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opening extract from

The Foreshadowing

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Part One



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I was five when I first saw the future. Now I am seventeen.

I can't remember much about it. Or maybe I should say I *couldn't* remember much about it, until now.

For years all I could recall was laughter, nervous laughter, and later, silence, then later still, anger. I felt ashamed, guilty, hurt when I thought about it, but I had quite forgotten what *it* was. Or rather, I had made myself forget.

Memories, half-hidden for twelve years, have started to surface, in bits and pieces, until I see a picture of that day long ago, when I was just a little girl.

We weren't living in Clifton Terrace then, with my wonderful view of the sea, but I don't know where we did live. There was a big garden, bigger than the one we have here. I was playing in this garden with another girl, about my own age. Edgar and Tom were young then too, and even played with us sometimes when they weren't trying to fall out of the big cooking apple tree.

It was summer, and the girl and I were best friends. Her name was Clare and she was the daughter of friends of my parents. It was a long and happy afternoon, but eventually it was time for Clare to go home.

And this is the part I had pushed away and hidden in the depths of my memory for so many years.

I was standing in the hall, giggling with Clare while grown-up chat buzzed above our heads.

Then I said something. I said something that stopped the grown-ups talking and started the silence.

'Why does Clare have to die?' I asked.

Because no one said anything, I thought they hadn't heard me, so I tried again.

'I don't want Clare to die tomorrow.'

Then they did start talking, and I knew they had heard, because Mother was scolding me, and Clare started crying and her mother took her away.

I was wrong. Clare didn't die next day. But I was only five, and, I suppose, didn't understand that tomorrow meant something more specific than *soon*.

Soon, however, I *was* right. Clare died of tuberculosis. It came quickly and there was nothing the doctors could do to save her. I can remember very clearly now wishing I could have helped her. Stopped her dying.

Then the silence started.

Not long after, we moved house, here to Clifton Terrace, and gradually I forgot all about that day when I was five.

Until now.

100



I have seen the future again, and it is death. I can no longer pretend it is my imagination.

I wasn't sure. That I had dreamed about something that came to be might just have been a coincidence. It was a month ago that I dreamt George had been killed. The morning after my dream Father was reading *The Times* at breakfast.

'George Yates,' he said, without looking up. 'That's Edgar's friend, isn't it?'

Mother nodded.

Father read from the paper, still without looking up.

'"Captain George Yates died of wounds, Vermelles, 26 September, 1915."'

I was too shocked to know what to think.

'Poor George,' said Tom.

'Poor Edgar,' Mother said, thinking of her other son. Her elder son, away somewhere in France.

Clumsily she began stacking the plates from breakfast. Tom, my other brother, rose to help her.

'Edgar is fine,' Father said. 'He's a strong young man.'

Now he looked up from his paper for the first time, to fix his eyes on Tom.

'And where's that blasted girl?' he went on, meaning Molly, our maid. 'Don't we pay *her* enough to do that?'

Tom ignored him and carried the plates out to the kitchen.

'No harm will come to the strong,' Father said. 'The brave.'

He started to read the casualty lists again. I don't know why he has to do it. He spends all day with the sick and the dying in the hospital.

'Where is Molly?' Father snapped.

'Cook's away and Molly's busy,' said Mother.

'Alexandra,' Father sighed. 'Help your brother.'

I jumped up and tried to lend a hand, but I could only think about George. He had been at the front; he had been killed. That was not unusual, not anymore. But I had dreamt that it had happened, the night *before* news of it had reached us.

Was that possible?

Over the following days I tried not to dwell on it.

I continued my studies during the day with Miss Garrett and in the evenings I sat with Mother. She's always busy organising her circle of friends, as well as running the house, and Cook, and Molly, who's sweet, but scatterbrained.

I tried again to persuade Father to let me help around the wards, but still he refused. He says it's not fitting for a girl like me, and once his mind is made up, it usually stays that way.

Although I tried to forget George, I couldn't. Images of his death came to me; I don't know where from. One morning I was sitting at my mirror, brushing my hair and thinking how long it was getting, when into my head came a picture of George's mother reading the telegram that gave her the news.

I saw George caught on the wire that we're always hearing about, but that may have been my imagination. I don't know how he died.

I was frightened, but the days passed and I told myself it was a coincidence. Thousands of men are being killed in France each week, and the fact that I dreamt about the death of one of them could be nothing more than chance. I even wondered whether I might have already heard about George's death and not taken it in. Maybe it had already been posted in the lists and Father had missed it. It seemed unlikely, but I clung to this explanation until time allowed me to put it to one corner of my mind, if not to forget about it entirely.

But after what happened yesterday, I can no longer pretend it is my imagination.

Mother and I were walking down Middle Street. We passed the Hippodrome, where I used to love to go to see the circus when I was little. I dawdled outside, remembering a silly act we'd seen there once featuring Dinky, the high-diving dog. Mother pulled my hand.

'Come on, Sasha,' she said. Sometimes she still uses my pet name, as though I'm her little Russian princess.

The sea was in front of us. It's late October and there was a grim grey sky above us. Waves were being whipped against the sea wall by fierce winds. As so often the town was full of soldiers; a mass of khaki uniforms.

We would have walked up to the hospital to see Father, but it looked as if it might start to rain any moment. People scurried past us, a horse and empty cart hurried for home, its driver glancing nervously at the sky.

'We'll take the tram,' Mother said, so we turned and cut

through to the Old Steine, to the stop outside Marlborough House.

There was a long queue. Everything was perfectly ordinary as we waited for the tram. When it arrived the ladies jostled a little to be first on, but in a good-tempered way.

Mother looked at the gathering clouds.

'Come on,' she said, taking my hand.

'No,' I said.

She glanced round at me, surprised.

'Don't play games, Alexandra, I'm cold and it's about to rain.'

'I'm not,' I said.

I didn't know what was wrong.

I just knew I didn't want to be on the tram. That I *mustn't* be on it.

A soldier waiting behind us was impatient.

'Come on, darling,' he said. 'Get a move on.'

But I didn't move.

I could see Mother was embarrassed. The soldier pushed past, bumping into me, as he got on to the tram. He spun round on the step. I stared straight into his eyes.

'Sorry, gorgeous, can't hang about,' he said. There was a cheeky smile on his lips, but as he looked at me, the smile lost its life, and died on his face.

I *knew* he was going to die. I don't know what else I can say. I saw it. Not in France, not in the war, but soon. Here.

'Are you feeling all right?' Mother said, not cross now, thinking I was unwell.

'I don't want to go on the tram.'

'Sasha . . .' Mother began, and then stopped. She sighed.

People pushed on to the tram, but the soldier stood on the

step, still looking at me. Mother saw him and I think it was that, and no other reason, that made her let me have my way. I knew what she thought about 'rough' men.

'We'll walk,' she said, and the tram moved off.

As it went, the soldier was still staring at me.

I watched it go. Mother tugged at my arm, impatiently, but I couldn't move. It was as though I was rooted to the spot. It all happened very slowly then. But somehow very quickly, too. The tram got up to speed and rumbled away towards Grand Parade.

The rain began to lash down then, very suddenly.

A wheel lifted from the tracks somehow; on a point maybe. The tram came off the rails, and laid down on one side, with a tremendous crash. It hit a wall and there was a shower of sparks and rubble.

I was aware of noise all around us. The noise of the tram hitting the wall seemed to take the longest time to reach us, and to be the quietest sound. The sound of screaming was the loudest.

Mother finally dragged me away. Last night, before I went to bed, I asked her why we had left, and she told me that there was nothing we could have done. That lots of people, too many perhaps, had immediately swarmed around the tram, to help others off. The police had arrived, and ambulance cars took the injured to the Royal Sussex, where Father used to work until he was put in charge of the Dyke Road Hospital. I still feel I should have done something. I should have helped.

This morning I read in the paper that most people in the accident had not been too badly hurt, but that one man had been killed.

A soldier.

Thinking back to yesterday, I remember feeling one emotion from my mother. Fear. But not fear of the accident.

Although she doesn't know that I have remembered, I know what she's thinking about. She's thinking about a day long ago, when I was five.