

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.

