

# Snow Choir

---

*Our Lady of Succour* care home was in lockdown again after the two-day Christmas reprieve. Maria-Louisa Gallagher was Covid-free but in strict isolation again because of her great age and her underlying conditions.

There had been another heavy fall overnight and further snow was expected.

Staff numbers were depleted due to Covid and the severe weather. After the round of breakfasts, medications and treatments, the staff took a short break and the buzz died down.

Maria-Louisa felt herself being rolled forward to the window by an unseen hand.

The sky brightened and the sun broke through the white, misty clouds.

Sheep and cows were huddled among the low stunted trees at the far end of the field. The scene reminded her of her childhood in Ireland.

She noticed a dark-haired man standing beside the animals, tall, upright, in his prime, wearing faded tan-coloured overalls and black wellies with the tops turned down. Waving, he moved towards her. There was something about his walk, the rolling limp which reminded her of her father.

Closer to, she saw he was wearing a face mask, emerald green.

Behind him other people crowded into focus, talking, laughing, shoving, shouting, throwing snowballs, adults and children, dozens of them, dressed in warm clothes and wearing brightly coloured hats, scarves and gloves.

Closer to, she saw the adults were also wearing green masks.

The father figure picked up a shovel and made a pile of snow.

The children crowded round him.

Suddenly a snow woman was revealed, dumpy, dressed in purple, wearing a raincoat and a bobble hat with a long scarf draped around her neck.

The snow woman was also wearing an emerald green mask.

A smallish, bustling red-haired woman, quite chubby, also wearing a faded tan overall and in black wellies took charge of the children, bossily arranging them in two rows with the taller boys and girls at the back and the smaller children at the front. She handed them song sheets.

# Snow Choir

---

From the group of adults, a man in white cassock stepped forward, removed his mask, and began to sing in a sweet tenor voice:

*A Christmas Storm was breaking; there are people in the square  
There was snow high on the mountain, there was magic in the air  
My mother held my hand in her hand, till we reached the chapel on the hill  
And the choirboys made a wonderful noise; I can hear that melody still.*

The children's choir replied:

*Adeste fideles laeti triumphantes  
Venit, venite in Bethlehem  
Natum videte Regem angelorum.  
Venite adoremus Dominum.*

In turn they sang on, first the man, then the children, verse for verse.

As the sound of their voices faded, the smallest child, a plump little girl, ran forward and threw herself up onto her lap. Maria-Louisa had expected the child to be heavy, but she was as light as a feather, no weight at all.

"Gran-Gran-Nan, are you very, very old?"

'Well, Christina, I suppose I am since I was born in 1919.'

'But Gran-Gran-Nan, I'm not Christina. I'm Violet. It's Gran who is Christina.'

'Really? Well, you are just her very picture, just every bit as pretty.'

'I love you Gran-Gran-Nan.'

'Well, Violet, I love you too. Now, off you go and play. It's time for my nap.'

Later, after the staff break, the care team made their rounds and found the old lady as if asleep, her face set in a broad smile. On her lap, grasped tightly in her hand, was the Virtual Reality helmet which her eldest grandson had given her for Christmas.

## *Snow Choir*

---

Checking her pulse, the Senior Resident Nurse said, 'Ah, there, there, there, as expected. So, our Maria-Louisa has finally slipped away from us. She's been ready to leave us since the lockdown after Christmas. I'll call her family and let them know she passed with a smile on her face. She lived for their visits. And look at that family montage they gave her on her hundredth birthday: five sons and three daughters, twenty-six grandchildren and eleven great grandchildren. What riches.'

The Matron added, 'Yes, she was such a wonderful lady and look at that sepia photo over there, taken on her second birthday with her mother and father, on their farm. Time after time she told me he was champion male voice at the Donegal Festival six years in a row. She was a lovely singer herself. God Rest her soul. She had a good life.'