

‘You’d hardly notice it’ Lottie’s mother said hugging her close.

Lottie Maguire shrugged away from her mother and went to the nearby mirror to look at the red line on her cheek. ‘Yeah, if you were blind you wouldn’t notice. I’ll be known as ‘Scarface’ now for the rest of my life’ she muttered.

‘Oh for God’s sake. Come on let’s get out of here. So Lottie, are you going to tell me now what really happened?’ Flora Maguire said once they were outside the A& E doors.

‘I told you and the Doctor already.’ Lottie said, pulling her hair down to cover the damaged side of her face.

‘Yeah, and because we were inside the hospital, I pretended to swallow that ridiculous story about Jayne’s nail-file flying out of her hand and hitting your face. But I’d like the true story now’

‘Why, what difference will it make?’

‘Lottie, please talk to me.’ Flora touched Lottie’s arm.

But the thirteen year old girl just stared straight ahead.

‘Hey Lottie, you okay?’ the question was shouted from across the hospital car park and Lottie’s heart began to thump when she saw the group of girls waving at her.

‘Isn’t that Jayne over there? Maybe I should go and ask her what happened?’ Flora said, Lottie grabbed her arm and said ‘Don’t Mam. Let’s just go home please.’

Alone in her bedroom Lottie cried. She knew that the three neat stitches wouldn’t leave a huge scar on her face, but it would always be a reminder. Lying on the bed, Lottie pulled her much loved Teddy from under the duvet and hugged it close, trying to figure out

how she could make things right. Her phone pinged, a message from Jayne ‘Audrey wants to talk to you’

Knots formed in Lottie’s stomach, her life had changed since Audrey Whyte had moved into Elm Tree Park. Now she was called ‘Scaredalot’ by the others, just because she had refused Audrey’s dare in a game of ‘Chicken’. Every day Lottie tried to prove that she wasn’t a coward. Even Jayne, who had been Lottie’s best friend since they were four, was afraid to stick up for Lottie.

‘I can’t, Mam won’t let me out now.’ Lottie pressed send

‘Hey, ‘Scaredalot’ get over here now.’ the message came from Jayne’s number but she knew it was Audrey who had written it.

Pulling on a clean hoodie, Lottie inched her way down the hallway, she heard her mother talking on the phone ‘I don’t know what happened to her. She won’t tell me, maybe you could talk to her. Yes, yes I know you’re busy with work, but she’s your daughter too!’ Lottie felt the tears welling up again, as she quietly closed the front door behind her.

‘Okay Scaredalot, what did you tell them at the hospital?’ Audrey circled Lottie as she questioned her, ‘N-n-nothing I swear’ Lottie stammered. The other girls giggled.

‘You had to tell them something, they need details for their records’ Audrey insisted.

‘I told them Jayne’s nail file flew out of her hand and hit my face’

‘Jeez, was that the best you could come up Scaredalot?’ Audrey laughed and poked Lottie in the arm. ‘Anyway, how much did you get?’ she said, holding her hand out to Lottie. Lottie pulled twenty euro from her jeans pocket. ‘That’s all was there’ she said shoving the money into Audrey’s hand.

‘You’ll have to do better than that the next time, won’t she girls?’ the other girls nodded but Lottie noticed that Jayne looked away.

‘No, you said I only had to do it once to prove I wasn’t scared, and I did it’

Audrey grabbed Lottie’s arm and said into her ear ‘see, sometimes I change my mind. So one more time ok? Get me fifty euro and you can have your name back’

Lottie backed away from the laughing pack and ran home thinking about Audrey’s words ‘Get me fifty euro’

Back in her room, she counted the money in her piggy bank, it came to fifteen euro. ‘Where am I going to get another thirty five euro?’ she whispered.

‘Lottie! Your Nan’s here.’ Her mother rapped on the bedroom door.

‘Okay, I’ll be down in a minute.’ Lottie yelled, gathering up the coins from her bed.

The two women were in the kitchen, and Lottie heard her Nan say ‘Lizzie said it was a youngster, but she’s wondering how he got in. You know the way her sight is so bad! She’s afraid he came in right behind her when she came back from the shops. I’ll tell you something Flo, ‘tis after takin a lot out of her, she’s talking about going to live with her son. Imagine a pup of a youngster, making you so afraid you’d think about moving out of the home you’ve lived in for more than thirty years! In our day, it wouldn’t have happened, the kids these days have too much time on their hands, if you ask me!’

‘Drink your tea, Mam. I’m sure they’ll catch him. Did he get much?’

‘She’s not exactly sure how much was in the house but to be honest the money doesn’t really matter. Tis the fright she got more than anything, no one has ever struck her before, in all her seventy two years. Ah there you are Charlotte, your Mam was telling me you had a bit of an accident, are you okay love?’

‘Yeah, I’m grand.’ Lottie kissed the older woman’s cheek, and went to get a juice from the fridge.

‘I passed your friends on the green, it seems like only yesterday ye were out there playing ‘hide and seek.’ There was a tall red-headed girl that I didn’t recognise, who’s she?’

‘Oh that’ll be Lottie’s new friend Audrey, her family only moved into the estate a while ago. The Dad works in the Bank, isn’t that right Lottie? I’ve only met her once or twice, but she seems like a nice girl.’ Her Mum answered, and all Lottie could mumble was ‘Yeah.’ What she really wanted to say was; ‘She’s the bitch who’s making my life hell!’ but of course she couldn’t do that.

‘Hey Lottie will you hand me my bag, it’s under the jacket on that chair in the corner, just mind when you pick it up, the clasp is a bit dodg...’ the words were swallowed by the sound of the big handbag clattering onto the kitchen floor. Lottie scrambled around gathering up her Nan’s belongings. Reaching for the wallet that had skidded under the chair, she saw it was unzipped and was bulging with money. Glancing over her shoulder she saw that her Nan was busy rearranging her stuff, so Lottie took a couple of ten and five euro notes, and stuffed them up the sleeve of her hoodie, before zipping up the purse up and handing it to her Nan.

‘Thanks love, will you come over to me tomorrow? I’ll get a cake in.’ Lottie’s Nan said, pressing a two euro coin into the girl’s hand. ‘She thinks I’s still a little kid’ Lottie thought as she slid the coin into the pocket of her jeans. ‘Thanks Nan, I’ve got stuff to do now, but yeah I’ll see you tomorrow’

Lottie felt a twinge of guilt when she heard her Nan say to her Mum ‘You’ve been blessed with that child Flora.’

She cried herself to sleep and woke the next morning to the sound of her phone pinging rapidly. Eight messages from Jayne’s number. She pressed the delete button without

reading any of them. Passing her window, Lottie glanced out and saw her Nan talking to somebody. 'Oh no' she whispered before running to the bathroom and puking.

'You okay love? You're looking a bit peaky' her Mam said resting the palm of her hand on Lottie's forehead.

Lottie moved away from her Mam 'Yeah, I'm fine. I'm going across to Nan's now.'

'Oh right! It's a bit early, but sure she's usually up with the dawn, so I don't suppose it'll make that any difference. Tell her I'm doing a chicken for dinner this evening, if she fancies joining us.'

The big green play area was all that separated her Nan's house from theirs.

'Hi Nan, it's only me' Lottie called out, and hurried to the kitchen. She stopped short when she saw who was sitting at the kitchen table with her Nan.

'Hi Lottie, your Nan's been telling me what a great girl you are' Audrey Whyte smirked, 'I was just going to tell her about the way you help some of the local old people' Lottie blushed. Her Nan said 'Ah that's lovely. Anyway, it's been really nice chatting to you Audrey, and thanks for giving me a hand with the bins. Charlotte will have to bring you around for another visit again sometime.'

Audrey smirked and whispered to Lottie as she passed her 'Be seeing you Scaredalot'

'There's something about that girl that I just can't take to, Charlotte. I know she's your friend but she's just a bit too sweet to be wholesome for my liking. Now, get yourself a juice and there's a cheesecake in the fridge, I want to pop upstairs for something.'

Lottie felt like she was going to get sick again. What was Audrey doing hanging around Nan's house? She wondered.

‘Isn’t this the charm bracelet I gave you for your birthday? Her Nan said, holding out the silver bracelet.

‘Oh yeah, I’ve been searching for it, where’d you find it?’

‘Well that’s the strange thing, I didn’t find it, Lizzie Ryan did’,

‘Mm that’s weird isn’t it? Anyway it’s great to get it back, do you want some cake Nan, it looks delicious and.’

‘Charlotte Stop! Just tell me how your charm bracelet ended up in Lizzie’s house. I want the truth, were you with that youngster who broke into Lizzie’s house, is that it? I want the whole truth now, do you hear me?’

Lottie started crying and nodded ‘I’m sorry Nan, I’m so ashamed!’

Her Nan hugged her and said ‘don’t cry love, we’ll sort it out. But I want to know who did it.’

‘I didn’t mean for it to happen I swear I didn’t. I just panicked when she came back from the shops early. Oh Nan what’ll I do if she tells the Guards, will I end up being sent to one of those awful homes, I just wanted to prove that I’m not a coward and..’ Lottie heard her Nan’s sharp intake of breath before her comforting arms stopped hugging.

‘What? Are you saying it was you who almost frightened the life out of Lizzie? I don’t believe it.’

Lottie cried ‘I’m sorry Nan, no one was meant to get hurt. It was just a dare and.’

‘A Dare! Are you joking me? Lizzie could have had a heart attack with the fright you gave her, and how did you get into her house anyway?’

Lottie dried her eyes and whispered ‘I took the spare door-key that you mind for her’

‘What?’ Okay I’ve heard enough. Come on we have to go around to Lizzie’s and tell her all this. I’ll give back her key, and tell her I’ll pay for a locksmith to change the locks if she feels that’s what she should do. I’d better give the other neighbour’s their keys too. I couldn’t risk something like this happening again.’

‘It won’t Nan, I promise. I’m so sorry, please tell me you don’t hate me’ Lottie sobbed, but her Nan didn’t answer, she just opened the front door and waited for Lottie to come out to her. They walked to the next street in silence until they stood outside Lizzie Ryan’s house.

‘Who is it?’ a frightened voice answered their knock.

‘Tis all right Lizzie you can open the door. Tis only me, Franny Burke’

The grey-haired woman opened the door an inch and peered out, ‘who’s that with you Franny?’

‘Tis my grand-daughter Charlotte, remember I told you about her. Can we come in?’

The door opened wider and Lottie and her Nan stepped into the hallway, Lottie looked at stairs and her fingers instinctively went to the stitches on her cheek.

‘Sorry for keeping ye on the doorstep, but I’m very nervous, what if that young fella is out there watching the house?’

‘Now Lizzie will you sit down a minute, Charlotte wants to say something and while she does I’ll make us a pot of tea. Go on Charlotte, and don’t let anything out. Do you hear me?’

Lottie’s eyes filled with tears ‘I’m so sorry Mrs Ryan, it wasn’t a young fella who was in your house the other day. It was me. I just told my Nan and she made me come around to tell you the truth. I’m sorry you’ve been so scared because me. And I honestly didn’t mean to

knock you over, you see when I heard you coming back early from the shops, I ran down the stairs and tripped. And as I tried to save myself, you were just coming in the door, and I bumped against you. It was an accident!’

‘I’m sorry Lizzie, it’s breaking my heart to hear that a Granddaughter of mine could do such a thing. And not only that Lizzie, but she broke my trust too. She took the spare key that I mind for you, that’s how she got in here.’ At her Nan’s words, Lottie began to sob harder

‘Ssh girl, stop the wailing now. At least you’ve had the decency to apologise to me. But why did you pick my house, was it because I’m partly sighted is that it? You’ve taken something from me girl and I’m not talking about the money. You’ve taken my confidence.’

‘She said she did it for a dare, Lizzie! Imagine that, she’d terrorise someone for a dare.’ Lottie’s Nan put a cup of tea in front of her friend.

‘I can hear the pain and disappointment in your Nan’s voice. You’ve a lot of making up to do young lady. Now a dare has to be set by someone, so who was it that decided to target me?’

‘Audrey!’ Lottie whispered, ‘It was Audrey Whyte, she makes everyone call me ‘Scaredalot’ and she said I could be called ‘Lottie’ again, if I did it. But now she wants me to get more money for her’ Lottie pulled the scrunched up money from her jeans pocket and handed it to her Nan ‘I took this from your purse Nan, I didn’t know what else to do. I’m so sorry, But Nan she was in your house... what if she sends someone to hurt you? They’re right you know, to call me that name ‘cos I’m so scared all the time.’

Lottie was surprised when her Nan pulled her into her arms and said ‘Oh my poor lamb, what’s been happening to you and none of us noticing?’

Half an hour later, Lottie had told the two women about the way Audrey treated her and her friends. Lizzie Ryan said ‘She sounds like a right bully, and what do bullies live on Franny? Fear! That’s where they get their power, didn’t we have to deal with a few bullies in our own time, Franny? The only way to defeat a bully is by standing up to them. So Charlotte, that’s what you’re going to have to do.’

‘But, I can’t. The others will side with her.’ Lottie squeaked

‘Well then, if that’s what happens, I’d think twice about calling them friends.’ Her Nan said.

‘Now, about those door locks! I think you’re right Franny they need to be changed, but it’s Charlotte’s responsibility to pay for them, not yours’ Lizzie Ryan said.

‘I’ve about fifteen euro in my piggy- bank, will that pay for them. Mrs Ryan’ Lottie said, glad that the old woman sounded less scared. Lizzie laughed ‘No, but it will help, you can pay off the rest by doing a few odd jobs for me, how about that?’

Lottie smiled, suddenly feeling as if things might end up okay after all.

The walk back to her Nan’s house was again silent. At the door her Nan said ‘Charlotte, I think you’d better go home now.’

Lottie hugged her and whispered ‘I really am sorry for everything. Will you still love me, even though I’ve been so horrible?’

‘Ah Charlotte, I’ll always love you pet. But it will take time for me to get over what you did. Are you going to tell your mother?’

Lottie nodded.

As she crossed the green, Lottie saw them. Audrey smirked as she got closer 'well if it isn't the perfect 'Scaredalot' she said and the others laughed. Lottie's heart thumped and then she remembered Lizzie Ryan.

'My name is Charlotte Maguire, and I am not a coward. I don't care what you or anyone else calls me. I know who I am. I was a coward when I frightened an old lady. But I've apologised to her. And you know something Audrey! You're not a nice person. You're nothing but a Bully. So get out of my way. I'm going home.'

To Lottie's surprise Audrey moved and said 'Come on she's not worth bothering with'

Lottie took a deep breath, hardly able to believe Audrey had backed down.

'Hey Lottie wait' she turned to see Jayne running towards her.

'I'm sorry! Can we be friends again? I can't believe the way you stood up to Audrey. She's still very scary though isn't she?' Jayne said.

Lottie nodded, but the girls laughed and hugged each other. Then Jayne pointed to Lottie's stitches and said 'I'd say when they come out, you'd hardly notice it.'

Scars run Deep by Ger Morrissey