

One for sorrow, two for joy,  
Three for a girl, four for a boy.  
Five for silver, six for gold,  
Seven for a secret that must never be told.

Traditional

## *Chapter One: A different world*

The ten-pound note appeared as if by magic. A breath of air from the open door lifted it from behind the chocolate display and chased it across the counter. It teetered on the edge then fluttered to the floor and came to rest beside the feet of seventeen-year-old Stephen McBride.

Stephen glanced around the shop. Next to the magazine rack, a fat, middle-aged man wearing soiled dungarees was leafing through the latest issue of Playboy. Closer to him, a freckle-faced schoolgirl was standing on tiptoe gripping the top of the freezer, trying to decide which ice cream to choose. Neither was paying Stephen any attention. His eyes flicked to the elderly shopkeeper. He too was busy, making silly clucking noises over a baby held up by its adoring mother.

*All clear.*

He crouched down, seized the note, and stuffed it into his trouser pocket.

When he rose, the shopkeeper was peering at him over his glasses. 'What do you want, lad?

A drum pounded in his head and for a second he couldn't remember why he was here. It came back to him in a rush and he blurted out, 'A packet of Senior Service, the Daily Record and the latest Rave magazine please, and I'd like a quarter of Black Jacks.' Even though his face was burning, he forced himself to meet the shopkeeper's searing gaze.

The old man measured out the sweets on his scales, watching Stephen through narrowed eyes. 'A quarter pound of Black Jacks, right,' he said, twisting closed the

paper bag and sliding it across the counter. He plucked the cigarettes from the shelf behind him and picked out the two publications from the stacks on the bench. ‘Do you need a bag?’

Stephen nodded and thrust a crumpled ten-shilling note at the man.

McIntyre handed him his purchases and some coins, then turned his attention to the girl who was still searching for an ice cream. ‘Can I help you there, lass?’

Checking his change, Stephen hurried outside. His heart soared and he longed to jump into the air and pump his fist. He was desperate to look at the ten-pound-note and make sure it was real, but he didn’t dare until he was in a safe place. And it wasn’t safe here.

Stephen had learned the hard way to keep his head down if he didn’t want to attract the attention of the bovver-boys. He slung the shopping bag over his shoulder and stretched out his hands. One pinkie was fatter than the other thanks to Archie Stewart, who had ordered his pals to hold him down while he banged Stephen’s hand with a brick. He had been five years old at the time, but the injury was still there as a constant reminder that Archie was capable of anything.

He pushed away the memory and scrunched the banknote in his pocket. *Feels genuine all right, but it might only be a quid.* He risked pulling out a corner to make sure.

*Ten pounds.*

His mind whirled—he was rich!

Now he could afford that second-hand guitar he had been begging his parents to buy him for months. *But they’ll want to know where the money came from, won’t they?* Reluctantly, he abandoned the idea of the guitar, and the Chelsea boots he was keen on. There was no point in thinking about a new pair of ice-skates, either. He wouldn’t be able to explain having any of these things. The thought struck him that there wasn’t a lot he *could*

buy without inviting unwelcome questions. Then he saw the poster affixed to the streetlamp. The fair had come to town. *Perfect!*

As he turned onto Juniper Drive, the evening sun cast long shadows over the brooding tenements, and his mood plummeted. He had been in dreamland. What was the point of wishing and hoping when this was his reality? He felt the buildings press in on him: the grey verandas with their shabby shirts and tattered trousers hanging lifeless in the still air; the coal smoke oozing sullenly from soot-blackened chimney pots high above; and the wild grasses and weeds crawling from untended gardens, spreading their long green tendrils across the footpath.

Children were playing on the road like urchins from a Dickens tale, wearing hand-me-downs too big for them or fit only for the rag-man. Girls chanted 'Blue Bells, Cockle Shells' whilst leaping from square to square, oblivious to everything except the rough chalk lines of their hopscotch. Stephen trapped a wayward ball and tapped it back to some lads playing three aside with goalposts marked on the road by cans and jackets. Some toddlers peddled tricycles past him, their bare knees angled outwards, backs hunched over handlebars, and bells and hooters clanging. They might be poor, he thought, but these kids are happy. He knew that would change by the time they reached their teens. He had seen it happen often enough before. A few would escape their surroundings and make their way in the world while others would remain imprisoned here forever.

He vowed not to let that happen to him.

Stephen had lived most of his seventeen years in a council-owned tenement flat on the outskirts of Glasgow. Like most, he had left school as soon as he turned fifteen, and had taken on unskilled, poorly-paid work at local factories and building sites. It wasn't long before the excitement of bringing home a weekly wage faded, and

he came to the realization he would have to go back to school if he wanted his life to change.

Now, in August 1965, he had finished the first year of the Certificate in Civil Engineering at Joseph Banks College. This marked him as different from other youths in the area and—like an albino lacking camouflage—made him an easy target for predators.

Outside number five, a train of baby carriages was being watched over by elder brothers and sisters who shook plastic rattles and replaced spurned dummy teats trying to soothe the restless occupants. Stephen recognized the red-haired Brannigan twins, blankets askew, bootees discarded, and legs kicking furiously. The McPhees and the Camerons were there too, as was the latest addition to the brood of seven belonging to his next door neighbors. Where on earth did they all sleep? The Fergusons lived in a three-bedroom flat, just as he and his family did.

No-doubt, the babies' mothers would be at their weekly get-together, enjoying cups of tea, sweet biscuits, and a generous helping of gossip. The street gangs didn't bother parents or young children much, which didn't surprise him given they often included brothers, sons, and other family members.

*They live in a different world.*

Stephen scanned the street ahead, looking for any yobbos who might be hanging around. Archie Stewart wasn't the only one to give a wide berth to, but he was the worst. Stephen's crushed finger was only one memento of Archie's malevolence. As bad as that was, it was nothing compared to the scar he would carry for life left by a flashing blade that had lopped off his earlobe after a dispute with Archie a couple of years back. He had been speed skating and came off the ice too quickly, landing on Stewart's foot. Even though he'd apologized, Stewart had been furious. So he and his mates had waited outside the ice-rink until Stephen left, and then

challenged him. He would never forget that night. He'd run until his lungs were bursting, but it didn't matter because eventually they'd caught up and cornered him. The blood splashing down his neck onto his shirt had shocked him, and he had gone to the emergency room to have the wound stitched.

Stephen fingered the scar as he made his way along Juniper Drive. His mum hadn't been too happy at the time, but at least he'd had the good sense not to tell on Archie, blaming it instead on 'some hooligan from Glasgow'.

He spotted Archie and his two cronies, Neil Kennedy and Johnny Coyle, leaning over the balcony on the first floor, three blocks down. Half-a-dozen teenage girls, dressed in preposterously high-heeled shoes and pink miniskirts, had gathered on the pavement beneath them. In the center of the group, wearing a yellow silk sash with the words "Bride to be" emblazoned across it, Gina Courtney was braced on either side by her friends.

'Hey Archie, do you want a ride?' The question met with shrieks of laughter from the other girls.

Two years older than Stephen, Archie was six feet tall, with a heavy muscular frame, blond crew-cut hair, and wintry grey eyes. He had a dangerous look about him that encouraged others to cross to the opposite side of the road when they saw him approach.

Stephen had read somewhere that girls found this evil-macho-look sexy, but he couldn't understand why—surely Archie's vile temper would put any girl off? Stephen was curious, but he didn't want Archie to spot him as he passed by, just in case he decided to make trouble. He stood behind a parked truck, out of Archie's line of sight, and watched. He'd move on when the excitement was over and it was safe.

Archie appeared mildly amused. His lip curled, and he flicked his cigarette butt at the girls. They scattered, screaming, but quickly came back together.

Neil Kennedy, a tall skinny eighteen-year-old, with mousey brown hair and a sour, pinched expression on his face, looked down on the girls. ‘Nick off, pisspots. You’re all steaming. What are you doing getting plastered this early?’

Stephen thought that a bit rich. It was a known fact that Kennedy carried a half-bottle of cheap wine in his jacket pocket wherever he went.

The third of the trio was short and fat with greasy fair hair and adolescent pimples covering his red face. He stuck two fingers in the air. ‘Stupid bitches. Scram before I come down there and sort you out, tossers!’

Gina’s elder sister, Moira, her red locks swirling to and fro, weaved to the front of the pack and shook her finger. ‘You’re the tosser, Johnny Coyle! You don’t have the guts to take on even one of us. Not that anybody would want you to.’ She mimed putting her fingers down her throat and gagging.

The bride-to-be whooped and lifted the front of her skirt to display a pair of frilly white knickers, and was cheered on by her friends. Then the group linked arms and kicked their legs in a can-can, chanting, ‘We want Archie. We want Archie!’

Stephen appreciated the show. He knew the girls were teasing Archie, believing there was no chance he would take them up on the offer. If he did, then they would be out of there fast.

Some of the neighbors had gathered and were laughing at the antics of Gina and her friends. It was obvious Archie was unhappy with the attention, and Stephen wasn’t at all surprised when he leaned over the balcony and shouted in a voice shrill with loathing, ‘I wouldn’t put my dick near any of you lot, especially you Moira Courtney—you’ve all got the pox. I feel sorry for the poor bastard who has to marry that slut sister of yours. Up the duff, are you, Gina? Your boyfriend doesn’t know what he’s let himself in for, poor sod.

Probably thinks he's the father. Does he know you've been fucked by every guy in the neighborhood?'

Kennedy and Coyle hooted at their leader's wit.

The girls' exuberance vanished, and Gina began to wail. The redhead tugged at her sister's arm and glowered up at the veranda. 'Jeezus, Archie, we only wanted a bit of fun. You are such a rotten mongrel—you ruin everything.'

Stephen sympathized with Gina and her pals, but he felt none the wiser after the exchange. Why had they bothered? They must have known what Archie was like.

The onlookers dispersed, joking and laughing or muttering and shaking their heads. Stephen peeked around the truck. Archie and his pals were still on the balcony, intent on taunting the girls as they made their escape. When one spectator walked in his direction, he realized with a shock what was going to happen.

The man pulled open the door of the truck, hauled himself in, switched on the ignition and drove off down the road in a cloud of exhaust fumes.

Stephen felt suddenly naked. He glanced towards the balcony then quickly looked away and forced his legs to move.

Kennedy nudged Archie and pointed towards Stephen.

Archie leaned over the balcony and shouted, 'Hey, McBride, who are you staring at? You'd be the one prick this side of Glasgow that hasn't been up Gina Courtney yet. Go on, help yourself.' He gestured at the girls. 'This lot are right up your street.'

Stephen pretended not to hear. Keeping his head lowered, he fixed his eyes on the road and ignored his conscience crying 'coward'. He knew Archie wouldn't need much provocation. The fact that he had witnessed the exchange might be enough to set him off, and heaven help him if Archie thought he had been laughing at him.

At this point, it was asking for trouble to even glance



in Archie's direction. Stephen was tempted to make a run for it, but knew this would spell disaster. He sucked in his stomach and continued walking at a steady pace until, with a sigh of relief, he reached the safety of number twenty-three Juniper Drive.

## *Chapter Two: All the fun of the fair*

Stephen lived on the ground floor of one of the few blocks on the street where the walls weren't daubed with gang slogans or religious rallying cries denouncing either the Pope or King Billy. He couldn't decide whether this was a good thing or not. The white picket fence, the well-mown lawn and the colorful annuals were a pleasant distraction from the drabness of the surrounding area, but it was further proof to his enemies that he was different.

He stooped to pull out a dandelion sprouting next to his dad's prize rose, and then plucked a long-stemmed crimson Dahlia from one of the half-barrels that served as flower pots. Stephen's dad, Tom, and their neighbor Jack Wilson were both keen gardeners and competed each year for the title of the best-kept garden on the street and the twenty pounds prize money that went with it. Others might think it a miracle their gardens survived as well as they did there, but Stephen's dad, Tom, was a foreman on a nearby building site, providing work for a number of men in the street, and he was given respect from them and their offspring.

'Hey Mum, got your cigs!' called Stephen, as he swung through the front door into the hallway. On the radio, Lonnie Donegan was singing "My Old Man's a Dustman" and his mum, Christie, was humming along.

She emerged from the tiny kitchen, a bucket of coal in one hand, the other replacing a strand of auburn hair that had escaped its bobby pin. Stephen watched her with amazement. Even though she was pregnant with her fourth child and was finding the morning sickness difficult to cope with, she never stopped working, yet

somehow she still managed a smile for him.

He held out the flower to her.

‘Och, you’re a good lad, Stephen. Your dad’s waiting for his paper, and there’s a cheese sandwich on the table there, and some cold milk in the larder if you want it.’

Stephen took the bucket from her and picked up the sandwich, devouring it in three bites as he entered the living room. His father was sitting in his favorite chair as usual, and Stephen passed the Daily Record to him, then stooped to place a lump of coal on the fire.

His mum slumped into the armchair opposite and let out a sigh. ‘Arthur said Black Bob was a certainty at the White City tonight. He said you should put your shirt on it.’

Stephen’s dad laughed. ‘Did he say how much he was going to wager?’ This was a standing joke. According to Stephen’s mum, her youngest brother was a bit slow ‘on account of him falling off the bus when he was ten years old.’ His father had a different opinion. Arthur often gave others a ‘hot tip’, whilst he placed his money and won on a different animal, and then afterwards denied that he had given them the tip in the first place.

Before Stephen’s mum could respond, the front door crashed open amid loud squeals and laughter. Stephen’s younger sisters had come home, pink-cheeked and breathless. As usual, they had run from the bus stop at the top of the street. Both girls rushed into the living-room, with Margaret giving her best impression of Shirley Temple; stamping her feet, folding her arms, and sticking out her bottom lip.

Stephen’s mum tried not to laugh. ‘Oh, you poor soul! Look at that petted lip. It’s a shame. Did Anne-Marie win again? Never mind. You’ll beat her one day. Come here and give me a hug.’ She winked at Anne-Marie as she held Margaret close. ‘How did your visit to Barrhead go? Was your grandpa up and about?’

‘He looked better than the last time we saw him,

Mum.’ Anne-Marie took off her black duffel coat and tossed it on the dining table next to the window. ‘When we got there, he was sitting in his favorite chair drinking a cup of tea.’

‘He told us a story and played with my hair.’ Margaret flicked back her shining ringlets. ‘Grandpa likes playing with my hair.’

‘The doctor had been to see him before we arrived,’ said Anne-Marie, ‘and Father Mooney came round for a visit later. Grandma looked as though she’d been crying, although I think she was trying to hide it.’

Stephen knew it wasn’t unusual for the priest to visit, but he had never known his grandmother to be the emotional type. He saw his parents exchange glances. His grandfather, Lochlan, had been unwell for several weeks, and if it were something as simple as a cold or a virus he should have gotten over it.

The next visit to Barrhead had been arranged for the following Sunday. They would drive out after morning mass, said his mum.

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It wasn’t until after tea that Stephen managed to escape on the pretext of going over to see his best friend, D’Angelo Robertson. He sped along Blackhawks Road and dashed under the old bluestone railway bridge, remembering at the last moment to hold his breath. The place always stank of stale urine from drunken fans returning home after Saturday’s football game.

Once out the other side of the tunnel, he slowed to a walk and picked his way across a vacant lot, pushing through waist-high knapweeds with purple spiked flowers until he arrived in front of the cooperage on Walker Street.

Stephen loved the woody smell of the new oak and the clash of hammers on metal. The names of the differently sized casks made by the coopers appealed to his imagination: hogsheads, firkins, puncheons, and

rundlets, all primed to receive their precious cargo—whisky, cognac, sake and rum—which suggested faraway places. Through the security-wire fence, he could see some of the men in their work clothes, with leather aprons tied around their waists and sleeves rolled up, maneuvering finished barrels onto the back of a truck. He called out a greeting as he passed, but no-one looked up or waved back.

He continued on until he came to a familiar red-brick building. At one time, this had been a carpet factory providing work for the neighborhood, but it had lain empty for years now. Some of his pals had found a way in via a rear window last winter, and the main hall had been an ideal place to stuff around and play soccer when it rained or snowed. Unfortunately, some nosey-parker had tipped off the council, and they'd been caught and given a fair old scolding. Afterwards, the doors had been boarded up and the windows covered with wire mesh.

Stephen sprang and caught hold of a window ledge. Gripping the wire with both hands, he heaved himself up until he could peer through a jagged hole in the glass. Other than a few cobweb-covered cardboard boxes piled in one corner, the vast building was empty. Dust and animal droppings covered the floor and shafts of daylight barely penetrated the interior.

The sandals he'd worn to play soccer still hung from the light shade, high above, where one of the workmen had tossed them for a joke. Stephen sensed movement at the far end and craned his neck to see. A rat, the size of a small cat, was tearing at the feathers and flesh of a juvenile magpie. The bird was still alive, but the screeching and fluttering came to an end when the rodent's teeth clamped onto its head. Stephen shuddered and dropped to the ground. The magpie hadn't stood a chance. It was too young, too inexperienced to escape marauding nature. God, if there was a God, hadn't protected it. The bird was as much a victim of its

environment as he was.

At the end of Walker Street, the factories and other industrial buildings gave way to the open spaces and green acreage of the local soccer grounds. During the season, hordes of teenage boys would descend on the playing fields to practice their skills. Right now though, and for the next two weeks, one large corner of the park had been reserved by the council for the arrival of the visiting carnival.

As Stephen approached the perimeter, the sun sank beneath drifts of low clouds and the sky turned a fiery red, outlining the Ferris wheel and the Dive Bombers in halos of hellish light. People were streaming in and out of the fairground. Many of those leaving were families with young children clutching stuffed toys, balloons and other trophies, whilst those on the way in were mainly excited teenagers and young adults.

When he walked through the entrance, a jumble of noise assaulted his ears. Elvis Presley's 'Hound Dog' competed for attention with Frank Ifield's 'I Remember You' and 'Apache' from the Shadows. The music mingled with the shrieks of screaming girls, the hum of portable generators, and the hiss of powerful pneumatics. The amplified voices of showmen encouraged punters to 'Come aboard for the ride of your life.' Stephen's pulse raced in harmony as he took in the scene around him.

Multi-colored lights flashed hypnotically on rides and side shows, illuminating gaudy art images depicting wild and exotic scenes. Lions, tigers, and other ferocious beasts were prominent alongside larger-than-life portrayals of classic movies such as 'Ben-Hur,' 'The Mummy,' and 'The Wild One.' The names of the most thrilling rides—'Sputnik Chaser,' 'Codona's Speedway,' 'Whites Waltzers'—glittered like diamond-encrusted tiaras perched atop each attraction.

Stephen's nose twitched at the sugar-sweet aroma from the candy floss machine and the tantalizing smell of

fried onions from the food vans. He wandered in a haze, trying to take it all in and make his mind up which ride he would try first.

He decided on the Ferris wheel because it would give him a bird's-eye view of the fairground. The operator in the ticket booth stared at the ten pound note and held it in the air in front of him. He looked back at Stephen, then shrugged, placed the note into his cash tin and counted out nine pounds, nineteen shillings in change.

Stephen climbed into an empty carriage and clanged the bar shut. The wheel revolved one carriage at a time, allowing patrons to get on and off, all the while moving Stephen higher and higher. When he reached the top, the din of the fair receded and the gondola creaked to and fro in the breeze. Stephen gripped the safety-bar. It was okay when the ride was going, but up here, swinging around like this, he felt a bit light-headed because the fairground was a long way down.

He spotted six or seven boys standing at the ticket box below and immediately recognized Archie Stewart amongst them. The ride moved forward towards the ground. The nearer he came to the group below, the more vulnerable and powerless he felt. He could do nothing to prevent his descent, and he knew that when he reached the lowest point, he would be face to face with Archie. The wheel jerked to a stop. Archie, Neil and Johnny climbed into the last empty chair, and the ride accelerated.

*What rotten luck.*

He counted the seats between them.

*Five.*

Had they seen him? His stomach was in a knot.

*It would be just perfect if I covered them in spew.*

The wheel went round and round, and he cringed every time they came into view, but they were too busy rocking their chair and acting like idiots to notice him. He held his breath as the Ferris wheel slowed and came

to a stop just when Archie and his pals reached ground level. They were the first to be let out, ranting at the operator about being short-changed. When his turn to get off arrived, they had gone. He was relieved but also worried. He'd need to be careful, but if he kept his eyes open, then with a little luck he should be able to avoid meeting up with them in the crowded fairground.

For a while, he wandered amongst the side-shows, popping Ping-Pong balls into clowns' mouths, rolling pennies onto tables and throwing darts at cards. The only prize he won was an orange orangutan for a score of twenty-one at the rifle range. He donated the stuffed toy to a crying toddler being dragged by his mother to the exit.

As darkness fell, he decided to try out the Meteorite. There was a long queue for the popular attraction, but he knew it would be worth the wait. At last, the attendant locked him into the cage on the cylindrical wall of the machine. He looked around at the other people on the ride. They were laughing and calling out to friends, each one as excited as he. The cylinder began to rotate, and the centrifugal forces pinned him against the wall. Strips of colored lights flashed past so quickly, Stephen was certain that the skin on his face fluttered as the Meteorite reached high speed. The support for his feet drew away, and Stephen gasped as he slipped down a few inches.

A single coin escaped from his pocket and clinked through the bottom of the cage. He watched its flight downwards. To his dismay, he saw Archie stoop and pick it up. He tossed it in the air and laughed at his pals as he put it in his pocket and walked off. Stephen had panicked for a moment before he realized there was no way Archie could have recognized him behind the mesh, but he didn't enjoy the rest of the ride, since he felt sure they might return at any time.

By nine o' clock, the fairground was a living organism, pulsating with energy. The lights were



brighter, the music louder, and the rides faster. An opaque glow hovered overhead, obliterating the stars and creating a feeling of isolation from the world outside. Eager patrons crowded around the entries to well-known rides or stood in long queues at ticket booths with their heads raised to watch the roller coaster soar around corners before screaming towards the ground then clacking back to the peak again.

The Dive Bomber rotated to a halt in front of Stephen, and Gina Courtney and her friends staggered from the shell, hands covering mouths and hair soiled with puke. Stephen looked at them, shaking his head in bemusement. It didn't look like fun to him, but they weren't the only ones who'd had too much to drink this day. Some, like Gina and her pals, came from poor backgrounds, from generations of under-class who drank to forget, at least for one night. Others, he knew, found it liberating to lose their inhibitions and ditch their common sense in the company of a group of like-minded individuals.

A bunch of intoxicated youths reeled in his direction, bumping into people and then swearing at them. Stephen turned aside to avoid them, and caught sight of Archie crossing his path up ahead. He swung left and circled around the Carousel.

He'd feel better if D'Angelo was with him, but carnivals were not D's thing and his pal wouldn't be much good anyway if it came to a fight. By now, he had tried out the best rides and eaten his fill of hot dogs and candy floss, and the lure of the fairground was not as seductive as it had been an hour earlier. He still had most of the money he had started out with since it would take him a week to spend it at two shillings a ride. There was only so much whirling and spinning one person could absorb in an evening.

His conscience was also beginning to bother him. He wondered what his family would say if they discovered his dishonesty. He realized he had frittered away a lot of

someone else's money. Perhaps the young mother who had been in the shop earlier had dropped it. Or some old lady on a pension. The loss of ten pounds would cause heartache for either one and the more he thought about it, the more troubled he became and the less enjoyment he took from his extravagance.

*One last ride on the dodgems and then I'll head home.*

The Tornados' top-ten hit 'Telstar' faded into the background, and the bumper cars slowed to a halt. Waiting patrons scrambled eagerly to claim their favorite vehicle while attendants helped the customers get in and out as quickly as possible. Stephen clambered into the car he thought was quickest and settled himself behind the driving wheel. The music started again, and he planted his foot on the accelerator and took off.

The ride had been underway for no more than a few seconds when his car was jolted from behind. Laughing, he turned and found himself face to face with a glowering Archie Stewart and his pal, Neil Kennedy. Stephen's grin vanished as fear gripped him. He jerked forwards as Archie rammed into him again. The shock of seeing his nemesis up close galvanized him into action and he wrenched the steering wheel to one side.

*Move it, move it!*

He stamped hard on the accelerator, trying to force the pedal further to the floor. He glanced over his shoulder. Archie was still pursuing him. Twisting the wheel, Stephen avoided another car but his own shuddered as Archie crashed into his back bumper once more.

'That's nothing to what you're going to get when you get off this ride, ya shite,' Archie screamed at him.

Alarm surged through Stephen, now suddenly nauseous from the mixture of fairground food and fear. He watched Archie's pals spread around the perimeter of the ride, waiting for the cars to stop.

'Telstar' was approaching the final few bars when

Stephen unclipped his seat belt and abandoned the car. Angry attendants shouted after him as he narrowly escaped being hit by several patrons. He leapt off the boardwalk and landed awkwardly on the ground. Pushing himself to his feet, he raced towards the boundary of the crowded fairground.

Panting from fear as much as exertion, Stephen swerved around crowded stalls and sprinted past the Hall of Mirrors at the edge of the fair. He reached the Ghost Train and ducked behind the Laughing Sailor Kiosk, where some younger kids were joining in the infectious laughter from the machine. The cackling did little to settle his nerves, and he peered back through the crowd seeking his pursuers. He couldn't see them. Maybe he had dodged them. He began to breathe easier.

*That was close.*

A blow to the back of his neck sent him reeling to the ground. He instinctively curled into a ball and protected his head and face with his hands.

'Get on your feet, you fucking moron,' shouted Archie. 'Get up!'

Stephen stayed hunkered down on the ground as the group of youngsters faded into the background. 'Why are you after me? I haven't done anything.'

He looked up at Archie and Neil from between his fingers. Neil took a swing with his boot that connected with Stephen's stomach. The rest of the gang crowded round him.

'I've been watching you spending up big like a millionaire, ya wanker. How can someone like you afford that?' said Archie.

Stephen rolled onto his side in the dirt to avoid another kick and a shower of coins fell from his pocket.

Neil Kennedy's eyes widened. 'What's this? Where did you get this money? Tell me, or I'll thump you again.' He leaned forward with his hand clenched.

'No, don't,' pleaded Stephen. 'It's mine. I've been

saving up for months.'

'Hit him, Archie. He's a lying bastard!' said Johnny Coyle from the sidelines, his spotted face twisted in a scowl.

'You stole it, didn't you?' said Archie, as he rolled Stephen over with his foot and pulled out his pockets. He counted the money—seven pounds, nine and sixpence—more than a whole week's dole money.

'No, no. I found it, honest! It was lying on the street...'

'Honest? You don't know the meaning of the word.' Archie cut him off as he counted the money again.

'It's the truth. I was going to hand it in – put it in the poor box tomorrow.'

'You don't need to worry about that. I'll make sure it gets to the poor all right,' said Archie. 'No buts,' he added as Stephen began to protest, 'and if you tell anyone about this, I'll boot your fucking head in, understand?'

Stephen cringed as Archie simulated another kick before he and the rest of his gang walked away, laughing at the joke.

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Stephen arrived home not long after ten o'clock; his trousers torn, shirt hanging out, and his cheek heavily bruised. He managed to hold back the tears as he told his parents the half-truth that he had been set upon by a group of older boys for no apparent reason. 'They said I was staring at them, but I didn't mean anything by it. They were looking for a fight.'

His mother put her arms around him just like she had when he was younger and needed comforting. Her swollen belly pressed against him and he pulled away, feeling embarrassed. The thought that his mum and dad must have sex had never occurred to him before now.

Later, lying in bed with his throbbing cheek keeping him awake despite two aspirins, Stephen's thoughts vacillated between feelings of remorse and memories of

bright lights, exciting music, and swirling Waltzers. As he fell asleep, the last thing that came to his mind was the cackle of the laughing sailor and the sneering face of Archie Stewart.

### *Chapter Three: Tianyi Chi*

Tianyi Chi gripped the iron railing of the ancient bridge spanning the White Cart and searched the shallow water. Her uncle had told her after a hundred years of industrial pollution, trout had recently been seen swimming up river from the sea. She saw no fish, but as she watched, a snowy white swan emerged from beneath the bridge. She gasped in delight as the bird fanned its wings in a graceful display then lowered its head into the water to drink. She searched her pockets for something to feed it and found a biscuit from yesterday's lunch.

The swan was her lucky mascot. She had adopted it after reading the story of *The Ugly Duckling* her uncle had sent her on her ninth birthday.

Six years ago, she and her young brother Shiou, had been helping their father plant seedlings in the field outside their village when her mother had arrived in a state of great agitation, urging them to come home immediately. Her father was reluctant because a lot of work still needed to be done, but her mother had insisted. 'You must come. We have a guest!'

When they arrived back at their two-roomed, stone hut, Tianyi had gaped at the stranger seated at their table. He looked Chinese, yes, but he wasn't like any of the adults in her village. She'd never seen anyone so perfectly dressed, with sharp creases in his trousers, shining black shoes and immaculate

hair. He had bowed and introduced himself as a friend of her mother's brother who lived in Great Britain. She didn't know this land he spoke of, but he had explained it was an island on the other side of the world, populated by pale-skinned people who worshipped a God they had put to death in the most violent manner imaginable. He was visiting Jilin Province on business, he said, in a perfect Manchurian dialect.

'And you must be Tianyi. Your uncle sends his greetings and fond wishes for your birthday.' He opened his briefcase and took out a parcel wrapped in colorful paper with a brown label attached on which her name was written in large letters.

Her whole family had been astonished. None had ever received a gift wrapped in paper with a label attached. The visitor explained that he had carried the parcel all the way from Scotland and was now making his way back there. He politely refused her mother's offer of tea and cake because he had to leave immediately to catch the train to Peking.

When he had gone, the family marveled at the package for an hour, passing it from hand to hand. The wrapping had strange drawings on it: alien but intriguing caricatures of a yellow bird, a black and white cat and a pink pig.

Eventually, her mother said Tianyi should open the present, which she did, taking care to put the paper aside without creasing it. That night, she would pin it to the wall above her bed. Inside she discovered a picture book: a fairy-tale, she had realized later, by Hans Christian Andersen about the ugly duckling that turned into a beautiful swan. The text was in English, and hence unfamiliar, but the family pored over the pages night by night, creating their own words to match the pictures and admiring

the colorful illustrations.

Since then, Tianyi had often dreamt of one day being transformed into a beautiful creature. It was silly, she knew. Her father would have told her to put away such childish notions. The world was a harsh place, he'd say, and she needed to be strong and brave to survive.

*I am strong, father, I am brave. I will survive.*

She watched until the swan disappeared around the bend, then crossed to the grand Gothic building on the opposite bank.

Two years earlier, when she first arrived in Scotland, Tianyi had been enrolled in Ferguslie Park Public School where she developed a passion for reading. She progressed quickly from primary school texts to books like *Alice in Wonderland*, and in her last six months had devoured *Little Women* and *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Religious observance at the school was a compulsory part of the curriculum and was based on the Christian ethic. Her history teacher, Miss Hughes, also doubled as an instructor of religion and had brought her class to visit the Abbey of Paisley to take advantage of the synergy between her two subjects. Tianyi had absorbed every detail.

Built in the twelfth century, the imposing grey-stone building with tall arched windows and a square tower perched midway along its roof was one of the holiest and most historic buildings in Scotland. After that first visit, Tianyi had come here often to pray for the souls of her family.

She pushed on the massive wooden door that led into the nave and entered.

Her footsteps echoed from the high vaulted ceiling, and she sensed the presence of the Christian God she had learned about at school. The Sunday



service wasn't for another hour and the church was empty save a few tourists listening to the organ music and admiring the intricate carvings on the ancient Celtic cross. Tianyi walked along the central aisle past the choir stalls until she reached the East window depicting the ascended Christ. Her heart sang with compassion. A vision of the loving Father holding his crucified Son in his lap filled her mind, and she knelt to pray. *Dear Father; please take my family into your arms. They are not Christian, but they are good people.* She did not consider the fact that she had prayed the same prayer to the Lord Buddha earlier that morning as an issue. As far as she was concerned, all deities were joined in spirit, and by praying to more than one, there was a better chance of being heard.

She moved on until she came to the tomb of Marjory Bruce, the Princess of Scotland and daughter of Robert the Bruce, the famous heroic king. As was often the case, the sarcophagus was decked out in wildflowers, and Tianyi added her posy to the floral display. After *The Ugly Duckling*, the story of Marjory Bruce, who died nearby after falling from her horse, and whose unborn child survived to later become king, was her favorite. It reminded her of the folktales of her childhood in Jilin.

Tianyi sat on a nearby chair, appreciating the delicate colors radiating through the stained glass windows onto the bluestone walls and flagstones around the tomb. It was peaceful to sit here amongst the noble people, warriors and abbots of the past, but the old church also had a dank smell about it that reminded her of the boat.

Her mother had protested the vessel was too small, little more than a wooden fishing trawler, but

her father replied she knew nothing of the sea, and the captain had assured him he had made the journey many times without incident. 'We have no choice in any case,' he had said. 'I have paid the money. Either we go now or we stay and starve.'

Her mother gripped Tianyi's hand so tightly she squirmed. Her younger brother Shiou was hanging on to his father's coat, wiping the tears from his eyes, and trying to appear brave.

Tianyi thought she would always remember that moment: the despair of her mother, and the resolution that shone from her father's eyes.

It had taken three weeks for the East Wind to cross the South China Sea. During daylight hours, the captain allowed no more than a dozen on deck at one time. He told the passengers he was worried the boat might be spotted by a warship from one of the many countries that had competing territorial claims over the area.

Tianyi thought he was mean, especially after the weather closed in and the boat began to rock like a giant cradle. She retched until there was nothing left in her stomach except sour bile and she became too weak to rise from her bunk. Her mother had a stronger constitution, and each day she and the other women would lower buckets of sea water into the hold to clean it, but it was never enough to take away the nauseating smell of vomit and human waste. When they anchored off a small island on the coast of Indonesia, they were forced to remain below decks in the foul air for two days whilst the crew took on fresh water and provisions.

A shadow hovered over Tianyi, rousing her from her reverie. A dark figure stood in front of the window, surrounded by a bright halo. Tianyi's heart leaped.

*Mother?*

The shape resolved itself into the earthly form of a parishioner who had come for the morning service. She nodded, recognizing Tianyi as a regular. 'Lovely day outside, Miss Chi. Summer's well and truly arrived.'

Her heartbeat slowed to normal and Tianyi returned the smile whilst trying to recall the woman's name. Since arriving in Scotland, almost two years ago, she had come to appreciate its reputation for poor weather, but today was perfect. 'Yes, Mrs. Albright, it is—how do you say—a bonnie day.'

It had been mid-summer too, when the East Wind neared its final destination off the coast of Western Australia. The weather should have been fine, but instead the passengers were welcomed by the raging seas and howling gale of a category three cyclone. When the captain tried to outrun the storm, the mainsail snapped, and the boat swung broadside-on to the wind.

The engine was powerless against the fifteen-foot waves and the boat tilted grotesquely before crashing onto a jagged reef. Tianyi, already weakened by sea-sickness, had been knocked off her feet by the impact. The Indian Ocean gushed through a rupture in the hull, causing the passengers to panic.

Her father emerged from the gloom and swept her into his arms as though she weighed nothing, then waded through calf-deep water towards the stairs. They clambered out of the hold and were instantly set upon by the wind.

The rain stabbed at Tianyi's eyes, as she clung to her father's sleeve. The storm lessened momentarily, and she heard him shout, pointing to

where Shiou and her mother were clinging to the mast. Reunited, the family huddled together. Tianyi whimpered against her mother's body and thought her teeth would never stop chattering.

A tear trickled down her cheek as she remembered. Her father had always seemed the strong one in the family, but her mother was ever the comforter.

The therapist at Perth Hospital had encouraged her to think and talk about her experiences on the East Wind, but it was still a bitter memory.

She glanced around. The pews were filling up with parishioners and the choir-members were settling into the loft, high above. A low murmur filled the Abbey. Men escorted their families to their seats, and there were nods and polite greetings exchanged as friends recognized each other. Tianyi searched for any sign of falseness in their faces. But no, all appeared pleased to be here, sharing fellowship. The civilized courtesy the churchgoers paid to each other stood in stark contrast to the primeval self-preservation of the passengers on the East Wind.

They had grasped at anything to prevent themselves from sliding overboard: steel hawsers, capstans, masts, and other people. Some were pushed away by those they thought of as friends. Thus rejected, they scrambled and scraped at the deck as gravity took hold, and many disappeared over the side.

A cluster of male passengers and crew were fighting over a few remaining life vests. Tianyi watched as her normally-placid father burrowed into the pack, howling like a jackal, and heaved at one of the jackets. He staggered back towards his family, blood running from his nose, but with the

trophy grasped in his hands.

Abruptly, Tianyi heard the doleful pealing of bells.

*No, that's not right. There weren't any bells.*

They echoed again, louder this time, and Tianyi woke. The abbey bells, high above, were calling the faithful to service.

The first notes played on the organ, and Tianyi stood. Today, she would pray for her father. He had cried when he looked first at her mother then at her, and finally had placed the life vest over the head of her younger brother. Her father had held her tight in his arms, whispering in her ear that he loved her, that he was proud of her, and to always be brave.

*I am strong, father, I am brave. I will survive.*