

## **INCOMING**

### **Bill McGuire**

I blink away a droplet of sweat and draw Bea's thin frame closer. She looks up at me, shivering despite the heat. In the darkness, the small girl's face is a pale, featureless smear, but I know it bears a closed expression; the brown eyes nurturing the haunted look they have held since the day her mother was killed. The night is sweltering and starless, the feathery fronds of the young palm beneath which we crouch, hanging motionless in the still air. Across the short stretch of water ahead of us, the towering steel and concrete wall of the Bulwark is bathed in cold, blue light. The dark maw of the Huntingdon Seagate is the only break in the unassailable barrier which, to the left sweeps southwards in a long curve, and to the right marches into the distance along the shore of the Cambridgeshire Bight. A container ship the length of half a dozen city blocks, lights blazing from stem to stern, eases slowly to a halt, heaving to alongside three others queuing to enter the port concealed beyond the Seagate. The ship is the latest in an almost continuous train of supply vessels that navigate

the polar routes from Asia to feed the insatiable appetite of London Max, the greatest of the European city states.

A shabby little ferry exits the Seagate, bumping and bouncing on a creamy, v-shaped, wash that briefly ruffles the black, oily, surface of the otherwise flat calm water. Its open deck is packed with weary incomers, indentured labourers returning home from 12-hour shifts to the vast favela that straggles for a dozen kilometres along the north shore of the Bight. As the boat clears the gate, the three red lights above its cavernous entrance – each as big as a house - switch to green, prompting the pilot on the closest of the container ships to nudge it forwards into the breach and out of view. Dwarfed by its enormous bulk, the ferry crosses the prow of another of the great ships, turns hard to port and heads directly for a rickety wooden jetty thrusting into the sea from a cluster of ramshackle huts. Just as a collision seems inevitable, the helmsman simultaneously spins the wheel and cuts the engines, swinging the boat violently and leaving it to clatter side-on into the row of battered tyres that shield the jetty's fraying edge. Before the boat can rebound, a couple of the crew, shirtless and barefoot, leap the shallow gunwale and tie up.

Cowed and exhausted, the passengers follow slowly, shuffling the length of the jetty with little enthusiasm to queue at the checkpoint that blocks their passage. Arms outstretched, they are searched one by one, but the pat down by the pair of city protectorate guards is cursory, yielding little more than the odd trinket. Few try to smuggle anything of value out this way. Jobs are too precious to risk and the professional gangs take a dim view of any competition. The very real prospect of a knife in the ribs on a dark night is all that is needed to deter serious pilfering.

I sense a presence, corroborated by a hoarse whisper: 'Davie!' and turn to find DB at my shoulder. A waxing moon momentarily evades the cloud cover, casting a sickly yellow glow on the newcomer's face and picking out a puckered scar that draws his mouth upwards at one corner, so that it seems to be curled in a constant sneer. A tattooed hand, holding two idents is paraded in front of my face. DB attempts a grin, revealing broken and missing teeth and croaks three words:

'It is time.'

Bea shies away from the grim apparition, burying her face in my side, but I smile my thanks, take the thin metal plates and stuff them inside my sweat-soaked shirt. DB pats me on the

back and utters one further word:

'Go.'

Cloud scuds briefly across the moon and when it emerges again he is nowhere to be seen.

Taking Bea's hand, I stand, uttering a soft groan as my knees sound their objections. We duck out from beneath the palm fronds and walk the short distance to a track of compacted sand and pebbles that follows the seaward edge of the dune field to the jetty and its attendant agglomeration of hovels. To the south, the sky beyond the Bulwark glows a ghostly white from horizon to horizon; the low cloud broadcasting far and wide the extravagant light from a gigacity that stretches uninterrupted for more than a hundred kilometres to the Channel. I turn my head towards the north and home. Here, beyond the dunes, darkness holds sway, save for a few guttering palm oil lamps in the sleeping favela and the pinpoint flickers of campfires on the distant wolds. Shutting out emerging thoughts of Ruth's candlelit smile and a past life that – like Ruth – is dead and buried, I do my best to look purposeful. I increase my stride so that Bea has to trot to keep up, and fix my gaze on the ferry and the future.

By now, the returning incomers have passed

through the checkpoint. A few have paused to sink a glass or two in one of the tumbledown bars, but most have followed the winding path through the dunes to bed and welcome oblivion. Already a sizeable crowd has gathered at the jetty, awaiting embarkation for the return journey. Some talk in barely audible murmurs. Others slap their faces to shock themselves fully awake, readying body and mind for another shift of grindingly hard physical work for a paltry handout and the chance to win the monthly residents lottery, which – for one in a million - will guarantee citizenship and transform their lives. Most stand silent, yawning and scratching. I am surprised and shocked at the number of children, some very small. They rub sleep from their bleary eyes with tiny fists or just stand there, pitifully thin arms hanging limply at their sides, pinched faces drawn. Many clutch at the legs of an adult, desperate for a last drop of parental companionship before they are siphoned off to pick clean the filters of the desal plants or to reach those difficult places in the air-con ducts. Neither size nor age are barriers to work in the great city of London Max.

As we join the back of the queue, one of the guards opens a low gate allowing the early arrivals to pile on to the boat in a stampede to

grab one of the few benches in the prow, upwind of the filthy engines. The rest bundle on behind, jostling and elbowing one another as they funnel through the small gateway. More a melée now than a queue, tempers fray and fists fly as it becomes clear that the favoured standing positions around the edge of the deck are going fast. A small boy, who looks about four, but is likely older and stunted by poor nutrition, falls and is saved from being trampled by his quick-witted father, who scoops him up. Concerned about losing control, one of the guards shouts a warning, raises his rifle and launches a fizzer across the heads of the throng. The potentially lethal bolt falls harmlessly into the sea, sending up a small plume of steam, the near invisible filament trailing behind detaching from the rifle and drifting onto the heads of some in the crowd, who brush it away in irritation.

Grudging calm ensues and embarkation continues in a mood of barely concealed frustration and dissent. I examine the trigger-happy guard with distaste. The network of cooling tubes that criss-cross the outer surface of his red light-armoured suit makes him look like some sort of alien being. No – not an alien – a flayed human, arteries and veins exposed to full view. As

often seems to happen in such situations, the guard turns and catches my eye. Momentarily flustered, I drop one of the idents and have to scabble amongst a forest of legs to retrieve it.

The ferry is filling rapidly and I start to worry there might not be room. Then we are almost at the gate and I allow myself a small sigh of relief. Now there are just three young lads ahead of us. Two are brash and loud, high on youthful bravado and perhaps something else. The third – a stocky, red-haired boy – seems to me a bit jumpy, something the guard notices too. He carefully scrutinises the youth's ident, which hangs on a lanyard around his neck, and those in the hands of his more ebullient companions. All seem in order and he waves them through. A far more rigorous check will take place at the other end, so the guards this side are pretty laid back.

We are at the gate. I hand the idents to the guard, who gives the thin metal plates little more than a passing glance. He looks us up and down - a thin, prematurely grey, man and a scrawny little girl in a torn and grubby dress - features and expression hidden behind the reflective visor of his air conditioned helmet, then waves us on. We are about to step forward when the guard shoots

out an arm to stop us. For a moment, my heart is in my mouth, but then he points at the ground. Stripy Ted. Bea must have dropped the old and battered soft toy when she covered her eyes to blot out the guard's intimidating visage. I pick up the comforter, hand it to Bea and lift her over the shallow gunwale onto the packed deck. As soon as I follow, the guard snaps the gate shut behind me, the ferry's engines launch into an ear-splitting roar, a couple of shoremen toss the hawsers to the crew and we are off amidst a fugg of palm diesel smoke.

Forced up against the gunwale at the back of the boat by the press of bodies, I hold Bea close and she clutches at my waist, burying her face in my crotch. The journey to the Seagate is short but unpleasant, the salty tang of the sea air compromised by overtones of none-too-clean bodies marinating in the night's damp heat and the ever-present stink of the palm diesel. As it always does, the smell takes me back to the day Ruth died. A day like any other until the kids appeared.

They seemed friendly enough, half a dozen or so in all, a few girls amongst them. They were seeking food, but didn't appear armed or dangerous. Still, I should have known not to let

my guard down. I only turned my back for an instant, but the next thing I knew I was lying on the ground in the hut, head splitting, hands tied in front. Bea was next to me, screaming. Ruth was slumped in the far corner, also bound and very still. There was smoke and a strong smell of the palm diesel that we used in our small generator, and flames were already licking at Ruth's feet. The fire spread with unbelievable speed. By the time I managed to struggle to my feet, Ruth was hidden by a curtain of flame and chunks of burning wood and straw were falling from the roof. There was nothing I could do for her. I kicked at the wall closest to us; the rickety corrugated iron sheets requiring little effort to batter down. As best I could, I grabbed Bea's ankles with my bound hands and dragged her through the gap and away from the hut. A minute or so later, there was nothing left of it but a smouldering heap. Bea didn't stop screaming for a long, long, time and hasn't spoken since.

Eventually, I managed to free our hands. We needed shelter and food, and there was no reason to stay, so we headed for Darbee. Up until then we had kept well away from the wreckage of the city because of the collectives, but our situation now was desperate and I had Bea to think of. Luckily, I

am pretty handy with a crossbow, so the Rustlers – one of the less psychopathic collectives – took us under their wing. Most of the time, my job was to provide some muscle on scavenging trips and to pot any live meat wandering around, but there was inevitably some involvement in less savoury episodes, which I am not proud of. To be honest, though, there was little choice if I wanted to accumulate enough valuables to barter for the forged idents. By then I had decided that if Bea was to have any life to speak of, we had to get inside the Bulwark.

I am shaken out of my retrospective as the ferry is struck side-on by the wash from a monstrous tanker, encroaching too close and moving too fast in its urgency to return to its Asian roots. The boat bucks violently, causing the passengers to surge as one to port, the sudden redistribution of weight tilting the deck dangerously. From the small cabin amidships a string of profanities drifts in the direction of the rapidly retreating ship.

The Seagate is close now. The lights remain red following the tanker's hurried exit, so the helmsman throttles back the engines, and the ferry bobs uncomfortably just outside until a row of

green lights grants passage. Veterans of countless previous trips, most of the passengers show little or no interest as the ferry crosses the Bulwark's threshold. Bea, too, is oblivious, but I can't stop myself gaping upwards at the immense slab of concrete and steel that hangs fifty metres overhead. Despite its impregnable appearance, the gate shows its age, the surface scarred and crumpled by the increasingly savage storm surges that assault the Bulwark during the winter months, when the gate is almost permanently closed. Suddenly aware that my wide-eyed interest is far from the sort of behaviour expected of an inured incomer from the favela, I return my attention to the view ahead.

Even more astonishing than the gate itself is the enormous bay that opens up beyond. Along its entire length, countless spider-like cranes are in constant motion; sliding up and down their rails beneath brilliant arc lights like a troop of meticulously choreographed dancers. Around the clock, in an unending ritual, container after container is scooped from the decks of a stream of gargantuan freighters, to be added to the many thousands that cram the dockside. More luxuries for the inhabitants of London Max awaiting onward transport to the stores, boutiques and

restaurants, more material distractions to keep guilty minds turned inward, away from the awful reality of the world beyond the Bulwark. Far to the left, a fleet of palm oil tankers pumps out the lifeblood that keeps the extraordinary gigacity functioning and its residents cocooned from the chaos and despair outside. Pipelines as tall as a man suck the oil into clusters of globular storage tanks from which it begins its journey south to meet the needs of London Max's 200 million citizens.

As the helmsman hauls sharply on the wheel and the ferry turns hard to starboard, the oil terminal slides out of view. Ahead, now, is a different prospect. More than a dozen wooden jetties, matching the one we embarked from, project into the oleaginous waters of the bay, around which are gathered an army of boats of every shape and size, many of which seem barely sea-worthy. Several ferries, some in a far worse state than ours, are docked, embarking and disembarking incomers, while others jostle for the few free jetty berths. Beyond the jetties, covering every available patch of quayside, is an enormous souk, a profusion of stalls, small sheds and pre-fabs; grocers, bars, knocking shops and small businesses, most in little better condition than

those of the favela, which cater to the basic needs and desires of the countless incomers who pass through every day. On the souk's far side is the maglev loop, its trains slowing, but never stopping as they cart the incomers speedily and efficiently to work and return them, sucked dry of spirit and stamina, to the ferries. But I have no eyes for these. My gaze is fixed above and beyond, at the multitude of brilliantly-lit towers of glass and steel that hem in the port like some bastardised surrogate of a primaeval forest. Many are so high that I have to crane my head far back to see their upper levels. Some even penetrate the cloud base, their pinnacles fading into Stygian gloom. The spectacle is so astonishing, so beyond anything I have ever experienced that, for a brief time, I forget Ruth, forget Bea, forget even why I am here.

As the ferry puts on an extra burst of speed to squeeze out another boat that has crept up on our inside, I am jolted back to the here and now. The helmsman shows no sign of slowing as he single-mindedly sets course for a recently vacated berth. Just as it seems we must crash head-on, he again performs his party trick, cutting power and swinging the ferry through ninety degrees, so that it crunches into the tyre-lined jetty. As we lurch as

one to the left, I wonder absently how long the boat can withstand this kind of treatment.

Once the ferry is secured, the incomers queue, with little enthusiasm, to step across the gunwale and onto the jetty. They shamble slowly towards its end, where four city protectorate guards cluster around the entry checkpoint. Two officers in red – one tall and lanky, the other short and squat - man the rapID portal that checks the DNA of incomers against the DNA profiles stored on their idents. A prominent sign over the portal is a daily reminder to incomers that, if they are astonishingly lucky, they may achieve *Citizenship through Labour*. Two green-clad subordinates slouch against a railing nearby contemplating the throng – their body language signals - with a mixture of boredom and disdain. I wait until most of the others have disembarked before stepping carefully onto the slippery wood of the jetty and reaching back for Bea. I feel sick, partly a conspiracy of palm diesel fumes and the ferry's motion, but mostly due to the growing realisation that this is it, the culmination of everything I have worked towards for the last year. In a few minutes, we could be in. Either that or facing two years hard labour before being 'repatriated' to the so-called northern hinterland. I look down in

anger and frustration at Bea, clutching at my thigh and trying desperately to fight off sleep. She would never survive the ordeal.

The more I try to stay calm, the twitchier I get. My heart is thumping in my chest and my breathing shallow and rapid. My bowels feel watery. Bea is blind to my torment and to the cardinal importance of the moment. She is unfazed by the wonders of London Max, her demeanour unchanged, her thoughts trapped in the past - in a burning hut far to the north.

Progress along the jetty is slow as incomers enter the portal one by one to have their idents verified. With maybe twenty or so ahead of us in the queue, we reach a gap where a couple of planks have rotted away and fallen into the water below. I lift Bea over and, looking down, step across myself. Raising my head, my attention is drawn to a scuffle at the portal, where the three lads are awaiting ident confirmation and entry. The light above the portal flashes red, and the grating sound of an alarm flags the interception of yet another illegal desperate enough to risk imprisonment, or worse, for a better life. Now, one of the youths – it looks like the twitchy red-head – is shouting, one arm raised in an attempt to

snatch back his ident, which the lanky officer holds just out of reach. Lanky says something, the sound coming out harsh and metallic through his helmet mic. The youth is not to be mollified, and throws himself forward to make another grab. Lanky is far too quick, jabbing him hard in the kidneys with the fingers of a gloved hand and bringing him to his knees. In seconds, his shorter colleague has the youth's hands behind his back and securely tied. Stirred from their torpor by the commotion, the green-clad guardsmen are quick to respond to events, their bolt rifles swiftly unslung and trained on the youth's two companions. All three are bundled to one side and forced to hunker down close to the jetty's edge under the watchful gaze of the greens. The remaining incomers in the queue have seen it all before. They stand sullen and patient, eyes averted, awaiting their turn.

The next in line – a tiny boy - is waved into the portal by the short officer. I watch as he takes the boy's ident, inserts it into a slot on a small panel and makes a few taps on an adjacent screen. He bends down and says something inaudible to the boy, who places a thin forearm facing upwards on a metal plate above which hovers a robot arm holding a needle. A sudden downward movement

and the needle pierces the skin and extracts a miniscule sample of blood. In just a few seconds, the boy's DNA profile has been determined and compared with that stored on his ident. A light flashes green above the portal and the boy is ushered through, waiting patiently on the far side while his father takes his turn.

A thought strikes me like a sledgehammer and I have to stop myself groaning out loud – the needle! The incomers have their blood sampled every day. Over the months and years their forearms have become pockmarked with a diffuse pattern of tiny but obvious red dots. On the ferry I noticed this on the arms of some of the other passengers, but assumed it was heat rash. According to our idents, Bea and I have worked as incomers for two years, but our arms are unmarked. My knees sag and I am overwhelmed by a wave of despair as the awful implication strikes home. The guards can't fail to notice. Despondency turns quickly to anger. Why didn't DB tell us? He must have known. Dog Breath was far from agreeable to look at, or to be near, but I had trusted him. Now this. Maybe the idents are no good either? I know the Rustler's forging facilities are primitive and far from biologically secure, so there is always a risk of contamination

that would result in poor DNA matches. Looking down at the two idents in my hand, I can't help but wonder if they are nothing more than worthless pieces of scrap. I would find out soon enough.

The queue shuffles forward a little more. I am dimly aware that my face has taken on a hunted look, eyes darting left and right of their own accord, but there is no possibility of escape. There are only about half a dozen people ahead of us now, the rest having passed through the portal to be swallowed up by the great throng milling about the stalls, shops and bars on the quayside. At last, there are just two incomers between us and the portal, a young couple leaning on one another, seemingly so careworn they are barely able to stand unsupported. The light flashes green, and again, and then it is our turn. The corps-commander's insignia on one shoulder marking him in charge, shorty signals us forward with an impatient flick of a red-gloved hand. I detach Bea's arms from my leg, whisper reassurance in her ear and gently usher her forward. Clutching Stripy Ted to her chest with one arm, she places her other on the plate, and a new needle rotates into position. Before it falls, I screw shut my eyes and wait for the exclamation from the guard that will signal the loss of all hope.

My eyes fly open at the expected outburst, but it comes from an unanticipated source. The bound red-head who, for some time, has been muttering expletives to himself, suddenly aims a blast of invective at the guards and attempts to get to his feet. Momentarily distracted, shortly turns away as the needle jabs Bea's arm. As she let's it fall back to her side unnoticed, I dare – for a moment - to hope. My renewed optimism lasts barely a few seconds, as a flashing light on the touchscreen flags a mismatch between Bea's DNA and her ident profile. Designed, it seems, to humiliate, to broadcast our misfortune far and wide, the light above the portal flashes red and the screech of the alarm reverberates across the quayside. Bea turns to look at me, wide-eyed and terrified. I stretch out my arms, ready to embrace away her fear, when events take an unlooked-for turn.

The light and the alarm have acted seemingly as a trigger, prompting the red-haired lad to struggle to rise again; his snarling mouth spouting a concoction of obscenities and spittle. A green-clad guard stretches forwards to club him down with the butt of his bolt-rifle. Seeing an opportunity, one of red head's companions,

crouched on the jetty-side, trips the off-balance green and upends him into the scummy water. By the time the two officers have unslung their guns and taken aim, the third lad – this one tall and dark skinned - has ripped the helmet off the second green, and holds the point of a short but wicked looking knife to his throat. His captive drops his gun. His arms hang limply at his sides and his face bears a look of unmitigated terror. Knifeman shouts something at the officers, who have begun to inch towards him and away from the portal, but so strong is his accent that I can't make out the words. Whatever they are, shorty's response is to send a fizzer close by knifeman's right ear; its thin trailing filament crackling in the still air and the bolt sending up a puff of steam as it shatters the rainbow sheen on the water's greasy surface. Knifeman neither moves nor speaks, but his intention, should another bolt be forthcoming is clear. Pressing harder with the knife point, he breaks the unfortunate guard's skin, launching a trickle of blood that runs slowly down his neck and drips onto the front of his green chest armour. Stand-off. Lanky covers the still bound red head and the unarmed lad, while shorty's rifle sight never deviates from knifeman. The captive guard's eyes are closed, his lips working rapidly as if in silent prayer. No-one speaks.

I stand rooted to the spot, arms enfolding Bea, both of us stock-still and forgotten. Hardly daring to believe our extraordinary fortune, I put a finger to my lips, take Bea's hand, and walk with her through the portal. The quayside is still some way off along the jetty, and it seems to take an age to get any nearer. I don't dare look behind me, but the hairs on the back of my neck bristle with fear and the anticipation of a fizzer. As we near the quayside and safety, a scream and a series of crackles forces me to turn in time to see knifeman fall backwards into the water, his senseless body jerking and flailing. The unarmed youth is down too, heels drumming vigorously on the wooden slats of the jetty. Red head crouches, bound arms held awkwardly above his head; a dripping green guardsman – breaker of the stalemate – patting him down for hidden weapons. The tall officer is bent over, listening impassively to an animated shorty, whose body language spells anger and frustration. Shorty points in our direction and lanky turns his head to look.

'Run!' I urge Bea forward.

'Run, sweetheart – as fast as you can! Daddy's behind you.'

Countless experiences since we were burned out of our home have taught Bea to recognise desperation in my voice, and she needs no further

urging to take off along the jetty as fast as her small legs can manage. I follow close behind, my body protecting her, my progress hobbled as I am forced to match Bea's pace. We are almost at the end of the jetty when the first fizzer misses my shoulder by a fraction. I can smell the ozone as the electric charge ionises the air, but the bolt thuds harmlessly into the quayside ahead of us; the attached filament drifting onto the wooden jetty. We leap the few steps down onto the quayside as two more bolts fizz overhead, one embedding itself in the jetty's wooden gateway. Seconds later, we are enveloped in the noise and smells of the market, our passage slowed by the crush of sweaty, ripe, bodies, but our safety assured by the sheer number of people that jam the narrow spaces between the stalls and shacks.

I usher Bea onwards, hands on her shoulders as we shuffle through the crowds. I have no idea where we are headed or what we are going to do, but I can't keep a wide grin off my face. We have made it, we are in! Even while I shake my head in disbelief and sheer delight, a small part of my mind is already picking away at our predicament. Where will we sleep tonight? Where will we live? How will we live? I've heard that illegals can easily find work, no questions

asked. I am under no illusion. It will be hard, but it can't be worse than trying to survive in the savage and lawless world beyond the Bulwark. Involuntarily, one hand reaches into a pocket and fidgets with a scrap of paper, a contact supplied by DB that, until now, I have not tempted fate by thinking about.

Wading onwards, we find ourselves at the maglev loop, where we are caught up and carried along by the hordes of incomers boarding and leaving the trundling autonomous railcars. Keeping Bea close, I forge a way across the powerful current of humanity and into a narrow jitty. Its pitted and potholed surface is littered with rubbish, and worse, but the food smells from the stalls that jostle close along either side are too enticing to ignore. I collapse into a battered rattan chair outside a baker and hoist Bea onto my lap. Neither of us have eaten for more than twenty-four hours and I know Bea must be desperately hungry and thirsty, though she never indicates as much. Installing Bea on the chair, I walk a few paces to the shack's serving hatch. A grubby, bearded, face appears around the door into the back kitchen and vanishes almost immediately. Moments later a scruffy little boy, no more than eight year's old, is ushered out from the doorway

by an apparently disembodied pair of very hairy arms. Barely able to see over the counter, the boy says nothing but stares at me expectantly. So much of the food on display behind the serving hatch is new to me that I struggle to make a choice. On the young boy's recommendation, I plump for a pasty filled with some sort of meat, and choose a couple of jam-filled tarts for Bea. Ingrained wariness of cholera, which rages unchecked beyond the Bulwark, prompts me to turn down an offer of a jug of water and two smeared glasses, instead taking a couple of rusty cans of a fruit-flavoured drink. Like the favela, the port market is alienated from the city's cashless monetary system, so goods and services are bartered or paid for in kind. I am relieved when the shop's hirsute owner accepts in payment, via the boy, a single, small, silver earring.

I swallow half my pasty in one go; cramming it into my mouth and savouring the tingling warmth of its spicy meat filling. I place the cans and the jam tarts on a small table and, remaining standing, watch as Bea reaches tentatively for the nearest tart. She picks it up and examines it closely, touching a finger to the jammy centre and placing it to her lips. For a few seconds nothing happens, then the corners of

Bea's mouth start to lift in the beginnings of a smile, the first for far too long. I realise that I have been holding my breath and expel it in a long, shuddering sigh, purging from my body the pent-up fears and doubts of the last few days, the last year. I smile as Bea takes a huge bite of the tart, her upper lip jam-smearred and her eyes brighter than I have seen them since the fire. Even as she eats, tears trickle down her cheeks and mix with the red goo. It's as if she too has been holding her breath - ever since her mother's death, holding everything in until this moment, this first flicker of light in a dark and desperate year. I lean forward and hug her close, my eyes wet, my food forgotten. Everything would be alright now. They were going to be fine. They were in.