



## *The Very First Rehearsal of the Lyrebird Lake Ladies Choir*



**Thursday, 1 July 2004**

*Feeling like there's something missing? Need a creative endeavour?*

*Want to join like-minded women in companionship and song?*

*Then join the new Lyrebird Lake Ladies Choir.*

*When: Every Thursday evening, starting 6:30 pm.*

*Where: O'Sullivan's Surgery – front rooms.*

*Who: All women. Any age. Any ability. All welcome.*

*Can't sing? That's perfectly fine. We'll teach you.*

*We're about connection, not chords.*

*Light refreshments provided.*

Maggie O'Sullivan stood in the foyer of the grand old house, clutching the flyers. They were printed on pink paper, with a border of treble clefs and crotchets that she'd hand-drawn. She clung to the hope that plastering the flyers all around town would mean a good turnout.

Her sister, Eleanor, stepped up beside her and wrapped her arm around Maggie's shoulder. 'This is a good idea, Maggie. Really. But don't be upset if we don't get a huge amount of interest. A choir isn't for everyone. You know that.'

Maggie did know that but wouldn't be perturbed. 'You heard the murmurs in the surgery when we put these out,' she said. 'People are keen.'

Eleanor smiled. 'Are you sure they weren't just being polite to the only doctor in town?'

That was possible, and it wasn't as if Maggie and Eleanor had been back in Lyrebird Lake long enough yet to stitch themselves into the fabric of the place. But Maggie was certain there were women, just like her, who wanted to build connections. And, really, who didn't love a choir? Or at least to sing, even if only in the shower. And if their choir could create the right atmosphere, then maybe the shower singers would feel comfortable enough to emerge from their bathrooms and join them. She knew people would come. She just had to provide them the opportunity.

Maggie knew Eleanor hadn't been sure about coming back to Lyrebird Lake, and her hesitation wasn't unwarranted. Maggie wasn't oblivious to the odd sideways glances thrown her way from the older residents, whose memories were long. She just didn't let them get to her the way Eleanor did. But that wasn't surprising; Eleanor took her role as protective big sister very seriously. Even after all these years. She always had.

But when Maggie had seen the old place come up for sale, she knew there was a chance to take a piece of their fractured past and turn it into something full of light. And it had only taken a modicum of persuasion to bend Eleanor to her will.

'We could set ourselves up for retirement away from the city.'

Eleanor had frowned.

'We could turn that vision we once had for the place into a reality.'

Eleanor's eyebrows had raised.

'Please? I can really see us doing this.'

‘This wouldn’t have anything to do with you coming down with a serious case of empty nest-itis, would it?’ Eleanor could always see through her.

Maggie had turned her nose in the air. ‘I’m thrilled my son has gone off to see the world, to fill his life with adventure.’ And she was. Genuinely. But Eleanor was right. With Tim off travelling, the house that had been their little piece of sanctuary since Maggie’s husband had died had become an empty shell – a reminder of a life that was no longer hers.

‘It can be a fresh start.’ She’d looked Eleanor in the eye. ‘For both of us.’ Maggie had wanted this. But she’d known Eleanor needed it. ‘Will you do it? For me?’

Maggie knew she hadn’t played fair, but she also knew the end goal would be worth gently exploiting her sister’s fierce desire to ensure Maggie’s happiness. And just quietly, she’d hoped the move, and now the bold step of setting up the choir, would recapture some of the spark they’d shared in their younger days. When Eleanor would write in that now-ragged songbook she still kept secreted under her pillow; when they would burst into well-known lyrics at the mere mention of a word; when they would dance together under the hawthorn trees in the moonlight. Before their lives changed forever. When Maggie’s life was changed forever. Before the shadow of that night had settled in their lives.

Eleanor didn’t believe in fate or destiny or magic or signs. But Maggie did. Part of her still believed in the fairies that legend said lined the Irish fields of their childhood home. First, the house that once had held so much promise and pain for the sisters had come on to the market after the death of Maggie’s husband, then Tim had moved overseas, and shortly afterwards Eleanor was made redundant from her admin job with the Arts Council – if they weren’t signs to move back to Lyrebird Lake, then she didn’t know what was.

And now they were here, Maggie was determined to make the most of it. And that meant starting the choir.

‘Come on.’ Maggie nudged her sister. ‘Let’s set out the chairs.’

The bell over the front door chimed and Maggie glanced towards the sound, where she saw the familiar figure of one of her patients walk in. Janet’s faded blue eyes darted around the large open foyer. Maggie had heard the rumours around town – everyone had – about her husband’s infidelities. At fifty, the same age as Eleanor, Janet, a kind, funny and intelligent woman, had given her life to that scoundrel, and that philandering excuse for a man was a fool, if you asked Maggie, for even looking at younger women.

Behind Janet, two more women stepped cautiously into the foyer and Maggie’s heart sang.

‘Told you they would come.’ She bounced up and down next to Eleanor and rushed to greet the very first members of the Lyrebird Lake Ladies Choir.