

**TROUBLE AT
RIVERSIDE
ACADEMY**

LIAM MOISER

**DEDICATED TO MY
WONDERFUL STEPDAD**

GRAHAM

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Chapter 1

THE BEGINNING

It was a warm spring day. Easter was over for another year, and the students of Riverside Academy were just arriving back for a brand-new term.

A first year boy, running around on the school field, his brand new school uniform already ruined by a mixture of grass and mud stains. His white shirt, looking like all it was fit for was the nearest bin. He stopped and stared into the distance. Walking down the pathway was an odd-looking man. His hair well oiled, his face showing signs of ageing, and the suit he was wearing was old and patched up. The man had been around before; a few months back. He and another man had been looking through the school gate. They had seemed fascinated with the school.

The first year was about to go for a closer look when, suddenly, he felt a fist tapping his back. He turned to find his friend standing there, his hair flaming ginger and his uniform also a mucky mess.

“Tag.” His friend grinned at him. He then sprinted off towards the trees.

Instantly forgetting all about the man, the first year boy gave chase. He did not see the man enter the school building.

The school was privately owned by Lady Simpson. Her Grandfather had started the school after the start of World War II, when many children had been evacuated to his home.

Riverside Academy was housed in an old, stately Edwardian home. There were three floors to the building, but the third floor was off-limits as this was where Lady Simpson lived, and her private collection was housed there. The school rooms were adorned with amazing paintings; there were even a few replicas of paintings from the likes of

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Picasso and Van Gogh. There was one though near the front door that took pride and place. It was not valuable, but it held a special place in the school's history. It was a picture of the first group of students at the school. The furniture was all handcrafted and delightful to look at. The Academy could host around 500 children, and many who came to the school often went on to Oxford or Cambridge.

In the grounds to the left of the main stately home was the sporting complex which had private tennis courts, and even a floodlit pitch for hockey and football. There was also an Olympic-sized pool towards the back of the grounds. One of the main reasons most students came to the school was because it was well known in the sporting community. The trophy case, that was near the main hall, was filled with trophies of different shapes and sizes.

In a part of the school that only prefects and staff were allowed to go, Rachel Smith and Benjamin Thornton were taking a gentle stroll in the gardens. They were both looking at the different flowers starting to bloom. There were daffodils, lilies, daisies and carnations, which gave both students a splendid view.

Rachel had recently turned sixteen. She was the current head girl at Riverside Academy. Her lovely blonde hair, which went down past her shoulders, was tied up in a ponytail. She was very petite. Her head girl badge was currently pinned on her shirt, there was the distinct smell of roses coming from her and she was wearing a lovely silvery bracelet that adorned her left hand.

“Can you believe it?” Her silvery voice suddenly filled the air.

“Believe what?” Benjamin, his posh upbringing evident in his speech, was also sixteen. He and Rachel had been going out for a couple of years now. He was very tall, the sort who'd never have a problem reaching the top shelf of a bookcase. His brown hair grew wild and his hazel eyes shone brightly.

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Rachel stopped at a fountain. It was bronze, a sculpture of two dancing dolphins adorning the very top. She had adored it ever since she first caught a glimpse of it when she had started at the school.

“It will soon be the end of our time here,” she muttered, sadness etched into her sad smile.

“I know,” Benjamin agreed. “It feels like just yesterday that we were both walking through these gates for the first time. Soon we will be walking through them for the last.” Benjamin dangled his hand in the flowing water. “I also remember how it took me over a year to finally muster the courage to ask you out. I never dreamt in a million years that someone as beautiful as you would want to go out with someone as plain as me.”

“What have I told you about that?” The words, said in a high-pitched tenor, made them jump. Coming towards them, walking as quietly as a mouse, was Lady Simpson. She was short and stubby, her long thick black hair was done up tightly in a bun. Her light brown eyes sparkled. She was standing with a man neither of them had seen before.

“That I shouldn’t say that about myself.” Benjamin spoke meekly.

“Correct! I have told you all before, you are all perfect in your own way.” Lady Simpson rewarded them with a grin. She seemed to suddenly remember the man that she was with. “This is Mr. Stallion.”

The students smiled politely at the guy.

“He’s in the Navy,” Lady Simpson continued, “and is thinking about sending his only child to the school. So I am giving him a tour.”

“It’s a...” Mr. Stallion’s eyes suddenly grew wide and there was a hint of sadness glistening in them.

“Is everything okay?” Rachel asked him, seeing the way he was gawping at her bracelet. It was like he was shocked to see her wearing it. But why would he feel this way? “I can tell you more about the school if you would like.” she added sweetly.

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No . . . no . . . its fine, honestly,” Mr Stallion answered, a bewildered look on his face.

Rachel saw that the man was trying to wipe away the sweat from his brow. What was wrong with him, she wondered.

“I’ve got to go. I’ve got to get back for an important meeting.” Mr Stallion glanced nervously at his watch. “In fact, I should have really set off five minutes ago.”

Lady Simpson frowned at him. “Okay then, let me . . .”

“I can find my own way out, thanks,” Mr Stallion interrupted her. He then added, “I’ll let you know of my decision when I get around to it.” And, before anyone could say anything else, he disappeared faster than two cars battling to win a race.

The three of them stared at each other. Then, finally, Lady Simpson broke the silence. “I can’t have this, can I?” she joked. “My head girl and boy scaring off my guests.”

Rachel gave a weak smile; it was good of the headmistress to try to make light of what had just happened. Then she noticed that Lady Simpson was staring at her in the same way Mr. Stallion had.

Lady Simpson laughed softly. “I know it wasn’t your fault.” She looked into her two students’ eyes. “I just noticed that you two were around and I thought it would be nice to show the man what you can achieve at this school.”

Rachel blushed with pride at the compliment, whilst Benjamin just stood there looking as confused as a penguin learning to tap dance. In the end, Rachel took it upon herself to speak for both of them, “Thank you. We’ll not let you down.”

They all stood in silence. The only noise being made was the sound of water dripping as it ran down the fountain. It was a few moments before Lady Simpson spoke and when she did, Rachel noticed the pride in her voice.

“I know you won’t,” she told them brightly. “Now if you don’t mind, I have a book I want to try and finish before

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lunch. So I'll let you get back on with what you were doing." And, with a friendly smile and a cheery wave, she headed off towards the school.

"We have ten—" Benjamin began to speak, but he was soon cut off by the noise of tires screeching down the driveway and out towards the main road. Both students just stood there in shock. "He sure was in a hurry." Benjamin just stood gawping at the dust the car's wheels had thrown up. "I wonder what caused him to panic so much."

"Didn't you see?" Rachel sighed, her heart pounding hard, as she realised that the man was becoming extremely reckless and desperate.

"See what?"

"The way he changed once he caught a glimpse of my bracelet," Rachel spoke softly and nervously; though she had no idea why it was bothering her so much.

"I think you're imagining it." Benjamin spoke assertively.

Rachel looked at him. She knew he wouldn't want her to worry about it. And she knew, if he had agreed with her, she would have been too scared to sleep. Her imagination was as crazy as a young child playing with a cardboard box. It was one reason why they didn't watch horror films.

"I'm not sure," Rachel sighed, resting her head on his shoulder. Her silvery voice was filled with worry.

Rachel allowed Benjamin to give her head a reassuring pat. "I promise you that the guy was just late for a meeting."

The way Benjamin was looking at her made Rachel feel nice and safe. "Let's do something else. We have five minutes before we have to go to our first lesson."

"Yes, let's do that." Benjamin looked relieved.

Rachel lifted her head from his shoulder and then, when he held out his hand, Rachel took hold of it. "This is nice." She beamed, all thoughts of the man drifting from her mind. They stood at the fountain for a few more seconds before they started to walk back towards the school. They knew that something weird had happened that day. But

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what exactly, they had no idea. Suddenly Rachel noticed that Benjamin had stopped.

“Did you get permission to come with us this summer?” he abruptly asked her.

“Yes, I did. My stepdad wasn’t keen on the idea at first, but my mother talked him around.” Rachel had forgotten that was the reason that they had come to the fountain in the first place. Their parents had met a year ago. Thankfully, they had hit it off, which had been a surprise for Rachel as she had been concerned about how Benjamin’s parents would react to hers. Benjamin’s parents were super famous and they were used to hanging out with other stars. Rachel’s mother was a dentist and her stepdad was a solicitor, and Rachel suspected it had taken a lot of persuading for Benjamin to get his parents to meet hers.

Rachel glanced at her watch. “We should go or we’ll be late,” she told him sternly. It would, she thought, set a bad example to the rest of the school if the head boy and girl were given a tardy form for being late.

They set off and, thankfully, got to the lesson just as the bell rang.

The male teacher’s words boomed around the classroom like the thunder in a storm. “Welcome back, everyone. Let hope for a nice, quiet term to finish your school year off.”

Chapter 2

WHAT DO WE DO?

Not that far from the school was the small port town of Riverside. Sadly, the town had seen much better days. With the decline of the shipping trade, most of the houses were now up for sale, and a lot of the shops had shut down. There was a house, which a child who had died from the plague, had been haunting for centuries. No-one had touched it for years. Well, that was until a few months ago when a visitor had arrived in the town and snapped it up.

The town was peaceful at the moment. Everyone was going about their normal routines, but that was about to change. Suddenly, there was a screech of rubber, and a car sped down the road, finally skidding to a halt outside the boarded-up house. The people in the street stopped to look. But, when they saw that it was one of the new owners, they went quickly on their way.

Mr Stallion slowly got out of his car and walked towards the house. He knew the cupboards were bare and the fridge was empty. But it didn't matter; as they weren't planning on staying long.

He opened the oak door and walked inside. The house was still dirty with mouse dropping on the floor, and cobwebs clinging to the ceiling, but it was better than when they had first arrived. And Mr. Stallion was grateful for all the cleaning that his friend had done.

He slowly started walking towards the living room door when, out of nowhere, a man's hand grabbed hold of him, causing him to nearly jump out of his skin.

"What the...?" His heart was beating really fast.

Ian looked at his friend before letting out a long slow sigh of relief. "I- I'm so sorry but you told me not expect you for a few more hours." Ian spoke weakly and timidly.

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He had a distinct stutter. His face showed signs of stress, and his dark brown eyes seemed to flicker with worry. His black hair was scruffy and looked like it hadn't been washed in weeks. He smelt strongly of cigars and he was standing there like a rabbit caught in car lights. His clothes were like rags on a doll; they had clearly seen better days.

After Mr Stallion regained his breath, he led Ian back into the sitting room. Looking around, there was a wooden table which had paper currently flung messily across it. There were also a few plastic chairs scattered around it. At the other end of the room was a fireplace and a couple of armchairs. The armchairs were old, they had been left in the house when the previous owners had left. They were hardly fit for purpose with many of the springs starting to pop out. The walls were covered in damp and one of the plug sockets was hanging off by the wire. There was also the strong smell of cigars which, mixed together with the smell of damp, produced a most unpleasant odour.

Ian looked at his friend nervously. "W- what happened?"

Mr. Stallion guessed Ian would think that something was wrong. Well, in a way, he was right. But he didn't know how much to tell his friend. After all, he knew his friend was already worried about going back to prison. He knew, if it wasn't for the reward at the end of it, Ian would have scarpd already. Just like the rest of the gang.

Mr. Stallion saw there was a fire roaring in the grate. Suddenly, he really needed to sit down. Going over to the armchair next to it, he plonked his backside down.

"I saw my daughter at the school."

Ian went and picked up the cigar he had been smoking. Taking a puff, he stood silently for a few moments. "H-how do y-you know it was her?"

Mr. Stallion rubbed his brow. He knew Ian had every right to doubt him, but he was annoyed anyway. "I just do," he muttered, sounding agitated. "And I can also tell you this." He stared into the fire for a few seconds before speaking. "Judging by the fact that she didn't recognise me

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I would say my ex-wife hasn't told her about me." He slammed his fist into his palm. "I doubt Rachel's seen a single one of my letters."

"W-well in some ways it's good," Ian stammered. "It means she doesn't know where you've been." Ian then added slyly. "Tha- that's if she is your daughter."

Mr Stallion sat there glaring at him. "I have already told you, I'm sure of it."

He then looked towards the fire, staring into the flames, as he started thinking about the night he had lost everything. It had started out as a normal evening. He'd kissed his wife and new-born daughter goodbye and went off to help Ian and a few others with this job he had lined up. Everything had been going swimmingly until he had taken the wrong turn-off and they had ended up down a dead-end road. It had taken them forever to bury the loot. They had just finished and headed off back toward the town when they had been surrounded by cops. They had all been given fifteen year sentences.

"W-what are you thinking about?"

Mr Stallion sighed "Just about the night when we almost pulled off one of the biggest bank jobs in the country."

"I-I know, we were so close."

Mr. Stallion suddenly saw something he hadn't seen in a long time. It was like a light was shining through the darkest night. There was a hint of excitement in Ian's eyes.

"This could be a stroke of luck."

"How so?" Mr. Stallion inquired.

"W-well, if she is your daughter," Ian stuttered, "W- we can use her."

Mr Stallion sat bewildered as his friend spoke. He hadn't thought about that. He knew Ian was making sense but he didn't want any harm coming to his daughter. "I thought we were doing it in the summer," he said, a hint of desperation in his voice.

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“W-well, Riverside Academy has some of the rarest treasures in the country. Security will be tight then.” A sadistic smile appeared on Ian’s face.

Mr. Stallion couldn’t argue with that fact. He sat there, trying to think of a rebuttal, but everything Ian was saying was making sense. Mr. Stallion slowly got up out of his chair and started to pace backwards and forwards across the room, like a soldier guarding a piece of land.

Ian watched him closely. “Y-you know it’s a good idea.”

Mr. Stallion stopped his pacing and stared at him. He was still trying to fight the different thoughts that were spinning in his skull. “I’ll let you know.”

“It’s a g-golden opportunity.” Ian slammed his fist on the desk, causing the flighty Mr. Stallion to jump.

“I’ve told you, I’ll let you know!” Mr Stallion told Ian through gritted teeth; his voice sounded as furious as a lion’s roar.

Without saying another word, he walked out of the room and stormed up the stairs. There were a few small holes in the stairs where the floorboards were broken but, other than that, they were perfectly safe. He walked towards the room where he slept and stepped inside. In some ways, it would be good to get the job over with, because it meant he wouldn’t have to sleep in the dimly-lit room anymore. The bed was also lumpy, as the springs were gone on the mattress, and there was water dripping through the ceiling.

Mr Stallion sighed as he sat on the bed and took out the photo of his daughter that his wife had sent him a few weeks ago. He was still trying to come to terms with the fact that his wife hadn’t even mentioned him to his daughter. He desperately clung to the photo wishing it was her, but that was impossible for the moment. He just hoped things would soon change.

Chapter 3

THE VISIT

For the next few weeks, things were normal. There were a few pranks pulled and a few students got warned for misbehaving. On one occasion, a first year student got bored and started to make kitten noises. The only problem was that they were so realistic the teacher thought a kitten had got stuck somewhere and searched high and low, in all the cupboards and under a few desks, which had the other students in the class in stitches. Another time, two third year students started arguing in the canteen and when one threw mash potato, it missed its intended target and, before long, a massive food fight had started, which resulted in most of the students covered from head to toe in all kinds of different foods. But, all in all, it had been a peaceful start to the term. Today, though, things were about to change.

Rachel and Benjamin were walking down one of the corridors after a difficult science lesson. The lesson had been about the different compounds in the periodic table and what they were used for. Science wasn't one of Rachel's strongest subjects. The corridor was full of paintings and expensive ornaments. In fact, there were a few very expensive vases lining the window sills and only the grown-ups and the older students were allowed in the corridor. Rachel thought the stained glass windows were splendid; one of them had the scene of Noah's standing next to his ark on it. Whilst another had a lovely picture of a robin sitting in its nest. Whilst the final two just seemed to create a few patterns. In all the views they provided were magnificent.

They were chatting away, talking about their upcoming exams.

"Which exam are you dreading the most?" Benjamin playfully teased his girlfriend.

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Rachel glared at him. As the exams were not far off, she was already a nervous wreck, “Don’t remind me about them,” she scolded him. Her silvery voice trembling as she spoke. She was seriously going to miss this school. She had loved every minute of her time here. But exams she wasn’t going to miss at all.

“I know . . .” Benjamin started to say. He then let out a loud gasp of surprise and stared avidly out of the window.

“What is it?” Rachel asked eagerly, her mind racing, wondering what he might have seen.

“Nothing,” Benjamin smiled as he turned away from the window. “I just thought I saw someone, but they’re not there now.”

“Oh. Who did you think you saw?” Rachel felt confused. Normally her boyfriend would tell her straight away, and she found it odd that he was brushing this off. She was about to say something else when Lady Simpson walked in.

“There you are,” she said, smiling at them.

Suddenly there was movement behind Lady Simpson and Rachel’s eyes nearly fell out of her head when she realised who it was. It was Mr Stallion. And, oddly, he still had on the same old worn-out suit.

“You’ll both remember Mr Stallion, right?” Lady Simpson introduced her visitor. “He wanted to come to have a second look around and get more information.”

“Yes, we remember him.” Rachel had a feeling even if she had wanted to, she wouldn’t have been able to get the last visit out of her head. It had been quite a memorable one. She was also intrigued as to why he would need a second visit. Normally one visit was enough.

“I was hoping that you both could help out and give Mr Stallion a tour.” Lady Simpson looked eagerly at her two students.

“Yes, Miss.” Rachel wasn’t sure if she wanted to or not, but she didn’t want to let her headmistress down.

“Of course,” agreed Benjamin.

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Rachel was watching Mr. Stallion with interested; he seemed to be looking at a picture. She looked over and noticed that it was an old school picture from around thirty years back, it was a photo of a group of teenagers with the headmaster sitting in the middle of the front row. She assumed it was Lady Simpson's father, but she wasn't sure. They were sat outside in front of the school building, with the Riverside Academy sign above them.

"I will leave him with you then. I have a lot of work to be getting on with." Lady Simpson looked relieved. "When you have finished giving him a tour, come to my study and I'll finish from there." Lady Simpson turned to their guest. "Don't worry, sir. You are in the best hands possible." She gave a soft laugh.

"I am sure that they will give me a wonderful tour," Mr Stallion said enthusiastically, his eyes swivelling to his daughter..

Rachel watched as Lady Simpson walked with an air of authority down the corridor. Once Lady Simpson had vanished from view, she spoke. "So, where do you want to go first?" Her face was beaming with pride at being asked to show a member of the public around the school.

"I would love just to get a general feel of the place." Mr Stallion was staring out of the window so that no one could see the tears that were starting to form in his eyes. He brushed them away with his sleeves before he looked at them both, his eyes twinkling. "You know, just to make sure it's a fit place for my daughter."

"You will have no problems with that," Rachel replied eagerly. "Riverside Academy is one of the top schools in the country. I would never swap this school with another. I am grateful my parents sent me here, and I am sure your daughter will be just as grateful after she has spent a few weeks here." Rachel wasn't going to let anyone say anything bad about the school. She knew if she had to, she would defend this school to the hilt.

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“I am glad that you like it here so much.” Mr Stallion sounded a bit heartbroken as he spoke, but Rachel was no longer paying much attention to Mr Stallion; she was more concerned with the fact that, since the start of the conversation, Benjamin hadn’t said a word. Rachel had a feeling that Benjamin was thinking about something very, very hard.

“Are you alright Benjamin?”

“Yes, I’m fine.” Benjamin mustered a tiny smile. “I was just thinking?”

“We could see that.” Rachel realising that Benjamin was now frowning and decided to change the subject quickly. “Are you going to lead the way, Benjamin?”

“Yes, I think we should get going.” Benjamin stood silently for a few moments, before he added. “Let’s take Mr. Stallion around the main building, since that is where most of the activity happens.”

Rachel took one last look at the painting the man had been admiring. “You see, the main students aren’t allowed down this corridor. We hold our prefect meetings in that little room there.” She pointed to a small door a few feet down the corridor. “And the staff room is right at the other end.”

Mr Stallion looked to where Rachel was pointing and then spoke to Benjamin with a wry grin on his face. “Lead the way then, young fellow.”

For the next forty minutes, Rachel and Benjamin took Mr Stallion around the school. They showed him where everything was, and even interrupted an English lesson so that he could see first-hand how good the lessons were. Some of the students even helped out by answering a few of Mr Stallion’s questions. At the end of it, he thanked the students for their answers, and then Rachel and Benjamin dropped him off with Lady Simpson.

“Thanks again for helping me out,” Lady Simpson said as they both left the room.

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They scurried along the corridor, and made it to their next lesson five minutes late. Rachel had been a bit worried that the teacher might tell them off, but Lady Simpson had sent a message to their teacher, saying that they were doing her a favour and warning the teacher that they might not be on time. When they got into the room, all their teacher did was look up and whisper to them to turn to Page 292 of their textbook.

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Meanwhile, Lady Simpson talked to Mr Stallion about the cost of attending the school. Whilst she was talking, Mr Stallion kept staring out of the window at the school playing fields.

“Do you want me to tell you about the sports we offer here?” Lady Simpson suggested.

“No, it’s all right,” Mr Stallion stood meekly. He was acting like a student about to be told off. “I was just thinking that the school fields seem to be huge.”

“Oh, that.” Lady Simpson looked out of the window, down to the playing fields. “They didn’t used to be until about five years ago. We decided to improve the facilities, and we made the grounds—” Lady Simpson stopped abruptly.

Mr. Stallion was standing there, frozen to the spot, his face had also suddenly turned a nasty shade of white. “Is everything all right?” Lady Simpson went over to her desk.

“Yeah, everything is fine.” Mr Stallion wiped his forehead.

“Are you sure you don’t want a glass of water?”

“Yes, I’m sure,” Mr Stallion whispered, his voice still shaking from the shock. “I’ll be in touch.”

Lady Simpson gave him another concerned look. In the end, she escorted him to the front door and shook his hand goodbye. Once he had gone, she went back to her office and peered out of her window, watching him saunter up the

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school path. 'What a very peculiar man,' she murmured to herself. Then, with a shrug, she went and sat down at her desk and took out the book she was currently reading.

Chapter 4

THE NOTE

The sun was shining down brightly on the school as the students made their way out of the dining hall. The students, after having lunch, were now all doing a whole range of activities in their lunch break. There were a few games of football going on. A number of the younger students were running as wild as Tasmanian devils. Further up the field a group of students were practicing walking on their hands, with various level of success. The noise was like a hundred drummers playing at the same time and it was deafening to those around.

Rachel had decided that instead of going to the fountain as she normally did, she would go and chat with some of the younger students to make sure that everything was going well. Benjamin had also tagged along. After ten minutes of chatting to students, Benjamin and Rachel were happy that the younger students were behaving and enjoying themselves, so they headed off to find a nice quiet spot. They were just settling down by a chestnut tree when, suddenly, Lady Simpson came flying towards them, a look of urgency etched on her face.

“Hi Miss.” Rachel, noticing the look on Lady Simpson face, shot up like a cat that had be scolded.

“I’m glad I caught you both.” Lady Simpson high-pitched tenor tones were filled with worry. “I have an important package that needs posting today, I meant to post it earlier but I totally forgot. Do you think you could post it for me?”

“We’d love to,” Rachel beamed. She didn’t like it when people were stressed, and it seemed important that the parcel be posted as soon as possible.

Lady Simpson looked glad when she saw Benjamin get up and nod his head in agreement “Thank you. I knew I

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could count on you both. If you'll come with me, I'll get you the package and the money to post it."

They left the field together and went to the front office. Ten minutes later Benjamin and Rachel had the parcel and were walking down the main pathway out of the schoolyard. Once they got out of the iron gates, they turned right and started walking. At first, they walked past farmers' fields, where they could smell the manure. There were a few tractors working in the fields. The two students, could also see the beautiful farm houses, with the thatched roofs and the beautiful oak windows. After about ten minutes of walking though, the pathways got rougher and they had to be careful where they trod as a few of the tiles were loose.

Once they got near the post office they heard cars flying past them and a few lawn-mowers in the distant. She looked at the post office and sighed, the sign was missing a few letters and the roof was badly in need of repairs; there was also a window that was boarded up.

Rachel checked her watch as she got there. "It took us longer than I thought it would."

"Well, Lady Simpson knows she can trust us, and she will know that we tried our best," Benjamin said reassuringly. "Why don't you wait out here whilst I go inside and send the parcel off?"

"I would like that." Rachel didn't know why, but she didn't really want to go inside.

Benjamin was looking pleasantly at her, "I won't be long," he promised as he turned to face the post office. Rachel spotted that, along with the parcel, he also had a letter in his hand. She wondered who it was for.

Rachel watched as he went inside and then went back to looking at the houses nearby and noticed how most of the grass was over growing and how the gardens were looking messy with rubbish everywhere.

Rachel knew that the docks were the heart and soul of the town, but she'd had no idea how much it had affected the town when the shipping businesses had closed down

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around a decade ago. She was lost deep in her thoughts when something hit her in the back of the head. “What the—?” She shot back to reality with a start. She looked down to see what had hit her and noticed that it was a crumpled piece of paper. She opened it up and started to read:

Dear Rachel,

You don't know me, but I can guarantee that I know you. I have seen you a few times in my life, and I want to talk to you about something important. I know it might sound strange, but if you meet me at 11 p.m. just at the front of Riverside Academy, then you will understand everything, and maybe you can help me out. If not, there are ways that I can make your life unbearable.

*From,
Mr S*

Shaking with fright, Rachel stood there clutching the letter. She rattled her brains for a few seconds, as she tried to think who it could be from. She couldn't decide what she wanted to do, so in the end she pocketed the note and glanced around to see if she could see anyone.

Suddenly Benjamin tapped Rachel on the shoulder. “Done.”

Rachel who hadn't heard Benjamin exit the shop, jumped about ten feet in the air, her face turning white and her eyes showing true panic.

“Are you alright?” Benjamin asked, looking concerned.

“Jesus, you nearly gave me a heart attack,” Rachel sighed. It felt like her heart was beating at twice the normal rate. She glanced around again, and when she saw Benjamin watching her with interest, she gave a half-hearted smile.

“Just admiring the view,” she lied.

Benjamin looked at Rachel, watching her closely. “Okay, let's head back.”

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Rachel was relieved that Benjamin hadn't asked any questions; she had been standing there nervously expecting him to.

Mr Stallion had been watching them from his hiding place. As soon as they left, he came out and went in the opposite direction, back towards the centre of the town.

The walk back to school was uncomfortable for them. Neither of them spoke, and Rachel was sure that Benjamin knew that something had happened. But, still, he didn't say anything. She glanced at his face, trying to get a read on him, but was unable to, so she just stared ahead and kept on walking.

Rachel had to stop and do a double take as she looked at the school gates in front of her. She had been so lost in her thoughts and scenery, she hadn't realised how long it had been. Turning into the school grounds, she suddenly noticed someone coming towards them.

Lady Simpson had been standing at her office window looking out, waiting for them to arrive back. Once she saw them coming through the beautiful iron gates, she walked outside and thanked them for their services.

"You're welcome." Rachel beamed with pride, as she thought about how much Lady Simpson had helped her.

"You two had best head off to your lesson." Lady Simpson spoke politely. "I have told your teacher you might be late."

They both headed off towards the school and then they went into the classroom.

Rachel spent most of the day confused; she was in an awful state of panic. In one lesson, she tried to hand her English homework into her Science Teacher, which had the rest of the class in a fit of laughter. She spoke only when she was spoken to and even in her favourite subject, Geography, she didn't put her hand up like she would normally do.

Once the lessons were over for the day, Rachel excused herself and went into her private bedroom. Rachel had

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decorated her room with a couple of plants. The window faced towards the gardens, and the roses and daffodils were just starting to bloom which, with the window being open, made the room smell as nice as an ocean breeze. She stood there for a few moments taking in the wonderful smell before she closed the window and started to re-read the note.

She read it over a couple of times but she couldn't figure out what it meant. She then decided to try and get on with her homework.

After working for an hour, she stopped. She let out a long low sigh and she went over and closed the curtain. It was all so strange. I really must go find out what this is about. Rachel turned to her alarm clock and started to fiddle with it. She set it for 10.40PM. She then clambered into her bed. Her mind was racing, full of the note and what it might mean. She continued thinking about it right until the last moments before she fell asleep.

Chapter 5

RACHEL'S DILEMMA

The alarm went off in Rachel's room and, urgently, she turned it off. Then she sat there with baited breath to see if anyone else had heard it. After a few moments she decided no one had, so she slipped out from beneath her duvet and began to tiptoe around the room trying to find a few things to wear to keep her warm. In the end, she decided to wear jeans and a long-sleeved shirt. Exiting her room, she crept over to a door at the very back of the house. She knew the front door would be locked at this time, but the back door never was. Once she arrived at the door, she opened it. It creaked a little but, thankfully, nobody came running. She then slowly walked out, gently shutting the door behind her.

The sky was calm and starry, and there was a gentle breeze in the air. She walked slowly to begin with but, when she got away from the main building, she legged it across the main yard.

Suddenly, she noticed a lone figure standing next to a car. His feet were tapping the ground, and he kept glancing at his watch. He was still wearing the same old suit.

"You!" she snapped, her jaw dropped in amazement "You sent the letter?" She pointed her finger at him.

"My dear Rachel." Mr Stallion gave her a sadistic smile. "I did. I needed to tell you something,"

"What?" Rachel hissed. She was feeling very annoyed at allowing herself to get dragged out here in the middle of a cold night. She also thought she should have realised this man wasn't the sort who wanted to send his daughter to the school. Come to think of it, looking at him now, she was surprised he'd tricked anybody into thinking he was. The way he had dressed for the visit to the school in the same dirty old suit he had on now was not what she expected

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from a navy man. Even his curls were a greasy mess, and he stunk like rotten fish.

“I know you won’t believe me when I say this, but I am your father—and I can prove it.”

Rachel started trembling with fear as she stood there. When she eventually found her tongue, the word she uttered was filled with dread. “How?”

Rachel watched as Mr Stallion pulled a pile of photographs from his pocket. He handed them to her and she slowly looked through them. They were of her! There was one of her as a five-year-old on a bike. Then there was another showing her blowing out seven candles on a birthday cake. There was even a photo of her in her uniform on her first day at school.

“So?” Mr Stallion prompted her.

“These don’t mean a thing,” Rachel snapped as she handed them back to him. “For all I know you could have stolen them out of my fath—” Rachel stopped as she remembered something her mother had told her about her father, that he was in the navy and was really high up.

“What about your father?” Mr Stallion face showing a look of intrigue.

“You can’t be my father. He’s some big shot in the navy,” Rachel whispered weakly. Her voice filled with dread.

Seriously, her mother wouldn’t lie to her about anything like this, right? She pictured him out at sea leading a crew on long missions. She was now starting to question it though. Why had he never visited her, and why when she brought it up did her mother always quickly change the subject? “You can’t be.”

“I’m sorry, Rachel. I don’t know who told you I was in the navy, but they lied.”

Rachel stared into his eyes, hoping that they would help her determine her next course of action.

She was about to speak when he spoke first. “Many years ago. I was desperate for cash, so I decided that I would rob

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a bank with the help of a crew. We got away with a lot, and we were nearly home and dry...” Mr Stallion paused a faraway look in his eyes. “You see, I made a mistake, but luckily we managed to hide the loot. Can you guess where we hid it?”

Rachel listened in astonishment to the man in front of her. Was he seriously telling her that he was a master criminal? Something suddenly came to her that made her breathe easily again. Surely, if he had stolen a fortune it would have been all over the news. “So, let me get this straight – you stole a fortune and buried it around here?” Rachel's voice was full of sarcasm.

“Yes,” he said, a look of relief on his face.

“Well, I'm sorry. I don't believe you,” Rachel sneered, a frown plastered on her face. How dumb, did he think she was? “You see, if what you are saying was true, there would surely be some newspaper story about it, and there would still be people searching for the loot, but I've never heard of anything, and I've been at this school for years.”

She stared, her eyes like daggers, daring him to tell her anything else. “If that will be—”

He suddenly grabbed hold of her wrist, cutting off her words as she turned to leave “Please, Rachel, I promise I'm not making it up,” Mr Stallion croaked. “I swear it. I would never lie to my daughter.” The way he spoke sent a shiver down Rachel's back.

Rachel studied his face. The look he was giving her made her feel uneasy. A thousand different emotions and thoughts were going through her head, but first she would have to find out if the story he was telling was true – and if he really was her father. She stood there for a few moments trying to figure out what everything meant, but she was struggling and at a loss for answers. She knew it wasn't a decision that she should make lightly.

“All right, I'll look into this to see how much of it is the truth.”

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“That is wise,” he said, releasing her wrist. “How about we meet back here in a fortnight?”

“Okay then.” Rachel just wanted to get away from him. He had dropped a bombshell, and she was still trying to come up with reasons why he couldn’t be her father. She was wracking her brain, but was coming up empty at the minute. She was also feeling a bit chilly now. Even though it was April, she hadn’t expected to be outside for as long as she had been.

“Great!” Mr Stallion took the photos from Rachel, but he left one with her. He then opened the car door and clambered in. Grabbing hold of the car door handle, he turned and glared at Rachel. “Just remember, if you tell anyone about this, there will be trouble.” He then slammed the door, started the engine and drove away.

Rachel just stood there in shock. What had just happened? She remembered how, on the first day of meeting him, he had looked at her differently. Was this why? Was she his daughter? But if that was the case, why did her mother lie to her? She was so confused about everything, and when she looked down into her hands, she realised that he had left a photo. Was that to remind her about this evening? She turned the photo over and was shocked to see that it was her as a young child, when she was learning to ride a bike. She stood there for a few moments before she headed back towards the school.

She was glad when she realised the door was exactly as she left it, though she was shocked to see that it was nearly half past eleven. She had been out for over half an hour. She shut the door and headed back toward her bedroom. She had just turned off the lights and got in bed when she heard footsteps heading down the corridor. Her heart was racing at a thousand beats a second – or it felt like that anyway. She was very upset with herself for breaking the rules. In all her years as a student, she hadn't gotten a single detention. She lay awake, everything twirling through her mind. And, when she finally did fall asleep, it wasn't into a

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pleasant slumber but instead she kept replaying the meeting in her head. Each time she thought she was as free as a bird, she would be dragged down.

Chapter 6

A PLAN IS MADE

Rachel was tossing and turning. She felt like she was struggling for breath; she was going to be trapped where she was for eternity. She watched as bird flew overhead, but no matter what she did, she couldn't escape. The maze, no matter which way she went, was taking her to the one person she didn't want to see. Mr. Stallion.

"Rachel..." A voice from the distant was calling her.

She continued to struggle frantically for a few moments, but then there was light at the end of the tunnel and she slowly opened her eyes. She blinked a few times. It took her a few minutes to remember where she was and what had happened the night before. Standing beside her, looking down at her, was Lady Simpson.

"Is everything all right?" Lady Simpson asked her softly. "I've called for the nurse to come and check on you."

"What's wrong?" Rachel asked, confused as to why there was such a fuss happening.

"Well, dear, when you didn't turn up for breakfast. I sent a teacher to see where you were, and she came back to report that you were talking and moaning in your sleep."

Rachel looked startled when the headmistress mentioned breakfast. Turning to her clock, her eyes grew wide with alarm. "I'm so sorry."

"What are you sorry about?" Lady Simpson looked a bit confused. "You can't help being ill, you know."

Rachel didn't know what to say. She knew what she wanted to do. She wanted to explain everything to Lady Simpson, who was standing there, but Rachel remembered what the man had told her. She decided, after much thought, that she wouldn't tell anyone for now.

It seemed as if Lady Simpson was about to say something, but then the nurse arrived. She was a picture of

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beauty. Slender, with light brown curls that flowed down to her waist, and crystal-blue eyes. Everyone at the school thought she looked like a model. She was also very sweet and caring. The next thing Rachel knew, a thermometer was being put in her mouth and the nurse was taking her pulse. Ten seconds later, she removed it.

“Am I okay?” Rachel inquired. Her head felt like a marching band was playing in it.

“You have a temperature,” the nurse answered with an Irish accent as she began to search through her bag.

Rachel couldn't see what the nurse was looking for but soon a cup was thrust at her with the order to drink it. She took one sip and nearly spewed up all over her sheets. It tasted worse than rotten eggs. Putting her finger on her nose, she swallowed the rest, the taste lingering bitterly on her tongue.

“Good girl.” The nurse gave Rachel shoulder a gentle pat. “Hopefully that will get the temperature down.”

“Now sleep.” Lady Simpson ordered.

Rachel watched as both women left her room. She tried to sleep but, no matter what she did, she just couldn't get comfortable.

~

Benjamin walked nervously towards the head's office. He had been enjoying his break when he had been asked to go and see Lady Simpson. When he arrived at her door, he took a deep breath before he knocked.

“Come in,” Lady Simpson called from the other side of the door.

With a look of nervousness on his face, Benjamin slowly opened the door. He walked towards the desk. He then stood there a few moments before Lady Simpson spoke.

“Welcome, Benjamin.” Lady Simpson looked up at him from behind her desk. “It seems you are feeling nervous.”

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She spoke calmly “I only called you because I want to know if Rachel has said anything lately?”

Lady Simpson got up and went towards the window. She looked out at the school fields and the fountain that they had all been standing at a few days earlier. After a few more moments she looked back towards her head boy. “It seems the nurse is worried about her,” she told him softly. “Rachel has a temperature and when I went to check on her earlier, she was tossing and turning in her sleep, mutter about something, but she won’t say anything to me. Has she said anything to you?”

Not that I . . .” he started to say, when suddenly his thoughts turned grave. “On the way back from taking your parcel, she was very quiet.”

Lady Simpson looked back out the window whilst Benjamin just stood there. It was a few minutes before she spoke. “Sorry, my boy. Here I am, lost in thought, and I haven’t even asked if you want to sit down.”

“It’s okay.”

“Anyway, whilst I was standing there, I was thinking that maybe, when Rachel is well, you and her could go for a long walk together.”

“I think we just—” Benjamin started to say, but Lady Simpson held out her hand and he fell silent.

Lady Simpson continued as if no interruption had happened. “And if you happen to ask her what is wrong then there is nothing I can do about it.”

Benjamin’s eyes suddenly lit up. “Yes, Lady Simpson. I think that was exactly what we were planning on doing.”

“I knew I made an excellent choice when I appointed you head boy,” Lady Simpson beamed, her voice sounding better now. “I think you had best get off. I’m sure the prefects will be wondering where you are.”

“See you later,” he said, giving her a quick smile before heading out of the room. He then slowly walked towards the prefect room. As soon as he got there, they all started talking and asking him about Rachel. “She’s fine. She’s just

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not feeling very well.” Benjamin told them bravely. But his words were drowned with worry.

~

A week later, Lady Simpson walked briskly into the staffroom. Sadly, Rachel was still too unwell to go on the walk with Benjamin. Instantly, the teachers stopped what they were doing.

“Rachel will be coming back to her classes tomorrow. The nurse wanted her to stay off longer, but Rachel insisted she’s ok, and since the fever has gone and she ate all her dinner, it has been decided that we will let her.” Lady Simpson stopped and paused for a few moments before continuing. “If anyone sees a change in her, please let us know immediately,” Everybody in the staffroom nodded.

“Thank you,” Lady Simpson said and, without waiting another moment, she swept out of the room and back towards her study, leaving the staff talking about the latest event.

Chapter 7

A VISIT TO THE LIBRARY

Rachel was absolutely delighted the first day she was allowed back into school. She had been getting bored the past couple of days, and had done the nurses head in with all the begging. She had also been really afraid that she was going to fall behind with her work. She knew that the exams were very close and she had missed a week's work because of her illness.

Standing outside of her classroom, waiting for the teacher to come and allow them in, she smiled sweetly as Benjamin walked over to her. She had been hoping to see him at breakfast but they had both been busy with their responsibilities and so it wasn't until now that they could actually speak to each other.

"Guess what?" Benjamin smiled.

"What?" Rachel's eyes were wide with excitement.

"I've got a surprise for you this Saturday."

Rachel watched Benjamin like a hawk, trying to figure out if she had to guess or if Benjamin was going to tell her what the surprise was. "Come on! Don't keep me waiting."

"It's a surprise for you," Benjamin teased her.

Rachel stood there, her lips pouting as she put on the fake tears. "Pl- please?"

"Sorry!" Benjamin spoke firmly.

Rachel sighed. She knew Benjamin well enough to know that he was not going to tell her.

"It'll be worth it." Benjamin smiled sweetly.

Rachel, who felt like she was about to explode with curiosity, suddenly said, "Okay, I'll try and wait." She still wasn't sure if she could or not, but she would at least try for him.

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“I promise you, you’ll like it.”

“I trust you.” Rachel suddenly heard movement behind them and soon they were all let into the classroom. Now though, Saturday couldn’t come soon enough for her.

~

There were posters on the wall everywhere, describing what was coming next. The floor was tiled and the smell of popcorn filled the air. There was a small wooden counter where you went to get your tickets. A small group of people were leaving the building, chatting away happily. Rachel was currently wearing a red t-shirt and pink shorts. Her blonde hair tied firmly in a ponytail. She had just come out of the Saturday afternoon showing with Benjamin, who was wearing blue jeans and his favourite football teams’ top. Walking outside, the street was nearly empty and the group of people who had been inside with them, split up and went different ways. They went over to the nearest bench, sat down and started to talk about the film they had just seen.

“What did you think?” Benjamin asked her.

“Well, to tell you the truth,” Rachel sighed, her eyes glistening with sadness, “it wasn’t as good as the first two.”

Benjamin seemed to deflate like a flat tyre. “I thought it was okay.”

“It was. Sort of.”

Benjamin sighed. “I wanted to treat you after your illness.”

Rachel had wanted to see the film badly and, for the past few months, she had been begging Benjamin to take her. “I’m sorry, I just was expecting more.”

The boy smiled. “I guess it was a bit boring, particularly the beginning.”

Rachel smiled too, glad that he’d forgiven her. “Yeah, the last two films had so much more action.”

They chattered away, talking about the film, until Rachel suddenly heard the unmistakable sound of an ice-cream

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van. Getting up, they both walked over to where it had stopped. She ordered two mega ninety-nines. The ones where they put five flakes in the ice-cream, strawberry source and the ice-cream dripped all over your fingers. Once she got hers, she took out one of the flakes and started to chomp on it.

“What are we going to do next?” Benjamin asked after taking a lick of his ice-cream.

Rachel shrugged. “I don’t know.”

Benjamin and Rachel stood there, eating their ice-creams. Benjamin was better at licking his than Rachel was so, by the time she had finished, her hands were sticky and there was the strawberry sauce all over her top.

Rachel, after taking the last bite of the cornet, wiped her hand on her top, as if it was a dirty tea-towel. “I want to go and check something in the library,” Her eyes grew wide in alarm as she remembered her two weeks were nearly up. “I want to look alone though,” she added.

The smile instantly vanished from Benjamin’s face. “Why can’t I come?” he asked.

“Because I want to be on my own!” Rachel snapped, her eyes flashing with anger. “I’m fed up of spending all my time with you!” She glared at him for a moment. Then she turned on her heels and stormed off towards the library. “And don’t bother to follow me,” she called over her shoulder.

Benjamin stood there gawping after her. Then, finally, with a shrug, he walked off towards the shops, as he had a few things to buy.

As Rachel walked over to the library, she kept checking behind herself make sure that Benjamin wasn’t following her. Each step felt like more weight was being added onto her shoulders. What if the guy was telling the truth? How could she cope with knowing her father was a criminal? Would her friends still like her if the truth came out? She felt like bursting into tears, but she knew that she had to be strong and figure out what was happening.

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She turned the corner and there, in front of her, was the library. It was very old-looking with a tiled roof and a grand-looking oak door. There were two white pillars in front of it that formed a sort of arch.

She walked slowly over to it and, pulling open the heavy doors, she stepped inside. The smell of books instantly hit her. It was a smell she'd always loved. The library was made up of two floors. The ground floor held all the generalist books, and at one end was the children's section where there were loads of different pictures and a small play area. Upstairs was the local history section. She climbed the old oak stairs as she headed off towards that section, knowing one way or another that her life was about to change. She felt frightened and, the closer she got, the slower she walked. She wanted to put this off for as long as she could.

"Go ahead," a voice behind her spoke, making her freeze in fear. She slowly turned around and saw that Mr Stallion was smiling sweetly at her, which made her feel even more nervous. "I'll wait right here and we can talk afterwards."

Chapter 8

RACHEL MAKES A PROMISE

Rachel stood her eyes wide like saucers holding a local newspaper in her hand from sixteen years earlier. The content was causing her a lot of distress. It wasn't true . . . it couldn't be true! She was trying to figure out why her mother would lie to her and why no one had searched for the loot.

Local Man Arrested
Riverside, London--6th November 2000
By James McDay

In one of the worst crimes committed in recent times, a local man, Mr Richard Stallion, 25, was arrested today after being caught in the middle of one of the biggest robberies in the country after he allegedly stole over one million pounds from a local bank. Unfortunately for Mr Stallion, his sense of direction seems to have failed him at a crucial moment, and he ended up on a dead-end road between the prestigious Riverside Academy and a factory, which meant that the police could arrest the whole gang.

Unfortunately, the loot was never recovered, even though an extensive search was undertaken. A reward of £40,000 has been posted for any information on the whereabouts of the loot.

Stallion seems to have needed the cash after losing his high-paying job. With a wife and baby daughter to feed, he allegedly became so desperate that he ended up working in the company of serial criminals.

Mr Richard Stallion now faces up to 20 years in prison.

Rachel knew there was more, but she was struggling to get over the “my daughter Rachel” part. Was he telling the truth then? Was he really her father? It looked highly likely

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that he was. She put that newspaper down and then retrieved one from nearly five months later.

***Local Man Gets Fifteen Years
Riverside, London--12th March 2001
By James McDay***

Mr Richard Stallion, 26, was sentenced to fifteen years in prison yesterday. He was led out of court into a waiting police van.

This reporter spoke to Mrs. Stallion after the verdict was given and she had this to say.

“My daughter and I will have nothing more to do with him. I have already started divorce procedures and I am already making arrangement for the future. I am shocked and appalled that he thought that this was the only way forwards. He had his friends and family willing to do anything for him.”

This newspaper did get in touch with Mr. Stallion’s legal team, but no response was forthcoming.

Rachel just stood there with tears pouring down her cheeks as she read more and more. Why had this well-liked and respectable man that it seemed was her father turned so suddenly to crime? Had she had something to do with it?

Rachel took out her handkerchief from her pocket and slowly wiped her eyes and blew her nose. She wanted to sit in the library forever, hoping that he would get bored and leave, but she knew that it was just wishful thinking and that she would have to deal with him in the end. She took a deep breath and went back towards the staircase.

Mr Stallion sat on the stairway, reading the newspaper. Rachel was surprised to see that he hadn’t moved since she had left him. He looked up as she approached him.

“Rachel!” he smiled sweetly. “Do you believe me now?”

Rachel just stared at him, rattling her brain for reasons as to why he couldn’t be her father. But, after a few moments, she nodded her head.

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“That’s great,” Mr Stallion said as he got up and folder his paper. “Let’s go over there to talk. There is no one there at the moment, so we can’t be overheard.” He slowly walked down the stairs and towards the seating section. Once there he sat down.

She followed him meekly, trying to come to terms with everything that was going on inside her head. She sat down across from him.

“So, what do you want to know?” he asked her quietly.

“Why?” she whispered, her voice quivering.

“Why what?” Mr Stallion inquired.

“Why did you do it?” She sighed. “Was it my fault?” She really wanted to know if her birth had been the reason he had gone astray.

Mr Stallion just stared at her for a few moments. Then, ignoring the first question, he asked. “Why would you think that?”

Rachel looked away from him, trying to regain her composure. She was still very distressed about the whole situation, but she knew that she wanted answers. After a few moments, she looked back towards him her eyes showing a glint of sadness. “Well, you see it happened after I was born. So, was I the reason why? Was I such a bad baby that you had to escape from me and do what you did?” Rachel sighed, her mind racing as she spoke.

“Rachel, listen to me. You have nothing to blame yourself for. I was stupid, and I made a mistake at work which cost me my job. I had a family to feed, bills to pay, and a new born daughter who needed things that I could not afford.”

Rachel could see that Mr. Stallion was struggling to keep it together, his eyes were starting to well-up and his face was a picture of anguish. She attempted to focus on what he was saying. “You see I got caught, and my one regret is that I never got to see you grow up into this wonderful lady in front of me. All I have are photos that your mother sent me.” He sighed, glancing over at his daughter.

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“If that’s the case, why are you turning back to crime now?” Rachel asked, bemused. He seemed genuinely upset that he had missed out on her childhood, but now he was risking it all.

“I...” He stopped and sat there as still and silent as a statue.

Rachel listened, as it seemed that her father was internally struggling with the man he once was with the man he had become. She really wanted him to change. She didn’t know him well, but it seemed that he might have been sweet and caring at one time. Wasn’t that why he went to jail? Because he cared too much.

“Yes?” she pushed him, trying to get a reason from him.

Mr. Stallion turned back to face her. His mood had changed, and he was now acting and his voice was icily cold when he spoke. “I need the cash. Now, will you help me?”

“If I do this, will you promise to leave me alone?” Rachel whispered softly and weakly, her composure completely gone.

“Yes!” He glared at her.

Rachel stared sadly at him. At first, she had thought he was going to try and make up for what he had done in the past, but now it seemed he was back to being cold and heartless. When he had snapped at her, she had jumped in surprise. “Well, I guess I have no choice,” she sighed sadly. His mind seemed to have been made up.

“Great,” Mr Stallion hissed at his daughter. “Now listen carefully. We will be at the school grounds at around one o’clock Wednesday morning. I expect you to be there to let us in.” He then got up and stalked out of the library, leaving a bewildered and scared Rachel behind him. For the next five minutes, Rachel didn’t dare move. She just sat there in stunned silence. When she finally found the courage to move, she walked off towards the front door. When Benjamin came into the library, which was a relief, she knew that she had an apology to make.

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“I know you are.” Benjamin smiled sweetly. “Let’s head off back to school.”

Arm in arm, they walked out of the library, chatting away as if nothing had happened.

Chapter 9

ON THE GROUNDS AT NIGHT

For the next few days, Rachel was very nervous, lest anyone found out what she was up to. She ate less and less, and the teachers were getting more and more worried about her. But she still refused to tell anybody what was bothering her. Benjamin was also getting more and more worried too; he just hoped there would soon be a reply to the letter he sent.

~

It was the middle of the night, and Rachel was wide awake. She turned over and looked at the alarm clock that sat on her bedside table next to two photos: one of her and Benjamin, and one of her parents. She sighed as she realised that it was 12:40 a.m. She knew if she was going to do this, it was now or never. In some ways, she wanted to just roll over and try to sleep, but if she did that, everyone might find out about her father. After all, she had bragged about him being a big shot in the navy when she first came to the school. As silently as possible, she threw on a t-shirt and jeans. Then she added a jumper; it was probably cold out there. She then slowly walked out of the room, quietly closing the door behind her.

The clouds of the past few days had been replaced by gushing winds. When Rachel got outside, she was glad that she had put on her jumper, though she hoped that she wouldn't be outside for long. She quietly walked over the first half of the field but when she got further away from the school, she legged it to the iron gates. She opened the small gate that the students walked through and went to the

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edge of the pathway. Peering both ways, she noticed nothing was coming and the road was silent. Suddenly a huge gust of wind made her shiver. She was glad that she had her jumper on. She looked up into the sky and sighed; there was a lot of low cloud up there. Rachel had a feeling she was soon going to get very wet.

~

She was standing there when a van suddenly came trundling up the road. At first it looked like any other van but, as it got closer, she realised that it was different. It looked much higher than other vans and the back was huge; perfect, she thought, for carrying lots of heavy gold.

The van suddenly stopped, and Rachel was shocked to see that it wasn't just her father that had come; it seemed that he had brought a friend with him. This friend made a beeline straight towards her.

‘H-have you t-told anybody?’

‘I- I...’ Rachel meekly stammered, feeling very uncomfortable and nervous around him. ‘No,’ she finally got out.

‘A- are you sure?’

‘Tan, she has already told you that she hasn't told anyone.’ Mr Stallion voice was husky as he went over to his daughter and tried to give her a hug, but as soon as he put his arm around her, she wiggled free.

‘I don't want a hug from you.’ Rachel stared icily at him. ‘Once this is over, I want nothing to do with you.’ She just wanted to get back on with her life and forget about this sorry affair.

Mr Stallion looked at his daughter with narrow eyes. ‘Things have changed,’ he told her icily. ‘If you don't want anyone finding out you were involved, then you won't tell a soul until we leave the abandoned house in town.’ He glared at his daughter daring her to disagree. ‘Do you understand?’

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Rachel had a feeling that he was trying to get her back for not giving him a hug. She was shaking with fright and her mind was racing about what everyone would think if they found out she was involved. It took her all her courage to weakly reply. “Y-y-yes,” her voice was nothing more than a faint whisper.

“Good! Now lead the way. We don’t have time to stand around talking all day.”

Rachel and the two men slowly walked to where Mr Stallion directed. The wind was getting stronger and a light rain was starting to fall on them. Rachel was getting more and more agitated the longer the men were there.

Rachel watched as Ian made sure that the security cameras were out of action before turning back to Mr Stallion. “Y-you sure it’s here?” he stuttered nervously, his eyes shooting around like a hawk.

“I’ll bet my only daughter’s life on it,” Mr Stallion snarled back. Then he picked up a shovel and started to dig.

Rachel was shocked by her father’s blatant statement. She was his only daughter, and he would risk her life for gold! Now she was starting to understand why her mother had not been truthful to her. Maybe she didn’t want her to know just how far her father had fallen. At the library, he had seemed nice. But now he was just icy-cold, as if she was just a burden.

She stood there as she watched Ian pick up a shovel and start to dig. She was fighting with her inner self. Something inside her wanted her to turn around and run as fast as she could, but she was rooted to the spot. “W- what are you thinking?”

“N-n-nothing,” Rachel answered as she was jolted back to reality.

“I hope you’re not thinking about running.” Mr Stallion glared at his daughter as he continued to dig. “Surely you want to see the loot.”

Rachel went as white as a ghost as her father spoke to her. How had he guessed what was in her head? She stood

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there in stunned silence. In some ways, though, he was right. She did want to see the loot. Even if it was wrong.

For the next thirty minutes, the men continued to dig. Rachel got more and more nervous. She had no idea how she would explain being caught out of bed. For her, the thirty minutes were the slowest in her life. She was just about to say something when Mr Stallion spoke. "I think we've hit it," he smirked.

Rachel, who had just been standing there, scooted closer to the hole that the two men had made. She was intrigued by the thought of this loot that had been under her feet the entire time she had attended school. What she saw made her eyes widen. At the bottom of the hole were bars of gold!

She watched as Ian sauntered off to get a ladder. When he returned, he placed the ladder in the hole. "Now you'll see the real action," he muttered, his mouth twitching into a sardonic smile.

Working together, Ian and Mr Stallion soon retrieved the gold and put it into the van. They then set about filling in the hole. At first, they had not wanted to bother, but after a little pleading from Rachel, they had relented.

"I'll send you a letter when we are clear. Until then, say nothing. Do you understand?"

Rachel mustered what little strength she had left to weakly nod her head.

~

It was past 1:30 a.m. when Rachel stood at the front of the school and watched the van trundling down the road. The rain was getting heavier, and the wind was much stronger now, pulling at the trees. She stood there for a few seconds contemplating what she had got herself mixed up in, and what would happen if anyone found out. Finally, she trudged back towards the school. She got inside just in time, as the heavens opened and the rain came thundering down.

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~

Early the next morning, the nurse was walking past Rachel's room when she heard grunts coming from inside. She slowly opened the door and peered in, watching as Rachel tossed and turned in her sleep. She watched for a little longer before shutting the door and heading over to Lady Simpson's bedroom. She knocked on the door.

"Come in," Lady Simpson said sleepily.

The nurse opened the door and went inside. She went directly over to where Lady Simpson was sitting up in her bed.

"Rachel is at it again." The nurse, sighed, stifling a yawn, which betrayed how tired she really was.

"Something is wrong, but she'll tell us in her own time." Lady Simpson spoke firmly.

The two women looked at each other for a few moments, before the nurse excused herself and went off to find her own bed.

Chapter 10

BENJAMIN'S LETTER

It was now Friday and, no matter what anyone tried, Rachel refused to talk. No one had seen her like this before, and the staff was starting to get really worried. Her once lovely eyes were starting to show signs of lack of sleep, and her face constantly had a nervous and worried look on it.

What was worse was that it seemed like someone had played a prank on the school grounds by digging a part of it up. It had taken the groundskeeper four hours to fill it back in, and when Lady Simpson stood up in assembly and asked the school who the culprit was, no hands went up.

It was a sunny morning. The clouds and rain that had been hanging over the school for the past few days had gone. Benjamin and Rachel sat at the front of their English class. But Rachel had no interest in studying English. Instead of working, she was doodling in her book. The teacher kept coming over and scolding her about it, but the more she was told to get on with her work, the more she doodled.

“Rachel.” Her teacher was a sweet old lady, who had a soft sweet voice. “I’ve already told you three times to stop doodling.”

“Why?” Rachel asked sarcastically. “It’s better than your boring te...”

“Rachel!” A voice at the door suddenly spoke.

She looked up to see Lady Simpson at the door. Instantly, Rachel’s face went red in embarrassment. “I’m sorry” she muttered, and she quickly began scribbling in her book.

“I expect an example to be set from my head girl.” Lady Simpson walked over to where Benjamin and Rachel were sitting. “Come to my office after this lesson.” She then

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turned to Benjamin. “There’s a letter for you that says it is urgent. You might want to go and read it now.” She turned to the teacher, who nodded her head.

Benjamin, with one quick glance at Rachel, got up and went to find a quiet place.

Lady Simpson watched as Benjamin left. “Remember, what I’ve said.” Her eyes bored downwards towards Rachel.

Rachel was feeling terribly uncomfortable, and her lack of sleep seemed to be affecting her judgement. For a second she even thought about saying no, but when she looked up at her head teacher, she instantly got the feeling Lady Simpson knew more about the situation. “Okay,” she said after a small pause.

~

Benjamin went straight to the prefect room and found a comfortable chair. There was no one there at the minute. He sat there hesitantly as he looked at the letter. Then, with his hands trembling, he slowly opened it up and settled down to read it.

Dear Benjamin,

I am so glad that you have brought this to my attention. The man that you are referring to sounds like my ex-husband and Rachel’s dad. Many years ago, when Rachel was just a baby, he was involved in a heist. Since then, I have wanted him to have nothing to do with her, though I have sent him photos of her – after all, he is still her father. I told Rachel when she was old enough to understand that he was in the navy and we just fell out of love. The truth, though, is much more complicated.

You see, he was once a decent member of society and a role model, but just after Rachel was born, he made a terrible mistake. He was a surgeon at the local hospital, and he unfortunately lost a patient, which haunted him. In the end, due to his behaviour, it cost him his job. After that, he just wasted away, drinking beer all the time. I think

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when the gang offered him a lot of money he was in a bad state and desperate for cash, so he grasped the opportunity with both hands.

In some ways I blame myself, as maybe I should have stuck around with him, but once he was arrested for robbing the bank, I divorced him and made a promise to myself never to let Rachel find out about it. If my ex-husband is back at Riverside, then it can only mean that he is searching for the loot. I had hoped that after his prison sentence he would go back to being the decent man that I once loved, but, alas, it seems that he hasn't got over losing his patient, and I have a feeling that he never will.

I hope this has helped you one way or another, and I hope that you will keep me informed of any developments. I also hope that, other than this small distraction, everything is going great and you're both working hard towards your exams. I know you can both do amazingly well in them.

Benjamin sat there in stunned silent. Finally, he checked his watch. Break had started five minutes ago. He slowly got up from his seat and headed towards the door. Opening it, he walked off towards the main school.

~

Rachel stood there glaring as a first year girl was trying to persuade her to go see Lady Simpson.

“Why should I go see her?” Rachel hissed. Seriously, why couldn't they leave her alone?

“Because she has asked you to see her.” The first year was begging now.

“Tell her to come and see me then.” Rachel glared, daring the first year to say anything more.

The first year opened her mouth a few times but no sound came out. In the end she turned to leave. Suddenly, Rachel grabbed hold of her shoulder, twisted her around and slapped her as hard as she could. She then tripped her so that she landed hard on the floor.

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“That’s for sticking your nose in other people’s business!” Rachel sneered, her face contorted with anger.

Benjamin, who had just arrived at one end of the corridor, stood where he was out of sight, frozen in horror and shock. A few minutes passed before Lady Simpson came walking briskly down the corridor. The first year was nowhere to be seen.

“I have sent Sophie off with another teacher.”

“So.” Rachel’s voice was dead.

“Follow me!” Lady Simpson spoke calmly but firmly.

Rachel, who was standing like a statue, was suddenly brought back to her senses as she walked meekly behind her headmistress.

~

The fire was still roaring in the room as they entered, and the half-drunk cup of coffee was still on the table next to a pad of paper that Lady Simpson had been working in. Without saying a word, the headmistress pointed to the seat in front of the desk, beckoning for Rachel to sit down.

Rachel did as she was told. She had never seen Lady Simpson like this. In some ways, she wished that she would shout at her, tell her that what she had done was wrong, but instead she was getting this cold, silent treatment. Rachel sat there like a figure cut from stone as she waited for her punishment.

Lady Simpson was studying her head girl. “Rachel.” Her voice was icily cold and, once again, it was like a stab in the heart to girl. “I can’t believe that you would behave like you have, first being cheeky in class and then assaulting a younger student.” Rachel sat there as quietly as a mouse, trying to ignore everything Lady Simpson was saying to her.

They both sat there in silence for a few moments. The only noise that could be heard was the crackle of wood on the fire.

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“In the past few weeks, you have been disruptive, argumentative and sneaky. I’m tempted to just expel you.”

Rachel knew what her head teacher was saying was true. She couldn’t look at Lady Simpson, so instead she started to fiddle with her hands whilst she looked around the room.

“Look at me when I’m talking to you.” Lady Simpson spoke politely but firmly, and Rachel realised that she had no choice but to look at her. “Now, Rachel, are you going to tell me what happened a few weeks ago which changed you from the sweet, caring girl I know into this?”

Rachel was fighting with her conscious. She hadn’t meant for it to go so far, and she dreaded to think what her mother would say if she was expelled. She was trying to fight the demons in her head when she heard Lady Simpson speak again and her heart dropped.

“In that case...”

Rachel looked over at Lady Simpson. She didn’t want to get expelled, and she was trying to fight back the tears that were starting to form. Suddenly the door to the office burst open.

“I know...” Benjamin looked from Rachel to Lady Simpson.

“You do?” Rachel whispered, relieved that someone else knew of her plight.

“I do.” Benjamin nodded before turning back to Lady Simpson. “I’m sorry for bursting in.”

“It’s okay. Now, will someone please fill me in on what is happening?”

Chapter 11 IN THE OFFICE

Lady Simpson listened in astonishment as Rachel and Benjamin told the story. Sipping her coffee, she seemed to become less and less angry until, finally, she put her cup down and walked over to the window.

“They made me take them over to where they had buried the gold last Tuesday night.” Rachel, who had started the story with a few tears falling, was now crying heavily. The burden of the last few weeks that had caused her so much stress was finally lifting, and it felt like a weight had been lifted off her shoulders.

Lady Simpson went over to Rachel, who was shaking uncontrollably.

“They - they told me if I - if I told anyone they’d tell everyone that I had - a criminal as a father.” Rachel had finally come clean on what was bothering her the most.

Lady Simpson looked at her students and spoke firmly. “Rachel, you need to understand that no matter what your parents may or may not have done, it isn’t they who make you who you are.”

Rachel frowned, Lady Simpson’s words rolling over and over in her mind. Was she right? Did it not matter to people that her father was a criminal? She hoped not.

“I think the best thing for you to do now is to get to bed.” Lady Simpson smiled as she turned to Benjamin, who was standing there quietly. “Can you go get the nurse?”

Benjamin nodded and left the room, whilst Rachel sat there shaking and crying hysterically.

“I’m so sorry!” Rachel said heartbrokenly.

Lady Simpson gave her a reassuring smile, before speaking. “I know you are. Now do try to stop crying, or you’re going to make yourself ill.” She waited for Rachel to make eye contact before continuing. “I want you to promise

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if this happens again that you'll never ever try and handle it on your own. Go and find someone who can help you."

Rachel nodded. After everything that had happened, she was still trying to figure out why the headmistress was being so kind to her. "I promise."

"There's a good girl," Lady Simpson smiled kindly. Rachel then heard footsteps outside the door and, sure enough, the door opened and Benjamin and the nurse came into the room.

"Take her straight to bed," Lady Simpson said firmly.

Rachel was soon snuggled under her blankets, and, as soon as her head hit the pillow, she was fast asleep. The nurse stayed with her for around thirty minutes, but it seemed like everything was back to normal. Her cheeks were starting to change back to their normal colour, and her face, which had been showing signs of stress, was now starting to look rosy again.

~

Back in the office, Lady Simpson had been on the phone to the police, who had promised to send a man down straight away. Whilst she waited, she continued with her paperwork. She had just finished when the policeman arrived. Lady Simpson told him what she knew and gave a description of the man they should be looking for. He assured her that the description would be circulated to all the local police stations as soon as he got back to his office.

An hour later, the nurse arrived at the office and Lady Simpson poured them both a cup of coffee and put out a plate of biscuits.

"She was sleeping soundly when I left her." The nurse frowned, a hint of intrigue in her Irish voice. "What made her feel so much better?"

"It's simple. She's come clean about what was bothering her." Lady Simpson then gave the nurse a brief description

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of what had happened, which left the nurse looking relieved but angry at the same time.

“I’ll check on her later.” The nurse smiled as she dunked a hobnob into her steaming cup.

~

Rachel was feeling poorly the next two days, so she was happy to stay in bed. The headache that had followed had been one of the worst she had ever had. She had been worried about her schoolwork and her future as head girl, but Lady Simpson had visited her as soon as she had woken up and told her that they would forget most of the past two weeks and that she could still be head girl. However, they couldn’t forget about the incident the day before. She would have to write an apology and she would have to spend the next four Saturdays in detention. On the third day, though, she was starting to feel a lot better. She was sitting up in the bed as the nurse leaned across to make sure that her pillows were fluffed up.

“Can’t I go to my lesson?” Rachel inquired as the nurse finished her task.

“Not today, but if you eat all your dinner then maybe you can in a few more days.”

“Please?”

“I’m sorry, Rachel, though I do have a surprise for you this afternoon if you behave yourself.” The nurse smiled with a gleam in her eyes.

“What is it?” Rachel demanded.

“If I told you it wouldn’t be a surprise,” the nurse laughed.

No matter what Rachel tried, the nurse wouldn’t budge. Finally, Rachel stopped bugging her and decided to settle down to read a book.

~

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Later that evening, after demolishing a plate of fish fingers, chips and peas, Rachel was waiting patiently to see what the surprise was. She was sitting up on her bed trying to figure out what the nurse had meant earlier about it being someone or something she missed dearly. Suddenly a figure appeared at the door.

“Benjamin!” Rachel’s voice was full of excitement and her face lit up even more. The one thing she had hated about being ill was not being able to spend time with Benjamin.

Benjamin walked over to the chair and plonked himself down on it. “How are you feeling?”

“I’m feeling a lot better now that I’ve seen you,” Rachel replied.

“That’s good.”

Rachel then leaned over to him. “I’m glad you’ve come. I want to make amends for everything I’ve done. I remember my father talking about an abandoned house in town. When I’m well, I want to go,” she whispered.

Benjamin looked at her inquiringly. “As long as I get to come with you,” he replied gently but firmly after a few moments pause.

“Of course. That is why I’m telling you.”

They kept on chatting for a while, Benjamin telling her all about school and what she’d missed in class. Until, finally, the nurse shooed him away.

Chapter 12

ALL'S WELL IN THE END

It was Sunday, over a week since Rachel had been ill. Rachel and Benjamin were getting ready to go out to see the abandoned house. They were both sure that they knew which one it was. They left a note in Lady Simpson's office and then set off out of the school grounds. The sun was shining brightly as they chatted away.

Around twenty-five minutes later they arrived at the part of town where the docks were. Even from there they could see all the boarded-up houses, but there was one in particular which Rachel had noticed just before the Easter holiday. It had smoke coming out of the chimney, which intrigued her. They slowly walked down the streets until they came to that house. Once outside, they both stopped, wondering if coming there had been such a good idea.

They were just about to leave when a voice spoke from behind them. "Rachel, I thought I told you not to tell anyone."

The two students stood frozen in fear. As they both turned around, they saw two men standing behind them. When they finally attempted to leave, the men grabbed them and, making sure no one was watching, wrestled them inside.

~

In the meantime, back at school, Lady Simpson had come back from a meeting early. She was sat in her office, the window was open, birds were singing outside and the sound of a lawn mower could be heard. She was sat there shuffling a pile of letters as if they were a pack of cards. She

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looked at the clock; she had time to get started on them. She turned the first one over and, using her letter opener, she opened it. It wasn't important, just a parent arranging for their child to start in September. In fact, most of them were like that. That was until she got to the bottom of the pile. Stuck between two letters was a hand-written note. She turned it over and started to read it. The more she read it, the whiter she became. She picked up the phone, her hand shaking as she phoned the police. Her voice stammering as she told the police exactly what the note said. Once she had put the receiver back, she walked briskly out of the room.

~

The two men took the two students into the house and tied them to chairs. They started to pack up the stuff that was currently in the house. Then they began to put the gold into the van.

Whilst this was going on, Rachel was trying to struggle with her restraints. She watched as Ian and Mr Stallion continued to load up the van. She was upset with herself for allowing herself to get Benjamin involved in this terrible nightmare. As she continued struggling with her restraints, she looked at Benjamin, who seemed to be lost in thought. She was very confused about how calm he seemed to be. She was in even more shock when Benjamin spoke.

“Why couldn't you get over losing a patient?” the boy asked Mr Stallion.

Mr Stallion, startled, dropped the bar of gold he had been carrying, which caused an almighty crash. “It's none of your business,” he retorted.

“But surely Rachel has the right to know,” Benjamin said, trying to coax out an answer.

“No one needs to know. Now shut up. I have work to do.” The man glared at him. “If you don't, I will duct tape your mouth shut.” He held up a roll of packing tape he had

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been using to seal boxes to prove the seriousness of his threat.

Rachel was still struggling with her bonds, trying to figure out what was going on, when she suddenly felt pain in her face as Ian slapped her.

“Th-that’s for going back on your word.” He glared as he got up close to her face so she could feel his hot breath that smelled of tobacco. He slapped her again. “St-stop struggling with your restraints.”

He then turned toward Benjamin and slapped him too. “And that’s for getting involved and meddling in things you shouldn’t.”

Mr Stallion had turned away as Ian had slapped his daughter. “I think we should take them with us,” he said.

“N-no way. They know too much. We need to get rid of them.” Ian glared at him.

“No, we don’t,” Mr Stallion argued back. “We can use them as hostages.”

“N-No! I’ve made up my mind,” Ian declared as he finished loading the gold into the van and came back carrying something deadly.

Rachel felt her throat go dry. Was this it, her life coming to an end before it had fully begun? She closed her eyes and waited for the inevitable to happen.

“Then I’m sorry, but I’ve also made up mine.” Mr Stallion picked up a vase and, before Ian could figure out what he was doing, he smashed it across his friend’s head. He then ran over to where Rachel was tied up.

Rachel had half opened her eyes when she had heard the crash, and she looked on dumbfounded as he started to untie her. “Why?” she asked, the quiver in her voice plain.

“Because you are my daughter,” he answered evenly. “No one hurts my little girl,”

With a lot of different thoughts crowding her mind, Rachel allowed him to unbind her. Hadn’t he been the one to cause her plight in the first place? She watched as he untied Benjamin.

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“You both need to get out of here as quickly as you can, but first can I ask you to do me a favour?” Mr Stallion looked over at Benjamin. “Hit me on the head with something when I’m looking the other way.”

Benjamin stood there gawping. “What?”

“I need you to hit me,” Mr. Stallion begged.

“Why?” Benjamin’s eyes were as wide as saucers.

“Because I need it to look as if I attempted to stop you..”

“I can’t.” Benjamin looked towards Rachel.

Rachel could see the pleading looking on Benjamin face, her mind racing as she tried to figure out what was best. She was about to speak when Mr. Stallion spoke.

“Look, it’s important. I need Ian to think we both got hit, I know he probably saw me hit him, but at least this way there’s a chance.” His husky voice was nothing more than a whisper. “I’ll look the other way, it’s up-to you now Benjamin.”

Rachel was still of two minds. In one way, she just wanted to leg it out of there but, after all the distress he had caused her, she knew he was still her father, and she didn’t want to let him down. After a few seconds, she nodded her head.

Benjamin sighed. He picked up a vase, his hands shaking like a leaf in the wind, and did what Mr. Stallion asked. He watched as Mr Stallion crumpled to the floor. “I’m confused about him – one minute he’s nasty, the next he does things like that. It seems, somewhere deep inside, he’s still the lifesaving doctor he was.”

“He was?” Rachel hadn’t heard about this.

“Yes,” Benjamin told her gently. “But I can fill you in later. Now we best do what he suggests and leave.” He grabbed for Rachel’s hand.

They both walked out of the room and into the corridor. They had only gone a few yards, when suddenly there was bashing at the door.

“You don’t think?” Benjamin asked nervously

“What?” Rachel replied intriguingly.

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“Get behind me!” Benjamin ordered.

“Why?” Rachel face was a picture of confusion.

“Just do it!”

Rachel looked at Benjamin and for the first time she noticed the hint of desperation he was showing. She was shocked to see it. After all, they had gotten rid of the bad guys. Now, all they needed to do, was get out of here.

“Now!” Benjamin screamed.

Suddenly there was another bang on the door and Rachel nearly jumped out of her skin. Whoever was outside, desperately wanted to get in. Benjamin stood there like a lion stalking his pray. Rachel felt a hand on her back and she was roughly pulled backwards behind him.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

She could hear how the door was struggling to cope with the strain and she was sure that it wouldn't last much longer. She stood there behind Benjamin, shaking like a leaf. “This is it.” Benjamin gave her hand a soft squeeze. “Who knows who this could be?” His voice was calm but Rachel could tell there was a hint of panic in it.

Rachel was about to say something when suddenly the door flew off its hinges and landed with an almighty crash on the floor. Rachel let out a loud scream of panic that filled the room.

“Please don't...” Rachel whimpered.

“Rachel?”

Rachel peeked out from her hiding place. Standing next to a police man was Lady Simpson. She suddenly started to breathe easier as she realised she was safe.

“Lady Simpson.” Rachel squealed in delight.

“Where are they?” the officer spoke in a gruff voice.

“In there,” Benjamin waved at the door. “They are both unconscious.”

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The police officer looked at the boy in disbelief. And, when he went to check, he gasped in surprise. “You’ll both need to make a statement,” he murmured, looking rather shell-shocked.

They all left the building together. The police officer going back in with a group of his colleagues. A few moments later they returned with Mr. Stallion and Ian in handcuffs.

“W- what happened?” Ian asked woozily.

“You got outsmarted by two students.” Lady Simpson beamed with pride.

Rachel had a feeling that Ian didn’t believe it. Just the way his eyes drilled into Mr. Stallion, it was like he knew whose fault this whole mess was.

“Y- yeah right,” Ian sneered.

Rachel felt a prang of guilt wash over her like a wave hitting the beach, as she realised that Ian knew what had happened. She gave her statement and then waited for Benjamin to give his. She watched as Ian started shouting and screaming about getting his revenge on them.

“C- can I hold it?” Ian asked, as he watched a bar of gold being brought off and loaded into a security van. “P- please.”

“Nope, sorry,” Rachel said, voicing what everyone else was thinking.

They watched as the police taped off the crime-scene and then left with the thieves and the gold. They waited until the cars and van had rounded the corner before Lady Simpson spoke.

“Let’s go.”

They set off back towards school. Once they got to the school gates, Lady Simpson stopped and looked at the school building her eyes lingering over the sign a few seconds before she turned to look at them. Then she spoke, and there was a hint of pride in her words. “I told you at the beginning of the term that I was so glad I picked you as head boy and girl, and today I can still say the same thing.”

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She looked towards the school and smiled. “Now, though, I think we should head inside, don’t you?”

Rachel smiled. She agreed whole-heartedly, and she had a feeling that Benjamin felt the same way.