**Sadistic Pleasure**

The disused quarry entrance was obstructed by strands of rusty barbed wire, haphazardly strung across the overgrown track.

Further along, stood a battered sign that had seen better days but its faded message was profoundly clear.

*‘Danger. Do not enter. Private Property.’*

For those who ignore and wonder further were confronted by signs positioned around the quarries edge.

*‘Danger. Unstable. Keep Clear.’*

What drew the reckless and foolhardy, lay silent and motionless, surrounded by towering walls of glistening granite.

For boys from the nearby boarding school, this watery magnet they called ‘*The Abyss’* was strictly out of bounds.

But on hot summer days, several absconded, to cool in the deep waters. And once a year, a handful would arrive for a secret and dangerous initiation. If successful, they were excepted into the school’s elite brotherhood— but most failed.

For ‘Plebes,’ as the un-initiated were called. Standing above the dark lagoon, was for some, too much to bear. The twelve-meter plummet looked two hundred.

So the clandestine brotherhood paid tribute to the boy who volunteered to jump first. This act of bravery allayed fears of certain death, for those who dare follow.

Wearing shorts, t-shirt and running shoes. Each Plebe had to chant allegiance to the brotherhood before a black hessian bag was pulled over their head by Dragon, the supreme leader. Who would then ask?

‘Are you willing to follow into the darkness?’

If their reply was ‘Yes’. Depending on how Dragon felt towards the recruit.

The command to jump would be immediate or delayed a few seconds, allowing the subject time to chicken out, which many had done.

On those occasions, the failed Plebe was allowed another attempt but not before agreeing an austere forfeit. This had to be completed within two days— if he jumped. If not, he was banished to the world of Plebes for eternity.

§

An elated twelve year old scrambled from the cold lagoon, before looking at eight cheering boys assembled high above. Hugo proudly returned their mock German salute without stretched arm, then sat shivering by the water’s edge, teeth chattering uncontrollably.

Overcoming fear of certain death, followed by the shock of frigid water had filled him with a rush of hot adrenalin, which now pumped vigorously through his veins.

He stared hypnotically at the once still water that now lapped rhythmically against the gravel, close to his feet.

Bravery had moved the dark liquid, setting energy in motion that continued after he’d left.

A sporadic sensation suddenly intoxicated his racing mind. He’d done things. Seen things but through the eyes of a different person but oddly— it was him.

But as quickly as the images had arrived, they vanished, as they always did.

Hugo DeVilliers became aware early in his short life, that he held the power of life and death. This filled him with an amazing feeling he relished and that escalated as he tortured and killed all manner of living creatures.

Pushing those bazaar bounders, led his developing mind along a path that brought him into conflict with members of society.

But in his contrived mind, his perceived uniqueness gave him power over them too.

A sudden scream made Hugo glance towards a hooded figure hurtling towards the water, which crystallized a decision in his intoxicated warped mind.

At this scene of adolescent high drama, he would kill his first human.

§

Hugo was adopted when four months old and lived with his new parents, in a well to do area of Salvador, Brazil.

Young Mr and Mrs DeVilliers were childless after three years of marriage, so decided to seek a child for adoption.

Hugo’s terrible two’s were softened slightly by an unexpected arrival into their family.

Marcus was born three weeks premature, constituted a ten day stay in hospital before mother and child were allowed home.

After years of medical checks, the surprised parents had given up hope but now were thrilled with their new babe— their other son was not. He was taken a child psychologist just after his fifth birthday, after admitted hanging his pet hamster by its neck, from a beam in the tool shed.

A few months later he was in hot water again, due to tethering a bird to the cat's tail by a long piece of string. For this, he received a stern lecture from his father before been sent to his room.

Unfazed, he whiled away the time by feeding flies to his pet spider, a black hairy thing that lived in the corner of his bedroom window.

A more serious worry to his parents was Hugo’s total lack of concern for his younger brother’s safety. On numerous occasions, he’d lock his sibling in the coal cellar while he went off to play, leaving the distraught child to be retrieved sometime later by their young nanny.

Incidents like this brought friction between his parents, to a point where his mother was convinced her youngest was becoming increasingly vulnerable the older Hugo became. Her husband brushed these problems aside as nothing more than boy’s rivalry. In his eyes; their youngest would become stronger for it.

Two months before Hugo’s twelfth birthday, his mother found out her husband was planning to send him to boarding school. Even though this solved the problem regarding her boys, it made her extremely upset that she’d not been consulted.

Arguments became more frequent and heated, where she became extremely agitated and sometimes hysterical.

This didn’t bother Hugo in the slightest. In fact, the more distressed she became the more fascinating he found it. He was also becoming solitary and secretive, which fueled his cruel vindictive nature.

Inflicting pain on anything living, gave him a great deal of pleasure, fueled by an inner need to dominate.

**To Be Continued**

**An Old Coin— A Lost Boy**

Their gang was Arnie, Stick, Sid, Jacko and Vinnie. They all went to the same school, apart from Vinnie. She attended the girls only just outside the small market town, where they all lived and played.

Paula Vincent’s nickname came about because she was the exception to the rule. She could climb trees better than most boys, ride a dirt motorbike her dad had given her and was very proficient at horse riding, bareback.

The gang’s time together was mostly spent exploring the surrounding woods or messing about in general, trying not to get into trouble. A great entertainer was the river that encircled half the town. Hours were spent trying to get across without getting wet, either by rope or homemade floating devices. Many maritime raft battles had taken place to the enjoyment of the old folk as they strolled through the neighbouring park. One amazing adventure took place after a huge storm, the abundant flow rushed their excited group eight miles downstream to the next town, using only inflated car inner tubes roped together. Fortunately, their parents only found out after the fact.

§

Arnie had just turned twelve and was due to change schools at the end of this summer but all the others would have to wait until the end of the year before following him to high school.

Sadly Sid wouldn’t— he’d vanished.

His mother, father and three sisters were devastated. The manhunt that ensued over the following days was extensive and thorough, almost all the town turned out to help. Even though their group was nowhere near the river, the waterways authority searched miles in both directions.

The kids had been playing among the remains of the 12th century Abbey that stood on an elevated patch of ground, a mile out of town.

But during questioning, they couldn’t shed light on what had happened to their friend; basically, they all relayed the same information.

They were the only ones at the Abbey. Even the small car-park that was favoured by courting couple, was deserted.

One minute Sid was there, the next, he was gone.

§

Fifteen years later the remaining team got together for a wedding at the local church, where Arnie was to marry Alice, one of Sid’s sisters.

Stick had flown in from America, where he was an interior designer. Vinnie and Jacko had come from Australia where they worked in the mining industry but all three had managed to come several days earlier to visit family and chill out together.

Three days before the wedding, Arnie’s stag-night was a high point. It was held at the Grange, a large manor house built for a local dignitary a hundred and fifty years ago but recently had been turned into a boutique hotel, with a very pleasant bar and restaurant.

When things eventually died down, only the core members were left and the conversation turned to the day Sid vanished.

And this is when Stick showed the coin he’d found at the Abbey five years ago. Oddly on the anniversary of their friend’s disappearance.

“Why didn’t you tell us about it before?” Arnie asked.

“I’d come back to the UK for my Gran’s birthday. I was only here a few days and I’d attended meetings in Blackpool, before heading back to the US,” he said shrugging. “Anyway, I stopped off at the Abbey for old time’s sake and that’s when I found it.”

“You should have told us,” snapped Jacko.

“There was so much going on and the trip was short— it just slipped my mind.”

“So where did you actually find the coin?” asked Vinnie.

“Well, that's the odd part. I was stood by the big arch with the oak door, thinking about the old days and us lot fooling about, when I had this odd feeling Sid was there but that vanished when I noticed this coin rolling in front of me.”

He stopped with a vacant look on his face that said, that's all there is.

The local council took care of the old ruin and its small paddock and car-park. The main task was cutting grass and making sure the structure was safe for people to wander around. The Abbey’s remaining arch was beautifully carved but structural engineers maintained that if the huge doors were opened or removed, it would only be a short time before everything collapsed. Therefore it was decided the doors would be permanently sealed to avoid anything untoward happening. So for years the solitary arch had stood like a gothic sentinel and was often featured in wedding photographs.

“You're saying the coin rolled in front of you— but where did it roll from?” asked Vinnie.

“Well, here’s the thing,” Stick replied, sitting forward in his seat, “I’m not really sure. It might have been lying on the ground and I’d kicked it, which started it rolling— because the only other option doesn’t make sense.”

“From my recollection, the flagstones are very smooth around there, so disturbing the coin could’ve started it tumbling or rolling,” Vinnie said thoughtfully.

“What do you mean by— ‘the only other option doesn't make sense’?” asked Jacko.

Stick looked around at his friend for several seconds before responding.

“I’d wandered up to the arch and stood there admiring the old door. That's when I had the odd feeling Sid was there. But as I looked down, I noticed the coin rolling away from the door as though it had come from the other side. Then as it came to a halt and fell over, the odd Sid feeling vanished.” Stick paused but no one spoke. “I dashed to the other side but there was no one there, so I crouched down to look under the door,” he added shaking his head. “Every gap is sealed with wood strips, nothing could get under or around that door— it's jammed in there tight,” he stated emphatically. Silence prevailed for several seconds as everyone appeared to contemplate what to do next, until Vinnie spoke.

“You guys do realise, tomorrow is the anniversary of Sid’s disappearance but as it’s ten after midnight, it's tomorrow now.” She stood and looked around at her friends. “We should go to the Abbey and do something, say a few words, be there for him, see if we can feel what Stick felt.”

Standing in front of the Abbey’s huge arch, the old friends joined hands and, in turn, expressed their thoughts to Sid. Moments later the group settled on the stone steps, as tales and stories about Sid were intertwined with fits of laughter, stirred up wonderful fond memories. “I think my favourite was when Sid’s homemade raft suddenly collapsed and he was thrashing about as though he couldn't swim and that guy jumped in fully clothed to save him,” Arnie said. “When Sid saw him coming, he swam in the other direction and the guy ended up chasing him out of the river.”

As the laughter had died down, Stick suddenly jumped to his feet and grabbed the coin from his pocket. “That bloody thing is getting warm,” he said offering it to Arnie. “Wow, it is!’ Arnie said, quickly passing it to Vinnie. “Ok, Stick,” she said with a smirk, “where've you had this tucked— somewhere private I presume?” She added before tossing it back to him. He grinned. “You wanna peek?”

Moments later they sat cross-legged around the coin. “There has to be a reason I found this,” Stick said, looking around at his friends. “I think we should join hands and ask the coin to bring Sid back.”

“Oh, Yeah! And we’re suddenly going to turn into the ‘Famous Four,’ and get magical powers?” mocked Jacko, which started Vinnie and Arnie sniggering. “And Stan Lee from Marvel Comics will suddenly make an appearance.” They all laughed, but Stick was adamant.

“Look, guys, this is serious. The coin came from here and now it's got warm and— well— I don’t frigging know but I do know, I love and still miss Sid very much.”

With a clear sky and a full moon, they could see each other's expressions in the half-light and yes, they’d all agree with Stick’s comment.

“He was a cute cuddly guy,” Vinnie said fondly.

“Oh!— Is there something you're not telling?” Arnie teased.

“No— but sitting here remembering back— he was a cuddly guy,” she said, which set Jacko off sniggering. “He was full of hot air,” he offered with a wry smile. “That boy could fart at will.”

As they were all chuckling at this, Vinnie suddenly pointed at the arch. “Is light coming through the cracks in that door?”

The rest turned to look. “It must be the moon,” Arnie offered. “It can’t be, it's over there,” said Stick, gesturing in the opposite direction.

Arnie quickly dashed to the other side of the arch.

When he returned he was shaking his head. “Nothing back there.”

“Well look, the light is getting brighter at this side,” Vinnie noted.

Indeed, it was intensifying as though the source was approaching but oddly this brightness didn’t seep around the outside of the stone arch. It only penetrated the door’s imperfections. Slivers of bright light scything through the fine cracks and tiny holes, making the whole wooden structure begin to gradually radiate a mellow glow. As this was taking place the group moved several meters away and stood holding hands captivated by what was happening.

“If I hadn’t seen this with my own eyes, I’d never have believed it,” uttered Stick, which drew little or no response, apart from ‘Gosh’ and ‘Wow’.

“But that door looks like its dissolving, how can that be?” whispered Vinnie.

As time ticked by, the door started to become translucent. What lay beyond was out of focus but it was obviously a bright summer's day that shimmered and flickered. Seconds later their group jumped in fright, as an electrical discharge cracked loudly, transforming their vision to a crystal clear picture.

“This is bloody crazy,” Arnie spluttered as he turned to look in the opposite direction, “and so is that,” he added, prompting everyone else to look. With light streaming through the arch, their group should’ve cast long shadows across the gravel behind them— but there wasn’t.

“What the hell’s going on here?” uttered Jacko, then quickly added. “Do you think that’s a doorway to another world?”

“Maybe a wormhole,” Stick whispered, “like you hear about on science programmes.”

Surrounded by the blackness of night, the colour and detail contained within the portal were exaggerated.

“It's like a doorway to the other side of the world,” Arnie whispered.

“Could be another world altogether,” said Vinnie softly, as they tentatively walked closer to get a better look. “What do you think we should do?” she asked. “Because, if that’s where Sid went, I don’t want to lose my family— if you understand my meaning?” Vinnie paused and sniffed the air. “Oh! My God, there's a breeze coming through! Can you smell the wildflowers?” she asked excitedly.

“Guys, if it was daylight on our side, you’d be hard-pressed to tell the difference,” Arnie said. “You’d wander through there without a care in the world and that's probably what happened to Sid.”

“No— that's not possible, that’s been sealed for as long as I can remember,” advised Jacko. “I know that— but it might hav—”

A sudden shout made them focus through the portal, as a figure came running towards them.

It was a young lad wearing short trousers and an open-necked checked shirt and he was waving excitedly and shouting.

“Hey! You won’t believe what I've found,“ he yelled, then suddenly tripped and fell over but was up and running a moment later still laughing and shouting but they couldn’t hear because of what Vinnie was saying. “Oh! My God, it’s Sid,” she shouted, then lurched forward to meet him but Jacko grabbed her arm and pulled her back.

“Yes it is— but look— he’s the same age as when he went missing.”

**To be continued**

**Tough Timber**

Not sure how long I’ve been asleep. I’d imagine, due to my great age, it’s been some good length of time.

A summer breeze had stirred me awake as twilight edged into our secluded valley. This serene paradise had been my home for as long as I could remember but once upon a time, things were far from tranquil.

In the carnage of those traumatic days, I lost a great many family and friends in the fire and smoke. All due to the humans they called Spanish.

My reminiscing is suddenly banished, as it often is, by an irritating mumbling sound.

“Oaky, you're awake at last. You sleep a great deal, don’t you?” The hoarse voice muttered.

I didn’t have the energy or interest to respond. I was rather sad I’d woken. Now I had to listen to the irritating mutterings from a cluster of newbies.

“Oaky— I had sex three times while you were asleep,” one bragged.

“Oh! I had it hundreds of times,” another chipped in, and then added. “But one of my intruders kept sneezing.”

“Must have been its first time,” a slender Silver Birch chuckled, which brought sniggering from a cluster of Willow trees down by the pond.

I groaned and shrugged my old carcass, sending a tremor through my weary extremities, dispatching a flurry of overdue leaves, as more exaggerated nonsense spewed forth.

“Because I’m so fertile, I’m having sex day and night— it's wearing me out,” another added.

I pulled hard on a submerged limb. Could I up-end the gossip and stop this constant babbling about sex?

In my youth, it was called fertilization— or was it *poly* something? Due to my slow-moving sap, I get confused these days.

But each year the process is completed by multitudes of little workers in a frenzy of activity that’s now called— *sex*.

I blame the Norwegian Pine and Dutch Elm, with their liberal open-minded attitudes. It’ll bring us all crashing down, as will this interbreeding idea I got wind of a while back. To my way of thinking, it's the thin end of the wedge but this tittle-tattle about sex was triggered by two young humans.

They’d taken shelter under my leafy canopy and what they got up to sparked this new age gossip topic.

It had started with them giggling a great deal, while they peeled off their outer coverings. Then they’d held each other extremely close, which oddly had brought on a sudden frenzy of pleasure.

Now I’m not one to gossip. I’m a proud British Oak and have stood here 800 summers but I have to say in all honesty, the human frenzy didn't last very long but seemed to have brought them a great deal of pleasure.

Then they talked at length about how much they loved each other and how this place in the forest would always be special.

This was partly due to yours truly. They said I looked so majestic among the foreign looking trees.

These invaders had arrived two years after my extended family had disappeared in the *‘Big Cut’* as it was called.

As I remember, sap had just started rising, so winter must have broken, when an army of humans arrived. Most set up primitive camps around me and it was then I learned the year was 1587.

Through spring to autumn, my family were taken away to build ships for a human called Queen Elizabeth. She was going to fight an Armada. A fleet of ships sent by a Spaniard called Philip and *‘we’*—wehad to stop them.

But I was left behind.

I’d taken root next to a large rocky outcrop. This meant my trunk and limbs had twisted as I’d grown and only straight timbers were good enough to beat the Spanish.

So through the hot summer, my shade acted as a welcome retreat for the labouring humans.

The following winter I stood alone in a wasteland, my branches home to an abundance of birds, while four-legged creatures had left in search of new shelter.

I must then have slept a great deal because in no time at all the humans were back planting saplings. Not strong noble trees like Oaks that had beaten the Spanish, they said. But timber was in short supply and these foreigners were fast growers.

So I must stand tall among them. I’m a proud British Oak with a flag to prove it. Threadbare it may be but high above the red white and blue flutters proudly for all to see.

But closer to the ground hangs a delicate yellow ribbon, a token from a lover. She’d come alone, heavy with child and sat sobbing beneath my canopy.

Three summers on, she’d returned hand in hand with a small child, her beautiful golden hair the colour of my ribbon.

Sat in my shade, stories were relayed, of a father she’d never seen. How proud and handsome he was. How funny and loving. His gallantry and bravery beyond reproach. For in battle at sea, he’d given his life to keep them free.

The tragic news stirred me. I liberating a flurry of leaves in remembrance but little did I know, they would be my last. And later that year, time slowed almost to a standstill.

From a pitch-black sky, blades of fire exploded among my branches, but the second strike split me in half. Sap boiled and abandoned me, leaving roots without use or feeling, as light and warmth faded everywhere.

⥈

A sudden shriek from a child wrenched me back from the escalating darkness.

It was a beautiful summer's day but oddly, I was cold.

Far below, mother and daughter gazed at my shattered remains through tear-filled eyes.

After they had knelt and prayed, they’d talked about how they could save me.

Straining to hear made the cold dig deeper, drawing me to that endless sleep but suddenly a triumphant cry pulled me back, as the child held up handfuls of Acorns.

“Old tree, old tree, we will save you with these,” she shouted, then giggled excitedly.

Deep within my shattered fibers that familiar giggle triggered a memory of two young lovers. Whose frenzied pollination had created this beautiful golden-haired genius.