

# Red Hair

by Sheila Luecht

She was a wisp of a girl on the verge of becoming more. She was the beloved of a son whose mother loved him. The mother did all she could to make her feel at home, to be a part of the family.

Her life was a journey. Her home a kind of place where the neat little facade faced the street, while inside turmoil reigned. A kind of quiet suppressed life, one of tip toeing around the edges of happiness, sometimes it exploded with great light and mostly it hid in the shadows.

She was the middle child, tall and lank, red haired and strong, in a girl kind of way. A girl forced to cope with something tough and objectionable. She was the care giver to her younger brother, making sure he got out of bed and ready for school. She did all she could to keep things for him. Her older sister had already escaped from the chains of making things seem all right, of making do. She tried to be on her own. Her choices were not always good ones, but she was out of school and working at a job and had friends and well, frankly, had a life.

The son loved the girl and she was there for dinner, and more often than not, it was her primary meal. It was a sit down meal, with all kinds of food to eat, and she did not have to do anything but eat it and enjoy it.

As the years went by and the son went to college, they continued to have a relationship. It was a kind of love, but a kind of young, fresh and uncomplicated kind, idealistic, without constraints, as long as they were with his family at his house.

Home was a different story. She did her best to live there and take care of her brother and the house, but she was working hard to

balance finishing school too and getting a job. She was not good in school and more child like in some ways and that betrayed what her life really was. She didn't know if she came home from school if her mother would be lying on the floor passed out. She didn't know if her mother would be weaving in the road, driving, trying to find something, or someone. The father was a troubled man and divorce was part of his consciousness. She herself could have had some issues that were associated with fetal alcohol syndrome because her mother always drank.

While all this spun like a web around her, she lived her life. She latched on hard to the young man and he cared for her as you would expect someone raised to value marriage and family would do.

She did her best, but her coping mechanisms in life involved lying, and also silence. The inability to be honest about what she thought or wanted was predicated on the backlashes that she had always received from her mother whom she so desperately wanted to please.

When she smiled, it was like a bright light in the sky from heaven. She often smiled at dinner, the winsome smile of a child pleased by something special. All homemade food, some her favorites could be periodically expected to generate a bright smile from her.

She had some accomplishments, she had done step dancing as a child and was proud of it. She took some classes at the junior college and enjoyed a few. Her eyes lit up when she talked about one or two. The lying and coping with family was a constant darkness on her. She was childlike in that amusement parks and stuffed animals made her happy still. She moved into a kind of orbit of love and wanting marriage and children. She planned what foods she would make for family gatherings and she fantasized about the life she would have with the son.

One day they were sitting all around the old oak table having dinner. The food was something she liked and she was beaming. She unfolded her napkin and sat comfortably as dinner was placed. A general conversation about marriage and weddings, dresses and preparations came along and it fit the pattern of what had been coming on for ages. The couple had recently selected an engagement ring. Suddenly the mother said, "Bridie"

The girl looked startled, shocked even, her red curls bouncing in response to her head bobbing up. Everyone noticed it, something had triggered a change in her. The mother was grasping for what to say, had she somehow offended, she wondered? "Why did you say that?" the girl wanted to know. The mother quickly said, "Oh I was just thinking, bride, and it came out, calling you Bridie."

The girl seemed to get the color back into her cheeks and took a breath. "I just have not heard that name in a very long time. My grandfather from Sligo used to call me that when I was a little girl." She paused, "I was very close to him. He used to live with us. He died when I was about seven, I think." She looked into a void, as if remembering.

The mother smiled deeply. She assured her that the name had just been a rhyming of the word Bride, not that it had any significance to her name; that she meant. That would do for now.

She could not tell her that the name had been whispered to her, in a man's Irish brogue, by a fleeting spirit, hovering near her ear. As long as everyone was happy, she was happy.

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