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## Woe Betide

by Stuart Carruthers

Overhead the gulls squawked and Helen smiled and wondering if their excitement was a result of seeing a stranger walk along the pier wall. Secretly she hoped it was.

The fishing fleet had long gone. The village was deserted. The small sandy beach was covered in dirty white foam, or mermaids as her mother used to call them. This was once their favourite place to play. The children of the village would spend their free time skimming stones or making up stories about the rubbish that would often wash ashore. Within the chimes of the onshore wind she could hear her brother's childish laugh. She was too angry to cry.

Whenever people left Innisraig, they seldom returned. Of the two young girls who boarded the bus that bitterly cold morning, only one would return. They had no choice. There was nothing their parents could do. The communities within these unseen fishing villages are very close knit and that proved a problem for Helen and her best friend. Her parents were well respected in the community but they couldn't defend their daughter after the incident with Jack Wallace's son. The Gardaí were never called. They resolved the problem themselves, or at least they thought they had.

Sometimes people need to lie to themselves most of all. That's the only way they can survive.

For over twenty years that was Helen's escape mechanism but unfortunately her best friend Kate wasn't as strong a character and eventually she found the devil at the bottom of a bottle. Death by mental torture.

Externally she could give the appearance of a vibrant happy person, yet inside Helen was anything but. She was desperate for the day when her sins would be forgiven. Her brother's death offered such an opportunity.

The twisting footpath that led up to the family home took Helen past row upon row of fishermen's cottages. There wasn't a soul to be seen. But she could sense her every move was being watched. Turning the key in the door the first thing she noticed was that familiar homely smell.

There would be no more lies she quietly told the empty cottage.