

Trinity Truelove and the Order of Time

by

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Novel. Children's MG (10+) time travel fantasy adventure

“The adventure of all of time itself is about to begin.”

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70 MILLION YEARS AGO (GIVE OR TAKE A FEW CENTURIES)

Imagine a child. Lost. Alone.

Imagine her name. Trinity Truelove.

Not yet thirteen, the age we will get to know her. Another five years to go.

At eight years old, her story begins...

Trinity Truelove wore the threads of slumber; inappropriate attire, peculiar and out of place on this strange deserted beach. She'd normally wear a tee-shirt, shorts, flip-flops and a thorough basting of sunblock. Just like any other kid.

But not today.

The little girl found herself on all fours, befuddled, disorientated, both palms flat upon golden sand. Odd. Very odd. She clambered to her feet, her face blessed with the kiss of warmth from the afternoon sun, her body slave to an untamed sea breeze intent on ruffling delicate cotton against her petite frame. The beach, the sun, the breeze, everything seemed so authentic, so very real. But it couldn't be. Could it? And as the eight-year-old took in her curious new surroundings, two questions sprang to mind:

1. Where was she?
2. How did she get here?

Prior to the beach stealing her body and soul, Trinity Truelove was tucked up in bed, not quite asleep, not quite awake. Prior to the beach stealing her body and soul, the middle of the night reigned supreme, a time of hush, save for the occasional distant bark of a disturbed dog, the dull brrrrmmm of a passing car or the eerie yowl of a city fox. And prior to the beach stealing her body and soul, she lived far, far away from the nearest available seaside.

These very facts prompted two additional questions:

3. What happened to her bedroom?

4. What happened to Mum's flat?

And again, she wondered to herself, how did she get here?

Then oh, a surge of recent memories burst free. She recalled experiencing an odd sensation, difficult to explain, not quite an ache, not quite a twinge, not quite an itch, not quite a shiver. Then sitting up, tossing aside the duvet, staggering out of bed. She remembered feeling dizzy, light-headed, nauseous, losing her balance, dropping to her knees, then onto all fours, both palms flat upon the carpet. Oh, and her final memory within the four walls of that bedroom, finding herself engulfed in a strange silvery shimmer, like... like rippling water. And then...

...a golden plain of sand, a majestic backdrop of mountainous tuffet-peaked dunes, the tumbling flurry of white-crested waves at play and the placid hiss of receding surf.

This mysterious beach had appeared out of nowhere.

Trinity inched forward, one pace, two paces, a few steps more, journeying through hectic tricklets of water, cool and fresh, busily carving a reunion with the sea after a recent turning of the tide. A million stowaway grains of moist sand clung to the bare feet of their newfound host, refusing to budge, refusing to say goodbye, tickling such sensitive skin.

Leaving the watery oasis behind, it was back to sand so warm and dry, reminding Trinity of rare seaside happiness, of ice cream dripping from cornet onto hand, of the lobster skin of sunglassed bathers, of the relentless mocking laughter of herring gulls. Only, this beach wasn't a typical holiday haven... which made her very, very nervous.

Seeking clues, she looked left, she looked right, struggling to make sense of her current predicament. Nothing about this mysterious location offered any explanation as to how she came to arrive he—

'Greetings.' A male voice. Adult. Behind her.

Trinity spun around and was met with the affable smile of a man whose charcoal locks danced in the breeze. Oh, so the beach was not so deserted after all. She took note of his peculiar clothes, the type of attire she'd seen in books or movies about the distant past, a tricorne hat, a frilly shirt, high leather boots, a long frock coat, all apparel dyed in the shade of soot, oh, and what appeared to be a black eye mask hanging redundant around his neck. He looked like... what was it now? Ah, yes, a highwayman. She recalled almost falling asleep during a recent history lesson about highwaymen and how they robbed horse-drawn carriages hundreds of years ago. So why was this man pretending to be one? Was he in fancy dress? If so, what was he doing in fancy dress on the emptiest of beaches?

The stranger circled the child, curious, intrigued. 'Do you often visit the beach in your nightwear?'

Trinity peered at her nightie, at its crude cartoon cat design, at her legs, at her sand-encrusted feet, then returned her sights to the man. No, of course she didn't. What a daft question. At first, she considered remaining defiantly mute. That would teach him. However, seeking answers and needing them now, she instead decided to say, 'If it's not too much trouble, I'd like to know how I got here.'

The man grinned. Annoyingly. 'The same way I did.' He surveyed the locality, admiring the beauty, the serenity. 'I visit this place when I need to get away from it all for a while.'

Hmm, no lover of a distinct lack of answers from the human cryptic crossword puzzle, Trinity rolled her eyes and huffed like a little madam. 'At least explain to me why my bedroom disappeared.'

'Have you mislaid it? Ooh, careless. When did you last see it?'

'Just now. I was there... but now I'm here.' Ewww, she grimaced at her own gibberish.

'I see.' The man squatted low, gazes levelled. 'Well, it's lucky I came along when I did. It just so happens I might be able to help you.' And then he stood up straight again.

Help sounded good. Very good. Trinity was about to respond to the offer when a bizarre and unexpected cry, somewhere between a wail and a squawk broke the silence of the sky above. She peeked heavenwards and caught sight of a distant airborne creature, its lean yet substantial form difficult to fully make out, blurred, silhouetted, courtesy of the dazzling sunlight. With two huge wings outstretched and a long, slender beak cutting a route through the air, it circled the vicinity with faultless grace. If it was a bird (it had to be a bird, surely. Or a bat. A very large bat), it was not a species she'd laid eyes upon before.

The man followed the direction of her gaze. Out of his smile came a certain air of familiarity and experience, as though he'd witnessed this curious sight a million times before. 'Breathtaking, isn't it?'

To which Trinity replied, 'I've never seen a bird so big before.'

'I think you'll find it's not a bird.'

'Then what is it, smarty-pants?' She'd acquired a talent for a splodge of rudeness laced with a splat of sarcasm from her mother, from the way the single parent acted the majority of the time, a big kid.

'It's a pteranodon,' the man informed the child. And off her blank stare, he added, 'Oh, sorry. Would you like the answer dumbed down a smidgeon?'

'I don't need anything dumbed down. I know a lot more than you think.'

'Oh? Such as?'

'I've studied prehistoric creatures at school. Guess what? They all became extinct millions of years ago.'

'They certainly did.'

'So how can that pteranodon be here right now?'

'Because this isn't...' Open finger air quotes. '...right now...' Close finger air quotes. '...as we know it.' He gave a wink, then jabbed a thumb skywards. 'Best to keep a beady eye on

our winged friend. It won't attack me, I'm too big and bulky. But you... well... it probably sees you as a tasty little snack.'

For Trinity, the conversation had travelled way off-topic. 'You said you can help me.'

'Indeed I can.'

'Then tell me where I am.'

'It would be better to rephrase the request as, "Tell me when I am."'

The statement swept right over Trinity's head without stopping to apologise for its blatant ambiguity. 'What are you talking about?'

The man tapped the side of his nose with his index finger, unwilling to offer across the gift of enlightenment. 'Oh, you'll find out one day, Trinity Truelove.'

An ice-cold wave of concern swept through her tiny body. 'How do you know who I am?'

'You told me.'

The Trinity Truelove in question was one hundred per cent certain she hadn't. 'When?'

'When you were older.'

Trinity blinked. And then she blinked again. 'That doesn't make sense.'

'The time will come when you realise it does.'

Bored of getting nowhere in this conversation, she bleated, 'You're spewing absolute nonsense. Are you a broken-brain?'

'Broken-brain?' The man laughed. 'Where did you pick up such a put-down?'

'My mum. She calls a lot of people that.'

'Your mother sounds...' His face collapsed into a skewed grimace. '...delightful.'

Fed up with talking to a total stranger, for Mum would blow a gasket if she caught her only child chatting to an unidentified male in fancy dress, Trinity felt the time was right to totally unstranger this person. 'What's your name?'

‘Oh, yes, sorry, I haven’t fully introduced myself,’ he said, the upcoming greeting accompanied by gesticulatus theatricalus, an overblown bow of the head and a wide side-sweep of arms, as if welcoming a superstar to the stage. ‘Sebastian Quickly at your service.’ The statement was more than spoken, it was almost sung.

‘Sebastian Quickly?’ Trinity could feel her face scrunching at the absurdity of it all. ‘That’s not a name.’

‘Granted, it’s not exactly my true birth identity. But discovering one’s inner self often involves becoming somebody stronger, somebody braver, somebody willing to take that risk.’

Once again, the man’s ramblings went straight over the little girl’s head. ‘I have no idea what you’re banging on about.’

‘Oh, but you will. In time.’ Sebastian broke into a fresh smile alive with zest. ‘Trinity Truelove, you are destined for great things. You just don’t know it yet.’

Trinity stared at him.

Sebastian stared back.

Mutual silence prevailed.

And for the longest of moments, his “destined for great things” statement lingered in the air between them.

Then argh, the attack came without warning, one piercing war-cry, two sets of talons snatching the scruff of her nightie, the rabid flapping of colossal bat-like wings and Trinity was lifted into the air.

It was the pteranodon. She hadn’t kept a beady eye on the animal and now it had her in its clutches. Neither bird nor bat, it was a monster, its lengthy beak, bulky head and arrowhead skull crest looking bizarrely out of proportion in comparison to its squat body. And oh, its eye-goggling wingspan measured at least six Trinity Trueloves laying down head to toe.

Not liking the way the distance between bird-thing and beach was widening, Trinity wriggled and squirmed, attempting to free herself from its hold. She screamed, she yelled, she hollered, hoping her ear-popping screech-fest would alarm the animal. But no. Undeterred, it continued to make its ascent.

Trinity gawped at the beach below, spotting Sebastian looking up, running after her. She watched as he came to a halt and stooped low, picking up a rock as large as his hand and lobbing it into the air. Whoosh, the rock flew past Trinity's right ear, totally missing the creature. Who was his target, the oversized chicken or a certain eight-year-old?

Then oh, the pteranodon changed direction, doubling back, sending the girl swinging to and fro like a human pendulum. The winged creature swooped low, soaring past Sebastian, almost bowling him over with that same human pendulum, warning him off, forcing him to hit the deck. And then, man down and victorious, the beast began to make a fresh ascent.

Oh, this time, the pteranodon struggled to gain height, flapping its wings hard and fast. Was Trinity's body too heavy for the tiring creature to handle? She certainly hoped so. Again, she peered down at the beach. Sebastian was now on all fours, searching through sparse scatterings of rocks, in need of another suitable missile. This prompted the child to hope to God he would hit the actual target this time.

It was then when the animal lost its grip, sending the little girl plunging beachwards, landing with an oof upon a thankfully soft ridge of sand dunes. Urgh, spitting out a mouthful of golden grains and somewhat winded by the fall, she checked her arms, her legs, her torso for any signs of damage, good, nothing broken. Then came a screech from above. Trinity gawped skywards at the circling pteranodon, the beast seeking a second opportunity to grab its chosen prey.

Struggling to her feet, she watched as the animal made a fresh approach, talons at the ready, aiming to take the child. Uh-oh, she knew she should run. Fast. But she couldn't. Her

trembling form refused to budge, the ice-cold grip of terror freezing her feet, her legs, her entire body. This was neither fight nor flight. This was statue territory.

The child couldn't bear it, she slammed her eyes shut. For sure, this was the end of Trinity Truelove. Seconds ticked by. Followed by further seconds. What was happening? She couldn't help herself, she reopened her eyes, then whack, a massive rock slammed into the approaching pteranodon's head with unbelievable force, knocking the airborne creature off-balance, sending it hurtling out of control towards her. Rediscovering movement, Trinity ducked. The dazed animal whooshed past the girl, missing her by mere centimetres. Then thud, the pteranodon crash-landed on the sandy beach, the continuous force of momentum sending it tumbling and bouncing and rolling for quite some distance before coming to an awkward halt in an ungainly heap, injured, confused, disorientated, attempting to straighten itself, flapping one wing in vain, struggling to free its trapped second wing from underneath its fallen body, desperate to find its feet, needing to pull itself into an upright position, but failing miserably.

Taking advantage of the time-sensitive opportunity, Sebastian galloped over to the child. He squatted low, his left arm wrapped around her tiny frame, his right hand fishing for something unknown in the right-hand side pocket of his frock coat. Then oh, more squawks and shrieks from above. They both looked up. Bird-like silhouettes in the sky. An entire gang of them. Uh-oh, company was coming for dinner.

'We've got to get out of here right now,' exclaimed Sebastian, a telltale tremor of trepidation evident in his voice.

'How?'

He produced a silver pocket watch on a chain and held it aloft. 'With the aid of this.' And before Trinity could spout something sarcastic, he added, 'You need to think about home.'

'What? Why?'

She clocked Sebastian peering across at the distressed pteranodon and followed his line of vision. The animal was recovering, its trapped wing freed, almost back on its feet. Very soon, way too soon, it would take flight and be ready for another attack. Then came further shrieks from the sky. The two potential human meals both tossed upward glances at the approaching creatures. Their prospects weren't looking too rosy.

'Concentrate, girl,' he ordered, ultra-insistent. 'Picture your bedroom in your head.'

'How is that supposed to help?'

'We don't have time for dumb questions.' The level of insistence in his voice had now been upgraded to red alert. 'Just do it.'

'Okaaaaaay.' In her mind's eye, she could see her bed, the wardrobe, the horribly childish wallpaper that hadn't been changed since she was a toddler. She didn't have a clue why she needed to perform this task. But hey, Sebastian was an adult, and adults knew best. Apparently.

'Can you picture it?' he asked.

She sighed. Irritably. 'Yessssss.'

It was then when she once again felt that odd sensation, not quite an ache, not quite a twinge, not quite an itch, not quite a shiver. Next, the weird silvery shimmer returned, enveloping the two of them and...

FIVE YEARS AGO

...a dizzy, disorientated Trinity stumbled and fell, landing on all fours, both palms flat upon the carpet. Oh. Her bedroom carpet. Trying her hardest to ignore her stomach tying itself in knots, she took in the familiarity of the bed, the wardrobe, the awful childish wallpaper. She was home, she was safe, not a pteranodon in sight.

Trinity failed to realise she still had company until Sebastian spoke.

‘Is this home to you?’ the highwayman asked in whisper-speak, so as not to disturb any family members occupying the flat.

In response, Trinity offered across a definite nod.

‘Well done. You wouldn’t believe some of the places previous fledglings have taken me. You’re clearly a natural.’ The man returned his timepiece to the right-hand side pocket of his coat, then stood up from his squat. ‘Don’t freak out about the dizziness and the nausea. It always happens to newbies. Once your body grows accustomed to travelling, you’ll be fine.’

‘Travelling?’ the frowning little girl whispered back. ‘Where?’

Sebastian grinned. ‘Anywhere and anywhen.’

‘Trinity, what do you think you’re playing at in there?’ Uh-oh, her mother’s voice. Annoyed. Coming from the adjacent bedroom.

‘Ah. My cue to disappear.’ Sebastian opened the window and climbed out onto the ledge. ‘Ciao for now.’

‘What are you doing?’ hissed Trinity, standing up. ‘This is a tower block. We’re three floors up.’

Sebastian looked back at the child. ‘Oh, don’t you worry about me, Trinity Truelove, I’m a big boy now.’ Again, he produced his pocket watch. ‘See you when you’re older.’ And then he jumped.

A moment later, a flash of light tore through the night, after which the silence of darkness reigned. Trinity raced over to the window and peered out.

Not a trace of Sebastian Quickly.

Then oh, the bedroom door burst open, the light came on and her mother Tara stormed in, wrapped in a tatty woollen dressing gown. 'You'd better have a very good reason for disturbing my beauty sleep.'

Trinity said nothing in return. What could she possibly say? She wasn't exactly sure what had happened herself. However, needing to make some kind of response, she opted for the non-speakery of a vague shoulder shrug.

Tara marched over to the cause of a chilly draught. 'What's this window doing open? You're letting out all the heat.' She closed the window and turned to face her daughter. 'Well? Cat got your tongue?'

Again, she shrugged. Again, no words were uttered. Instead, she winced at the stupidity of the cat/tongue phrase. They didn't own a cat. And even if they were blessed with a feline, what would it possibly want with Trinity's tongue?

'Get back to bed, you,' the parent snarled, making her way back across the room. 'School in the morning.' She then turned off the light and parted company with the child, slamming the door behind her.

Alone, Trinity stood in silence, her petite form semi-illuminated by a moon undressed of its recent cloud cover. The little girl found her juvenile mind rammed with questions. What just happened? How did she get to the beach? Who was Sebastian Quickly? Why did he have such a weird name? How come the pteranodon creatures existed when they should have been extinct? And above all, how did she get home?

Or... had it all been a dream? A really, really vivid dream.

Well?

The child sat herself down upon the edge of the bed. Yes. It must have been a dream. Bizarre events like that didn't happen in the real world. Ah, but if Trinity had been dreaming, how come she wasn't snuggled up in bed? Hmm, sleepwalking perhaps?

Oh, she then drew her attention towards her feet.

Her sand-encrusted feet.

Oh, wow, it hadn't been a dream after all. For reasons the little girl couldn't possibly comprehend, she had actually travelled back in time to a prehistoric beach.

This brought her neatly onto one final question:

Would she ever cross paths again with that mysterious man?

Heh, somehow, Trinity Truelove knew this was not the last she'd seen of Sebastian Quickly.

TODAY

Imagine a teenager. Mentally lost and alone.

Again, imagine her name. Trinity Truelove.

At thirteen years of age, her story continues...

Trinity Truelove wore the threads of education, although the way she portrayed herself as a pupil trashed every school uniform rule in the book. Her necktie dangled limp and askew, the result of a slack knot positioned way too low. The tail of her blouse hung loose, enjoying its freedom, refusing to be tucked in. Meanwhile, further down, boring navy blue tights had long since been given their marching orders in favour of the red and white striped variety, and an endlessly repeated request for the pupil to wear sensible black patent shoes was no match for her current personal preference of bright pink trainers.

Her hair was also a visual protest against... well, everything really. The schoolgirl wore her lengthy locks in a super-high ponytail at the very top of her head, a thick trunk reaching skywards, held in place by not one but two scrunchies, before fanning out and cascading in all directions, a chaotic waterfall, kicking and screaming severe attitude.

Trinity shifted in her chair in an attempt to prevent the onset of pins and needles in her buttocks. How long had she been forced to sit here? Barely five minutes or so, granted, but it seemed much, much longer. And her buttocks agreed. Wholeheartedly. Therefore, as a way of displaying her escalating intolerance towards a plastic moulded seat clearly designed by a total drip with no previous experience of sitting down, she tightly crossed her arms and let out an absolute Krakatoa eruption of a sigh.

The recipient of the absolute Krakatoa eruption of a sigh came in the form of the school's head teacher, a certain Miss Bleak, boasting a fitting surname for both the present location

(Miss Bleak's office) and her personality. The woman leaned back in her far more comfortable leather chair, pressing together the fingertips of both hands and glaring over the top of her half-moon spectacles.

'Trinity Truelove,' began Miss Bleak, breaking the stifling hush of non-speak. 'I don't care how much you huff and puff. You are not leaving my office until you explain to me why you chose to attack poor Harry.'

Poor Harry, a fellow pupil, sat to the left of Trinity, his face and upper torso smothered in a lumpy, gooey, drippy yellow liquid. Trinity glanced at Harry. Harry glared at Trinity. Zero words were exchanged, but the detected level of mutual animosity slid way off the Richter scale.

Returning her attention to the head teacher, Trinity claimed, 'It wasn't my fault.'

Miss Bleak overly rolled her eyes, blah, blah, blah, she'd heard it all before. 'Funny how you say that about any disruptive act with your name on it.' She cleared her throat, then started reeling off the disruptive acts in question. 'When you set off the fire alarm during the Armistice Day two minutes silence, it wasn't your fault.'

'I was bored of the hush,' said the guilty party.

'When you scribbled "Rubbish, rubbish, total pants" all over Felicity Jackson's art coursework, it wasn't your fault.'

'If she can't accept constructive criticism, then painting clearly isn't for her.'

'When you smothered the school cleaner's mop handle with superglue, it wasn't your fault.'

'Oh, get with it, Miss Bleak, it was only a prank.'

'A prank? She had to go to hospital to have it removed from both hands. Even after all these months, I still can't convince the poor woman to return to work.'

Trinity huffed, tightening her crossed arms. There was that word again. Poor. Poor Harry. Poor school cleaner. It was as if everybody around her was an innocent victim and Trinity Truelove herself was the sole evil villain. Granted, she was no angel, far from it, but she hadn't always been so volatile and rebellious.

She recalled how, five years ago, nobody had taken her seriously about the beach incident, not her mother, not her peers and certainly not the school nurse who went on to recommend a full psychological assessment, the traitor. This led to no fewer than five sessions with a child psychologist who drummed it into her head that Sebastian Quickly and the hungry pteranodon were merely figments of an over-active imagination. From time to time, somebody spiteful would bring up the past, and that's when Trinity found herself lashing out. Therefore, in her opinion, it wasn't her fault. And she felt Miss Bleak needed to know that.

'I poured cold custard over Harry,' Trinity explained, 'because he called me a total head-warp.'

'You are a total head-warp,' whimpered (poor) Harry, indicating to the drippy coat of yellow goo. 'And this proves it.'

Miss Bleak waved down the boy's protest. 'Harry, please. It's not nice teasing the girl about her former... um...' She wrestled for an appropriate phrase, then decided upon, '...psychological issues.'

'Amen,' said the schoolgirl, grateful for the defence.

'And as for you, Trinity, you could have so easily avoided all this trouble by simply asking him to stop.'

Oh. Defence short-lived. 'I tried. He didn't listen. So I splurged him.'

This had been Trinity's revenge served cold. Allow him to continue to tease her, say nothing in return at the time, then wait until they were both in the school canteen... where a humungous pot of gooey cold custard sat available for potential mischief.

‘Right, let’s get this over and done with, shall we?’ said Miss Bleak, longing to end this meeting. ‘I’d like you to apologise.’

Trinity prompt-nudged Harry’s shoulder. ‘Go on, you heard the woman. Say sorry.’

Miss Bleak offered freedom to a long-trailing sigh. ‘I meant you, Trinity.’

‘Me? Why should I apologise? He was the one doing the insulting.’

‘True,’ responded the head teacher. ‘But you retaliated in a most inappropriate manner.’

Trinity thought about it. The adult in authority sitting opposite needed to realise that “most inappropriate” in the eyes of one person could quite easily be seen as “serves you right” to another. However, fuelling further debate on this occasion was futile, the head teacher backing down an unlikely scenario. Therefore, the only option (and viable means of escape from this office of doom) was to [insert sour grimace here] comply.

‘Fine, Miss Bleak, whatever you say.’ She glanced at Harry and donned her most convincing repentant face. ‘I’m sorry.’

At last, Miss Bleak was finally getting somewhere. ‘Thank you.’

Trinity’s repentance, however, gave way to naked contempt. ‘I’m sorry I only chose to pour cold custard over your head when I could have so easily splurged you with the entire canteen menu.’ Then, switching her sights to an appalled head teacher, she added, ‘May I now be excused?’

She wasn’t excused. Miss Bleak gave her detention.

However, the very moment the head teacher left the designated detention classroom to grab herself a fresh cup of tea, Trinity escaped.

Arriving home, she slotted her key into the front door of the third-floor flat and gave it a twist. As the door swung open and the schoolgirl graced the hallway with her presence, her ears detected the rhythmic beat of dance music versus the arrhythmic stomp, stomp, stomp of out-of-sync feet.

Heading into the lounge, she found herself repulsed by the sight of her mother star-jumping in front of the TV, dressed in a shocking pink leotard, a blinding yellow tee-shirt and bright green ankle warmers, attempting in vain to keep up with the rigorous exercise moves of yet another celebrity workout routine.

‘Oh, Mum, like, what the actual?’

Tara yelped with fright, then clutched her chest, expelling the world’s loudest wheeze of relief. ‘Trinity, you scared the life out of me.’ She paused the TV show, freezing the celebrity exercise instructor in mid-star-jump. ‘I thought you were a burglar.’

Trinity looked down at herself, then back at her mother. ‘Wearing school uniform?’ And then it was over to the matter in question. ‘What exactly is going on here?’

‘I happen to be keeping fit.’

‘I’m not talking about the workout routine. It’s your outfit I have a major problem with.’

‘What’s wrong with it?’

‘Those three colour choices. Together.’ The teenager disposed of her schoolbag on the carpet for any takers to trip over, then claimed the entire sofa, legs up, body outstretched, lazily horizontal. ‘I’m lucky my eyes didn’t melt.’

‘Says the girl in the red and white striped tights and bright pink trainers.’

Trinity uttered nothing in return. She couldn’t be bothered. Instead, she ran the childish route of sticking out her tongue.

And then the doorbell did its ding-dong thing.

‘Oh, who’s that now?’ the parent huffed, heading out into the hallway.

Trinity remained on the sofa, attempting to listen in on what was happening in the adjoining room. First, she heard the front door open. Next, the owner of a male voice mumbled something or other, after which Tara mumbled her own version of something or other. And that was basically it. Boring.

A moment later, Tara made her return, looking more than a little anxious. ‘Trinity, it’s for you. Says he’s from the school.’

Uh-oh, the schoolgirl sprang to her feet. Was her mother about to receive the lowdown on the custard splurge? It certainly looked that way.

Mother and daughter watched as the school representative sailed into the room, an odd-looking man dressed in a conspicuously vintage three-piece suit and an equally vintage wide-brimmed hat, matching blue in colour, the costume making him look like a hardboiled yesteryear gangster from one of those mega-ancient black and white movies endlessly repeated on obscure satellite TV channels.

‘Good afternoon,’ the newcomer said to Trinity through a prominent smile in a charming, well-spoken voice, politely removing his hat and holding it in both hands. ‘You must be Trinity Truelove.’

‘I might be. Who are you?’

‘The name’s Ramone. Felix Ramone.’

Despite everything, Trinity couldn’t help but smirk. The man who looked like a hardboiled yesteryear gangster from a mega-ancient black and white movie boasted a name which perfectly suited a hardboiled yesteryear gangster from a mega-ancient black and white movie.

‘Confession time, girl,’ hissed Tara, wearing her trademark “needing to know everything” face. ‘What are you guilty of this time?’

‘Let me assure you, Mrs Truelove,’ said Felix, ‘your daughter has done nothing wrong.’

‘It’s Ms Truelove actually,’ bleated Tara, laying bloated emphasis upon her current title. ‘I’m divorced.’ She held out her left hand, showing off her band of gold. ‘See? Kept the ring to prove it.’ And then it was down to business. ‘So what’s all this gumpf about my daughter doing nothing wrong? She must have created havoc in some shape or form. Otherwise, why would you be here?’

‘Granted, the education system does consider young Trinity a problem child.’

‘I knew it,’ interrupted Tara, lobbing an accusatory glare towards the teenager. ‘You’ve gone and flooded the school by turning on all the taps. Again.’

‘However...’ counter-interrupted Felix, his voice now a tad more commanding, ‘...the reason for your daughter’s, shall we say, rebellious nature might be down to the sheer frustration of a school unable to understand and nurture her special talents.’

‘Special talents?’ The single parent’s perplexed face was almost laughable. ‘She ain’t got no talents. She’s just... her.’

‘On the contrary, Ms Truelove, your daughter is a most remarkable young lady.’

The single parent’s brow wrinkled, bemusement overload, desperately seeking clues as to the whereabouts of any remarkable properties associated with her only child. When zero results emerged, she said to the gentleman caller, ‘You never did state the reason for your visit.’

‘It’s quite simple. I’d like to offer Trinity a place on a seven day field trip.’

Trinity liked the sound of that. ‘Does that mean I’ll miss a week of school?’

‘You certainly will.’

Trinity mega-liked the sound of that.

Curious, her mother asked, ‘What kind of field trip are we talking about?’

‘Myself and my associates run a special facility way out in the middle of nowhere. We call it The Shop. A venue where we can turn all her pent-up frustration into positive energy.’

‘Ooh.’ Tara’s face illuminated. ‘You mean like a boot camp? I’ve seen places like that on TV. Short, sharp shock.’ She almost laughed. ‘That’ll sort her out good and proper.’

Felix chuckled. ‘No, no, no. Nothing quite so draconian.’

Tara looked way too disappointed for her own good. ‘Shame.’ But then she perked up again. ‘Mind you, I do love the idea of having the whole flat to myself.’

‘Do I get a say in all this?’ barked Trinity, not liking the sound of any of it.

‘No,’ snapped her mother, fiercely territorial of her newfound freedom. ‘You’ve brought this on yourself.’ She turned to face Felix. ‘How do I sign her up?’

‘All I require is Trinity’s presence at my office tomorrow morning at 9:00AM sharp where I will fill her in on all the required nuts and bolts.’

This led the parent to enquire, ‘Will I need to attend?’

‘That won’t be necessary.’

Tara’s sigh of relief could probably be heard as far away as China. ‘Good. I don’t give up my traditional Saturday morning sleep-in for nobody.’

Trinity had been hoping for her own personal version of a Saturday morning sleep-in. Huh, zero chance of that now, her plans scuppered by a strange man in an outfit way past its best-before date.

It was then when the man in question plucked a brass pocket watch on a chain from his waistcoat pocket and eyed the clock face. ‘Goodness me, is that the time? I must be making tracks.’

Trinity couldn’t help staring at the pocket watch. She was reminded of the silver version owned by Sebastian Quickly, the highwayman who never returned... mainly because, so she’d been told time and time again, he didn’t exist.

And after returning the timepiece to its rightful home, Felix popped his hat back on his head and smiled at Trinity. ‘Would you do me the honour of seeing me to the front door?’

The thirteen-year-old didn’t want to, but, ‘Suppose so.’ And then she led the visitor through the hallway and opened the door for him.

Felix stepped outside amid the grey blandness of the concrete communal access walkway, then spun around to face the schoolgirl. ‘Oh, I almost forgot.’ He passed across a handwritten note. ‘That’s the address of my office in town. You can’t miss it. It’s situated slap-bang

between Foster & Son Family Butchers and Soled Out Shoes.’ He tittered to himself. ‘Soled out. I do love a clever play on words.’

Trinity failed to offer a reciprocal titter. Instead, she crossed the tightest of defiant arms. ‘How do you know I’ll even turn up?’

In a covert, clandestine manner, Felix neared Trinity, his head almost meeting hers. ‘That time on the prehistoric beach when you were eight years old,’ he whispered, so as not to attract eavesdroppers, especially the girl’s mother. ‘It was no dream.’

Hey, did Trinity hear him correctly? Yes. She did. Eye-opening news or what? ‘But... nobody took me seriously. They thought I was lying. Are you saying... you believe me?’

‘Your trip to that beach was very real indeed,’ Felix responded, pleased to have gained Trinity Truelove’s complete attention. ‘And tomorrow, I will explain how and why it happened.’

SATURDAY

Oh. My. God.

The incident on the prehistoric beach, it actually happened. And today was the day when Trinity Truelove would discover how and why. The prospect of finally learning the truth felt both exciting and unnerving in equal measures.

Trinity wondered if she should dress formally for the meeting, but soon dismissed the idea. After all, she didn't own a garment even remotely formal. And why would she? With the girl riding her debut year of teenagehood, formality just didn't happen. Therefore, a pair of ripped, distressed and whatever-elses jeans, her cherished bright pink trainers and a pale yellow tee-shirt sporting the acronym OMG in bold black lettering became today's outfit of choice. The final touch, a cropped denim jacket, and she was out the door.

The girl caught a bus into town. Journey's end came ten minutes later. Alighting from the vehicle, she headed for the site of Felix Ramone's office. Destination reached, she couldn't find herself any more bemused. To her left stood Foster & Son Family Butchers. To her right, Soled Out Shoes. And slap-bang between the two shops stood –

– a car park so cramped and claustrophobic, it was hardly worth the effort.

Strange or what? According to Felix, this very spot was the exact location. So where was the office? And why was she met instead with grey-black tarmac and weather-faded parking bay lines?

'Is this some kind of wind-up?' she grumbled to herself.

This girl needed assistance. Badly.

The door to Foster & Son Family Butchers ding-a-linged upon Trinity's entry. An ancient man, all grey hair and wrinkles, and dressed in the traditional uniform of his chosen vocation stood to attention behind the counter.

‘Can I help you, madam?’ he asked, trading politeness for potential custom.

‘I’m looking for Felix Ramone.’

‘Felix Ramone,’ the butcher quoted, his face oddly aglow with nostalgia. ‘Now there’s a blast from the past. My old man, God rest his soul, was always rabbiting on about him when I was a young lad. Nice chap apparently. Always smiling. Very partial to our special family recipe sausages.’

Trinity sighed, only half-listening to the man’s drivel. She wanted answers, not a breakdown of Felix’s eating habits. Plan B, she lent him the handwritten note. ‘His office is supposed to be next door. This is the address I was given.’

The butcher donned a pair of spectacles, formerly dangling free via a cord around his neck, then scanned the sheet of paper with squinted eyes. Once read, he offered across a cheeky grin. ‘I think you’ve been duped, young lady. This address doesn’t exist.’

If frowns came with sound, Trinity would be making serious noise right now. ‘What are you banging on about?’

‘Sure, there was once an office building next door,’ the butcher explained. ‘But it was demolished years ago.’

Fuming, Trinity stormed out of the shop. How could Felix Ramone act so heartless? The nasty man in that stupid vintage suit had psyched her up with the golden promise of answers, only then to lead her down a dead-end street named Disenchantment Close.

Then oh, standing before the entrance to the car park, she felt a strong, almost magnetic compulsion to step forward, as though an impossible to resist force was willing her to do so. Hmm, the life-preserving notion of turning around and legging it sprang to mind. But no. Whatever the cause of this bizarre attraction, she needed to face it. Like, head-on.

Decision made, she entered the car park. And then...

1952

...an acute attack of nausea wrenched Trinity's stomach as all around her, the interior of an office appeared out of nowhere. Yes. An office. But strangely without a computer, a photocopier, a water cooler or anything else associated with such a workplace.

'Ah, Miss Truelove,' addressed Felix Ramone, his well-spoken voice jolting the girl free of her questioning thoughts. 'You found me. Well done. You've passed the first test.'

Smiling as usual, Felix sat behind a desk at the far end of the room, minus his trademark headgear which instead hung from a nearby wooden hat stand. Upon his desk lay a closed foolscap file, various items of stationery and a vintage Bakelite landline telephone. Behind him stood a metal filing cabinet and not a lot else.

'Test?' murmured Trinity, balanced somewhere between unsure and insecure.

The seated man eyed his pocket watch. 'And extra bonus points for punctuality.'

'Where am I?' she dared to ask.

Felix put to bed his timepiece. 'Welcome to 1952.'

'1952?'

Felix nodded a definite yes. 'This is my time period.'

'Time period?'

'Are you planning on repeating everything I say throughout this interview?' He indicated to a wooden chair positioned before his desk. 'Or would you care to take a seat?'

Trinity shook her head, uncomfortable with this bizarre situation. 'This is all too... demented.' Defensive mode kicking in, she shuffled backwards and...

SATURDAY

...the office disappeared.

Once again, Trinity found herself alone at the entrance to the car park. Urgh, she felt like throwing up, and almost did, but managed to contain the offending stomach contents with a good hard swallow. Yuck!

The girl glanced to her left. Foster & Son Family Butchers. She glanced to her right. Soled Out Shoes. Okay, so she was back where she'd started. Saturday. Twenty-first century. Phew. The illusion of 1952 (it had to be an illusion, surely) was but a fading memory.

Needing to flee from this bonkers situation, Trinity abandoned the car park and peered down the road at the nearest bus stop, a distance of approximately twenty metres. She attempted to journey towards her chosen method of escape, but no, her feet weren't liking it, oh, and her brain had other ideas, tempting her to tackle the unknown once more to seek that elusive enlightenment.

Okay, fine, her brain won. Returning to the car park entrance, she went about composing herself. Once ready, she stepped forward and...

1952

...the office suddenly reappeared.

The nausea, thankfully, wasn't so harsh this time. More of a niggling gripe in her gut.

'Welcome back,' Felix greeted, still seated behind his desk. 'Please. Do sit down.'

Trinity parked her bum upon the offered chair. 'I don't get it. How can I be in 1952?'

'Asks the girl who once travelled to a prehistoric beach and back again.'

'Okay, fine, I'll rephrase the question. Why am I in 1952?'

'Well, you could hardly visit my office in your time period. The building no longer exists.

Therefore, I took the liberty of creating a time aperture to allow you direct access to mine.'

Trinity frowned. 'A time aperture?'

'In other words, a corridor through to a designated point in time. We use these corridors to safely transport the inexperienced among us – on this occasion, you – from A to B. As you've no doubt gathered, the time aperture itself is invisible. Security measure. Oh, and it's not permanent. Another security measure. It will close when you next return to your own time period.'

'How did you...' And that's where her question ended.

'How did I create it? With a device called an aperture creator, of course.' The reply was almost spoken as if it was obvious o'clock. And then, taking note of Trinity rubbing her fragile abdomen, he added, 'That nausea you're feeling. It only happens the first few times.'

'Yeah, I've kind of already been briefed.'

'Ah, yes. By good old Sebastian Quickly.'

Mr Ramone's mention of such a familiar name intrigued Trinity. Oh, and the blatant contempt splashed across the "good old" section of his sentence didn't go unnoticed. 'I'm guessing you know him.'

Behind Felix's faltering smile lay a disagreeable grimace likened to a man who expects to taste sugar but instead swallows salt. 'Let's just say we have... history.'

To Trinity, it was obvious. Felix Ramone and Sebastian Quickly were a far cry from best buddy material. Exactly why was the burning question. She expected him to offload a tad more information relating to the man she'd met all those years ago on that beach. However, Felix failed to divulge any further snippets of gossip.

'Now, where were we?' Felix uttered, shrugging off any signs of ill-feeling towards a certain Mr Quickly. 'Ah, yes, the nausea. It's caused by your inexperienced body adjusting to the sheer physical stress of skipping from one time period to another. You see, in order to meet me here in 1952, you just travelled faster than the speed of light. Backwards.'

In response, Trinity's stomach attempted an impromptu triple somersault. 'I swear, if you keep banging on about nausea, I will personally deliver a pavement pizza all over your desk.'

Felix's fresh half-smile told Trinity he understood fully. 'That won't be necessary.' The man cleared his throat. 'Now, let's get down to business.' He opened the foolscap file. It contained official-looking typed paperwork. 'I must say, your psychology report from five years ago makes for a very interesting read.'

Trinity couldn't believe what she was hearing. 'My psychology report?'

Ignoring her query, Felix made an exaggerated point of skim-reading the document aloud. 'Deserted beach, blah, blah, blah, Sebastian Quickly, blah, blah, blah, pteranodon attack, blah, blah, blah, pocket watch, silvery shimmer, blah, blah, blah, back in your bedroom, goodbye Sebastian, the end.' He looked up, taking note of Trinity's evident disquiet. 'Is anything the matter?'

'How did you get hold of that report? It's supposed to be confidential.'

'I might have accidentally...' Felix offered a somewhat childish smirk. '...stolen it.'

'Stolen it?'

The man waved down her ballooning unease. 'There's no need for concern. I'll return the document a moment after it came into my possession. That way, Doctor Penfold will remain blissfully unaware that it even left her office. In fact, I'll take it back now.'

Producing his pocket watch, he vanished in a silvery shimmer. Along with the report.

Okaaaaaay, so Trinity was now alone.

Oh, a few seconds later, another silvery shimmer and Felix reappeared, seated again at his desk, no foolscap file in sight. 'Mission accomplished.' His face oozed a generous helping of triumph as he put away the pocket watch. 'By all accounts, you have quite a story to tell. Are you still trying to convince people that the beach incident actually happened?'

She shook her head, a gloomy no. 'What's the point? Nobody ever did believe me.'

'Good. It's best the normals hear nothing more about it.'

'The normals?'

'Yes. People without your gift.' And off her puzzled frown, he added, 'My dear Trinity Truelove, do you not realise? You have been blessed with the ability to travel through time.' He paused for a moment to allow the statement to sink in. 'Oh, yes. Your trip to that beach was no one-off fluke. Since then, your special talent has been maturing and developing inside you.' His eyes glinted with oodles of enthusiasm. He clearly loved dishing out the preamble. 'With the necessary training, which I will be happy to provide, you will learn exactly how to control and master your ability.' He leaned back in his chair. 'Very soon, Trinity Truelove, the entire history of the world will be at your disposal.'

Speechless, Trinity failed to prevent her mouth flopping open. The entire history of the world? Oh, wow, all her life, she'd known she was special... even though nobody else seemed to agree. Yet here was living proof that she was not so ordinary, not so dull and certainly not a total head-warp after all. Hah, stuff you, haters.

'Any questions so far?' Felix asked.

‘Yes. You’re not from the school, are you?’

He shook his head, a definite no. ‘Little white lie. I needed a cover story. The normals are blissfully unaware of our existence. I’d like it to stay that way.’ He pressed the fingertips of both hands together. ‘I am a member of a secret organisation called the Order of Time, its purpose, to monitor and police time travel.’ A pause, but only brief. ‘You see, the majority of time travellers are honest, decent citizens. However, there are a number of rotten apples in the orchard who seek to manipulate history for their own personal gain. We simply cannot allow that.’ He leaned forward, grave face initiated. ‘Meddling with time is a dangerous game. One false move and the entire universe could implode.’ He leaned back again, losing his grave face and acquiring a way too chirpy beam. ‘But don’t let that put you off.’

Trinity sat in stunned silence, not knowing what to do, say or think. History manipulated, the universe imploding, what was she letting herself in for?

Then oh, that odd sensation from five years ago sang its encore, not quite an ache, not quite a twinge, not quite an itch, not quite a shiver. She clocked the look of concern on Felix’s face, but failed to comprehend his echoing words. The girl couldn’t help herself, she fell backwards, her chair toppling over. And that’s when she realised, oh, no, it was happening again. She was about to plunge helplessly through time.

Cue the silvery shimmer and...

1771

...Trinity landed bum first onto a patch of hard, compacted ground, ouch, that hurt, some kind of dirt track or bridle road cutting its way through leafy woodland. Then oh, no time to stand up, a deafening clatter of hooves noised up her world as a horse-drawn carriage thundered towards the seated girl.

‘Whoaaaaaa!’ cried the startled coachman, yanking hard on the reins.

From clatter to clippety-clop, the two horses responded, snorting their discontent, grinding to an ungainly halt mere centimetres from the cowering teenager.

‘What do you think you are doing, sitting in the middle of the road?’ the coachman yelled, his voice gruff and unrefined, glaring down at the girl from the wooden seat situated high up at the front of the carriage. ‘You could have been trampled to death.’

Trinity leapt to her feet and brushed herself down, a human shaking leaf. ‘I’m sorry, I...’ In her confused and fretful state, she surveyed the area, nothing but trees to the left, trees to the right, then returned her attention to the driver of the carriage. ‘...don’t know where I am.’

‘I can tell you where you are. In my way, that is where.’

Two heads belonging to the passengers popped out for a curious peek through the glassless windows of the coach doors, one man, one woman, both middle-aged, him with a white periwig, bushy sideburns and a double chin, her with a neck of pearls and a scalp of greying locks, tied up and tightly bunned, providing a perfect setting for the unhindered display of matching pearl earrings. The two of them were clearly members of the well-to-do moneybags brigade.

‘What the devil is going on out there?’ the male passenger demanded to learn, his grey-blue eyes proving a stark contrast to a pair of rotund cheeks boasting both the blush and shine of fresh red apples. ‘Why have we stopped?’

‘Girl in the road, Mr Pancroft.’ The coachman indicated to Trinity’s distressed jeans. ‘A filthy beggar, judging by her ragged clothes.’

Trinity took great offence at the coachman’s audacity. Filthy beggar? Ragged clothes? ‘Oi, you,’ she protested, jabbing an index finger towards the very, very intentional rips in her jeans. ‘This happens to be fashion.’

Pancroft clambered out of the carriage, but kept a cautious distance from the girl. Trinity looked him up and down. She knew it was rude to disrespect people based upon their appearance, but come on, the laughable disparity of scrawny legs and an overfed belly gave him the amusing body shape of a frog.

His upmarket attire consisted of a wide-lapelled coat, a satin shirt, knee-length breeches and buckled shoes. Trinity had seen this type of status dress before, worn by male subjects of the priceless oil paintings she’d cast indifferent eyes upon during last month’s yawn-fest school trip to a stately home. She was no history expert, but all assumption roads led to the probability that she’d ended up sometime in the latter half of the eighteenth century.

Important question: How was she supposed to get back?

Unhelpful answer: ???

Annoyed and put out, Pancroft looked up at the coachman. ‘What on earth is a beggar doing out here in the woods?’ His attention then switched to the supposed beggar, his weasel eyes squinting at the bold OMG lettering on her tee-shirt. ‘Omg?’ he grunted, not understanding it as an acronym and instead pronouncing it as a word. ‘Is that your name?’

Trinity sneered the mother of all sneers. ‘You seriously need to get with it.’

Pancroft frowned the father of all frowns. ‘Get with it? What kind of strange language is that?’

For the second time, the concerned female passenger turtle-headed out of the window. ‘Dear husband, please get back inside this carriage. This is the middle of nowhere.’ Mrs

Pancroft's apprehensive eyes scanned the surrounding trees, every moving branch, every dubious shadow. 'Danger could be lurking anywhere out here in the forest.'

'No need to worry about me, my dear,' came the stout man's reply, all smug and hoighty-toighty. 'The only lurker I see before me is a mere vagrant. Nothing I cannot handle.'

Trinity snorted her utmost disagreement. 'I'd like to see you try.'

Pancroft glared at Trinity. Trinity counter-glared at Pancroft.

Then oh, three armed men on horseback galloped towards them, a highwayman leading the assault, dressed in the theme of black, a tricorne hat, a dark frilly shirt, high leather boots, a long frock coat and an eye mask concealing his identity. Two unshaven henchmen accompanied their leader, flintlock pistols at the ready, dressed in stained linen clothes, no eye masks, too stupid to disguise themselves.

'Stand and deliver,' cried the highwayman, wielding a far superior pistol, bigger, better, shinier and evidently more dangerous. 'Your money or your life.'

Pancroft yelped in horror and raised both hands. Mrs Pancroft screamed, backing further inside the carriage. And the terrified coachman, he leapt off the footboard, legging it towards the cover of trees, self-survival his priority, not once sparing a thought for the safety of his passengers.

'Please do not shoot me,' Pancroft whimpered, almost but not quite at the humiliating stage of wetting himself. 'I can give you anything. Anything you want.'

The highwayman smirked. 'That's the general idea, Pancroft.'

Even though he was tooth-chatteringly afraid, the rich man failed to prevent his uncontainable self-importance kicking in. 'Mr Pancroft to you.'

'Is that right?' The highwayman dismounted his steed and brandished his weapon like some kind of trophy. 'This loaded pistol says otherwise.'

Pancroft thought it best not to argue the toss regarding the thief's logic as both henchmen climbed down from their horses and joined their leader. Three men, three guns, big trouble for the posh couple.

Meanwhile, away from all the action, Trinity stood in wide-eyed silence, frozen on the spot, in a state of fear, yes, but vastly overshadowed by awe and wonder. The highwayman, he hadn't yet looked her way, he hadn't even noticed her, but was it Sebastian Quickly? He certainly looked like the guy she'd met on that prehistoric beach. His clothes, his face (well, what she could see of it), his hair, his voice, all his features, they were exactly how she remembered them. It had to be the same person, surely.

'Don't be shy, Mrs Pancroft,' the highwayman who was probably-maybe Sebastian Quickly called into the carriage. 'Step outside where I can see you.'

Mrs Pancroft remained a passenger, shrinking into herself, unwilling to play ball. In response, one of the henchmen yanked open the carriage door and grabbed her arm, removing the woman by force from her sanctuary.

'Hurry up, people,' prompted the highwayman, holding open a jute sack in his free hand. 'Hand over your shinies and sparklies. And make it quick, I'm a busy man, places to go, people to rob, oh, what a hectic life I lead.'

The two victims disposed of their worldly wares. Pearl earrings from her, various coinage from him, the pearl necklace from her, a jewel-encrusted snuff box from him, an assortment of rings from her, and so on, and so on, everything tossed into the sack.

'You will never get away with this,' hissed Pancroft, not a fan of losing his cherished belongings to a common thief.

The common thief in question scoffed a whatever. 'I already have.'

With the tossing of valuables spent, the highwayman checked his haul. Even though he'd acquired a rich bevy of trinkets, he looked positively incensed. Exactly why was more than a burning question, it was a white-hot inferno of a mystery.

'Where are they?' he snarled at Pancroft.

The posh man dealt a clueless shrug. 'Where are what?'

'Dark blue gemstones. Smooth. Round. Shiny.'

'I have no idea what you are babbling on about,' came Pancroft's jittery response.

Irritated, the highwayman flung aside the stolen goodies, the jute sack landing upon the ground with a tinny chink. Sliding his pistol into its rightful holster, he grabbed the stout fellow by the collar with both hands. 'Yes, you do.' He was most insistent, nose-to-nose. 'You won the stones last night in a card game. Ten of them in a black drawstring pouch. I was there, I saw you.'

The well-to-do man's proverbial penny dropped. 'Oh, those stones. Huh, worthless little rocks. I only accepted them because they were all my opponent had left to gamble.'

The highwayman tightened his grip. 'They're not so worthless on my side of the fence. So be a good gentleman and hand them over. Now.'

In search of the thief's requirements, Pancroft tapped his coat pockets. Uh-oh, no joy. 'I... I appear to have mislaid them.'

'Liar.'

'I swear, I am telling you the truth.'

Still, the bandit didn't believe him. 'Pancroft, if you don't relieve yourself of that pouch right now, I will –' Sudden silence. A half-completed threat abandoned. The reason was simple. The highwayman had just this second noticed a certain thirteen-year-old girl watching from the sidelines. Still clasping his victim's collar, he asked Trinity, 'Who are you supposed to be?'

Such an odd question threw the girl. ‘Don’t you recognise me?’

The highwayman’s continued bewilderment told the teenager he didn’t.

‘Okay, so it’s been a while,’ Trinity hastened to add. ‘Like, five years and stuff. But —’

‘Aha, so the two of you are acquainted,’ surmised Pancroft, his hoighty-toightiness making a return appearance. ‘Hah, I would not be surprised if you are working together as a team. The master plan: She throws herself in front of a coach, making it easier for you to rob the passengers.’

The highwayman, now doubly irritated, let go of Pancroft’s collar. ‘I have never before laid eyes upon that girl.’

‘A likely story.’ And then Pancroft called across to Trinity, ‘I will not forget your face in a hurry. Nor your...’ He indicated to her yellow OMG tee-shirt, the distressed jeans, the bright pink trainers. ‘...your strange attire.’ Returning his attention to the highwayman, he warned, ‘Mark my words, the parish constable will be hearing about this vile partnership.’

‘Oh, no, he won’t.’ The thief drew his pistol and aimed it at the rich man. ‘Dead men don’t talk.’

‘Sebastian, no!’ cried Trinity, not wishing for anybody to get hurt.

The highwayman froze, a long-trailing groan finding it difficult to squeeze through such a taut mouth. Returning his weapon to its holster home, he slowly turned to face the teenager, the black look on his face akin to an impending thunderstorm. His two accomplices also gave the girl their full narrowed-eyed attention. Uh-oh, Trinity then realised why. She’d called out his name, revealing his identity. Oops, this did not bode well.

Behind them, Pancroft saw his opportunity and obtained possession of the jute sack. He and his wife then made a speedy getaway towards the open-armed safety of the trees. Taking note of the escapees, both henchmen twisted around and aimed their pistols, but —

‘Let them go,’ Sebastian ordered. ‘They are no longer important.’

Following his command, the subordinates reluctantly lost their pistols to their holsters. And then the highwayman removed his eye mask to reveal he was indeed Sebastian Quickly.

Oh. My. God. After all these years, it was actually him. And wow, he hadn't aged a day.

However, judging by Sebastian's hostile glare, a touching reunion looked doubtful. 'It appears we have a much bigger fish to fry.' He pointed straight at the teenager. 'Men. Grab that girl.'

The two henchmen charged towards Trinity. She in turn legged it around the coachman's horses, seeking sanctuary at the opposite side of the carriage. Slowing to a halt, she realised at once that it was hardly the greatest of hiding places, nor the best means of escape, for one of the henchmen followed her route and approached his nervous quarry. Uh-oh, time to make tracks. Double uh-oh, the other henchman emerged from behind the rear end of the carriage, blocking her path. Trapped. What now?

Aha, the solution, she yanked open the door of the carriage and jumped inside. Slamming the door shut behind her, she made her way with haste through the coach interior, opened the opposite door and stepped outside.

The henchmen jogged around the carriage and came into view, again one to Trinity's left, one to Trinity's right. As they made their lumbering approach, Trinity re-entered the carriage, clambering back through to the other side and emerging from the opposite door, much to the irritation of her hunters.

Sebastian, meanwhile, stood leaning against a tree, his arms folded, the fattest of grins filling his face, amused by the teenager's scattergun approach to evading capture. He didn't move. He didn't attempt to fry his bigger fish. Instead, he carried on tree-leaning, watching the farce unfold.

Once again, the henchmen circumnavigated the vehicle and closed in on Trinity. And once again, Trinity avoided capture by re-entering (or rather re-re-entering) the carriage. Midway

through this particular interior journey, Trinity stepped on something hard. Lifting her foot, she discovered a black drawstring pouch. Oh, wow, presumably the black drawstring pouch. Snatching it from the carriage floor, she peered inside. Dark blue gemstones. Smooth. Round. Shiny. The very stones Sebastian wanted to get his hands on.

Argh, the nearest door flew open, the henchmen attempting to pile inside. Making a hasty retreat, Trinity stuffed the pouch inside one of the back pockets of her jeans. Pursuing their prey, the two men found the journey an uncomfortable struggle, their larger bodies unaccustomed to such cramped surroundings.

Finally vacating the coach, the henchmen looked right, looked left, where was the girl? In a rare moment of using his brain, the first henchman dropped onto all fours, his head close to the ground, his eyes scanning the underside of the carriage for signs of the hunted party. Aha, spotting Trinity's legs heading around the vehicle, he leapt to his feet and silently gestured for his partner in crime to journey through the coach interior while he jogged around the carriage in the opposite direction. Nodding his understanding, the second henchman clambered back inside the carriage, struggling through, bumping into wooden panels and upholstery, losing his pistol from its holster along the way and not noticing, the weapon finding a new home on the carriage seating.

Clocking the first henchman emerging from around the carriage, Trinity jolted to an awkward halt. She went about doubling back and re-entering the carriage, but no, the other henchman burst free from within, leaving the door hanging wide open. Trinity backed away, nowhere to run, nowhere to hide, unsure of her next move. The cackling henchmen advanced, their arms held out like those of hungry zombies. Uh-oh, what now?

Aha, light bulb moment, she whipped out her mobile phone. Calling somebody, however, was the last thought on her mind. No point. She wouldn't get a decent signal for over two

hundred years. Instead, she held out the device, the camera lens aimed at her chasers who stopped in their tracks, wary, unsure.

‘Come any closer,’ she warned them, ‘and I’ll trap your souls inside my magic slate.’

The henchmen traded bemused looks. Then came raucous laughter. Not believing a word of it, they ignored the warning and drew closer.

‘Hashtag you’ll be sorry,’ chanted Trinity, thumbing the camera icon on her screen, the white flash and camera shutter sound effect taking the henchmen by surprise.

Trinity twisted the phone around, showing them the fresh photo on her screen. A likeness of two men. Two familiar men. Them! Argh, believing their souls were indeed trapped, they both screamed in terror. Within a matter of seconds, they’d mounted their horses and were out of there, faster than fast.

Aglow with one-upwomanship, Trinity failed to notice Sebastian’s stealthy approach.

‘I just can’t get the staff,’ he uttered, faux woe style, snatching the phone from her hand and studying it with interest. Raising the device at arm’s length and aiming the camera lens at his own face, Sebastian struck a pose. ‘Selfie time,’ he chanted, stiffening his lips into a mega-overblown pout, the absolute father of all duckfaces. Photo taken, he tossed the phone back to its rightful owner.

‘That’s hardly an eighteenth century device,’ Sebastian remarked, circling the girl with a heavy air of suspicion. ‘What exactly is your business in 1771?’

‘You think I’m here in this forest by choice?’ She jabbed a thumb at the horse-drawn carriage behind her. ‘I almost got splattered by that thing.’

The hint of a wicked grin waved hello on Sebastian’s face. ‘Didn’t your mummy ever teach you to look both ways when crossing the road?’ Ignoring the teen’s subsequent displeasure, he added, ‘Tell me why you are here.’

‘Isn’t it obvious? Once again, I’ve accidentally fallen through time.’

‘I see.’ Sebastian indicated to the girl’s modern clothes. ‘That explains your notable lack of disguise.’ Then the first two words of Trinity’s most recent sentence sunk in. ‘Once again, you say? So this has happened to you before?’

Trinity frowned. And then a secondary frown out-wrinkled the first. What was Sebastian playing at? Why was he pretending not to know her? Granted, the first time around, she was eight years old. A little girl in a cat-themed nightie. But even so, five years of further growth hadn’t exactly changed her facial features beyond recognition. She still retained the same button nose, the same bad attitude eyes, the same slightly (yet noticeable) wonky mouth she’d been cursed with since birth, the only difference being, she was little older now. A teenager as opposed to a child.

‘You know it’s happened before,’ came Trinity’s tetchy response. ‘You were there. You found me on that beach when I was eight. Remember?’

The man shook his head. ‘Doesn’t ring a bell.’

‘How could you possibly forget? It was a significant day in the history of me. You saved my life.’

‘Is that a fact? How lovely of me. Where’s my medal?’ Sebastian pointed to his mouth. ‘Read my lips, twenty-first century girl. We. Have. Never. Met.’

Trinity pointed to her own mouth. ‘Read my lips. Five. Minutes. Ago. I. Called. Out. Your. Name.’

‘Lucky guess. I’m not the only Sebastian who ever lived.’

‘Quickly. Your full name is Sebastian Quickly. How could I possibly know that?’

There came a reaction from the man, albeit subtle, at the correct mention of his moniker. And then it was gone, lost to the ether. Offering a vague shoulder shrug, he suggested, ‘Maybe you’re a mind reader.’

Trinity was fast losing her patience with the guy. Why keep up this infuriating charade? Their previous meeting had indeed taken place. Definitely. It hadn't been a dream. Ultra-definitely. So why was he denying his involvement? Hmm, the teen was no authority on the subject of time travel, but even she knew it didn't erase the traveller's recollection of events. Otherwise, she herself would have no memory of the trip to that beach five years ago.

Ohhhhhh, and then a theory was born. The guy hadn't aged. Therefore, 'Oh, my God. You don't recall our first meeting because it hasn't happened yet.' Trinity's eyes shone with eureka zeal. 'But it will happen. And I reckon it'll be today.'

'Oh, really? So you also moonlight as a fortune teller?'

'The last time we met, you were wearing those exact clothes.'

'Riiiiight.' He returned to his inquisitive circling routine. 'So let me get this straight. What you're saying is, according to the law of probability...' He indicated to himself and his attire. '...me standing here in the same outfit suggests that a trip through time to introduce myself to the eight-year-old version of you is imminent. Am I warm?'

'You are proper scorching.'

The highwayman mock scratched his chin, now circling the girl in the opposite direction. 'Okaaaaay. Let's say, for argument's sake, I'm in a life-saving mood. There are a lot of beaches in the world. How am I supposed to find you?'

'Oh.' Trinity felt her recent eureka zeal melting away to nothing. 'Good point.' The beach, she didn't know where it was. Or when it was. 'It was just... a beach,' she murmured in an all too pathetic manner. 'In prehistoric times.'

'Oh, goody, that narrows it down to several hundred million years.'

Trinity sighed, feeling a #fail coming on. Then aha, she remembered the line Sebastian had uttered to her younger self about the setting. 'You told me it's the place you visit when you need to get away from it all for a while.'

‘Ahhhh.’ Sebastian’s mouth curled into what could only be described as an almost-smile, nearly there, not quite perfectly formed, but existing all the same. ‘That beach.’

Glad to be finally getting through to the man, she found herself overwhelmed by a scattergun wave of manic gusto, reeling off sentences in rapid, erratic bursts. ‘When I was eight, you called me by my name. I thought, eh? How does he know who I am? We’ve never met. And you said I told you when I was older. Well, I’m older now, so I guess you were talking about today. So it’s really, really, important that you remember my name when you go back in time. It’s Trinity Truelove, yeah? Otherwise our conversation won’t play out correctly.’

For the longest of moments, a deep in thought Sebastian stared at the teenager, scanning her face, studying her eyes, as if attempting to suss her out, or catch a glimpse of her soul, or even read her mind. For that same longest of moments, not a single sound fell out of his mouth. Why the silence? Why the mystery? Why was he acting so annoying?

And then he said, ‘Sorry. I think I’ll pass on that one. I’m not in the mood for a day out at the seaside.’

‘But you don’t understand. My younger self is in so much danger. That pteranodon looked really hungry. And so did its mates. If you don’t save me right now, everything will be different and we’ll be messing around with the natural course of time and the entire universe might implode.’

Sebastian was most amused by her rabid doom-mongering. ‘Are you always this excitable?’ And then something unexpected happened. He actually gave in. ‘Okay, you win,’ he said, holding up the exaggerated hands of mock surrender. ‘I’ll go for a paddle in the sea and do my good deed for the day when I have a spare five minutes.’

‘Not good enough. You need to go now. You said yourself a pteranodon will see me as a tasty little snack. Well, technically, you haven’t said that yet. But trust me, you will.’

Sebastian waved down the girl's latest case of the jitters. 'Trinity. Think about it. It doesn't matter when I go back, whether it's in the next two minutes or in half an hour's time. As long as I appear on that beach at the exact same moment as you, everything will be fine.'

'Oh. Right.' She felt a tad foolish, but, 'You need to remember, I'm a newbie.' And then a worrying afterthought raised its trembling hand. 'Hold on a minute. How do we know when that exact same moment actually happened?'

'We don't. Which is why I need to do this.'

Sebastian lunged forward and grabbed her hand, interlocking his fingers with hers. Trinity yelped in surprise, attempting to yank herself free, but his grip was too tight. Then oh, a blue-white glow radiated between their palms, weird but thankfully painless, just for a moment, a matter of seconds, before fading to nothing, after which the man withdrew his hand, freeing a very, very alarmed teenager.

'What did you just do?' she demanded to know, stepping back, checking her hand, making sure it was all right.

'I paired with your time aura.'

Trinity grimaced. 'Any chance of explaining that again without it sounding so creepy?'

'Relax, it's nothing sinister. I extracted your travel history of the day you first fell through time. Think of it like internet browsing history on a computer. I'll now be able to use this information to locate your younger self.'

Relief poured out of Trinity. The universe was safe, it wouldn't implode today. 'So... with that one touch, you have all the details you need? The exact time, the place, everything?'

'That's how it works.' And then Sebastian asked, 'Any more requests while I'm in such a humanitarian mood?'

'Yes. I'd like to get back to where I came from?'

'Sorry. No can do.'

Ouch. Talk about abrupt and final. A moment ago, he was most obliging, most “humanitarian.” And now look at him, playing for the mean-spirited team. Huh, it was official. This guy was a mood yo-yo.

‘Why not?’ she dared to enquire.

‘Can’t be bothered.’

‘You helped me last time.’

‘For me, the last time hasn’t happened yet. Therefore, it doesn’t count.’

Sebastian’s horse grazed nearby. He began to head towards the animal.

Trinity clocked his impending exit. ‘Hey. Where do you think you’re going?’

No reply from the man in black.

‘You can’t just leave me here.’

The highwayman stopped and turned around. The look on his face burned with the probability that he could indeed abandon the girl. ‘What do you think I am, a taxi service?’ He continued to walk away. ‘Make your own way home.’

‘I don’t know how.’

Taking hold of the reins in one hand and patting the horse’s snout with the other, he uttered, ‘Not my problem.’

Uh-oh, it was true. It wasn’t the guy’s problem. But he was her only hope. An only hope who was preparing to mount his steed and ride away. If she did nothing to stop him, if she simply stood there and allowed his departure, he would be long gone and she would be... well... history. Oh, God, think, girl, think, she needed to do something. Something desperate. Something drastic. But what? And that’s when she spotted it through the open door of the carriage. A metal object abandoned on the seating.

The henchman’s flintlock pistol. Aha!

Sensing that something wasn't quite right, Sebastian turned around and followed her line of vision. Oh, he also laid eyes upon the pistol. No time to lose, he lost grip of the reins and set about making a hasty return. Without a second thought, Trinity dived into the carriage, grabbed the pistol and held it in both hands.

Sebastian approached the open door. 'Don't even think about it.'

Moment of truth time, she aimed her newfound weapon at the highwayman. Wearing her best threatening face, she growled slowly but surely, 'Take. Me. Back.'

A concerned Sebastian reversed a number of paces, both arms raised. 'I strongly advise you to lay down that firearm.'

But Trinity wasn't listening, the pistol enjoying its ongoing aimed state. 'Take me back, Sebastian. You'd better do as I say. Or I'll shoot.'

'Is this some kind of joke?'

Not in a joking mood, and to enhance her point, a very serious teenager wrapped a finger around the trigger. Trinity could deduce exactly what the man was thinking. Before, he'd no doubt labelled the girl as just another dumb modern teenager. But look, shock of shocks, she was much more than that.

'Be very, very careful,' uttered an anxious Sebastian. 'That trigger is a lot more sensitive than you think. Even the slightest pressure could —'

BANG, the gun went off, the sheer force of the shot sending Trinity flying backwards onto the seating of the carriage. Sebastian ducked, a grey wisp of gunpowder residue catching the breeze above him. The two horses whinnied their terror, a duet of equestrian screams, front legs raised, hooves kicking the air. And then, back on all fours, they were off, charging along the bridle road, away from danger, away from that awful noise, taking the carriage and its lone teenage occupant with it.

The open door slammed shut, the sudden lurch of the speeding coach sending Trinity crashing into the backrest panels of the seating and bouncing off onto the coach floor. It didn't take a genius to calculate that the carriage was hurtling out of control.

Sebastian, meanwhile, rose from his awkward squat. Alarmed was the understatement of the eighteenth century as he watched the wooden chariot disappear into the distance. He patted his hat to make sure it hadn't been knocked off his head or damaged by the gunshot. Good. Still there. And still in one piece.

'She shot at me,' he croaked to himself, shaking his head in disbelief. 'She actually shot at me.' An inappropriate grin sprouted upon his face. 'Wow. That girl's got balls.' Shaping his hands into a funnel to amplify his voice, he called into the forest, 'Any takers on saving that fair maiden?'

He waited.

Nothing.

'Anybody?'

Again, he waited.

Again, nothing.

'No?'

Silence from the trees. Hush from the brambles. Zero volunteers.

'Looks like it's up to me then.' And as Sebastian mounted his horse, he cried out, 'Follow that carriage.'

The thumpity-thump of galloping hooves upon turf signalled the animal speeding into action, leaving a dancing, almost rejoicing haze of yellow-brown dust in its wake.

Man and beast were in hot pursuit.

Up ahead, the runaway carriage rattled and shuddered behind its Equidae engines, the four wooden wheels spinning so fast, they were in danger of breaking away from the chassis. The

spooked horses showed no signs of slowing down, charging forward at an incredible pace, transforming trees on both sides of the track into fuzzy smudges of green.

Rolling here, rolling there, rolling everywhere on the floor of the coach interior, Trinity struggled for control, reaching out, grasping, snatching, all to no avail. She tried again. Fail. And again. Fail 2.0. Then yes, thankfully, she won herself grip, two fingers of her right hand hooking a groove in the wooden panelling below the seating. Initial grip established, her left hand went on to enjoy its own victory, three fingers and a thumb. She used her newfound hold to pull herself towards the structure, then clawed her fingernails into the soft quilting of the seat's upholstery, gaining adequate leverage to hoist herself up into a kneeling position. Well done, Trinity, she thought. Award yourself a catching of breath.

Holding on for the proverbial dear life, she shuffled across and popped her head out of the glassless window of the left door. Through the dust and debris made airborne by clattering hooves, she could make out half of one of the two galloping horses.

'Whoaaaaaaa!' she cried out.

No joy. The animal kept on sprinting alongside its partner. Why no response? That's how people commanded horses to quit the dash, wasn't it?

'Whoooooooooaaaaa!' she yelled again, louder this time, just to make sure.

Still no joy. Oh, great. It worked for the coachman. But not for her. Huh, so much for a self-taught crash course in horse control. She then scolded herself inside for thinking of the word "crash." Knowing the predicament she currently faced, it was way too much like tempting fate.

Then oh, she was sure she could hear her name being called. Turning her head to face the source of address, she spotted a horse and its rider gaining ground behind the carriage. Oh, look, it was Sebastian. In hot pursuit. Wow. He was trying to save her.

‘Sebastian!’ she hollered over the clatter of hooves, the rattle of the carriage, the rush of displaced air around her. ‘I can’t get the horses to stop!’

Sebastian nodded his understanding, yanking harder on the reins, his instruction for the horse to gallop, gallop, gallop. All a helpless Trinity could do was stare in open-mouthed awe as the distance began to shrink between the chaser and the chased.

Then bumph, a wheel hit a rocky outcrop, again knocking Trinity to the floor. The entire carriage tipped to the right at a dangerous angle, its left wheels kissing goodbye to terra firma, hurtling along the bridle road on two right wheels only. Behind, Sebastian gasped, predicting the coach to roll over, but no. Gravity took hold, the carriage straightened up and the left wheels found their feet once more.

Inside, Trinity struggled to gain that elusive grip. Outside, rider and horse struggled to gain that elusive ground. Inside, the teenager grappled, grappled, grappled. Outside, all horses galloped, galloped, galloped. Inside, Trinity bagged herself enough grip to heave her body back into a kneeling posture and take a peek through the window at exterior views. Outside, Sebastian bagged himself enough pace to draw level with the left hand side of the speeding carriage and take a peek through the window at interior views.

In a rare moment of compassion, Sebastian called across to Trinity, ‘Are you okay?’

In a not so rare moment of sarcasm, Trinity called across to Sebastian, ‘I’m trapped in a runaway carriage. Do I look okay?’

The highwayman’s response: ‘Fair point.’

Guiding his horse as close to the carriage as he could manage, Sebastian stood up in his stirrups. He steadied himself before reaching out with his right hand and grabbing the wooden lip which ran along the entire length of the carriage roof. Satisfied with his initial grip, his left hand bid farewell to the reins and said hello to the edge of the coachman’s seat.

Next, in a split-second move, he vaulted his left leg up and over the saddle, then sprung from horse to carriage, both feet coming to land on the coachman's footboard.

This time, it was Sebastian holding on for the proverbial dear life as he climbed towards the seat and argh, he slipped and lost his footing, his hands gripping the seat irons, his legs playing the pendulum. Face determined, teeth gritted, he lifted his legs, treading air, a team of two frantic feet searching for a foothold. Then yes, success, the toecaps of his boots boasted a reunion with the footboard. One hasty climb later and he was in the driver's chair. He reached forward to claim the lonely reins, yes, his second success, then went through a series of yanks and pulls.

'Whoaaaaaaa,' he called out. 'Whoa now.'

The two horses ignored his commands, carrying on regardless.

'Whoaaaaaaaaaaaaa,' he repeated, more yanks, more pulls. 'Easy now. Eaaaasyyyyyy.'

At last, the animals responded. There followed a gradual reduction in speed, slowing to a canter, then to a trot, then to a walk, then to a rest. The carriage came to a halt. Sebastian blew out a weighty sigh of relief. Below him, the door flew open and a distressed but relieved Trinity leapt out, dropping onto all fours, touching the grass, the daisies, the dandelions, the soil, glad to be back amid the non-moving sanctuary of solid ground.

After catching her breath, she looked up at Sebastian. 'Thank you.'

'You're welcome.' Sebastian climbed down from the carriage. 'Not that you deserve all the trouble I just went through. You shot at me.'

'I didn't mean for the pistol to go off. I was desperate.'

'I can see that.' He loomed over the teenager. 'Just for the record, don't you go thinking I'm the type of guy who makes a habit of saving people in trouble. Because I'm not.'

Trinity stood up, brushing herself down for the second time that day. 'So why did you save me?'

‘Well, I would say, “I must be in a good mood,” but I’m far from enjoying the gift of happiness, seeing as I didn’t get what I came here for. Damn that idiot Pancroft for mislaying that pouch.’

The teenager felt her back pocket with her fingers, the move clandestine and surreptitious, making sure the drawstring pouch containing the stones was still in residence. Good. It was. Ah, but something told Trinity not to inform Sebastian of her find. The man was eager to obtain the gems, but his motives were unclear. Therefore, for now, it would remain her secret. Finders keepers.

‘What’s so special about those stones?’ she decided to ask, eager to learn.

‘What’s so special about them? Everything, that’s what.’ He shook his head in a mock scolding fashion, as if the reason was common knowledge and Trinity should be ridiculed for playing the dunce. ‘The normals consider them nothing more than insignificant crystals, of no real use to mankind other than, say, costume jewellery. But to time travellers, the stones are made up of arguably the most important element in the universe. Timinium.’

‘Timinium? Never heard of it.’

‘Of course you haven’t. You’ve been brought up with people who think it’s a poor quality derivative of quartz, and therefore not worthy enough to get a mention on the periodic table.’

‘How come it’s so important?’

‘We use timinium to accurately manage time travel. Without it, we have no control, running the risk of falling through the centuries and literally ending up anywhere, just as you have experienced today.’ He produced his silver timepiece. ‘See this pocket watch?’

‘Yeah, yeah, it’s how you get around,’ Trinity cut in. ‘Old news. Tell me something I don’t know.’

Sebastian looked more than a tad thrown by her harsh manner.

This led to Trinity explaining, ‘You kind of showed me last time... which technically hasn’t happened yet... but it will.’

‘Okaaaaaaay. Well, it doesn’t necessarily have to be a pocket watch. Any object will work, as long as it has timinium set into it.’ Losing the watch to his pocket, Sebastian continued his explanation. ‘And while we’re on the subject, timinium has an equally important function. It can be used to move objects other than ourselves through time. The more stones, the larger the cargo. Bagging myself a generous handful of gemstones would help me kick-start my very own private delivery service.’ He offered a smug grin, congratulating himself on his vast knowledge on the subject. Oh, yes, the guy was actually showing off. ‘Unfortunately for me, timinium is notoriously difficult to obtain. The spoilsport “Powers That Be” made sure of that a long time ago to prevent rogue time travellers taking advantage of its lucrative properties. Hence the reason why I’ve had to resort to tracking it down through the ages and stealing it.’ He dealt the listener of his explanation a long-trailing sigh. ‘Such a shame. I could have done with Pancroft’s pouch of stones.’ He ambled over to the carriage and patted it with a yearning hand. ‘This baby is in such good nick.’ He toe-kicked the nearest wheel three times, as though checking the condition and pressure of a tyre on a second-hand motor vehicle. ‘I was hoping to transport it to an auction house in the twenty-first century. The sale would have made me an absolute fortune.’

‘Ah.’ Trinity was glad she hadn’t given away Pancroft’s pouch. Oh, yes, she’d sussed out Sebastian good and proper. ‘So you’re one of the bad apples Felix mentioned.’

Sebastian twisted on his heels to face Trinity, a flash of curiosity evident on his face. ‘You’ve met Felix Ramone?’

Trinity nodded. ‘Before I fell through time, I was in his office in 1952.’

The highwayman was most intrigued. ‘How did you manage to travel so accurately to that particular year?’