

# The Devil's Porridge Gang

by Colin Garrow

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*for Calum*

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## Prologue

It was all Neil Armstrong's fault, Sam decided - if him and his astronaut mates hadn't landed on the moon, Flattybeak and Baz wouldn't be in hospital and Roxanne might still be alive.

Sam put down the newspaper. Perhaps that was a bit harsh. After all, it was only because the Gang had been starved of adventure that they'd got involved in the whole Dougie debacle in the first place. If Netherton hadn't been such a boring town, he mused, they might never have had anything to do with Sid and the others.

He looked again at the black and white photo in the Netherton Chronicle. According to reporter Ted Cullen, it had been taken on

*'the occasion of a mesmerizing performance by the talented youngster, at the Hirst Head Showground annual Gala'.*

The photo showed Roxanne sitting on a pony, her short dark hair sticking out from underneath a lopsided riding hat, as she smiled down at pony trials judge, Cynthia Reynolds. The article was dated Thursday, July 31, 1969 and was a follow-up to the story from Monday. It told how doctors had done everything possible, but Roxanne Jones (12½), had finally succumbed to her injuries, just after 4.00am that morning. Sam felt his eyes begin to water. He sniffed, picked up the scissors and carefully cut around the article before placing the clipping into the folder marked 'Gang Info'.

Pulling his chair over to the window, Sam looked across the road to the building site where hard-hatted men carried bricks, checked plumb lines and mixed mortar. He tried to recall how the other side of the street had looked before the bulldozers had come lumbering down Ironworks Lane, but the only image he could conjure up was the crumbling corner of Mr Trewitt's house as the steel ball smashed into it. He and Baz had watched excitedly as one after the other, the old houses were torn to the ground. That first day of the holidays had been less than two weeks earlier, but now it seemed like months ago...

## Chapter One - Hamsters, Bottles, Toffees

That Monday morning, the day everything started to go wrong, was the first proper day of the holidays. It was also Uncle Norman's morning for visiting, (though it seemed to Sam that every day was Uncle Norman's morning for visiting). Red-faced and breathing heavily, Uncle Norman was one of those people who always sat in the same upright chair - the one by the dining room door - as if he might want to leave suddenly. He often called in on his way home from his job at the toffee factory. He wasn't really an Uncle, but Sam and his sister had always called him Uncle Norman because he did those things that uncles were supposed to do - like bringing sweets and handing out pocket money. And he was funny, too.

Norman worked the nightshift at Walton & Robson's sweet factory in the next town. He often brought bags of squashed toffees for Sam and Lizzy. Lizzy, at 13½, was more than a year older than her brother and was of course far too mature for sweets. She would make an 'up-yer-bum' face whenever Norman handed round the toffees. Norman said they were rejects - ones the factory couldn't use because they weren't mixed properly, or were double wrapped. Whatever the reason, the sweets Uncle Norman produced on his daily visits were always a bit squashed. Sam thought this might be because Uncle Norman kept them in his back pocket and had been sitting on them on the top deck of the bus.

Norman beamed at Sam. "Where's tha been then, young un? Watchin em pull pit rows dahn, eh?"

Uncle Norman's attempt at a Yorkshire accent usually made Sam laugh, but today he kept a straight face. Sam had been practicing. "Oh, eck," he replied, "Ah were rate chuffed whent bulldozer cum round top o Station Rowd into our strate. Ah thowt - ere we go, lads, in fer a rate treat, now eh?"

Norman laughed and slid easily back into his native dialect. "Not bad, bonny lad. Not bad. And what about you, young Elizabeth? You been oot watching the dozers an aall?"

Lizzy forced a smile. "Nobody calls me Elizabeth."

Norman nodded sagely. "No, Ah bet they don't." He winked at Sam. "Not to yer face, anyway."

Lizzy sighed dramatically and got up off the settee. "I'll go and help Mam with the tea." She turned in the doorway and said "Ah suppose you'll be wantin biscuits?" She went out without waiting for an answer.

"What's up with her, then?" said Norman. Sam shrugged, grinning.

"Be a bit of a view with that lot down, eh?" Norman went on, nodding towards the window.

Sam nodded. "Oh aye, you can see right across the shuntin yard and everything. It's great. Dunno what'll be like when they've finished, though."

"Hey, Ah'll bet you were up at three o'clock this morning watching the moon landing, eh?" said Norman.

"No," Sam shook his head sadly. "Dad said it was too late for us to be up."

"Aw, that's a shame - it was great!" enthused Norman.

Sam leaned forward, suddenly interested. "You saw it? Thought ye'd be at work?"

Norman grinned like a Cheshire cat. "One of the lads on my shift brought a telly in. The gaffa let us turn the machines off for an hour. Shoulda seen us - we were all sat roond with cocoa and biscuits, watchin Neil Armstrong jumpin up and doon on the Moon." He sat back. "Aye, it was summat to see, Ah'll tell yer."

Sam made a grumblin noise. "Ah wish we lived in America," he sighed wistfully.

"What?" said Norman. "Chuffin America? What hev they got that we hev'n't got?"

"Rockets." said Sam, simply.

Norman shook his head. "No, divvent gan dreamin your days away thinkin about America bonny lad, Ah can tell yer, ye're far better off where ye are."

Sam pulled a face. "Aye, right." He sighed again. "It's just...whey maan, nothin ever happens roond here."

Norman laughed. "Oh, behave yersel - Netherton's got everything you need. What d'yer want? Wars? Segregation? Communists? Nah, we're fine where we are, believe you me."

"Aye," said Sam. "That's what the grown-ups always say."

Uncle Norman rubbed his big hands together as if trying to keep warm. He paused, then "Saw your mate ower the road. What's it you call him - Barry? Aye. Ah knew his dad, you know?" He pulled a large green handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his nose. "Aye..."

Sam nodded and looked at the floor. Baz's Dad had been killed in an explosion at the pit a few years before.

Norman coughed. "Aye, well..."

Sam stood up. "Ah'll give me Mam a hand with the tea."

In the kitchen, Mam was pouring tea into mugs while Lizzy sat on the stool, watching. Mam gave Sam one of her looks. "Oh, Sam, you've not left your Uncle by himself? Poor man'll think nobody likes him."

"Nobody does," muttered Lizzy.

"Elizabeth!"

"Oh, Mam, don't you start!" Lizzy jumped up and stormed out the through the back door, slamming it shut behind her. She made a face at Sam through the kitchen window then trounced off into the back lane.

Sam shrugged at his mother's questioning look. "Ah, haven't done owt," he said.

"Ah know, pet," said Mam. "I expect it's that Douglas whatisname."

Sam was suddenly alert. "What - Speckyfoureyes Dougie?"

Mam had picked up the tray. Now she put it down with a resounding thud, spilling Uncle Norman's tea. "Samuel David Todd!" Sam grimaced. Whenever Mam spoke in her Sunday voice, everybody knew she was annoyed.

"How many times have I told you about calling people names like that," she said. "It's not nice." Mam picked up a dish cloth and wiped up the spilled tea. "You wouldn't like it if your friends called you names, would you?"

"Me friends do call me names," said Sam.

Mam sighed. "They don't call you names that you don't like, though?" Then added, "They don't, do they?"

Sam grudgingly shook his head.

"Anyway," said Mam, "Ah think your sister's got a bit of a fancy for Douglas. Not that she'll admit it, of course." Mam picked up the tray again.

Sam opened the cupboard above the kitchen table. "Alright if Ah get some Custard Creams, Mam?"

She nodded, barely concealing a smile. "Aye, go on, pet."

Sam, Uncle Norman and Mam sat in silence while they drank their tea, watching the activity on the demolition site across the road. Eventually Uncle Norman said "What's on the agenda today, then eh?"

Sam shrugged.

Mam nudged Sam and gave him one of her 'be nice' looks.

He sighed. "Oh...just...stuff. Ye knaa?"

Uncle Norman nodded. "Aye. Ah knaa."

Mam and Uncle Norman talked about Auntie Olivia, who'd just gone into hospital, then lapsed into silence again. After five minutes Sam reckoned he'd fulfilled his obligations. He stood up. "Ah'm away oot, Mam." he said, sliding his half-full mug onto the table, his free hand hovering over the plate of biscuits.

"Mind you're back for your dinner, then," said Mam.

Outside, Sam stuffed the Custard Creams into his pocket and broke into a gentle run. At the top of the lane he turned right into Station Road and crossed over to where Baz and Flattybeak were waiting in the Budge, an old wooden bus shelter.

“Where ye been, maan?” said Baz, drawing a familiar image on the side of the wooden shelter with a piece of green chalk.

“Ye knaa where Ah’ve been,” retorted Sam. “At hyem.” He took the chalk off Baz and began adding detail to the drawing.

Baz smirked. “That’s kack, that.” He cast a glance at Flattybeak, who was nodding appreciatively.

“Gurr maan,” Flattybeak made a gurgling noise. “Ye knaa nowt, ye dae Baz. That’s clivver.” He clapped a hand on Sam’s shoulder. “Ye should be an artist, Sammy.”

“Rather be an astronaut,” said Sam, signing his name underneath the sketch of Elvis Presley.

“Now hey...” Baz snatched back his piece of chalk. “My name gans under there, not yours.” He rubbed out Sam’s signature with his hand and wrote ‘by Baz’ under the image.

Flattybeak dragged a grubby sleeve across his mouth and said “Hurr maan, ye divvent want to sign yor names, ye daft gowks. If yor dads see that ye’s’ll get a gud clowt.”

Baz made a tutting noise. “Wey, Ah knaa that, maan,” he said. “Ah was just testing ye’s.” Baz spat into his hand and rubbed out his signature.

Sam, Baz and Flattybeak ambled past Johnstone’s the Chemist, over the level crossing, round the corner and into the doorway of Ron’s Café. Baz craned his neck to see inside the shop. “Are they cummin then, or what?” he moaned. He stuck his hands into his trouser pockets and began humming a tune.

“Guurr. How should Ah knaa?” said Flatty. “Go an ask em.”

“Ask em yersel,” muttered Baz.

Sam sighed. “Ah’ll ask them, will Ah?” His friends looked at him as if this was the only possible solution.

“Tch. Yous two.” Sam pushed through the doorway and into the darkened café.

Behind the counter, Big Ron moved around, stacking and unstacking boxes. He looked up as Sam came in. “Alright, marra?” he inclined his head to one side, in greeting.

Sam nodded back. “Aye, Ron. Canny.” He liked the way Big Ron always spoke to children as if they were adults. He didn’t seem to care that Sam and his friends hardly ever spent any money.

Roxanne and String were leaning over the pinball machine at the far end of the room. Roxanne banged a hand on the glass top and glared at the points marker. “Oh, luk at that, will ye? Useless...”

Not to be outdone, String banged his hand on the machine and gave it a kick. “Oh, maan,” he moaned. “Flippin knackered, this thing.” He went into an elaborate slow motion mime of kicking the machine until it was no more, then sighed melodramatically and sat down at the nearest table to slurp the dregs of a strawberry milkshake.

Roxanne smiled at Sam. “Hello. What ye doin, then?” she asked.

Sam sniffed. “Nothin. You?”

Roxanne shrugged. Sam nodded towards the doorway where Flatty and Baz were standing watching them. “Might gan ower and wind up Gordy.”

Roxanne twisted her face. “Nurh. Boring.” She took out another coin for the machine. “Do something later on if ye like?”

Sam nodded. “Aye, alright.” He looked across at String, who was banging his head slowly against the window. In the street outside an elderly woman in a long green overcoat waved an admonishing finger at him. String pressed his mouth against the glass, puffed out his cheeks and made himself go cross-eyed. The woman suddenly bared her teeth and made a gnashing

sound. String sat back, alarmed. "Whoa!" The old woman grinned, winked at him and walked off.

"Ye not cummin then?" asked Sam.

String shook his head. "Canna be fat-ig-yood." ('Fatigued' was String's word of the week; a concept he'd developed himself and which included words he liked the sound of and could easily mispronounce in order to irritate other people).

Sam did a slow motion mime of punching String in the head as he walked past. String mimed taking a heavy blow to the temple, reeling back in his chair and sprawling across the table, dead.

Gordy's hardware shop stood at the far end of Station Road South, between the chip shop and a newsagent. The sign had faded years ago and few people could remember the shop's original name, but everyone in town knew Gordon Pringle by sight, so the shop was known simply as 'Gordy's'. Gordy knew the contents of his shop inside out, and even the two younger women who had joined the staff a mere sixteen years ago when Gordy spied a gap in the market and expanded into wallpaper and paint, couldn't better his knowledge of all things hardware. And few would dispute the sharpness of his mind. Well, some would, but only in as much as Gordy's contact with the outside world had long since ceased to include anything remotely to do with things non-hardware.

The entrance hall ran between two large front windows that curved round into a gloomy passageway leading up to the main door of the shop. Sam carefully pushed open the door and blinked in the darkness. He stood for a moment peering inside. Ancient gas lamps swung lazily from the high ceiling, diffusing their dim glow over the long, high benches that ran round the walls and down the central aisle. Sam sniffed. The unventilated building smelled musty and old. It was stacked with tin baths, fly paper, rope, candles, hurricane lamps, and of course, wallpaper and paint.

Baz and Flattybeak loped along behind Sam as the three of them made their way slowly into the main area of the shop. At the first counter on the right hand side stood the two women who most customers preferred to deal with, as they at least were likely to answer queries with reasonably clarity. They eyed the three boys suspiciously as they walked past, then went back to their conversation about the latest episode of Doctor Kildare.

Baz stuck a grubby finger in Sam's side. "What ye ganna ask for, Monkeyman?"

Sam reddened slightly at the sound of his nickname. He turned round, "Me?" he whispered. "Ah'm not asking for owt. It's yor chuffin turn."

Baz snorted. "Yer howkin yor beak? Ah did it last chuffin time."

Sam recalled that indeed he had. He looked at Flattybeak who immediately held up a hand. "Gurr, go on maan, Sam. You're the best," he moaned. "It's got to be ye."

Sam groaned. It wasn't that he didn't want to do it, it was just that he knew sooner or later their luck would change and he didn't want to be the one face that Gordy remembered.

A man in a shabby blue overall was bending down beside several stacks of shiny aluminium buckets in the far corner of the shop. As they edged closer, Sam could see it was Gordy, engrossed in sorting out a box of sink plungers. Sam turned to check the whereabouts of his friends. Baz and Flatty had dropped behind and were pretending to examine bicycle lamps. Sam jerked his hand to indicate they should move closer.

As he approached the counter, Sam's bravado finally slid away. He turned round and motioned to Baz to take over.

Baz took a step forward and said loudly "What's that, Sam? What was it ye were lukkin for?"

Sam pulled a face and turned back to the counter just as Gordy looked up. The old man straightened himself and brushed down his overall. His smoky-grey hair hung limply across a furrowed brow. He lifted a finger and carefully pushed his glasses up to his eyes, cleared his

throat, coughed and made a harrumphing sound. "Er...can Ah help ye, lad?"

Sam took a deep breath. "D'you sell hamsters?"

Outside, Sam, Baz and Flatty broke into gales of laughter. They ran back over to the café and fell in a heap of guffaws in the doorway.

"What a nob!" sputtered Baz. "Do you sell hamsters!"

Sam was creased up. "Aye, did you see his face, eh? What a plank."

Flatty leaned against the doorway. "Guur, daft auld sod." He reached into his trouser pocket and pulled out a bag of sweets. He stuffed two into his mouth before offering the bag to his friends.

Sam looked at the bag, then at Flatty. He had stopped laughing. "Where'd ye get them?" he asked.

"Huur. What d'you mean, like?" said Flatty.

Sam grabbed one of the squashed sweets out of the bag and waved it in Flatty's face. "These! Where'd ye get them?"

Flatty looked bewildered, as if his whole existence had been thrown into doubt. "Uur maan...off me dad. What for, like?"

"Aalright, Sam?" At the sound of Roxanne's voice Sam turned and looked at her. She was standing with hands on hips, eyes wide and mouth open, showing her white teeth.

Sam seemed to forget what he was saying. After a moment, he muttered "Aye, canny Rox. Canny." He glanced back at Flatty who was now stuffing more toffees into his mouth.

That evening, after tea, Baz, Monkeyman Sam, Flattybeak, String and Roxanne gathered around the dying embers of a brazier at the edge of the site that had recently been Paradise Row. From where they stood, Sam could see his own house further down on the other side of the street. Mam was standing at the garden gate talking to someone. Sam moved round behind Flatty so he was out of sight.

The Gang watched the last of the workmen pack away their things and walk across the street into the Butcher's Arms. One of the men nodded to Baz. Baz waved.

"Who's that, Bazza?" asked Roxanne.

"Me grandad," said Baz. He picked up a piece of brick and began throwing it up in the air and catching it. "He's moved in wi us. To give me mam a hand an that."

Roxanne stole a glance at Sam and gave an almost imperceptible nod towards Baz. Sam shrugged in reply.

Sam considered this new information for a moment. Baz often didn't have much money and Sam presumed it was because his mam had been forced to take on a second job to pay the bills. Sam hadn't wanted to pry, but he'd started giving Baz his copies of *The Wizard* when he'd finished with them.

"Hey, did ye's see the News?" he said.

Sam nodded. "Aye, great, wasn't it? Wish Ah'd been up to see it when it was actually happenin."

"Huur," gurgled Flatty. "Ye's daft gowks. They landed on the moon an were off back into space by the time...huur...by the time it got onto the telly."

"What are ye's talking about?" asked Roxanne.

The lads all turned and looked at her. "The Moon? Space? Ye knaa?" said Baz.

"Oh that." said Roxanne. "Anyway, me dad says there's more to all that stuff than meets the eye. Says it isn't exactly what it seems to be."

String rolled his eyes. "Yeah, cos he would know."

Roxanne punched String on the arm. "He would, actually." String opened his mouth to complain, then thought better of it and showed her his best I-don't-care face.

"Huur," gurgled Flatty. "You're funny, Rox."

String pointed across the road. "Why'd they caall it Paradise Row, Sammy?" he said,

indicating the remains of the street. "Ah mean, it wasn't exactly paradise, was it?"

Sam sighed, annoyed at String interrupting his moon-related thoughts. He nodded towards the old wheelhouse that stood silhouetted beyond the now deserted building sight. "Cos of the pit. The miner's would've been working doon the pit aall day, breaking their backs, getting covered in dust and clarts and that, and they wanted something nice to come back to. That's what me dad says, anyway."

String followed his gaze. "But why'd they not caall where ye live Paradise Row? It's on the same street."

Roxanne gave String one of her looks. "Dae ye not knaa anythin?" She put her hands on String's shoulders and turned him slightly so he faced Ironworks Lane. "What's down there, String?"

String pulled away from her. "Hey maan, Ah'm not daft. Sam's hoose."

Roxanne nodded. "And what's behind it?"

"The woods," said String.

"Aye," said Roxanne. "And what's in the woods?"

String looked at Sam, then at the others. "Erm...trees?"

Sam took over the history lesson. "Remember that day we went doon the woods and dug aall that stuff oot the ground?"

String nodded. "Aye, that metal stuff. What we chucked through Bikey's greenhouse window?" He laughed at the memory.

"Aye," said Sam. "It came from the ironworks. It's like waste. There's still ruins of the old buildings there, in amongst the woods and that, doon near the river. And the iron stuff...well, it's just the rubbish that naebody could use."

String looked puzzled. "So...?"

"The Ironworks owners had these houses built for the workers at the factory. Then later on the mine owners built houses for their workers, but obviously they didn't want their bit called Ironworks Lane cos it was for the miners, so they built like a row of cottages. So Paradise Row's the name of the hooses, not the street."

String thought about this, then "So why's it caalled Paradise Row...?"

The Gang gave a collective sigh and went back to watching the brazier. They were silent for a moment, then Roxanne made a show of looking at her watch. Sam couldn't help notice Baz raise his eyebrows in a "here we go..." gesture.

Roxanne put her hands on her hips. "Well?" Everyone looked at her. This was part of the routine to decide how they would occupy their time. Roxanne posed a question and the lads came up with possible answers until someone put forward a suggestion they all agreed on. And whatever it was, as long as it was something Roxanne wanted to do, then that's what they would do. Not that Roxanne was in charge or anything like that, it's just that everyone found this method the easiest.

"Could go up the Penguin Club," suggested Baz.

Roxanne sneered. "And do what - get a thick ear off me mam for being out after eight o'clock? Ah don't think so."

String took a deep breath. Everyone sighed, knowing what was coming. "We could gan to my hoose and listen to records..." he started.

Sam did the honours. "String, what's the point?"

String began to whine. "Aw, go on, maan", he said. "Ye's never cum to mine...?"

"Nobody likes Cliff Richard. He's a nob and he canna sing."

"Ah knaa," said Baz. "We'll go down to Baxter's and nick some bottles. Tek them to the pub. Get at least half a crown. At least."

"Huur," said Flatty. "Yeah, me dad took a load of bottles back to The Lamp and he got tons of money."

This seemed like a reasonable plan. They all knew how profitable it could be to return empty pop bottles to the Miner's Lamp pub. Of course, you had to have a lot of empty bottles.

Everyone looked at Roxanne. "Alright," she said. "But I'm not clamberin ower any waalls unless there's definitely somethin worth havin."

Baxter's owned a fleet of lorries and delivered bottles of pop to houses all over town and surrounding area. They'd won several awards for their manufacturing capabilities and had recently expanded into fresh orange juice. Customers could return the empties for a discount on their next order, or if they preferred, hand them in at any of the local pubs to get a small refund. Bottles returned to Baxter's were stacked in crates in one half of the vast yard behind the factory offices in Telephone Road, ready to be cleaned and re-used.

Of the five friends, none of them really wanted to climb over a wall and steal empties from the hundreds of crates under the beady eye of the night watchman. In fact, they never had. It was one of myths they spoke about as if it were part of their rich history, but hadn't actually got around to carrying out. It was unfortunate that none of them would admit this publicly, because if they had, then that would have been an end to it, and they wouldn't have come into contact with Sid or the photograph, and the rest of their holiday might have remained safely untainted by villains, adventure and death. But no-one did.

By the time they'd walked up Bebside Avenue and across the football field, it was well after nine o'clock and getting dark. Roxanne led the way along the side of the pitch and down behind the club house. Squeezing through a hedge and into one of the long allotments that filled an otherwise unused stretch of ground behind the factory, the Gang walked up the narrow path and past a rickety garden shed. When they reached a small gate at the top, they stopped. Beyond this was the lane used by Baxter's lorries and the handful of home owners from the houses at the far end of Telephone Road. Roxanne gave the gate a shake. It was tied fast to its post with a piece of twine.

"Just lowp it," said Baz. Roxanne gave him a pained look. She easily swung her leg over the top of the gate, stepped down to the other side, then held out a hand to help the boys.

Baz grunted. "Give ower," he said. "Ah divvent need a lass to get meself ower a gate." He swung his leg high, launched himself forward, caught his boot laces on a rogue nail and fell on his face in the lane. Roxanne didn't bother to hide her delight as she grinned down at him.

The back lane was deserted and they quietly slipped across to the corner of Baxter's premises. Baz rubbed a sleeve across his face, then stuck his hands in his pockets and calmly ambled around the corner. After a moment he returned and whispered "Quiet as a moose."

"It's too light," observed Roxanne.

Sam nodded. "Rox's right. We canna gan in there just yet."

There were irritated grumblings from the others, but they knew there was nothing they could do. String pulled out a pack of cards and they settled down to play Pontoon until it was dark enough for them to make a move.

At ten o'clock, the sky had clouded over and the moon was nowhere to be seen. It wasn't as dark as they'd have liked, but the high walls would allow them to at least hide in the shadows.

The faint orange glow of the street lamp at the corner made little difference as Sam surveyed the scene. The wall around the yard seemed longer and higher than he'd remembered. A large heavy door was set in one end of the wall near the corner and a pile of soggy cardboard boxes were stacked next to some dustbins. Further down the lane, before the factory wall abutted that of the first of the houses, he could see the huge wooden gates used by the delivery lorries.

"Come here, Baz," said Roxanne. "Ah'll get on yor shoulders." Roxanne took hold of him and manipulated him into position against the wall. "Make a step, then," she ordered. Baz did as he was told. Roxanne placed a foot into his cupped hands. "Bend your knees..."

Before Baz could object, she straightened her leg and planted her other foot on his left

shoulder. Baz winced but stood firm while she stretched up to reach the top of the wall. With both feet on his shoulders, Roxanne peered over the top.

“Blimey,” she whispered. “Have a look at this lot.”

Sam and Flattybeak copied Roxanne’s method and in a moment Sam had hauled himself up and was peering into the yard.

“Sit on top, Sam,” she said. “Then we can pull the others up.” Sam swung a leg over the wall into a sitting position and gazed into the yard.

“Ah’m not getting up there,” said Baz. “Ah might faall.”

Roxanne snorted. “Yeller belly custard,” she hissed. “Come on, ye plank.”

Sam and Roxanne were now standing on top of the wall. The sky had cojuled over throwing the yard into shadow. They could see a light from the office where the night watchman would be. It was impossible to tell if there was anyone actually watching the yard, but it was a chance they’d have to take.

“How we gonna get back up again?” asked Sam.

Roxanne surveyed the scene below them. She pointed across at a pile of crates. “As soon as we’re doon, get a few crates and stack them up against this waall.” Sam smiled in the darkness. He had to admit, for a girl, Roxanne was pretty smart.

Roxanne gave Baz instructions as she and Sam lowered themselves into the darkened space. Sam could hear Baz and String arguing in hushed tones. Flattybeak was now on top of the wall looking down at them. “Hurr, what’ll Ah dae?” he gurgled.

“Stay there, Flatty. Ye can pass the bottles ower.”

Roxanne had moved across the yard in the shadow of the right hand wall. Sam followed carefully, picking his way between the broken crates on the ground. Just then, a light came on beside them.

“Watch it!” hissed Roxanne. “Back against the wall.” She pushed Sam backwards, tripping over a crate as they fell to the ground. Sam was about to complain, but Roxanne’s hand was over his mouth before he could speak. He was suddenly aware of a presence close by. A door had been pushed open and a pair of grubby overalls was standing within spitting distance of Sam and Roxanne.