



**Woman's Weekly  
Fiction Editor, Gaynor**

'A new author for *Woman's Weekly*, Libby lives in Texas. She decided to send us this story to see what we thought - and we loved it! Welcome aboard, Libby.'

# Me & Shirley

I am going to Ireland with Shirley Valentine today. Before you know it, we will be knocking around the pubs, drinking beer from tubs and kissing strangers on the dark side of the street. We will leave our mates back in the States in their comfy recliners watching their favourite sport and wondering who will retrieve their next beer. Only then, will they notice that we are gone.

I packed lightly - I always do, for I'm dressing for no one, except me, and maybe for those one or two nights at a bar full of merry Celtic folks when I will dance until my feet ache. I bought a simple, emerald green wench's blouse, cut slightly below my adequate cleavage and gathered where it accentuates my waist; below that, tufted fabric fans out to move seductively around my hips, while my black flowing skirt twirls when I am being whirled around by the men who have bought me more beer than any respectable woman should drink. I'm salivating, just thinking about the whole outfit, and the pair of black pumps that can be easily kicked off.

Shirley packed heavily. She has much more bosom than I could carry around on my small-boned body. She wears layers of clothes that frame her ample cleavage, and when you see her coming towards you, you see it first before you see her big flashing smile, and finally those incredible luminous eyes. I like her. I like her a lot. She's the kind of friend that a woman finds once in a lifetime.

I won't tell anyone this, but Shirley has a wall that she tells everything to and holds nothing back, like I do when I write in my journal. Best of all, the wall doesn't criticise her, chastise her, nor does it agree with her or patronise her on those moody

days when she could use a little pretence. It simply listens and echoes back what she has told it; keeping Shirley balanced without applying too much practicality, but just enough common sense to help her make decisions, like going to Ireland. She likes her wall. She feels lucky.

## *At a bar full of merry Celtic folk I will dance until my feet ache*



Now that our children are grown, we are left alone with our thoughts. Thoughts that have been kept locked up in a vault so thick, only dynamite could break it open. Once the last child left the nest, and there were no more

clothes to pick up off the floor, big meals to cook or stories about bad teachers and rotten girlfriends, the house became strangely empty. The men sitting across from us at the dinner table began to take unrecognisable form, and it occurred to us that they did not

know who they were. Yet days of routine and nightly dinners went by for months on end until Shirley found her wall and I found my writing tablet. It was then that we realised it was not only the men who had changed - we had changed, too.

The taxi picked me up promptly at eight. My husband stood at the door frowning, his head bent as he looked at his ugly brown house shoes, my very first gift to him 25 years ago. I entered the cab and rolled down my window, waiting for him to say something kind or valuable, or a simple, "Have fun!" He just continued to stare at his shoes and stayed that way until the taxi



rounded the corner, and he was no longer in sight. I wondered how long he stood there, and I hoped that this sad image wasn't the way I would remember him from then on.

During the cab drive, I took the time to recheck the contents of my oversized backpack: passport, lipstick, driver's licence, comb, credit card, breath mints, Kleenex, nail file and a cheap paperback that my neighbour said was a 'must read'. Seven pairs of undies, two bras, running shoes, four cotton shirts, three pairs of shorts, socks and that green blouse and skirt with the slip-on heels. Most importantly, my journal and a new pen, easily accessible in a side pocket. Anything else I needed I was wearing, including a light sweater wrapped around my waist. I was essentially hands-free.

I giggled, thinking about what Shirley would pack, and imagined her lugging the biggest roll-on bag they make – a bright red one so it could easily be found. She would never think of carrying an ugly backpack on her back, unless it was decorated in rhinestones. I'm certain that her essentials are quite different from mine and include a large bulging make-up bag, a set of hot rollers, an outfit for every day with matching shoes, a travel iron and a first-aid kit, all crammed neatly inside. If she could have, she would have packed her wall, too. But she made it clear that there would be no talking on this trip, just playing. I'm kind of cheating by bringing my tablet, but I can't help myself – there will be so much to write about.

The airport is especially crowded this time of year when school is out, and folks are either vacationing or sending their kids off to camp. I'm not fond of crowds and tend to find the quietest spot by the windows to watch the magnificent planes being prepared for their next flight. The idea of that large beast carrying 250 passengers across the mighty ocean for nine whole hours without stopping never ceases to amaze me. I admire it on the ground and in the air and mostly when it lands me safely at my destination.

However, I do not admire the seats and to this day I have no idea if first-class seats are really better. If I had an extra thousand, you can be darn sure I wouldn't spend it to find out.

The longer I sit, the more I think about my life. The image of my sad husband standing in the doorway has not yet left me. I try hard to remember him when we first met and settle further down in the seat to put my memories on paper.

He was a beautiful man, tall and slender with thick, black hair like my mother's. We met at a party, like many couples did back then. Seems like there were always parties – one every night, on campus, around campus, generally in a rich kid's apartment. We liked each other immediately and wasted no time

## *I sat slumped in the waiting area wondering what to do next*

falling in love. He got drafted, I got pregnant, and we both had to quit college. I saw him only twice in two years while I lived with my mother and raised our little girl. Soon after, he left the Army, started a new company, bought us a home, and we brought two more children into the world. They were simple years. We both worked diligently, and life dealt some hardships, but my husband was strong-willed and determined and we came out shining every time.

And here I am, waiting to board a plane that will carry me thousands of miles away from 28 years of marriage with a good man. A good man that no longer loves me enough to travel with me, nor loves me enough to take me dancing, or bowling, or to parties, like he used to do. A good man that no longer looks at me across the room and stares, or shoves me against the wall and kisses me hard, making me feel like his lover, or wakes me in the middle of the night and tells me about his dream. A good man that once thought I was beautiful and funny and once upon a time, would never want to be without me.

The image of my still-

handsome husband with his greying hair and strong hands standing in the doorway, afraid to look at me, but finding comfort in looking down at his house shoes, brought tears to my eyes. We both had changed, but I thought I was brave enough to do something about it.

Only thing is, after I roam the green hills of Ireland, close down the pubs with my new best friends, visit cold castles that bring me no comfort, wash down corned beef and cabbage with a pint of Murphy's, sleep on the side of a hill and bicycle through villages with names such as Claddaghduff and Killarney, I will still have done nothing about it, and everything will be the same when I return home nine days later.

While Shirley was probably already seated aboard her plane

passed my favourite department store, and I asked him to let me run in for a minute to pick up something for my husband. He smiled and gladly turned around.

When we reached our driveway, I saw that my husband's truck was still parked in the same place. I shook my driver's hand, and he wished me good luck. When I entered the house, I was surprised that the television was not on, and not even one light. I peeked down the dark hall before heading towards the master bedroom. Entering slowly, I saw, nearly hanging off the end of the bed, my husband's size-13 feet in his favourite pair of white socks, the bottoms blackened from walking outside in them to get the newspaper. He was asleep, or so it seemed, as he had his arm resting over his eyes, and on his chest was our wedding album, opened and gradually rising up and down as he breathed.

I sat down next to him and put my hand on his. He jerked a little and uncovered his tear-filled eyes. When he saw me, he half-smiled and said, "I can't believe I let you go."

I looked back at him and said, "I can't believe I let go of you."

Then, that husband of mine pulled me towards him and kissed me like the young soldier I married. When he let me come up for air, I handed him his gift. With a big grin on his face, he sat up and opened it and pulled out a fine new pair of house shoes.

"Does this mean you want to start over?" he asked.

"I do," I laughed, feeling a little bashful like a newlywed, and with the children no longer living there, we left the bedroom door wide open.

THE END

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with a \$10 bill in her hand, waving it at the flight attendant to take her drink order, I sat slumped in the waiting area of Gate Five wondering what to do next. I needed an answer.

Over the loudspeaker, a thin voice reported that our flight to Dublin would be delayed for possibly three hours. People moaned and groaned, and some headed straight up to the counter to complain, while others surrendered to the nearest bar. I flagged down the next taxi and headed home.

Along the way, I shared my story with the taxi driver, who sadly confessed after 10 minutes into it that he understood English much better than he could speak it. I told him not to worry, that it felt good just to talk about it. We



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