

Chapter One

A Matter of Money

The Blue Finn Nightclub; Edinburgh, Scotland

March 1937

His luck was about to change. Laurie MacKenzie glanced at the gold engravings on his college ring. A graduation gift from his girl. University of Edinburgh, Class of 1937. He would rather have celebrated graduation with his mates in a lively Edinburgh pub, blow off some steam, but Marguerite insisted they meet at The Blue Finn Nightclub, a classy place. She wasn't the pub type, and anyway, wasn't this the life he dreamed of having? A smile spread across his handsome face.

He entered the lobby with a nod of appreciation. Even from the door, he could see the place was packed. The band played a favorite American song, "Pennies from Heaven." The singer didn't sound like Bing Crosby, but it still put Laurie in the mood to dance.

He handed his fedora and overcoat to a redhead in the cloakroom. She smiled at him, her eyes traveling over his features. Laurie had a dusky complexion, an odd contrast to his sea-blue eyes. His dark auburn hair, a little on the long side, fell over dark brows. He raked his fingers through his hair and shrugged his new white dinner jacket into place. Laurie borrowed the money to pay for the jacket just to please Marguerite. He straightened his tie before stepping into the crowd.

Small lamps flickered from every table. His pulse raced as he caught sight of Marguerite and the way her pale blond hair shone in the soft lighting. He recognized two classmates sitting

at her table. One lad leaned forward, saying something that made her laugh. He shook off a momentary stab of jealousy. *No worries. The lass is all mine. After all, she chose me.*

“Pardon me. Excuse me.” Laurie maneuvered past dancing couples. She hadn’t noticed him yet. He wanted to watch her face when she saw how he’d dressed for her. A hand touched his arm.

“Mr. MacKenzie?”

A young busboy stood at his elbow.

“That’s me.”

“A man at the bar gave me a note for you.” The boy held up a folded cocktail napkin.

“Thanks.” Laurie stopped to read the scribbled message before asking, “Which man?” But the lad disappeared into the crowd.

The note read: “Back door. Urgent. Rab.” Although the hand bore no resemblance to that of Laurie’s grandfather, there was always a possibility the old man had sent someone. *Rab’s getting so eccentric it’s hard to know what to expect from him next.*

Laurie took one last look at Marguerite, wanting to ignore the note, but he doubted Rab would send someone unless he needed help. With a heavy sigh, he turned toward the kitchen.

He’d make this quick. She’d picked him, sure, but it wasn’t wise to let his girl wait with so many other suitors ready to catch her attention.

“Where can I find the back door?”

The passing waiter pointed down a corridor to his left. Laurie trotted down the hall and through the doorway, his mind distracted with thoughts of Marguerite.

A hand reached out, spinning him around.

“What the hell!” He struggled to pull away. A large fist rammed into his nose. He might have fallen backward if his assailant’s other hand hadn’t grabbed his expensive dinner jacket. Another stunning blow landed just above his right eye. Laurie had been in a few fights and could handle himself, but the man’s long arms held him like a rag doll. The massive hulk before him wore a suit stretched over bulging muscles. Laurie swung out wildly. He couldn’t connect with anything solid. With surprising quickness, the bloke let go and landed three punches to Laurie’s midsection, leaving him struggling to breathe.

He slumped to the ground. Time slowed. Sounds of a busy kitchen mingled with the hum of cars as they passed on the street, but no one was near enough to help. Not even an alley cat watched his beating. Still trying to breathe, Laurie squinted through already swollen eyes to see the face above him. The man’s bulbous nose bent at an odd angle.

“Get on yer feet.” Once again, giant hands took fistfuls of Laurie’s lapels. The squashed nose loomed so close Laurie’s eyes couldn’t focus on it.

The big man growled, “You look like you can afford to pay.” He released Laurie, sending him sprawling on the pavement. Laurie blinked up at the beefy face as the man spit out his words. “Toby wants his siller. I’ll gi’ ye a break the now. You don’t want to make me do this again.”

A wave of panic hit Laurie. His grandfather frustrated him, sure, but he’d do anything to protect him. “Rab. If you hurt him—”

“The old man’s no been touched this time. Toby makes a point of knowing who he’s dealing with, aye?”

Laurie lunged to his feet, throwing weight into a punch launched at the man's jaw. The giant stood his ground. Laurie's fist felt like it hit solid rock. With one punishing roundhouse blow, Toby's man sent Laurie back onto the cobblestones.

Laurie wiped a sleeve across his eyes. Blood and dirt smeared across the white fabric. "Look what you've done. This jacket's worth more than you are."

A heavy foot kicked him hard in the side, punctuating the disgust in the man's gravelly voice. "Tomorrow, mind, an' you better pay what you owe. Don't make me get rough." Laurie's attempt to laugh at the trite gangster imitation sounded more like a cough. It started a spasm of wheezing.

"Here, what's this?" A little man in shirtsleeves and an apron appeared from the club's back door with a bucket of kitchen scraps. As the alley filled with light, Laurie's companion melted into the shadows.

The little man dropped his pail, calling over his shoulder for help. Muscular arms supported Laurie as the kitchen worker sat him up.

"Are you all right, mate?"

Laurie squinted up at the work-worn face. He patted the little man on the arm. "No worries, you should see the other guy."

Chapter Two

Alec's Little Chat with Father

Commerce Street, Edinburgh

March 1937

Rain washed over Edinburgh. The wind whipped up from the North Sea, giving the early spring day an icy chill. In the warm attorney's office, a different kind of chill settled over Alec. At twenty-six, Alexander Frazer cringed like a chastised child as his father railed at him once again. The sign outside read Thomas Frazer and Son, Solicitors. His father made sure Alec knew they weren't partners or equals.

Why do I keep trying to please him? He knew the answer. He enjoyed the rich office and prosperous clientele. Over the years he'd learned not to listen when his father's temper flared. Alec's face remained impassive, but his mind wandered to the mirror above his father's desk. The light reflecting off the polished wood gave the room a warm glow. It was a distraction, a

way to block his father's biting criticism. Alec remembered as a child how fascinated he'd been by mirrors, convinced the world beyond was far more appealing. The boy in the mirror had a kind father and a mother who didn't cry all the time.

Alec pulled his thoughts back to the present, though his gaze remained fixed on the ornate mirror hanging above his father's perfectly organized mahogany desk. He studied his own reflection. Some said his face had a boyish, likable quality. Alec had his mother's tall, thin frame instead of his father's short, stocky build.

I'm grateful I don't share my father's resemblance to a bulldog. No, the chap in the mirror had it all together. *Bloody hell he does.*

Something the old man said caught his attention, and he made eye contact. A mistake. The Alec in the mirror disappeared, leaving the child to stare at his father's questioning face.

What had he missed? Alec tried to cover himself. "The files in front of you. We offered to sell the house, transfer the funds to Canada. She declined." He spread his arms in frustration. *What the hell did the old man want?* "Miss MacDonald should be in Southampton by tomorrow morning. We've arranged passage on the night train. She should arrive in Edinburgh day

after tomorrow. I don't see what else we can do. After all, she is the legitimate heir."

"Of course, you don't see." Thomas Frazer did not conceal his disappointment. "Which is why you will never be more than a junior partner in this firm."

The verbal blow nearly took Alec's breath away. *That's where you're wrong, old man. Someday, he promised himself, I'll be the senior partner in this firm.*

Thomas continued. "Well, I haven't waited for you to do something right. I've got my man on top of things."

Alec waited for his father to elaborate. He wanted to ask, "What man?" but questioning his father would likely start another rant. Thomas gave his full attention to the documents on his desk. Alec turned to leave. *So much for my little chat with Father.*

Chapter Three

Fiona's Dream

Canadian Pacific Ocean Liner Empress of Australia en route from
Quebec to Southampton, England

March 1937

Fiona stumbled over broken bricks, almost falling. Smoke swirled around her. She squinted but could only see a few feet ahead. She croaked, "Hurry." Her feet sluggish to obey, heartbeats pounded in her ears. Her thoughts shifted, warning her to stop. You don't want to see this.

She shouted back, "I need to find them. I have to know if they're--" A sob choked off her words. Tears made tracks down her cheeks, and she wiped them away. Tears. Not from smoke, no. She already knew what she would find.

Fiona sat up, fully awake. She rubbed her eyes and moaned. "The Dream. Not real, only a dream." She rested her head in her hands, trying to steady her heartbeat.

The rocking of the steamship pulled her back to the present. She stood and turned on the gaslight in her tiny cabin, surveying the mess she'd made in her sleep. Over the last three years, this same nightmare troubled her sleep many times. As always, she'd found herself on the floor tangled in blankets as if in trying to escape her bed she could somehow escape the dream. Her diary lay on the floor. Photos scattered across the small space. She bent to gather them, but her hand hesitated as she reached for a faded news clipping from *The Greenock Telegraph*.

Unable to stop, she read, "On Tuesday at 4 p.m., while workmen were away for their tea, a gas meter behind Drummond's Dispensary on the corner of Eldon and Lyle exploded, demolishing buildings between Eldon Street and Queens Avenue. Lost in the blast were the Honorable Reverend and Mrs. James MacDonald. The Rectory and the Mount Eldon Presbyterian Kirk built in 1789 were a complete loss. The Pastor and his wife are survived by their 19-year-old daughter, Fiona Ferguson MacDonald. Also lost. . ."

The words blurred with unshed tears. Fiona's shaky hands folded the clipping and slipped it into the pages of her diary.

She stooped to pick up a picture of herself and her Aunt Tyna taken a few months before Fiona left Canada. Leaving Tyna had been hard. After all, Auntie had taken her in when her parents died, but Canada would never be home. She felt like she'd left her heart back in Scotland.

Her timepiece told her morning would soon be here. The aftermath of her dream left her breathless, hungering for fresh air. Fiona dressed in the clothes she'd laid ready for the new day. She wrapped her MacDonald plaid around her to keep away the cold March morning air and made her way to the foredeck.

An icy blast of wind threatened to rip the wool blanket from her grasp as she pushed through the outer passageway. A woman stood at the balustrade, but Fiona's attention focused on the choppy sea.

Atlantic mist stung her cheeks. She peered intently into the black void beyond the railing. It was rumored they would see the rocky shores of England today. Gradually, pale light brought the seascape into focus, giving waves luminescent white tops.

As the light intensified, there was a sudden clarity of details. On the horizon, the still-dark outline of land separated an overcast sky from the restless ocean. Fiona's dark brows pulled together at first sight of the grass-covered stone cliffs of Britain's shore. Had it only been three years ago

she'd said goodbye to these same shores? At twenty-two, she was going home.

The compact figure at the rail was that of Mrs. Abernathy. Mrs. Bee regarded Fiona, a kind smile on her weathered old face. Silver strands of hair escaped their tight bun to blow wildly around her head.

"Hello, dearie." Mrs. Bee turned back to look at the rugged coastline. "Quite a sight. I couldn't sleep either. Come stand with me." The older woman studied Fiona. "You had that nightmare again."

Fiona sighed. "It's been three years since my parents died, and I still smell the smoke." She bit her lip to hold back a wave of sadness.

"Well, never you mind." Mrs. Bee reached out to squeeze Fiona's hand. "Best to think on the future. You said your uncle left you a house."

"In Edinburgh."

"Big responsibility that."

"Aye, I'll have to find work soon."

Mrs. B gave Fiona's hand another squeeze. "Don't you let those solicitors get the better of you. And take my advice, sell the place, and go back to your aunty. I'm sure she misses you terribly."

They had this conversation before. Mrs. Bee didn't approve of young women traveling alone and lectured on the importance of having family around. Fiona took a deep breath of ocean air. *How can I make her understand when I don't understand myself?*

"You're a treasure, Mrs. Bee, but no, I've set my course."

"Well, my late husband was a Scot. You don't have to tell me how stubborn they can be."

Fiona started to say she wasn't being stubborn, but knew it was a lie. She stared at the restless sea. She felt her emotions tossing her around like the waves, threatening to pull her under.

"I didn't belong there. Aunty was wonderful to take me in after my parents died, but Quebec wasn't home."

"A widowed with no children," Mrs. Bee persisted. "I'm sure she'll be lonely without you."

Fiona shook her head. "My aunt's a nurse. Works with the Indians. The First Nations people in the little town called Three Rivers love her. No, Tyna is never alone."

Still, Aunty was sad to see her leave. Fiona regretted the hurt their parting had caused. But Aunt Tyna had found her calling in service to those in need. *I wish I knew where I belong. The trouble is I don't know where to look.*

"You are a sweet girl," said Mrs. Bee. "I worry about you. Inheriting a big house from an uncle you've never met? Sounds suspicious to me."

Again, the dark waters swirled around Fiona's heart. "Except for Aunt Tyna, I thought I was alone in the world. Why didn't Mum tell me she had a brother?" The wind blew Fiona's long black curls around her face. She pushed them out of her eyes.

"I expect you'll learn more when you get there. Will you be all right?"

Fiona nodded, thankful for the older woman's protectiveness.

"Well then, I've got to get back to my cabin and pack up a few things." Mrs. Bee turned to leave but drew in a breath. "You should come with me. There's a man in the shadows." She nodded toward the passageway door. "There's something off about him. Up to no good, I'll wager."

Fiona turned. A tall man in an overcoat and muffler leaned against the wall near the door. The deck lamp shone on his face. A ragged scar ran across his nose. Thick dark brows cast ominous shadows, leaving his eye sockets no more than two black smudges.

"Morning, misses." His smile was unpleasantly toothy, but he tipped his hat.

Mrs. Bee humphed. "The cheek. Come with me, dearie."

"I'm fine, Mrs. Bee. Thank you. I just need to walk a bit." Fiona moved toward the stern, away from the odd man. She stood gazing at the empty ocean. This was the second time she'd crossed the Atlantic to find herself--first to her aunt in Canada, and now she was going back to Scotland. Her lips curled in a wry expression. *Just how many more trips will it take me to find where I belong?*