

**The
Chestnut
Man**

Richard T. Smith

The Chestnut Man

Richard T Smith

Copyright © 2014 by Richard T Smith. All rights reserved worldwide. No part of this publication may be replicated, redistributed, or given away in any form without the prior written consent of the author/publisher or the terms relayed to you herein.

ISBN #: 978-1-326-01519-0

Content ID: 15213828

Book Title: The Chestnut Man

Table of contents

- 5 .. Liverpool 1953**
- 6. . Troubled times**
- 8.. The Chestnut Man**
- 10.. Growing up**
- 10.. University**
- 13.. D. Regan, Solicitors**
- 15.. The young lord calls**
- 17.. Italy**
- 26.. The Mouth of Truth**
- 28.. The Proposal**
- 30.. Backlash**
- 32.. The paintings a fake**
- 34.. Cap in hand**
- 37.. Reap what you sow**
- 39.. Let them stew**
- 40.. The gallery**
- 40.. Mrs. Jordan**
- 43.. The chestnut man dies**
- 46.. The fall-out**
- 47.. The bag lady**
- 49.. Watching over you**
- 56.. Breaking all ties**
- 62.. Sweet revenge**
- 63.. Acknowledgments**
- 64.. Other books by Richard T Smith**
- 65: Disclaimer**

Liverpool 1953

Ruth Doyle had died after giving birth to a little girl named Emily.

'I'm so sorry to hear of your loss, Mr. Doyle,' the social worker said sympathetically. 'Have you thought about what you're going to do?'

'Going to do about what?' asked Mr. Doyle.

'How you're going to manage with the baby,' she asked.

'We'll be alright,' he replied.

'Times are hard, Mr. Doyle; and taking care of a baby takes a lot of time and money.'

'I'll manage,' he responded.

'Mr. Doyle, I see this all the time. While your intentions are good, is it the right thing for the child?'

'What are you suggesting?'

'You could consider giving her up for adoption,' the social worker suggested, unable to offer any other solution to the difficulties she knew he would face as a single father of a young child.

'Never,' he replied defensively, more in fear than in anger, for he had heard of Social Services taking children away from parents before. 'Is that what you want? To take her away from me?'

'We only want what's best for the child, Mr. Doyle.'

'Have you got any children?' he asked.

'I did have a little boy, his name was David.'

'Did have?'

'He died of polio.'

'I'm sorry to hear that, it must have been very hard for you and your husband.'

'Yes, it was. We are not together anymore. My husband took David's death badly. We couldn't talk to each other so we drifted apart. The sad thing is that he was a good man, he just couldn't handle it; and I couldn't help him because I was hurting too. Basically, we couldn't help each other. But I shouldn't be going on about my troubles when you've just lost your wife.'

The mood was calmer now.

'Have you ever thought about adopting a child yourself?' he

asked her.

'I'm on my own now, and as much as I would like another child, it just wouldn't be fair to the child. So you see, Mr. Doyle, our circumstances are similar.'

'I guess so,' he conceded. 'You have to do what Ruth would have wanted you to do for the best. If you keep the baby, then the quality of two lives will be affected, maybe for the worse. You could end up resenting the child; I've seen that happen.'

'I'm scared; I want to make the right decision,' he assured her.

'Mr. Doyle, no-one can predict the future, we can only do what we feel is right at the time. I know of a couple who cannot have children. They are wealthy, so the prospects for any child they adopt are good. The child would not want for anything – the best schooling, clothes, food and travel.

Maybe you could take some time to think about it.'

Mr. Doyle reluctantly agreed.

Troubled times

Mr. Doyle managed to find a neighbour to mind Emily while he went to work at the tyre factory. He seemed to be coping until one day he was called into the works offices by the foreman. 'Take a seat, John.'

It was strange how the foreman usually referred to workers by their surname, and yet he had just called him by his first name, and he was about to find out why.

'I'm sorry, John, I have to let you go.'

'Why?' asked John, disbelievingly.

'It's not me, it's the-powers-that-be, upstairs.'

'I'm a good worker. I keep my head down and get on with the job.'

'I know, John. Your work record is faultless, and if it had been left to me we wouldn't be having this conversation now.'

'I can't believe this. Who else is going?' asked Mr. Doyle.

'Nobody, just you,' the foreman told him.

'Just me? Why?' asked Mr. Doyle again, trying to make some sense of what was happening.

'They didn't give a reason, John. I had the same question for management. I couldn't understand it either. All they said was that they were following orders and strongly suggested I should do the same. It appears to be the owner's decision, not ours.'

'But I don't even know the owner,' Mr. Doyle told the foreman.

'It seems just as strange to me as it does you,' the foreman replied, staring down at the papers on his desk and hating this part of his job.

Covering his face with his hands, Mr. Doyle said, 'I can't get my head around this. I have a child to look after. I don't know what I'm going to do.'

The foreman gave him a moment to compose himself.

'So I finish at the end of the week, do I?' asked Mr. Doyle.

'I'm afraid not. It's effective immediately. You have to collect your things and leave today. Once again, I'm sorry, John.'

The following months were devastating for Mr. Doyle as he lost one job after another. Following a prolonged period of unemployment he reached the end of his tether. A month shy of Emily's first birthday he was forced to give her up for adoption.

Mr. Doyle walked around the living room with Emily in his arms. He was a broken man. 'It's for the best, Princess.

They can give you far more than I can. I have failed you; let you and your mother down. I'm so sorry'. Mr. Doyle kept repeating his words as he held his daughter for the last time. He cried so much that his tears made her shawl wet.

'It's time now, Mr. Doyle,' the social worker finally told him.

Mr. Doyle nodded. Handing Emily over to her he asked, '

She will be looked after, won't she?' He knew he was grasping at straws, looking for the slightest reason not to part with her.

'I promise you she is going to a good home, Mr. Doyle. I've packed her clothes and dolls in a little suitcase.'

As the social worker closed the front door on her way out, Mr. Doyle walked into the bedroom, curled up on the bed like a small child and broke down. 'Sorry, Ruth, I'm so sorry.'

The Chestnut Man

Twelve years had passed since Emily had been adopted by James and Margaret Marston of Belgrave Square. As the social worker had informed him, they were wealthy; they enjoyed a big house, money, fine clothes and holidays. Emily had everything. Everything, that is, except love. Sadly, Emily wasn't aware that she had been adopted for all the wrong reasons, and they didn't really spend a lot of time with her. It was Nanny Clair who looked after her.

Emily regularly stared out of her bedroom window at the chestnut man across the street. She was fascinated by the way he let down-and-out people put their potatoes on his fire to cook, even though they had no money to buy his chestnuts. They would laugh and talk all night, sitting around his fire keeping warm. She didn't know where they went at night as when she got up to go to school in the morning they had gone; all except the chestnut man; he was always there. One day, Emily, through curiosity more than anything else, walked over to the other side of the street to ask him a question. Little did she know it was to be a meeting that would change her life in more ways than she could ever have imagined. A shabbily-dressed bag lady was sitting on a box talking to the chestnut man. Bag ladies were so called because they carried their worldly goods around in a bag as they were usually homeless. Emily stared at the chestnut man without saying anything. Turning to her he said, 'Hello

young lady, can I help you?’

‘What, exactly, are chestnuts?’ she asked.

‘You mean you haven’t eaten a chestnut before?’ he asked her.

‘No,’ she replied.

Handing her a brown piece of paper twisted into a cone shape he instructed, ‘Here, take this; keep tight hold now,’ and he poured in half a dozen hot chestnuts from his shovel. Emily’s hands were instantly warmed by the heat of the chestnuts.

‘Let them cool down a bit before you eat them,’ he warned her.

‘They feel hard.’

‘Only the shells are hard, the nut inside will be soft,’ he told her, adding, ‘but not everyone throws the shells away.’

‘Why would you want to keep the shells?’ she asked.

He explained, ‘If you lived on the streets, you might want to keep them.’

Looking puzzled she asked, ‘Why would you want to do that?’

‘For protection,’ he answered.

‘I still don’t understand,’ she said.

‘People who live on the streets spread the shells around them so if someone tries to creep up while they’re sleeping, they are alerted by the sound of the shells cracking.’

‘He’s right,’ confirmed the bag lady, nodding in agreement.

‘Wow! That’s a wonderful idea,’ Emily cried, clearly impressed.

‘Off you go, young lady, otherwise your parents will be wondering where you are.’

Emily thanked him for the chestnuts and made her way back home.

Later that night when her father came in to check on her at bedtime, he could hear the sound of shells cracking under his shoes.

‘It works!’ Emily shouted.

‘What is all this?’ he shouted at Emily.

‘Chestnut shells, Daddy. The chestnut man said it warns you if someone creeps up on you while you’re sleeping.’

Her father flew into a rage. ‘You are never to go near that

man again! Do you hear me?' Shaking her, he made her promise.

Emily didn't see the chestnut man ever again not because of choice but because from that day onwards he never came back. She never asked her parents where he had gone as the memory of her father's rage remained in her mind.

Growing up

Over the following years Emily was constantly reminded to stay focused on her future career as a solicitor. 'It's a well-paid and respected profession,' she was reminded, 'and one day you will have your own practice.' If she had heard that once, she had heard it a thousand times from her father. It was always about the money. Along the way Emily witnessed kindness and warmth from people she met in college and university, and she embraced every moment as that was very much lacking at home. She called the parents of her school friends aunty this or uncle that, because she felt closer to them than to her adoptive parents. She appreciated the gifts they gave her on birthdays and at Christmas, even though they cost very little compared with the extravagant presents received from her parents. The presents received from her new 'surrogate' families were always practical things; gloves, blank cassette tapes, an ice scraper for the car window, and trendy, dual function key rings. They meant more to Emily than her parents' expensive presents as they were given to her with love and affection.

University

Emily had great memories of Oxford University. She made two good friends, Russell Ward and Jayne Corrigan. Russell was the quiet one of the group. He was known as the sensible one by Emily and Jayne, always on hand to help if he could, even if it meant just listening to someone's problems and giving advice. Jayne, on the other hand, was a practical joker, always performing magic tricks, which she had learnt from her grandfather. If a party needed livening up, she was the one to do it. Yes, Emily enjoyed her

university years, except for the fact that she was constantly pursued by Lord Singleton's son, Alan. He was a very arrogant and vain young man who once pointed out that his name, Alan, in the Breton language, meant masculine, and that was why he was such a success at sport. He told Emily that he wouldn't rest until she gave in, but that wasn't going to happen. He was the total opposite of what she would want in a man, and on each occasion Emily would respond by telling him hell would freeze over before she would go out with him.

Emily stood out from all the other girls in her class. She had a great sense of humour and she was street smart, which seemed strange considering her sheltered upbringing. Another thing that made her stand out from all the other girls was her rich, red hair. But Emily stood out not only because of her beauty on the outside, but because of her beauty on the inside. She mixed with friends that social-climbers at the time would call nerds – a term coined by Dr. Seuss in his book *If I Ran the Zoo* (1950). Emily wasn't the type to run with the crowd.

'Why are you associating with these people?' Alan would ask in a loud, attention-seeking voice so everyone could hear. 'They're losers, every one of them.'
'Well, it takes one to know one. Why don't you go back to your own friends? Oh sorry, my mistake, you don't have any, do you?' she retorted, angrily.

One day Emily caught Alan in a face-off with her friend, Russell, who looked vulnerable.
'What do you think you're doing?' asked Emily.
'It's none of your business!' Alan told her.
'He's my friend, so it is my business.'
'I don't have to explain myself to you.'
'Really ? Then try explaining to your friends how a girl kicked your arse.'
'Oh, yeh!' Alan sneered.
'Trust me. I have the temper to go with this red hair. Try explaining the scratch marks on your pretty little face,' Emily

told him as she took off her coat. It seemed a long time before Alan pushed Russell away, saying at the same time, 'He's not worth it.'

'So this is how you try to impress a girl is it, Alan? Trust me, it doesn't work.'

With that, Alan left.

'What was all that about?' Emily asked Russell.

'He asked if I was going out with you. I told him we were just friends. He said keep it that way.'

'Did he now?' Emily was very angry at that point and stormed off after Alan to have it out with him.

'Leave it, Emily. He will go mad because I told you,' Russell shouted.

She found Alan with his friends on the university campus.

'Oi, Big Guy, if I ever find you pulling a stunt like that again I will make you wish your mother had never met your father.'

'Am I supposed to be scared?' Alan responded.

Putting her face right up to his, Emily whispered so only he could hear, 'I don't care how hard you are; you'll never be as hard as the bumper of my car. Do you understand?'

At this point Alan assumed a serious demeanour. 'You don't mean that.'

Emily stared straight into his eyes and said, 'Don't I? Try me. Nobody threatens my friends – and yes, they are my friends,' she added, 'something you wouldn't know about.' Indicating the others in Alan's company, she told him, 'They only hang around with you because of who your father is. You're shallow, the lot of you,' she shouted, glaring at all of them before storming off. 'She has a temper that one,' commented one of his friends.

'She can give me a hiding any day!' said another with a grin. 'I'll give the pair of you a hiding if you don't shut up,' Alan told them. He felt humiliated, and wasn't the type to ever forget it. Emily's popularity increased throughout the duration of her university period because of her caring nature and dry sense of humour, whilst Alan became more unpopular because of his lack of compassion. For Emily, university was a pleasure, whilst for Alan it was toil.

'Well, tomorrow's our last day,' Emily remarked to Jayne and Russell who commented that their university years had flown by.

'We will have to keep in touch with each other,' Russell said, his gaze more on Jayne than on Emily.

'Definitely!' replied Jayne, aware of Russell's attention. Emily felt pleased for both of them as she sat in silence, reflecting on all the good times they had at university, even vowing always to be friends.

D. Regan, Solicitors

Following university Emily took up a position with D. Regan, Solicitors. Mr. Regan was well known to her father who had given him a lot of business over the years, and this was Mr. Regan's opportunity to return the favour. However, her father had "ulterior" motives. Mr. Regan was a fair man who was generous in passing on his knowledge and experience to his staff. Give your clients value for money, and when they least expect it, give them more, and It must be a win/win situation at all times, he used to say, and Emily hung on to Mr. Regan's every word, feeling she could trust him with anything.

One night over dinner her father told Emily to pick Regan's brains and obtain copies of his clients' details, telling her it wouldn't be long before she would be running her own law firm.

Emily couldn't believe what she had just heard, 'I couldn't do that!' she exclaimed.

'Why not?' demanded her mother.

'Because it's dishonest and I would be breaking a trust with Mr. Regan.'

'Look here, young lady, it's a cut throat world we live in. You can't afford to be soft; you can't make an omelette without breaking eggs,' her father told her, banging his fist on the table to enforce his statement. That was something he usually did to demonstrate that he meant what he said. Emily recalled how, all those years ago, following her meeting with the chestnut man, he had shaken her, making her promise to

do as he demanded. But Emily wasn't a child any longer; she was her own woman and she spoke her mind.

'Your father's right. We have invested money in you, child. Her mother didn't get a chance to finish her sentence before Emily interrupted. 'Invested?'

'I meant invested a lot of time in you,' her mother said, correcting herself.

Emily stood up, and with both hands on the table stared at her mother.

'Did you really, Mother? I'm not a child, I'm a grown woman, and I have a name, and I'd like that name to be used.'

Turning to her father and banging her fist down on the table in retaliation, Emily shouted, 'I'm not one of your investments and, more importantly, I would never betray the trust of someone who has taken me under their wing and taught me so much.'

'No, but our money has been good enough to put you through college and university,' her mother argued.

'That's right, at your insistence,' Emily replied.

'I've put a lot of work Regan's way over the years,' her father shouted.

'That does not give you the right to betray his trust,' Emily countered.

'If you won't do it, I'll get someone who will,' her father threatened.

'No, you won't, I'll warn him.'

'You wouldn't,' gasped her mother.

'Wouldn't I?' Emily responded angrily.

'Look, let's calm down, this is getting out of hand,' her father said, adding, 'besides, Alan will be here shortly and we don't want him walking in on a scene.'

'Why is he calling? Not to see me, I hope,' Emily exclaimed in alarm.

'He phoned to say he was stopping by. He didn't mention why. Besides, you know he's smitten with you, and that he has felt that way since you both went to university together,' her mother said.

'We didn't go to university together, he just happened to attend the same university, that's all.'

'Nevertheless, he would be a good catch for some young lady.'

'As long as it's not me, I don't care. Just because he's the son of a lord doesn't mean he has breeding,' Emily protested.

The young lord calls

Suddenly, there was a knock at the door.

'That will be him, I suppose,' said Emily. 'Time to roll out the red carpet and get out the best china.'

'Don't be like that, Emily; you could do worse,' her mother said.

'How? Is Jack the Ripper still alive?'

Her mother glared at her as Alan appeared with her father.

'Hello, Alan. How is your family?' asked Margaret.

'They're fine thank you, Mrs. Marston,' answered Alan.

'It's nice to see you're going into politics like your father,' she continued.

'Yes,' Emily said, 'but that's not what he wants to do, Mother, is it Alan?'

'Of course it is, isn't it, Alan?' Margaret exclaimed defensively.

'Yes,' replied Alan, 'I'm not the person I was at university, Emily.'

'You lie so eloquently,' Emily said, giving Alan a steely look.

'Stop it, Emily, you're embarrassing our guest,' her mother exclaimed.

'It's alright, Mrs. Marston, I'm used to her,' said Alan.

'So, why have you called? Not to borrow sugar I hope!' said Emily.

'No, it's for something far sweeter than that; it's to ask you to accompany me to the Royal Albert Hall on Saturday.'

'Why? Don't you know the way?' asked Emily.

'Don't be so rude, Emily,' said her mother in a chastising manner.

'I can't go,' Emily replied, curtly.

'Why ever not?' asked Alan.

'Because hell hasn't frozen over yet,' Emily said haughtily, adding, out of curiosity, 'What's on?'

'Carmen,' replied Alan.

'Ah, Carmen; one of opera's finest. Do you know, Mother, Carmen is an opera in four acts by the French composer Georges Bizet? The Libretto was written by Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy, based on a novella of the same title by Prosper Mérimée.'

Her mother looked impressed, relieved that Emily was showing some interest.

'So you will come?' asked Alan.

'No, I hate opera. I'm going to see a play.'

'You prefer to see a play rather than going to see Carmen at the Royal Albert Hall?' asked her mother.

'Carmen is a story of jealousy, rage and death – so you should be at home, Alan – whereas this play is a comedy. It's much more fun. You should see it, Alan; or maybe not. After all, we don't want to run the risk of your face cracking, do we?'

'I can't,' Alan responded, ignoring her sarcasm, 'I have already promised mother and father I would go with them.'

'We understand, maybe some other time, Alan,' Margaret said.

Alan excused himself and left, looking despondent.

'You can be so rude at times!' her father told her.

'He wasn't asking me to go for my benefit, it was for his. With mother and father,' Emily said, shaking her head from side to side. 'If I were to go, Carmen wouldn't be the only tragedy happening on the night.'

'He is a true gentleman, that is what he is,' declared Emily's mother, sounding exasperated.

'He needs to grow a spine, I know he doesn't like opera or politics, but he has to toe the line,' Emily continued, ignoring her parents' displeasure.

'Lord and Lady Singleton are fine people, and I won't have you say a wrong word about them,' said her father, pointing his finger at her, angrily.

'That man can do no wrong in your eyes. In the past he got away with things only because of who he is and the people he knows. Alan will be the same – the apple doesn't fall far from the tree,' Emily told them.

'You're wrong, he's respectful, that's what he is, unlike you!'

her mother told her.

'You're entitled to your opinion, Mother, just as I am, so let's leave it at that.'

'I think you've said enough, Emily,' said her father.

'It's only enough when I say things you don't want to hear, Father. They don't have a son, they have a puppet!'

They didn't know that Alan had not left and had been listening at the living-room door and had heard everything.

'Puppet? I'll give her puppet, one day,' he muttered under his breath as he quietly left the house.

Italy

Over the next few years Emily travelled the world alone, but she always enjoyed the company of people in the places she visited. One day, whilst looking at a sculpture in the Accademia Gallery in Florence, she heard a voice behind her saying, 'This is Michelangelo's "David". Between 1501 and 1504 it became one of the most readily recognised works of Renaissance sculpture, becoming a symbol of both strength and youthful beauty. Emily turned to see a smiling, young and very handsome man.

'You're very knowledgeable,' Emily said.

'Not really, it's all in this brochure,' said the stranger with a cheeky grin.

Emily laughed.

'I'm Mathew,' he said, holding out his hand.

'I'm Emily,' she replied as they shook hands. 'What brings you here?' she asked.

'I'm in the art business. I'm passionate about art and although I'm on holiday I can't pass up the opportunity to see the finest works of art here in Italy.'

'And where is your wife? Shopping I presume,' Emily said, enquiringly.

'I'm not married. I like to travel by myself as I find my friends don't appreciate the things I like so I would end up lazing around every day, and that's not me.'

'Likewise. I go on holiday on my own for the same reason.'

'Where are you from?' asked Emily.

'I'm from London.'

'That's not a London accent!' she laughed, accusingly.
'I'm originally from Dublin. I came over to study art at University College, London. After graduation I stayed in London, got some small premises and went into buying and selling paintings. What about you?'
'I'm from London, but as I'm adopted I don't know where I was originally from. I went to Oxford to study law and now I work for a firm of solicitors.'
'Oxford! The state of you!' Mathew said jokingly.
'Yes, but being a solicitor is useless here in an art academy, so you have the upper hand,' Emily pointed out.
'Don't worry, My Lady; if you'll allow me, I'll be your guide for the rest of the tour,' Mathew told her, taking a playful bow.
'Why, thank you, kind sir,' Emily responded, laughing.
As Mathew escorted Emily around the academy she wondered what her parents would think of her talking to a total stranger in a foreign country, but she didn't care. She was enjoying his company and when the tour came to an end Emily thanked Mathew, beginning to feel quite sad that it was over.
'For what?' asked Mathew.
'For taking the time to show me around.'
'The pleasure was all mine,' he assured her.
After a short silence Emily was pleased to hear Mathew ask her if she would like to go for a coffee.
'That would be nice,' she said, her face brightening up.
They talked for a few hours, telling each other more about themselves and later enjoying a few glasses of wine together. 'So what got you into art then,' Emily asked.
'It was my grandmother; she used to paint – scenery not people,' Mathew explained.
'Is she any good?'
'Grandma passed away a few years ago.'
'Oh, I'm sorry. Were you very close?'
'I am what I am today because of her. I was never away from her house. She was a pretty good artist, although she never thought so herself. She would take me to the art gallery and tell me about the artists. I remember calling at my grandma's one day. She had a landscape scene cut from a magazine stuck to a canvas and placed on an easel. She encouraged

me to paint over the picture using oil paints. Although my effort wasn't perfect I could see what it was she was trying to relay to me. The picture seemed to come to life, as if it were being projected. From then on I had the bug. I continued to use the method with pictures of people and various objects. Grandma taught me all about artists and their work. I remember her telling me about Vincent van Gogh and the various changes in his style of painting. Initially, his palette consisted mainly of sombre tones, showing no sign of the vivid colouration that appeared in his later work.'

'How did that come about?' Emily asked. 'When he moved to Paris he discovered the French Impressionists. He began to see pictures in a new light – or sunlight I might add, as it was the sunlight in the south of France that enabled his later work to grow brighter in colour as he developed his unique and highly recognisable style.'

'You know a lot about him,' Emily commented.

'It's not just Van Gogh, it's all artists, whether it be a painting or a sculpture. It's fascinating to find out about the man or woman behind the work of art.'

'Have there been any female artists?' Emily asked, becoming interested.

'Yes, there have been, and still are, some very talented female artists. One in particular, Artemisia Gentileschi, was an Italian Baroque painter. She was the first woman to become a member of the Accademia di Arte del Disegno here in Florence. She painted many pictures of strong and suffering women. Some say it was because she was raped.'

'How terrible,' remarked Emily.

'It happened while her father was working with another artist by the name of Agostino Tassi inside the Pallavicini Rospigliosi Palace in Rome. Her father, Orazio, hired Tassi to tutor his daughter privately.'

'Why didn't he tutor his daughter himself?' Emily asked.

'It's funny you should say that, as it was mentioned that they both painted in a similar manner; other than that, nobody really knows.' After taking a sip of wine Mathew continued,

'It was while he was tutoring Artemisia that Tassi raped her.'

'Oh my god!' Emily responded.

'Another man, Cosimo Quorlis, had helped Tassi with the

rape. After the initial rape, Artemisia continued to have sexual relations with Tassi.'

'Why would she have done that? I'd have cut his nuts off,' said Emily.

'Things were different back then. Artemisia had expectations that they were going to be married with the intention of having her dignity and her future restored.'

'Spend the rest of her life with the man who had raped her? Married or not, I couldn't do that!'

'It was a lot different in those days.'

'So, what happened next?' she asked.

'Tassi went back on his promise to marry Artemisia.'

'I'm not surprised,' said Emily, who was disgusted at the way Artemisia had been treated.

Mathew continued his story: 'Some eight or nine months after Tassi had raped Artemisia, her father found out that Tassi wasn't going to marry her, so Orazio pressed charges against Tassi. The main issue of the trial was the fact that Tassi had taken Artemisia's virginity. Now, here's something to get your head around, Emily. If Artemisia had not been a virgin before Tassi raped her, they would not have been able to press charges.'

'You are kidding me, Mathew!'

'No, I'm not. During the seven-month trial, Artemisia was subjected to gynaecological examinations and tortured using thumb screws to verify her testimony.'

'That's barbaric.'

'Tell me about it. At the end of the trial Tassi was imprisoned for two years.'

'Two years!' Emily said in disgust.

'You're going to hate this bit, Em,' Mathew told her. 'He didn't serve the time as the verdict was later annulled and he was set free.'

'So that poor woman, as well as having been raped, had to endure torture and humiliation for what? Nothing!'

'Sad, isn't it?' asked Mathew.

'Does the story have a happy ending?'

'As Artemisia grew older, she became more graceful and "feminine", and it was reflected in her work; and while this

was, to some extent, part of a general shift in her taste and sensibility, becoming more self-conscious of her gender could have played a big part in it.'

'Such an amazing woman.' 'She is regarded as one of the most progressive expressionist painters of her generation,' Mathew added.

'How the hell she got over all that is beyond me.'

'Do you really want to know?' asked Mathew.

'I do, yes,' replied Emily.

'You'll find out if you come to the Uffizi Gallery with me tomorrow because that's where Artemisia's paintings are on display.'

'I travel up to Rome tomorrow by train,' Emily said rather sadly.

'That's a shame. I'll be driving to Rome the following day. It's more scenic. The train is stuffy and you're lucky if you get a seat.'

'Do I detect an invitation?' Emily asked, laughing.

'Guilty as charged,' he replied, adding that it would be nice to share the scenery with someone.

'You're such a charmer, how can I refuse? I will stay one more day in Florence. So, it's the Uffizi Gallery tomorrow then,' Emily agreed, wondering once again what her parents would say about what she was doing.

'I could travel up to Rome tomorrow, if it's inconvenient,' Mathew offered.

'It's alright. Anyway, I could be your guide tomorrow, Mr. Art Dealer,' she joked.

The next day Mathew took Emily to the Uffizi Gallery. The building itself was a work of art. They marvelled at the wonderful art work of great Italian artists such as Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, Botticelli, Giotto, Cimabue, Raffaello and, of course, the lady herself, Artemisia. Looking at Artemisia's paintings Emily couldn't help but think of the tragic experiences she had endured and, upon reaching the painting known as "Judith and her Maidservant", Emily realised that a pattern was forming. Tears fell from her eyes as she told Mathew she understood it all. This

series of paintings reflected Artemisia's method for resolving her anger with Tassi.

Pausing only to wipe her eyes, Emily continued, 'Artemisia succeeds in the ultimate revenge by killing the aggressor, and we all know who that is. The decapitation could be the symbolic castration of Tassi.'

'Welcome to the world of art,' said Mathew, giving Emily a round of applause before continuing, 'Revenge has been used in the paintings of many great artists. For example, when painting the "Last Judgement" in the Sistine Chapel, Michelangelo depicted Minos, the Judge of the Underworld, resembling the pope's Master of Ceremonies, Biagio da Cesena, who had often complained to the pope about the nudity of the painted figures. So Michelangelo took his revenge on Biagio by adding his portrait to the damned in hell.'

'I look forward to seeing that when I visit the Vatican,' Emily told Mathew.

'There was also Anne-Louis Girodet de Roussy-Trioson and Salvador Dalí's name but a few.'

'So what you're saying, Mathew, is that it doesn't pay to upset an artist.'

'Something like that,' he replied.



The rest of the day was spent taking in the sights and various places of interest, stopping for lunch along the way. Mathew was a true gentleman in every sense of the word.

'It's a beautiful place, isn't it?' Emily asked.

'It certainly is,' he agreed.

'Life seems to go at a leisurely pace here, even at meal times people take their time eating and engage in conversation,' Emily observed.

'I couldn't agree more.'

In her quiet moments Emily felt happy that she had stayed a day longer in Florence as she had really enjoyed Mathew's company.

Later that night, as Mathew dropped Emily off at her hotel, he asked if it was OK to pick her up at 9a.m. in the morning and maybe they could have breakfast before setting off for Rome. Emily eagerly agreed.

'OK. 9a.m. it is,' Mathew said as he kissed her hand. Emily smiled as he drove away.

The following morning Mathew arrived promptly at 9a.m. in an open-top car; a picnic basket on the back seat. He explained that as it was nearly a three-hour drive to Rome they could stop halfway at a place called Orvieto where he wanted to pick up some wine, adding that Orvieto is famous for its wines.

'We can skip breakfast if you like, Mathew.'

'I don't mind if you don't mind,' he said.

'We will build up an appetite for when we arrive in Orvieto; besides, it's only one-and-a-half -hours away, it's hardly going to kill us.'

Along the way Mathew and Emily talked and laughed as if they had known each other all their lives. It was amazing how much they both had in common. On reaching Orvieto they toured the city and the winery. Later they sat down on a picnic sheet on a hillside enjoying the scenery, and Mathew handed Emily a plate of food and a glass of Orvieto wine, purchased from the vineyard. Emily noticed that Mathew didn't have a glass.

'Why aren't you drinking, Mathew?'

'I'm driving,' he replied.

'I can't enjoy this on my own.'

'It's alright, really,' Mathew told her.

'Do you have to be in Rome today?' Emily asked.

'Not really, I can please myself.'

'Well, why don't we stay the night here in Orvieto and drive on to Rome in the morning? That way you get to enjoy this wine and we can watch the sunset over this magnificent

view,' Emily suggested.

'I would be a fool to say "no",' he laughed. Everything was wonderful; the picnic, the scenery, the wine, but most of all the company. They had separate rooms, but if the truth were known, both would have liked to have shared.

The next day they continued their journey to Rome, enjoying the scenery along the way in an open-top car allowing the pleasant breeze to keep them cool.

Emily and Mathew were caught up in the romance, history and tradition of Rome. Emily didn't want it to end; it was a new world to her. She mentioned on a number of occasions that it was a shame it had to come to an end, and Mathew agreed.

During their visit to the Vatican, Matthew told Emily he had a surprise for her. He took her to see Raphael's fresco masterpiece, the 1511 "Cardinal and Theological Virtues", adorning one of the four Raphael rooms in the Vatican. It depicts Pope Gregory IX approving the Vatican Decretals, which had an onlooker with an uncanny resemblance to Sylvester Stallone, star of the Rocky movie released the previous year in 1976.

'The likeness is uncanny,' Emily giggled.

'It is, isn't it?' Mathew laughed, before going on to show Emily Michelangelo's painting of "The Last Judgement" in the Sistine Chapel, the painting in which he took his revenge on Biagio. As they left the Vatican Emily said, 'We've seen the Vatican and Coliseum, what's next?'

'The Mouth of Truth.'

'The Mouth of Truth?' repeated Emily.

'Yes, while we are in Rome we have to visit the Mouth of Truth.'

'Why?' asked Emily, 'What on earth is that?'

'It appeared in one of my favourite films, the 1953 film Roman Holiday, with Audrey Hepburn and Gregory Peck.'

'But what is it?' repeated Emily, trying to hide a smile. 'Wait and see; it's a surprise,' Mathew told her.



The Mouth of Truth

When they arrived at La Bocca della Verità they made their way to the Church of Santa Maria in Cosmedin, where, located in the portico, they found an image of a face carved

from Pavonazzo marble.

'What is it?' Emily asked.

Mathew explained that it acted as a lie detector, and that it was said that if you told a lie with your hand in the mouth of the sculpture, your hand would be bitten off.' Shall we try it?' he suggested with a mischievous glint in his eyes.

'Alright then,' replied Emily.

'Ladies before gentlemen,' Mathew said.

'You coward, Mathew.'

Emily put her hand into the mouth of the carved image and looked at Mathew, 'What is your question?' For a moment they stared into each other's eyes expectantly. 'If I were to ask to see you again when we return home, what would be your answer?' Mathew asked.

Emily's face lit up as she said, 'Yes.'

Mathew seemed surprised as he asked, 'Really?'

'My hand is still here, isn't it?' asked Emily, removing her hand from the Mouth of Truth and holding it up for him to see.

Mathew's face mirrored Emily's at that moment.

'Your turn, Mathew.'

Holding Emily's hand Mathew put his other hand into the mouth of the statue. 'Ask your question,' he told Emily.

Once again they stared into each other's eyes with that distant look about them. Emily asked, 'Was it just the romance of Rome playing tricks with your feelings that made you ask your question?'

Mathew squeezed Emily's hand as he said, 'It happened long before Rome, it happened the first time I set eyes on you, in the Accademia Gallery in Florence. You are beautiful Em; I feel totally at ease in your company. You have an amazing sense of humour, and if there's such a thing as love at first sight, then this is it.'

'Do you really mean it?' asked Emily.

'My hand is still here, isn't it?' asked Mathew, removing his hand from the Mouth of Truth.

Emily placed her hand into the statue's mouth and said, 'I feel the same way,' and then she retrieved it to show once again that she wasn't lying. Mathew took Emily in his arms as they kissed. They held each other as if they would never let go.

Although they had known each other for less than a week they knew in their hearts that they were meant for each other. Following their return home they continued to see each other. Their relationship grew stronger despite the disapproval of Emily's parents.

The Proposal

'I take it you're off out to see him again,' her mother remarked as Emily was about to leave. 'Yes, I am, mother.' 'I don't know what you see in him, I really don't. He can't even call you by your proper name. It's either Em or Emma; your name is Emily,' complained her mother.

'His name is Mathew, but I sometimes call him Matt, so what's the difference? And as to what I see in him – kindness, generosity, intelligence, good looks just for starters; oh, and he's the complete opposite of Alan, because this is what this is all about, isn't it mother?'

'Alan's a better catch,' persisted her mother.

'I'll get over it; bye, then,' Emily left to go on her date with Mathew who was waiting outside in a taxi.

'Where are we going?' she asked him.

'You'll see when we get there; and don't bother asking the driver, he's sworn to secrecy, isn't that right, driver?' 'My lips are sealed,' replied the driver.

'As if I would ask him!'

'I know you too well, Emma.'

They eventually arrived at a little Italian restaurant called Moretti's, which was down a side street. Entering the restaurant they were greeted by the owner, Joseph Moretti.

'Welcome. Please follow me. Your table is over here.'

They were led to a candle-lit table in the corner of the restaurant. As they sat down Emily's eyes were drawn to pictures hanging on the walls depicting some of the places that she and Mathew had visited when they first met.

'Fancy that, Mathew, we've been to all those places.'

Just then Joseph approached with a bottle of wine, 'As you ordered sir.' He began to pour the wine into two glasses. 'We will bring your meals shortly,' he said and left.

'What are you up to, Mathew?'

‘Nothing,’ Mathew said, unconvincingly, trying to hide a smile.

‘I have just noticed that the places in the pictures on the wall are in the same sequence as the places we visited on our trip to Italy; this wine is the same as the wine we bought in Orvieto, and there isn't a menu on the table and yet he said our meal will be along shortly,’ Emily observed.

Just then the waiter arrived with the starters, ‘The bruschetta you ordered, sir.’

Suddenly, Emily had an idea as to what this was all about, or at least, she hoped it was. They were reminiscing about their time in Italy when the waiter interrupted with the main course and eventually the dessert. Emily noticed it was the same meal they had eaten on their first date. She didn't say anything to Mathew, she didn't need to; he could see in her eyes that she knew what he was up to. He was about to put her out of her misery when she started to laugh, as she had seen the restaurant owner Joseph carrying a picture of the Mouth of Truth in which they had put their hands when they were in Rome. The picture had a hole cut out for the mouth. Joseph held it as Mathew put his hand into the mouth and, looking Emily in the eyes, he said, ‘Emily, I love you. I have done since the moment we met. You are my best friend and I cannot envisage my life without you.’ Then he removed his hand from the picture to show he was once again telling the truth. ‘Every time I come to pick you up it takes, on average, twenty minutes. That's an average of two hours a week, which is an average of an extra four-and-a-half days a year I could be spending with you.’

‘What are you saying, Mathew?’

Taking Emily's hand Mathew asked, ‘Will you marry me, even if it's only to save me four-and-a-half days a year in travelling time?’

After a short pause Emily said, ‘ Yes.’

Mathew told her that he would always look after her to the best of his ability.

‘I know that, Mathew,’ she reassured him.

Backlash

'You look pleased with yourself,' Emily's mother remarked.

'I am, Mother. Tonight Mathew asked me to marry him.'

'What did you say?'

'I said "Yes" of course! Why wouldn't I? I love him.'

Her mother responded with, 'You are making a mistake, young lady.'

'Enlighten me, Mother, as to why I'm making a mistake... And don't mention that waste of space, Alan.'

'What do you have against that boy?'

Emily tried to explain, 'You only see the front he puts up when you're around him, I've seen his true colours. He's a bully, he's manipulative, and he takes great pleasure in demeaning anyone he considers inferior, and, besides all that, if he were not the son of a lord you wouldn't give him a second thought.'

'It's not that at all. His prospects are far better than the other fellow's,' her mother replied defensively.

'The other "fellow's"? It's "Mathew" if you don't mind.'

'What does Mathew have going for him? He sells second hand goods!' her mother continued.

'He deals in art; and he is successful at it I might add.'

'Wait till your father hears this,' her mother warned.

'Hears what?' her father asked entering the room.

'She's going to marry Mathew!' her mother announced angrily.

'When did this come about?' asked her father.

'Tonight, over dinner.'

'What type of family does he come from?' asked her father.

'They are down-to-earth people. He's from an Irish family, but you would already know that from his accent father.' He's not our type,' her mother commented.

'So, what is our type? Tell me please, because you always do this, don't you?' Emily said, snapping at her mother.

'Do what?'

'Rain on my parade.'

'We only want what's best for you,' her father said.

'Then be happy for me. I love Mathew and he loves me, and

nothing and no-one is going to change my mind. Now I'm off to bed as I have to be out early in the morning.'

Emily and Mathew made their engagement public, which brought good wishes from all who knew them – friends, work colleagues and family; with the exception of her parents and, of course, Alan.

At Mathew's home

'Italy? Why Italy?' Mathew asked, after Emily suggested getting married there.

'I don't want the fancy wedding that my parents want me to have, it's only a chance for them to invite people they know from the business world. They have already mentioned people I don't even know. It's our day, Mathew; not theirs. I want to enjoy the meaning of it, I want it to be sincere and not false; and our true friends and family will understand and travel over there to be with us. They can use it as a holiday and we can use it as our honeymoon. Or am I being selfish, Mathew?' she asked.

Mathew kissed Emily, telling her he thought it was a great idea.

'Really, Mathew?'

'Yes, really,' he assured her, 'we can do what we want to do, go wherever we want to go, choose our own company; we have our own lives to lead.'

'No suits, no fancy wedding dress, just casual clothes!' Emily shouted as she began to dance around the room.

Emily's wedding plans didn't go down too well with her parents.

'Let's get this straight. You expect us to pay for your wedding in Italy?' her mother asked.

'No, I don't want your money.'

'Then what are you suggesting?' her father asked.

'Mathew and I are going to Italy to get married. You don't have to pay for anything except your flight and hotel, and that applies to everyone we invite. They can consider it a holiday

and for us it will be our honeymoon.'

'You can't expect people to just up and fly over to Italy.

That's absurd!' said her mother.

'I don't expect anything mother. They either will or they won't. It's entirely up to them. The funny thing is that everyone we have spoken to is keen on the idea; that is, except you two,' responded Emily.

'It won't be a wedding, it will be a glorified circus, and I want nothing to do with it,' said her mother.

As Emily looked at her father he said, 'I'm with your mother on this.'

Emily shook her head from side to side asking, 'Why am I not surprised?'

The paintings a fake

'Are you Mathew Jordan,' asked the police detective.

'I am,' Mathew responded.

'I'm Detective Inspector Jim Tyler.'

'How can I help you?' Mathew enquired.

'Did you sell a painting to Lord Singleton?'

'Yes, he came into my shop two weeks ago and bought a painting by Eke Memos Hi.'

'Did you know it was a fake?'

'What? No way was that a fake!'

'Lord Singleton had it valued by art experts for insurance purposes. They say it's a fake – a good fake at that – but a fake nevertheless.'

'I have studied Eke Memos Hi's work for a number of years. I'm passionate about his work. I'm telling you, it's not a fake, I even had the Certificate of Authenticity with the right Provenance.'

'I must ask you to come down to the station, Mr. Jordan.'

Mathew got his coat and accompanied the police officers to the station where Inspector Tyler asked Mathew to disclose everything he knew about the painting, including where he obtained it.

'I bought the painting from Mr. John Parry, an honest and honourable man, and, as I told you before, he provided all

the relevant paperwork with the painting.'

'Let's cut to the chase shall we, Mr. Jordan? Either you're not as smart as you think you are and Mr. Parry pulled the wool over your eyes, or you switched the painting with a fake before you sold it to Lord Singleton.'

'Why would I do that? It would mean I couldn't sell the original.' It's not the motive we're interested in, Mr. Jordan, just the evidence; and as it stands now, it's either you or Mr. Parry. So who is it?'

'It's neither of us.'

'So, what are you saying Mr. Jordan? Lord Singleton faked his own picture?'

'Maybe not him, but someone around him has. Have you thought about that?' Mathew asked.

'Mr. Jordan, for how much did you sell the painting to Lord Singleton?'

'I sold it to him for £28,000,' Mathew answered.

'Lord Singleton informed us that he has paintings worth hundreds of thousands. This is just a drop in the ocean compared with the value of some other paintings. He told us he bought it because he liked Eke Memos Hi's work. It hadn't anything to do with the value. That said and done, a fake is a fake, so he still doesn't own a picture by Eke Memos Hi. His Lordship said if you were to hand over the original he wouldn't press charges.'

'I don't have the original. He has it.'

'You leave me no other choice, Mr. Jordan. I'm arresting you on suspicion of selling a fake painting. You do not have to say anything, unless you wish to do so, but what you say may be given in evidence.'

A short while later Emily arrived, Following a brief explanation from Mathew she did her best to reassure him that everything would be fine. The following day Mathew was released on bail and went home to gather his thoughts. 'Are you sure Mr. Parry sold you the genuine picture?' Emily queried.

Mathew assured her that he'd never been so sure of anything in his life and didn't understand why Lord Singleton would make such an accusation.

'Maybe it's not him,' Emily suggested. 'His son, Alan, is a nasty piece of work.'

'Yes, he's not exactly over the moon at the news of our marriage, Emily.' 'You could be right, but how do we find out if he has something to do with it?' Emily wondered.

'First we would have to find out who is good enough to paint a good fake.'

'Where do we start?' asked Emily.

'I don't know; but what I do know is that whoever did it had the original from which to copy.'

Cap in hand

Emily decided to ask her father to help. 'You know Lord Singleton, father; can you talk to him about this mess?'

Margaret spoke before her husband had a chance to reply, 'Well, well. How the mighty have fallen. You don't need us or our money, and yet here you are, cap in hand, asking us to get your future husband off the hook by getting our friend – incidentally, the one he stole from – to drop the charges. I knew he was the wrong one for you.'

'It's in all the papers, Margaret,' interrupted James.

'Will you help, father?' Emily pleaded again.

'You'll do no such thing, James. We need to keep our distance and show our disgust with the whole matter. His business will fold after this, no-one will touch him with a bargepole. Your reputation could be damaged too, Emily. You should call the wedding off before it's too late.'

'Reputation? Is that all you think about? You seem to forget what business I'm in, Mother. I will fight tooth and nail to get to the bottom of this; after all, I wouldn't want to tarnish the Marston name!' Emily replied angrily.

'I've a good mind to go to the prosecutor and let them know you've approached us on behalf of Mathew; hardly the actions of an innocent man.'

'Mathew doesn't know I'm here.'

Once again, Emily addressed her father, 'Will you talk to Lord Singleton, Father?'

'Maybe your mother has a point,' her father said, shrugging

his shoulders dismissively.

'Why don't you, for once, make a decision for yourself father?' Emily cried, before storming out of the house.

Back at Mathew's home Mathew told Emily she shouldn't have approached her parents.

'I know, my mother seemed to gloat about our despair,' she replied unhappily.

'I've had some good news,' Mathew told her, hoping to cheer her up.

'Really? What's that?' Emily asked.

'A man who deals in paintings – high-end stuff as it's known – got in touch with me today. He said an artist who specialises in reproductions had fallen on hard times, incurring huge debts, but has been seen lately spending a lot of money.'

'Do you think it's him?' asked Emily.

'I don't know, but it seems too coincidental for my liking. We'll just have to wait and see what he finds out... so fingers crossed.'

The following day Emily phoned Mathew. 'Good news, Mathew. I had to phone you right away. The artist you spoke about who does reproduction paintings – his name is Paul Rushworth – called at the police station and told them he was commissioned to do a reproduction painting for Lord Singleton's son, Alan. He was told it was to be put on display in place of the original for security purposes, but he thought it strange that Lord Singleton hadn't done it for any of the other paintings in his collection. I'm on my way to the station now,' Emily told Mathew.

'I'll meet you there,' he replied.

Meanwhile, at the station, Lord Singleton had been offering an explanation to the chief constable, who was a friend and fellow member of a distinguished golf club:

'So you see, it was just a total misunderstanding.

Unbeknown to me, my son had commissioned the painting to be done for security reasons. As I say, it's just a little

misunderstanding, that's all.'

Lord Singleton was reassured by the chief constable who undertook to personally look into the matter to see what could be done. Emily arrived at the police station in time to see Lord Singleton driving off in his car. Mathew pulled into the police car park moments later.

'I've just seen Lord Singleton leaving. I wonder what he had to say,' remarked Mathew.

'Well, we'll soon find out,' Emily replied.

Emily and Mathew were waiting in Jim Tyler's office, the detective in charge of the case, when suddenly the chief constable walked in.

'I'm Chief Constable Congreave. Mr. Jordan, I've just spoken to Lord Singleton who has confirmed that this matter has arisen as a result of a total misunderstanding, and that his son commissioned the reproduction as a security measure. Lord Singleton was not aware of this until his son told him this morning.'

'Was that before or after Paul Rushworth gave his statement?' Emily asked the chief constable.

'I believe it was before... and you are?' asked the chief constable.

'I'm Miss Marston, Mr. Jordan's solicitor... Where is Inspector Tyler?'

'He's on another case at the moment.'

'No disrespect, Constable Congreave, but I wish to speak with Inspector Tyler as he has been in charge of this case and is in full possession of all the facts,' Emily stated.

'There seems little point in dragging this out longer than necessary,' said the chief.

'It's not as simple as that. My client has endured bad press and his business has suffered; but of most concern is damage to his reputation.'

'I'm sure Lord Singleton will come to an amicable agreement.'

'The way I see it, the ball isn't in Lord Singleton's court.'

‘What do you mean?’ the chief constable asked.

‘Why did it take Lord Singleton's son, Alan, so long to come forward; after all, it was in the newspapers for over a week, surely he would have made it known to his father that he had the reproduction made?’

‘At this moment in time I'm not aware of all the details,’ replied the chief constable.

‘That is why I wanted to talk to Inspector Tyler. As it stands now we shall be requesting you to press charges against Lord Singleton.’

‘Do you want to take it that far?’

‘Did you ask Lord Singleton that question?’ Emily asked the chief as she stood, preparing to leave. ‘Apparently not. He was about to hang my client out to dry. We'll be in touch.’

Back in the car Mathew asked Emily if she was sure she had responded wisely.

‘Mathew, they – and I mean “they” because his son is in it with him – thought nothing about taking you to the cleaners, allowing a jail sentence to destroy your name and business... a business you worked damn hard to build up. If you drop it, then somewhere along the way they will try something else. The golden rule is never give your enemies a chance to come back at you. They started it and we will finish it... for good.’

‘So, what do you suggest?’ asked Mathew.

‘We will have to put this right out in the open for all the world to see – the press, the television; let the media fire the questions for us. Whoever he has in his back pocket will distance themselves very quickly.’

Reap what you sow

‘Have you seen the papers? What the hell did you think you were playing at, Alan?’ Lord Singleton shouted at his son.

‘I just wanted to take her down a peg or two. Besides, Paul Rushworth was supposed to keep his mouth shut. God knows, I paid him enough. I have a good mind to take the

money back from him.'

'And what are you going to say,' his father asked, "I want my money back as you failed to keep your word and told the police you painted the reproduction when I asked you not to"? You need to grow up; although...' Lord Singleton hesitated, shifting his gaze to look out through the window, 'I'm interested to know why he did it.' Directing his attention once more to his son he demanded, 'What came over you, Alan?'

'I wanted to split them up. I was angry about comments she had made to me in the past; things that hurt.' Alan told his father everything, remembering their time together at university and what he had overheard that night at Emily's home. Alan forgot to mention to his father that he loved Emily, and that jealousy had fuelled his actions. He had harboured his anger all this time.

'Anger, Son? And what good has it done you? Mark Twain once said, "Anger is an acid that can do more harm to the vessel in which it is stored than to anything on which it is poured". Looks like he was right.'

'I don't know what to do, Father.'

'What do you think you should do?' his father asked.

'I need to apologise to Emily and Mathew.'

'That would be the decent thing to do, but it would look as if we had backed down.'

'What are you suggesting, Father?'

'I'll talk to the Marstons and ask them to get Emily to drop the whole thing.'

Following Lord Singleton's visit Emily lost no time in pointing out to her parents that the boot was now on the other foot.

'It was a misunderstanding, that is all it was,' her mother replied.

'Is that what he told you, Mother, when he came cap in hand? Oh, how the mighty have fallen, eh, Mother?'

'You're enjoying this, aren't you?' her mother responded, angrily.

'Not as much as I will be in court.'

'Don't let it go that far,' pleaded her father. 'You need to distance yourselves from them; after all, you don't want the Marston name tarnished. I don't blame you for having your moment of glory, but please don't take it any further.'

'If I thought it would make them better people, I would do as you ask, but I'm afraid I don't, Father. I'm sorry. He came hoping you could change my mind, when he should have called to see me. After all, it's none of your business. I should get in touch with the Prosecution Services and tell them he asked you to intervene. Hardly the actions of an innocent man, are they, Mother?'

'Another dig at us, is it, Emily?' her mother asked.

'He's a friend,' argued her father.

'If he's your friend I dread to think who your enemies are'.

Let them stew.'

Later that evening Emily told Mathew, 'I don't know what to do, drop it, or go to court.'

'Whatever you want to do is fine by me,' Mathew assured her.

'Let him stew for a while, then hit him with a compensation demand?' Emily suggested. The couple spent some time discussing this before deciding to go ahead with the plan. Emily left it until the last minute before calling Lord Singleton solicitors to issue her demand.

Lord Singleton slammed down the phone.

'What's up, Father?' Alan asked, surprised by his father's unexpected reaction to a phone call.

'That was my solicitor. I'm being asked to provide a letter of apology and the original painting by Eke Memos Hi to cover loss of trade brought about by our, or should I say your, allegations. They are also insisting that the reproduction should be handed over to the police to be destroyed.'

'I'm so sorry, Father.'

'It will have cost me £28,000 plus solicitor's fees for your little escapade.'

'Don't give the painting to them, Father.'

'What choice do I have, Alan? There's no time left for negotiation, and as you created the best witness for them in Paul Rushworth, we stand to lose a lot more if it goes to court; legal fees, bad publicity, not forgetting a possible jail sentence!'

The gallery

'A little to the left... Mmm that should do it,' Emily said with a grin. 'Promise me, Mathew, that you will never sell it.'

Mathew promised, adding with amusement that it looked good next to the framed letter of apology from Lord Singleton. 'Now that's behind us, Mathew, we can look forward to our wedding and put the whole sordid affair behind us.'

'What about your parents,' Mathew asked, 'will they turn up?' Emily shrugged, 'Your guess is as good as mine, I'm not going to beg them to come. They're still unhappy that we didn't allow Lord Singleton to escape all blame for what happened.'

'My family is really looking forward to it; mum gains another daughter and, in their eyes, my sisters Jean, Colleen and Johanna, are gaining another sister.'

'It's a shame your dad's not alive, Mathew,' Emily said quietly.

'He'll be looking down on us, don't you worry,' Mathew replied.

Mrs. Jordan

The day of the wedding in Florence, where they had first met, was warm and sunny. Mathew's mother, Maureen, and his three sisters were in attendance as well as friends and work colleagues; the only ones missing were Emily's parents.

Emily drew Mathew's sister, Colleen, to one side to ask if she had seen her parents. Colleen, who had been asked to look out for them, confirmed that so far they had not arrived, adding that they were cutting it fine.

'I have a feeling they won't show; they haven't forgiven me over the incident with Lord Singleton.'

'But you're flesh and blood, you should come first, especially on your wedding day,' Colleen protested.

'Well, I'm not really flesh and blood as I'm adopted,' Emily explained.

'This is your special day and I won't let anyone spoil it for you and Mathew, no matter who they are... Do you hear me?'

Colleen assured her.

'I know Coll... If your dad were here I would have asked him to walk me down the aisle.'

Colleen told her he would have done it willingly, and been proud to do so.

'It's going to be nice being part of your family. It's something I have never really had while growing up.'

'We have our fights and rows like anyone else, but if you cut one of us we all bleed, and I include you, Emily; you're family now.' Colleen gave Emily a hug.

'I hear you loud and clear; thank you, Colleen. Would you do me a favour?' Emily asked, 'Would you ask my boss, Mr. Regan, to come to see me?'

'If it's what I think you're going to do, and in view of what you have told me about Mr. Regan, I think he's a good choice,' Colleen replied.

'He's a good man, Colleen.'

About fifteen minutes later Emily heard a knock on the door. It was Mr. Regan. 'Are you alright, Emily?' he asked.

Emily told him sadly that her parents still hadn't arrived.

'There's still a little time; maybe they stayed in a hotel on the outskirts of the city and have been delayed.'

'No, they won't be coming; I won't kid myself any longer. Mr. Regan, would you give me away?'

'Me? Why?' he asked, clearly taken by surprise.

'I have respected you since the day you took me under your

wing and taught me everything I know about law. You are a man of principle and fairness. I would be honoured if you were to walk me down the aisle. Please say you will.'

Old Mr. Regan took hold of Emily's hands saying the honour was all his, but he asked her to promise him one thing. Emily readily agreed.

'Don't let this make you bitter. It will only hold you back. Trust me when I say the loss is all theirs,' Mr. Regan told her.

After a short pause Emily made the promise.

Later that day the wedding took place at the Church of Santa Trinita. Emily looked beautiful as Mr. Regan walked her down the aisle in the absence of her father. Emily remembered her promise to Mr. Regan and nothing was allowed to spoil the wonderful day.

Her parents believed she had married beneath her status and remained adamant that she should have married Lord Singleton's son, Alan; remaining oblivious to his true character. Emily never mentioned her wedding day to her parents, which bothered them more than it bothered Emily... and she knew it.

Mathew was a down-to-earth man with a compassionate nature, a quality that Emily had been drawn to when they first met in Italy; and, more importantly, she felt safe around him. He had successfully expanded his art business and was now a wealthy man, although this had not changed him. He remained his own man and walked to the beat of his own drum, resisting attempts by the Marstons to introduce him to their circle of friends. This came as a disappointment to Emily's parents who had become aware that Mathew wasn't someone who could be controlled. 'He is new money,' they often remarked, a term used for someone not born into wealth.

Emily had become a partner in the law firm, working closely with Mr. Regan whom she looked upon as a father figure. She had achieved success honestly through hard work, and

life was good.

The chestnut man dies

One day Emily and Mathew were lunching in their favourite restaurant. In the middle of the conversation Emily suddenly became quiet.

'What's the matter?' Mathew asked.

'That woman outside, I know her,' she replied slowly, indicating a shabbily-dressed woman outside the restaurant. 'Excuse me one moment,' she said, 'I have to ask her something.'

With that she raced outside and approached the bag lady.

'Hello. My name is Emily. I spoke to the chestnut man on the corner of Belgrave Square where I lived and I remember seeing you there with him. The chestnut man gave me free chestnuts. What happened to him?' Emily asked.

'The man from the big house facing had him removed, said he would make things tough for him if he stayed around. Really hurt him that did. His health went downhill after that. Anyhow, that's all finished now.'

'What do you mean "finished"?' Emily asked.

'Ches, as he was known, died last week. His funeral is this afternoon, 2o'clock at St. Bernadette's,' the bag lady told her sadly.

'I'm really sorry to hear that,' Emily told the bag lady, 'truly I am.' Emily went back inside to join her husband but she didn't enjoy her lunch as she thought about how the chestnut man had been treated by her father, even though he had shown nothing but kindness to her.

'What time is it?' she asked Mathew.

'1:35p.m.'

'I've got to go.'

'Go where?' he asked.

'I can't explain now,' she said, hurriedly gathering together her things and adding, 'Talk to you later,' as she ran out of the restaurant.

'There's never a taxi when you need it,' she muttered to herself, making the decision to go by foot.

'It's about fifteen minutes from here,' she was advised when she asked for directions. She ran as fast as her high-heeled shoes would allow, arriving just after the service had started and finding an empty seat at the back of the church. The congregation was a mix of both well-to-do people and 'down-and-outs'. Various people spoke about the chestnut man with kind words and admiration. A gentleman by the name of Phil Heath was asked to say a few words: 'I'm an accountant. It was Ches who encouraged me along the way. I could always rely on his honest opinion.' With a laugh Phil recalled how Ches used to ask him, "Do you want me to tell you what you want to hear or what you need to hear?" 'Trust me,' Phil continued, 'he always told me what I needed to hear. I met Ches at the fruit and vegetable market where I used to work. Ches bought his chestnuts from us. One day he asked me if I liked working in the market. When I told him that I didn't, he asked me what I really would like to do. I told him I loved anything to do with figures and that I would love to become an accountant. He asked what was stopping me, pointing out that I was my own competition and asking if I wouldn't prefer to be paid for doing something I liked doing rather than something I didn't enjoy. I explained that I come from a family of manual labourers who would think I had ideas above my station if I pursued a white collar job. He advised me to take my life into my own hands and follow my dreams, suggesting that I would make my family proud. He was right; they are proud of me and of what I have achieved. I have helped my family, making their lives better because I'm financially secure. Ches kept an eye on me every step of the way, giving advice and encouragement. He was like a second father and I will never forget him or what he did for me. Ches was a true gentleman.' Next it was the turn of Barbara and Stephen Williams. 'I met Ches one day when I bought chestnuts from him,' said Barbara. 'I mentioned that I used them with sprouts, and he asked me if I did it for a living. I told him I didn't, but that I liked to bake cup-cakes. As I went to pay him for the chestnuts he told me to put my money away and just bring him some cup-cakes whenever I made them. So I took him a small box of assorted cakes. He insisted we both have a cup of tea and share the cakes. He

said they were good and asked if I'd ever thought of selling them. I told him I hadn't and he went on to tell me of a young man who made wedding cakes and who rented a large shop that was too big for one person with just one product. He suggested that it would make sense to share the rent and, as we both made cakes, our individual skills would complement each other. Ches arranged for us to meet and we subsequently succeeded in sharing the shop and the expenses and combining our businesses. As a matter of fact, that young man is here today; he's my husband, Stephen. We ended up getting married and now we share our lives.' 'I only married her for her cup-cakes,' Stephen joked. 'Ches always told us that family and friends are the most important things in our lives. Phil is our accountant, and when he married Sylvia we made their wedding cake. We scratch each other's back so to speak. Ches would always say that whatever you do, it must be a win/win situation for all parties concerned,' remarked Stephen.

'A win/win situation,' thought Emily as she remembered Mr. Regan using the same words.

Many more people took turns to relate ways in which Ches had helped them in their lives; the stories were coming thick and fast. Emily became aware of the number of people he had helped while remaining 'just' a chestnut man himself. Then she mentally chastised herself for thinking he was 'just' a chestnut man as he had been more than that to all these people. He was a wonderful, kind and considerate human being. What was really strange was that nobody mentioned his real name; they all referred to him as 'Ches'.

As the coffin bearers carried his coffin down the centre aisle and out of the church, Emily witnessed the most amazing sight. People were throwing empty chestnut shells into the aisle in front of the pallbearers. The cracking of the shells could be heard with every step they took. Emily cried as she remembered the story the chestnut man had told her that night when he gave her the chestnuts, even though he had so little and she had so much. Once again, she was

disgusted at the way he had been treated by her father.

As the people left the church, she noticed the bag lady. 'Hello, we meet once again,' Emily said, warmly. The bag lady smiled in response. Emily followed her from the church and joined the crowd as they walked behind the pallbearers to the graveside in the church grounds. The words of the priest seemed to take on a drone effect as her attention now focused on the words written on the gravestone; words that held her attention for what seemed a very long time. It was only as the coffin was being lowered into the grave that Emily snapped out of it. She lowered her head to join everyone in a prayer, and when she looked around her the bag lady was nowhere to be seen, which was disappointing as Emily had many questions to ask her.

As the crowd began to disperse she had an idea. She took out a small number of business cards, which she always carried with her, and began to approach some of the people who had attended Ches's funeral. 'Excuse me, could you give me a call as I would like to ask you about Ches.' They looked at her suspiciously, wondering if she were touting for business. 'No, it's nothing to do with business, it's to do with Ches,' she assured them, unconvincingly. They seemed defensive as she was asking so many questions. She doubted that this would work.

The fall-out

The following day Emily decided to confront her father over his treatment of the chestnut man.

'You're blowing this out of all proportion. I did it for your own good,' her father told her.

'My own good? I promised you I wouldn't go back over the road to see him again – wasn't that good enough?' Emily insisted.

'Don't talk to your father like that,' interrupted her mother, 'he was only doing what he thought was in your best interest. You can be so ungrateful at times, Emily.'

'Ungrateful? He didn't approach me, I went over to him. He

showed nothing but kindness, and what did he get for it? He was moved on. Is that what you do to people when you're not happy with them – move them on?' Emily shouted angrily.

'We have given you everything and this is the way you repay us,' shouted her mother.

Emily shook her head, 'Repay you? When you adopt someone it should be because you want to love them, take care of them. Lives should be enriched on both sides. You see, there lies the difference. The chestnut man didn't want to be repaid; but, there again, it's always business with you, isn't it, Father?'

'I think you should leave before you say something you'll regret,' responded her mother.

'Is that a threat, Mother?'

'Let's leave it at that,' her mother replied, turning to walk away and beckoning for her husband to do the same.

Distressed and frustrated, Emily headed for home where Mathew was waiting.

'So, how did it go?' he asked.

'Don't ask,' responded Emily gloomily, 'it's like talking to the wall.'

'You didn't lose your temper...? You did, didn't you?' asked Mathew, tentatively.

'Just a little,' Emily volunteered, reluctantly.

'The temper goes with that red head of yours,' laughed Mathew, 'but I wouldn't have you any other way.' He put his arm around her comfortingly. 'So, what's next?' he asked.

'How do you know there is a next?' she asked, despondently.

'Dog, bone. There's a message there, Emma.'

Emily wasn't listening, her thoughts already racing a head. 'I can't figure out the writing on the headstone... I have this crazy feeling inside about what it all means, Mathew.'

'Do what you have to do, but be careful Emily,' Mathew cautioned her, confident that it wouldn't end here.

The bag lady

It was apparent that the bag lady held answers to some of

the many questions Emily wanted to ask, and she decided that until she found her again she would do some research into the first name on the chestnut man's gravestone. Emily decided to contact the person in charge of the burial records at St. Bernadette's. 'Yes, twelve o'clock is fine, and once again, thank you for your help,' she told him. She made sure she had everything she needed: pen, notepad, her list of questions and a bunch of flowers for the Chestnut Man's grave. As she walked up the path leading to St Bernadette's her heart was racing in anticipation of what she hoped to discover. The man in charge of the church records placed a big, old and somewhat tattered book on an equally old and tattered desk.

'Now, what you're looking for should be around about here,' he muttered to himself as he proceeded to look for the details Emily required.

'Ah, here it is,' he told Emily, pointing to the records using a book mark as a guide. 'The records start here and finish here. Take your time; I'll be back shortly.' Emily carefully wrote down the details then began to gather her thoughts.

'Did you find what you were after?' asked the records man on his return.

'Yes, thank you. It's so kind of you to take the trouble,' Emily replied, grateful for his help. Having walked slowly over to the Chestnut Man's grave Emily kneeled down to place the flowers there. 'These are for you,Dad,' she wept, overcome with emotion and crying like she had never cried before. Suddenly, she heard a voice behind her, 'That's it, let it all out.'

Emily looked up to see the bag lady. She stared at her for a moment, more out of confusion than anything else. The bag lady she was used to seeing wasn't the one standing in front of her. Instead, this was an elegant lady, smartly dressed, with beautifully-styled hair. As Emily got up from her knees she sobbed in despair, 'I just don't understand.'

'I'm sorry I left the funeral early. I had to leave you to make your own decisions about finding the answers to your questions. I asked Bill in charge of the church records to call me should you decide to show up here. He contacted me right after you called him this morning. So you see, I was

expecting you at some time.'

'Ches is my father, isn't he?' Emily asked.

'Yes, it's true. John Doyle is your real father.'

'And Ruth was my mother?'

'That also is true. Your dad kept her ashes all these years before finally deciding to have them buried here as he knew one day this would be his final resting place. He kept your mum's ashes all these years, said it stopped him feeling lonely.'

'I realised it when I saw the date she died... it's my birthday.'

'She died giving birth to you. Complications set in.' After a short silence the bag lady told Emily, 'There are many questions requiring answers, but now is not the time or the place to talk. I live only a short distance away; I'll explain over a nice cup of tea.'

Watching over you

Arriving at the bag lady's home Emily observed nothing grand, just a small two bed-room rented house. Inside Emily noticed framed photographs of the bag lady and Ches. Soon she was sitting at the table with the bag lady enjoying tea and scones. 'You have Ches's eyes, warm and friendly; and, of course, your mother's red hair,' the bag lady told her. 'I'm sorry, but I don't even know your name,' Emily responded.

The bag lady introduced herself as Jean.

Emily couldn't help commenting that she looked different.

'You mean, I don't look like a tramp,' Jean laughed. 'That was Ches's idea. He thought if I looked like a down-and-out I would go unnoticed, and I did. You see, people are too busy to take notice of street dwellers.'

Emily asked about the people who used to put their potatoes on the fire to cook.

'Oh, they were genuine street dwellers; Ches always let them sit around his fire to keep warm. I dressed up as a bag lady one more time for Ches's funeral to see you. Your father knew you regularly went to that restaurant with your husband for lunch. I was hoping you would

recognise me. Your father knew you watched him from your window, and he always returned in time to see you going off to school in the morning.'

'How did you know my father, my real father, Jean?'

Jean explained that she had arranged her adoption as she worked for social services in those days. She described to Emily how hard her father had fought to keep her, challenging Jean when she suggested adoption.

'Adoption was your idea?' asked Emily, shocked at what she was hearing.

'I can see you're upset with me, Emily, but if you'll allow me to explain you'll see there wasn't much option for your father at the time. Ches never wanted to give you up, but circumstances left him no choice. Work was difficult to obtain, and when he had a job he had no-one to care for you. His family lived too far away and were in difficult circumstances themselves. When he wasn't working he had no money for food or rent. He was struggling to survive and couldn't stand the thought of you suffering as well. Times were hard for everybody. He did what he thought best at the time. He never stopped loving you, Emily.'

Emily asked Jean if she had children.

Jean smiled, 'You're your father's daughter, sure enough.'

Emily asked her what she meant, looking puzzled.

'Ches asked me the same question all those years ago. I did have a little boy, David. He died of polio. My husband, Bill, took David's death very badly. We didn't talk to each other and we just drifted apart. As I told your father at the time, my husband was a good man, he just couldn't handle it, and I couldn't help him because I was hurting. Basically, we couldn't help each other; as they say, a man who can't swim can't save a drowning man.'

'What happened to your husband, Jean?' asked Emily.

'He passed away not long after. They say a person can die of a broken heart, and that is something I believe to be true. He aged dramatically and looked like an old man when he died. The doctor said it was a heart attack, but I believe it was a broken heart. The same thing could have happened to me only for your father,' Jean told Emily, 'Ches just happened to bump into me one day, accidentally on purpose if you

understand what I mean. He had an ulterior motive.'

'What was that?' asked Emily.

'He knew I had the details of your adoption, and he was like a dog with a bone, he wasn't going to let up until I told him.'

Emily remembered that was the expression Mathew had used to sum her up after the row she had with her mother.

'So you told him where I was?' Emily asked.

'Not at first, it was more than my job was worth.'

'So what changed your mind?' Emily asked her.

'There were a number of reasons. I could see how it was eating away at your father's health not knowing where you were or how you were. What if my husband had been in the same position as your father? Wouldn't he have liked to know how David was?'

'So you told him?' Emily asked.

'I made him promise that he would never make direct contact with you, and Ches never broke a promise, not even the one he made to you, to always watch over you from a distance. Ches used to set up his stand early in the morning so he could see you going to school. He was more involved in your life than you realise. He was like a big soft child the night you went over to see him and he gave you the chestnuts. He told me he cried himself to sleep that night.'

'Didn't he ever want to tell me that he was my father?'

'Oh, he wanted to on many occasions, but he didn't want to ruin your life. You see, in Ches's eyes, you had grown into a fine woman who had what he couldn't give you: college, university, financial stability.'

'I see you and my father were close,' Emily commented, picking up a framed photograph of them together.

'Yes, we became very close. We were similar in more ways than one, that Irish charm of his; he could charm the birds out of the trees, Ches could.'

'Tell me about it, I have one at home like him!' Emily laughed.

'I loved your dad and I really miss him. We needed and cared for each other. He would have walked over broken glass for me. We both cried tears for our deceased partners, and never forgot them. But life has to go on, doesn't it?'

'Were you and my father an item?' asked Emily.

'No, we were the best of friends, that's all.'

'Tell me more about my father, where was he from?'

'Ches was from a place called Leitrim in Carrigallen, Ireland. He was from a big family. Times were hard, and some of Ches's brothers and sisters knew that if they were to survive, they would have to leave home to seek a better life elsewhere.'

'How did he meet my mother?' Emily asked.

'When Ches was standing at the dockside in Dublin he had to make a choice between food and a passenger ticket to Liverpool to start a new life in England. He didn't have enough money for both. Ruth worked on the Purser's Information Desk on the Dublin ferry. Once on board Ches charmed her into getting him some food. The journey was a lot longer than it is today, so he had more time to smooth talk your mother. When they docked in Liverpool she found him a job and a place to stay – like I said, he could charm the birds from the trees. Ches had a heart of gold; he was loved by all... especially Ruth's sister, Margaret.'

'Oh, my mother's name is Margaret,' Emily commented.

Jean looked serious, 'I know, Emily. They are one and the same person; your mother is really your aunt.'

Stunned, Emily asked how that was possible. 'Like I said, Margaret was smitten with your dad, she really loved him. Not that he ever did anything to encourage her, quite the opposite; it was your mother he loved. When your dad married your mother, Margaret became very bitter towards them both. She was a bit of a girl about town; after all, she was a very beautiful woman and she knew it. Margaret had one thing on her mind, and that was revenge. She knew how to get it, but first she needed a wealthy husband, and she had her eyes set on ensnaring a man with money. That man was James, who was in the banking business and knew people in high places. As God made them, he matched them; they seemed to be cut from the same tree.'

'They're both selfish,' Emily confirmed.

'I was thinking that, but I didn't want to hurt your feelings,' said Jean. 'Margaret never invited your parents to her wedding because she was ashamed of them. She was a snob; the money went to her head. She wanted nothing to

do with her old friends.'

'How did I end up being adopted by them?' asked Emily.

'Money talks, and they had plenty. The funny thing was that they turned down many children at the time, and quite specifically asked for you.'

'Me? Why would that be?'

'Hell has no fury like a woman scorned; it was a way of hurting your dad again, even though he was still hurting from the death of your mother. She didn't go to her own sister's funeral, and here was a chance to stick the knife in one more time by taking his child. You see, Emily, your dad, your real dad, seemed to lose job after job. We later found out that your father used his influence to get the companies your dad worked for to fire him, putting him in the terrible position of being unable to support his family. It was as if taking you had been planned, every move along the way.'

'As if I were one of his business deals,' Emily said, suddenly understanding.

'I think it was all Margaret's doing,' replied Jean.

'Like when he had him moved on after I had been over to see him that night, or was that her idea too?' responded Emily with disdain.

'I think you're right,' Jean said in agreement. 'Your father's business brought him to London. At the time Ches was selling his roasted chestnuts in Liverpool. When he heard that the Marstons lived in London he decided to move nearer to you; after all, chestnuts are chestnuts anywhere in the country. Ches set up his stand opposite the Marston's home. He would see Margaret going into the house with you on many occasions. He wanted to walk over the road and pick you up, but he knew there would be repercussions.' Jean paused to take a sip of tea. 'The disguise worked well, Margaret never realised that the chestnut man was your real father; well, that is, until he gave you the chestnuts. The following day Margaret went over to see who she thought was just a chestnut man, but was totally surprised to see it was your dad.' Emily was hanging on to every word as Jean continued. At the time of your adoption I wasn't aware of the history between Margaret and your dad or of her being your aunty; after all, she had a different surname. She didn't

disclose it during interviews with the adoption agency.'

'Why hasn't she ever told me? Why would she keep it a secret?' asked Emily.

'Because she loved your dad, that's why. She always resented the fact that he loved your mother. Your dad will always be around in the lives of the people he helped. He wouldn't want you to live in the past, Emily, it would be a life wasted.'

'Wasn't his life wasted, Jean?'

'Not at all. If friends were gold then your dad would have been the richest man in town. You only had to see the turnout at his funeral to see that. He was a learned man; he read book after book about law and business. Over the years he helped many people by offering advice and encouragement. He couldn't help you directly but he did so from a distance. Do you remember Miss Smith, Emily?'

'There was a Miss Smith at my college,' Emily recalled.

'That's the one. Becky Smith is her full name.'

'She always had time for me, she helped me a lot,' Emily told her.

'That's because your dad helped her, and a lot more people along the way. Like so many others, Becky used to buy chestnuts from your dad. He always had a smile or a joke for everybody. One day, Becky was dressed exceptionally smartly as she passed him, and so he asked if she was going somewhere special. Becky told him she was going for an interview at a school and asked him to wish her luck. Your dad told her it was a two-way deal, and when she asked him what he meant he advised her to tell them what they could expect from her and then ask what she could expect from them, pointing out that it was an interview and she wasn't going with a begging bowl. Becky was encouraged by this and took his advice. At the end of the interview they said they would be in touch. Becky told them that until she heard from them she would, of course, continue to seek employment. She hadn't reached her home before they had called to tell her she had been successful in her application. That wasn't the only time he had helped her, there were many, and he never wanted anything in return, he wasn't that kind of man; but people wanted to repay him for the things he had done

for them.'

'Were they the people who attended his funeral?' Emily asked. 'They seemed a mixed crowd.'

'They were business people, and very protective of Ches.'" Now I realise why they were so apprehensive about providing information about my real dad,' Emily said.

'Don't worry, it will be different when they know that you're his daughter,' Jean assured her, noticing Emily's anguished look, 'but I do worry about what you will do next.'

Raising her eyebrows, Emily looked at her quizzically. Jean moved to sit next to her and explained that she was afraid Emily would approach the situation with all guns blazing, which would be a big mistake. Jean explained that James belonged to an exclusive club of business men and knew some powerful people. 'Trust me, Emily, I know things that you don't know about the Marstons,' she told her. 'They manipulated their way into a position in which they were able to adopt you, and there is no limit to the actions they are prepared to take to protect their situation.'

'But what about all the years I've missed being with my real father?' Emily exclaimed.

Attempting to placate her, Jean asked, 'What have you to gain? The only important thing is that you know the truth. Don't say anything to the Marstons, it's all about going forward now. Time will right the wrongs that have been done.'

Emily hugged Jean as she thanked her for being there for her dad all those years.

'Your dad was my best friend, there's no need to thank me,' Jean assured her. Emily gave Jean her address, inviting her to call in any time she was in the area.

As Emily walked down the path, Jean called to her, asking her to wait a moment. Jean disappeared, only to re-appear a short time later carrying a tattered old suitcase.

'These were your clothes and your dolls. Your mother told me to dispose of them as she had replaced them with new things. She didn't have the decency to even look at them.'

'What did my dad say about that?' Emily asked.

'I never told him, I didn't want to hurt his feelings.'

'How come you kept them?'

'I don't really know. It's not something that I had ever done previously; after all, I never for one minute imagined I would ever see your dad again. It was just a gut feeling. I felt that maybe one day I would give them to him and, after all, they only took up a small space in my cupboard. I had never seen a man so broken at giving up his child for adoption.'

Once again, Emily thanked Jean for all she had done.

Breaking all ties

Later that day Emily told the full story to Mathew, who looked as if he were in shock.

'I don't know what to say. It's terrible to think of him in such a bad situation. You have to be careful how you handle this, you know. You risk losing all ties with your step-parents.'

'Correction – they will lose all ties with us, and what will they have left? Just each other, and they're welcome to that. I don't feel any love for them, Mathew. The only love I have ever been shown in my life, apart from you, has been from strangers who have had no ulterior motive.'

'What is it you want, Emily?' asked Mathew, 'Is it revenge?'

'Why not?' Emily responded.

Mathew suggested that taking revenge would make her no better than Margaret, and pointed out that she was above that.

'So, I should let it be and do nothing?' Emily asked angrily.

'If like attracts like, then I pity them,' Mathew said.

Emily stared at Mathew without responding until Mathew asked her what she was thinking.

'I was just thinking that would be something Ches would say...are you sure you haven't met him in the past?' Emily asked him with a smile.

'No, but I would have liked to,' Mathew told her.

'You're not alone,' Emily said sadly.

'What's in the suitcase, Emma?' Mathew asked curiously.

'Clothes and dolls that my dad gave to the adoption society when he handed me over to them. They were not good

enough for my mother and she didn't want them. I'm nervous about opening it, Mathew.'

'I think I understand, they're connections with your dad,' Mathew pointed out tenderly.

Emily pulled back the slides on the case and heard the two clicks as the locks snapped open. She opened the lid slowly as if it were a treasure trove. In a roundabout way it was a treasure trove of possessions chosen by her real dad from a chapter of her life, to which she had no memory of. Inside, her clothes were folded neatly, wrapped in plain white paper.

'My mother said they were rags, although she didn't even look at them.'

Emily unfolded each parcel of clothing carefully, as if they could break.

'These are not rags, Mathew. They're beautiful, maybe not up to Mother's stylish standard, but beautiful all the same.' Emily picked up a small parcel, which felt hard. 'I think this is a toy,' Emily told Mathew.

She was right. It was a teddy bear, a very old teddy bear.

'I think it may have belonged to your real mother,' Mathew said thoughtfully. 'It's old, and I can't see it having been your dad's.'

'Maybe you're right,' Emily agreed.

'Mrs. Marston doesn't realise what she has missed,' Mathew told her. 'That, my dear, is a Steiff Bear.'

Emily looked blank.

Mathew explained to her that Margarete Steiff had made the first soft fabric toy way back in 1880, and that as a trademark she had put a button in one ear of each teddy bear. 'See, there is the button; this is a genuine Steiff bear – and valuable at that.'

'How could my mother have obtained it?' Emily wondered.

Mathew reminded her that forty-five years ago, when her mother was a child, the bears weren't as highly valued as they are today.

'I don't care how much money it's worth, I'm not parting with it,' Emily confirmed. 'Quite rightly so,' Mathew agreed.

The next morning, while Emily and Mathew were having breakfast, there was a knock at the front door. To Emily's surprise it was Jean.

'I hope you don't mind me bothering you,' Jean said.

'Not at all,' Emily said, inviting her in and introducing her to Mathew.

'Sorry to call so early but I've been worried all night about you,' Jean told her.

'Why is that?' Emily asked her.

'I'm worried that you will do something rash,' Jean explained.

'I won't. We have spoken about this, haven't we, Mathew?'

'Yes, Emily has decided to sever ties with the Marstons.'

'Be careful how you go about this, Emily,' Jean advised.

'They can be vindictive. After all, they have spent a lot of time and money on you. There might be repercussions,' warned Jean.

'I'm not one of their businesses,' Emily exclaimed.

'It's not the way they see it though,' Jean cautioned her.

'I know exactly how I'm going to handle this, and don't worry, Jean; when I finish it, it will remain finished. Now, let's have a cup of tea.'

Emily laughed to herself.

'What are you laughing at?' Mathew asked.

'I've just realised you're not the only one with Irish blood in your veins,' Emily said.

'Ah, maybe that's what attracted me to you in the first place,' Mathew joked.

'You always said it was my red hair, Mathew.'

'That as well,' Mathew told her.

'There is something else I didn't tell you, Emily,' Jean said. 'It was Ches who sorted out the trouble you had with Lord

Singleton.'

'How come?' asked Emily.

'Well, he got me involved,' Jean said.

'I'm intrigued,' Mathew commented.

Continuing, Jean explained, 'Ches had connections in many places. He found out that Paul Rushworth had painted the reproduction and, putting two and two together, he realised that he must have been paid to keep quiet.'

'We didn't know he had been paid to keep quiet about it, we thought he had been paid to paint a reproduction for security reasons, and that when it appeared in the papers he had come forward to clear Mathew's name,' Emily told Jean.

'Believe me,' Jean assured her, 'he came forward after Ches had a word with him. Ches asked me to follow Rushworth one day and make a note of everywhere he went and anything that happened, no matter how trivial.'

'Why?' asked Emily.

'You'll see soon enough,' Jean told her, pausing to drink some tea before continuing her story. 'Ches went through everything I had written, and picked up on one small detail. While Paul Rushworth was taking his young daughter to the park on her bike, she fell off and hurt her knee.'

'And that was significant?' asked Mathew, incredulously.

'Before I explain you must understand that Ches wouldn't hurt anyone, and he did what he did to protect you both and without any violence whatsoever. There is a difference between saying you'll do something and actually doing it,' Jean stressed.

'I'm getting nervous now, Jean,' Emily said.

Jean continued, 'Ches said he would get a result without raising his fists. He went to a public phone box at 3.30a.m. and called Rushworth. It meant your dad was wide awake and Rushworth was half asleep. He knew it would unnerve him, especially in view of what he had to say to him.'

'Mind games,' said Mathew.

'Yes, sort of,' Jean agreed. 'Anyway, your dad told him that he was aware he had painted the fake and that he wanted him to come forward and tell the police. Rushworth was

arrogant at first, but Ches soon took the wind out of his sails by warning him he should either go to the police or expect a visit. Oh, and by the way, he told him to get stabilizers on his daughter's bike.' Clearly impressed, Mathew remarked 'Rushworth was dealing with an unknown quantity who knew him, knew where he lived, and had been watching him all the time.'

'You're right, Mathew,' said Jean.

'What happened then?' asked Emily.

'Well, Rushworth told Ches he did it because he needed the money.'

Emily commented that they all needed money but they didn't all set people up to get it.

Jean explained that Ches had then thrown him a lifeline and told him to tell the police he had painted the reproduction for Lord Singleton's son, Alan. When they asked why, he was to tell them he understood it was for security reasons and that the reproduction was to be put on display in place of the original painting.

'Ah, that way Alan couldn't ask for the money to be returned as he would have to admit he had asked Rushworth to keep quiet about it in the first place, and he would have to back Rushworth's story,' Mathew said.

'I don't want you to think any less of Ches because of his actions,' Jean cautioned.

'I think it was ingenious, utterly ingenious,' Emily shouted.'

And, as you said, Jean, a result without a single punch being thrown,' added Mathew, admiringly.

It went quiet for a moment before Jean, turning to Emily, told her, 'If your dad had been here now I know what he would ask you.'

'What would that be, Jean?' Emily asked.

'He'd ask what it is that you really want' Jean told her.

Emily looked at Mathew as she replied, 'I want what I didn't have when growing up, a proper family and good friends, that's all. Money has never been a priority for me. Come to think of it, I really never wanted to be a solicitor. I was pressured into that; I always wanted to live in a little cottage out in the country.'

‘What’s stopping you?’ Jean asked.

‘Me, I suppose,’ she replied, echoing Phil Heath’s words spoken to her father.

‘You can do anything you want to do,’ Mathew told her.

‘It seems so strange after all these years of being ordered to do this and ordered to do that, and now I can go for what I really want,’ Emily realised.

‘You only get one life, Emily; so live it, don’t waste it,’ advised Jean.

‘You’re right, Jean. I feel as if the weight of the world has been lifted from my shoulders. Mathew has tried to get me to lighten up for a while now. He’s right. It’s taken something like this to wake me up,’ Emily conceded.

‘And remember,’ Jean reminded Emily, ‘your dad had many friends who would always be willing to help you if you needed them.’

‘I have to admit,’ she replied, ‘last night I was really bitter towards my adoptive parents and the way they treated my real dad, almost to the point of wanting revenge so to speak, but I don’t feel that way anymore. I just want to sever ties and be done with it.’

‘Ches was proud of you, Emily,’ Jean assured her. ‘He told me often enough. Well I must be going; take care both of you.’

After Jean had left, Emily told Mathew, that her head was whirling, and she felt alive, liberated.

‘I’m pleased for you. You look happy,’ Mathew told her.

‘Take Jean’s advice though and think carefully about how you are going to deal with the Marstons.’

‘Do you have any suggestions?’ she asked Mathew.

‘You could drift away from them slowly to stop them being suspicious of your reasons for wanting nothing to do with them. We could make that move to the country without telling them and only let close friends know where we are.’

‘And your family, Mathew, or should I say our family?’ Emily added.

‘Yes, they’re not a bad lot the Jordans,’ Mathew responded

with a laugh.

'You know, Mathew, when I think back to the holidays I spent with Nanny Clair, just the two of us, on many occasions she was mistaken for my mother. I never told mother as she would have taken it out on Claire. I've decided, Mathew, I'm not going to drag this out, I'm finishing it as of now, but I do have one more gift for mother.'

Sweet revenge

'Who was at the door, James?' Margaret asked.

'It was the postman delivering a parcel. It's for you, Margaret.'

'I wonder who it's from.'

'It has Goodmans on the wrapping, so I assume it's chocolates.'

'I hope so; they make the finest chocolate around. I must have a secret admirer James – with expensive taste.'

'Are you trying to make me jealous?' James laughed.

As Margaret removed both the wrapping and the lid from the box of chocolates, the colour drained from her face and she stared as if in a trance.

'What is it? What's up, Margaret?' James asked.

Margaret didn't say a word as she handed to James the card that had been inserted inside the box of chocolates. On the card James read the words 'Goodbye aunty dear'. 'She knows!' Margaret exclaimed.

'How?' James asked.

Once again, Margaret said nothing, but handed him the box of chocolates. James stared at the box. Each chocolate had been replaced with a single chestnut.

Acknowledgements

Absolute editing
Stephen Williams

Other Books By Richard T Smith

Don't Stop The World I Want To Stay On

The Gobbledygook

The Tuffy Stories

Small Book of Life Changing Quotes

100 Nuggets of Gold

One Liners & Put Downs

Disclaimer

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, places, events and incidents are either the products of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

From *Don't stop the world I want to stay on*

From night club owner to professional fight manager, life was rolling along like a song, that is until it took a turn for the worse. In a short space of time, people I loved and cared for started dying, one after another. Simple decisions became momentous tasks. Now I was £35,000 in debt; my confidence was in the gutter. I couldn't see any way out, and being a world record holding magician counted for nothing. Then a chance meeting with a successful business man made me realise that, for once in my life, I was the right person in the right place at the right time. He passed on to me some pearls of wisdom that had stood him in good stead, and the only money he gave me was an everyday coin that you and I are familiar with, which held the secret to success in every walk of life. I didn't spend it, and it continues to help me to this day. It was a meeting that was to impact my life from that day on; money troubles were to become a thing of the past, and my life was to become calm and stress free. But more importantly, now it was me running my life. From the ingenious mind of Archimedes (287-212 BC), pre-eminent Greek mathematician and inventor, who produced works on plane and solid geometry, arithmetic and mechanics, this book holds his secret to success in business and every-day life, about which some of the top philosophers and motivational speakers in the world today have written and taught in seminars and lecture halls around the world. This secret is in code that predates Leonardo da Vinci's time. £1,000 to the first person to crack the code...could that be you ? ... The clues are in the book.

Archimedes was born in Syracuse, Sicily and educated in Alexandria, Egypt.

100 Nuggets of Gold

- Mix in the right environment... you don't send a duck to eagle school. If you want to be successful at plumbing, you must learn from plumbers and not electricians: horses for courses.
- If you come across someone who is wise... listen to them
- If you come across someone who is successful... learn from them
- If the task is too big... break it down into small pieces. Be successful at little things first, and build up to the big one later.
- If it's not broken make it better... you have heard that old saying if it's not broken don't mend it. With that mentality we would still be using the horse and cart; after all, it did the job for hundreds of years, so why fix it? What you're doing might be all well and good for now, but you still have to improve, all the time. Why? Because if you don't, your competitors will.
- Realise your true worth. 'It doesn't matter how good you are, if you don't realise your true worth then you are not worth your true worth.'
- Become an expert and you will be in demand.
- Pay yourself first. Out of everything you earn, no matter how small, pay yourself 10%.

- Make the 10% earn its keep. Invest it in something that gets a return.
- Mix with people better than yourself. You cannot fly with the eagles while clucking with the turkeys.
- Know what business you're in. At one stage the railways lost out to the airlines because they thought they were in the railway business when really they were in the transportation business.
- Stay clear of negative people. Be selective about who you mix with, negative people are as useful as a one-armed juggler; they will only bring you, or what you do, down.
- Don't be scared to change. For your life to change, you must change...Gandhi
- Inspire. Become someone people want to be with or around.
- Set out a game plan. We don't plan to fail, but we fail to plan. 'If you don't design your own life plan, chances are you'll fall into someone else's plan. And guess what they might have planned for you? Not much.'
- Become disciplined in what you do. To become successful you must be disciplined and carry out the plan to achieve your goals.
- Luck is when preparation meets opportunity; the harder you work, the luckier you'll get.

- You never get a second chance to make a first impression, so check everything before you make your first move.
- See yourself as a winner. Whatever you want out of life, see yourself as having achieved it. Some academy award winners have given acceptance speeches that they had been practicing for years.
- Deliver what you say you will deliver. A promise isn't worth anything until it's delivered.

..... ***And much more***

Small Book of Life Changing Quotes

- “A man who cannot swim cannot save a drowning man. For example if you're unemployed; mix with people who are in work and in a better position to help you.
- What you have in your head determines what you have in your pocket.
- You want a friend who will tell you what you need to hear not what you want to hear, but more importantly not what **they** want you to hear.
- It's not about where you are, it's about **who** you are

- “Don’t think success belongs only to those who are ‘University’ educated or born into wealth, it belongs to those who seek it.
- Don’t buy anything you don’t need, it only decreases the wealth to buy what you **do** need.
- They say the journey of a million miles starts with the first step. If that is so, then the journey of your success starts by standing on the shoulders of your first giant.Today they are called mentors.
- For your business to be in business your service or product has to be where the customers really are.
- They say we come to crossroads in our lives, I disagree. I think we come to many crossroads in our lives’ and there will be times when we take the right path, but there will be times when we take the wrong path. Remember on both choices it’s always just a direction we have taken. We are only as good or as bad as our last decision. When on the wrong road all you have to do is simply turn around.
- Put your brain in gear... before you let the clutch out on your mouth

- If you want to become successful, you “simply model the actions of successful people, you can learn from successful people, whether they are dead or alive through books.”

..... ***And much more***

Thank you for purchasing my book