

My Favourite Mistake by Marian Keyes

Stunned into silence, six faces stared at me.

Claire was the first to find her voice. ‘Anna, you’ve gone insane.’

A quick introduction to my sisters. Claire, the eldest, had an important job in the upper echelons of a global charity, wore covetable clothes, and talked a lot about sex and sexism. She budgeted for Botox the way other people budget for car insurance. (A necessity.)

‘Completely insane.’ Helen insisted. ‘Who wants to live in Ireland? It’s a shithole!’

‘An absolute shithole,’ Mum insisted.

Helen was the fifth Walsh sister, the only one younger than me. At first glance she seemed like a high-spirited teenager. Devoid of filter, her combative energy won her enemies wherever she went. She’d never fitted in and she’d never cared. Self-employed (because she’d kept getting sacked), she made a decent enough living as a private detective.

‘Anna? What about your job?’ Margaret, the second eldest, was direct but never cruel. The polar opposite of Claire, she had zero interest in injectables and had long stopped covering her greys. Partial to slow-fashion clothing in shades called Woad and Black Cabbage, but when she made the effort, she – in Helen’s immortal words – looked ‘like a social worker who’s having an affair’.

‘Will you be working remotely?’ Margaret asked.

I braced myself. ‘I’ve handed in my notice –’

As expected, uproar ensued.

‘I can’t do that job any longer.’ I needed them to forgive me. ‘Not for any money. I’m broken.’

‘You need a rest and a reset,’ Claire said. ‘Spend a little time in this country where the restaurants are pathetic and a funeral counts as a day out, where you have

non-existent public transport and zero privacy.’

‘Where there’s no opera –’ Margaret said.

‘– thank Jayzus,’ Helen said.

‘– or ballet –’

‘– thank Jayzus again. I love Ireland.’

‘You’re stressed.’ Claire said. ‘Everyone is stressed. Look at Rachel there, holding the lives of addicts in her hands!’

Rachel, the middle sister, was the Convert – a good-time girl who went to the bad then returned to the good. Wise and clean-living – except when it came to expensive trainers – she worked as an addiction therapist.

‘I’m more sad than stressed,’ I said.

‘But you’ve The Best Job in The World, tee emm!’ Mum choked out. ‘I’ve lorded it over my sisters for years. Don’t take this away from me.’

‘Sorry, Mum. In five months’ time, I’ll no longer work in beauty PR.’

‘No more free stuff?’ Helen sounded faint. ‘But this is . . . illegal. Imma get an injunction.’

‘Instead of free skincare, you’ll have me around all the time! That’s so much better, right?’

Helen’s sour look made me laugh.

‘I’ve spoken to lots of recruiters. I’ll definitely get a job.’

‘Doing what?’ Helen was suddenly breathless with hope. ‘Beauty PR? Right here in Dublin?’