

*When Poppy relocated to Margate she answered a card in the window of the Madam Popoff Vintage Emporium announcing, "Part time help required only special people need apply." She suddenly found herself drawn into a world of wonder, magic and healing. A series of short stories explore the ups and downs of life and the nature of healing.*

## **Last Train to Margate**

by Sally Forrester

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A sunset over the ocean with a silhouette of a person on a beach. The sun is low on the horizon, casting a golden glow across the sky and reflecting on the water. The person is standing on the beach, looking out at the sea. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

*Last Train  
To Margate*

SALLY FORRESTER

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The characters and events in this book are fictitious. Any similarity to real persons, living or dead, is coincidental and not intended by the author.

The author, Sally Forrester, took the front cover photograph, *Another Time* by the British sculptor Sir Antony Gormley, OBE. Sally also took the three photographs shown on the back cover. Winston is in the bicycle basket!

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## Chapter 8

Madam Popoff was away on one of her hunting expeditions and Isadora had telephoned Poppy in the early morning announcing she would have to stay home today and care for her sister's little boy who wasn't well. It was September 5th, a warm, sunny day but quieter than usual because the children had just returned to school for the new academic year. The crowds of holiday visitors had dwindled and retired folk on bargain breaks now frequented the old town and seafront.

A battered cardboard box waited to be discovered on the doorstep as Margate Clock Tower struck 11am and Poppy used the big iron key to open the shop door. She flipped the sign over to OPEN and picked up the box. It was heavy with a neat luggage tag instructing the finder to please give the contents a very good home. Poppy carefully opened the box and fingered through the contents. A musty smell spilled out into the shop. At the bottom of the box Poppy discovered a treasure. She carefully placed it on the oak counter top and went into the back room to make herself a cup of coffee. When she returned she sat down and spent some time carefully examining the treasure. It was a beautiful beaded clutch purse with an old fashioned clasp. It looked Art Deco, perhaps circa 1920 – 1930. The tiny beads, colourful hues of emerald green, striking blues and purple, made a beautiful image of irises blowing in the wind. The whole bag was exquisite. Poppy clutched it with both hands, drew it closer and rested it upon her heart; she closed her eyes and was suddenly taken back to, another time.

It was September 5<sup>th</sup>, 1925 and Lady Southborough stood in the lifeboat house at the end of the Margate Jetty. She had dressed for the occasion, resplendent in a beautiful emerald and blue suit, matching feathered hat and held a lovely new clutch purse decorated with fine beads that made a design of irises blowing in the wind. The new bag had been a special birthday present from her husband. Lord Southborough was chairman of,

*The Civil Service Lifeboat Fund*, and today she had been invited to name the new Margate motor lifeboat, *The Lord Southborough*. As she swung the bottle of champagne against the hull she declared, “May God bless all who sail in her.” What a joyous occasion for Margate, a new lifeboat, and the first one to be powered by an engine. The lifeboat had always been most important to a community whose many inhabitants depended upon the sea to provide their livelihood. Margate harbour was crowded with an assortment of boats mainly those belonging to fishermen and the local men looked to the lifeboat when bad weather caught them off guard and they desperately needed help.

Poppy smiled as she opened her eyes, she had smelt the salty sea air, heard the gulls wheeling overhead, felt the sun and wind on her face and the sense of joy and expectation. Above all she had shared the deep gratitude of the Margate people who had gathered that day by the water to applaud and welcome their new boat. Today, September 5th, both then and now was a good day, one that warmed Poppy’s heart.

Poppy had no more time to reflect as a group of elderly ladies, on a day trip crossed the threshold and kept her busy. When she finally turned the sign to CLOSED around 4 o’clock, Poppy decided to stop by the lifeboat house on the harbour quayside on her ride back home. She had never been in the lifeboat house before; she walked around *Leonard Kent*, the present Mersey Class Lifeboat and browsed the walls filled with old photographs and articles documenting Margate’s long association with lifeboats beginning in 1860.

As she stepped back out into the September sunshine her gaze took her across the quayside to the sea and the sculpture by Antony Gormley of a lone man standing on an old concreted area where Margate’s Jetty had once stood. The man, gazing out to sea, called *Another Time*, struck a chord in Poppy’s heart. Earlier this day an exquisite bag had transported her back to this very day in 1925. The seascape had been so different then, a busy jetty, a lifeboat house and steep slip at the jetty’s end, a harbour filled with boats and fishermen, a community happy and deeply appreciative, in another time!

The next day with Madam Popoff still being absent and Isadora away looking after her sister's son, Poppy had more time for reflection. Since the shop was quiet Poppy once again made herself a cup of coffee and settled down to contemplate how much money she should write on the sales tag for the new treasure. Poppy examined the exquisite beadwork creating the beautiful image of irises and turned the bag gently in her hands, and then she opened the old fashioned clasp. Emerald green silk lined the interior and out fell an old photograph. Poppy held it closer so that she could clearly see the image of a young soldier. She turned it over and read the brief message on the back.

*“Iris, words aren't enough to thank you, a piece of my heart will always remain in Margate with you and with all those who saved my life. May you always be blessed.”*

*Harry – Christmas 1940*

Poppy gently placed the faded photograph on her heart, she closed her eyes and once again she was transported back to another time, it was the summer of 1940.

They called the evacuation of 338,226 allied soldiers, *The Miracle of Dunkirk* as desperate men were plucked from the beaches and harbour mole of Dunkirk between May 26 and June 04, 1940. Large numbers of troops had been cut off and surrounded by German troops during the six week long, *Battle of Britain*. Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, had called it, “a colossal military disaster.” A large section of the British Army had been stranded at Dunkirk. The huge operation mounted to facilitate their rescue involved 39 British Royal Navy destroyers, four Royal Canadian destroyers and a variety of civilian merchant ships. Many soldiers had to wade out into shoulder deep water and wait patiently until it was their turn to be ferried to the larger ships by a manoeuvre that came to be known as, *The Little Ships of Dunkirk*. The flotilla of hundreds of merchant marine boats, fishing boats, pleasure craft, yachts and two lifeboats had all been called into service to help save the men.

Harry, a young Canadian soldier, had been badly wounded by machine gun fire. He was a fine soldier, greatly loved by his fellow service men, and now they vowed that they would do their best to ensure that he got onto one of the boats and be whisked to safety. Margate men had bravely answered Churchill's clarion call and many small boats ventured out from the safety of the harbour. *The Lord Southborough* was one of two lifeboats that made numerous trips across the channel. It rescued over 600 soldiers whilst under fire from German bombers and having to navigate the dangerous waters infested with mines. Altogether 49,342 soldiers were landed in Margate. Townspeople rallied as the injured, sick and starving were carried into seafront hotels and pubs. The locals brought food, water and warm clothing and did the best that they could to provide refuge and comfort before those that were able to could march to the railway station and journey on to London.

Young Harry had been lifted onto *The Lord Southborough* but when he arrived ashore he was barely conscious. His legs had been badly injured and breathing through the pain was all that he could muster. Kind Margate men gently lifted him onto one of Pettman's fleet of vehicles and he was taken to nearby Margate General Hospital.

On June 2<sup>nd</sup>, the same day that Harry was being whisked to the hospital, a young girl called Margaret, her big sister, Iris, and their mother set out for Margate railway station. Margaret was fifteen years. It was a beautiful hot June day and today was the day when she was to be evacuated with her school, Clarendon House, en masse with loads of other children. She carried a small suitcase, a tag and a gas mask. There was chaos in Margate. As they made their way to the station they witnessed long lines of ambulances stretching all the way along St Peter's Road where they lived. Once the family arrived at the station they had to clamber over many of the soldiers, as they lay injured or exhausted on the station steps. Some didn't even have their uniforms left they were just in long john underwear. Some were terribly injured. It was a sad and very fearful day for Margaret as she stood on the platform and hugged her big sister and mother goodbye.

Iris was barely twenty years old and had been nursing for a couple of years, now her skills and compassion were needed more than ever. She left the station and hurried towards the hospital. At the door she hastily adjusted her cap and apron and checked her watch. The past few days had been a nightmare, she had seen such horrific injuries as she had dressed wounds and had gently held the hands of brave young men who had taken their last breath. It was noon when she heard a young man called Harry screaming with pain in the hospital ward. Sister had asked Iris to do what she could before a doctor could get to him. This was to herald the beginning of a deep and personal friendship as Iris continued to nurse him for the many months that followed. She sat by his bedside when the ward was less busy, generally late at night. She heard about his family back in Canada, his parent's farm, his big sister who was also nursing at a Toronto hospital and all about his childhood sweetheart, Mavis.

It was the loving care and support of Iris, together with the other nursing staff and the skill of the doctors that saved Harry's life. He was also extremely grateful to the older ladies of nearby St John's Church who would take turns to volunteer and visit with the critically ill soldiers. The ladies reminded the soldiers of their own mothers who waited anxiously for news.

As Christmas 1940 approached Margate Hospital announced that there would be a Christmas dance for all the staff and their guests. Harry, now about to be discharged, joked with Iris asking who was going to take her to the ball. Iris blushed, she had been so busy working that there had been no time to step out with any suitable young men. Harry was just able to get down on one knee as he asked if Iris might accompany him to the ball. He was due to leave town the day afterwards and he felt that the hospital ball would appropriately mark his parting farewell to Iris and celebrate the passage of time he had spent in the warm loving embrace of Margate and its people.

Iris returned home all flustered and complained to her mother that she had absolutely nothing that she could wear. Several conversations later with some of the ladies from St John's Church finally provided the answer.

The next day a carefully wrapped package arrived on her doorstep. Iris eagerly unwrapped the thick brown paper tied with string and out bounced a beautiful white layered chiffon gown speckled with tiny royal blue polka dots. The gown came with a matching wrap and the most exquisite clutch bag decorated with irises blowing in the wind and all made from tiny beads.

“Oh, my!” Exclaimed Iris and her mum in unison as they read the accompanying message written on a brown luggage label:

*“Iris dear, you have given much. I once worked as Lady Southborough’s lady’s maid, she passed this lovely ball gown and bag onto me a few years ago and asked that I might one day find them a suitable home. Enjoy the ball Iris and thank you.”*

Iris and Harry made a delightful couple and after such a happy evening it was hard to say goodbye but Harry knew his family and his sweetheart were waiting patiently across the ocean. Harry slipped his photo into her purse as they bade farewell. They never saw each other again. Iris eventually met a wonderful Margate man, Harry married Mavis, had a family of his own and lived through to a grand old age. His life had been blessed with lots of good fortune but he never forgot Margate and the men who had risked their own lives to pluck him from the beaches of Dunkirk and he always remembered the young nurse who had held his hand through his darkest moments of fear and pain. As Harry’s own time had drawn nearer he had taken aside his oldest daughter and requested that when he passed away would she please ensure that a bouquet of irises adorn his coffin, there was to be nothing else. He never explained why but insisted that she keep her promise.

Poppy opened her eyes, she had been crying, she looked at her watch, a whole hour had passed away. “Another time,” she muttered as she lovingly examined again the beautiful clutch bag with the iris design and the photograph of the young soldier.

## Chapter 20

Dancing was on her mind when Poppy opened up the shop one bright Monday in early June. Aunt Flora had invited her to a tea dance at The Winter Gardens up on Fort Crescent on Sunday afternoon. Poppy wasn't much of a dancer but she loved to talk with Flora's friends, all elegant ladies and elderly gentlemen with silver hair who loved to dress up, socialize and dance. They always had such fascinating stories to tell. An ancient suitcase, plastered with bright luggage labels from a bygone era, had been left by the front door with a post it note instructing Madam Popoff to use what she could and to kindly throw the rest away. Poppy went about her usual duties sweeping the floor, tidying up, washing the cups in the back room and getting ready for a busy day. The town was filling with tourists now and business had picked up.

Poppy eventually settled down with a cup of coffee. It was still early and no customers had stepped across the threshold yet so she decided to investigate and open up the suitcase. A few old clothes spilled out, they smelled musty and didn't hold much appeal, "Someone has been up in their attic spring-cleaning," sighed Poppy. However, as she dug deeper she discovered a few pairs of old but really pretty dancing shoes probably dating from the 1930-1940's and she knew that Madam would be interested in these. As she dug deeper what really captivated her attention was a beautiful heart shaped wooden box wrapped in layers of faded, yellowing tissue paper. It looked as if it was made of cherry or some other close grained wood and inlaid with mother of pearl. Two tiny glass swans sat on top and when she carefully opened the lid she could see that it was a musical jewellery box. Poppy fiddled with the key at the back and much to her surprise a tune began to play. She recognized Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake*. Poppy smiled, gently held the box and whilst she listened to the music and the box lay close to her heart she drifted off to another time.

Bunty was a pretty young thing only 17 years old but already with a couple of competitive dancing awards under her belt. She was very good at ballroom and when she had stayed with relatives up in London for a few months during the spring of 1914 a wealthy aunt paid for her to take ballet lessons. “Fidgety feet,” called her doting father as she swanned out of the front door. Bunty never seemed to be still for very long, she was always in a hurry, busy and impatient much of the time. Tonight she was running late for the end of summer competition at The Winter Gardens Ballroom. She had been held up at The Hotel Metropole, a large hotel standing at the landward end of the Margate Jetty. It was popular with the visitors who arrived by steamship. Bunty had recently taken a job as a housekeeper but because she was a bright, well-educated girl she often helped out at the reception desk. Monty, her dancing partner, would be cross that she was so late. They made a lovely couple, completely dedicated to each other and to their dancing. They dreamed of owning a ballroom dancing school one day in the future. Dancing was becoming more and more popular especially in holiday resorts like Margate and they both had keen business minds. It was early days yet but they both predicted that dancing and a school would be their future. They were bright young stars with a sparkly future ahead of them.

That evening, once they were both out on the dance floor, they excelled. Bunty and Monty moved through the Waltz and the newly introduced Fox Trot, all the way from America, with the precision and accuracy of a Swiss watch. The judges couldn’t find fault with their naturally youthful talent, they were two young people in perfect harmony. As first prize winners that evening Bunty was presented with a beautiful heart shaped box crafted from cherry and inlaid with mother of pearl. The mother of pearl was in the shape of a pond and two tiny glass swans sat on top. As she carefully opened the lid she realized that it was a musical box and when she turned the key clockwork swans circled the pond to the sweet notes of *Swan Lake*. “My what a treasure!” Exclaimed Bunty. Monty received an equally lovely matching oblong box crafted from the same wood, the mother of pearl, inlaid in the lid, cast the single image of a swan. “Oh,” he gasped and as he opened it he could see it was a special case holding a fountain pen.

This dancing competition was to be the last time that the couple competed together. The future was uncertain; war had recently broken out in Europe and many of the Margate lads talked about joining up. Monty worked for Mr Edward Perkins and his Bathing Machine and Furniture Removal Company down on Margate's Marine Sands. Monty had a gift for figures and kept Mr Perkins accounting books in perfect order. He was very friendly with many of the donkey boys who also worked down on the sands. In the past they had all been classmates at St John's School. There had been much talk about them all volunteering together, and the newspapers were always urging the young men to play their part and sign up. After much thought Monty joined together with Ted, Sid, Jack and the other donkey boys standing in line at the East Kent Buffs Barracks in Canterbury.

Bunty promised Monty that she would wait for him to return as they all thought that the war would be over in a few months. There would be no more ballroom dancing or competitions until her dancing partner returned safely to Margate. She promised to hang up her dancing shoes and wait it out. The heart shaped music box reigned majestically on her kidney shaped dressing table with its brush, comb and mirror set and her bottle of expensive French perfume that her older brother had brought back from a business trip to Paris before the war.

Now it was 1915 and Bunty was growing impatient. Occasionally she would wind up the music box and play the *Swan Lake* tune. She would slip on her pink ballet shoes, tie the silk ribbons and flit around her large bedroom overlooking the sea and think about Monty and her brothers. Dancing satisfied her fidgety feet and her restless desire to always be on the move. Bunty was the youngest of seven and had always been the apple of her father's eye. All her siblings had left home, some of them had married and her four brothers had all recently gone to France. They were now at the Western Front with the other Margate Lads. Bunty inherited the large bedroom that her four brothers had once shared, and there was plenty of room for her to flit around.

Monty had packed his beautiful cherry fountain pen case with the inlaid image of the swan and would regularly write to Bunty. The pen case always reminded him of his perfect dancing partner, the dreams that they both shared and his beloved home. Bunty carefully kept all of his letters in her dressing table drawer; she was beginning to accumulate a large bundle. Monty missed everyone; he was sick and tired of the war, there were no signs of peace and he absolutely hated trench life and the uncertainty of his time on earth. One day he sensed that something had happened. He and Bunty were so close but he knew deep in his heart that all was not well. He anxiously gripped his swan fountain pen case. A week later he discovered that he had a nasty case of trench foot, the rain, mud and appalling living conditions, together with a dampening of his spirits, had all played their part.

Of course Bunty still wrote but her impatience and desire to dance had drawn her to the Winter Gardens one evening with some of the young chambermaids from the Metropole Hotel who had encouraged her to join them. Now this became a regular outing. Bunty sheepishly brought her ballroom dancing shoes out of the wardrobe and was enjoying the company of young men on the dance floor. Monty had been gone from Margate for almost a year. She was lonely and waiting was so very hard for her itchy feet. “No harm,” she muttered to herself, “after all I’m only dancing.” The tone of Bunty’s letters began to change and Monty knew, reading between the lines, that things were different. It was a set back for him and his spirits were particularly low.

The battle of Loos took place between 25 September and 13 October; it was the French and British Army offensive on the Western Front called, “The Big Push.” The intention was to strike a major decisive blow and break through the enemy lines before the cold winter weather set in. Casualties on the first day were the worst yet suffered in a single day by the British Army and included 8,500 dead. In total the battle resulted in casualties of more than 50,000 of whom some 16,000 lost their lives. Inexperienced wartime volunteers formed many British army battalions and their supporting artillery was short of heavy guns and shells. The

Battle of Loos was also the first time that the British Army used poison gas.

Monty was one of the fallen on that first day, September 25, 1915, the gunfire had been heavy and he had been badly shot in his legs, he was riddled with shrapnel. With the huge loss of life that fateful day and the horrendous injuries suffered by the badly wounded many young men had no chance at all and were left to die alone on the battlefield. Monty was one of the very lucky ones, Sid one of the Margate donkey boys, was extremely close by on that awful day. Sid had seen his good friend fall and had gone to his aid, but in doing so he had risked his own life. Sid was a strong burly lad and he managed to drag Monty back to a safer place, out of the range of the gunfire, where he could dress some of his wounds. In the chaos of the battle Sid could see that there were no stretcher-bearers or ambulances to help his friend and everything fell upon his shoulders. He dragged Monty further back to where some of the donkeys were tied up. With a great deal of effort he managed to eventually strap Monty onto one of the donkeys and lead him several miles back to a Casualty Clearing Station. Sid could see that Monty was in a very bad way by the time he reached the station. He was unconscious and had lost a lot of blood. The doctors and nursing staff didn't hold up much hope for him but they noticed that the shattered remains of a wooden pen box stuffed in his trouser pocket had stopped a bullet from severing the femoral artery in his right leg and he was in with a very slim chance.

Sid was absolutely exhausted, and collapsed on the grass outside the Casualty Clearing Station next to his donkey. He looked to the heavens above in thankfulness. He wondered just how he had managed to get his friend to safety and in with a fighting chance. He felt that somehow he must have acquired some super human strength that day; he looked lovingly over at his donkey and reflected how the donkeys had always been his faithful friends. Suddenly Sid remembered the little gold brooch with the seed pearl eye that Lord Avebury had presented him with. Ted, Sid and Jack had all worn their brooches with pride and viewed them as some kind of talisman. When they had all signed up together they decided

to continue to wear their brooches under their uniforms pinned out of sight onto their vests. The brooch felt good, connecting him with his friends, his donkeys and his home in Old Town Margate. "By all accounts I should be dead," Sid whispered to his donkey, "all that gunfire and bombing, I turned back to save my friend and I just don't know how I came out of it alive and how I physically got Monty to the Clearing Station." He reached inside his jacket, unbuttoned his shirt and gently ran his large, bloodied fingers over his little gold donkey brooch with the seed pearl eye. The big burly man, no longer a boy, wondered if he had a special kind of angel watching his back on September 25<sup>th</sup>, 1915.

Dr. E. Petrie Hoyle crossed over to Ostend in Belgium on September 04, 1914 with the Army Medical Corps; in fact he was the first American doctor at the front. He went onto work in Antwerp, Malines and Fumes and in 1915 he was appointed head of Hopital Auxilliaire No.50 in Rubelles. Despite the terrible septic wounds that Dr. Hoyle worked with he had never seen a case of tetanus or gangrene develop under his care. He attributed it to his working knowledge and experience of homoeopathy. Dr. Hoyle used diluted solutions of Calendula, better known as pot or garden marigold, he poured it over compound fractures and into the large gaping holes or torn flesh of the young men brought into his care. Many of the wounds he treated were black; soldiers would arrive at his hospital from the front that had no dressings on their wounds, sometimes they had been on the road for four days. He witnessed flesh that was not only black but extremely foul smelling, the rank odour of death. Despite such desperate cases the Calendula solution helped to heal and prevented a worsening prognosis. Young doctors, supervised by Dr. Hoyle, took notice of his methods and it was under such a young doctor that Monty had the good fortune to find himself when he was brought into The Casualty Clearing Station behind the lines at Loos.

Sid's quick first aid action on the battlefield with his own supply of bandages had been of help but things took on a more favourable turn once the Calendula treatment began. Monty was eventually transferred to a French hospital where he spent several months. As Christmas approached there was talk of him finally being transferred home to Margate.

Sid wrote to Bunty to tell her all about what had happened at Loos. Bunty suspected something was wrong when she opened her music box on September 25th and had tried to turn the key. It seemed stuck and there was no music that day or from that day onwards. She began to think that she was to blame after all she had broken her promise to Monty. When the letter arrived from Sid she cried all night and decided to put her dancing shoes back in the wardrobe. There would be no more dancing until Monty could step onto the dance floor with her.

When Monty arrived home he was in a sorry state. He still had both legs but they weren't so good. He could hardly walk, each step was unbearably painful and his disposition had become gloomy and very fearful for his future. Bunty tried the best she could to cheer him up and Mr Perkins gave him back his office job sorting out his bathing machine and furniture removal accounts but life just wasn't the same for Monty. It had all lost its lustre.

Bunty spent much of her time working the reception desk at The Metropole Hotel. So many of the Margate men had now left the town and joined up, women stepped up and filled their shoes. Monty's poor health and outlook concerned her and she would occasionally pull out her handkerchief and have a good cry when she thought that no one was watching. Unknown to Bunty a roly-poly old lady, her face wizened by age, was watching her very carefully.

Bunty had noticed the old lady taking tea in the hotel foyer for the past few days, yet she had never seen her before and didn't know if she was a guest. She seemed to like the chocolate cake. Today, when she had finished her tea, she approached Bunty and gently took her hand. Looking deep into her eyes she said, "My dear go every day down to the seashore and bring back the seaweed, mind it's fresh and be sure to collect it new every day. Wrap his legs with the seaweed and leave it to soak in for a few hours. In two or three weeks you will begin to see a difference. He will dance again but you have to have faith for both of you." Bunty was about to open her mouth when a large lady with a big hat swept up to the reception desk and demanded to know why her room wasn't ready. Bunty

didn't notice the wizened old lady leave but when she snatched a glance over the shoulder of the large lady she couldn't see her any more. It was as if she had faded into the ether.

Bunty really didn't know what to think, "What a very strange lady," she muttered to herself. Nevertheless something nagged at her and she felt moved to learn a little more. On her way home she stopped at Evans Chemist and Druggist shop in Margate High Street and asked them if they knew anything about seaweed. Mr Robertson peered over his horn-rimmed spectacles and reached for a rather large, dusty book high up on the shelf. Bunty shuffled from foot to foot as she tried her hardest to wait patiently for him to finish reading. He eventually found a whole section on seaweed and told Bunty that it was full of good things conducive to health, minerals such as iodine, selenium, magnesium, calcium, copper, potassium, zinc and iron. Bunty had never heard of such things but took him at his word. Everyone knew Mr Robertson, and he was well respected in the town. Apparently a seaweed bath could help relieve skin and circulation problems, detoxification, muscle aches and pains including joint stiffness. He mentioned a lot of big words that she had never heard before but she decided that tomorrow she would venture down to Margate sands and would give it a try.

As she was about to leave the shop he asked that she wait a minute. He went into the back room and came back a few minutes later with a small glass bottle. "It's for young Monty, this may also help his bad legs. This is a homoeopathic medicine called Silica we fondly call it *the homoeopathic surgeon*. It helps to bring things to the surface like splinters and bits of metal. Tell Monty to take one pill daily for several weeks. Its slow acting so please do be patient." When Bunty offered payment he waved her out the door, "It's the least I can do for a man who stepped up, volunteered and put his life on the line," he called out as the door was closing.

Instead of heading home Bunty walked along the seafront towards Margate Station. Monty had moved in with his Granny, in a two up and two down in a street of terraced homes near Margate Station and The

Royal Sea Bathing Hospital. Monty came from a large family and there wasn't room for him at home in Old Town, at least it wasn't suitable for someone who had become an invalid. The family decided that he would be more comfortable living with Granny.

Bunty excitedly explained everything that she had learnt from the curious old lady and from Evans Chemist and Druggist Store. She handed him the bottle of Silica and told him she would gather seaweed each day and bring it to Granny's home ready for him to do the wraps every evening when he returned home from work. Granny looked up from her sewing with a look of disbelief followed by amusement. Bunty wasn't at all sure if what she had shared would work and it seemed that an enormous amount of effort and patience would be required, she didn't know if she was up to it. Bunty knew that she lived in the fast lane, she wanted immediate results, and patience was clearly not a gift that she possessed. She rose up to leave she was so very weary. However, as she moved towards the door the image of the wizened old lady flashed before her eyes and her kind but stern words rang in her ear, "He will dance again but you have to have faith for both of you."

That night Bunty's sleep was particularly restless. The old lady came to her once again in a dream. Bunty saw her gathering seaweed out on the rocks in Westbrook Bay; she had filled a large wicker basket and turned to Bunty who was standing on the sands just off the Nayland Rock. Her words boomed in Bunty's ears as if they seeped through from another dimension, "Have faith Bunty, you can and must do this." The next morning, before beginning her duties as receptionist, Bunty went to see the manager at The Metropole Hotel and asked if she could switch her work duties from the usual 9am to 5pm and now work from noon until 8pm. She explained that she needed the morning hours to help a sick soldier. The manager could hardly turn down such a request; he knew Monty and so many other young Margate lads who had returned home with terrible injuries. He also knew that life would never be the same for them.

From the next day onwards Bunty left her home early each morning just as the sun was coming up, She ventured out warmly clad and wrapped up against the biting wind and icy cold. It was February 1916 and the Margate sands were always deserted. Bunty cut a very curious, windswept figure as she clambered gingerly over the slippery rocks at Westbrook Bay gathering large fronds of seaweed into two large wicker baskets. It took her an hour to harvest enough to fill her baskets and make her way to Granny's home. A large tin bath sat by the fire in the little kitchen and Bunty would fill the bath with seaweed and some water then she carefully covered it all with linen cloths waiting for Monty's return from work. Granny wasn't too keen on the smell but she could see that Bunty was dedicated and faithful and learnt to hold her nose when the smell was too bad. Some days Bunty chided herself and wondered if she was crazy because it certainly looked that way to observers walking their dogs along the seashore, especially when it was pouring with rain. Many times her long skirts and ankle boots would be soaked through, and on those days she had to quickly go home and change before making her way to the Metropole and her noon shift at the reception desk.

At first it all seemed somewhat of a farce, Monty didn't know what to think but he felt he should at least give it a try since Bunty seemed so dedicated. The laughing and snide remarks eventually stopped when Monty began to show signs of improvement. Every evening, after supper, he would sit for a couple of hours in the kitchen reading the newspaper with his feet and legs soaking in the warm water that Granny had boiled up on the stove. His injured legs were wrapped in the seaweed that Bunty had carefully harvested every morning when she had the chance. Of course she came to realize that the tides were a big problem because when it was an early morning high tide the seaweed was submerged.

Bunty knew that she couldn't take any more time off work to go out on the rocks later in the day so she paid a visit to the donkey stables up by St John's Church. There were no donkey rides on Margate beach during the winter months but a couple of the boys were always up at the stables caring for them. Bunty asked the boys if they would gather seaweed for her during the afternoons when she wasn't able to. They were quick to

make a joke of it all but many of the young donkey boys knew of Ted, Sid and Jack, and could sense Bunty's urgency so finally agreed to oblige and help Monty. Subsequently Bunty and the donkey boys kept Granny and Monty generously supplied with Margate's finest and freshest seaweed.

After several weeks Monty noticed he felt stronger, healthier, much less depressed. One day his legs began to ooze alarming thick yellow pus the colour of honey. Granny went to the chemists and bought a supply of bandages so he could cover up and continue to work. After six weeks bits of wood and metal could be seen just under the surface of his skin and as time went on they could be picked out with Granny's large tweezers. It was all so fascinating to watch and Bunty together with her little band of donkey boys faithfully continued to harvest the seaweed in all kinds of weather and drop it off at Granny's home. Mr Robertson at Evans Chemist and Druggist eventually gave Granny a small bottle of homoeopathic medicine called Calc Sulph, telling Granny that the oozing had gone on for too long and this would help to sort things out. After several weeks there were no more splinters, bits of metal or pus and Monty discovered that he could walk without a stick. His legs didn't hurt anymore, his sleep was good and all his bad dreams about war and death had gone away. In the end it was the love, patience and dedication of several people that eventually reaped the most wonderful healing rewards for young Monty.

Bunty returned to her usual hours working as a receptionist at The Metropole Hotel. May was approaching and with it the summer season, the donkey boys were getting ready for a busy season on the beach and Monty felt for the first time that he and Bunty might attend a dance at The Winter Gardens. Bunty had been so busy with the seaweed that she had quite forgotten about the heart shaped music box on her dresser with the two swans set upon a pond of inlaid mother of pearl. As she pulled out her dancing shoes from the wardrobe she decided to try and turn the key. She recalled how the last time she had tried the key it had been September 25<sup>th</sup> and the first day of the battle at Loos. This was the day that Monty's legs were shattered and the day that no matter how hard she tried the key

just wouldn't turn. The passage of time and nature's healing gifts brought flow and balance to Monty and Bunty's lives. Tonight the key did turn and quite easily. The gentle notes of *Swan Lake* began to fill Bunty's bedroom. She knew they had a future, she knew her faith and resolve had brought them both through a most difficult time. She had acquired the gift of patience and as she opened her door she could have sworn that she saw the smiling image of a wizened old lady in her dressing table mirror!

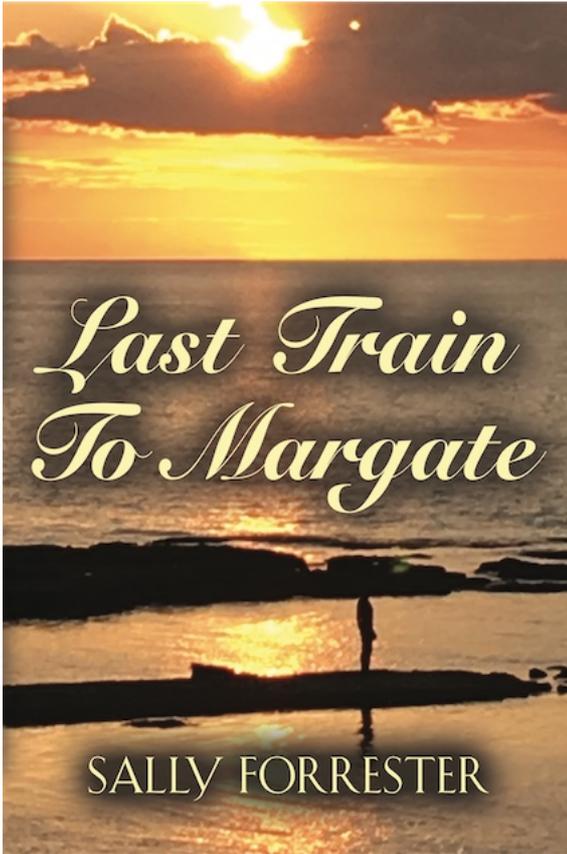
It was September 05, 1925 and a happy band of friends stood on Margate seashore waving to the new Margate lifeboat, *The Lord Southborough* as she motored along the seashore. Lady Southborough had just completed the launching ceremony. Ted, Sid and Jack, accompanied by their wives, together with Bunty and Monty all continued to celebrate by eating jellied eels on the seafront, washed down with a glass of port at The Benjamin Beale public house. It was a good day for Margate and its people. The happy band of friends knew all the fishermen and the lifeboat men; The Great War was a distant memory now. Ted was gainfully employed as an electrician, Sid had taken up an apprenticeship with a carpenter and Jack was a plumber. Bunty and Monty were particularly excited, as they had just taken a lease on a building and there was animated talk of their plans to establish a dancing school and their forthcoming wedding at St John's Church. Ted and Sid had made arrangements for a decorated donkey cart to take the bride to the church and then both of them to the reception. Monty's legs were never good enough to compete but he could dance and he could teach and he had the love and dedication of Bunty. It was more than enough.

As he grew older Sid spent some of his twilight years up at the donkey stables with Ted sitting on a hay bale and reminiscing. When Sid passed away his younger sister, Gladys, inherited his little gold brooch with the seed pearl eye. Sid's wife, children and other siblings had his house and the money in his bank account but Gladys had his donkey. She pinned the brooch to her tweed coat and wore it around the town with pride. As the years passed she lost count of the many people who stopped her and commented upon the little gold brooch. Gladys would tell them that it had belonged to her brother Sid, a brave soldier, a fine carpenter but best of

all he had been a donkey boy. He loved his donkeys and they loved him. Gladys knew she had a treasure much more valuable than the gold from which it was crafted. She knew and really appreciated its story.

When Poppy opened her eyes, Madam was standing next to her and the little heart shaped music box with the two glass swans had dropped into Poppy's lap. "I think it belongs up on the shelf with Ted's donkey brooch, after all they are family," whispered Madam in Poppy's ear. Poppy immediately remembered the roly-poly old lady who had appeared to Bunty. She looked up again at Madam and knew in her heart that it was she. Over a hundred years had passed since the Battle of Loos. That night, lying awake in bed, Poppy toyed with the idea that Madam Popoff might be a time traveller. Of course that's the stuff of fiction, or is it?

As she began to drift off to sleep Poppy began to think again about Dr. Edward Bach and his little tattered booklet, "*The Twelve Healers.*" She realized that *Impatiens* would have been a good remedy for Bunty, she was always in such a hurry and so impatient with those fidgety feet! Monty, out in the trenches, probably would have benefited from *Mimulus* for known fears and during that battle of Loos *Rock Rose*. Poppy thought about all those young soldiers going over the top, they must have been absolutely terrified. *Gentian*, for set backs, would have helped when Monty felt that things weren't the same between Bunty and himself. Also during his recovery when he was so doubtful of ever regaining his legs and getting back on the dance floor.



*When Poppy relocated to Margate she answered a card in the window of the Madam Popoff Vintage Emporium announcing, "Part time help required only special people need apply." She suddenly found herself drawn into a world of wonder, magic and healing. A series of short stories explore the ups and downs of life and the nature of healing.*

## **Last Train to Margate**

by Sally Forrester

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