

*AMATI*  
*Of Chance and Coincidence*

*BOOK 1*

*A novel by Andrew Ryan*

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For My Daughter  
Elise

Other books by Andrew Ryan

*Amati - Of Chance and Coincidence*  
*Amati - Cross the Sea and Change the Sky*  
*No Traces Backwards*

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'Tis my good luck,'  
crieth the fool!

'Nay, 'tis the law of averages,'  
declareth the scholar.

'But the romantic knoweth, 'tis by  
chance and coincidence.'

## INTRODUCTION

Like most things do at first, it began with a single thought. Years later when he tried to recall a time or place, or even how the subject of his grandfather, Charles Kinsmith's violin became such a persuasive obsession, he found it impossible to do so. It seemed to have just filtered into his mind like the recurring theme of a song or symphony. When it continued to infiltrate his conscious thoughts at random intervals during day or evening, he decided it was time to do something about it. Its consistency nagged him to the point where he wondered if, or for some mysterious reason, the subject had been locked away in his cellular memory, anticipating an event that would trigger its release.

Finally, through the access of modern technology and an amazing opportunity that later presented itself in the form of a letter from his aging uncle, the opportunity to unravel the enigma and assemble all the bits and pieces became available to him.

Absurd as the thought was to him at the beginning, he found himself wondering if the spirit of the violin was calling to him in order to bring about a conclusion to the saga that began in the latter part of the nineteenth century. And that by telling the story of how an Amati violin influenced the lives of so many people for three generations, it would bring to life the solemn intent of one man's magnificent obsession.

The haunting theme finally made sense. The story had to be told in order to venerate for eternity, the hopes and aspirations of a sensitive man, and to give credence to those dreams, albeit ninety years after his death.

His grandfather postured a courageous desire to bring the joy and intricacies of music to the people of a young and aspiring nation, Australia. A land bathed in the warmth of the southern sun, yet diverse in many ways from the land of his birth, England. It was his wish to share his talent with the new colonists and to help imbue an appreciation of music within the limited opportunities afforded to the first and second generation of Australian citizens, many of whom were children born to unfortunate felons, convicted for petty crimes

in England and Ireland and banished to Australia to serve out their sentence at the turn of the nineteenth century; children who had never heard the classic compositions of their European ancestors.

Charles Kinsmith had prepared himself for the task, or so he thought. What he eventually discovered was a country bustling with incredible potential, yet teeming with what appeared to be invincible challenges. Determined to bring his dream to a reality, he applied every effort to stick to his resolve, only to find that even though most people were favourably disposed toward music, more often than not it was low in their list of priorities. For them, the challenges of day to day living took precedence over everything else.

Charles Kinsmith died thirty-two years before his grandson was born. Another thirty-five years were to pass when, behooved by passion for his grandfather's aspirations, the recurring theme of the violin's bizarre disappearance finally made sense.

'Of Chance and Coincidence' traces the epic events of Charles Kinsmith's noble ambitions, his loves and disappointments.

## **ADDENDUM**

If the reader is interested in what happened to the Amati violin's catastrophic fate in a remote ghost town in Western Australia an e-book short description is available at [www.AndrewRyanAuthor.com](http://www.AndrewRyanAuthor.com) entitled – 'Amati's inconceivable fate'.

## CHAPTER ONE

The train for London was scheduled to depart the Brighton railway station at eight o'clock that particular morning in April 1885. As usual, Hettie, the ageing and faithful housekeeper for more years than Charles could remember, was already busying herself with the day's chores. First preparing breakfast for the family, then making last minute checks to make sure Charles had everything packed in readiness for a journey she had always hoped he would never take.

When satisfied there was nothing else she could do, she sighed deeply, then as usual whenever her sentiments got in the way of her duties, bit her lip, shook her head as though it was the panacea for all problems, straightened her back as much as her dowager's hump would allow, then set about protecting her image with an air of indifference. Everyone in the family knew it was an act she put on in order to keep her place as a servant, but for Hettie's sake, and her sake only, the family went along with it just the same. She was, as she had confessed many times over the years, a 'dyed-in-the-wool' stickler for custom, and nothing on God's earth could ever change that. But with the dawning of this day she doubted her ability to maintain that strict stance, when she knew that this was the day to farewell Charles, and she feared it was probably for the last time in her life.

She knew and loved him as if he were her own son. She was on hand at the time of his birth, and all the years that followed. Now faced with the pangs of separation, it all seemed for nothing. She realized how foolish she had been to believe that this grown man with passions of his own would still be around when she took her last breath.

A light shower of rain had fallen, leaving small puddles dotted here and there on the railway station platform, and from a break in the clouds a streak of weak sunlight struggled to brighten the day. Charles had hardly noticed. His mind was still endeavouring to come to grips with the complete and utter breakdown of Hettie's staunch regimen for convention.

A tear had first appeared in one eye, a telltale sign that her defence had been breached. Soon, the face that had always portrayed an image of staunchness and courage, could deny no longer the pent-up emotions that had always been there. Tears filled the crevices of her ageing face and she had reached out to him, burying her head in his vest.

His response had been natural and warm.

She felt the strength of his arms encircle her frail body, and then with a robust hug that went back through the years, she felt the depth of his sincerity warm her heart. She sighed but did not straighten herself or dare shake her head, for she could not. He had stepped back to cup her face in his hands. He smiled, and then lowered his head to tenderly kiss her thin cheeks. Words were not necessary. The expression on his face said it all.

She took hold of his hands and held them against her bosom, and then raising them slowly to her face, she lingered for a moment to savour the extraordinary display of affection that passed between them. Then raising his hands to her lips, she kissed the sensitive tips of his fingers in a rare demonstration of her esteem for his musical talent. At that sad, yet poignant moment, she knew there was nothing she could say or do to help change his mind. A lifetime of serving him was nearing its end. The brutal reality of his departure was too much for her and she turned and quietly left the room. Struggling to contain his own sentiments, he wondered if it would be the last time he would see her.

Several months before this day, he had made a decision, knowing full well that the consequences of following it through would test his ability to become a successful musician, in a country very different from his native England. He was now twenty-six years of age, and except for a short trip to Italy the year before, he had never traveled overseas, let alone to Sydney, Australia.

It had not been an easy decision for Charles. It meant leaving behind everything that was familiar to him, and more importantly, an affectionate and devoted family. In Charles' way of thinking, that always included Hettie.

When he first advised his parents that he was contemplating accepting the position of concertmaster for the opera company's first overseas tour in Australia, the news affected them deeply. They were

shocked, and applied every means at their disposal to try talking him out of it, but it had not worked for them.

They suspected that something must have happened whilst he was in Italy for him to become so restless. His usual bright disposition had changed, leaving them feeling bewildered. It was not that he had become moody or indifferent; it was something deeper than that, and whenever they tried to get him to talk about it, he would quickly change the subject, telling them they would not understand.

Everyone expected him to be ablaze with enthusiasm for having acquired his most cherished possession, the Amati violin, but those moments were rare. Instead he applied his time delving into subjects that the family seldom spoke about, which in affect left them feeling that he was distancing himself from them. Finally, both his parents resorted to badgering him in an effort to change his mind, and when that did not work they tried cajoling him.

In the end they gave up. His mind had become firmly affixed on the notion that not only his career in music needed to be more clearly defined, but his own life also. Peace finally settled upon the household, and together with his younger brother, his parents accompanied him to the railway station to bid their final goodbye.

His poignant farewell with Hettie earlier had taken him by surprise, and although he cherished the moment, he did not want it to influence the short time he had left before boarding the train.

Arriving at the station with his family, Charles looked for an excuse; anything that would help bring some relief to the disappointment already expressed on each of their solemn faces. The train was his first attempt.

“Trains often remind me of caterpillars,” he said with a cheerful lilt in his voice.

His brother Hayden screwed up his face and looked at him as though he had gone clear out of his mind, and then shrugged his shoulders to move on ahead of his parents. He did not have to say anything; he knew Charles would get his message.

His father conferred with a casual nod.

“Do they dear?” his mother replied kindly.

“Well just look at it all stretched out on the rail,” said Charles moving on. “It’s all brown and sort of earthy looking, and it’s got a black head that’s hissing and blowing off steam, and looking for all the world that if it doesn’t get moving soon it will explode.”

“Hmm, I see what you mean,” said his Mother. Hayden rolled his eyes. His attempt at trying to make light of the situation received only a placid response; the reality of his departure held them firmly in its grip.

They had reached the edge of the platform. Charles’ mother sidled closer to him, and taking him firmly by one arm, she leaned on him with a grip that shouted her fears and disappointments. A short time had passed when, with all good intent to delay the family’s fears, she endeavoured to solicit a promise from him. A pledge that he would return home when the opera season had run its full term.

He was about to explain that he could not make such a promise, when suddenly the shrilling sound of a steam whistle filled the air, followed immediately by several short bursts of the same ear-splitting sound that sent passengers and visitors into a flurry.

Then a middle-aged man dressed in a crumpled blue uniform stepped from the back of the train, dividing the crowd by swinging a bunch of keys in his hand. When he reached the centre of the platform he stopped, faced the train, then swaying side to side blew hard on a pea-whistle, before taking another long breath to shout at the top of his voice.

“All aboard! All aboard!”

The months of planning and carefully documenting his future had finally arrived. Before him stood his mother, father and brother, each one locked in a moment of anxious expectation, appearing as if they had suddenly become unhinged from the bonds that had kept them together over the years. Moved by the commotion, loving arms suddenly clamoured to hold and hug him, only to have to let go when interrupted by the guard calling to them to disperse.

“If ye wanna catch the train ye’d better get a move on!” Charles swung around to look at the man, then without uttering a sound, returned to quickly scan the anxious faces of his family. A rush exchange of last minute hug followed. Then accepting the violin case from his brother, he turned and stepped into the carriage.

Standing in the centre, he lingered for a moment, listening to the heavy doors being unceremoniously slammed shut one at a time along the length of the train. When the guard finally appeared at his compartment, he took a step back and waited. It closed before him with the clang of steel upon steel. He moved forward to look through the misty glass pane, hardly believing that this important day in his

life had finally arrived. The look on the disconsolate faces staring back at him left no mistake in his mind that it had.

Unabashed tears sidled down his mother's face, creating a translucent trail through the powder on her cheeks. A lump lodged in the base of his throat, and he clutched his chest in response. His father caught his reaction, then placed an assuring arm around her shoulders before looking back at Charles to form the words:

“Don't worry, she'll be all right.”

He looked at his younger brother Hayden who appeared to be having difficulty trying to come to terms with all the fuss. If Charles did not know him as well as he did, he could have felt offended by his brother's seemingly lack of compassion. However, he had over the years grown accustomed to Hayden's reserved nature, and accepted that although brothers, they did not share the same sense of adventure, or for that matter the same sensitivity to another person's feelings.

As the train slowly inched forward, the emotional scene lingered in his mind. He knew he was responsible for the grief that he had placed upon his family this day, a mishmash of confused feelings and emotions, each seeking to be reconciled with his need to find answers to the questions that had been plaguing him since he arrived home from Italy. This day was the culmination of his decision to embark on a journey, not only to apply his musical talents in Australia, but more importantly, an expedition into his own capabilities and strengths.

His decision called upon him to risk leaving everything behind, in order put to rest a rising desire to know where he fitted into a society whose merits, until now, he had never bothered to question. Although he had no reason to complain about his privileged lifestyle, he was aware that he had become restless during the past few months.

A notion had bothered him, wondering if he had the right to accept for granted the lifestyle he had enjoyed over the years, without first having tested his own willingness to invite the axioms and belief systems of other cultures into his own life.

As the sight of his family waving good-bye faded from his view, he smiled inwardly, remembering the initial shock on the faces of his friends and peers when he first announced that he was contemplating migrating to Australia.

His long-standing mentor, Professor Bradbury was the first to disapprove.

“Australia! Whatever do you want to go to that godforsaken place for? There could not possibly be an opening there for a man of your talent,” the man blurted, looking flushed and horrified upon hearing the news. “Have you gone clear out of your mind? The place is full of good-for-nothing convicts.”

Even his close friend and confidant Axel Larson, upon hearing the news threw his head back, laughed, then returned to look at Charles through serious narrowed eyes.

“God man, you don’t have to go to that extreme to get over your disappointment!”

Bradbury’s objection and Axel’s response had little impact on his final decision. In fact, neither did the counsel from his well-meaning friends and peers make any difference. It only helped complicate the situation, by telling him that he could be jeopardizing his career if he settled in Australia; that by separating himself from Europe, where music and the arts were more appreciated than by the audiences in Australia, he was more likely to do his career an injustice than enhance it. In the end he resolved to give expression to a hunch that his future may possibly lie beyond the shores of England.

He had reduced it to a matter of choice, and felt it was time to evaluate everything that made him the person he was. The only way he felt this was possible was to put the values he had learned to the test. If he did not, he would continue to consider that he had become a person, not in his own right, but one moulded by a society whose standards were now being challenged in a land in the southern hemisphere. Whatever it was that had enticed him to think that way, he was fairly certain that his Scandinavian friend Axel Larsen had something to do with it.

Although Axel was not able to see him off at the station, Charles was satisfied in the knowledge that important business had summoned his friend’s return to Sweden. Though Axel did not agree with Charles’ decision, he wished him well all the same, and hoped that his brave departure from everything that was familiar to him would bring a clearer definition to whatever it was he was searching for.

They had become the best of friends since the first day they met at the Conservatorium of Music. And now, after a year had passed since

Charles returned from Italy with his Amati violin, it was Axel who had taken the brave step to point out to Charles that his over-refined sense of propriety was restricting him from realising his full potential in life.

Axel had encouraged him to write his own life's script, a *carte blanche* document that would give him an unbiased opinion over his own decisions. At the same time he strongly encouraged Charles to release himself from the strict compliances of the society he just happened to be born into.

Charles knew it was a grand step he had taken, and he was aware that he did not have all the answers to where it may lead. What he did know, however, was that he had become unsettled with the way things were in his life, and the opportunity to be a part of the changes taking place in Australia appealed to him.

Well clear of the station, he took a seat on the red-leather bench, feeling relieved he had the carriage to himself. Emotional tears had gathered at the corners of his eyes as the train left the station, and it bothered him knowing that he would have felt embarrassed if other passengers were present to see him wipe them away.

He took a kerchief from his pocket, dried his eyes, and then blew his nose. He was about to replace the kerchief to his pocket when an unusual thought entered his head. Why would he have felt embarrassed he asked himself. It was a inane question, because he already knew the answer. It was more likely to be a subliminal protest than a question, he assured himself, though, he had to concede it did prompt him to wonder why he should feel uncomfortable for an emotion that was as natural to him as the shimmering light rain beating against the carriage window.

He wondered at what time in his life his childhood innocence began to wane. Like, at what age was he when he learned to not cry, and hold back the tears that filled his young eyes whenever he fell over and skinned his knees. Was he five, six, seven or even younger than five? He tried to recall a time, and found it difficult to do so, though he could remember when his mother first called him 'Her Little Soldier.' Was it the image that soldiers don't cry that had launched him into learning how to hold back the tears?

And how old was he when he first noticed the distinctive features of his gender? Was it at that time he realized that he must one day

learn to become a man, or did he evolve into that state of mind quite unconsciously? Probably the latter he postured.

He was acutely aware of the unwritten creed that Englishmen do not express their sentiments in public. However, since Axel had taken the brave step to point out to him how this unwritten code had insidiously encroached upon his life, and had caused a considerable amount of consternation for him whilst he was in Italy, a shift began to emerge in his thinking. Serious reservations about its merits began to fester and he began to brood over the deep-seated worth of such a code and how its tenets could be justified.

Charles was aware that he would miss Axel. He was a true friend. Axel had an uncanny way of pulling Charles up in a way that would make him take a strong look at himself and question where he was going. For his age, Axel maintained many extraordinary beliefs, and did not hold back from explaining them if he thought he had a reason to do so.

Like the time he asked Charles to explain why nobody objected to sentiment being openly displayed on the stage in front of an audience, yet if that same sentiment were to be expressed in public it would be shunned. Provoking Charles to question that if the hero in a stage production could openly show his grief at the loss of his loved one, why must the theatre be the only place for one to express his true feelings? It was a distortion, a cover-up to what is a natural part of nature he insisted; the truth of which is demonstrated when the audience is reduced to tears at a particular heartrending scene.

Charles could not answer Axel at the time, but now realized that in the past he, like so many other men in a darkened theatre, probably felt it a safe place for their inner feelings to surface.

This journey was about changing all that. He had taken Axel's advice into account when summoning the courage to ignore the advice of his peers and listen to his own counsel.

To while away the time, he looked through the carriage's soot-spattered window, the undulating green pasture still wet from the recent shower, glistened in the light of the early sun. Winter had at last given way to spring. Fruit trees, giving prominence to the hues of nature flaunted their pink and white blossoms. Heartening scenes in Charles' view, a welcoming sight, heralding the arrival of a new

season. A new life!

The panorama of transformation was evident at every bend in the journey, convincing Charles that diversity was to be a major factor in his own life from now on. It also helped to confirm that he had made the right decision in accepting the appointment as Concert Master for the Opera Company's first performance in Sydney, situated on the other side of the world and capital of the young colony of New South Wales, Australia.

Steaming its way toward London, the locomotive, pulling its bulky cargo, laboured to negotiate a hill around a wide bend. From his angled view in the carriage he fixed his attention on the engines tall stack. It amused him to sit back and observe the blast of black smoke being shot into the air, then wait for residues of soot splatter against his window to form grimy rivulets of grey snake-like images to finally pool on the ledge.

The odour of the smoke reminded him of his boyhood days when trains held a special fascination for him, a sense of adventure and youthful exuberance all its own. Recalling those days, he found it entertaining that now in his manhood, and on such an important day in his life, the journey seemed to strike a parallel with the days of his youth.

However, this day was not a journey back to his youth. It had become a leap into the future, a journey that would take him into the unknown where the guarantees he had become accustomed to all his life did not exist. For as much as his family had tried to persuade him to decline the offer, it had made no difference in the end. Their persuasive bids did little to suppress his overpowering need to express his music in another land, where his willingness to succeed would be challenged by obstacles never experienced within his native country.

Despite England's growing involvement in the industrial revolution and all the benefits that it had brought to the common people, Charles now realized that it was up to him to evaluate for himself the enormous changes that were taking place. Not only in the corporeal areas of England and Europe but, more interestingly to him, the new social levels that were beginning to emerge.

Australia was a new challenge. A continent surrounded by sea, a

land whose citizens were poised to develop opportunities hitherto unknown in the country of their birth, a land where Mother England had sent her sons one hundred years before to formulate a democracy and attempt to create trade routes with other lands as yet unknown.

Whichever direction Australia's destiny was heading, Charles wanted to make a contribution within the scope of his musical training, and to assist where he could in bringing the musical artistry of Europe to its shores.

He was anxious also to understand something that had bothered him for months. He was curious to know what motivated the spirit of special men, and women, to leave the safety and familiarity of their surroundings to explore another country on the other side of the world. Why the first explorers rejected this vast continent of Australia and why they wrote it off as being inhospitable and worthless, and how, in the light of its present transformation it became recognised as a gem now firmly affixed to the British Crown.

He held the opinion that England had discovered an unsuspected treasure when she decided to transport her burgeoning prisoners to its undeveloped shores. He felt sure that the glowing reports about Australia's rising prosperity were the main reason why so many well-established English families and corporate companies had decided to invest in its growing trade opportunities. He smiled at the irony of how the 'well to do' and the unfortunate had been brought together in the most unusual merger of fate and fortune. It was a dichotomy he concluded, and one that he felt curious enough to explore.

The rhythmic sound of the train's wheels connecting with each join in the rail track summoned his attention. Its clackety-clack sound created a unique tempo, and he amused himself endeavouring to balance its timing in terms of musical expression. For a moment he sensed a rush of achievement when he thought he had discovered its secret, only to find that it would suddenly change, and he would have to start all over again. An hour passed when he finally gave up, conceding to the phenomenon that not everything has an explanation. However, his inability to decipher the rhythm had the affect of reminding him that even on this journey of a lifetime, he may not succeed in all his endeavours.

He recalled his childhood days and remembered when even at an

early age, music had somehow become firmly entrenched as a natural part of his life. He chuckled to himself when he recalled what a nuisance he must have been to his parents when so often he kept badgering them to allow him to learn the intricacies of the violin, only to be told that he was too young and would have to wait another year. And how he eagerly looked forward to Sunday afternoons when they would take him to the park. And how so engrossed he would become as he stared at the brass band playing in the rotunda. And how even then, his penchant for the sounds of the music would yield to every creative nerve within his young body. So animated, he tried many times to emulate the conductor by waving his small arms in accord with the rhythm.

From a tender age he knew that music would always be the motivating force in his life. Now, having completed his studies at the Brighton Conservatorium of Music, he was ready to impart the talents that had, after many years of study and training, become honed to the point where they were recognized as unique to his person.

Then last year a wonderful moment entered his life, an event that affectively overshadowed every precious memory from his past. A bittersweet occurrence so overpowering it monopolized his life, and invaded his senses to a point where it left him wondering if he had forfeited control of his life to an illusion.

A serene image permeated his thoughts as he recalled that life-changing event. An image that inspired him to alter his complete outlook in life, and move him to the present; a young man, seated in a railway carriage on the first leg of a journey that would take him into the future with a dream he hoped would one day fill the void in his heart. The image was of a young lady that captured his soul but allowed his over-refined sense of propriety to get in the way, and let her walk out of his life.

Ephemeral as that moment was, it remained with him, and contravening everything he once held sacred by allowing it to occupy his every waking thought. Her face, her hair, her eyes and her gracefulness haunted his memory like the recurring theme of a symphony seeking fulfilment. Above all it was the way she looked at him in a manner that touched the innermost part of his soul. A unique and silent moment that spoke volumes in words she had dared to not

utter.

He had travelled to the well-known city of Cremona, Italy. Well known for its famous violinmaker, Antonio Stradivari. It was not a Stradivarius violin that Charles wished to purchase, it was a violin made by his instructor, Niccolo Amati, the man who had imparted his genius to his now famous apprentice.

Elated that he had been successful in purchasing the Amati, he had decided to spend the last few days of his visit browsing the city's attractions and museums.

It was a warm afternoon, with a light breeze that kept the temperature pleasant enough for dining outdoors. A thin line of clouds provided a genial ambiance above the alfresco restaurant where he decided to pause for lunch. He had finished eating, and was musing whether to leave or stay and enjoy the warmth of the afternoon sun, when his attention was drawn to two women being ushered to a table nearby.

Endeavouring not to appear obvious, and to camouflage his curiosity, he picked up his empty cup and put it to his lips, pretending to drink. As he peered over the edge of the cup, he felt pleased that the elder of the two women had been seated with her back to him, giving him a direct view of her younger companion. In the moment it took for him to return the cup to its saucer, an indelible picture of unparalleled beauty filled his mind. The eloquence of her radiant face, the alluring quality of her composure and her long bronze-coloured hair, highlighted under a bonnet of the softest blue, complimented everything about her.

Captivated by the vision before him, he felt the thrill of rare enchantment run through his veins, forcing him to acknowledge for the very first time how the love-struck character in an opera must have felt on meeting his one and only true love.

Seated in the orchestra pit, playing in support of the poor character on stage, lamenting his inability to capture her heart, had often bored Charles in the past. Situations like that did not occur in real life, or so he believed. Now he wasn't quite so sure. An icon of beauty, elegance, and grace was before him, and, like the poor bewailing character on stage, he felt helpless to do anything about it. Then he remembered. The hero usually wins out in the end.

Sneaking several quick glances, he wished that time would stand

still, even if for only a brief moment, to give him the opportunity to observe her beauty in all its fullness; unhindered by the restraints of good manners.

Suddenly, her eyes met his, followed by a smile so gracious, he wondered if his enthralled mind was playing tricks. At first he felt a rush of embarrassment, believing that his fanciful thoughts had been discovered. Eager to find out if his interpretation was correct, he inclined his head to one side, followed by a smile of unspoken charm, and then waited for her response.

His heart sank with disappointment. She had turned to look back at her companion. His mind raced with thoughts of how he could regain her attention without it appearing too obvious. He signalled the waiter and ordered another cup of coffee.

Grasping to restrain his rising interest, he sipped the coffee slowly whilst peering over the rim of his cup, all the time labouring to devise a way of engaging her in conversation within the realms of diplomacy.

Some time had passed when he realized he was behaving like an infatuated schoolboy and that his hopes of making any impression was not working. The two women were preparing to leave and he had not succeeded in gaining her attention again. Then surprisingly something happened that brought a glimmer of hope to his already deflated ego. As the two women arose from their seats, he noticed an object fall from the table where the younger of the two had been sitting. His mind raced with all kinds of hopeful possibilities, at best, hoping that neither of them had noticed whatever it was that fell to the ground and would not stoop to retrieve it. He groaned with relief when he saw them walk away.

He waited until they were both well clear of the table. Then grasping his opportunity, he jumped to his feet.

“Excuse me! You’ve dropped this,” he called, waving the notebook he had retrieved from the now vacated table.

The two women stopped and looked at each other, causing him to wonder if they had understood what he had said. His mind raced to find the words in Italian. The anxiety drained from his face when they turned around to look back at him with delightful smiles that reset his hopes soaring.

“Oh look Claudia, your address book,” the older woman said in a clear English accent.

Relieved at the prospect of not having to speak Italian, he quickly formed the impression that both ladies were English. He slowly advanced toward them, hardly believing the incredible opportunity afforded to him to at last give life to his hopes.

“I found it on the ground at the side of your table Miss Claudia,” he said, courting the opportunity to say her name. “You must have brushed it off as you prepared to leave,” he continued, before handing her the notebook. “Thank you Sir,” she replied, courteously. “I am very much obliged to you.”

“The pleasure is all mine I can assure you,” Charles replied, lingering with each word. “I am at your service, Signorina.”

“Oh you speak Italian!” she teased.

“Very little,” Charles hastened to reply. “I am English and visited Cremona for a special reason.”

Oh?”

“To purchase a unique violin,” Charles explained.

“And have you succeeded in your venture?” she asked, smiling.

“Indeed I have,” Charles replied, hardly believing his plan was now working to his advantage.

“I am pleased for you,” she said, before preparing to leave. “Thank you once again, Sir, and I bid you a good afternoon.”

“And a very good afternoon to you also Miss Claudia, and to you Ma’am,” he said before biting his lip wondering what else he could say to prolong this moment.

Claudia paused to look at him curiously.

“Are you in pain sir?”

Charles blinked several times wondering whatever reason would prompt her to ask such a strange question.

“Pain?” he queried, shaking his head and looking bewildered.

“You were biting your lip.”

“Oh, umm...oh no, Miss Claudia, I was thinking of something,” he replied, regretting that he must have given her the impression of being a tad slow witted.

“That is the third time you have called me by my first name,” she said, honouring him with a gracious smile.

“Yes, I overheard your companion call you by that name,” he replied, daring her objection.

“And yours is?” “Kinsmith. Charles Kinsmith at your service Miss Claudia.”

“Then thank you again Mr. Kinsmith, I hope you have many enjoyable hours playing your newly acquired violin. Good afternoon.”

“I certainly will, and thank you.”

As she turned to leave he felt a knee-jerk reaction to delay her departure.

“Miss Claudia!” he called with a tone that bespoke desperation.

She swung around to look up at him with eyes that set his mind in a whirl. He wanted to speak from his heart but something was blocking the words. He knew what it was. His reticence to appear ill-mannered. An over-refined sense of manners that now stood in the way of what he really wanted to say but could not. Instead, he just looked at her with eyes that pleaded for understanding.

“Yes?” she asked, sensing his angst.

“I just wanted to say how pleasant it is to be in your company,” he said finally. “Even if only for a brief moment.”

“How very charming of you,” she replied kindly. “And thank you once again for returning my address book Mr Kinsmith. I must go now. My mother is waiting.”

“Your mother?”

“Yes, my mother. Good day dear sir.”

She turned to leave, and then hesitated. Moving closer, she looked up at him with intriguing eyes.

“Incidentally, I should let you know that I dropped the address book on purpose,” she whispered with a flirtatious toss of her head before hurrying to walk away.

Her shocking admission rendered him flattered yet speechless at the same time. Blinking with amazement, he felt glued to the pavement unable to move let alone find words in response. Was his ego playing some kind of delirious mind game he wondered? Intoxicated by some heady illusion he felt foolish and totally incapable of obeying an inner impulse to call out to her. So flabbergasted had he become he felt hopelessly overwhelmed by a sense of discretion and valour, each endeavouring to overpower the other of what to do or say, and all the time detesting his over-refined sense of propriety for letting her walk out of his life.

He did not see her glance back at him as she unfurled her parasol; it had blocked his view, and he did not see the admiration she felt for him expressed in her eyes, or the smile that expressed more than

words could ever dare say.

The clickety-clack sound of the train's wheels vied for attention with his thoughts of Miss Claudia. "Claudia," he sighed, knowing that whenever he spoke her name he would, like always, be left with an emotional residue that lingered and toyed with his thoughts. She had become the focal point in his mind, and he ardently wished that she were with him, sharing his loving aspirations and not simply the phantom she had become in his dreams.

As he looked through the window, the passing scenery hardly registered in his mind. Emptiness gnawed at his emotions, as it had done many times before, whenever he recalled her looking up at him with her head to one side, to say winsomely: "I dropped the address book on purpose."

He took a deep breath, and then chastised himself for being so foolish. A chance encounter, that's all it was, he had told himself repeatedly. And yet he wondered why the memory of that moment should affect him so deeply. Every time he thought of her walking away from him, he agonized why he had not taken control over his inhibitions, and gone after her to ask why she felt the need to gain his attention by leaving the booklet behind. He felt convinced their meeting was more than just a polite exchange of good manners, and the more he thought about it, the more it became a contest of sentiments. Bitter, yet sweet. Frustrating, and yet wonderful. If a lesson was to be gained from this chance encounter, he felt convinced he had learned it. The agony of not knowing the outcome, or the possibilities they might have explored together, continued to haunt him. His over-refined sense of propriety had ruined his chances, and he knew that if ever he met her again, neither hell nor high water would prevent him from asking why.

Addressing his common sense, he dropped the matter to return to the present. This time when he looked through the window, the change in the scenery surprised him. The rural meadows of the countryside had disappeared. The demands on progress to mechanize laborious tasks had been instrumental in converting the meadows and dales into grey-looking factories, with tall chimneystacks that belched smoke into the air. Rural lanes, paved in cobblestones, with semi-detached houses either side now completed his view. Then, to

appease the burgeoning demands of progress, parks of human design offered some relief from the grey lifeless forms, allowing the natural characteristics of nature to have their way. The first important leg of his journey was nearing its end.

From his hired cab, en-route to the hotel, he marvelled at the busy dissonant sounds of the Nation's capital. People were moving in all directions, each actively going somewhere, or doing something that kept them so occupied, it appeared they were oblivious of the never-ending cavalcade of traffic that passed them. As the carriage trundled through the busy streets, he leaned back in his seat, luxuriating in the thought that he was able to observe this phenomenon.

It had never occurred to him before. Each person was intently doing something, or going somewhere, that became a part of his or her life for that day. He noticed, for the first time, how each person went about their business, with seemingly no apparent interest in those they passed by. Then there were others exchanging business within the bounds of an unwritten code of conduct, that made it appear to be a harmonious arrangement. Yet underneath this civil facade of good mannered pleasantries, they remained detached from each other.

This was not his first visit to the city; he had been many times before in the course of his career. Why he should pay particular interest in its populace this day intrigued him. Lingering with the notion, he rationalized his thinking, on the pretext that in the past he had always been too engrossed in his own work or business to give the subject any attention. He had been just one of the crowd that now held his interest.

However, this day was unlike any other. He had become aware of an aspect of life he had never considered before.

Everywhere he looked, distinction of class and disparity of wealth were obvious. Raggedly looking men, women, and children, mingled with the fashionably dressed. People of different colour mingled with each other. Some pulling handcarts laden with hardware or produce, whilst passengers in elite carriages passed them by, seemingly unconcerned for those less fortunate than themselves. It became obvious to Charles that most people appeared to accept their relative positions, as if they had been delegated to it by an unwritten social code.

He wondered if his concern for the images now presently before him, had been lying dormant in his mind for some time, waiting patiently for his sense of equality to arouse him to action.

His sense of reasoning told him that the essentials for the perpetuation of the human race did not discriminate. It only required a biological act of sexual transmission and acceptance of the seed, regardless of its nationality or class, to perform the miracle of birth. Yet, society, for whatever reasons, insisted adherence to a biased opinion that opposed that fundamental truth.

Had there always been a sublime interest in why such disparity of class existed between the have and have-not, he wondered? Or was it because having found himself stuck to the pavement that day in Cremona, he had learned a lesson he would never forget?

That incredible moment had called his attention to an erroneous flaw in his programmed behaviour. It had made him aware that by adhering to the accepted practices of protocol he had missed an opportunity that may only come once in a lifetime. An opportunity that may have changed his life had he seized it.

Was it meant to have happened, he wondered? Perhaps the second leg of his journey might provide the answer. He did not know, but there was one thing he did know for certain; he had to prepare himself for an unknown future, and above all keep an open mind.