

When East meets West

An entwined couple snuggled behind a stone wall on the north side of the ruined abbey. The clandestine meetings happened only on the darkest of nights, their love shielding and protecting them from ancient ghosts. He pleaded with her to be his beloved from this night on until death do they part.

Behind a pillar another figure watched, and waited.

Draco's pure-black head rested on his master's lap. Abe Stokes patted the dog's head as he swiveled a pen in his fingers pondering the next sentence. How could he bring Minnie over to the East side so they could be together, forever? In yesterday's letter he'd begged to meet her that day at their secret rendezvous. He'd waited for three hours but she'd failed to come. Now he wrote that he would be there again at dusk in two days - he had a proposition.

The harbour bridge bell chimed, interrupting his thoughts. He looked up from his writing to see the bridge swing open. A sailing boat glided past his window, silent, like the breath from his dog's mouth.

He laid down his pen and pushed Draco aside.

'Come on boy, let's post this and take a walk on the beach.'

At the sound of the word "beach", Draco bounded to the hallway, dragged his lead from its hook and dropped it at his master's feet. Abe smiled at the animal and said, 'Yeah, I need the air too. I just wish I had your enthusiasm.' He dragged his great coat over his black leather suit, straightening his shark-tooth necklet in the process. Draco looked up with impatient, but devoted adoration, tongue hanging loose. Next, Abe pulled on his boots which were adorned in buckles and studs. He smeared on a thin layer of dark lipstick, picked up his top hat and opened the front door.

The North Sea broiled and hissed at the man and dog, daring the pair to step closer. Abe pulled his coat collar closer to his neck to ward off the strengthening wind. His face, ashen with pure white foundation, began to tingle with sea spray. Wisps of teased hair, black like the fossilised Araucaria that littered the sands, black like the thick eyeliner that extended beyond his eyes, escaped from beneath his hat and clung to his cheeks, giving him a harlequin appearance.

While Draco ran at speed across the sand Abe contemplated his difficult relationship with Minnie. Before she could be truly his, he needed a plan to resolve the dispute with her brother.

Minerva Beauchamp sat brooding on the sofa in her comfortable living room. In her hand lay a letter, slightly crumpled where she had scrunched at the paper. She really wanted to be with Abe, but it was impossible. Their cloistered meets had been discovered and had come to an abrupt end a few days ago. Her family forbade her from consorting with anyone from the East side, especially with a Stokes. Life's dross, they said. West did not mix with East and never would, they said.

Abe was not like the rest; he was more ... she struggled to find the word ... refined. Yes, more like a ... gentleman.

She read again the words asking to meet him, but she had been too afraid to go and was now full of regret.

She rose and walked across the Persian rug to the grand Georgian window and looked toward the East side. Fishing and sailing boats in blues and whites, moored up along the harbour wall. How pretty they looked. On the cliff top, the ancient abbey stood guard over the old town, like a picket ready to jeer if anyone dared break the line. Her eyes settled on Abe's terraced house tucked in tight close to the swing bridge. She gasped and pressed her hand against her chest when her paramour, pallid-faced, emerged from his front door, followed by his faithful Labrador. In his hand, he carried what appeared to be an envelope. She would receive another letter soon.

What was to be done? Her cheeks burned at the sight of him and her body flushed with anticipated touches. She stroked her bottom lip, reliving his last kiss. His parting words had been, 'I love you, Minnie. We **will** be together, I promise.' She liked that he called her 'Minnie', his special name for her.

Could she, dare she meet him again? Her brother Tyrone had said, 'No way was a sister of his going out with a ridiculous, long-haired, good-for-nothing zombie from the East side.' He'd said those words as he pounced from behind the pillar after waiting until she and Abe had said goodbye. He'd dragged her by the arm down the full one hundred and ninety-nine abbey steps, across the bridge almost throwing her over the threshold of their home. He'd warned that he would kill the ridiculous Goth if he caught them together one more time.

She nudged her silk scarf down a touch and stroked her creamy neck letting her fingers rest on the two tiny puncture holes where her lover had placed his mouth in a passionate embrace. Shivering with remembered pleasure she made a decision.

Abe Stokes sat at his desk and wrote "Tyrone Beauchamp" on the envelope. Inside, the note read, "*Meet me at the bridge tomorrow night at sundown. AS*"

In the dark of night, his black figure skulked, unnoticed, over to the West side where he slipped the note beneath the door of a large Georgian house.

At dusk, when townsfolk were indoors having tea, Tyrone Beauchamp walked to the West side of the harbour bridge. A big man at six foot two, weighing fourteen stone he wore a checked shirt tucked into turned-up jeans that sat just above white socks and Doc Martins. Opposite him, on the East side, Abe Stokes stood with his legs spread wide and hands on hips, his great coat and hat folded neatly on the ground.

Tyrone rolled up each sleeve showing puffed-up biceps. He stared hard at the wild-haired poof wearing make-up and jewellery. In a slow deliberate move, Tyrone slipped his fingers into the front pockets of his jeans and hooked his thumbs over the top. Hair shorn to within a quarter of an inch, a tattoo of a skull and cross bones painted on one forearm and a swastika on the other, he mimicked Abe's stance.

'Hey, Stokes,' he yelled. 'Are you reading for a beating? You won't be messing with my sister again.'

'Ha! Grow your hair Beauchamp.'

Tyrone removed his hands from his pockets and began a slow walk over the bridge. Abe made a move at the same time. Both men stopped, inches apart in the middle, squaring up. Time stopped.

Boats slapped against the harbour wall as the River Esk crept higher with the incoming tide. Faces peeked from behind closed curtains as news spread about the showdown.

Time sped up. In a flash, Tyrone retrieved a knife from his back pocket and flicked open the blade. A glint of streetlight caught the steel enabling Abe to sidestep the thrust. Tyrone lunged again, but this time his adversary grabbed his arm, twisting it round behind his back nudging it higher between his shoulders until he could no longer hold on to the knife. It fell to the ground.

Tyrone could feel hot breath as Abe leant up close to his ear, whispering, 'Now, who's taking a beating, eh? Your sister is mine and I mean to have her.'

Tyrone snarled and wriggled to free his trapped arm, but he was held fast. He hadn't the faintest idea that this ponce could be so strong.

Closer still, Tyrone shuddered as the man cupped his lips around his ear, 'Think you're a hard man don't you. See that river down there. Deep isn't it.'

Abe pushed Tyrone's head over the bridge parapet. 'You can't swim, can you? I'm going to pick you up and throw you in.'

The menacing threat was real. Tyrone was powerless and could feel warm piss trickling down his leg. The next thing he knew he was being held aloft like a piece of stretched-out tissue paper. This guy was unreal, not normal.

Tyrone hit the water as if it was hard concrete and despite repeated thrashing, hoping his overweight body would suddenly swim, he grew exhausted and succumbed to the river. The grinning face of Abe Stokes stayed with him as he sank into the depths.

Abe and Minnie stood perilously close to the cliff edge.

Tyrone's death brought the Beauchamp family and their supporters in search of his killer. Their distant murmur thickened into angry shouts as they drew close. Dark clouds circled the abbey walls and cast shadows across the cliff top.

Minnie clung to Abe and trembled when the unmistakable rotund figure of her father approached, followed by eight of her brother's brutish skinhead friends.

Her father waved his fist in the air and ordered, 'Minerva, for the sake of Tyrone, come away, NOW! We SHALL have our revenge.'

Minnie nestled further into Abe's arms. 'Tyrone tried to kill Abe. I love him and would rather die than come back to the West side.'

The crowd tightened around them.

Abe pulled Minnie's face close to his. In an almost imperceptible whisper, he said, 'Go home, Minnie. Wait for me. I'll come back for you.' He propelled her toward her father and just as the crowd surged forward to grab him, Abe threw himself over the edge.

That evening at supper, Minnie savoured her rare steak more than usual. She moved the meat around her mouth sucking at every drop of the deep red blood before letting it slip down her throat. Later, in bed, she stretched out her limbs catlike, from head to foot, and relished the new strength that began to pervade her body. In her sleep, she dreamed of Abe.

The next morning they came to retrieve Abe's body from the bottom of the cliff, but when they arrived they found Draco sitting at the spot. The dog growled and bared his teeth if anyone came close. There was no sign of a corpse, only the mocking caw of a jackdaw circling above.