Sounding the Dark

By two o'clock, the midway at the 1933 Vancouver Exhibition seethed with people. The hot August Saturday sun, the whistling music of the Calliope truck, brought a mood of expectation and excitement to everyone. The air was filled with the aromas of popcorn popping, peanuts roasting and the tangy undertone of animals in the nearby stables. A trip to the Exhibition was a rare opportunity for people to forget their troubles, even if just for an afternoon.

Larkin Figgis, a fifteen-year-old-girl wearing her prettiest summer dress, wandered alone through the grounds heading for the Girlie tent. The talker stood on a box in front of the tent. "Step up, gentlemen! We have a special show for you. We're going to take you through all the seasons. Winter, fall, summer and spring. We've got real good lookers in this show. Lookers better than those pin-ups you love on your cigarette cards. You like Miss DuMaurier, just wait until you see our Miss Spring. Step up. Fifty cents for a lifetime of delicious memories."

A group of skittish stable boys stood close to the entrance to the tent. The tall one with the wavy black hair smiled at Larkin. His name was Alex DeCarolis. Larkin rolled his name around her mouth like Turkish candy at Christmas. He waved and then pushed his way through the crowd toward her, as she waited in the line-up.

"I have something I have to do, right now," Larkin said.

"I know. Just wanted to say hello."

Larkin nodded. "I'll meet you out back by the dressing tent after the first number."

"I'll be there," he said.

Larkin knew she was good at picking coins but needed a little magic to pinch a wallet from a man's pocket. She felt confident about her choice of mark. He wore a white shirt that held its starch, grey trousers with a bulging back pocket. He was pale and clean shaven. A man who still had a job. Surely, he had a couple of dollars in his wallet. Three days left before September rent was due. She needed three dollars. With a nod and smile from the ticket taker, she followed her mark into the tent.

The sweltering air, the stink of sweat, tobacco and women's perfume made her dizzy. She closed her eyes, lost track of her mark but spotted him again as he cut through the crowd toward the stage.

The gold velvet curtain pulled back slowly.

"I wish I had her legs." That was always the first thought that came to Larkin when she watched her mother step out on the stage. Edie's legs were yards long with just the right curves and promise. She wore a silver gown, all sparkle, rhinestones and sequins. When she blew a kiss to the crowd, the three-man band at the side of the stage started to play, coloured lights shone on her from above. She danced into the rhythm of the drums. She was magical up there.