



CHAPTER ONE

This is a list of what Marty's grandad had:

- 1 pair of spectacles (one arm broken)
- 7 teeth
- 1 single-room bedsit above the
Crown and Anchor public house
- 1 broken outboard engine
- 457 teabags
- 1 tub of powdered milk
- A lot of time
- 1 allotment with shed (with a giant map
of the world nailed to the wall inside)
- 1 squeaky camping chair that tried to
swallow you whole if you sat on it funny
- Very sparkly blue eyes
- 1 old trilby hat
- 1 Hodgkins & Taylor & Sons seed catalogue
- 1 empty biscuit tin

This may sound like a lot, but it kind of isn't. Not compared to Marty's mum. Marty's mum had billions of things. Billions and trillions and infinity of them. I mean I'd make a list, but even if you lived to be a hundred I don't think that you'd ever finish reading it because Marty's mum kept everything. Newspapers and holey shoes and rusty lawnmowers and unread books and broken picture frames and, well, EVERYTHING. When she used to be able to leave the house, she could never pass a skip on the side of the road without reaching in and bringing something 'useful' home, and she got really stamp-footed and scared if you tried to throw anything away.

Marty's house was the one at the end of the road with the overgrown garden with all the stuff in it. There were washing machines that didn't work and piles of carpet rolled up like soggy cigars. There were coils of cables and old sofas stacked on top of each other. The house wasn't very big to begin with, a bungalow with four small rooms and a sort of narrow kitchen and a square room out the back, but ever since Marty was born the house had been shrinking. Not actually shrinking, like magically shrinking, but it was definitely getting smaller.

He didn't actually remember ever having been into their living room. It had always been full of stuff, but he kind of remembered sneaking into his mum and dad's bedroom when he was little, when his dad was still around, and sliding into their bed for cuddles in the middle of the night. But you couldn't even open that door now as so many piles of stuff blocked the way.

After a while, the corridors had started to fill on both sides, leaving only a thin path through from the narrow kitchen to his bedroom. You could only get to one cupboard in the kitchen, and the sink, and that was always full. Mum slept at the back of the kitchen now, in a lounge chair by the back door, and the only time she went outside was when she'd sit on the back step and smoke. In the bathroom, the bath had been filled with old letters and bags of clothes so that he could only have a stand-up wash with a flannel and some soap and half a sink of semi-warm water.

So far, Marty had managed to save his bedroom. Every time a bag of stuff was put there, he'd push it out again, a bit like standing on the beach and pushing back the waves with your bare hands. So that's why he went to see

Grandad at his allotment every night after school. Even though they did nothing, really, except sit outside the garden shed and drink tea from enamel mugs together, it was a break from the squashiness of home, the sense that you were about to be washed away by a tide of stuff.

‘All right, Marty boy?’ Grandad flashed his toothy grin and passed him a mug of tea so sweet you could live off it for a week.

Marty sat down quietly and shrugged. Now, Grandad was always sparkly-eyed, but today he was fizzing inside about something. This wasn’t entirely unusual, because Grandad had a history of getting very excited about strange things. Such as the time he thought he had brewed a new wonder-fuel from rhubarb leaves and wanted to call NASA, and the time he built an automatic slug squisher out of six pairs of old boots and an ancient Hoover, oh, and the time he built the bum scratcher 2000, and the automatic tea stirrer 250, which worked so well that it stirred and stirred Marty’s mug of tea until it started sloshing from side to side more and more violently until, suddenly, it flew off sideways in a spray of scalding liquid, forcing them both to throw themselves

on the ground for fear of burning themselves. Today, though, Marty could tell that something else was up.

‘I got you something.’ Grandad smiled. ‘Been waiting for it to arrive for weeks!’

He pulled a small, brown envelope from his pocket and held it out.

‘Happy birthday, Marty, my boy.’

Marty blushed. He thought everyone had forgotten. His mum hadn’t said anything this morning. Even he had tried to forget for most of the day too.

‘I didn’t have much money but I wanted to get you something special . . .’

Marty didn’t get many presents and, since the house had started filling, Marty didn’t really care for ‘stuff’, but it was nice that Grandad had remembered.

‘Open it, then,’ said Grandad eagerly, his eyes prompting Marty to tear open the envelope. Even though he wasn’t a kid any more, Marty still felt the shyness of being watched while opening a present.

Marty took his time. He put down his mug of tea and slid his finger under the envelope flap. It was a small, brown, square one, like the kind they used to

put his mum's wages in when she worked at the shop. His grandad was still smiling at him. The envelope was so light that it didn't seem to have anything in it, to be honest. So he tipped it upside down and shook it over his palm and out plopped a seed. Marty's heart fell a little.

'Wow!' he said. 'A seed!'

'One of Hodgkins and Taylor and Sons' finest, I'll have you know!'

Grandad was smiling at him still. Marty didn't quite know what he had been expecting, but it wasn't this. He swallowed down his disappointment.

'It's really great . . .' he heard himself saying.

Marty held the seed in his fingers. It *was* an extraordinarily large seed. Smooth, with a plump belly, and it was lightly striped as if it were wearing pyjamas. Marty studied it: it was too big for a sunflower, too pippy-shaped for a flower . . .

'What kind of seed is it?'

Grandad flashed a grin of excitement.

'That, my boy, is a surprise! I could only afford one, so let's hope it's a good one!'

Marty's smile was fading.



‘Listen,’ Grandad said, ‘I’m sorry I couldn’t get you those computer games and things that the kids have these days. I’d give you the whole world if I could. You know that, don’t you?’

‘I know,’ said Marty softly.

‘And you never know what this little stunner has in store for us,’ Grandad said, taking the seed from Marty’s palm. ‘There’s magic in seeds, you know.’ He winked.

‘You can never tell what wonders are in them.’

Marty looked at his grandad with his usual mix of love and confusion.

‘It is a lovely seed,’ he said.

Grandad held it up to the last light of day and studied it, his whole body quivering with excitement.

‘You’re right, my boy – it’s a beauty! It’s a rollicking beauty!’



CHAPTER TWO

This is a list of what Marty had:

- 1 old BMX bike
- 2 jumpers that fitted him: one red, one blue
- As many books as he could pull from the stuff in the house
- 1 mother who wouldn't leave the house
- 1 five-centimetre-tall statue of the Eiffel Tower given to him when he was tiny by the dad he hadn't seen since he was four, which he kept in his pocket
- 1 uniform donated to him by the school, which included:
- 1 pair of trousers with the name Harry Thomas sewn inside them
- 1 school T-shirt with the name Nathan Sharp written in ink on the collar