its first Christmas tree ‘switch on’ and a new Tullaghan Logo and brand for the village was also launched.

