



The Wink of Summer

SHORT STORY

MARINA GERRARD

THE WINK OF SUMMER

By Marina Gerrard

Copyright 2022 Marina Gerrard

It was a summer no one remembered. For the simple reason that it winked out of existence and back in when it was all done and dusted. What happened in between was anybody's guess. Though no one was interested in doing so. Guess that is. They were not required to. It had nothing to do with them. Nothing whatsoever.

When push came to shove the summer of that year was pretty much lost to memory. There was nothing to remember it by. If anybody even noticed that the days on the calendar had come and gone without them the only comment it rated was 'oh my, doesn't time fly?'

True, there were a few that moaned. They were the ones that were normally tanned to within an inch of their lives. They compared their milky white arms with those of others. Then they shook their heads sadly. 'Should have gone to the Canaries,' they said. Little did they know that summertime had been eclipsed there too. Like it had been everywhere else. They looked at their pale faces in the mirror and gave it a deep sigh. 'Not a good summer' was all they could come up with. Some just turned the mirror around. They forgot all about looking at themselves until the winter sun in Switzerland had tanned their faces and the après-ski had rewarmed the cockles of their saddened hearts. It never occurred to them to question what 'it' was that had happened.

Of course, it had all been over in the blink of an eye, so to speak. But it hadn't been an eye that had blinked or winked, was it now. It had been summer itself. There was, however, no question of it having been 'on the blink' (subdued chuckle, snort) or even of having glitched. No, treble no. It hadn't been that at all. Not at all!

'It' hadn't been a temporary malfunction nor a fault of equipment. Unless one counts a temporary lack of noddle a malfunction, but apart from that, no. Categorically not. It had been something quite else. An unfortunate happenstance. Yes, certainly that.

It hadn't been an error of judgment on her part. Oh no. A mistake at best, if you wished to call it that. Summer certainly wanted to call it that. But what happened had been her fault. Hers. No one else's. Hers. Yes, Summer was female. Always had been. Always would be. Summer with a capital S, to distinguish her from that insipid season called summer. She had felt for a long time that the lower cast 's' made her invisible. So one day she decided to do something about it. That's all. But what actually happened hadn't been what one might call

‘wilful’. It hadn’t been . . . planned. As such. Besides, even though what she did was done on purpose, her intent had not been malicious, had it? Or had it? Subconsciously perhaps.

All she had wanted was to cause a stir but not the kind of havoc it had wreaked. Purposeful yes when it came to the act but premeditated no when it came to the consequences. She had simply made a mistake. A mistake but one that had undesired consequences. And those consequences were hers to regret. That sort of thing happens, doesn’t it? Doesn’t it?

Summer sighed and shook her head.

When it came to humans, yes. But when it came to nature, no. Nature doesn’t make mistakes. It is. It runs its time but it does not, NOT, make mistakes. And she wasn’t human, was she now. She was a natural occurrence. She came, she went. It was her given path, her assigned slot in the year. Nothing she could do about that. So that ruled out mistakes. But nature also wasn’t wilful, was it now. So what did that make her?

She didn’t know.

But admit it. She had tried, hadn’t she? Tried to change the course of things. Push her way to the front, draw attention to herself. Be visible. In every one’s eye. The way she had seen humans do. So again what did that make her?

A fraud, at best. A pretender.

Summer cried when she passed this judgment on herself. In doing so she producing a little bit of summer rain. Not that anybody noticed. It dripped like a single tear into the fold of time where Summer had her allotted place in the wheel of nature. Her rain would not fall now until her slot came up again. Next year. After her sister Spring had done her bit, that was. That was the way things were.

That being said the undeniable fact of it upset her hugely. She had hoped for better things but there she was. Tucked away again. Invisible. Biding her time as she had done before and would be doing for aeons after. All she could do in the meantime was reminisce. For after all there was something that came out of it all. Memories. That thought brought a little cheer to her heart. It burst out like a little ray of sunshine that briefly pierced Autumn’s gloom.

Her brother Autumn didn’t mind. He felt the glow, brief though it may be, and warmed himself on it. If he hoped for more he would be disappointed because Summer had already

lost herself in happy, though regrettable, memories of what had occurred. And how it had come about.

It had all started when, thinking about visibility, her eye had fallen, and rested, on something that gave her the idea. The door. The one that gave access to her ‘abode’, her residing place. The place underground she retired to after she had done her summer thing. Where she was *banished* to, she had begun to think. Imprisoned, as it were. Not a happy thought. But there it was, the door. Affording not only entry but also exit. A thing that opened and closed. That offered opportunities. Such was her train of thought. Then.

Yes, that had been it, hadn’t it. She permitted herself a little snigger when she thought about it.

Funnily enough that door of hers was also the one and only thing visible in what one could call ‘real time’, human time. There it attracted no more than amused notice. From people who walked the park and accidentally saw it sitting there, a minute door lodged into the bottom of a huge tree. When they saw it they just assumed it had been someone’s idea of fun. *Look*, they would say, *a fairy door*. Then they would tell their kids stories about elves and dwarfs as they carried on walking. Summer herself didn’t know who was responsible for the door and why it looked that small on the outside. From inside it looked much bigger. She had never given it any thought. To her it was just there. Always had been. It certainly wasn’t sitting there for fun. It had a purpose. It was the door to summer itself, to the underground place where Summer readied bulbs and plants to push theirs heads above ground and sample the summer sunlight when their time came. Little did they know about that, those people who pointed and laughed and then moved on without giving the door and what it meant any further thought. Unaware and uncaring.

That’s what peeved Summer royally. The very thought of being dismissed. Just like that. Exactly like she was. It had to change, she had decided. And, looking at that little doorway, that’s when the idea had come. Yes. The idea of a summer clean.

She really didn’t know why Spring should have the prerogative of doing any cleaning. She cleaned for her brothers Autumn and Winter. They came before. After the cleaning Spring sat pretty. She never cleaned for Summer. Summer came after, which was already a sore point with her. But after all the dust of Spring’s cleaning had cleared it settled down in Summer’s

quarters. There it was invisible and hence forgotten. Except by Summer. Summer felt the prerogative for cleaning should be hers. By now there was so much dust in her quarters that she could barely move. The air was stuffy, the temperature was rising, it was stifling and everything was covered in thick layers of dust. It made her sneeze. After each sneeze she dolefully watched the dust swirl and swirl and then settle again. But then she saw that little door. The idea of opening it and brushing the whole lot out sprung out of nothing. It blossomed and bloomed within a bare second and she acted. Right there and then. On impulse. No ifs or buts. No second thought or anything.

She opened the door and let out a huge blast of scent. Her store of scents contained many. Luscious, thick and fruity scents. Leafy, glorious, ripe and honeyed scents. She let them all out and they swept over every surface. Dust rose from everywhere. It tickled her nose, brought tears to her eyes and made her sneeze like she had never sneezed before. It was a humongous, cracker of a sneeze. It shook her whole abode. It created a tremendous draught that took every ounce of dust with it. Out of the door, exactly as she had wanted. However, the sneeze had been of such magnitude that it also affected the weather. A huge gale blew up. The first -and in this case only- summer gale of the season. Because at the same time, unfortunately and totally unexpectedly, the force of the sneeze had also blown Summer herself out of the door. Thus she followed in the slipstream of the gale and was transported. With that the wink, or blink if you wish, was a fact. Summer was no longer in her allotted slot. She was nowhere to be found. She was somewhere totally else.

It all happened so fast that she didn't realize what the consequences were. Besides she was enjoying herself too much. For the first time in her existence she felt free.

Where did she go? She didn't have a clue. And truth to tell, she didn't care. She was up in the air reaching for the sun. She was rushing down diving into the sea. She danced with the birds, she swam with the fishes. She floated and she swirled. Head over heels, topsy-turvy. In short, she had a whale of a time. Wherever she passed she trailed the scent of apples and ripening fruit. Something that went totally unnoticed by anyone. Well, except for those of course who were extremely sensitive. They felt her leave or rather they smelled her, as there was that huge surge of scent. Quite a few of them sneezed since they were allergic to that kind of thing. But that was all. The scent soon evaporated and memory with it.

When night time came Summer tried for the stars but there she failed. When all was said and done, she was bound to the earth and its seasons. Eventually her gyrating stopped and she landed back on her feet.

When she looked around she had a shock. She fully expected to be back in familiar surroundings. She expected to see summertime. Her time. A time of fruition, fulfilment, happiness and above all beauty. But everywhere she looked her eye met the same thing. A blankness without any definition whatsoever. No blossom, no bloom. No colour of any kind. Nothing summery at all! Just a uniform, dismal grey.

Another thing she didn't see was that little door, her entry back to summer, to normal life, but it wasn't there. That was when she panicked. Oh yes. She didn't have a clue where she was. She didn't know how to get back to where she had started. She was lost. At that moment she went as blank as her surroundings and froze.

It took a while for the panic to disappear. When it had gone she came to her senses, albeit chastened. She took in her surroundings once more and realized she must be somewhere 'in between'. Wherever that was.

Panic tried but she nipped it in the bud. This was no time to panic. It was time for some serious thought and then some serious action. She knew full well that she couldn't let the situation carry on for long. Spring wouldn't miss her, the silly cow. She would have gone to sleep by now. But Autumn would. He wouldn't know where or when to begin. He never thought for himself. Too mellow and laid back for his own good. Came with being a male perhaps. Who knew. He'd be lost without her.

A slow tear started to trickle. She hadn't meant for this kind of disruption to occur. She wiped the tear away with an angry movement. This wasn't the time for self-pity either.

Summer settled herself on a grey piece of nonentity and tried to track back to where it had all started. She skipped the bit about wanting to stir things up. She had stirred things up and now she was sitting in or on the consequences. No, she started at the point where she had opened her cupboard full of scents. She tried to remember what she had stored there. There were so many, luscious, beautiful scents. She could almost smell them. She briefly lost herself

in them. Then she pulled herself up by her ears. Stay with it, girl, she admonished herself. You can't afford to dream away your precious time.

Something tweaked her memory. She sat up straight.

There had been something in those scents that had made her sneeze. Not just any old sneeze. No. A humongous beast of a sneeze. What was it? Which one had it been? She carefully separated the scents and went through them one by one. Finally she got it. Cinnamon. Of course. The spice that went so nicely with apple pie.

It wasn't a summer scent. It wasn't fruity or leafy. It wasn't fresh or breezy. It certainly was aromatic but it was . . . spicy, pungent. More of a medicinal thing. Which just wasn't the kind of perfume Summer liked to wrap herself in.

The cinnamon leaves with their tiny white flowers had been a careless gift from a visitor who had walked past and dropped them in front of her door. At the time she'd thought they looked and smelled rather nice and put them in her storage cupboard. Then she'd forgotten all about them. Over time the oil in them had become stronger. By the time she opened the door of her cupboard for her intended clean it had started seeping out. When it combined with the dust, it made a concoction so spicy it had made her tear up and sneeze. Not just any old sneeze. No, it had ran up her nose and provoked it into that goshalmighty horse of a sneeze that had blown everything including herself out of the door and slammed it shut behind her. Open and close. One single mini-second. Wink completed.

Now she knew how and why it had happened. But that didn't help her any closer to a solution, did it now. No, it didn't. Summer hung her head despondently for a moment. She still didn't know where she was or how to get back.

A faint breeze blew across her face. She looked up. It had been a non-entity of a wind but still it gave her an idea. It must be coming from somewhere. Wind normally went from A to B, didn't it. Wherever A or B was. But whichever way it was blowing it swept things with it. And deposited them. Like she had been deposited. A little flame of hope lit in her despondent heart.

A was where she had come from and B was where she had landed. Yep.

She didn't care about B but getting back to A was paramount. After all, that was where she belonged.

She closed her eyes and concentrated. The breeze she had felt had come and gone and for a while there was nothing. Just when she was about ready to give up it was there again. Faint, but there. She turned her face this way and that, trying to gauge the direction it was coming from. It refused to be pinned down. The breeze was fluffy, it was playful. It tickled her face and then it ran away again. It took Summer quite a while to realize that the breeze was there to help her. It came, it went but it always returned and when it returned it tugged at her. Faintly, but yes it tugged. It pulled at her hair, it teased her up from the greyness she sat on and it always faded away in one particular direction. It pointed.

Summer wondered if that was the way she was supposed to go. Or did she have to go the opposite way? Against the wind. The direction she had flown in on. After some deliberation she decided that it didn't matter one little bit. The blankness that surrounded her had deprived her of any sense of direction. Besides, the wind might have shifted direction. It might be blowing from north to south or east to west or vice versa and she wouldn't know. There was nothing to gauge its direction by. Even its temperature had gone to blank neutrality. And there were no scents. Not even that of the cinnamon that had caused her so much trouble. She sighed. She was in deep doo-doo. She might as well follow the breeze and see where it took her.

The breeze came. It tugged and she followed. She moved forward. Or was it backward? There was no way of knowing whether she was going from B to A or anywhere else. The non-descript blankness around her did not change but the breeze was there and she followed.

Summer had no idea how long she had been going when she realized that a scent had penetrated the blankness. It was a gentle scent, indefinable but definitely summery. One of her own. With the scent came a ray of hope. She stopped in her tracks. She looked around but apart from the scent nothing had changed.

The scent faded and she was left with the breeze and the blankness. She sniffed but there wasn't a trace left. Nothing. Summer felt bereft and a tear slowly slipped down her face. Another one followed. And another. Slowly they dripped down and down, until they reached the solidness beneath her feet. There they made a little puddle and then a slightly bigger

puddle. Then the weight of her tears found a bit of a slope and an unevenness in the terrain and they began to flow.

Oh, it was only a little trickle but it flowed and it went from here to there, wherever that was. It was the slow movement of the water that caught her eye and Summer stopped crying. The breeze tickled the flow and made it ripple. It reminded Summer of the river outside her door. It made her feel quite homesick. She almost started to cry again. She took a deep breath and blinked until the urge to cry stopped.

The little river didn't stop, though. It ran on and she let her eye follow it. Like the breeze it had a direction. And it happened to be the same direction. Hope rekindled. She started to move again. A little faster this time. And faster still until she practically ran. This reminded her of herself running with the wind and the water, her hair flying wildly all over the shop. As she did at home. Her home. This made her feel so homesick again she stopped running. The water and the breeze ran on without her and soon disappeared from view. Summer cried out. She almost gave up then but then something pulled at her heart. It told her *Do not. Do not dare to give up! That way you'll never get home.*

Summer sniffed and fought back another bout of tears. She slapped her face and told herself off. She was made of sterner stuff, wasn't she. She wasn't like her silly, frilly sister Spring. No, she wasn't. She was strong and determined like her brothers Autumn and Winter. There was no getting around her, was there. As long as she was there, that is. So move yourself!

Summer moved. She took a tentative step in the general direction of where she had seen the wind and the water go. Then she picked herself up and started to trot. It wasn't long before she got a whiff of the scent she had lost. It was extremely faint. She inhaled it deeply and it suddenly came to her what it was. Peony. That lovely pink roundness which came at the tail end of spring and the beginning of summer. It had such a short flowering time that the fragrance usually barely registered with Summer. She had stored it in her cupboard, however, where it sat forgotten. Until now.

Since there wasn't a bud or a bloom in sight she assumed -no she knew- the scent came from her cupboard and she took heart. She carried on in the same direction, moving between nowhere and somewhere, hoping. And yes, not long after she encountered another scent. A

stronger, quite unmistakable one this time. Honeysuckle. Another one of her own! That's when she knew she was on the way home. Oh, it gladdened her heart so much she started to skip. And hop. And twirl. Her skirts flew, her hair raised and she laughed. And then it all stopped.

Because another scent came. Well, scent was too nice a word for it because it stank. It was a vile smell, the dank smell of leaves rotting in their buds, of bulbs and roots dying before they managed to push their plants above surface, the smell of drought and despair, a hopeless waiting for rain that would not fall. The smell of dust. She smelled the lack of summertime. She also detected the early signs of Autumn's coming without herself being there to anchor him in place. That's when she realized the enormity of what she had done. It suddenly dawned on her that getting back home was of the utmost urgency. Not only for Autumn but also for herself. After all, she had a duty and she had been negligent in performing it. The urgency piqued her into renewed action. It spurred her on. She ran, she flew, meeting more and more familiar scents on the way. Lavender, sweet pea, mock orange, phlox. All the flowers she now knew had died on their stems without their buds having opened, if they had even come to grow that far. The fear of arriving too late gave her wings.

It didn't take long before she started to see the blank non-entity of her surroundings take on colour. Soon after familiar landmarks appeared. Parts of the landscape that were perennial and not affected by her absence. The remnants of Spring's frivolous reign. Then the signs of neglect. The lack of fruition and ripening of fruits. The dank smell of rot that trailed behind her. All the evidence of Summer not doing what she had been supposed to do. It broke her heart. Her eyes started watering, shedding tear after tear on the cracked soil beneath her feet.

Summer cried, thus producing the first summer rain in the parched land thirsting for water. The torrent of tears blinded her but it didn't stop her moving. She carried on until her hands touched the tree that held the door that afforded entry to her domain. That's when she stopped crying and heaved a sigh of deeply felt relief. She was home. She opened the door and slipped inside.

But all was not yet well. Her home might be empty of dust but when she looked outside her eye was met by devastation. And time was of the essence. By now summertime had passed and she could feel Autumn approaching, ready to take her place.

It took Summer quite a while to restore order, both outside and inside her home. It fair wore her out. When she was finally ready it wasn't a moment too soon. There was a bang. A gust of wind blew the door open and there was her brother Autumn standing on the doorstep, dressed in a multitude of colours and raring to go. He barged in, then stopped in his tracks. He looked her up and down and scanned her face with a frown.

'Blimey, sis,' he said. 'Don't you look pale and peaky. Never seen you without a glorious tan before! Where have you been!'

'Don't ask,' Summer said tiredly. 'It's a story with a long tail and I don't think you'd want to know.'

'But I do want to know,' Autumn insisted.

'Oh very well,' Summer sighed.

She threw herself back on her lounger, which instantly collapsed from lack of use.

Autumn helped her up.

'Do hurry up, though,' he said. 'I have things to do and places to go. I have to rustle up the wind for starters. There is so much dust hanging around. There isn't a leaf that hasn't turned grey and wrinkled. But that's nothing new. You always, always, leave a lot of dust everywhere.'

Summer started to cry again. Her tears wet the floor and then they ran out of the door, where they created another, much missed, refreshing summer rain.

'Stop that right there,' Autumn cried. 'It's my time now and you're raining on my parade!'

Which made Summer cry even harder, having missed every single one of the summer pageants and flower parades she so loved.

Autumn rushed out of the door and slammed it for good measure. The first thing he did was turn the refreshing downpour into a sharp, stinging, blustery one.

'Summer is over,' he crowed as he swept the dust away.

Things were never quite the same afterwards. The relationship with Autumn remained strained for a long time. Spring never noticed anything because she slept through it all, the dozy cow. And Winter, well. The least thing said about him the better.

Summer sighed a lot, long and deeply. The sigh occasionally seeped out of the door. There, unknown and unseen to her, it combined with Autumn's gales to gain storm force. What she did know was well and truly never to wink again, planned or unplanned, wilful or not. Especially in combination with a sneeze. It wasn't worth the cost. She couldn't deny, though, that she had been enjoying herself hugely. The memories of that moment of freedom were sweet indeed. But there had been consequences. Severe ones. Her sneeze had caused devastation. The thought sobered her. Guilt came and then shame. Not only had she herself lost out on summer gladness. She had also deprived her human clients of the fruit of her loom, hadn't she? Even if they hadn't noticed and only grumbled about what a non-ness of a summer it had been. Hoping that next year would be better. Summer vowed sincerely it would be so. She would see to it. Dust and all. It was too late now to make amends but there was always next year. Summer wiped her tears away, took a deep sniff and allowed fatigue to take over. Soon snores filled the empty room. She did not wake up until Spring was started on her next bout of cleaning and dust began to fly everywhere. Summer woke up when dust tickled her nose and she was about to sneeze but this time she was well prepared. There was a huge box of tissues sitting beside her and at the first sign she grabbed a handful of tissues and caught each sneeze before it was ready to build. There would be no more winking. Summer would make sure of that. Absolutely.

###

Thank you for reading my short story. If you enjoyed it, won't you please take a moment to let me know? You can do so by contacting me through my website www.marinagerrardfiction.com. You'll find more information about my Dark&Scary and Light&Airy e books and my short stories there too.

Thanks!

Marina Gerrard

The Wink of Summer is a work of fiction. The contents are solely the product of the author's imagination. Except for that little door in the tree. That actually exists! Any resemblance to incidents that may have occurred or actual people, living or dead, is entirely coincidental. Any echoes of popular songs, adverts or catchphrases of TV programmes, if any, are purely meant as clues to memories stored in the author's memory bank.

About the author

Marina Gerrard graduated to writing novels after finishing a creative writing course and producing a few prize winning short stories. She is the author of Journeys into the Heartland, a mini series of three psychological thrillers that delve deeply into the world of relived traumatic experiences. After finishing this trilogy she decided it was time for something less intense. She then embarked on writing a series of light-hearted novels that can be best classed as 'dreamscapes'. In between she took to writing short stories. Her books and short stories are available in e book format, the short stories also in PDF.

Discover other titles by Marina Gerrard

The Journeys into the Heartland series

Eyes of Darkness

Demons

Fault Line

Dreamscape series

Dream Weaver

The Garden Path

Short stories

Moonfish

A Whiff Of Something Else

The Waiting Hour

Forty Winks but One

Whistling at the Moon