

The Dolls

Lizzie was starting to feel very, very warm and totally exhausted. Despite feeling hotter by the minute, she got into her bed fully clothed, spread her long red hair over her pillow, and felt herself melting away into the sheets of her comforting bed.

She had returned to the cottage just over an hour ago, having said her final goodbyes to her Grandmother Alizon that afternoon. The doctors in the hospital had said that her Grandmother had a long term heart condition, which she had known about for years, but had chosen not to tell Lizzie about. In trying to comfort Lizzie, the doctors had remarked that it was incredible that Alizon had lived this long and had been symptom free since her diagnosis.

Alizon had brought Lizzie up after Lizzie's own mother had been unable to, due to her drug fuelled and chaotic lifestyle. Her grandmother had given Lizzie everything a small, growing child could wish for, and they had vowed never to leave each other or the bliss of the cottage and garden they both loved. As a result Lizzie grew into not just a conventionally well educated young woman, but also a very wise woman, familiar with herbs, their medicinal uses, the knowledge of planting and harvesting according to the phases of the moon, along with a general wealth of folklore passed on to her by Alizon.

In her increasingly hot bed, and with her eyes closing, Lizzie re-lived her Grandmother's last words to her as she held her hand, 'We will always be together Lizzie, whatever happens. We live in each others hearts and our spirits will always be entwined and alive in our cottage. You know what to do'.

Earlier that morning, while Alizon was still in bed, Lizzie had been poking around the bookshelves in Alizon's study, and had noticed a battered old book on 'Folklore, Poppets and Magical Dolls' that she had never noticed before. When she pulled the book from the shelf and placed it, unopened, on Alizon's desk, she discovered behind it a small dusty wooden box, which of course she just had to retrieve and open.

Inside the box she found a bundle, tightly wrapped in sky blue silk that reflected the colour of the early morning sky. Within the silk were two small figures, crudely formed out of wax, that had been tightly bound together for some time. One had her grandmother's long white hair, with a bandage wound around it's chest and just a tiny piece of red felt poking out of the edges of the bandage. The other wax doll was a figure with long red hair, much like her own. She recognised the dried herbs surrounding them both as herbs for healing the heart (hawthorn, motherwort and rosehips) herbs for protection (hyssop and plantain) and rose petals for love.

Realising the time, and the fact that she was possibly nosing around in territory that she shouldn't be, Lizzie took the dolls into the kitchen with her. She placed the poppets on the kitchen table, put the kettle on the hot plate of the Rayburn and picked up the white haired doll for a closer look. She would ask Alizon about the figures later. As the kettle started to whistle, Lizzie jumped into action, putting the doll down next to the Rayburn. She prepared a tray for her Grandmother and took it upstairs as she did every morning. Just an hour later, having been engrossed in chores, she became aware and concerned that Alizon had not got up. Lizzie discovered her Grandmother burning up in bed and immediately called an ambulance...

After a number of weeks, the college contacted the Police with their concerns around Lizzie's continued absence and out of character lack of response. A couple of local Police officers called at the cottage. The front door was unlocked, so they let themselves in.

There were no signs of anyone at home, upstairs or down, but it was generally immaculately clean in the cottage and it felt lived in. The dish cloth was still damp and the Rayburn was still hot. The post had been opened, the garden was tended and a teapot was on a tray on the table, along with 2 cups, saucers and a milk jug. Next to the Rayburn, was a pool of semi melted wax, with a red felt heart set into it and some strands of white and red hair woven together in the warm wax. The Officers assumed it was a crafting accident waiting to be cleaned up.

There was a tatty old book open on the desk in the study, but neither of the Police Officers gave it a second glance.