

# CHAPTER 1

Two very young children lived on the wharf by the sea. Patrick Eugene O'houlahan, eight, and his sister Pauline Rose Mary, five, had lived along the wharf as long as they could remember. The only life that they had known was a life of misery and pain. They did not understand the reason for life, but they did know it was better than death. They could remember some good times when they played on a warm summer's day with the sun reflecting off the water. They also knew the tough times when in the winter's freezing grasp they would retreat to their shelter as the storms brought in the waves and bashed against their makeshift shelter with the dampness dripping through the cracks. They had resided there under the nets and hiding from the authorities for as long as they could remember. They ate from the garbage cans behind the fish restaurant and stole whatever they needed when things became really tough.

Yet they held on to the idea that, as Patrick would often say, "Things will be different when we get rich." Neither of them knew what it meant to be rich. It was just a phrase he'd picked up from the sailors as they passed by. Since they had enough sense not to draw attention to themselves they remained invisible in plain sight as they managed to survive from day to day.

One day Pauline asked, "What does it mean to be rich?"

"I don't really know," he replied, "but I think it means we'll be able to pay for our food instead of stealing it. Or, perhaps we'll have a real place to live."

That last part brought a smile to his face as he thought about being able to provide her with a warm, dry place for her to sleep. This, of course, set off all the bells of possibilities and a spark of hope was regenerated within his brain. It seemed that whenever he was feeling down

Pauline would be aware of it and would ask the right questions.

Today was one of those days. The night had been excessively brutal and, despite the extra blankets which were now soaked and a double tarp that served as a wall and a canopy, they had shivered through most of the night. In frustration, he shouted with such anger in his voice that she seldom heard that it actually frightened her.

Meekly, she approached him, placed her hand on his shoulder, and whispered, "Shu, people will hear you." She was simply repeating the words that he so often spoke whenever she would whimper about their unfortunate conditions.

"Yes," he responded with fire still in his eyes "but sometimes you just have to object aloud."

She wrapped her frail arms around his neck and repeated, "Things will be different when we get rich."

"Hey," he replied with a slight smile, "that's my thing. You've got to get your own."

It was a small thing but it broke the tension. He shrugged his shoulders in his usual manner, and it was obvious that he was over his temper tantrum. He placed his arms around her waist, gently picked her up, and gave her a soft, loving squeeze.

"Perhaps it will be better tomorrow," she stated. "Yep, that's my new phrase, 'perhaps it'll be better tomorrow'." After that, every time he said, "Things will be better..." she would reply, "Perhaps it will be ..."

One evening as the dusk was settling in, they were returning from a day of scrounging. As they approached the dock they were accosted by a big dirty man who was obviously drunk. He had determined that they were a couple of wharf rats, and he could do with them as he pleased.

He grabbed at Pauline and boasted, "You'll do fine. I need a slave girl, and you will do just proper."

Patrick had been in these types of scrapes before so he didn't hesitate a second. He grabbed a loose board and swung it at the man's legs. Although he was successful, he simply didn't have the power to be very effective and only made the man mad.

"You little scum; I'll cut you up and feed you to the sharks."

He kicked the boy once more as he tightened his grip on the girl. Patrick rolled back several feet but didn't allow his condition to stop him from mounting a second charge. This time he had a larger board with a nail on the end. Without regard for his own safety, he swung the board across the drunk's back, and the nail penetrated, causing him to screech a long blast of obscenities as he turned on the boy.

"Now I'm going to cut you to pieces and drop you off the side."

The hatred spewed forth as he drew his long steel scraping knife from its sheath.

"Not today!" a voice from behind the drunkard stated matter-of-factly. "Not today."

The drunk wheeled around while half-swinging his knife and observed a short stout man standing between him and his escape route.

"First I'll finish you, then the punk kid before I take my prize."

The shorter man didn't wait a split second before he landed his massive fist in the right jaw of the taller man. He followed through the targeted blow with an uppercut into the groin. The drunk doubled up as the pain messages were transmitted from the brain to the stomach. With a violent reaction, his overstuffed stomach released all of the excess liquid and greasy food that he had so carelessly consumed on his last stop at the bar. The acids released were sucked back into the windpipe as he gasped for breath. Blood spurted from his eyes as he reeled and fell to the boardwalk. Patrick just stood there taking it all in while Pauline grabbed his hand and whimpered.

It seemed like forever but finally the man spoke. His voice was deep but soft. "If you're going to hit them, hit them where it will do the most good."

"Thank you..." Patrick stammered as he tried to process all that had just taken place. "Thank you very much."

The man stood silently for a minute then replied, "Kevin Thomas Donahue from Dublin. And you?"

Patrick was both thankful and confused. The O'houlahan's and the Donahue's from the old country had been enemies for as many generations as have existed on the island. Why would a Donahue come to his aid? He had seen the man before and knew him to be a man proud of his heritage. Surely he knew that Patrick and Pauline were O'houlahan's. Yet he had come to their aid.

The man observed the concern on his face and simply stated, "In the old country the two clans have been at war for so long they don't even know what they are fighting about. We live in a new country, the home of the free and the brave, so old squabbles do not concern us from across the water. To remain free you have to be brave enough to admit the mistakes of your forefathers and let bygones be bygones."

Patrick stepped forward, extended his hand, and proudly stated, "O'houlahan, Patrick Eugene O'houlahan."

"Proud to meet you, Patrick Eugene O'houlahan. Well, we best be on our way before this piece of trash comes around."

Patrick thanked him again, took Pauline by the hand, and headed for their makeshift home.