

*Elderly, mystical, enigmatic Maria Popoff opens another vintage emporium. New employee, Desmond, learns to discern stories of items left upon the doorstep. Key West's rich history unfolds besides ups and downs in the lives of the owners.*

## **From Margate to Key West with Love**

By Sally Forrester

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SALLY FORRESTER

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## Royal Platinum Jubilee Tea Party

While Maria, Cousin Rollo and the rest of the St. Eustace team were celebrating their good fortune exciting happenings were also occurring across the vast Atlantic Ocean. 2022 heralded the 70th anniversary of Queen Elizabeth's accession to the throne. She'd become monarch at the age of 25, following the death of her father in the early hours of 6<sup>th</sup> February 1952. In the months leading up to the Jubilee Poppy was really busy navigating the flurry of celebrations set to take place in the Isle of Thanet. In her rare moments of down time, she often wondered what Maria was up to in Key West. Sometimes she would sigh as she collapsed back at Lookout Retreat after a busy day. She quietly yearned for Maria to return and help out even if it was just for a short while. All three shops were really busy as townsfolk came in seeking bargains from the 1950's. It seemed as if everyone wanted a 1950's vintage style frock ready to wear during the jubilee celebrations!

Over the first weekend in June the 96-year old's Platinum Jubilee was to be marked by four days of celebrations across the United Kingdom. Many of the events - including a pageant, Trooping of the Colour and a star-studded concert at Buckingham Palace - involved an outdoor element. Of course, the fickle weather so notorious in Great Britain, was always a cause for concern. Thankfully it proved to be mostly somewhat kind, sunny and mild for the special long weekend of celebrations. Many street parties were planned to take place locally and Poppy decided early on in her event planning calendar that she would do something special in the Madam Popoff Vintage Emporium situated on King Street, Margate. Of course, nowadays there was the little shop in Ramsgate and the bigger one in Broadstairs too but it was in Margate where her new life had really begun. After all it was in Margate where Poppy had learnt so much from the old, wizened, mysterious shopkeeper. It was the Margate shop that had always captured her heart and had set her upon her own healing journey. It was in Margate that Poppy had finally come to appreciate that she was indeed someone special.



Poppy planned a large tea party celebration for late afternoon on Sunday June 5<sup>th</sup>. The shop would be closed at 2 pm when a band of willing helpers were set to come in and help her to organize for a 4pm start. They had also kindly offered to bake cakes and scones and make delicate cucumber and smoked salmon sandwiches. Racks of clothing would be pushed to one side and the old sewing machine tables would be brought out. Poppy planned to cover them with the beautiful tablecloths that Dennis had embroidered with lovely flower designs back in the early 1950's as he lay in his garden shed recovering from pulmonary TB. Maria Popoff had accumulated a vast collection of elegant porcelain china. All sorts of odd pieces such as cups, saucers, dessert plates and teapots were stashed away in the back-room cupboards. These were well loved treasures that Maria had collected over the years and now they would grace the tables for a fine Royal Platinum Jubilee afternoon tea party. Ollie was set to bring his heavenly harp and Cedric would be accompanying him on the violin. Isadora was going to shop for appropriate bunting and even some cardboard cut outs of Her Majesty. Gertrude offered to hand write pretty invitations decorated with flags and crowns. In mid-May they were mailed to all the regular customers who frequented the Madam Popoff Vintage Emporiums across the local area. Aunt Flora even agreed to come and read the tea leaves and Mary was set to bring in Winston for the tea party as long as sausages were on the menu!

A few weeks before the big celebratory long weekend Poppy arrived very early one May morning at the King Street shop. She planned a major tidy up and to clean the large picture windows before she and Gertrude decorated them with Jubilee memorabilia. It was a beautiful morning, one of those special days when the air was fresh and the sky was just turning a soft pastel blue. The recently risen sun was warm and the noisy seagulls were wheeling around the fishing boats securely tied up beside the stone pier. Margate hadn't woken up yet and Poppy always savoured such special moments. It was times like these when she felt so blessed to be in Margate and so very thankful that she'd made the decision to leave London and embark upon a new life beside the sea when her dear Aunt Flora had beckoned. When the mysterious

Maria Popoff stepped out of the shadows and offered her gainful employment and a whole lot more Poppy began to realize that she had many broken pieces to mend. She began to understand that she'd much to learn in the safety of her new found security. She breathed a sigh of relief as she opened the door, she felt the warm embrace of the little town and its people in her heart and smiling she muttered to herself, "I'm home."

It was only when Jack the lad was settled upon his velvet cushion and she'd made a cup of coffee that she noticed a couple of discreet brown paper parcels left in the recess by the front door. Poppy sat down and carefully unwrapped the mysterious packages. One of them was packed tightly with frocks from the 1950-1970's eras. In the second parcel, amongst layers of faded tissue paper, she discovered a beautiful porcelain cake plate, a matching cup and saucer and what looked like a shaving mug. Upon careful examination she could see that they marked Queen Elizabeth's coronation in June of 1953. They were obviously well loved and in mint condition. As Poppy held the large cake plate decorated with Elizabeth's image to her heart she began to drift off to another time.

Muriel was a proud, well-dressed woman but underneath it all she was just a bored 1950's housewife. Her life was dull. It lacked both focus and purpose. She often felt like a ship adrift at sea without a rudder and wondered what her life was all about. Her husband, Wally, was extremely difficult. Although he was a successful businessman, he was an absolute pain to live with. He was bossy, critical and always liked things to be just so. He demanded that everything should be squeaky clean, neat and tidy in their well-kept bungalow overlooking the sea. He insisted that his dinner was ready and on the table at exactly six o'clock every evening as he walked through the door. After dinner he would sit and read the daily newspaper and then watch his favourite programs on their black and white television. He made little effort to converse with Muriel. Sadly, the love that had once upon a time drawn them together in their late teens, when they met at a local dance hall

during the Second World War, had dissipated in the mundane hum drum of everyday post war life.

Muriel was thirty years old and just a few years older than the new queen at the time of the coronation. She'd been married for ten very long years but unlike the Royal Family they'd not been blessed with any children. By 1953 Muriel was at the end of her tether. She felt isolated and lonely because all of her friends from her school days and the local typing pool, where she'd worked from the age of sixteen until her marriage, had families of their own. They'd all moved on. Muriel was stuck at home. Wally insisted that his wife did not need to venture out to work. He insisted that work was a man's job and it was his role to support his wife and family. He would often chide Muriel when she brought the subject up. Cutting her short and getting red in the face and hot under his collar and raising his voice he yelled, "Muriel what will the people in my office say when they hear that you've returned back to work? It just isn't done with people like us. Think about our social standing. We'll be the target of local gossip and I'm having none of that! I've a well-paid job and there's absolutely no need for you to return to the typing pool."

Being childless Muriel was the odd one out amongst her group of friends. Invitations to social gatherings were few and far between as the years began to fly by because Muriel and Wally didn't fit the traditional family model of two or three children. They couldn't relate to the conversations that young parents often have when their children are growing up. Muriel knew nothing about breast versus bottle. She knew nothing about terry towelling nappies or the latest fads in weening. She wasn't familiar with the local nursery schools or which local school was best for primary age children.

Of course, the long-anticipated coronation was a welcome reprieve. It definitely added some colour to Muriel's dreary life. She would buy the *Woman and Home* magazine at the local newsagents and pour over all the stories featuring the Royal Family. The anticipated glamour, pomp and ceremony of the June 2<sup>nd</sup> coronation helped to take her mind off the

drudgery of her own life. When Wally surprised her by announcing that he had booked a hotel for a few days up in London for the event Muriel felt that her life had suddenly taken a turn for the better. They were going to take the train and stay at a small place near Oxford Street making it easy to get up early on the big day and join the crowds lining The Mall. London would be full of well-wishers and Wally wanted to be sure that they would get a good view of the Gold State Coach as it headed out from Buckingham Palace towards Westminster Abbey. It was to be pulled by eight grey gelding horses.

Muriel was so excited and enchanted by it all, the anticipation and then at long last the train journey up to London on Monday June 1<sup>st</sup>. The small hotel was neat and clean and passed the test of Wally's eagle eyes. On the big day the couple joined crowds of well-wishers waving flags. Muriel looked up at wonder at the Union flags flying from the lampposts. As the coach eventually passed by Muriel even caught a glimpse of Her Majesty wearing the stunningly beautiful George IV State Diadem. This is the crown depicted on stamps. It was made in 1820 and features roses, shamrocks and thistles with 1,333 diamonds and 169 pearls. Unfortunately, June 2<sup>nd</sup> was a cloudy, rainy day but that didn't take any of the magic out of this spectacularly historic occasion. Wally, always thoroughly prepared, had of course brought two large black umbrellas for them both just in case!

Of course, the young couple got swept away with the excitement and grandeur of this once in a life time event. Wally fully intended to boast about their outing to some of his work colleagues when he returned to the office and insisted upon buying a few pieces of coronation commemorative china. A fancy cake plate, cup and saucer were purchased for Muriel and a shaving mug for himself. As the exciting day began to draw to a close the couple went to one of the Lyons Corner House Tea Rooms for a slap up, celebratory late afternoon tea. In their heyday, Lyons had 250 Corner Houses in London. Muriel and Wally eventually wandered back to their small hotel situated just off Oxford Street and near to Selfridge's. They were both pleasantly weary and retired to bed early after spending an hour or so in the hotel's sitting

room. They talked to other weary but excited tourists who'd ventured to London for the coronation and they all shared their memorable experiences.

The couple's small bedroom was located on the ground floor. There were two small windows opening onto a side alley. The room felt hot and stuffy so Muriel cracked one of the windows open a little before retiring. They fell asleep quickly but Muriel was eventually suddenly woken up by the urgent wailing cries of what sounded like a baby. Sitting up she looked at her bedside clock it was 3 am. Muriel crept over to the window and the cries became much louder. She gingerly opened the window as far as she was able and quickly determined that the noise seemed to be coming from one of the aluminium dustbins stored directly underneath the window. Wally was comatose and snoring loudly so Muriel plucked up courage and quickly dressed herself. She quietly closed the bedroom door and ventured down the dark corridor towards the hotel's front door. Wedging it open with a large book from a nearby bookcase, so that she wouldn't be locked out, Muriel stepped into the deserted street. Drawing a deep breath and continuing to pluck up courage she wandered around to the side of the hotel to where the dustbins were located. The crying had stopped so Muriel was uncertain which dustbin to check as there were several of them all lined up against the brick wall. It was dark but she just about made out the room with an open window and looked in the dustbin closest to that window. Muriel lifted the lid; it was dark and difficult to make out exactly what was inside but as she reached her hands down much to her surprise, she suddenly felt something very soft. The bundle stirred and let out a little whimper. Muriel quickly lifted the soft bundle out and there was a little baby wrapped up in a shabby woollen blanket! She gasped and then her motherly instincts took over. She reached back into the dustbin to ensure nothing else pertaining to the bundle was there then she hurried back into the safety of the hotel with the baby cradled safely in her arms.

Muriel knew that she couldn't return to her hotel room as Wally certainly wouldn't be amused at all. She opened the sitting room door,

thankfully it was deserted. Everyone in the hotel seemed to be asleep. In the silence of the night, she turned on a table lamp in the empty room and sat down on the sofa. Muriel slowly began to examine the baby. She carefully unwrapped the faded, threadbare blanket and a tattered piece of paper drifted to the floor. The little baby was naked, it was a girl. She looked up at Muriel with wide eyes. She was fairly clean and seemed to be very young. Having no experience what so ever of babies Muriel really couldn't tell if she was new-born or a few weeks old. Wrapping her up again Muriel reached down to the floor and opened the scribbled note.

*Finder's keepers!*

*I'm so very sorry BUT I just can't manage her.*

*I already have six children. My husband left and I'm on my own with no money or help to feed my children. I beg you to please take care of her. Bring her up as your own and tell her when she's old enough that her mother loved her but just couldn't manage.*

*Hopefully she'll understand.*

Muriel began to cry. Here was a desperate woman with too many children but she and Wally had none. Life seemed to be so very unfair. She'd prayed every night for a baby for so many years and now it seemed that God had finally answered her prayers. As Muriel looked down at the tiny bundle she determined there and then that for once in her life Wally wouldn't be having his own way and that she would do everything that she could in order to keep this little girl. Muriel bent down and lovingly gave the baby a kiss and said, "I'm going to call you Queenie because it was the coronation that brought me to London and led me to you my little one." Muriel cuddled the little bundle and eventually curled up on the sofa and fell asleep with Queenie cradled in her arms.

Doris always set her alarm clock for 5 am because that gave her time to wash, dress and sort her hair out. She touched up her face with a dab of rouge, fine powder and a lick of the latest shade of pink Revlon lipstick. It was the new spring colour touted by the girls who served behind the cosmetic counter at Selfridges. Doris was a woman of routine. She always arrived in the kitchen at 5.30am sharp and spent the next hour preparing breakfast for the hotel guests. She would cover the ten tables in the dining room with freshly laundered crisp white tablecloths and set out the polished cutlery, china cups, saucers and side plates. Then she ventured into the adjoining kitchen and put the water on to heat in the large tea urn. She filled the milk jugs and sugar bowls, set out little pots of thick homemade orange marmalade and pats of bright yellow butter and finally she started to cook the porridge oats on her big aga stove. Once the oats were bubbling nicely away, she sliced the bread ready for making toast.

Bert usually made his appearance by six o'clock. He was a large, jolly man with a big beer belly that made his striped apron a tight fit. He liked to sing the latest popular songs as he would start to prepare the eggs, sausages and bacon. Breakfast was always served between 7 and 8.30 am. The middle-aged couple had a well-oiled routine. They'd run their successful business for almost ten years. It usually catered to businessmen working in the City of London but weekends were usually busy with tourists. They offered bed, breakfast and a set evening meal at a reasonable rate. Therefore, their hotel had gained a good reputation and was often full. Of course, the coronation meant even more business. Tourists had secured their room bookings as far back as the Christmas of 1952.

Doris came downstairs as the clock in the hallway chimed 5.30am and her eagle eyes immediately noticed the large old book obviously out of place and lying on the floor by the front door. When she'd locked up at 11 pm on June 2<sup>nd</sup> she knew that everything was in order and that all of her guests were in for the night. Then she noticed the door to the sitting room was slightly ajar. Doris popped her head around the door and was shocked to see Muriel fast asleep on the sofa and cradling what looked

like a baby! Doris, in her surprise blurted out, “What the dickens is going on here?” As Muriel stirred and began to sit up bleary-eyed Doris recognized her and knew full well that she hadn’t arrived with a baby. Actually, children weren’t allowed in her establishment. Doris and Bert had always made it clear that they only catered to reputable businessmen and married couples on holiday who had no children. Doris married Bert when she was sixteen and immediately fell pregnant with twins. Their boy and girl were now thirty years old; they were long gone from the family home. When the couple established their hotel business, they decided that there were to be no children. They were noisy, unpredictable and often left a mess!

Alarmed and all in a fluster Doris sat on the sofa beside Muriel and peered into the tattered threadbare blanket. She saw a tiny head and what appeared to be a very young baby sleeping. By this time Muriel had really woken up and began to slowly recount the events of the night and handed Doris the scribbled note. Following careful scrutiny of the tattered note Doris announced with an air of authority that she must telephone the local police station immediately and call a doctor to come and examine the poor little waif. Muriel was hesitant, more than anything she wanted to keep the baby. “Muriel, we simply must notify the police and I’ll find you a clean crisp tablecloth to wrap the little mite in.” Doris insisted.

PC Gordon was a married man with a young family of his own. He’d been in the Metropolitan Constabulary for 10 years; he knew Doris and Bert and their hotel as it was located on his local beat. Sometimes he would stop in for shelter when it was pouring down with rain. Doris would ply him with tea and Bert’s famous bacon sandwiches and keep him talking in the kitchen. She loved to hear all the local gossip and PC Gordon always knew exactly what was going on. His heart immediately melted when he arrived at the hotel. It was 6.15 am. Doris was behind with her breakfast preparations and was hastily laying the tables.

Bert had come downstairs and was hovering over the tiny baby wrapped in a crisp white cotton tablecloth and still sleeping in Muriel’s



arms as she sat on the sofa. PC Gordon had seen many things during his 10-year employment but when children were involved, he found his job difficult to cope with. Over his career he'd witnessed 6 such abandoned babies, here was number seven, a wee waif probably a week or so old. He pulled out his notebook, scrutinized the tattered note that Muriel had discovered and sighed. Turning to Muriel he gently said, "Muriel, you probably saved this baby's life. They're often left in dustbins or at bus stops or on the underground platform late at night. If they're not discovered within a few hours, they usually die of hypothermia, heat exhaustion or starvation. The sisters at the local convent take them in, care for their immediate needs and eventually, if the little one is lucky, social services place them with a foster family or a family willing to adopt them."

Muriel started to cry and began to tell the kind policemen her own story. "PC Gordon I'm desperate for a child. I would like to adopt this baby I've already called her Queenie because of the coronation. I feel that God led me to her, he's sent her as a gift to me. I was meant to find her. I've prayed for so many years for a child and the note clearly says *finder's keepers*." PC Gordon scratched his head and said, "Muriel you can't argue with the note. Yes, I agree it does indeed say *finder's keepers*. However, this is very irregular. Couples have to be vetted, there's a whole procedure for folk who want to adopt. My wife's sister can't have children and a few years ago she and her husband had to go through the whole process. It takes time. You simply can't take the train home with this babe in your arms as if you just bought her from a fancy London store! Rest assured the sisters are kind and a local doctor will look her over." Smiling and putting his big hand on her shoulder he continued. "Muriel, I can certainly put in a good word and see if you can visit the convent later today and talk things over with Mother Angelica. You can explain your situation. I know that the sisters have many babies currently requiring adoption. If the paper work goes well I think there's a really good chance that in a few weeks' time you may be able to take tiny Queenie home. I'll telephone the hotel once I've talked with Mother Angelica. Of course, she'll want to meet your

husband too and ensure that the baby is going to a home with two loving and dedicated parents.”

Muriel dried her eyes, kissed Queenie goodbye and placed her in the burly policeman’s capable arms. It was 7.30am. The tempting smell of cooked bacon and sausages was whiffing out into the hallway from the kitchen. Bert had wrapped up a warm bacon roll in grease proof paper and pushed it into PC Gordon’s tunic pocket as he was leaving the hotel with Queenie. The hotel was beginning to wake up and a few guests had already entered the dining room. Muriel was exhausted both emotionally and physically. She was still sitting on the sofa thinking about what she could possibly say to Wally when she caught sight of him out of the corner of her eye. Looking happy and eager for a hearty breakfast he simply thought that Muriel had woken up early and had come to read her magazine in the sitting room.

Muriel knew that her difficult husband needed food before she could possibly broach anything of importance. She dutifully followed him into the dining room, poured him a cup of tea, buttered several pieces of toast and spread them with marmalade. Then she watched him enthusiastically tuck into a plate full of scrambled eggs, sausage and bacon. Unfortunately, before she had time to tell her story Doris had sauntered over to their table and asked where PC Gordon had taken the baby. Wally put down his fork and looking most surprised he enquired, “Muriel, what baby?”

A terrible feeling of utter dread suddenly came over Muriel but she slowly summoned the courage and found the right words to tell her husband all about baby Queenie. What Muriel hadn’t anticipated was Wally’s unusual response. Much to her surprise and delight he actually agreed to accompany her to the convent to meet and talk with Mother Angelica. Deep down Wally had known for a long time now that his marriage was in serious trouble. He knew that his wife was desperate for a child. He knew how depressed and unhappy she’d become and he feared losing her. He also knew that if he was to get on in his office and achieve senior management, he had to have a wife. It certainly wouldn’t

look good amongst his peers if his wife left him or worse still, if she had a mental breakdown or even committed suicide.

The young couple spent that morning wandering up and down Oxford Street window shopping. Then they headed over to St James Park to feed the ducks, sit down and relax whilst enjoying a pot of tea and a sandwich at a nearby café. It was almost 3pm before they returned to their hotel. Doris had been anxiously waiting for their return because the convent had telephoned shortly after lunch and requested that Wally and Muriel visit and take tea with Mother Angelica at 4 pm. Muriel's heart began to flutter as she quickly changed her clothes, combed her hair and put on some lipstick. Wally took a clean neatly ironed shirt out of his case and donned his favourite tie. Doris had walking directions to the convent ready and assured them that it was only ten minutes away so there was absolutely no reason why they wouldn't arrive at the appointed time. As they were leaving Doris shouted, "Mother Angelica is very particular so mind your p's and q's!"

The convent was a large imposing grey stone building surrounded by a high wall. They entered through a large wrought iron gate that creaked as it swung shut. There were a number of trees in the garden and some of them were in blossom. The last of the tulips were still flowering and the iris beds were about to burst forth. A young nun with a rosy face and dressed in a long black habit greeted them at the door and summoned them into the cavernous interior. She introduced herself as Sister Veronica and told them that she would take them to Mother Angelica's study. Muriel immediately noticed a beautiful statue of Mother Mary resplendent in blue and white and cradling baby Jesus in her arms. She had a circle of silver stars suspended above her head. Muriel smiled and immediately felt reassured despite the intimidating building, the hushed tones and the unfamiliar sight of nuns walking by in their black habits with their heads bowed.

Much to their relief Mother Angelica greeted them with a broad smile and a friendly, warm handshake. She introduced Mrs. Brown from Social Services who rose from her comfortable arm chair and smiled.

Turning to address Muriel Mother Angelica said, “PC Gordon has shared your story. Do sit down, tea will be served soon. You’ll be pleased to know that baby Queenie is in the nursery. She has taken a bottle feed from one of the sisters and we’ve found some nice clothes for her. The local doctor stopped by at lunchtime and gave her a good looking over and pronounced her in excellent health. He has estimated that she’s about one week old. Mrs. Brown is here to talk through the whole adoption process and has some papers for you to look over and sign. Of course, there’ll be some back ground checks, that sort of thing but we’re thinking that if all is well you should be able to take baby Queenie home in three- or four-weeks’ time. This will give you both time to prepare a nursery and to purchase all of the basic baby necessities that you’ll need.” Muriel gasped with delight she couldn’t believe what she was hearing. It all seemed like one big fairy tale. Mother Angelica suddenly looked sad and pensive, “Muriel, tragically we have so many unwanted babies here. However, PC Gordon put in a very good word for you both and assured me that Queenie would be going to a good home and that we needed to sort things out quickly while you were both still here in London.”

Early that evening after tea, scones and cakes the couple made their way back to the hotel. Muriel had a spring in her step. She realized that her life had just changed forever.

Indeed, it had, neither Muriel nor Wally remembered the train journey back to Margate the following day and the next few weeks went by in a whirl. They shared their exciting news with their family. Muriel called old friends from the typing pool and Wally mentioned things to his colleagues in the office. Friends, neighbours and relatives were all very excited for the young couple and enchanted by what seemed to be a fairy tale story. Several old friends sorted through their cupboards and donated baby clothes and necessary nursery equipment. Some of the older ladies living in their neighbourhood insisted upon knitting pretty outfits for baby Queenie. Wally insisted that his daughter should have a brand new Silver Cross pram. One just like that used by the royal babies as their nanny had pushed them around in the London parks.

When baby Queenie eventually came home to Margate in early July of 1953 the local paper sent photographers and a journalist to report upon her story. Of course, Wally revelled in all of the attention. Muriel simply smiled and thanked God because at long last she had her baby and all was now well in her world. Queenie was lucky, she was coming home to a comfortable bungalow overlooking the sea and parents who would come to love her dearly and dote upon their only child.

Muriel now had a new focus in her life, a reason to get out of bed every day. She decided to learn how to sew. Wally kindly bought her a sewing machine for her Christmas present in 1953 and she signed up for Mrs. Rodwell's popular sewing classes held on a Friday night in Hawley Square, Margate at The Thanet School of Art. Wally would come home early that evening and baby sit his daughter while Muriel learnt useful dressmaking skills and made new friends. Queenie brought a lot of joy into the household. Muriel was always out and about taking her to the park or to the beach. Sometimes they would meet friends at the Lyons Tea Rooms on Margate High Street for a treat after she'd taken Queenie shopping. By the time that she was three years old Queenie had grown a mop on ginger curls and was ready to start dancing classes at Monty and Bunty's successful dance school.

When she was four years old, they purchased a puppy, a corgi, the breed that Her Majesty adored. The puppy brought yet more excitement and change into the household and they all started to have a lot of fun as a family. Gradually, over time, Wally slowly began to soften, he became considerably more flexible, less bossy, more centred upon helping others and less interested in his image and getting ahead in his office. Queenie brought stability to his marriage and at long last he too began to feel complete and truly happy with his life.

The coronation china, purchased on that magical day back in June 1953, graced the family's sideboard. Every year Muriel would carefully wash the fine porcelain cake plate, cup, saucer and shaving mug and pore over the image of Queen Elizabeth. The china always took her immediately back to the events of that auspicious night when she'd

heard a baby crying under her window. Queenie went on to develop her dancing skills and eventually became a ballerina. In time she married and had a family of her own.

When her parents peacefully passed away in their late 80's, amongst many other things, she inherited the coronation china. It was when Queenie had turned eighteen years old that Muriel had finally plucked up courage and shared the story of her adopted daughter's beginnings. Therefore, when Queenie eventually became the coronation china's guardian, she too had a very special place for it in her heart. However, many years later unfortunately the china became lost or perhaps this was the fine porcelain's destiny.

It all happened in late May of 2022. Queenie was packing up her parents' bungalow. She'd inherited her childhood home when they'd passed away and she'd used it for the best part of fifteen years as a summer weekend getaway. It was the ideal place for her to retreat to when it became too hot in London where she'd been living and working for most of her adult years. Now that she was almost seventy years old, she planned to retire. Her daughter lived in Cornwall and wanted Queenie and her husband to relocate to that area so that they could all be near each other. Now it was sadly time to sell the little family bungalow overlooking the sea. Property in Margate was selling quickly and for a very good price too. Margate was definitely up and coming. A growing number of affluent and well-educated young couples had already relocated or were currently in the process of looking to purchase a property. Following two difficult years of Covid-19 many people had become accustomed to working online and had seen the benefit of such flexibility. Larger houses, clean air and living beside the sea was a big draw especially if there were ever to be more lockdowns in the future! After all, the local Thanet area, had beautiful sandy beaches, clean air and a developing economy focused upon young people with money in their pockets. There'd been an escalation in the growth of a number of new establishments. Kitsch boutiques, cafes, restaurants, bars, art galleries and culture were particularly

attractive to the hipster crowd and drew them to the area. Margate was quickly becoming The Place to live and to be seen!

The neat little bungalow commanded an amazing sea view and no one was really surprised when it quickly sold. Although she'd tried to prepare herself for this painful moment Queenie was extremely sad and found it difficult to hold back her tears. The sale marked the passing of time. It marked the closure of many important chapters in her life. It had always brought back so many pleasant memories from her childhood and the enduring love and dedication of her adoptive parents. However, deep in her heart she knew it was time. Queenie had finally come to realize that this happy little place needed another family. It needed others who would enjoy the view and create their own fond memories. She still had a couple of old school friends living locally who graciously volunteered to help her sort through the home. Following a few video calls the three ladies hastily arranged and advertised a morning yard sale to sell the many things that Queenie had agreed to part with.

The yard sale proved to be most successful. Business was brisk. Thankfully there was no rain in the forecast! The weather was bright, sunny and warm drawing many nosey neighbours out to take a look. They'd mainly stopped by for a chat, to reminisce and to say goodbye to Queenie. Several elderly ladies, well into their nineties, shared their fond memories of Wally and Muriel and remembered tales of baby Queenie growing up.

After lunch Queenie and her friends worked with purpose to clear away what was left. She'd arranged a cleaning company to come by the next day to give the bungalow a thorough going over so that it would be ready to welcome its new occupants. Her husband arrived at 3 pm with a hire van to help out. Remnants from the yard sale were to be donated to charity. Other things such as a few pieces of sentimental furniture were to be packed into the van to take up to their London residence and eventually onto their new home in Cornwall. It was in all the hectic

comings and goings of that sunny afternoon that the carefully packed coronation china was put into the wrong pile of things set aside.

Jean, Queenie's good friend from childhood, agreed to take things in her car to a local charity shop and she knew that there were a few clothes amongst the things set aside that might be appreciated by the staff at The Madam Popoff Vintage Emporium in King Street. This is how the coronation china ended up in Poppy's hands. Several days passed before a distressed Queenie discovered that her adoptive parents very precious coronation china was actually missing and by this time it was all too late. Queenie was forced to sadly accept that the link with the most crucial chapter of her life was finally closed. However, before finally letting go, she'd spent several nights lying in bed late at night wondering if she should return to Margate and visit all the charity shops searching for the china.

It was a memorable dream that finally had helped to set her mind at rest and to bring about closure. Queenie found herself back in the little bungalow. She was seated at the dining room table near the big picture window overlooking the sea. Muriel and Wally were also sitting there with an old, wizened lady who'd stopped by with homemade chocolate cake. The old lady was friendly and seemed to know Muriel and Wally. However, she was drinking tea from the coronation china and happily eating cake off the coronation cake plate. Queenie thought to herself how audacious! The coronation china was sacred. It had never been used for its intended purpose. For her entire life it had always graced the sideboard. As she'd grown up Muriel and Wally had always chastised her and told her never to touch the china. She had constantly been instructed only to look and never to touch. Her mother reverently removed it once a year and carefully washed and dried it. When her parents passed away Queenie had taken up the mantle of guardianship and had dutifully followed the once a year washing routine. Queenie just couldn't believe her eyes and more surprising still was the fact that her parents apparently were taking no notice. They didn't seem to mind at all! The three of them were engaged in animated conversation. Sitting at the table perplexed and not knowing how to respond



appropriately the old lady suddenly turned and addressed her. She seemed to have sensed Queenie's shock and utter dismay. Wally and Muriel looked on as the old woman drew in a deep breath and then spoke with clarity and authority.

“Queenie, it's high time for everyone to move on. Muriel and Wally are happy and in a different place now. They love you; they always have. They want the best for you and one day they'll be waiting for you to come and join them. Sometimes truly moving on means letting go of the past, moving on to new things, new places, new opportunities and new memories, creating your own special memories. Soon their little bungalow will be in others hands. The coronation china was meant to be used and loved. However, it was part of their own special memories because it marked the memory of the day that your mother found you and she and Wally agreed to give you a wonderful home. Let the china go. Let it find a new home now. Let it find people who will love it just as much but in a different way. Let it be used by folk that will eat and drink from it and celebrate the amazing life and legacy of Queen Elizabeth.”

With the ending of those profound words the old woman faded away. Muriel blew her daughter a kiss as she and Wally quickly faded away too leaving Queenie alone with her own thoughts. Then she suddenly woke up. Her pillow was wet from the tears that had gently fallen as everyone had faded. Queenie realized that she'd been given permission to leave things alone. She was ready to begin her new life in Cornwall.

Poppy opened her eyes; tears were flowing down her cheeks too as she gently fingered the fine porcelain china. She turned to Jack the Lad and stroking his silky coat she simply muttered, “quite a story!” Suddenly, out of the corner of her eye, she caught sight of two ladies anxiously waiting on the doorstep. Glancing at her watch she realized it was time to open up for business. There was little time to reflect that particular day because business was brisk. However, that night as all was quiet and still and as she lay in bed at Lookout Retreat, she thought about Muriel and Wally and that eventful coronation night. She wondered

what would have happened if Muriel hadn't acted when she'd heard the baby crying. Poppy felt that some kind of unseen force must surely have drawn Wally and Muriel to that particular hotel. She then sadly reflected upon all the babies who had never made it into the arms of someone who cared, the undiscovered abandoned babies left to die. Then her mind wandered to those who grew up in large institutions and were never fortunate enough to experience life growing up in a loving family home.

Her mind slowly turned to Dr. Bach and his 38 flower remedies and she began to reflect upon some remedies that might have helped the childless young couple. Poppy recalled that Dr. Bach completed his important work not long before his untimely death in 1936. Her active mind reflected upon *Bach Rock Water* for Wally. Initially, before baby Queenie came along and changed the household dynamics, he seemed to have very high standards. He worked diligently and appeared to be most inflexible, a man of routine, particularly hard on himself. Wally certainly insisted that things were done to his own special liking. Poppy also thought that *Bach Vine* would have been helpful too because he liked to dominate others. *Vine* folk tend to be very capable, gifted and ambitious, thinking that they know better than others and they put other people down.

She thought how depressed and lonely Muriel had been stuck at home with no friends, a controlling husband who wouldn't let her work and her own unfulfilled need for a child. Before the excitement and glamour of the coronation she must have been at her wit's end. Poppy thought that maybe *Bach Gorse* would have been helpful at that particular time in her life because it seemed to be a good flower for feelings of hopelessness and despair. She definitely felt that there was no light at the end of the tunnel. After 10 long years of marriage and with no baby on the horizon she felt there was no hope and was about to give up.

Poppy smiled as she thought about baby Queenie who finally brought sunshine into Muriel's life. Wally changed before her eyes; he began to soften as the new baby helped to save their marriage. Finally, she

reflected upon Queenie's life and what a lucky baby she'd been. Her loving, adoptive parents were such a blessing and a gift. It wasn't surprising that she'd found it difficult to come to terms with the loss of the coronation china as it brought back such fond memories of her parents and of her idyllic childhood living beside the sea. Poppy remembered that *Bach Honeysuckle* was a good flower for those who are over-attached to past memories, perhaps of much happier days. On the other hand, *Honeysuckle* may also be useful for people who are unable to get over unhappy past experiences. *Honeysuckle* folk may find it difficult to get over the passing of deceased relatives whom they loved dearly and now they find themselves revisiting the past all of the time.

Poppy smiled, she felt so very grateful for all of Dr. Bach's remarkable work and his teachings. Her new found knowledge had made it possible for her to offer some help so many unhappy, sick customers with these Bach flowers. She fondly recalled the day that she discovered his little tattered booklet describing *The Twelve Healers* in a pile of donated dressmaking patterns and magazines. She recalled how it had sat upon the old oak counter top until she, the student, was indeed ready to receive such an amazing gift. Before falling asleep her mind wandered yet again to Maria Popoff. Poppy constantly deliberated whether the wizened shop keeper might actually be an angel, or was she a magician? On the other hand, perhaps she was simply a wise old-time traveller? However, whatever Maria was Poppy knew that she missed her mystical presence, her all seeing eyes and her guiding hand. She really hoped that her guide, her mentor and her best friend would return one day soon from far away Key West.

The next few weeks were busy in the run up to the Platinum Jubilee. Poppy shared her remarkable coronation china story with Gertrude. They decided that the exquisite china would help to make a perfect window display, after all they'd planned to do something special to mark the historic occasion. Poppy dressed two of the shop mannequins up in some beautiful 1950's vintage clothes that were hanging upon a rack in the back room. She'd saved these elegant outfits for such an

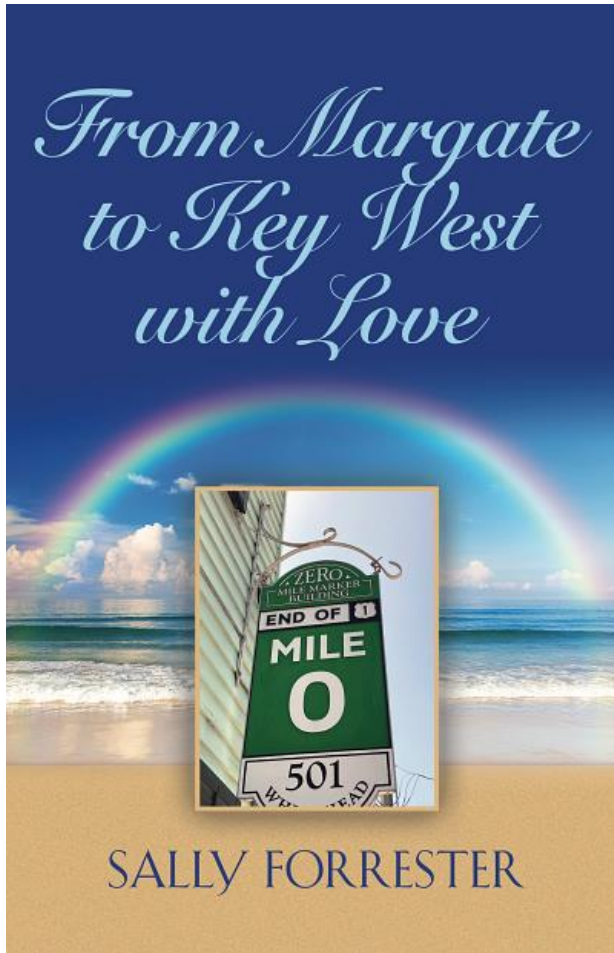
occasion. They'd been left on the doorstep in a large dustbin sack along with some other clothes about a year ago and she felt that one day they might come in useful. Gertrude found matching hats, handbags and gloves all from the 1950's era to complete the scene. Poppy brought two chairs from Lookout Retreat and a little coffee table. The well-dressed mannequins were carefully propped up on the upright chairs and Queenie's beautiful coronation china was laid out on a pretty white lace table cloth. Poppy also brought in a few extra pieces to complete the tea party setting from Aunt Flora's special china cabinet. Isadora's young niece liked to play shops and conveniently had a collection of realistic looking plastic fruit, cake and other foods that she was willing to lend for the window display. Poppy was able to add these to the coffee table and create an attractive 1950's scene. The window was finished by hanging very old union flags that Cedric had recently discovered stored away in the rafters of his garage.

Everyone was excited as the Jubilee long weekend approached. When she returned to Lookout Retreat after a busy day at the shop Poppy and Aunt Flora enjoyed following all the commentary on the television. Margate was bustling with visitors, there were street parties and celebration bunting everywhere. One evening she took her elderly aunt down to the Margate Sands to watch the magnificent firework display. Eventually Sunday arrived, the much-anticipated tea party day! Poppy felt so much gratitude for all those who had graciously volunteered to help. There were all the men folk who helped move the furniture, pushing racks of clothing aside so there was plenty of space for the sewing machine tables. She felt really thankful for all the ladies who'd volunteered to make fancy fairy cakes, scones and sandwiches.

Bill arrived to help out. He'd arranged to borrow a large tea urn from his local radio amateur enthusiasts club. Bill headed for the kitchen to set the urn up. Poppy and Bill had been stepping out together for almost a year now. Poppy smiled as he busied himself with chores and she reflected upon just how much she'd grown to love this dashing silver haired man.

Regular customers from around the local area started to arrive shortly after 4pm. Many of them had dressed in 1950's fashion. Mary arrived with Winston and Aunt Flora stepped out of a taxi holding Sir Humphrey, her darling little chihuahua, cradled securely in her arms. Cedric and Ollie were already playing to the excited gathering. A small table and two armchairs had been set aside for Aunt Flora so that she could read the tea leaves for the curious and adventurous. It was whilst everyone was tucking into delicate salmon and cucumber sandwiches and pouring Earl Grey tea from fancy china teapots that Maria Popoff made a sudden surprise appearance. It seemed that she just appeared from out of nowhere stepping into the middle of the party from behind the large costume mirror at the back of the shop. Everyone gasped as the wizened, portly lady smiled, gave a royal wave and sat down in the armchair next to Aunt Flora. Poppy sighed and muttered to herself, "Maria heard my prayers. I'm so very glad that she came to join us. Our party is now complete."

It was in all the joy and excitement of celebrating Her Majesty's historic milestone that Bill proposed to Poppy. He'd visited SH Cutting the local jeweller in Margate Old Town Marketplace a few days previously and had picked out a beautiful heart shaped sapphire ring surrounded by diamonds. Poppy, with a slice of chocolate cake in hand, couldn't believe her eyes when he'd risen from his chair and had got down on bended knee to propose. Everyone else also looked on with surprise and joy. They put their china teacups down and began to clap as he asked Poppy to marry him. With baited breath they all waited for her answer. Of course, it was *yes*, how could it have been anything else? Poppy had fallen head-over-heels with this kind, gracious and intelligent widower who was crazy about her and old radios!



*Elderly, mystical, enigmatic Maria Popoff opens another vintage emporium. New employee, Desmond, learns to discern stories of items left upon the doorstep. Key West's rich history unfolds besides ups and downs in the lives of the owners.*

## **From Margate to Key West with Love**

By Sally Forrester

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