



## CHAPTER 1

Early morning sunshine streamed in through the stained glass above the panelled, front door and dappled the mustard and terracotta patchwork of cool tiles. A large bunch of fresh, yellow chrysanthemums graced a half-moon table under the dark wood mirror and the stairs gently creaked as she hurried down.

Avril stuffed the vocal score into her bag and looked into the mirror. She pulled the wide-brimmed hat over her mane of reddy-brown curls, tucking in her fringe. At least one new freckle had manifested during the night. She gazed into her own eyes. It was rather ridiculous to wear a hat, she thought, when that year's summer was such a scorcher.

It was August 1932 and he would have been approaching his fifty-seventh birthday – instead, it was twenty years since his death. She pulled a large feathery-headed bloom from the vase.

Outside and the chorus of birds were in fine voice. The pavements were unwashed by rain and dusty and that heady, pine scent from sun-baked suburban hedges was beginning to fill the air.

Fifty minutes later and Avril had emerged from South Kensington underground station with the chrysanthemum in her hat. She was briskly walking up Exhibition Road towards the Royal Albert Hall but adopted a

slightly more ladylike pace as she grew nearer, and she straightened the creases in her dress.

A small queue had already formed at the box-office window. It was nearly opening time. Rehearsal was about to start. A rush of panic flipped her tummy over. She hadn't wanted to draw attention to herself but she would be rather spectacularly late. She would have to 'excuse me' her way past the seated knees of fellow choristers as they waited, in irritated silence, for her to find her place. Breaking back into a trot and with one hand on her hat, she passed the queue and rounded the building towards the artists' entrance and disappeared from sight.

A poster flanked the box office window – a print, in the Deco style, of a Red Indian standing with his arms outstretched in front of mountains and rivers and forests of pine. 'Samuel Coleridge-Taylor's 'Song of Hiawatha' – Opens Tonight', Dr Collard read as he waited, second in line, behind a rather frail gentleman who straightened when there was a sound behind the glass.

The ticket girl appeared, humming tunelessly. She positioned herself on her swivel stool at the window and unlocked a long, narrow drawer of coins to her right. She had all the time in the world as she popped a large, chewed box of reserved tickets marked 'A to L' on the desk to her left. She reached down for a second box that was equally well stuffed with the other half of the reservations. She looked at her fingernails then insincerely smiled at the elderly gentleman through the glass as she removed the 'Box Office Closed' sign.

"Good morning, Sir."

"Yes, good morning," the old man said. "A ticket has been left for me, I believe. The name is Beckwith – J Beckwith."

“For tonight is it, Sir?”

“Oh yes. Rather. Thank you, dear. Although, now I come to think of it, it may be in the name of Walters. Colonel Herbert Walters?” he twittered.

Her fingers walked casually over the flaky contents of the box. Her other hand mused casually in the air until she decided to rest her chin, too young to be quite so world-weary, on her hand and sighed. At last she found it and read the envelope note.

“Here you are, Mr Beckwith. It’s already been paid for by the look of things. Enjoy the performance.”

“Thank you, dear. Yes I shall.”

Mr Beckwith decided that the delay he had caused, or rather that she had caused, didn’t quite warrant a full apology, so he simply smiled to the man behind him as he went on his way.

A minute later and Dr Collard too had his ticket safely stowed in his breast pocket. He drifted towards Kensington Gardens. He had a whole day to kill. The buses and motorcars would be reduced to a more pleasant hum from a sunny bench in the gardens. All the old, horse-drawn trams had long since been replaced by the electric ones, but over the past couple of years these too were being slowly usurped by the trolley buses with their pneumatic tires. Motorbuses were becoming very popular too. All these advances were happening rather too quickly. He couldn’t keep up with it all; perhaps a sign of his own encroaching old age – a curse poor Coleridge had been spared.

He found his bench in a sunny spot and sat down. He closed his eyes. He felt the sun on his face – the sweet scent of chopped and drying grass and warmed earth, his toes toasty-warm in their creaky leather, but thought

interrupted the careless nothingness once again. Time gathers such a pace as you near the final destination, he concluded – when there was so much more distance behind you than was probably left in front. An aeroplane buzzed overhead. He looked up and watched it for a moment, until it buzzed off. His eyes closed again, he tilted his head to feel the sun full on his face again and silence. Beautiful silence.

It had been silent on Bandon Hill that morning, as he had waited for the sun to rise. It used to be such a beautiful place to walk but they had cleared the woodlands to make way for London's burgeoning dead and the bluebells didn't like to grow there anymore – too muddy for bluebells.

He heard footfalls on the fine, shingle path and opened his eyes as they neared. An old lady, looking rather glad to find a bench, smiled at Dr Collard and made herself comfortable. He smiled back and returned to his dozing. He was quite prepared to share his perfect spot. But then the rummaging started, the hunting for something in her bag, as elderly ladies often do. She was trying to do it quietly but it just seemed to drag out the pain – like someone trying to crunch a boiled sweet behind you at the pictures – crunching slowly; but silence does not automatically come with slowness. He heard her tutting and muttering in mild irritation as she rummaged. She had travelled all the way from Bournemouth the previous day and had stayed over at Claridges. She was determined to be one of the first in line to collect her ticket. He opened his eyes and sighed – slowly, so that she wouldn't hear.

She was proud to have met the composer, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, on precisely two occasions, she would

tell – both occasions, many years before. The first time was at the Royal College of Music on the day of his graduation and the second was some years later, following a concert he had conducted. What a fool she had made of herself over him that day.

“There you are,” she said in triumph. Dr Collard couldn’t help looking over, cheekily expecting it to be her marbles she had thought lost but it was an old piece of paper, perhaps a letter, folded neatly. “Why is everything always in the last place you look?”

He smiled at her.

“Perhaps,” he said, “because once you find what you’re looking for, you stop looking.”

She looked at him. She chuckled.

Unbeknownst to either of them, they had shared a seat once before. It had been a pew in the back of that ghastly little chapel, all those years ago, in that place – that cemetery that spread over and stole the whole of his Bandon Hill.

“What a simply glorious day,” she said with a sigh but her companion was rising. “I haven’t driven you away, I hope?”

“Not at all,” lied Dr Collard. “Places to be, you know. Good morning.”

“Goodbye.”

She watched as the man walked away. A whole bench to herself – what a splendid result. She looked down. Her fingers slowly slipped between the folds of the paper, her forearms resting on the sides of the bag on her lap. It was more than twenty-five years old. It had been years since she had held it – that precious treasure. Her hand trembled. She was almost sure that the young woman to whom it rightly belonged would

be singing that evening. To hear that music again, she thought, after so many years would be such a wonderful thing, but the real reason for her travelling all that way, and at her age, was to deliver her most precious treasure, and the message it contained to the composer's only daughter.

She didn't know what the girl would look like and didn't know how she would find her. All she did know was that she would. She knew she would recognise her. The young woman was sure to be singing and that was a start; and of course she remembered the name of Coleridge-Taylor's daughter. It was a Welsh name – it was Gwen.

Avril entered the magnificent auditorium of the Royal Albert Hall to join the chorus of more than two thousand strong. Choral societies from all over the country had prepared for months and this was the day that they would come together for the first time to rehearse as one – a single day of rehearsal before the two week run opening that evening. To her relief it looked like they were a long way from starting. She relaxed.

People were strewn all around, wherever there was space, many standing and all still in their hats and coats. They chattered excitedly as they waited for Dr Sargent, the conductor, to arrive.

Avril took off her hat and touched her hair with the heel of her hand. Behind her, she could hear the ladies and gentlemen of the orchestra tuning up, assembling clarinets, polishing flutes, tightening and relaxing strings. Somebody moved and Avril turned to see that separating the chorus from the audience, and by a staged area, was a large, dark lake that reflected the ceiling. Everyone was

looking around. Everyone was awestruck. There was a narrow footbridge crossing it to the conductor's stand and in the lake, the moon was reflected.

Avril's eyes drifted up to the gaping, circular Hall's domed ceiling. Vast cloths were hung all around the upper circle reaching up to a centre point; frozen in sail-like billows. It gave the impression of a wigwam's interior but of a cathedral's scale. The bottom edge of the great swathes, were exquisitely painted with wispy, dawn clouds drifting dreamily across a pale, eggshell blue sky. Higher up, the mid-section was streaked all around with purple and blue, turquoise-green, and coral pink of the setting sun. Her mouth fell open and her skin chilled cold with goose-bumps. Higher still and the cloth cone bled into inky, blue-black night, with starry constellations and a waxing moon.

Somebody behind jostled her shoulder again. The Hall smelt of paint and somewhere a man was hammering. Many of the others were looking over her shoulder to the chorus seating. Avril turned.

Hiding the great organ pipes from view, at the back of the cavernous Hall, was a backdrop of twelve hundred square foot, slung from one side of the Hall to the other. There was thunder in those painted mountains with their snow-capped peaks and the palisades of vast and ancient pine forests on the slopes that met with the dew and damp of prairie meadows below. It was the majesty of an unspoilt and perfect wilderness, with innumerable echoes and curling, blue smoke of the wigwam village fires.

Avril and the rest of the multitude in the centre of that most ornate cave, watched as dustsheets protecting the chorus area were removed to gasps from the whispering

crowd. A hillside of bushes and log chutes were revealed, down which would pour a cascade of water, ending in falls that would splatter on rocks and ripple the lake.

This was the Golden Age made real – the Land of the Dakotahs when the land belonged to itself. This was the wigwam of Hiawatha’s father, the Great Spirit – the West Wind, Mudjekeewis.

Mr Beckwith slowly walked towards the Natural History Museum. He patted the breast pocket that held his ticket. How proud he felt to have been the great man’s first music teacher. He was meandering in these rambling and absent-minded reminiscences when suddenly he heard the unmistakable sound of a marble being dropped, bouncing once or twice and then rolling – rolling along towards him. He stopped.

Down a cobbled back lane, a scruffy, little lad had stood up with pained expression. The boy knew he couldn’t catch the wayward marble before it was lost forever down some drain or other, but it rolled towards Mr Beckwith and the old man just managed to catch it under the creaking rubber of his right shoe.

The boy beamed and trotted over. The old gentleman had saved his favourite marble from almost certain death. The old gentleman lifted his shoe and the urchin retrieved his marble. The boy looked up and in that moment, Mr Beckwith’s own skin goose-bumped. It was him. Well of course it wasn’t but it really was most disarming nevertheless. The boy had exactly Coleridge’s smile; a smile of uninterrupted and perfect joy. He was about six; about the same age as little Coleridge would have been when he had first encountered him back in 1881 or so. He was strikingly similar, except of course that this little boy was



white and Coleridge was black. At least, he presumed the boy was white – under all that soot and grime.

That day, half a century ago, six-year-old Coleridge had been playing marbles too; playing happily on his own, on the pavement outside Mr Beckwith's Croydon home like some grubby little church-mouse, in grey shorts and with those great, big, beautiful brown eyes. And on the pavement by the brown mouse's kneeling knees was his tiny, tattered, scratchy violin case.

Mr Beckwith had been standing at his front door with his last student of the day when he noticed the little black boy in the street. Mr Beckwith was just twenty-two, but was already well established in the music world of South London's newest suburbs and was regularly engaged to compose incidental music for the local theatres there.

Deirdre, his pupil, had no real talent, just like most of his adult students. She was being made to study music by her family who believed that the ability to play an instrument was fitting for a young lady of her class. Not that Mr Beckwith thought that she would ever really fit into the class that her family clearly aspired to. He hated teaching adults, with their desperately unrealistic expectations and their giving up so soon. He hated Deirdre.

He limply helped her on with her coat, relieved that he no longer had to hear her scrape away at the melody on her defiled violin; each note played to set a new tempo and expose a new nerve end. Deirdre would hit a note one of two ways; either with the pained and ferocious purposefulness or a croquet ball savagely malleted through a hoop, or in such quick succession with some other poorly chosen ones, that it sounded

like someone falling downstairs with a tray full of cutlery. Thankfully though, after torturing the poor piece to her satisfaction, she would normally despatch it fairly swiftly with an unclean but sharp ring of the neck.

“Thank you again for the tickets. We thoroughly enjoyed it and all agreed that you’re wasted on the Croydon Grand.”

“Thank you, dear. Yes,” he said, watching the small boy at the end of his path and not really aware of what she was saying, or what he was saying himself.

She talked incessantly and had no awareness of the signals used in polite society, that lead a person to know when to stop talking, when to listen and when to make your excuses and fetch your hat. Mr Beckwith knew that this alone would lead to her inevitable exposure as a fraud. Not that Polite Society would point the finger and shout, ‘fraud!’ at her for pretending to fit where she patently did not. Instead, Polite Society would merely smile a half-smile and watch over tea-cup brims as the poor wretch clung onto the preferred class by her bleeding fingernails whilst the burden of truth hanging from her rather swollen ankles grew ever more weighty. Would she never shut up?

“So I won’t see you next week but the week after next at the same time if that suits? ...Mr Beckwith?”

“Pardon? Oh yes... next week. That’s fine.”

“You really do belong in Drury Lane you know, but I suppose you wouldn’t feel the need to teach so much if that were the case. Drury Lane’s loss!”

She laughed. So did he. He didn’t know why. Nor did she.

“Yes, goodbye, er... Drear.... Deirdre.”

She started down the path and managed to sidestep the small boy in her path without a glance.

“Goodbye,” she said, cheerily waving the back of her hand at him without turning as she clacked her way down the pavement.

The little boy was deeply engrossed in his game as Mr Beckwith approached him with a friendly smile. The child looked up for a moment and grinned a toothy grin, then went back to rolling marbles.

“Hello,” said Beckwith as he put his hands in his pockets. He never put his hands in his pockets.

“Hello,” said the boy without looking up.

“Do you speak English?”

He looked up. “I am English.”

“Oh, I see.” It was uncommon to see black people in England but to see a black boy who was English was unheard of. “And you have a violin! Are you as clever on that as you are at marbles?” The boy looked at the battered, black case containing the child-sized instrument.

After considering the question for a moment, “I’m a bit better at that actually. Would you like to hear? You’ll have to be the music stand as well if you don’t mind.”

Mr Beckwith said that he would very much like to hear him play and that he didn’t mind holding the music in the slightest. He sat on his low wall and held the music. The boy stood and stuffed the marbles into his misshapen pockets. He unclipped the case, grabbed the little violin by the neck and propped it under his chin, squeezing his cheek against the black rest. He gave the music to Mr Beckwith who held it up for him. Then the boy started to play.

“You’ll have to hold it still,” the boy reprimanded.

“Righto,” said Mr Beckwith.

His eyes followed the notes on the page in rapt concentration. Beckwith checked the page for his moment to turn. It was rather an advanced piece for a child of his age, Beckwith assessed, but he played flawlessly. His fingers darted about on the instrument’s skinny neck. Mr Beckwith couldn’t suppress his broadening grin. The bow was handled as lightly and as swiftly as the little chap had spoken. He was expressing himself through the piece. He brought an emotional depth to it that many adult learners never achieve but the piece was brief and ended too soon. The boy gave a well-rehearsed bow and Mr Beckwith clapped. The violin went straight back into its case.

“You are a clever boy, aren’t you?”

“Not really,” he said simply as the marbles came out of his pockets again.

“Yes you are,” Beckwith enthused, “What’s your name?”

“I’m Samuel.... Samuel Coleridge Taylor. What’s yours?”

Samuel lived in nearby Waddon Road. His Mother, Mrs Evans, was white. In fact the whole family were white. Mr Beckwith never asked into the boy’s parentage or circumstances even though he was dying to. He visited the Evans’ ‘mend-and-make-do’ household in order to introduce himself and to offer his services, free of charge of course, as music teacher. To have a student as engaged and talented as Samuel was, would be a joy. He was too talented, he told Mrs Evans, not to be nurtured. She insisted upon a fee and so a peppercorn one was agreed and hands were shaken.

Two months later, Mr Beckwith was enjoying a drink at the local watering hole with his friend, Herbert Walters and spoke of his outstanding new pupil and little else. Colonel Walters listened silently. How many black or mixed race boys of that age could there be in the local area, he asked himself. It must be – it simply had to be Dr Taylor’s boy. The last time he had seen him was when he was a baby, a little over five years before. He had been friends with the newly qualified Dr Taylor prior to his decision to return to West Africa. The good people of Croydon had not been quite ready for a doctor of colour.

Despite being a retired Colonel of the Queens Royal West Surrey Regiment, Walters was only a year older than Beckwith. He was a well-born, handsome and highly entertaining man – knowing simply everyone. He was well known for his philanthropic ways and was musically gifted himself. Although not a professional, he was, at that time, organist and choirmaster at St George’s and also at St Mary Magdalene’s in Addiscombe.

One of the many that the well-connected Walters knew was Dr Drage, headmaster of the British School in Croydon. Within a few weeks of Mr Beckwith reacquainting the young Colonel with Mrs Evans, Walters found himself intervening once again in the boy’s life and secured him a place at Drage’s school. Mr Beckwith continued to tutor him once a week, Samuel excelled at school and in this way, and all too quickly, the years passed.

When Samuel was about eight, Herbert Walters made a place available in his choir and this proved a fertile ground for the lad to develop musically. He had a charming singing voice and was soon singing solo parts.

For the most part things went splendidly well, but just as in any child's life, the road wasn't entirely without its rocks.

Just before a rehearsal for that year's Christmas Carol Service, Colonel Walters learnt that one of the other boys had called the lad 'Sambo'.

Samuel hadn't been particularly bothered but Walters took him to one side nevertheless and explained that he didn't believe there was any malice in what had been said, just a lump of stupidity. He told him that it was probably because his name was 'Samuel' – and then a thought struck him. He asked if it might be alright if he called him 'Coleridge' instead – if they all called him Coleridge. Suddenly another thought flitted across his mind.

"I expect they might call you 'Coley' in that case. Would you mind that?"

"No, Sir. They call me 'Coley' at school. I like 'Coley'."

It was settled.

Colonel Walters was called upon to make three more interventions in the boy's life. The first was when Coleridge was pushed into the stream on his way to choir practice. Colonel Walters had had to walk his charge, looking more like a drowned rat, home. Mrs Evans laughed. She gave Coleridge a towel and a cuddle and told him that every boy under the age of twelve had ended up in that stream one way or another since time immemorial. The second event was more serious and warranted a 'bit of a chat' with both Coleridge's mother and with Kenneth's mother in attendance – Kenneth being the offending chorister.

During the Carol Service, Kenneth had used a candle to set Coleridge's hair alight, just as 'the little Lord Jesus lay down his sweet head'. Without negating the seriousness of the incident, Walters told Mrs Evans that it wasn't the first time a chorister had caught fire during the annual Carol Service and that he was almost sure it wouldn't be the last.

Mrs Evans nodded, sagely.

"I'm really sorry, Coley. I didn't mean to hurt you," Kenneth said. Coley hadn't been hurt. "I just wanted to see how it would burn."

The smell of candle wax and singed hair hung in the air of the then empty, austere and gothic suburban church. Kenneth's head hung low, weighted with leaden shame, but it was embarrassment that made Coleridge's head hang heavily. He hadn't even been aware of his head being on fire. One moment he was singing out, with all his heart, 'We love thee Lord Jesus', happily thinking about the donkeys and shepherds, when suddenly and without warning, about six of the surrounding choristers started to wildly thrash about his face and neck with their song sheets.

"Now, I think that you two should shake hands like proper gentlemen," said the Colonel. The boys shook hands as their mothers looked on. "There now, the matter is closed." Closed with a civilised, unequivocal and military handling.

Walters knew that there was only so far anyone could go in a small parish choir and all too quickly, Coleridge had turned from a little boy into a young man, and so – the final intervention. Walters and Beckwith had organised a number of concerts in the church hall over the preceding years, so that Coleridge could

perform, thus enabling him to not only become a more confident solo performer, both at singing and on his violin, but also to broaden his repertoire into the more secular and popular music that he enjoyed so much. But in 1890, when Coleridge was 15, it was beginning to become clear that he was outgrowing these too and so a question arose as to a next step.

Colonel Walters had many friends in the City and often managed to secure his boys junior positions in London firms. Coleridge certainly had the schooling and the ability to make a career in the City, but Walters knew it would spell the end of the boy's first love. It was patently clear that the boy wanted to be a musician despite the well-worn fact that this was not normally considered a viable career option – especially for a boy from a family that was, to be frank, far from wealthy. Musical careers were the preserve of those with means, to whom any career was an undesirable option rather than a necessary evil. A musical career was not for boys like Coleridge who couldn't afford a violin larger than the child-sized one he had been playing for the past ten years.

There was always Sir George, an acquaintance of Walters' late father. Sir George had founded the Royal College of Music.

Walters had already broached his plan to Mrs Evans so as to take every precaution against unrealistically raising Coleridge's expectations but if he could arrange a meeting and if the boy could secure a place there, then, Walters had told Mrs Evans, Coleridge should surely apply for the scholarship. What was there to lose?

The church hall had all but emptied. Walters sat on the edge of the stage watching as Coleridge slowly



walked towards the far end, to close the door behind the last to leave.

He was a thoughtful and modest boy; bright too. Perhaps a little small for his age. He was a good performer but somewhat awkward and gangly when he wasn't playing. He was always dressed in 'hand-me-downs' but clean and very neat and tidy. When his clothes needed mending they were repaired with the care and expertise of a very proud and loving mother.

As Coleridge closed the heavy door, the thought that he had successfully pushed from his mind all evening, gradually started to loom and demanded to be acknowledged. That concert was to be the last of his concerts in the church hall organised by his teacher Mr Beckwith and his protector Colonel Walters; his benefactor and friend. This was the step nearer the end of a chapter without any clue as to what might come next. Coleridge took his time before turning. This was a goodbye.

He turned and saw Walters sitting casually on the stage with the violin bow in his hand. Coleridge awkwardly walked back down through the lonely hall and sat next to him on the edge of the stage. He looked out at the rows of empty and upset chairs. He slowly swung his legs and looked at his shoes.

They sat in silence for a moment or two and then, as if reading the young man's mind and answering the unaskable question, Walters told him that his father would have been very proud had he been there.

"Will you tell me about him once more?" Coleridge asked.

Walters smiled.

"Well.... Dr Taylor, your father, was a charming man. Not very much taller than you. He was most fastidious

in his appearance and quite the cleverest man I ever met. He was a very fine doctor. He was a very good friend to have.”

“I can’t picture him,” Coleridge said. “I can’t imagine his face. I try all the time.... I thought he might come back one day – if I could make him proud.”

Walters clipped the bow into its clasp on the hinged lid.

“You need a bigger violin,” he said. He couldn’t think of what else to say. He collected his thoughts. He started to talk, then couldn’t. He said, “Coleridge, everyone does the very best that they can with what they have at the time – with what they understand and know and think and believe... at the time. Does that make sense?” Coleridge nodded. “Mr and Mrs Evans are wonderful people....”

“Oh, I know,” Coleridge said, suddenly feeling ungrateful – a feeling he hated. Words weren’t coming very easily to him either. He knew what he wanted to say but didn’t know what words to use to say it with. He knew at least that he had to try. He knew that there may not be another opportunity and so.... “Colonel Walters, I... I need to tell you that... Well, what I want to say, Sir is that I don’t quite know how I will ever actually be able to thank you properly for all you’ve done for me.”

Walters smiled as the warm light filled him.

“I just want you to be happy, Coleridge.” The only thing Herbert Walters ever asked of those around him was that they be happy and for many this was simply too much to ask. Coleridge knew that this was the only thing that any truly good man ever asked. Walters smiled down at the young man but saw that his eyes were beginning to fill with tears and one splashed out

and fell on his trouser knee. Walters pretended he hadn't seen. He drummed his fingers on the violin case and changed key.

"So, the only question remaining is where to place you. You know I have many friends in the City?" Walters asked. He looked at the crooked rows of chairs, some with their programmes still on, still twisted from the boy's first standing ovation.

"You've done too much for me already." He couldn't take his eyes from his shoes.

"And you know I have found positions there, for those boys who have outgrown us here."

"Yes, Sir," Coleridge said.

"Well, I can't help wondering if you might be far happier elsewhere." Coleridge frowned in puzzlement. "Coleridge, I would like you to tell me... what do you really want?"

Coleridge thought.

"If I could, I'd like to work in the City."

"Fibber."

Coleridge sighed, "Alright, if I really could," he said, "I'd be a musician, but..."

"— a what... did you say?" Walters interrupted, playfully nudging Coleridge's shoulder with his own.

Coleridge smirked a little and he pinched his eyes drier. Walters was glad of the smirk. The last thing he wanted to do was overwhelm the boy.

"A musician," Coleridge repeated smiling at Walters who was still looking ahead, but nodding thoughtfully.

"Ah," he said as he passed the violin case to Coleridge, "then you might be pleasantly surprised to learn that I wrote to Sir George Grove at the Royal College of Music to arrange for you to see him there,"

Coleridge gasped as his jaw dropped and his eyes widened. "...and if you should be accepted there as a student in September, I shan't hear a word from either you or your parents worrying about the fees."

This was too much. Another thick, glassy tear rolled out of Coleridge's eye and down his cheek and then another. He threw his arms around Herbert Walters' neck.

"Thank you," he said. He squeezed him. "Thank you, Sir." He sniffed and squeezed him. He squeezed him and silently sobbed. There were no words that could say that particular 'goodbye'.

At last, he let go. He wiped his eye and blew his nose and became a gentleman again. He looked up at Colonel Walters. Walters had joy emblazoned upon his face. But it transcended joy and it wasn't on his face, it was coming from within. Joy was expressing itself through him.

He took his mentor's hand shook it. "Thank you, Sir."

Coleridge jumped down from the stage.

"I'd better go."

Colonel Walters nodded. "You better had."

"What can I do to...?"

"The only thing I want from you Coleridge is a promise. I want you to promise me that you'll always be happy. Can you do that? Will you promise me that you will always be happy?"

"I'll always work hard. I promise. I'll always do my best. I promise. Better than my best... I promise."