

Chapter One

But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint. Isaiah 40:31, KJV

“Come on, Seamus,” Rhiannon coaxed as she held her arms out to the plump baby. “Come to Rhiannon.”

Rhiannon sat cross-legged on a faded blanket that had been placed on the grass behind the house that Doctor Sanford had built for his family. A short distance away Katie stood partly bent over Seamus, his chubby hands firmly holding onto hers. Above them the breeze gently lifted the leaves of the tall eucalyptus trees, creating a haven from the heat of the summer day.

“Come on. You can do it.”

Gingerly Seamus took one step forward still holding onto Katie’s hands then plopped down on the ground and giggled.

“He’s not ready to walk yet,” Katie stated matter-of-factly.

“He should be ready. I was walking at nine months. Father thinks he’s almost twice that now so he should be walking.” Rhiannon sounded frustrated.

“I don’t think me sister Emily walked until she was almost two.” Katie screwed her face up as she tried to remember.

“Well he’s getting too heavy for us to carry all the time. He’s going to have to learn to walk. One more time.”

“Perhaps if ye held him and he walked to me?” Katie held the child out to her friend.

“Oh all right.” Rhiannon’s tone surprised Katie. It was well known by all in the Sanford household that Seamus preferred Katie and would do for Katie what he wouldn’t for any other family member and usually Rhiannon didn’t mind. But today she appeared upset by Seamus’s preference.

As Rhiannon stood Seamus on his feet and prepared to let go of his hands all three occupants of the back garden were startled by the

ringing of a bell and loud thumping that originated from the front of the house.

“I’ll get it.” Katie stood up and hurried toward the house.

Passing through the hallway she blinked several times to give her eyes time to adjust to the dimness of the interior where all the curtains were drawn in an attempt to keep the heat out. At the front door she paused as the thumping resumed, this time louder and more urgent but not appearing to be coming directly from the other side of the door.

Opening the door she was surprised to see a tall rough-looking man peering through one of the house’s front windows and banging his fists against the window frame. Immediately Katie felt uneasy.

“May I help ye, sir?”

The man turned at her voice and started edging over toward where she stood holding the door ajar.

“I’s here to see the doctor. And if you there knows what’s good for you, you’ll get him here on the quick like.”

The doctor and his wife had gone to the harbour to welcome new settlers to this still raw yet fast-growing penal settlement of Newcastle but something about the man’s voice and manner made Katie reluctant to divulge such information to this visitor.

“Is he expecting ye, sir?”

“I’d say. Bin expecting me for a time now I reckon.”

“The doctor hasn’t mentioned –”

“No he wouldn’t now, would he?”

“I beg yer pardon?”

“He has me kid and I’s a wanting him back. Is he here?”

“I don’t know what ye mean.”

“Don’t play daft with me.” The man reached out a hand toward Katie but acting instinctively she slammed the door in his face and bolted it. She could hear him swearing and hammering on the other side of the door as she turned away.

“Katie?” Rhiannon stood at the end of the hallway with Seamus in her arms.

“Quick, take Seamus upstairs.”

“What’s going on?”

“Do as I say.”

Pushing past her startled friend, Katie rushed to the back door and locked it too. Then, seeing that Rhiannon was still standing in the same place and looking confused, she grabbed her friend and dragged her up the steps.

“Katie! What are you doing? Let go of me!”

“Hush. We have to hide.”

Rhiannon tried to shake Katie’s hand free. “Why?”

“That man. At the door –” Katie’s breaths came in short bursts as she continued to struggle with Rhiannon and Seamus and force them up the narrow stairs leading to the attic space. “He said – he said he was here – to take Seamus.”

“What?” Rhiannon tried to sit down with Seamus but Katie continued to alternately push and pull the pair up the stairs. Finally with a strength that she hadn’t known she possessed, Katie pushed the two through the trapdoor and scrambled in after them. Only when they were all safely inside and the trapdoor locked and a trunk placed over it for extra security, did she turn to look at Rhiannon and Seamus.

Rhiannon looked pale and frightened and Seamus, after being so rudely dragged up the stairs, had started to howl.

“There was a man at the door. He said the doctor had taken his child and that he was here to claim him.”

“Seamus’s father was here?” Rhiannon’s voice broke as she sank to the floor with Seamus still in her arms and still howling at the top of his voice.

“That’s what he said.”

“It can’t be happening.”

“Well of course it’s happening. But what ye mean is, it can’t be true.”

“But it could be.” Rhiannon’s eyes were huge dark discs in her face. Katie reached out and took Seamus and immediately his sobs

subsided. “What do ye mean it could be true? Didn’t ye say that Seamus didn’t have a ma or da?”

“That’s what we thought. His mother was a patient of Father’s and when she died Father brought Seamus home for us to raise. We thought his father was dead too. But I don’t know if Father was ever able to find out for sure. What do we do now?”

“We stay here until yer father and mother get home.”

“But we can’t tell them.”

“We have to tell them.”

“But Mother – after Lily – it will break her heart.”

“Who’s Lily?”

Rhiannon stared at her. “You mean you don’t know? After all this time with us, no one has told you about Lily?”

“I don’t think so. I’ve not heard her name before. Where is she?”

“She’s dead.” Rhiannon put her head down on her knees and began to sob. Katie waited. After a few minutes, Rhiannon lifted her head and wiped her face on the hem of her dress. “Lily,” Rhiannon gulped. “She died on the voyage over. She – she was my cousin – although I didn’t know that at the time. She was just a baby when she died. My – my parents adopted her. Mother can’t – well she could only have me – she –”

“She can’t have any more children,” Katie finished for her. “It’s nothing to be ashamed of.”

“It’s just not something we talk about.”

“So what happened to Lily’s parents?”

“Her mother died. Just like Seamus’s mother. And her father didn’t want to know about her.”

“And now Seamus’s father is here.”

“We never expected him to claim Seamus.”

“But he has.”

“Yes. Now he has. But we can’t tell Mother. It would break her heart.”

“We have to tell her. We have to tell both yer parents.”

“But –”

Katie rocked Seamus who had thrust his thumb in his mouth and was almost asleep. “We have to. They’ll know what to do. If that man comes again we might not be able to stop him from taking Seamus the next time.”

Rhiannon ran her hands through her hair. “But it’s going to be so hard on poor Mother and Father.”

“It will be even harder if they were to come home and not find him here because we hadn’t told them about the man.”

Rhiannon’s fearful look returned. “Do you think he’s gone?”

“Have a look and see.”

Rhiannon crept over to the attic window and looked out. “I can’t see him.”

“Hopefully he’s gone then. But we’ll stay here until yer parents return.”

“It’s hot up here.”

Katie nodded. “I know. But I think we’ll be all right. Yer parents should be back soon.”

“Won’t they be surprised to find us up here?”

“Shocked more like.”

The two lapsed into silence as they tried to get as comfortable as the cramped space and stifling heat would allow.

“Today isn’t turning out the way I expected.” Rhiannon broke the silence.

“What did ye expect?”

“I thought we’d teach Seamus to walk. And we’d tell Mother and Father and they’d be so proud and everyone would be happy.”

“Seamus *will* walk. And ye will be happy. But we just have to figure out how we’re going to keep him safe.”



“And you didn’t ask the man for his name?” Doctor Renton Sanford leaned forward as Katie shook her head.

Both girls had recovered from their shock by the time Rhiannon’s

parents had returned to the house, but retelling the experience had stirred their emotions again. Rhiannon sat quietly twisting a handkerchief between her two hands while Katie explained to the doctor what had transpired earlier in the day.

“No. I’m sorry. I didn’t even think to ask.”

“But you’re sure he said he was Seamus’s father?”

Katie thought for a moment. “No. I don’t think he did. He just said he was here to collect his son that ye’d taken from him.”

“Mmm.” The doctor leaned back and closed his eyes. In the time that Katie had been with the Sanford family she had come to recognise this as a sign that the doctor was thinking deeply on important matters.

“Seamus, stop playing with your food.” It was the first time that Rhiannon’s mother had spoken since the girls had told their tale and the tension in her voice was evident.

“Did he refer to Seamus by name?” The doctor’s eyes were still closed.

“No. Just that ye had his child.”

There was silence as each individual around the polished timber table wrestled with their own thoughts, apart from Seamus who, having given up pushing his food around his plate was now, undetected, spooning it onto the floor beneath his chair.

“He wasn’t Irish. And he wasn’t drunk.”

The doctor’s eyes flickered open and he stared at Katie. Seamus’s mother had been Irish and they had assumed his father was also.

“Are you sure?”

“I’d recognise both.” Rhiannon gasped at Katie’s statement.

“Mmm.” The doctor closed his eyes again.

Again there was silence. Seamus, his plate now devoid of food, picked up his spoon and started banging it on the table. Absentmindedly Esther Sanford removed it from him. Suddenly Seamus started to howl.

Roused from his thoughts by the noise the doctor declared, “I’ll have to see the magistrate in the morning.”

“Magistrate?” Katie’s voice was a squeak.

Surprise flicked across the doctor’s face. “It’s his job to keep law and order in the settlement. He’ll know what to do.”

“Won’t he take Seamus from us?”

The doctor shook his head. “I don’t think so. If I tell him what occurred here today I think it’s likely that he’ll do everything in his power to ensure Seamus is kept safe from the man claiming to be his father.”

“Oh I hope so. I truly hope so.” It was the first time that Rhiannon had spoken. “The magistrate is a kind man. He’ll help us. He won’t let anyone take Seamus away. There’s nothing to worry about after all.”

As Katie looked around the table she realised that Rhiannon was the only one who believed it.



Rhiannon’s Journal

January 28, 1830

Father went earlier in the week to visit the magistrate but he had been out of town sorting out a dispute between two ex-convicts over land grants. I know that they probably thought they had need of the magistrate but our need was greater. It’s been hard to wait these three days to tell him our story and hear his verdict.

Father told the magistrate what had occurred and he has promised to help us. He agreed with Father that even if this man is Seamus’s father, as he claims, it would not be safe to let Seamus go with him.

Mother walks around as if in a dream. No, not a dream but a nightmare. Every time she passes Seamus she stops to give him a cuddle and he squirms and tries to get away. He doesn’t understand what’s happening or that his world is under threat.

Katie is the only one who is calm. I would accuse her of not caring for Seamus but I can see the grief on her face. I don't know how she can carry on but when I asked her she said something to me about trusting God.

I do trust God – well at least I think I do. But I want to know right now that everything is going to be all right. I don't want to wait – it's the waiting that is so hard. But Katie doesn't seem to lose hope despite the waiting. She's only a year older but she seems to have so much more faith. Perhaps it's because life has been so hard for her whereas, apart from Lily and Grandfather, I've never known what it is to suffer. I wonder if I'll ever be as strong as her one day?