

Dreamer

A wave broke on the beach, discharging the dark menace of the Atlantic. The water glistened in the morning sun as it retreated. I was perfectly placed to watch it, sat in the cottage's front window. Warm and indoors and snug, a cushion behind my back and free from the cares of the world. Another wave flung itself against the shingle and frothed up the slope.

'Incoming call,' the virtual assistant announced. 'Fiona Hunter.'

'Fiona?' I said. 'I'll take it.'

'Well, helloo,' came Fiona's west coast Scottish tones, filling the room more completely than if she had been here with me. 'You're not actually awake and out of bed this early, are you? I'm amazed.'

'Hello yourself,' I said. 'I am so too. I'll have you know that I've been up and busy for an hour already.'

'And pigs are flying over London Bridge station outside my office window. I'll send you a picture.'

'It so happens,' I explained, 'that I have showered, walked to the village shop where Mrs Scuffel told me the odds of Stephen Gormley singing in the arts festival, bought *The Connaught Telegraph*, a pint of milk and a small loaf, tripped along the sun-bathed strand, come home, breakfasted and read said *Telegraph* from cover to cover.'

'You know most men of leisure would spin that out to fill the whole morning?'

'They might, at that. I, however, have a higher purpose today. *Finnegans Wake* awaits.' I looked over at the mighty tome that was making the dining table list slightly to

one side. ‘You may also be overestimating the entertainment value of *The Connaught Telegraph*.’

‘Perhaps. You certainly have a full and arduous morning’s work in prospect if my recollections of *Finnegans Wake* are anything to go by—’

‘They aren’t,’ I cut in.

‘No?’ she said.

‘No. What you remember from undergraduate days as dense, unrewarding text with all the charisma of wet putty is a work of unalloyed genius which will fuel a hungry mind for days to come.’

‘A mind like yours?’

‘Exactly like mine. I am fertile ground, on which even the rarest of crops will flourish.’ I picked up a child’s play block from the windowsill I was sat on. It was made of weathered hardwood and had a picture of a factory pasted on each face. I tossed it in the air, bounced it off my arm and caught it in my hand. ‘And there’s a Richard Stark novel if I need light relief,’ I went on.

‘I’m glad that your boyish optimism has survived the past fortnight intact and has been joined by a healthy realism.’

‘I always was one for the silver lining,’ I said jauntily. ‘So are you just calling because you’re at a loose end and you’ve given up social media for Lent?’

‘No, I had five minutes free before the Editorial Meeting and thought I’d check that no dreadful calamity had occurred since you left these shores.’

‘You are in communication with a calamity-free zone,’ I declared with mock solemnity. ‘I am better than fine. I’m good, in fact. I should have done this years ago.’

‘That’s what I was hoping you would say.’ She paused a moment. ‘Can a friend offer

a word of advice?’

‘Of course.’

‘Follow your dreams,’ she went on. ‘Now you have the time and space and opportunity. Think about *you* for once.’

‘Pop Psychology 101 now, is it? You sound like the back pages of a woman’s magazine.’

‘I mean it,’ she said. ‘Decide what you really want and commit to it completely.’

‘I thought I had been doing that these two decades past.’

‘Surely you still have dreams? New dreams.’

‘I do, as it happens,’ I said. ‘Only last night I had the most vivid dream in which a horse called Lanarkshire Vixen romped home in the 4.20 at Kempton Park. It was 100-1 and I had twenty quid riding on it. I woke up positively euphoric.’

‘Very funny, you big oaf. That’s not the kind of dream I mean. I mean a dream of a better life. A happier future. And, by the way, I’m from Bute, not Lanarkshire.’

‘Bute?’ I said playfully. ‘Tell me, is that in the Highlands or the Lowlands?’

‘It’s neither,’ she snipped. ‘Or both. The Highland Boundary Fault cuts the island in two. As you fully well know.’

‘Fine,’ I said. ‘I see you’re still bearing up well yourself, then.’

‘I am. Though I would much rather you were here with me, helping sort out all the chaos, and we could be bearing up together.’ A hollow banging sounded over the speaker.

‘They’re calling me, sorry. Must go.’

‘Got your game head on?’

‘I have. Royal baby pics front and centre. If it bleeds, it leads. No shit from Charles Fotheringhay about the Tory party conference.’

‘Good.’

‘And your dreams,’ she added quickly. ‘Think about them.’

The line went quiet. Out the window, a wave crashed against the shingle of the beach, and a seagull squawked angry thoughts about the world. I looked over at *Finnegans Wake* and the peat briquettes stacked by the fireplace.

#

The peat had burnt down to a deep, orange colour, almost exactly matching the glowing sun I could see sinking below the horizon through the window. *Finnegans Wake* had a torn strip of *The Connaught Telegraph* sticking out of it six pages in and Richard Stark’s *The Jugger* lay finished on the mantelpiece. I was debating whether to crack open the bottle of Caol Ila I had bought in Duty Free, or to walk the seventeen yards (counted last night) to O’Malley’s Bar.

‘Incoming call,’ said the honeyed tones of the virtual assistant. I wondered what she would look like, a woman with that voice. ‘Fiona Hunter,’ the VA went on.

‘Accept.’

‘Who gave it to you?’ Fiona said breathlessly.

‘And hello to you too,’ I replied. ‘Who gave what to me?’

‘The tip about that horse, Lanarkshire Vixen.’

‘No-one gave it to me. I dreamt it, like I said. And I thought it would be funny to rib you with.’

‘Yes, hilarious.’

‘Why, what happened?’ I asked.

‘What happened is’ – she stopped, at an uncharacteristic loss for words – ‘what happened is I went to the Editorial Meeting after we spoke this morning and said to Ben

Newton, you know Ben—’

‘On the Sports Desk. Sure. I recruited him.’

‘I asked Ben if I should put twenty pounds on Lanarkshire Vixen at Kempton Park, just to get a rise out of him.’

‘And?’

‘And he told me not to waste my money. Then he looked at me strangely and said that was unless I had heard something special. He told me that the Kenneally stable had been bringing through some magnificent stallions and if I’d got a whisper it might be worth a punt.’

‘You hadn’t got a whisper, though.’

‘I know. I told him that. Then I explained that I *had* heard something, only it wasn’t a whisper, but came from a friend in Ireland. I didn’t say who.’

‘I should think that drove Ben nuts.’

‘It did. He got very excited when I mentioned Ireland and asked if I trusted the person who told me.’

‘I hope you said no.’

‘I said I trusted him with my life. Ben became very serious then and told me that I shouldn’t put twenty pounds on Lanarkshire Vixen.’

‘No?’

‘He said I should put my house on it instead.’ A silence came into the conversation and hung heavy in the air. I got out of the armchair and walked across to the windowsill, where I picked up a wood block with a picture of a princess on it, and began tossing it up and catching it. ‘So I put twenty pounds on Lanarkshire Vixen,’ Fiona said at length. ‘I got odds of a hundred to one, same as you said. I’ve never put a bet on before, truth be

told.’

‘And what happened?’ I asked. ‘Ye gods, woman. Don’t keep me in suspense.’

‘Lanarkshire Vixen won by three lengths and was easing off as he crossed the line. Ben said it was the most remarkable debut since Frankel at Newmarket in 2010.’

‘So, a twenty pound bet got you – what? – two thousand pounds?’ I said in disbelief.

‘Got *you* two thousand pounds,’ Fiona replied. ‘I put the bet on for *you*. I was going to make you pay me the twenty pounds back next time I saw you, to teach you not to make fun of me.’

‘This is all a joke, right? You’re winding me up?’

‘No joke. You have just won two thousand pounds, my friend,’ she said. ‘Two thousand and twenty, actually. And Ben put on a bet too.’

‘He’s not allowed to,’ I said automatically. ‘Conflict of interest.’

‘Yes, he made me write him a letter stating that I had passed the tip on to him and that I gave him a special dispensation to place a bet based on it. Apparently that’s legal.’

‘It is. Legal enough.’

‘So Ben put five hundred pounds on Lanarkshire Vixen.’ She took a breath. ‘He’s in the pub now. I gave him the afternoon off.’

‘I should think so too.’ I whistled low, doing the sum in my head. ‘The man just won fifty grand on a bogus tip.’

‘He wanted me to go as well, so he could show me his appreciation with lunch at La Gavroche.’

‘If I was still the Editor, I would have made you join him.’

‘You *aren’t* still the Editor. I am. And I have a newspaper to send to press.’

‘True.’

‘And even if I didn’t, this is all messing with my head. Honestly, Peter, where did you get the tip? You can tell me.’

‘It wasn’t a tip,’ I explained. ‘And if it had been, of course I would tell you the source. You of all people. But I dreamt it. That’s all. Who knows? I might have heard someone mention it at the airport, I suppose. Or in the pub last night.’

‘I don’t buy it. 100-1 outsiders don’t come in. That’s why they’re 100-1.’

‘Every so often a horse breaks through. Or has a lucky day. Just accept it, and spend the money on something nice.’

‘But this is no ordinary horse. It’s special. Once in a generation. Ben called me from the pub. He said the word is it’s got a decent shot at winning the Racing Post Trophy after this afternoon’s performance.’

‘Ben always loves dramatising sport. It’s why we employ him. Sorry, why *you* employ him.’

‘I just don’t understand why you would hide something like this from me. I thought we were ... *friends*.’

‘We are.’ I felt my face flush. ‘If it hadn’t been for you, supporting me every day after Jenny’s accident, I don’t think—’ My voice went dry. I paused and swallowed, felt pain burn inside me. I tried again. ‘I don’t think I would have made it,’ I said finally. ‘You could say I owe you my life.’

‘Then tell me where you got the tip. I won’t be angry you didn’t say before.’

‘I dreamt it, Fiona. The horse just happened to win. Coincidences *do* occur.’

‘On some random horse, maybe. Not on the great young stallion of the coming decade.’

‘It just came to me in my dream, Fiona,’ I said.

‘Really. What else have you dreamt then?’

‘Nothing,’ I said. I threw the wooden block into the air, then caught it and returned it to its rightful place on the windowsill. ‘Actually, I did nod off this afternoon after I finished my novel.’

‘You read *Finnegans Wake* in one sitting?’

‘No, my Richard Stark book, *The Jugger*. I fell asleep by the fire after that. I’d only woken up five minutes before you called.’

‘And?’

‘I dreamt that Osanto Pharmaceutical shares went through the roof. I know what you’re thinking,’ I said, looking to bring a little levity into the conversation. ‘I have the dullest dreams this side of Caernarfon.’

‘That’s not remotely what’s on my mind. Can you guess what is?’

‘That today has just about got you done,’ I tried hopefully, ‘and you’re going to meet Ben in the pub?’

‘No. I’m thinking that if you don’t call me back by five PM, I am going to take your two thousand pounds—’

‘Two thousand and twenty pounds. And it’s *yours*.’

‘Sod the twenty pounds. I’m going to put *your* winnings on a hedge that Osanto Pharmaceutical will rise by a factor of five by the end of the week. Then we’ll see who’s laughing.’

‘You haven’t the slightest idea how to hedge a share investment.’

‘No, I don’t. But I know someone who does. Let’s see if the prospect of your two grand going up in smoke focuses your mind enough to say where the tip came from.’

‘For God’s sake, Fiona, give the money to charity or something—’

The line went dead.

#

My head throbbed like, well, to use the local expression, like a bastard. The thin shafts of daylight poking through the curtains were enough to cause pure, unadulterated pain. I rolled on to my side and burrowed deeper under the duvet.

It was the conversation with Fiona yesterday evening that started it. Going to the pub, angry, and confused, and the first Guinness went down so quickly. And the second the same. Then the whisky too. After that ... God knows what happened.

‘Incoming call,’ the VA announced from next door, ‘Fiona Hunter.’

‘Go away,’ I shouted through the duvet, making my head hurt intensely. ‘I am not in communication with the mortal realm.’

‘Incoming call,’ she repeated patiently. ‘Fiona Hunter.’

I threw the duvet off and said, ‘Okay. Accept’.

‘Right,’ came Fiona’s voice, clearly agitated. ‘You have crossed the line now.’

‘Speak more quietly, please,’ I managed to say.

‘What?’ she bellowed.

‘My head hurts,’ I explained.

‘What’s wrong with you?’

‘I had a drink,’ I said, then stopped, incapable of further speech.

‘Great. You’ve turned my world upside down and when I call for an explanation you have a bloody hangover!’

‘I went to the pub,’ I said weakly, as if that would end the matter.

‘And?’

‘And I don’t remember coming home.’ I belched violently, unleashing a combination

of flavours that left me wondering what I'd eaten for dinner. 'Why are you calling? Is this morning?'

'It's past bloody lunchtime. Am I waking you up?'

'I went to the pub,' I said again.

'Well, while you have been catching up on your beauty sleep, others have been busy.'

I let out a noise that was somewhere between a snore and snort. 'Are you falling asleep on me?' Fiona asked.

'Just closed my eyes,' I mumbled, sitting upright decisively.

'Osanto Pharmaceutical. Tell me more.'

'Is this twenty questions?' I said. 'Because now isn't really a great time if it is.'

'Who told you about Osanto?'

'No-one told me. It was a dream.'

'Which just happened to come true ... exactly like the one about the horse did?'

'How so, come true?'

'Well, since you didn't call me back yesterday' – she was chewing down the words – 'I phoned a friend and made him construct a financial instrument for the hedge.'

'Oh dear Lord, you didn't.'

'I was *furious* with you for not calling back. What else could I do?'

'Not throw the money away?' I ventured.

'The thing was, my friend spent ten minutes trying to talk me out of it. Then, when he realised that my mind was set, he explained that it had to be made up to fifty K for the trade to work. By that stage he had gotten so curious about what I was saying that he offered to put the forty-eight thousand pound difference up himself.'

'He must really like you.' I thought about the words that had just left my mouth. 'I

mean *really* like you.’

‘Yes. Well. Really.’

‘How very *WIA*,’ I said irrelevantly.

Fiona, however, was not for sidetracking.

‘Since the market opened, Osanto have announced federal approval for a new retroviral drug.’

‘I imagine that has done no harm to their share price,’ I said, cradling my head in my hands.

‘No harm? It’s up five hundred points already.’ She clicked some keys. ‘Six hundred and two points, actually.’

‘I don’t have the slightest idea what that means.’

‘Let me make this simple. The two thousand pound stake – when I talked to my friend a half hour ago, this is – is now worth more than seven hundred thousand pounds.’

‘Hang on. That must mean your friend—’

I tried to do the arithmetic, and found that the relevant circuits in my brain had stopped working.

‘My friend is thirty-four million pounds to the good,’ Fiona said helpfully. ‘I can repeat that if you like. Thirty-four million. *Pounds*. As in money, not bags of flour. Money by the barrow load. He phoned to give me the news and say he is retiring. Effective immediately.’

‘Did you close out the position?’

‘Yes. Seven hundred and nine hundred thousand pounds is in transit to my bank account as we speak.’

‘I hope you’ve got a good accountant.’

‘And I hope *you’ve* got a good lawyer,’ she bawled. ‘Taking a tip on a horse, that’s one thing. Advanced knowledge of sensitive market information, and then profiting from it, that’s prison. For both you *and* me.’

‘Who have you told?’

‘No-one. I switched off my phones, cancelled my meetings, locked my door and threw my laptop in the bin. I’ve just been sitting in the corner of my office floor rocking slowly back and forth.’

‘You know that won’t look good in a glass-walled office?’

‘Zoe came in to ask if I was alright. I screamed at her so loudly that no-one else has dared.’

‘I don’t know what to say, Fiona.’ I rubbed my brow gently. ‘And my head hurts like someone drove a truck over it. In fact, I think they may well have done so,’ I added on reflection.

‘So now I need to know the truth, Peter.’

Fiona’s voice was suddenly hushed.

‘What truth?’

‘Who told you – about the horse and about Osanto. I promise you I won’t be angry. I just need ... to know.’

‘They were dreams. That’s it,’ I said simply. ‘There is no other truth to reveal.’

‘It’s just that—’ Her words petered out momentarily. ‘I could deal with prison. I wouldn’t like it, and life as I know it would end, but I could endure it. But if our friendship means so little to you that you won’t tell me about this ... then I think’ – she suppressed a sob – ‘I think I might just give up myself.’

‘If there was something I could tell you, Fiona—’

‘Oh dear Lord, I felt like this when Craig MacKenzie broke up with me when I was thirteen years old. How can it still be like this in my forties?’

‘Fiona—‘

‘I’ll make it straightforward. Straightforward, and easy for you if you just can’t come out and be a man about it. Did you dream last night?’

‘Last night?’ I repeated stupidly. I searched the blank recesses of my mind. Something began emerging from one of them. ‘Actually, I did have a dream.’

‘Choose these words well, Peter. Because you know what I’m going to do.’

‘In my dream, Princess Victoria announced she was divorcing Harry Styles.’

‘Oh God. No. Really?’

‘In my dream, yes. The nation was traumatised. A people in mourning.’

‘Well, I am there already. So that’s what you’re saying – Victoria and Harry will divorce?’

‘Yes. But in my dream only. Nowhere else.’

‘Then all seven hundred K will be bet on Harry and Vics divorcing within – what? – a month?’

‘Fiona—‘

‘Bear in mind that your next words may be the last we ever exchange.’

‘Please, just don’t do this. Let me come to London and we can talk—‘

A deathly silence filled the room.

#

Walking along the beach had agitated my hair and calmed my thoughts in equal measure. There was now a levity and vigour to my coiffure that felt strange atop my head as I stepped into the cottage and closed the door.

‘Mrs Tierney,’ I said to the small woman stood by the front window. ‘I didn’t know you were stopping by. I wouldn’t have gone out if I had.’

‘Oh, don’t you worry yourself, Mr Peter. I just wanted to check you were settling in all fine and cosy here.’

‘I have everything that a man could wish for – food, drink, a glorious view and a warm fire, thank you so very much.’

‘Not quite *everything* a man would wish for,’ she said, eyes a-twinkle. I felt something twist in my heart. ‘But I’m glad you’re comfortable.’

‘I am. Now, can I offer you a cup of tea, Mrs Tierney?’

‘That’s very kind of you, but no, I am fine. What I will do’ – she began gathering the woodblocks from the windowsill – ‘is take these with me. They belong to old Mr Tierney.’ She looked at me conspiratorially. ‘Young Rory brought them here when we were preparing the cottage for you. If his great-grandfather found out that Rory had gone off with them, I shouldn’t like to think what would happen.’

‘Well, I wouldn’t want Rory to get into any trouble. I shall miss them,’ I said, indicating the horse, factory and princess blocks she held in her hands. ‘They have become quite my companions when I sit on the windowsill taking the view.’

‘Have they, now?’ Mrs Tierney said, regarding me oddly. ‘Have they now. I’ll just be taking them with me, back where they belong. Well, good day to you!’

With that, she was gone.

As the door clicked shut, the VA spoke.

‘Incoming call,’ it said. ‘Fiona Hunter.’

‘Put her on, sweetheart,’ I replied.

Fiona’s soft west coast brogue filled the room.

‘Have you seen the news?’ she gabbled.

‘News? No. I’ve just been trying to persuade Mrs Tierney not to take some rather lovely antique children’s wood blocks away.’

‘Some what?’

‘Wood blocks. Toys for children to play with.’

‘Jesus, Peter. You’ve only been there two days. You can’t have gone native already.’

‘Sorry. What news?’

‘Vics and Harry ... divorcing. It’s on the front of every news site, us included, and no doubt it will even reach *The Connaught Telegraph* given a week or two and a fair wind.’

‘I don’t believe it.’

‘Oh, you should believe.’

‘Then—’ I stopped, lost in my own sentence. ‘You didn’t put that ridiculous bet on?’

‘Put it on? I spent an hour on the phone to the bookmakers convincing them to take such a large amount. They were suspicious at once, but after they checked, and ascertained who I was, they halved the odds, to two hundred and fifty to one, and accepted. I gather they lay off bets this size to a re-insurance firm and have to pay quite a premium to do so.’

‘Wait. I am not understanding this. *That* sum of money. *At those* odds. It must be ... enormous.’

‘Yes.’

‘How much?’

‘Just shy of one hundred and eighty million pounds.’

‘It sounded like you said one hundred and eighty million.’

‘I did.’

‘They won’t really pay that. Let’s be realistic.’

‘On the contrary, I’ve spoken to them. To their CEO, in fact. The loss is taken by the re-insurance firm, and the bookmaker is using it to lead their Marketing for the rest of the year. “Make your dreams come true.” That sort of thing. When I told him that the tip came from a dreamer on an isolated Irish island, the CEO was practically ecstatic.’

‘You didn’t tell him my name?’

‘No. I gave him the facts and let him spin the yarn from them. And we get the money. I have that in writing. What will you spend it on?’

‘Me? That was *your* twenty pounds.’

‘I put the bet on, sure. But, confident as I was that the stake would be lost on each occasion, I was clear in my head that it was *your* money I was wasting.’

‘Why not call it *our* money then? I don’t see how either of us rightly has any less claim to it than the other.’

‘Ours?’

‘Yes, ours. It seems to me that, between us, we suddenly have enough money to do anything we want.’

‘That thought crossed my mind too.’

I looked down at the empty space on the windowsill.

‘You told me yesterday that I should follow my dreams,’ I said. ‘Let my heart lead me to what I should be doing.’

‘I did.’

‘I’ve been thinking about that. Last night in the pub, and this afternoon, walking a circuit round the whole island.’

‘What did you decide?’

‘Two things. One, that I won’t give up on the material that was leaked to the newspaper, the Virgin Island Papers. The story is too important. It may have cost me my job and likely has ruined my career. But it leads to Downing Street, and the Kremlin, and the White House too.’

‘Peter—‘

‘I know, I know. But I got into journalism to make the world a better place, to help people, to bring truth where there are lies. Well, that’s what the Virgin Islands Papers are. Truth amongst lies. So I decided that I would find a way to bring what’s in those papers to the attention of the world.’

‘But you don’t even have those files. Not since you were—‘

‘Say it,’ I said.

She hesitated, as if afraid of the words.

‘Not since you were fired,’ Fiona said finally.

‘I do have them.’ I turned over the memory stick in my pocket with my fingers. ‘I have them here. And if I’m domiciled in the Republic of Ireland, I think I will have a fair degree of protection, legal protection, for stories that HM Government would prefer to quietly kill off.’

‘If that’s what your heart tells you to do, then that’s brilliant.’

‘It is.’

‘I’m so pleased for you. I really am. What was the second thing?’

I drew in a breath, long and slow, then exhaled.

‘I want you to be in my life,’ I said.

‘I am in your life. We’re talking now.’

‘I mean in my life every day. At the centre of my life. Together.’ I paused, bewildered by the words coming out of my mouth. ‘The past few months have made me realise that I’m not complete without you.’

‘Peter, I’m married.’

‘You are. And for as long as I’ve known you, you’ve been unhappily married to a man who doesn’t appreciate you. He doesn’t place you at the centre of his universe, and doesn’t give you what you need. I want to change that. Today, and for all your days.’

‘I don’t know what to say.’

‘Then don’t say anything.’

A silence slowly spread across the room, the most unnervingly intimate and exposing silence that I had known in my life. Great, heavy waves beat down on the shingle outside, spending their fury, one after the other, on the stones of the beach.

‘Alright,’ Fiona said at length. ‘I’ve composed myself. As much as I can.’

‘Yes.’

‘David and I have been unhappy. You are right. Unhappy together, and we’ve made each other unhappy. Which is worse.’ She rallied her energies once more. ‘And two months ago I found out he’d been having an affair, for more than a year, with one of his mature students.’

‘Oh Fiona, why didn’t you say? I could have helped.’

‘How could I tell you? You were still in pieces after Jenny’s death. The last thing I could have done is impose a burden on you.’

‘It would never have been a burden. Not with you.’

‘And then I had feelings for you. Confused, muddled feelings. Feelings I didn’t understand. Add to that that you were my boss and, well ... to be blunt, when that goes

wrong it's usually the woman who ends up being marched out of the building by a security guard.'

'I'm not your boss any more.'

'I am well aware of that.'

'So come to Ireland. Come here, to Inishbofin Island. Let James put Saturday's paper to bed and come for the weekend. We can talk.'

'Just talk?'

'Talk, and walk along the beach, looking at the ruined abbey, and the star fort that Oliver Cromwell built to house Irish prisoners, and the sun-bathing seals. Spot cormorants on the cliffs. Get an appalling hangover at Killian O'Malley's pub.'

'*That* I could do.'

'Come for the weekend then. We can talk. About everything.'

'What will I tell David?'

'Do you really care?'

'Actually, no. I don't. If I'm honest, I don't give a damn. But I am terrified that if I do come you'll wake up on Monday and have ... a new dream.'

'A new dream?' I repeated. An image of Mrs Tierney gathering the wooden blocks flashed through my mind. 'I don't think I'll have any more of those.'

'How can you be sure?' She paused a moment. 'How can *I* be sure?'

'Because, my love, my days of dreaming are over. Reality is what I want. Your reality. Your face across the table when I eat breakfast in the morning. Your body beside me in the night. Your hand in mine when we walk along the beach at sunset. Your voice in my ear when I'm ninety-five and my legs won't do what I tell them.'

A different silence filled the room, dangerous and exciting, laden with opportunity

and the pain of all the generations of humans who had lived on the island here before me.

Brutal waves pounded the shingle of the beach. A seagull squawked in anguish.

‘My flight lands at Connemara Airport at four fifteen,’ Fiona said quietly. ‘Be there.’