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opening extract from

Time Train to the Blitz

written by

Sophie McKenzie

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A gust of air whooshed past Joe's ears. He opened his eyes, his hand still gripping Pippy's collar. The train had stopped centimetres in front of them. The sky above them brightened.

"Wow," Scarlett breathed.

Joe blinked. The train standing in front of him now wasn't like any he'd seen before. It was the usual train shape – long, with a rounded front end, like a bottle-nosed dolphin. But it was made from the same glowing material as the train tracks, pulsing with a faint fluorescent light.

And it seemed to hover above the tracks – not quite touching them.

Joe peered round the side. The train wasn't long – just a single compartment with a single door. There was no sign of a driver.

Smoothly, silently, the door slid back, revealing a bright orange interior.

"Woof!" Pippy wagged her tail.

"Look, Joe." Scarlett peered inside. "There are two big chairs and a TV screen and –" she craned her neck further round the door – "someone's left some clothes on a table too…"

With a bark, Pippy jumped on board.

For a second, Scarlett hesitated, then she leaped after the dog.

"Pippy, Scarlett, come back!" Joe yelled. Honestly, that was so typical of Scarlett – rushing into things without checking them out first. Joe crept closer to the door, taking in the big orange chairs. What kind of train had only two seats?

A blank TV screen ran down one side of the compartment. Beyond it, at the end of the carriage, Scarlett was standing beside the table, holding up a white pinafore. Pippy padded over to her.

"Pippy, come here," Joe said, firmly.

Pippy stared at him with her big brown eyes. "Woof!" She wagged her tail.

Joe sensed she was trying to reassure him. Scarlett had put down the white pinafore and was now holding up a pair of long, dark-brown shorts.

"Wow," she said, her eyes shining. "They're like dressing-up clothes, Joe. Girls' stuff *and* boys'."

Joe took a deep breath and climbed into the train compartment. He grabbed Pippy's collar and looked round. "This is well weird," he said.

"I know." Scarlett was now examining a blue dress. "Look at this, it's really heavy – but isn't the colour *beautiful*?"

Joe shook his head. He picked up a coarse white shirt from the table. It was a boy's shirt. About his size and similar to the one he wore for school – though made of much rougher and heavier material. Orange writing on the inside of the collar caught his eye.

Scarlett held the dress out in front of her.

"I'm going to try it on," she said, all excited.

Joe rolled his eyes. Trust Scarlett to treat this bizarre experience as an excuse for playing dressing up.

"It's not yours," he pointed out.

But Scarlett already had the dress half over her head.

Joe frowned, then looked back at the orange writing on the inside of the shirt collar. *No.* He peered more closely. It couldn't be...

Joe Simmons. The orange words spelled out his name.

Joe stared at the embroidered writing on the shirt, unable to believe his eyes.

"Look at this," he gasped.

But Scarlett wasn't listening. "Look at *me*." She twirled round in the blue dress. The long skirt floated out around her legs.

She picked up the white pinafore again and held it up in front of her. Four white straps hung from the central white panel. "I reckon this goes over the dress," she said. "How d'you think it ties up, Joe?"

Joe stared at the pinafore. A glimpse of orange on one of the straps caught his eye. He snatched the pinafore out of Scarlett's hands.

"Hey," she complained. "I was just…"

"Look." Joe held out one of the straps. The name *Scarlett Simmons* was written in orange along the edge. "It's like it's for you." He showed Scarlett the shirt collar with his name on it. "And this one's for me."

Scarlett stared at the words, then looked up at him, her eyes wide. "But who put them here?" she said.

"I don't know."

At that moment the TV that ran along the side of the compartment burst into life with a series of colourful pictures.

Scarlett's mouth fell open. "What the…?"

Joe stared as a street full of narrow, brick houses filled the screen. A thick white stripe was painted along the road. A line of children in old-fashioned clothes, like the ones Joe and Scarlett had just found, were walking along the street.

Joe blinked. "This is *really* odd." He looked around. "What's making the TV work?"

There were no knobs or switches beside the screen – there was nothing that they might have touched by accident, and no remote control or computerized handset either.

"Joe!"

He turned back. Half the screen was now filled with a large block of clear, white writing.

"Read it, Joe."

Joe read out loud:

May 1941. The Blitz, London.

Alfie Suggs, aged 10, died a hero's death yesterday when a bomb exploded in his house at 4.05 p.m. Alfie left the safety of an air-raid shelter to warn his deaf grandmother that the sirens were sounding.

"He was such a good boy. Always putting others before himself," Mrs. Suggs said. "He knew I wouldn't hear the siren, so he ran to warn me. I'd got out of the house before the bomb fell, but Alfie was trapped inside. I'm his nan and I will miss him for the rest of my days."

"That's so sad." Scarlett's face was pale.

"Yeah," Joe agreed. "Poor Alfie…"

Joe's phone beeped. A text.

"That's probably Mum, wondering where we are," Scarlett said.

Joe pulled the mobile out of his pocket. But instead of the usual sign saying, *New message,* the phone had somehow gone into stopwatch function. It was counting down from an hour – fifty-nine minutes and fifty-nine seconds…fifty-eight seconds…fifty-seven…

The hairs on the back of Joe's neck stood on end. What on earth was happening?

Scarlett peered over his shoulder. "Why's your phone—?"

Slam! The train door slid shut.

"What's going on?" Scarlett cried.

The train filled with that strange, thin *whee* noise it had made before. And then everything happened at once. The compartment jolted. The engine throbbed. And the TV screen vanished, leaving a clear glass window in its place.

Outside, the grass was speeding past.

"We're moving!" Joe shouted. "The train is taking us away."