**THE PHOTOGRAPH**

Emma didn't have to think twice when the leader of her writing group asked members to bring a photograph to the next session—one with particular meaning. It was a photo she hadn’t thought about in years—maybe fifty or more years—but it had flashed in her mind immediately. That night she pulled out her old, cracked, yellow psychedelic-patterned photo album, seeking that one picture. When she found it, it wasn’t quite what she had remembered. She studied the photo of the two of them together, bent over two small sand castles. She was holding a boat paddle, while he was holding what appeared to be a tall stick. They were laughing and obviously very proud of the work they had done. She remembered sharing this accomplishment with their other friends lounging nearby on the beach, although those friends weren’t visible in the photo.

In Emma’s mind, the castles had been much bigger and her back had been to the camera looking at him, but here they were side by side, both looking up and smiling. While the photo had faded to sepia tones with age, she knew it had been a beautiful day. The sea was a deepening cold blue behind them, and rising off in the distance were the lonely Donegal hills, smooth green masses sweeping down to the deep-shaded sandy beaches. And while it could have been any hour of the day, she remembered it had been late afternoon because they had all—well, at least she—had been very hungover that day, and being that they were very far north, it stayed sunny until well-past midnight during the summer. She loved the picture and she loved the memory.

 She and her friend Pam had come to the hostel—the northern-most hostel on the northern-most point of Donegal, on the northern-most point of Ireland—to meet up with friends from Dublin who had been coming there every May and September for years. They came before the hostel officially opened for the season, and again after it had officially closed, so they would have the place to themselves.

 Emma and Pam had been hitching around the Irish coast and were invited to join the group by their friends from Dublin, Neve and Donal. Emma had worked with Neve at one of Dublin’s children’s hospitals and Donal, Neve’s fiancé, had been hosteling for many years and had helped Emma and Pam plan their trip. She and Pam had arrived, however, before their Dublin friends. When they first checked in with Bridie, the elderly, chair-ridden manager, they were told they couldn’t stay because the hostel wasn’t yet open. Once Emma mentioned Neve and Donal, however, Bridie did an about-face, welcoming them. Her brother, Sean directed the two girls up to the hostel itself, where they found two guys in the common room. One was lying on the couch reading a book, and the other was sitting in a chair with his feet propped up before the fire, doing the same. With good manners and typical American enthusiasm, Emma introduced themselves to the two. While the one on the couch got up to greet them, the one in the chair simply said, “I never remember names,” and then went back to reading his book. Lukas was the guy who didn’t remember names and he was the one in the photo.

This is perhaps Emma's only photo where Lukas was looking at the camera and smiling. Most photos of him were in profile always wearing his dark glasses. A Bohemian, sans beret. He was tall and thin and German, although one couldn’t tell any of this from the photo. He almost always wore black and there was generally a cigarette in hand—Gauloises. His straight black hair often fell across his eyes and he would carelessly sweep it back with one hand. He was the quiet one in the group. Snatches of memories bombarded her.

Lukas had always been good to them. He was the one who drove down to pick up Emma and Pam after the two had gone south to visit relatives in Cavan. He was the one who put them up in the lovely guesthouse when they went to visit him in Geldern, the little town where he worked in northern Germany. He had given them his car so they could go visit his friends while he was working. He drove them down to Bonn to meet his family, and he put them on the night train to Munich, where they were going to meet Pam’s parents.

 Emma remembered the pub had been packed the night they arrived back from visiting her relatives, where, fortunately, their five friends had saved the three of them seats—something difficult to do. Live music and singing were underway and like many of the old Irish songs, which were often sung acapella, their friend Cecil had begun to sing *She Moves Through the Fair*—Emma’s favorite of the old songs. Pints of Guinness and glasses of hot whiskey instantly appeared and kept coming that night, and even when the pub closed, their group had moved to the back room and continued the party into the early morning, knowing the pub’s owner.

That evening didn’t end well for Emma. She threw up on the winding road back to the hostel, in the back of Donal’s beautiful, new burgundy-colored car, and over her friend Cecil’s beautiful Aran sweater. When they arrived back, the women—and there were only the three of them—commandeered the men’s bathroom as the women’s was still under renovation and had no showers, which Emma would definitely need.

Emma later learned the men had held a pissing contest on the side of the hill, where several had ended up sliding down the wet grass, though no one would ever admit to that. So, despite the ignominy of the night for her, it seemed that all had had a good time. No one had ever held a grudge for the problems she had caused, even many years later. If mention was ever made of the incident, it was with a laugh that she could share.

After Emma returned to the States, she remembered driving the three hours from Providence to Kennedy and back, in the snow and bitter cold, just to see Lukas when he was traveling to Ecuador, where he would be working as an environmental engineer for what was the German equivalent of the Peace Corps. At that time, you could still meet up with someone at an airport, if only through a fence between domestic and international flights.

Emma remembered the beautiful, heavy black brocade poncho Lukas had sent from Ecuador—one she could never wear because it always smelled like horses, even after multiple trips to the cleaners. And there was the beautiful blue, blown glass globe he sent from Germany one Christmas. There were long periods when she didn’t hear anything from him, and she had been unsure how to reach him.

After several years, Emma returned to work again in Dublin. It was then the letter came from Lukas’ sister telling her that Lukas had taken his own life—no reason or details. Emma had been having her morning tea and toast and had gone to pick up the morning mail which had just been deposited in the mail slot. She remembered her shock and confusion—the calls to friends to see if anyone knew what had happened. There were never any further details. In later years, Emma thought Lukas’s suicide may have been the result of depression—she had always felt a certain sadness in him. Her father suggested that Lukas had possibly been ill. Somehow that seemed easier to swallow. Nonetheless, she knew illness and depression were often related.

Emma looked again at the photo. She and Lukas were barefoot, with their pant legs rolled up. She knew it had been cold. It was always cold in Donegal. And there was always the wind off the water which had spun dark tendrils across both their faces. She remembered the smell of that fresh sea air. Lukas was wearing jeans and an old green Army jacket. She was wearing a long, green corduroy coat she remembered being lined with something like rubber that had supposedly made it waterproof; it wasn’t. She remembered the blue sweater she wore in the photo; the sleeves were always down to her wrists, and her wrists became the demarcation between her brown hands and startling white arms.

That day on the beach had been fun—childlike fun. It had been safely stored in the far reaches of her mind all these years and now decided, for itself, that it was time to resurface. Lukas had taught her a valuable lesson—to never accept that first impression of someone. Sometimes it just took time getting to know a person, even one who never remembered names. And then sometimes, there was never enough time.