**7 Alleys**

[page 10 – 11)]

Scary Mary was her name,
‘Knock and nash’ was the game.
The boys would egg each other on,
Ring the doorbell, then they’d run.
Chests bursting, hearts pumping,
Feet pounding, legs jumping,
Over fences, through a ditch,
Running from the scary witch.
Down Preston Road ‘til they reached the drain
Then back to do it all again.
It was just some fun, just a dare,
Just for the kicks, just for the scare;
Just to fill the boring days,
‘Til something different came their way.
Then one day, the boys were skiving,
When something different was arriving.
Two black horses pulled a carriage,
A street sign proclaimed “*7 Alleys*”.
Fiddlers played up on the back,
Runners and riders dressed in black.

Horse hooves, bells and violins,

All making an enormous din,

And all the while, some parchments given,

Tied up with blood-red silk ribbon.

 [page 12 - 13]

As the carriage pulled away,
The boys returned to usual play.
Now Richard’s turn to ring the bell;
He turned to scarper - but he fell!
With twisted ankle, knee all scraped,
He’d barely made it to the gate,
When Scary Mary caught his eye,
And beckoned him to come inside.
Something in her look that day,
Meant he dare not disobey.
She washed and patched him up with care,
And told him that she knew their dare.
“You think you’re brave” she laughed with glee,
“Young man, you’ve not a thing on me!
When I was your age, just a scally,
We used to run the 7 Alleys. *One alley, two alley, three alley, four,
We’d dare ourselves to run one more,.*

*But number seven, no one knew,
It eluded us, as it will you.”*

*‘But there’s a search on!’. Richard said,*

*‘I saw the invites, bound in red.’*

*“Then go!” said Mary, on her feet,*

*“And bring me tales of who you meet.”*

[Pg14-15]

He counted down the days from then,

With dreams of alleys opening;

And knock and nash lost some appeal,

Though still up Mary’s path they’d steal.

One night in May, when it was dark,

He dragged them all up to East Park,

Where lights were strung from tree to tree

And no one knew what they would see.

‘What’s this?’, his mates scoffed, with a groan.

‘We’d have more fun by going home.

‘You really think you’ll find this alley?

They’re baby fairytales, you wally!’

But then, the ground beneath them moves,

Vibrating with the thrum of hooves.

A whinny, bells, the violin;

Smoke and sparks and it begins.

His friends move back, their faces bulge,

But Richard feels excitement surge.

*A dare to find the 7th Alley?*

He doesn’t hesitate or dally.

And Mary’s voice rings in his ears,

As through the crowds he disappears,

*‘*Bring me tales from who you meet…’

He shuts his eyes and moves his feet.

Pg16-17

The morning’s like a world away

As all the boy are out to play.

But Richard? He’s not kicking balls,

Or lobbing tin cans off the wall.

Today he has a place to go -

To Mary’s house, to let her know

About the things he saw last night,

The dreams and memories in flight.

 ‘Come in!’, she says, and steps aside,

But Richard hesitates and smiles.

‘Come OUT!’, he laughs. ‘You really should.

A bit of sun will do you good.’

And so they sit there, face to face,

While Richard tells her of a place,

Alight with stories, flame and smoke.

‘It sounds amazing’, Mary croaks.

He nods. ‘A lady, made of white,

Spinning, twisting in the night.

She scattered pages all around,

Just like this torn-up one I found…’

She takes the page with trembling hands,

Reads it over while he stands.

At last she sits back with a sigh –

‘Is it Bransholme? But when? And why?’

**GNGG**

Page 20-21

A Gold Nose. A Gold Nose? What does that mean?

Chelsea stood wondering, idly.

Her wares seemed to taunt her, her doorway stood empty,

Yet over the road were people aplenty.

A week ago had been a quite different matter,

The hubble and bubble of gentle chit-chatter –

She’d welcomed her regulars into her shop,

From morning to evening, her feet wouldn’t stop.

Then suddenly – nothing. The shop door stopped swinging.

Worse still, her till had completely stopped ringing.

And everywhere round her shone trays of gold treasure,

Waiting for people to buy at their leisure.

It started one Saturday, out in the centre,

Some kind of procession was starting to enter.

She stuck out her head to see trumpets and pleats,

A riot of colour disrupting the streets.

They marched past outside with solemn expressions,

People from all walks of life and professions,

A woman held something aloft. Shoppers lingered.

A whisper began; ‘*The Gold Nose of Green Ginger?*’

No-one quite knew what this thing was about;

Some talked of a treasure, others of doubt.

One thing Chelsea knew was she hadn’t a clue

What these weird people were, or what they would do.

Page 22 – 23

As days turned to weeks her shop dwindled in trade;

The Gold Nose of Green Ginger had interest swayed.

She freely admitted she was starting to hate,

This odd-shaped gold thing found inside an old crate.

And yet, though she didn’t know quite how to say it,

This Gold Nose was starting to pique her vague interest.

It seemed to her that there was more than she reckoned,

And things were getting more strange by the second.

The girls who would always fawn over her gold,

Were over *there* now, obsessed with this nose.

Not a glance at her shop – Chelsea’s mind boggled -

They were serving up tea and playing with toddlers.

They hung off The Guardian, talked to The Nose

Jammed flutes up their nostrils, wore colourful clothes.

They whispered of wishes made true by nose magic

(which Chelsea discarded as rather dramatic).

One girl, who no one had ever heard speak,

Was first to arrive and the last one to leave.

She helped the small children make noses to wear,

And tidied the shop after craft sessions there.

Yes; something unusual had definitely occurred,

But no one else Chelsea met seemed to concur.

They were drawn to the Nose Shop like moths to a flame,

Coming back over and over again.

.

Page 24 – 25

It got to week four and the stories got dafter,

She tried not to meet them with cynical laughter.

But really, she asked, is there no one I know,

That hasn’t had wishes made true by a Nose?

So far – and this is just all on one day –

She heard of arthritis just going away.

A new job, a pools win, an MOT pass,

A long-lost twin sister appearing at last.

“It honestly wouldn’t surprise me one day

To hear a world leader pop up just to say;

‘We’re announcing world peace, that we’ve hoped for so long,

Because of a wish on a nose in Bransholme.’”

And yet, though she scoffed, at the back of her mind

Was a creeping suspicion she tried hard to hide.

It started to edge out as every day passed;

And Chelsea had even more questions to ask.

There is more to this life than we oft dare to dream,

But what was the Gold Nose, and what did it mean?

You couldn’t deny it brought laughter and fun,

As she watched people dancing and playing their drums.

As the noise grew, it was like Chelsea shrank;

Could it be it was nothing more than a cruel prank?

She knew it was nonsense but maybe, just maybe,

Could this silly talisman grant her a baby? (is this still the wish? Not sure it’s right)

26 - 27

Another day passed with no sale still in sight

And Chelsea was locking the shop up at night

When curious thoughts stole into her mind

And impetuously told her to see what she’d find.

She pulled down the shutters, stole straight to The Nose,

Creeping and balancing on her tip-toes.

Her heartbeat drummed louder than anything there,

But Chelsea was far too excited to care.

It wasn’t quite what she expected, close up;

Not quite like a nose, but more like a … cup?

Was this really the thing people revered so much?

She couldn’t see anything magic, as such.

Then suddenly, out of the silence, it came.

She listened more closely and heard it again;

The unmistakable sound of soft breathing;

Louder and faster, her heart started beating.

How long did she stay there? She just couldn’t say.

But Chelsea would always remember that day.

For standing there, on her own, with The Gold Nose,

The hope in her belly ignited and rose.

She put pencil to paper and took a deep breath,

Her hand scribbling furiously over the desk.

Then posting it paused, her hope now increased;

Would The Nose hear her pleas and her deep wish unleash…?

**Longhill Burn**

Page 30-31

Jimmy Johnson feels adrift

Although he can’t quite pinpoint it.

On the surface, all is good,

Kicking ‘round the neighbourhood.

Sundays, Wednesdays, Five a Side,

Teaching kids how not to dive,

Running round the playing fields

Wind-burnt cheeks, knees scuffed and peeled.

He picks up odd jobs now and then,

Helping on the allotments.

(Margaret says he’s a godsend,

while her back is on the mend).

Life ticks on and though it’s busy,

Jimmy knows that something’s missing.

He often dreams of childhood days,

The endless, stress-free summer haze

Of running wild and climbing trees,

Building dens and grass-stained knees.

But then, he always had some pals,

To knock about with on weekends,

And since Year Ten it’s always been

Just him and Laura, love-lorn teens.

He always wanted her to do

As much as possible, it’s true;

But right now, university

Seems very, very far away.

Page 32 – 33

Shouting, whooping, panting, jumping,

Rounders has their small hearts pumping,

Bats and balls strewn all around,

An evening filled with happy sound.

Jimmy watches, hand on chin,

Recalling happy times again,

When suddenly, to their surprise,

Rain starts falling from the skies.

First a spitting, then a pour,

People run for their front doors,

And as they do, then Jimmy spies

A copper tea urn, burning bright.

‘Have you heard?’, a voice chirps up,

behind a steaming tea-filled mug.

‘There’s going to be huge bonfire,

a flaming, crackling Longhill pyre.

They’ve asked if we’ll write down our hopes,

And put them in those envelopes.

Then they’ll burn them well and good,

To send the hopes out in the world.’

Jimmy pauses, thinks it through;

It seems an odd concept, it’s true;

But they had that beast thing two years since,

So weird things shouldn’t bother him.

pg34-35

It’s been three days since Laura called

And Jimmy’s feeling really bored.

He twiddles both his thumbs and sighs,

Wondering where she is tonight.

‘Look here!’, his mother points and says,

‘That massive bonfire that they’ve made!’.

He doesn’t know what he expected,

Or where the hopes are they collected,

But he’s watched these people grafting,

Building, heaving, layering, crafting.

And now the neighbourhood’s alight,

excited, for the Burn tonight.

‘

The light is fading fast and pink,

When Jimmy and his mum go in.

‘Hope you don’t mind!’ A Longhill Host*.*

*‘*Can we just ask – what gives you hope*?’*

Jimmy takes the piece of paper,

Holds it tight, tried to remember,

And somewhere deep within his heart,

He feels tiny flicker start.

He writes of people brought together,

Longhill memories in all weathers,

Then hands it back in heat-edged dark,

To watch the bonfire-lighting start.

Pg36-37

Jimmy doesn’t check his phone,

He’s transfixed by the heart-shaped hole

Right at the top of the huge pyre,

Now burning brightly, kissed by fire.

Suddenly, some people make

Their way beside him with a crate.

They lift it up – the heart-shape glows –

And place it gently in the hole.

And then he starts to realise

That all their hopes are crammed inside,

And burning them, ‘til black and curled,

Will send them out into the world.

The crowd is whooping, full of cheer,

And songs of Longhill reach his ears.

 When the fireworks hiss and crack,

A hand is placed on Jimmy’s back.

He turns. She meets his eyes and smiles,

‘I wanted to come home – surprise!’

He doesn’t know if it’s for good

But something’s lifted in his mood;

Their arms entwined, fire dancing high,

They watch the colours in the sky.