

7 SPIRIT OF THE GAME

Seven-year-old Barry awoke delighted at the sight of a blue sky and the promise of another sunny day. That was until his surroundings reminded him that he and his family had moved. It was his third day in the new district and the first week of his new school's summer holiday.

He thought about his old friends, this made his bottom lip go into pout mode; something it did whenever events took a downward turn. He disliked making new friends. This was due to the self-consciousness his disability caused him. Having one arm had made him different, and the very last thing he wanted to be was different. Physically he could manage most things, his problem was convincing others. Youngsters of his age were inquisitive; their curiosity was his torment. How did you lose it, why do you pin your sleeve up, how do you do your shoes up? All innocent and logical questions any intelligent child might ask, yet unintentionally they emphasized the fact that he was, at least physically, different. And of course new acquaintances meant more questions, more humiliation. Nevertheless, he was a boy who thrived on companionship; without pals, he was a lost soul.

I suppose it'll be another boring day up the park, he thought to himself as he kicked back his bed covers. He glanced around the room at his new surroundings then focused on the picture overlooking his bed. It depicted Jesus holding up a lantern. "I am the Light," said the caption below. Barry tried to figure its meaning but gave up. Jesus seemed to be staring at him; Barry scrambled across the bed and the eyes in the picture followed him. He got up and walked about. Again, the eyes of Jesus followed him. Reason told him he should be frightened, but for some reason he wasn't. He started to dress when a thought struck him. "Yes the weather's right for it, and Friday's my lucky day."

Now, dressing with more haste, he wedged both feet down the same trouser leg and started hopping around the room until his mother, shouted from the foot of the stairs.

"Barry! How many times do I have to tell you to wash before you go to school?"

"What's the time?"

"Never mind," she said, "the weather's cold." He grimaced, he didn't mind shredded wheat with hot milk, but his mother had a habit of putting a knob of butter on it saying it was full of goodness, and what that meant he'd not the foggiest. He only knew that whenever she applied the saying to food, he wasn't going to like it.

Forgetting the wash, he slid down the banister and began searching the cupboard under the stairs, pulling out gasmasks, evacuation boxes and all things familiar to that period: 1946. Not finding what he was looking for, the pout returned. He pushed everything back in the cupboard and sauntered into the kitchen.

"I'm not really hungry Mum," he said glumly. "Can I go now; I want to go to the park?"

"What's so important about getting to the park this early, got some new friends have we?"

"Cricket," he said, ignoring the second question.

"So that's what all the noise was under the stairs. You were looking for your cricket set. You should have asked me," she said, then teased him with silence.

"Oh, come on Mum, where is it?"

"Well...the ball's in the lounge drawer, and the bat is in the cupboard underneath it, but I don't know where the sticks are."

"They're called stumps," Barry said irritably.

"Are they? Well, I still don't know where they are."

"Don't matter, because I only need the ball." Barry jumped down from his chair, making ready to dash off into the living room.