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courage
will see her
through...

MAGGIE HOPE

An Orphan's
Secret

An Orphan's Secret

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A Mother's Gift

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Orphan Girl

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MAGGIE
HOPE
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Secret





EBURY
PRESS

14

Ebury Press, an imprint of Ebury Publishing
20 Vauxhall Bridge Road,
London SW1V 2SA



Penguin
Random House
UK

Ebury Press is part of the Penguin Random House group of companies
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First published in 1994 as *Bright is the Dawn* by Judy Piatkus (Publishers) Ltd
First published in 2016 by Ebury Press
This edition published in 2022 by Ebury Press

www.penguin.co.uk

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 9780091956226

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

The authorised representative in the EEA is Penguin Random House
Ireland, Morrison Chambers, 32 Nassau Street, Dublin D02 YH68

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One

January 1878

It was cold in the lane behind Railway Cottages, so cold even the stink from the netties wasn't so bad today. But Meg and Jonty didn't feel the cold. Both were wrapped up warmly with mufflers tied round their heads and necks, criss-crossed around their chests and tied at the back. They were playing in the middle of the lane, they were playing house. Meg was standing inside a circle of stones which was the house, rocking the baby in her arms, and Jonty was striding down the lane with Uncle Jack's cap on his head. He was coming home from his work on the line.

'Now then, Meg,' he said as he stepped through the gap in the stones which was the doorway. 'Is the dinner ready? I'm starved.' He did his utmost to deepen his voice to sound like a man but at three years old, going on four, only succeeded in making himself cough.

Meg pursed her lip and shook her head in imitation of her mother.

‘You’ll be wanting some butter and sugar and vinegar the night, to cut that cough,’ she said reprovingly.

‘Meg! Jonty! Howay in now, I want you to get ready to go up to the Hall.’

The children dropped their make-believe and looked over the frost-covered lane to Meg’s mam, standing in her back doorway. They moved close together. Meg took hold of Jonty’s hand, feeling it tremble. She held the baby, now just a peg dollie, by its head, dangling it by her side.

‘We don’t want to go to the Hall, Mam. Jonty doesn’t like it,’ said Meg, speaking for them both.

Hannah Maddison came out of the house and walked awkwardly towards them, the bulk of her late pregnancy lifting her apron high at the front.

‘I know, pet, I know. But Jonty has to go, and you don’t want him to go on his own, do you?’ She put a gentle hand against each child’s head, Meg’s so fair and Jonty’s so dark, caressing them both.

‘Look, hinnies, it’s Monday, I don’t think Jonty’s da will be there. You like Jonty’s grandmother, don’t you?’

‘I don’t think she *is* Jonty’s grandmother,’ Meg declared stoutly. ‘If she is, why’s she not mine an’ all? Me and Jonty, we’re twins.’ Meg had heard Mrs Hart say they were just like twins so she had asked Da what

twins meant, and he said it was when two bairns were born at the same time to one mam. So she knew she and Jonty were twins.

Hannah smiled, but still she led the children firmly into the house to clean them up for the visit to the Hall.

‘No, Meg, you and Jonty are not twins, you’re cousins.’

But Meg was not convinced. Later on as they walked over the fields to Grizedale Hall, Meg held on to Jonty. She was his twin and if Jonty’s da was there she wouldn’t let him touch Jonty, no, she wouldn’t.

Jonty was quiet. He scuffed the frost with his boots, making long trailing marks, and Meg knew he was frightened, just in case his da was at home after all.

Mrs Grizedale, Jonty’s grandmother, was waiting in the hall to greet them. She must have been watching out of the window. Meg rushed straight in but Jonty hung back, casting fearful glances around at the closed doors. Meg came straight to the point, even before saying hello nicely like Mam said she should.

‘Is Mr Grizedale in?’

The old lady shook her head, smiling down at the little girl standing so fiercely before her cousin, ready to do battle for him.

‘No, dear, John Thomas’s father isn’t in, he’s gone to Darlington today on business.’

Meg relaxed and stood aside, allowing Jonty to move forward to be kissed by Mrs Grizedale. ‘Hello, Mrs Grizedale,’ she said belatedly, ‘are you well today?’

‘Yes thank you, dear. Now, come into my sitting-room, both of you. I’ve ordered hot milk and Cook has baked some gingerbread men.’

Gingerbread men! Meg’s eyes glowed in her rosy face. And it was weeks since Christmas. It must be somebody’s birthday if they were to have gingerbread men. She waited impatiently while Mrs Grizedale loosed the knot in her muffler and unwound it, then did the same for Jonty.

Soon they were sitting before the fire in the sitting-room, drinking milk and eating the biscuits. Meg sat quietly, giving all her attention to picking out the currant eyes and eating them first then nibbling at the legs, bit by bit, making it last as long as possible. She was not really listening to Mrs Grizedale who was talking to Jonty, asking him questions. Was he well? Was his Auntie Hannah well? And Jonty was smiling and saying little, just keeping close to Meg and following what she was doing so that his biscuit wouldn’t be finished before hers.

‘Come, Jonty, talk to your grandmother,’ Mrs Grizedale pleaded at last. Meg heard that all right and decided she would get this question settled once and for all.

‘You’re not Jonty’s grandmother. How can you be his grandmother if you’re not mine?’ she demanded. ‘She’s not your grandmother, is she, Jonty?’

Jonty shook his head. He knew better than to disagree with anything Meg said.

‘Oh, but I am, dear,’ protested Mrs Grizedale.

‘But me and Jonty, we’re twins,’ insisted Meg.

‘No, dear, cousins, that’s what you are. Your mother and Jonty’s mother were sisters.’ Mrs Grizedale looked at Meg’s indignant little face, the biscuit poised in one hand, forgotten for the moment. ‘Jonty’s mother passed away, dear, so your mother took him to live with you. Then, when he’s old enough for school, he will come back here to live.’

‘He won’t!’ asserted Meg. ‘Eeh, no, he won’t. Jonty’s going to live with us for ever and ever.’

Mrs Grizedale gave up the argument, there was plenty of time yet, Jonty was not yet of school age. She changed the subject.

‘Hurry up and finish your gingerbread men,’ she said, ‘then you can go up to the old nursery and play with the rocking-horse. You won’t make too much noise, will you? Grandfather is in bed today, he’s not feeling well. Later on perhaps, you can go to see the horses in the stables. You’d like that, wouldn’t you, Jonty?’

He smiled and carried on with his biscuit, carefully watching Meg, synchronizing his eating with

hers so that they finished the last crumb together. Mrs Grizedale watched them, a faintly anxious expression on her face.

‘Oh, I do hope I did the right thing taking you down to Hannah to nurse,’ she murmured, almost to herself. ‘I hope you won’t find it too upsetting when you have to come here.’ Luckily, her murmurs were too low even for Meg’s acute hearing.

It didn’t take Meg long to lose interest in the rocking-horse.

‘Howay, Jonty,’ she said, sliding down from the painted wooden saddle. ‘Let’s go out to the stables and see the real galloways.’

‘I haven’t had a go yet,’ he objected.

Meg sighed. ‘All right. You get on the daft thing and then we’ll go to the stables.’ She went over to the nursery window and looked out between the bars, over the stables and outhouses and beyond to the frost-covered, sloping fields of Farmer Teasdale’s farm. The rocking-horse squeaked and groaned as Jonty energetically rode it behind her.

‘Howay, Jonty,’ she said impatiently. ‘Hurry up, man, I want—’ Meg forgot what it was she wanted when out of the corner of her eye she saw a horseman emerge from the trees which lined the stream at the bottom of the slope. She clung to the bars and hauled herself up

higher, the better to see. He was coming up to the Hall all right, up by Farmer Teasdale's hedge, but on the inside, not on the track which the hedge bordered.

'Jonty! Come and have a look.'

He slid down to the ground obediently and went over to the window.

'What is it?'

He climbed up beside Meg and peered out.

'What're you looking at, Meg?'

'Over there, by the hedge. Look, can you see?'

The horseman had dismounted and was leading his horse up the field, but the two children had no difficulty in recognizing him immediately.

'It's me da!'

Jonty's cry was panicky; he began to tremble all over. He dropped down from the window bars and turned to run.

'Howay, Meg, howay!'

But she was thinking hard. She knew they couldn't just run home, Mam would make them go back and say goodbye to Mrs Grizedale properly. No, the best thing to do was find a safe place, somewhere Jonty's da wasn't likely to find them.

'We'll go to see your grandfather,' she decided, and led the way down a flight of stairs and along the upper hall to the door at the end which led to the master bedroom. She knocked hard on the door and Jonty knocked

too, but no one said to come in and Jonty was getting more agitated by the minute. Meg reached up and turned the handle and went in.

It was a large room with tall windows which faced on to the rolling parkland at the front of the house. Meg found time to admire the lovely thick carpet on the floor and the gleaming wood of the furniture. By, she marvelled, it was grand. But the middle of the room was taken up by a large bed, an impressive four-poster, and in the bed, propped up on pillows, was Jonty's grandfather, dressed in a white nightshirt and covered with a huge, puffy eiderdown quilt. He had his eyes closed.

The children walked over to the bed and stood watching him gravely. He was breathing slowly and deeply and Meg stared, fascinated, at the tiny bubbles appearing at the corner of his mouth every time he breathed out.

'Go on, tell him good morning,' she urged Jonty. After all, it was Jonty who should wake him. He was Jonty's grandfather, wasn't he?

'Good morning, Grandfather,' said Jonty.

'You'll have to say it louder than that,' pointed out Meg, 'or he'll never hear you.'

'Good morning, Grandfather.' Jonty raised his voice almost to a shout and the old man stirred but did not wake. And in the silence they heard footsteps approaching along the upper hall, a man's footsteps, and the sound sent terror coursing through them both. If Jonty's

da came in and his grandfather didn't wake up, Jonty would be in trouble. His da would hit him again.

He always hit him whenever he saw him and said nasty, nasty things to him. And it was too late now to seek out Jonty's grandmother for protection, she was downstairs somewhere.

Quick as a flash, Meg ran for the wardrobe, tugging Jonty after her. She thought she would never get the key turned in the lock but in the end she did and the door swung silently open. She pushed Jonty inside among the clothes and jumped in herself. She couldn't manage to close the door from the inside but she pulled it to and held it by the rail on the inside which held ties and things. Behind her, Jonty buried himself behind the clothes. Her poor Jonty! She wouldn't let his da get him. No, she wouldn't.

They heard the footsteps pause at the bedroom door and the door open. And Meg peered through the crack where the door wasn't quite to and saw Jonty's da walking over to the bed.

'Father?' he said.

Old Mr Grizedale stirred and opened his eyes, grunting when he saw his son. He pushed himself up against the pillows and as he did so began to cough, a harsh, dry coughing which seemed to catch his breath. His face coloured up with the effort of it.

'What do you want, sir?' he managed to say, between bouts of coughing. 'Didn't I make it plain you would

get no more money from me until your next quarterly allowance?’

Meg watched. She didn’t know what to do. Should she come out and offer to get old Mr Grizedale some butter and sugar and vinegar for his cough to make him better? Maybe he would look after her and Jonty, maybe he wouldn’t let Jonty’s da be cruel to him. She hovered undecided and in that moment saw Jonty’s da pick up a pillow and hold it over the old man’s face. Jonty’s da was bending over the bed and holding the pillow down. Meg could see it plainly. Did he think that would make the old man better? For sure it had stopped him coughing. Behind her she could hear Jonty breathing. It was the only thing she could hear at all.

Jonty’s da straightened up and put the pillow back under the others on the bed. She could see Mr Grizedale now. He was lying quietly, peacefully, not coughing any more. Meg leaned forward, opening the door a little further the better to see what Jonty’s da was doing. And the door swung open and she fell headlong out of the wardrobe and into the room with Jonty behind her.

‘What the devil!’ cried Jonty’s da, and his face went purple with rage as he saw the two children come out of nowhere. Meg didn’t want to see what he would do, she had to save Jonty for it didn’t look like old Mr Grizedale would wake up and stop Jonty’s da hitting him. He must be having a really good sleep. She grabbed hold of Jonty yet

again and fled out of the room and down the stairs to where Mrs Grizedale was just coming out of her sitting-room.

The two children paused. They had to say goodbye properly. Didn't Mam always say they had to?

'We have to go now, Mrs Grizedale,' said Meg, if a little breathlessly.

'Yes, we have to. Thank you very much for having us,' said Jonty, though he didn't take his eyes off the staircase. He was ready to fly the minute his da appeared at the head of the stairs, but they had to wait for Mrs Grizedale to answer them.

'Oh,' she said. 'I thought you wanted to look round the stables? It's early yet, you know, not twelve o'clock.'

'Aye, but me mam wants us to do the messages,' improvised Meg.

'Oh, yes, of course. I understand,' said Mrs Grizedale, and as she turned away she added in her undertone, 'Hannah must be near her time.'

Though she might as well have spoken out loud for neither Meg nor Jonty knew what she was talking about. And still Jonty's da hadn't appeared at the head of the stairs, even though they had to wait while Mrs Grizedale wound their mufflers round them and pinned them at the back, he didn't come.

The children ran down the drive and over the fields, racing each other like whippets let out of the cage to chase a hare.

‘You’re soon back, mind,’ said Mam. She was kneading bread dough in the big earthenware dish, lifting the heavy dough from the outside and pressing it into the centre. The children watched, fascinated by the rhythm.

‘Da came back,’ volunteered Jonty, and Hannah frowned and paused in her work to look closely at him.

‘He didn’t touch you, did he, pet?’

‘We ran away,’ said Meg. ‘We said goodbye to Mrs Grizedale first, like.’

‘Good lass,’ said her mother. ‘I’m going to put the stotty cake in now. I’ll give you both a bit of dough and you can make little ones. Do you fancy doing that, then?’

The next half hour was spent happily, kneeling on the form at the table and moulding dough. Mam put the large bread cake on the bottom of the round oven and the slightly grey smaller ones beside it to cook, while the loaves were rising on the fender before the fire. And when the stotty cakes came out of the oven they ate them hot with treacle spread on them, soaking into the bread and oozing all over the place.

It was a lovely afternoon. Meg forgot all about Jonty’s nasty da as they sat, one on either side of Mam, on the settle drawn up to the fire. And she told the story about how she took Jonty when he was a baby to love and bring up with Meg.

‘Your mother was my sister,’ Mam told Jonty. ‘Eeh, she was a grand lass, she was. I married Uncle Jack and she married Ralph Grizedale. And when she died you were a tiny baby so you came to live with us.’

‘Why did she marry Mr Grizedale, Mam? He’s a nasty man.’

‘Whisht, pet, don’t say that,’ said Hannah. ‘Our poor Nell – she was your mam, Jonty – she must have loved him. And he is Jonty’s da.’

‘Mrs Grizedale’s nice. She gave us gingerbread men,’ said Meg. She wished with all her heart that Mr Grizedale wasn’t Jonty’s da.

‘You won’t die, will you, Auntie Hannah?’ put in Jonty. He leaned against her and looked up into her face with anxious eyes. Meg hadn’t thought of that and felt a tug of fear. They knew what dead was. Hadn’t Mrs Hall in the end house died and they’d taken her away in a box and she’d never come back?

‘Nay, lad, I’m not going to die,’ said Mam, and Meg and Jonty sighed with relief.

At six o’clock Jack Maddison came home from his work on the line. He was a platelayer. Meg and Jonty both ran to him and he swung them up in the air and round and round before putting them down on the settle, breathless and laughing. But when he turned to face his wife he was no longer smiling. His face was grave.

‘Old Mr Grizedale died today,’ he said quietly. ‘This morning sometime. He was in bed with a cold. The maid found him when she took him up a dish of tea. It must have turned to congestion or something.’

‘Oh, poor man,’ sighed Hannah. ‘The bairns were up there today an’ all, but they came home early. Jonty said his da had come home, that was what it must have been for.’

‘Nay, lass,’ said Jack, ‘that cannot be right. Ralph Grizedale was away in Darlington all day.’

‘But – well, mebbe Mrs Grizedale just told them Ralph had come back so they would come straight home.’

‘Aye.’ Jack sat down by the fire and unlaced his boots. ‘The old man’ll be missed, he was a good man. At the chapel an’ all, he was a good preacher.’

Meg had been listening and understanding far more than her parents thought.

‘Jonty’s grandmother didn’t tell us, we saw him,’ she asserted, and Jonty nodded agreement.

‘Yes. Well, I think it’s time you two were in bed,’ said her mother, and Meg knew she thought she was making it up.

‘But it’s not time yet,’ she objected.

‘It’ll be nice and warm in bed. I’ve put the oven shelf in.’

Hannah was brooking no arguments and in no time Meg and Jonty were tucked into bed, their feet cosily on

the towel-covered oven shelf and a new clippie mat over the blanket for extra warmth. And it was nice to cuddle down in the bed with only their noses out in the cold air. They were almost asleep when they heard a great commotion as someone came in.

‘I’ve come for the boy.’

The words and the voice speaking then sent terror coursing through Meg’s veins. Her eyes flew open and Jonty clung tightly to her, already beginning to tremble.

‘Get under the bed,’ she said urgently, but Jonty could do nothing but cling to her. She listened hard to what was going on downstairs. Da would stop him taking Jonty, wouldn’t he?

‘Why, man, the bairns are in bed,’ said Hannah. ‘You can’t take him now. Whatever for would you do that?’ Her voice was rising, she sounded panicky, thought Meg, not like her mam at all.

‘I can do what the hell I like, Hannah Hope. Haven’t you heard I’m master now?’

‘Not in my house, you cannot,’ said Da. ‘And my wife’s name is Hannah Maddison.’

Jonty’s da laughed and the sound of it gave Meg a horrible feeling in her stomach. She felt sick.

‘Your house, is it? This hovel doesn’t belong to you, Jack Maddison, it’s railway property. And now I’ll be on the board, think of that.’

The sound of his footsteps as he bounded up the stairs galvanized Meg into action. She jumped from the bed, pulling Jonty after her, and for the second time that day she tried to hide them both from Ralph Grizedale. But it was no good, he saw them straight away, they hadn't time to get under the bed. He caught hold of Jonty and even though Meg clung on he managed to separate them, knocking her down with a backhanded blow across her head.

'Don't you touch my bairn!' cried Jack. He had followed Ralph up the stairs and just reached the small landing to see Meg go flying across the room. She lay for a moment, dazed, and saw Ralph give Da a great kick in the stomach which sent him flying, head over heels, to the bottom of the stairs. She screamed, and Mam screamed. But Jonty's da tucked Jonty under his arm, though Jonty was kicking and yelling too, and took him down the stairs and out into the bitter cold night dressed only in his nightshirt.

He shoved his way contemptuously through the group of neighbours gathered to see what it was all about, climbed on his horse and galloped off.

'Jack! Jack!'

Meg heard Mam cry as she got to her feet and ran down the stairs. Mam was there at the bottom, lifting Da and cradling his head in her arms. Now Da was stirring. He got to his feet and lifted Mam up with him.

'I'm all right, Hannah,' he said. 'Oh God, Hannah, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I couldn't do anything.'

Meg clung to them both, hanging on to Hannah's skirt with one hand and Jack's trousers with the other.

'He took Jonty, Da,' she sobbed. 'He took Jonty.'

Jack bent and lifted his daughter up into his arms. 'Whisht now, petal,' he said softly. 'Whisht now. He was Jonty's father, we couldn't help it. I'm sorry, I'm that sorry.' He carried Meg back to bed and lay down with her until she fell asleep.

Meg woke next morning and turned over on to her back, putting a hand out for Jonty before remembering what had happened last night. She got out of bed and pushed her feet into her boots and walked over to the window, shivering.

The world was white. During the night snow had fallen and everything was covered with it: the coalhouse roof and the nettie, the fields behind and the trees. Almost, she called for Jonty to come and see, before remembering numbly that he wasn't there. She could hear Da moving about downstairs; she would go down and ask him if he could get Jonty back.

Da was standing by the fire, cooking strips of bacon in the iron frying pan.

'Morning, petal,' he said as he turned and smiled at her. He looked tired out, she thought, had he not been to bed? Why was Mam not frying the bacon?

‘Da, where’s me mam? Can you go up to the Hall and get Jonty back?’

Jack shook his head. ‘I cannot, Meg. I cannot, bairn. But your mam’s in the room, go away in and see her. She’s got something special to show you.’

‘But Da, I want you to—’

‘Go on now. Go and see your mam.’

Meg reluctantly went through the connecting door to the front room and over to the brass bed in the corner. Hannah was sitting up with a bundle in her arms.

‘Mam, why can’t we get Jonty back?’ asked Meg. All she could think about was him. It left no room in her mind for questions such as why Hannah was still in bed or what she was holding in her arms.

‘Jonty’s me brother, Mam,’ she said vehemently.

‘I’ve got a new little brother for you, Meg,’ said Hannah, and Meg stared.

‘Howay, hinnie, come and see your new baby brother.’

Meg clambered on to the high bed and peered at the bundle in her mam’s arms. She looked at the tiny nose and the fair downy hair on its head.

‘That’s not a proper brother,’ she said stoutly, ‘not like Jonty. That’s just a babby.’

Two

May 1878

‘The candymen! The candymen are coming!’

Mrs Hart’s warning cry rang through the houses, bouncing down the short street and reverberating off the middens across the back lane. Meg jumped up from the back step where she had been playing house with the peg dollie Mam had made for her, her heart beating wildly, responding to the alarm in Mrs Hart’s voice and increasing at the sight of Mam flying out of the house. Mam had a look on her face such as Meg had never seen before. It was enough to send fright racing through the little girl.

‘See to the bairn,’ her mother called over her shoulder, and Meg, peeking out of the front door before she obediently turned back to watch little Jack in his cradle, saw her joining the other women of the street and forming a line, a thin barrier against the half-dozen or so strange men marching on them.

Jack Boy, disturbed by the noise, began a fretful crying and Meg rocked the wooden cradle with her foot as she had seen Mam do while clutching her dollie to her and staring out of the door with round blue eyes.

‘Whisht, whisht,’ she said softly, her voice trembling. Where was Da? He’d been around the house for days and days, getting under Mam’s feet till she scolded him and, muttering, he would fling himself out of the door and go for a walk, calling to Meg to go with him if she wanted to. And she usually did want to now, for Mr Grizedale had taken Jonty away and stopped him coming to play with her and Meg didn’t know why that was. Her heart hammered as the shouting outside increased. By! She wanted Da to be here, she wanted him more than anything, and he’d gone out somewhere and this time hadn’t even asked her to go with him. Jack Boy snuffled and his eyes closed again so Meg stopped rocking the cradle.

There was a great commotion on the street, there was. A lot of people were shouting and a woman was screaming. That was Mrs Hart, Meg knew her voice well. The ball of fear in the little girl’s stomach grew larger and larger. The screaming wakened the baby again but he didn’t whinge, he was just staring up at Meg with wide open eyes as blue as her own.

‘Whisht now, Babby,’ said Meg, as much to reassure herself as her baby brother. If only Mam would come

back in. Fearfully, Meg went to the door and peeped round to see what was happening.

Mam was glaring angrily at the hefty Irishman confronting her, her anger heightened by her despair. It was hopeless, even little Meg knew it was, the women couldn't hold out against men.

'What did we do to you?' Mam demanded. 'Aren't you ashamed, throwing women and bairns out of their homes?'

'Just doing the work I'm paid to do, Missus,' the man answered casually. At least that was what Meg thought he said, his speech was so thick she had trouble understanding him. Leaning over, he pushed Mam out of his way as easily as if she'd been a straw. Meg gasped as Mam staggered and would have fallen but for Mrs Hart, who held on to her arm.

'Mind, Hannah!' she cried.

Mam found her feet and would have fought back but just then a cry went up which sent her fleeing for the house.

'The Bobbies! The rotten sods have sent the polis an' all.'

Most of the women turned with her, they knew the day was lost. All they could do was get the bairns out of the houses before the dreaded candymen got in. They had to save what bits of furniture they had. Mam reached the door barely in front of a burly bully-boy.

She rushed in and snatched the baby from his cradle, thrusting him into Meg's small arms. She picked up the cradle as the grinning candyman reached for it. Shrugging, he picked up her two good chairs and flung them out of the house.

'You didn't have to be so rough,' Mam cried, but his grin grew wider as he picked up the rocker, the old rocker that had been Gran's, and threw it after the chairs with the ominous sound of breaking wood.

'Now, Missus, out,' he said, and started towards her. 'Or I can always carry you out.'

Meg edged to the door whimpering softly as her mother took the cradle outside and put it down beside the broken chairs before going back in for Meg and little Jack.

'Away wi' you then. Go out, pet,' Mam said quietly as she folded the baby in her shawl. As Meg, crying softly but steadily now, went out of the door, Hannah Maddison gathered the spittle in her mouth and spat full in the face of the candyman. Then, quick as a flash, she turned and ran. Meg grabbed a hold of her mother's skirts almost by instinct as she went, the angry roar of the candyman close behind them as they fled.

Meg's terror flared. She ran as fast as her four-year-old legs would carry her, clinging on to Mam's skirts for dear life, stumbling and falling over the uneven ground of the old railway track, past Mrs Hart's door which was

already being nailed up by the men, stubbing her toes on the stones through her thin boots, choking on her sobs.

'Da! Da!' she cried, for the Irishman would catch them, and then what? Her young mind couldn't imagine what would happen then.

But Mam was slowing to a walk. She was looking over the field by the side of the old railway, the very first railway in the world, Da had said proudly, the irrelevant thought running through Meg's head even as she gasped for breath.

'I dropped me dollie!'

Meg rubbed her eyes with the back of her hand and looked fearfully over her shoulder. The candyman had stopped too. He was watching them though. Meg followed Mam's gaze. A man was sitting on a great grey horse in the field, just sitting there quietly, watching them, his face blank. A big man with a florid face, bigger even than the candyman who had been chasing them. Meg knew him all right, it was Jonty's da. Maybe the sight of him had put off their pursuer, for now she saw the Irishman go back to the little row of cottages.

'You did this.'

Meg stopped sobbing altogether and looked up at Mam, surprised. Mam was talking to Jonty's da. Was he a candyman then? Meg stared at him. He was way up in the sky on his big horse. Cal. Short for California,

Jonty had told her, but she didn't know what California was any road. And then, Jonty's da didn't like her, Meg knew. He had yelled at her that time in the Hall and then he'd taken Jonty.

Mr Grizedale was staring at her now. Meg moved in even closer to her mother.

'Not at all, my dear Hannah.' He smiled, and his voice was patronizingly pleasant. 'It was the board's decision. I'm only one man, what could I do? No, if you want someone to blame then go no further than Jack Maddison, the man you married, the man who led the men into this folly. The brave champion of the people.' He glanced around him and shrugged. 'But where is he when you need him?'

'You know well where he is. You knew the men were at a union meeting in Shildon. That's why you brought in the bully-boys from Hartlepool.'

'Well, my point is proven then. Why couldn't he see that this would happen? No, Hannah Hope, you married the wrong man, a man who can't protect his own—'

'My name is Hannah Maddison!'

'Oh, so it is. Hannah Maddison. Well, you are Hannah Hope to me and always will be. Maybe now you wish you'd married me and saved all this trouble?'

'God damn you to Hell, Ralph Grizedale! The biggest bloody candyman of the lot, that's what you are! I hope your soul rots in—'

Meg turned to see Mrs Hart, all four feet ten inches of her, dancing with rage as she screamed abuse at Jonty's da. It was true then, Jonty's da was a candyman, Mrs Hart said so. But there was a polis close behind the little woman and he was putting out a hand to her.

'Now then, Missus, that's enough of that.' The polis took a firm grip on the woman's arm and nodded respectfully at Jonty's da.

Mr Grizedale acknowledged the salute before shortening the reins and wheeling Cal round. Without another word he galloped over the fields in the direction of Grizedale Hall. Meg watched him ride over the hill and out of sight before turning back to her mother.

'Mam, where's me da?'

'Eeh, never you mind, pet, don't be frightened.' The hard, set look left Hannah's face as she bent down, lifting a corner of her apron to wipe the tears away from Meg's rosy face. She hoisted Jack Boy into a more comfortable position under her shawl. 'Howay, we'll walk up the road and find him, eh?'

'I'm frightened of the candymen,' Meg admitted.

'Aye. Well, they won't hurt you, petal, they just wanted us out of the houses.'

A small group of women, some of them with babies in their arms and other children around them, had gathered around Hannah. All of them had a defeated look about them, their anger drained away, all except Mrs Hart.

‘Bloody hell! Can you believe it, Hannah? I’m summonsed. Causing an affray, the polis said. Obstructing the bobbies as they escorted the candymen. Eeh, man, lass, it’ll be Durham Gaol for me.’

‘Aye, an’ me an’ all,’ cut in Hannah’s next-door neighbour, a widow of forty who looked all of sixty. Her husband had been killed in an accident in Shildon Railway Works but she was allowed to keep a railway house because she had two sons platelayers on the line. Keep her house until now, that is. None of them had anywhere to sleep tonight.

‘My God,’ a woman wailed suddenly, ‘what are we going to do?’

‘Bear up, lass,’ urged Mrs Hart, ‘talking like that will get us nowhere.’

‘We’ll go up to meet the men for a start,’ suggested Hannah, and the small group of women, trailed by their children, tramped up the black, rutted road which had been built in the time of their parents to carry coals from the Black Boy colliery to Shildon and on to Darlington, Stockton-on-Tees and the coast.

‘They broke our chairs, Da! The candymen did it. Da, they were chasing us—’

At last the men had come. Jack Maddison reached the side of his little family and swung Meg up in his arms,

holding her tight. His eyes were black with despair as he looked over her head at his wife.

‘I shouldn’t have gone, Hannah. Oh, God, I’m sorry, I knew this might happen.’

‘What could you do? You had to go to the meeting, you’re their union man,’ said Hannah. ‘You couldn’t just let them cut the pay like that, you had to try.’

‘Aye, but I knew it wasn’t any good. And now we haven’t even got anywhere to sleep tonight, and you with the babby an’ all. Eeh, they didn’t give us much time, did they?’

‘Aw, man, we’ll get by, lad, you’ll see.’

‘Were they chasing you? Did they hurt you, Hannah?’

‘No, no, they just wanted to frighten us away, they weren’t chasing us really. But Meg took fright.’

‘Mam spit at them! Didn’t you, Mam, you spit at them?’ Sitting in her father’s arms, Meg was brave enough to feel pride in her mother’s defiance.

‘Spit at them? By, if I’d been here I’d have done a lot more than spit at them.’ Jack let some of his anger and frustration burst through.

Hannah looked up at him glumly. Though Jack Maddison was no more than average height he was well-built and strong, tanned and healthy-looking, showing his farm upbringing in this area where the men were often short and stockily-muscled, but pale from working underground.

‘Aye,’ she said. ‘Well, mebbe it’s as well you weren’t here. You might have been on your way to the polis cells in Auckland by now, or even Durham Gaol.’

The rest of the people were beginning to drift back to the cottages to pick over the piles of their belongings before each front door. There was no sign of the candymen, just a lone policeman, there to make sure no one tried to get back in the houses.

‘What are we going to do, Jack?’

One of the younger lads, a boy of sixteen but head of the family now his father was dead, fell into line beside Jack and Hannah as they approached the row. Jack shifted Meg’s weight from one arm to the other and smiled encouragingly at the boy.

‘Why, Albert,’ he said, ‘you’ll manage. It’s only May yet, the summer’s afore us. At least it’s not snowing.’

Albert failed to return his smile, his face woebegone.

‘Haven’t you any family, like? Somewhere you can stay for a while?’ Hannah suggested. The lad’s mother answered for him.

‘Why aye, we have that. I have a sister up at Coundon and another in Shildon. It would be no good going to Shildon, though, her man works on the line and if they took us in his job would go, likely.’ She turned to her son. ‘Nay, lad, we must go to Coundon. Our Betty’s man works in the pit. Howay, thou must be a man.’

Albert, who'd been told he must be a man over and over since the death of his father, sighed. 'Aye.' He regarded the pile of furniture which was theirs. 'The thing is, what are we going to do about this lot?' He picked up a chair with a broken leg, looked around and found the leg and tried fitting it together, dispiritedly.

'You can use my handcart,' offered Jack. 'We'll get your stuff shifted this morning then I can use it this afternoon.' He put Meg down and walked across to where a small wooden cart was resting in the grass. Hannah followed him, speaking in an undertone.

'What about us, Jack? We have nowhere. Now my mother's gone, like.' For Mrs Hope had not lived long after Nell died, she had lost any will to live.

'I've been thinking.' He paused and looked at her with a question in his eyes. 'Grizedale might be your brother-in-law, but he's not going to let us take shelter anywhere near the Hall. He'll hound us out. But mebbe you and the bairns can sleep in one of his barns, just for a night or two? Then I can go and look for a place.'

Hannah shook her head in emphatic denial. 'No, Jack, we can't do that. I'd rather sleep in the open, any road. It's May, the weather's warm, we'll take no hurt.'

Jack sighed heavily. 'Aye. And then, if I was away for long and you had to apply to the Guardians – well, the way things are now, I could be taken up by the polis if

I left you and the bairns to be a charge on the rates. No, we have to go together or all go into the workhouse.'

Hannah shivered. 'Eeh, no, Jack, not that. We'll sleep under a hedge first.'

'Well, we won't be the first ones to camp out on the fell. There'll be more than us doing it this night.' Jack patted her clumsily on the shoulder. 'Don't worry, lass. You'll see, I'll find something, see if I don't. An' it won't be for want of trying if I don't.'

Hannah nodded and managed to summon up a smile but in truth her hopes were not high. Jack was a leader and union man and would be blacklisted by the railways and banned from carrying on his trade as a plate-layer. Even if the Board didn't do it straight away, Ralph Grizedale would see to it that they did eventually.

'Where are we going, Da?'

Meg, from her seat in the middle of the cart, asked the question as Jack turned left at Eldon and took the track which led to the Great North Road. It would lead them north and east and away from the Auckland district of south-west Durham. Until now, Meg had been quiet, staring around her with wide open eyes, awed by the events of the day.

The little girl had never in her life been this far away from the row of cottages on the old line which had always been her home. They had passed Grizedale Hall,

glimpsed only fleetingly through the trees of the park created by Ralph's father from farmland in imitation of the wealthy landowners surrounding him. Landowners made even wealthier by the coal under their land. She had looked and looked, hoping to see Jonty, but there was no sign of him, none at all.

At last Meg gave up staring as the tall chimneys of the Hall disappeared from view. Her father began to pant a little as he drew the cart up the steep hill. He had no breath to answer Meg for a while. Hannah, walking beside the cart with the baby slung in her shawl, shifted little Jack to her hip and lent a hand by pushing until at last they crested the rise.

Meg gazed round in surprise and pleasure at the rolling hills in the distance, one crowned by an ancient church. Everything was so green and fresh and glowing in the late-evening sun. By, she thought, it's grand.

Jack halted to take a breather and looked round at Meg, summoning up an encouraging smile. 'We'll see, pet, we'll see. But I don't think we can go much further tonight. Mebbe as far as Old Eldon.' Taking hold of the handle of the cart again, he walked up the lane.

The sight of the village, the first one Meg had seen which was untouched by industry, made her gasp with delight. Here there were no slag-heaps, no smell of coal and coke ovens, just farms and little cottages. Under the hedge, primroses reflected the sun and in the field

beyond, daisies and dandelions grew. Were they going to live here? She watched in fascination as a farmer herded a small group of cows up the lane and in to a field gate.

‘Cush, cush,’ he said quietly as they turned, followed by a bright-eyed collie. Meg looked at her father, wanting to share the moment with him, but he was looking at Mam, concern for her on his face. Mam was weary, Meg could see it in the way her body slumped as she leaned against the cart.

Propping the handles of the cart against the fence so that it remained approximately upright, Jack lifted Meg down and walked over to speak to the farmer. Meg went to her mother and stood watching quietly as the two men talked. Her thumb went to her mouth as the man looked over at the woman with a child in her arms and a small girl hanging on to her skirts. He nodded briefly.

‘Aye, all right, so long as you’re not tinkers. I can’t abide tinkers, thieving rascals.’ He clanged the gate shut after the cows and turned back to Jack. ‘You can sleep in the barn round the back. Keep out of the way, mind. There’s fresh milk you can have for the little ’uns but don’t light a fire, there’s still some winter feed in there.’ He frowned as Jack Boy woke up and started to cry fretfully. ‘I suppose you’ve been turned out? I heard of such goings-on today when I took the milk down to Eldon. I don’t like it, I don’t, turning women and bairns out of

their homes. But mind, I'm only a tenant here. You'll keep out of sight of the road and be gone first thing in the morning, will you. All right?'

Hannah and Jack hastened to reassure him that it was indeed all right and they were very grateful. So soon they were ensconced in the barn where the baby's cradle was taken down from the cart and little Jack fed and put to bed. Meg, after a piece of bread and dripping and a drink of milk supplied by the farmer, was also put to bed in the hay.

Wearily, Jack and Hannah sat down, talking in hushed tones together. Jack sprang to his feet as the barn door opened and a middle-aged woman, obviously the farmer's wife, came in with a tray which she put down at their feet. There was a pot of strong black tea and a piece of cold bacon together with fresh bread and home-made pickle. Hannah, who had not cried or complained all day throughout their misfortunes, felt her eyes fill with tears at this evidence of the innate kindness of folk. The woman understood, however.

'Don't thank me, Missus, it's nowt, we had it to spare,' she said, and hurriedly left the barn.

Meg watched as her parents ate their meal in the doorway so that they could take advantage of the waning light. Even though she was not yet four, she knew the food was especially welcome. They had brought some with them but their supplies were meagre. No money

had been coming in because of the strike. And she had often heard Mam say she had to eat or she would lose her milk and then what would the babby do?

‘I’ll get up early and help the farmer, we’re not taking any charity,’ Jack remarked, half to himself.

‘Aye,’ said Hannah. ‘By, I’m tired though. I don’t know where we’ll go either. I’ve got no one, not since me mam died. Just Cousin Phoebe, like, over in Haswell.’

‘Me neither, just me brother in Australia and we can’t go there,’ said Jack.

Meg could hear every sound made by the animals in the farmyard until at last she fell asleep through sheer exhaustion, as a cock crowed in the hen-house across from the barn and grey streaks of dawn slid in through the cracks in the barn door.

‘Cousin Phoebe might help,’ Mam was saying as she fell asleep, ‘we can ask. What else can we do? And Haswell is far enough away from Shildon for you to look for work, Jack.’

The day dawned clear and cold with a light frost covering the ground. Meg shivered as Hannah washed her hands and face and neck under the tap by the horse trough. She stamped her feet in their shabby, black boots to warm them up. But she forgot about the cold when she ran away into the field, watching the geese as they trooped out to go down to the pond at the bottom, scurrying

away as the gander raised his wings and quacked angrily at her as he shepherded his family. She came back to Hannah with a bunch of wild flowers, primroses and dandelions, daisies and sweet violets, which she handed proudly to her mother, her blue eyes sparkling and her cheeks rosy fresh with the sharp air.

‘Where’ve you been?’ demanded a harassed Hannah. She was busy removing all traces of their occupancy from the barn, determined that their hosts should not think they were like the tinkers. She didn’t see the posy in her haste. The baby was wailing fretfully, something Mam couldn’t abide, Meg knew. It always made Mam anxious when Jack Boy cried; anxious and bad-tempered. Now she looked up angrily at Meg from her kneeling position by the cradle.

‘I wanted you to see to Jack Boy, maybe he’s getting a tooth already. You could keep his chin dry. He’s dribbling all over and his skin will get sore.’ Then she saw the proffered posy in Meg’s hand and the smile fading from her daughter’s face. She got to her feet and took the posy, burying her nose in its fragrance.

‘Eeh, I’m sorry, petal, I am. I didn’t mean to shout. By, they’re lovely, they are. I just didn’t feel very well, I’m badly like. Now howay, honey, we have to pack up and be on our way. Your da must be nearly finished his jobs by now.’

* * *

By ten o'clock, the family was once more on its way, making for the Great North Road then travelling slowly up to Thinford where they would branch off for East Durham and the smoky colliery village of Haswell. Hannah could only hope that Cousin Phoebe still lived there, along with her miner husband, Thomas. She was very thankful indeed when, after making a few enquiries, she knocked on a cottage door and it was Cousin Phoebe who opened it, a Phoebe Hannah would have recognized anywhere from her likeness to her mother.

'Eeh, our Hannah, I can't believe it's you!' she said when Hannah told her who they were. 'By, I haven't seen you since you were little more than a bairn. Howay in then, don't just stand there on the step, like.' Phoebe peered over Hannah's shoulder at Jack who was carrying Meg in his arms. 'Eeh, what's the matter?' Phoebe's welcoming smile became a little concerned as she stood back to let them in.

Meg heard Mam going into lengthy explanations punctuated by Phoebe's exclamations but she was more interested in the man who had been sitting in a rocking chair before a blazing coal fire. He had risen to his feet as Jack carried her in and put her down on the floor. He had red cheeks, a bristling walrus moustache, and his eyes twinkled in welcome. Eeh, Meg thought, he was just like her friend Molly's granda who lived on the end

of the row at home; he even smiled like Molly's granda did.

'Are you my granda?' she asked, hope shining out of her blue eyes. She'd always wanted a granda like Molly's.

The man chuckled. 'No, pet, I'm not your granda. I'm not anybody's granda. But I'm your Uncle Tot and that's practically the same thing. You can pretend I'm your granda if you like.'

Meg swelled with happiness, Uncle Tot was a grand man, he was. The grown-ups were bustling about, Mam explaining why they'd come and Da and Uncle Tot were shaking hands while everybody talked at once.

'Well!' Auntie Phoebe said. 'Mind, what a surprise! Not but what you're not welcome – you are. Eeh, it's lovely to see you. Me poor old mother was always talking about you and wondering how you got on, your man and you.' She shook her head sadly. 'Things were bad then, they were, after the men were killed in the explosion. You were all the family we had left and you had to move away.' All the time she talked she was filling the kettle and settling it on the coals and going to and from the pantry to the table. 'It's a good thing I made a pie the day – it was for the journey tomorrow but we can eat it tonight. I can do sandwiches for the morn.'

'Tomorrow?' Hannah asked, latching on to the important fact that Phoebe was talking about a journey.

She stopped setting the table and turned to look at her cousin. 'Aye,' she said. 'I'm sorry, Hannah, you know we would've took you in, but Tot's got a new job to go to. He's to be fore shift overman at Black Boy. We're moving tomorrow.' Even through her concern at telling Hannah they would be unable to take in the family, her pride in Tot's new job shone through. But she saw the despair on her cousin's face. 'Eeh Hannah, you can come with us for a week or two. You know we won't leave you with nowhere to stay. We're kin. No pit folk would leave kin with nowhere to stay.'

'We can't go to Black Boy,' Hannah said hopelessly, 'it's too near Shildon.'

Meg heard the silence which fell on the grown-ups; saw the dismay on their faces. They sat round the table and looked at each other. Suddenly little Jack began to cry, a hungry insistent sound. But for once Hannah didn't jump up and go to him immediately; she didn't seem to hear him.

'Mam, the baby's crying,' Meg said, and when her mother didn't answer she went to the cradle herself and rocked it gently with her foot. 'Whisht, babby,' she said.

Uncle Tot watched her a moment then cleared his throat. 'Mebbe it's not so bad,' he said. 'You can camp out in here till Saturday, the key's not due to be given up till then. You have some furniture. An' then mebbe Jack

can find a job. There's the pit . . .' He faltered, knowing Jack was no pitman. But then Tot remembered something else. 'Hang on, wait a minute, I heard today that there were jobs going in the quarries up Marsden way. What about that, Jack?'

Three

Ralph Grizedale rode over the fields to Grizedale Hall and trotted California straight round to the stables at the back of the house. A young groom came running as he yelled imperiously and Ralph flung himself off the horse and threw the reins to the boy.

‘Give him a proper rub down – I’ll have no skimping, mind. And when you’ve done that, take a broom to this yard, it’s filthy.’

‘Yes, sir.’ The boy’s voice trembled as he answered, he had a healthy fear of Ralph. Taking the reins, he led Cal over the already spotless yard. Hadn’t he been up at five that morning to clean the stables and sweep the yard? But if Master wanted it swept again, well then, that’s what he would do. He needed to keep this job.

Ralph strode into the house and across the hall to his study, feeling decidedly out of temper though he didn’t know why. Shouldn’t he be feeling better now that Hannah, that thorn in his side for so many years, had gone and taken that prying brat of hers with her? If he didn’t see Hannah he would forget about her, he would find a

wife among his own kind and put her out of his mind altogether. Striding over to the bell-pull by the fireplace, he jerked it a couple of times and when his man appeared, ordered whisky and water. Something he hadn't been able to do when his father was alive, he thought, feeling amused for a moment. What the old man would have said if he'd heard the order. When the drink came Ralph threw himself into a great leather armchair by the ornate fireplace and sipped from the brimming glass.

In spite of himself, he couldn't keep his mind off Hannah and her brat. He could still see the two pairs of eyes staring up at him after the eviction – eyes so alike, so intensely blue, emphasized by the milky white complexions and fair, almost corn-coloured hair glinting in the sun. The familiar ache of longing rose in him and turned to the usual bitterness. She had chosen to marry a common railway worker, let her take the consequences. And her child . . . too sharp for her own good, that one. He remembered the way she'd lifted her chin and glared at him. So like her mother she was. Well, she had to be separated from Jonty, there was danger there.

Ralph frowned heavily as he heard a child's voice in the hall. Hadn't he told Jonty to keep away from the front of the house? Mouthing an oath, he stalked to the door and flung it open.

'Look at me, Grandmother, look at me!' Jonty was at the foot of the stairs, standing on his head and with

his face red from the effort of holding his balance, his legs wavering in the air before he toppled over. Mrs Grizedale was in the doorway of her sitting-room, clapping her lace-mittened hands gently and smiling at the child.

‘Oh, clever boy, clever,’ she was saying, and Jonty giggled as he jumped to his feet. But then he saw his father, face black with rage, striding over towards him and his face went from red to white and his eyes widened in terror.

‘Don’t—’ Mrs Grizedale stepped forward to put herself between her son and grandson, but she was too late. Ralph held Jonty by the scruff of the neck and was holding him off the ground and shaking him.

‘How many times do I have to tell you not to make a noise in the house? And to use the back stairs, not to come into the front hall at all.’

‘Ralph! Ralph!’ Mrs Grizedale caught hold of the boy and held him to her, shaking along with him until Ralph let go his hold and Jonty collapsed into a sobbing heap.

‘It was my fault, Ralph, not the boy’s. He was with me, we were going to have tea together in my room. I didn’t know you were back from your ride,’ cried Mrs Grizedale. She bent protectively over the child, while looking up at his father beseechingly.