

## The Legend

'It's raining out. George, button your coat.'

'I'm so happy. I don't feel the cold.'

'It's damp and it goes for your bones.'

'You sound like my mother. I'm forty-five years of age. I've been looking after myself for a long time, y'know.'

'Och aye, so you have, and I'd like you around for a lot longer. Will I see you tomorrow?'

'Wild horses couldn't keep me away. Good night.'

A kiss and then, closing the door behind me, I walked, no ... the truth is ... *skipped*.

Down the steps into drizzling Edinburgh. Smiling at the clouds, stepping jauntily onto the wet pavement. A pleasant afternoon with a friend. The weather couldn't deflate my mood, although, now that I was outside and the cold hit me, I could see that it was becoming dark and I should hurry. George Street was deserted except for the two men standing on the corner of South Charlotte Street. They looked as if they were deep in conversation over a pressing matter.

'Got a match, sir?' the taller of them spoke to me as I passed.

'No, I'm sorry I don't.'

'Miserable night', the other added.

'Mild for February, I think. Good evening,' I touched my cap and continued across the road to Charlotte Square, making my way towards Hope Street.

The trees hung dripping over the pavement concealing the light of the day. I heard footsteps behind me, they quickened and something made me turn.

The tall one was swinging a lead pipe at me. I tried to duck but he hit me square on the side of my head. I heard a yell, felt myself fall. My knees cracked as they hit the pavement. I felt boots thudding into me. Why me? I haven't hurt anyone. I don't have money. Take what I have. For God's sake, stop! My head spun, I felt blood in my mouth, and I seemed to fall into any abyss, into complete darkness. I thought a long time had passed and then, from the depths, I heard voices.

'Who is it?'

'I think it's George Chalmers, the artist.'

'What a mess. Who would do this?'

'We need to get him to the Infirmary.'

And now all I wanted was to get away from the pain, to be safe, warm and loved. In my mind, I found myself running, a boy again, not knowing where I was at first, but then I recognised the path to Granny Torrie's cottage. I was late and my head ached, but I disregarded that because I had to hurry. Granny would wonder where I was. She wouldn't want to start without me. The others would be there already. The path was wet, with here and there a puddle. My feet dragged and I couldn't run fast like I used to. And then I'm at the gate. I have to lean on it, although I'm not ill. So why am I stumbling? I reach the

door and put my hand to the latch. But I was never poorly as a child. Something is not right. I open the door quietly and peep around it.

Everyone is there: Euan and Fiona with Marie, their sister. Fiona and Marie are wearing their pinafores because they're always working for their stepmother. Euan's wearing his hat because he loves it, not because he's cold. Maggie is sitting on her favourite stool. She has new clothes because her Dad's the coalman, and she gets whatever she wants. Jamie's on a mat on the floor. He can't walk and he isn't growing properly. His legs and arms are too thin and his head's like a baby's. He loves coming to Granny's. David will have carried him. That's David, sitting on his box, in front of the window with his arm around Maisie. She's a scaredy cat, frightened of everything, especially 'The Legend'. It's my favourite of all the tales that Granny tells. We all love it and never tire of hearing it. The way Granny tells it, it seems new every time, and we're always deliciously afraid long before the end.

She's on her chair near the fire, wearing her hat and shawl, leaning forward, her hands helping to tell the story. She turns her head to smile at me and I know it's alright, she'll make sure I haven't missed anything. I tiptoe round to the back. Everyone's eyes are transfixed on her face so they hardly notice me. This is my favourite of all places. I could spend eternity here. The fire is low and it's warm but not enough to be uncomfortable.

I feel sore all over my chest. My face must show the pain but I keep my eyes on Granny and she continues telling 'The Legend'. I'm trying to concentrate. It's the exciting part where the monster from the loch takes Heather away. I hear voices in my head saying, 'It's no use. He's too badly hurt.'

'Such a pity. He's not old and a great friend and generous too.'

The pain is taking over and it makes me grind my teeth and I slip off the box and onto my knees. Now I'm staring at Granny without hearing her but I know the story's finished.

She's coming towards me with her arms open. In my head I hear,

'He's gone. There's no heartbeat.'

'Goodbye, George.'

Granny kneels down and touches my head and the pain is gone. She smiles and takes my arm. I'm able to stand up. She hugs me. I'm so relieved and happy.

Granny says, 'Georgy-boy. Your journey is over and you've come home.'

'Granny, I painted you. I painted us, listening to 'The Legend'.'

'I know and I'm so proud of you, my little Georgy. Welcome home. To the safest place you know. Welcome to 'The Legend'.'