

Chapter One



Catalyst

She melted away into the early evening with the child swaddled and crying beneath her hooded cloak. Leaving the large house behind, she left the gravel drive and kept to the shadows of the trees that ran alongside. She would have preferred to wait until dark, but Beattie insisted. He reminded her of the child's mother and her dying words. There was no time for hesitation. If she were to leave, it would have to be now. She grabbed what she could carry while Beattie gathered the child and some blankets. Within minutes, she was gone, with no plan or providence, just a desperate need to escape. Beattie had pushed an envelope into her pocket as he hugged her tenderly and then ushered her away without a word. Grief and worry lined his already furrowed features. She hurried between the house and the gated entrance, not stopping to glance behind her. Emerging from the trees, she hastened through the gates and turned left toward the village. From there, she could find transportation to somewhere safe.

She feared using the road. It would be safer to stay in the shadows of the outlining trees, keeping the road in sight. When she felt she was at a safe distance, she stopped to gather her wits. Plunging her free hand into her pocket out of the chill autumn air, she found the crushed envelope Beattie had deposited. She could feel the contents through the thin paper envelope. Money. A substantial amount if the weight was anything to go by. Putting the envelope inside the child's wrappings, she continued her flight while the twilight turned to dusk. Her first instinct was to flee as far from here as she could get, but where? The father's solicitor, Fairbourne, had the resources to find her almost anywhere in the world if he desired, moreover, what of the

girl child? She could not flee with both children for many reasons, forcing her to choose between them. The mother did not say why exactly, but she had the strongest feeling that the boy was in the most danger. Beattie would make provision for the girl, she had no doubt, but with whom? She was the only member of staff he had confided in. His loyalty to the family was beyond question or honour, but even he was concerned for the newborn twins. "The master had become unpredictable," he said, "unpredictable and spiteful." The deeper his grief, the more malevolent he became.

He had seemed to grieve long before she died, but for what or whom she could not say. Only that this last crushing loss seemed to push him over some kind of threshold, from which she saw no way of returning.

Before she died, the mother had held the two babies close, whispering to them even as her life's blood drained from her, before handing them to Beattie and extracting his promise that they would be made safe. Only then did she succumb to her weakness. Her eyes drifted to somewhere far away, as she whispered something in her native Welsh tongue before they closed forever.

She had seen and heard enough during her employment to know that something was shared between the children's parents, some secret that only they were part of. It had brought them together like magnets and then pushed them apart. However, the result of this union was two perfectly beautiful twins. Born out of tragedy, they were perhaps the only good thing that came from her time in the big house. Beattie had asked her to write him when she was settled so that he could provide her with a monthly stipend for them both, but she would not risk being discovered. The boy would have a happy, secure life; she would see to that, but he would never learn of his parents, not from her, not while she lived. The lights from the village loomed out of the darkness now. She had decided on her destination. She would have to wait a while for the last bus, but that was a risk she must take, and so she kept to the shadows. As long as she did not

draw undue attention, she could slip away to safety, using her mother's maiden name from now on. She would decide on the boy's name during the journey home. Instead of Blodwen Huws, she would be Blodwyn Trevelyan.



Charles Lester Seymour watched from the window as the housekeeper stole away with the child. It was no more than he had expected. Perhaps they had done the right thing. Gods rarely made good fathers. They lacked the moral aptitude for such endeavours. Having turned from the window, he poured himself a drink and sat at his desk in the library. He took the journals out of the drawer and added the last entry. He then locked the journals in his desk drawer and entered the nook. Seymour placed the keys in the smaller desk drawer and closed the door behind him as he left.

It would be decades before he was ready to put his plan into action. He would set the board during those long years of waiting and prepare the pieces. He must arrange an appointment with Fairbourne regarding the boy's future. After all, he would be the only male descendent of the long line of Seymour's. It was imperative that the boy inherit. His entire strategy depended on it. That was the first thing. The journals. They would be the key. If the boy grew to be anything like Seymour himself, or indeed his mother, he would not be able to resist the pull. The seduction would be irresistible to one such as him. The girl child was inconsequential. He had no use for her. She would be put up for anonymous adoption, having no part to play in his charade.

Next, he would need to ascend and prepare the other place. Only two people knew of its existence. And Morgan was dead. It was his alone now. But he had time. And patience. And cunning. It was the last that shocked him the most. His cunning. His desire to control this new Eden was as desolate as it was exhilarating. He refilled his glass,

returned to his desk chair, and watched the sky darken as he considered his manipulations carefully.

Chapter Two



Windfall

There are moments in time that can completely change the course of our lives and of which we are entirely unaware. Sitting in the waiting room, Gafyn Trevelyan, unaware of his pending moment, closed his eyes and listened to the rhythmic tap, tap, tap of the receptionist's false fingernails on her keyboard. He had already waited half an hour for this mysterious appointment, and only curiosity kept him in the seat, overwhelming the impatience that urged him to leave and make his way home. In the years to come, He often wondered where his life may have led to, if his impatience had won the day and led him home.

The receptionist announced, "Mr Fairbourne will see you now," as she pointed to the door to her left.

Trevelyan rose and strode into the solicitor's office, almost colliding with Mr. Fairbourne as he made his way to greet him. Fairbourne clasped his free hand over Trevelyan's while still shaking like an overly pleasant stranger or an old friend, leaving him feeling uncomfortable. Fairbourne dressed immaculately in a suit and waistcoat with an air of confidence and seniority that completed the almost cliché appearance of a successful solicitor in his early sixties. Only his Masonic dress tie betrayed the illusion that he was about anything other than the business at hand.

"Please take a seat," he said as he motioned Trevelyan towards his desk. Fairbourne positioned himself on the other side and sat down. "I apologise for your overdue appointment, Mr. Trevelyan, but I had to make sure I had all the facts at hand regarding my instructions, paperwork, and such. All appears to be in order, so I suppose you must be wondering what this is all about." His eyebrows rose as he spoke.

"I must admit," said Trevelyan as he smiled, "I have been more than a little intrigued since your correspondence".

Fairbourne smiled back, trying to hide his indifference, but then he caught himself short and continued. "Then let's get straight to it, shall we?" He shuffled the papers before him, his eyes darting through the contents. "I have been instructed to impart some rather sad news to you, Mr. Trevelyan. It is my solemn responsibility to inform you of the passing of your father, Mr. Charles Lester Seymour, the third, on the Twenty first day of September this year... I understand that this may come as some surprise to you, and if you need a moment to gather yourself, please do." He paused and rose from his chair. "I find a drink useful at times like these. May I offer you a scotch or brandy?"

Trevelyan's mind was racing. He was not expecting this. "Err... whisky, large, please," he blurted, trying to comprehend.

He placed a large tumbler of scotch and ice before Trevelyan and said, "Can I speak frankly, Mr. Trevelyan?" before continuing without waiting for an answer. "Mr. Seymour has been a major client of ours for many years and a close and personal friend of mine. I was deeply saddened by his passing. His health had deteriorated in the last few years, and his death was not unexpected. He received the best medical home care available and passed painlessly in his own bed." His eyes met Trevelyan's. "But in all the time I knew him, I must confess I never knew he had a son. I cannot ever remember him ever mentioning that he had any children. He remained unmarried and, might I add, uninterested in anything outside of his passions. He had remained a recluse for the last ten years of his life and took no partners, romantic or otherwise, in the years preceding his hermitage."

Steadied a little by the whisky, Trevelyan tried to comprehend what Mr. Fairbourne was saying. He was led to believe by his mother that his father died before Trevelyan was born. The victim of a fatal car crash during their engagement that his mother never got over. He had

not liked to ask too many questions in his childhood, as he could see the pain in her eyes while she tried to answer without getting upset. He had so many questions that he did not know where to start. "How on earth did you track me down?" he asked, feeling this was as good a place to start as any. "I believed my father to be dead, or at least that is what my mother told me".

"Ah," said Fairbourne, "that proved to be rather difficult at first, but it was through your good mother that we were able to find you. She never married, which is fortunate in these affairs, and with the help of certain agencies we employ in such matters, we could trace her to..." He paused while he searched the paperwork before him and continued, "the Oakwood Nursing Home." He reclined in his chair and said with a measure of sympathy, "We were informed by the staff that your mother has advanced dementia and Alzheimer's disease and that she is beyond any of our inquiries but were supplied your details as next of kin, and here we are." He sat forward to engage Trevelyan earnestly, saying, "I understand now that you are wholly unaware of these circumstances, so what I have to say next will come as a bombshell," he said, rising and taking Trevelyan's glass to refill. He did not continue until his guest had another large scotch before him and he, himself, had resumed his seat. "Mr. Trevelyan, you have inherited a vast fortune in the region of eight hundred million pounds sterling, after taxes on revenues and such." More paper shuffling. "Along with a substantial country seat in the Snowdonia range in northern Wales and all and any assets associated with it."

He paused to affect Trevelyan's attention once again and said, "I understand that this must come as a profound shock to you, and if I were in your position, I too would be speechless, to which end I have prepared a dossier detailing all the relative information and so forth for you to consider at your leisure."

After an hour of document signing and listening to the summary of the will, Trevelyan noted there was no direct correspondence to him

personally from his recently acquired father. He asked, "Did my father leave any personal letters that might explain his leaving all this to me? You must understand, Mr. Fairbourne, that until I walked in here an hour ago, I was a semi-successful artist with no real money, no prospects, and a future that did not include wealth and assets. Now I have more money than I could ever have imagined and a stately home! And yet I know nothing about him besides what you have told me today. Where was he when I was being raised by my mother alone? Did he know about my life? Did he know where I was and what I was doing? Why didn't he contact me in all this time?" Questions kept revolving through his head now that he had gotten over the initial shock, and the effects of the alcohol were beginning to show.

Fairbourne looked sympathetic when he said, "All I can tell you with any certainty, dear boy, is that the will was written by my father some thirty years ago when he was captain of this ship." He raised his hands and opened his arms, gesturing to his surroundings. "And has remained unedited and sealed until opened the day after Mr. Seymour passed away, per his prior instructions. Which would suggest that he made arrangements for your inheritance shortly after your birth. In answer to your questions, I wouldn't like to speculate, and unfortunately, other than your mother, I can think of no one living that could shed any light." He paused for a moment, then put his arm around Trevelyan's shoulder and guided him towards the door of his office as an act of finality. "On the bright side," he said, "You are now a wealthy man with the world as your playground. Should you find you require my services, please don't hesitate to contact me. I have put a business card in with your documentation, which I suggest you familiarise yourself with at your convenience. Any questions you may have..." He stopped, took Trevelyan's hand in his clasped grasp, and added, "regarding your estate or finances, they can be directed to the contacts listed within." With that, Trevelyan was back in the waiting room, still reeling from the news and the scotch.

Of all the thoughts whirling around his head in a tempest of confusion, one resounded above all the others. The only one he could fully comprehend. 'I AM RICH. I AM STONE-COLD, STINKING RICH! I have an obscene amount of unearned and undeserved money bequeathed to me by either my anonymous lifelong absentee billionaire father, or some crazy old fart, and a case of mistaken identity thirty years ago that was never revealed'. He wondered if someone out there with the same name and date of birth was expecting a fortune that would never arrive, although it seemed very unlikely.



As Trevelyan stepped into the street from Fairbourne's building, the rush of traffic and people only added to his disorientation. He stumbled as he turned left and headed to the Oakwood nursing home to escape the noise and grime of the city. The fresh air had lightened his senses more than he expected, probably because he had skipped breakfast that morning in an effort not to be late for his appointment. Also, he was still in shock and more than a little bewildered. He was not hungry, only impatient to get home and take all the information in.

His next thought was Rose: 'Ah, sweet Rose.' A complicated flower, to be sure, but beautiful nonetheless, with a rare bloom for those she deemed worthy. He was not interested in her worthiness, though, only in her lovemaking. He was fond of her on a personal level, but she had too many problems in her life, both real and imagined, for his taste. Her mental instabilities were no secret, but not serious enough for his consideration. She had a tough childhood with messed up parents and, from an early age, preferred self harm as a way of dealing with life. He considered them to be 'friends with benefits,' as the phrase goes. Nothing more. Although he was acutely aware that she had much higher aspirations for him and that she was, he was sure, in love with him. She knew better than to make emotional or romantic gestures toward him, but the signs were there, all the same.

The way she stroked his hair as they lay together. The passion that still lingered in her kisses long after their lovemaking was over. All these things and more he resolved to ignore because the situation, as it stood, suited him better than having a two-way relationship with all its encumbering responsibilities and levies on his time and person. He needed no one except himself. He knew she accepted his terms and conditions, hoping the time would come when he would succumb to her affections. Even through two abortions, she went along dutifully. Things were changing now, and Rose did not figure in that future.

The noise receded as he chose quieter back streets to meander his way to Oakwood and his mother. He needed to speak to her about Charles Seymour. But first, he left Rose a message on her voicemail. He did not want to speak to her right now. He needed to get his thoughts straight before that. He would later wish he could remember the words he left her. So much that happened later that day could have been avoided if he had been a little more sensitive to her sensibilities and self-esteem. But he would recall using the words “last goodbyes”.

He all but floated the last thousand yards to Oakwood, wondering if his mother would be awake and lucid enough for him to get some answers. Or scared and confused, as she seemed to be more often than not. The answer was neither. She was asleep. Or at least half asleep. Her eyes were closed as she muttered in her dreams. She appeared helpless, small, and defenceless lying there on that bed, in that room, in that place. Not at all the robust survivor of her generation that he called Mother. A strong Welsh woman. Dignified and proud. But she was always kind and rewarding to those she loved, and she did love him; he had never doubted that. He could recall times in his youth when they lived in her childhood home. A small slate mining village beneath the Moelwyn mountains and the hanging valley of Cwmorthin. They would walk the old slate miner’s paths that traversed the mountains and valleys in the area. She described to him

the part her father had in the quarries and mines that roofed the world.

That was a world away from this semi-conscious and confused old lady lying in a bed she would never get out of. He found it difficult to know how to feel, sitting next to her bed, holding her hand, with a world of contradictions and questions demanding to be sated. She seemed so small and frail, almost transparent with age. Did she ever intend to tell him? Explain about Seymour and why Trevelyan had grown up without a father? He could understand the whole “died in a car accident” charade because it was better than whatever truth be told, especially when he was growing up. But she had the opportunity to unburden herself long after he turned eighteen and before she began her descent into ill health and dementia. She must have known at some point that he would discover the truth. One thing he had learned in life was that lies never lay buried. Not that it was a lie exactly, but a withholding of the truth. A truth he could have asked about growing up, but was reluctant to on many levels. His concern for his mother’s feelings and the pain in her eyes when she thought about the past outweighed his curiosity about the small details that ultimately matter to a small boy with no father. If his father was some rich hermit, how come they had to struggle for everything that she could get for them both? They never went without food or a roof over their heads, but they never had it easy. His mother worked hard all of his life. She cleaned and cooked all day for other people. Then she went home and did it all again for him.

He just needed a reckoning... a confession seeking absolution, or at least an explanation. Perhaps on some level she could hear him, because, from time to time, she uttered rhetoric in Welsh that he could not fully understand. She had endeavoured to teach him Welsh when they lived in her home valley among the mountains, lakes, and rivers of Wales. But he was never the best pupil. He could make out the words ‘mother’ and ‘sister’ in Welsh as she muttered apologies to

him in her dreams. "Sorry that he will be left alone after she is gone," but the rest was unintelligible.

Whose mother, whose sister? Nothing about his father. The drink had gnawed at his patience. It had been a long day, and he had a whirlwind rolling around inside his head.

This is pointless. He knew there would be no answers, and he was not disappointed. He did, however, think that he would feel a little better, less burdened by the secrets, if they were out in the open. But he did not. Trevelyan sighed in forgiveness as he bent to kiss her forehead. And she found some peace in that because she smiled as a single tear rolled from her face to her pillow.

Chapter Three

Immolation

Last goodbye? He sounded drunk, but Rose knew him better than that. Trey never got drunk before ten in the evening. He could get a little out there during the day sometimes, but never drunk. He liked to loosen up a bit before he would paint, a little wine, maybe a joint—but never so much as to dull his mind. It had been seventeen days and nights since they were last together. She had tried to get in touch, but he never returned her calls if she were to reach out to him. He only called when he wanted her, and she always wanted to say ‘no’, ‘I’m busy’ or ‘I’m seeing someone else.’ But she could never resist. Could never turn down the opportunity to be with him because during that time she would feel like she had finally found her home. In his arms. Safe and secure, if only for a brief time. When they were apart, she felt like an open wound. Vulnerable and exposed all the time. The way she had always felt since she was a child. But when she was with Trey, all that disappeared. Until she was apart again and those exposed nerves jangled. It was what she supposed love felt like. To yearn for someone with every part of your body and soul. If life had taught her anything, it was to grab a hold of the things you love and do not let go. Not without a fight. And she loved him. So much so that it often scared her when she was alone in her bed at night.

Her thoughts betrayed her at every turn, throwing images of him with other women or, god forbid, a life without him at all.

It was in those dark moods that she would reach for the blade beside her bed and relieve her despair with blood.

She knew he did not reciprocate her feelings. But she believed that the times they were together belied his indifference to her. The love they made was proof of that. No one could make love that way and not be attached, body and soul. They were meant to be. She was sure of it. Even after the abortions she endured alone, she reasoned in his favour. They were her sacrifices for his happiness and the promise of a lasting togetherness. There was no mention of "last goodbyes" in that promise; there was no room for separation. She needed to take control for once in her life, instead of being led in the direction the world expected of her. *Yes, she thought. It is time.*

She gathered together the clouds of darkness that had begun to descend on her. She had work to do. While she worked, her hands steady, she contemplated what she would say when they embraced. They would embrace, she would see to that. She had to feel his arms wrapped around her if she had any chance of having the courage to see it through. With their eyes locked in an embrace of their own, he would not be anticipating her bravery. He would expect her to be her usual shy and compliant self, but this was too important to her to let it slip away. This would be her last chance to show him how much she loved

him. And that she could not bear for him to leave her because she could not live without him. If she was brave, he would see that she was not the sum of her fears and weaknesses. That she could take action when it was required. When they were locked into that embrace and their eyes met, he would understand. That is when she would need courage most of all. She must cling to him so very, very tightly. To say exactly what it was she intended.

And it would not be a 'Last Goodbye'.



Still reeling under the intoxication, and the bombshell that landed in the middle of his day, Trevelyan slunk off home, leaving his mother asleep and at peace for the time being. After a short walk away from the throngs and traffic, he entered his front door and headed straight to his studio. It felt good to be in a familiar place, surrounded by his work. Feeling exhausted now, he slumped in his easy chair and closed his eyes for a moment. A tempest ravaged his thoughts. He poured himself a drink and looked at the dossier Fairbourne had amalgamated for him. True to his word, pretty much everything Trevelyan needed to know was there in black and white. He was unconcerned with the majority of the information. Mostly legal papers and deeds. Details of bank accounts and financial adviser contacts filled the single folder to bursting.

Finally, he found what he was searching for. He opened the manila folder marked 'Bryngaer', only to be greeted

with an image of a spectacular mansion, all gables and windows, at the apex of a long gravel drive surrounded by a copse of trees. Gardens sprawled from the rear and drifted into wildflower meadows that bordered a slow moving, and wide stretch of river. Excitement welled up inside of him, and blessing his good fortune, he poured another scotch. Perusing the other pictures in the folder, he came across some photographs of the acres of land surrounding Bryngaer, showing the mountainous landscape in the background, the sky, dark and foreboding as it crossed the horizon. They struck him as familiar, as if he had seen them somewhere before in a magazine or TV programme. He could not put his finger on it, but he was sure he had seen that landscape before, and more than once. He sat back in the chair, nursing the remains of his drink. As his eyes roamed the studio, his thoughts concluded he would soon have to move all this stuff to his new residence.

There it was. Hanging on the wall. The same landscape in the pictures surrounding Bryngaer.

The sketch was not identical, but it was the same, sure enough. Even the sky looked the same. A figure concealed some details at the forefront of the scene. A young woman viewed from behind and to the right, showing her profile beneath a hooded cloak, staring off into the vista. Her long hair spilled from beneath the hood, stretching out behind her, borne on unseen winds. In his reverie, he almost expected her hood to blow backward in response.

Then the spell was broken, and the sounds of the day drifted in through the window and reasserted themselves and normality. Shifting his attention to the rest of the material within the dossier, he shuffled through the papers, not taking them in as his thoughts drifted off to Bryngaer and those majestic meadows by the river. He could see himself there. In the pictures. Walking through the cacophony of colour toward the riverbank. A life of luxury and leisure awaited him, starting tomorrow.

He wished he had not invited Rose over. He was more than a little giddy, and his mind was exhausted and racing simultaneously. Rose would not be happy about his change of fortune, and he instinctively knew she had already guessed that he planned to leave without her. *Damn my flippancy*, he thought. He should have kept her in the dark and disappeared into a new life with no drama. But what was done was done. He decided he should enjoy the “last goodbye” in the spirit he intended. Trevelyan would miss her, but only in the way you would miss a friendly stray cat. He was lost in thoughts of freedom he had never felt before. No longer are dreams to be imagined; but things to be attained and within his grasp.

The abrupt ring of the lower doorbell brought him back to reality. He made his way to the buzzer, and without greeting or ceremony, he hit the button, allowing entry to the lower corridor that led to his place, and turned to pour them both a drink before she came through the door. In what seemed like longer than it should have, he finished

his drink and poured another as he heard the door open behind him and Rose drift in.

He turned, only to be greeted by a soaked and bedraggled creature. Wild with distress and purpose, flinging herself toward him with outstretched arms. In his confusion, he could only spread his arms in anticipation and await her desperate embrace. But over her shoulder and through the window, he could perceive no deluge or cause for her appearance.

As she collided with him, he staggered back a little, bearing the force as she clamped her arms around him, her face buried in his chest. She lifted her eyes to him and said, "We'll always be together now." The smell hit him. Burning his eyes and making him falter backward yet again.

PETROL. She was doused in PETROL!

Before his thoughts could turn into action, he heard the sound of stone on flint. And the world exploded into a blast of wrath. Like a shriek of fury, while their screams were engulfed in fire and flame.