

*Whittington  
Manor*

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**Whittington Manor**  
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*In Memory of all those courageous men and women who fought to protect England during World War II and, in particular, the civilians who lost their lives rescuing our war heroes from Dunkirk.*

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

I should like to thank Pete, Linda, Brian, Alison and my family who supported and encouraged me to write this story.

With much love to you all. C.V

# One

Sarah Whittington-Lambert waved goodbye to the last of her party guests as they drove down the long winding gravel driveway. She looked out on to the grounds from the main drawing-room window. They were wonderfully designed, perfectly manicured, with symmetrically patterned lawns and hedges, and the riots of colourful plants were in full bloom now that it was early spring.

Whittington Manor was located in the rural outskirts of Portsmouth, between Portchester and Fareham, and boasted eighteen opulently decorated rooms. The house was over four hundred years old and had been inhabited by the Whittington family for the last two centuries.

A small smile crept across Sarah's face. It always gave her a sense of peace as she stood looking out at the grounds she and Joe had worked so hard on. It was easy to recall the desperation of the war. It still sent chills down her spine as she remembered the terrible tragedy her mother and Annie had endured and her brief and dreadfully unhappy marriage to Edward Hamilton. There were also those endless days without Joe ... It had all been so difficult then. The world was such a frightening place, full of desolation, continuous heartache and worry.

She looked down at her hands and at her wedding band embedded with dainty diamonds. She had worn it every day since Joe had placed it on her finger. They were still beautiful hands: graceful and useful, thank goodness, but nevertheless they were the hands of an eighty-year-old woman. She had lived long and survived hard times as well as many long and happy years.

Henry, the old black and white sheep dog, walked up the entrance steps, panting and looking sad that all the guests had gone and deserted him. He gave a half-hearted deep bark forcing Sarah to snap out of her dreamy state of mind. She called out to him, and he continued his waddle into the drawing-room. She patted him on the head, and he then made a bee-line for his basket close to the fireplace and flopped down in a weary heap.

It had been a long day, but Sarah never tired of seeing her closest friends and family. It warmed her heart how they spoiled her and always gave her such a fantastic birthday party. It was as if her family were expanding almost every year, with ten grandchildren and three great-grandchildren only recently born.

She turned from the window and looked at Joe's portrait hanging above the open fireplace. He looked important and proud. He had been thirty when that portrait was painted. His golden curly hair slightly ruffled and his mischievous sparkling green eyes seemed to follow her from wherever she watched in the room. It was as if he were constantly looking at her, watching out for her as he had always done when he was alive. She smiled warmly at him. If only he had been there today to celebrate her birthday, it would have been a perfect day. It was hard to believe that he had been gone ten years. There was not a day that passed when she did not think about him or long to hear his voice and feel his warm caressing hands, yet despite the feeling of emptiness in her heart, she continued her life with a smile on her face, just grateful that she had shared those many happy years with him and that they had raised four beautiful children together.

Sarah walked across the spacious room. The high ceilings and tall windows gave the room elegance, while the warm creams and subtle peach tones of the walls and curtains were a perfect back-drop for the two very large light brown chesterfield leather sofas placed in an L shape facing the fireplace. The plump deep red velvet cushions on the sofas and the soft dim lamps placed around the room gave a warm and homely appeal. A huge thick red and cream Persian carpet lay under an antique oval wooden coffee table. An old rocking-chair stood closest to the fireplace with a red velvet cushion matching the ones on the sofa and was shaped with an indent as if Joe had just recently got up from it. He used to love to sit there, smoking his pipe and gazing into the fire. Not far from the fireplace stood a grand ornate wall unit with a drinks cabinet, displaying the finest Edinburgh crystal glasses and decanters, containing liquor such as brandy, whisky, sherry and of course port, which was Sarah's favourite tippie.

Sarah opened the drawer below and carefully took out an old photo album. Its cover was faded and worn, and she gently dusted it off. Sitting down on Joe's rocking-chair, she slowly and delicately opened it. She ran her fingers softly over the first photo, which was of Joe standing on top of Portsdown Hill. Her lips curled into a soft fond smile. Portsdown Hill had been their special place, the place where they had first met, shared their first kiss. She had barely been more than a child then. So much had happened

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after that photo was taken, and it was on that very same day that England had declared war on Germany. It was odd ... it seemed so long ago, yet she remembered it as if it was yesterday.

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‘I just don’t think it’s fair, Mama ... What is so wrong with me wanting to become a nurse?’ Sarah pouted, folding her arms tightly in front of her and perching herself down on the cold chesterfield leather sofa. The fire was not lit, and there was a slight chill in the air now that the sun had gone down.

Lady Laura Whittington took a sip of her tea, placed the cup and saucer down on a small oval wooden coffee table in front of her and gave a heavy sigh. ‘Sarah, if I’ve told you once, I must have told you a thousand times, there is nothing wrong with wanting to be a nurse ... It’s just, it’s not what your father and I had in mind for you.’ The tone of exasperation in her voice matched her facial expression.

It was clear to see where Sarah had inherited her stubbornness and determination. They were two of a kind. They also shared the same fiery auburn hair, deep hazel brown eyes and soft creamy-coloured skin with a smattering of freckles.

‘So what exactly did you and Father have in mind for me?’ Her arms were now unfolded but the deep frown was still creasing the middle of her forehead.

‘With the threat of war coming, we really don’t want you putting yourself in danger. Who knows? With medical skills you could be sent off to work in very dangerous locations. Darling, you really must listen to me.’ Laura walked over to where Sarah was sitting and sat down next to her. The leather sofa gave a familiar creak. She picked up Sarah’s hand and placed it gently in her own. She was doing her best to reason with her but it was so tedious. Sarah pulled her hand abruptly away and folded her arms again. ‘So why did I have to study so hard? Why did you go to so much trouble for me to have private tutoring, if I’m to do nothing with my education?’

Laura turned to face her. Their eyes met challengingly. ‘Because one day you will find yourself a well-educated and loving husband, just as I did when I met your father, and being well-educated is a good thing. It means you will be able to talk knowledgeably with your husband and also join in conversations at dinner parties and other social functions. A good education never goes to waste, my dear.’ Laura glanced at her watch: they had been having the same discussion for almost an hour, and she was still not making any progress.

‘I don’t want to get married, neither do I intend to chat to pompous people at dinner parties. I just want to be a nurse, and you have no right to stop me, Mother!’ Sarah jumped up from the sofa, she was just as tired of the conversation, and there was only one thing for it: she would have to take the matter into her own hands, when the time was right, of course. She stormed out of the room, brushing shoulders with her father in the doorway. Their eyes locked for a second, as he searched her face for an apology. Eventually, it came. ‘Sorry Papa,’ she grimaced before continuing through the door.

‘And what was all that about?’ Lord Whittington asked his wife, with a trace of amusement. He was a tall and handsome man for his age, with dark blue eyes and a thick head of grey hair which gave him a distinguished look.

Laura threw her hands up in the air with despair. ‘She’s still insisting that she wants to be a nurse.’

‘Well, that’s absurd! She’s only sixteen years old. She can still carry on studying for now. That will keep her out of mischief, and in a few years she will be married anyway.’ He lit his pipe and gave a series of short puffs.

Laura walked back to her favourite arm-chair, nearest the window, and sat down. She looked weary as she rubbed her tired forehead. ‘I’m not so sure ... She’s very head-strong, William.’

‘Head-strong maybe ... but I am the head of this family, and it’s time she learnt that. Anyway, I have far more important things on my mind. I’ve just been reading today’s newspaper.’ He sat down in the matching leather arm-chair next to Laura. ‘You do realise what will happen if Hitler goes back on his promise not to invade Poland?’

Laura sighed. ‘I do, William. It really doesn’t bear thinking about. I feel sick inside with worry and especially for Charles and Thomas ... and there is still no news from Thomas.’ Her voiced trailed off wistfully.

Thomas, at the age of twenty, had been in the navy for two years now. The last the Whittingtons had heard was that he was heading for the South Pacific. Charles was working as an accountant in Fareham, but for sure, if war broke out, he too would be called up for service. Everyone was still saying that war was not imminent, but reading the newspapers and listening to the wireless, it certainly felt like it.

Sarah marched into the large well-kept kitchen with its sparkling brass pots and pans hanging neatly above the stove. An oak wooden cabinet stood tall and full of crockery on the far side of the room. Everywhere one looked, jars were labelled and neatly displayed; every item in the kitchen had its place. She slumped down on a wooden chair, and, putting her elbows on the oak wooden kitchen table, she cupped her hands over her face and groaned.



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Annie was watching her closely from where she was standing next to the stove. 'My, my, Miss Sarah, whatever is the matter?' Annie, the housekeeper, was a plump comfortable looking woman with rosy cheeks and a warm smile who was born and brought up in Portsmouth. Annie Philpot had joined the Whittington family fifteen years ago and loved caring for the Whittingtons. She was the kindest person Sarah had ever met. Nanny, she called her. She had called her that since she was able to talk, although she was not her Nanny, but she was as good as. Her own nanny who had cared for her up until she was thirteen had retired three years ago; Sarah had called her Nanny number two, always putting Annie first. She loved Annie dearly.

'Life isn't fair, Nanny.' She helped herself to one of Annie's homemade, freshly baked biscuits laid out on a baking tray cooling on the kitchen table.

'Oh, you're right there, little'un.' She wiped her hands on her starched white apron and then, stroking Sarah's arm affectionately, she smiled at her with her brown soft doe-like eyes.

'I want to do something with my life, Nanny. Is that so bad? I just want to be a nurse, but it seems that I am to be married in a few years instead. Nothing more is expected of me. If I had been born a boy, I could do whatever I want, maybe even become a doctor. It's so unfair.'

Annie gave a wry smile. 'Your Mum and Dad just want to keep you safe, that's all. If that 'Itler carries on marchin' through Europe, taking over countries, gawd only knows what will 'appen 'ere.' She suddenly looked very worried at the idea as she went back to her baking.

Sarah got up from the table and followed her. 'I know, Nanny and that's exactly why I want to be a nurse. They will need as many nurses as they can get if there is a war. I want to help other people, not stay hidden away in the unrealistic protective world that I live in.' Why didn't anyone understand? Not even Emma understood, and she was her best friend. All Emma wanted was to marry and have children.

'Ere, 'ave a cup of milk.' Annie handed a glass of milk to her. Her hands were still covered in flour.

Sarah sipped her milk and smiled thankfully at Annie.

'D'you feel better, now?' She was growing up fast, but she was still a little girl in Annie's eyes, and the idea of her putting herself in danger frightened Annie too. She understood fully why Lord and Lady Whittington had been so opposed to the idea of Sarah's becoming a nurse, although she would never have told her that.

‘Not really, but talking to you always helps.’ She shrugged her shoulders. If only she could speak to her parents the way she speaks to Annie, life would be so much simpler.

The Lambert brothers, Joe and Tommy, came marching up Portsdown Road in Portchester, on their way home. They were chanting triumphantly, ‘We won, we won, Pompey won!’

‘I can’t believe we beat ‘em 4-1!’ Tommy was still laughing as they opened the front door and went inside - ‘The Laurels.’

There were no house-numbers on any of the houses in Portsdown Road. The houses were recognised simply by the name. The Lamberts had been lucky to have secured a rental agreement in that street when they had moved from their small terraced house with an outside toilet in Summer Street, in Portsmouth, six months ago. The houses in Portsdown Road were semi-detached and modern. There were three bedrooms, although one was a tiny box room, but at least they had the convenience of having a proper bathroom located upstairs as well as a good-sized back garden, although it needed some attention, as the weeds were taking over the patchy lawn.

At nineteen years old, Joe was turning into a handsome young man, with his blond curly hair and attractive green eyes. There were many girls in Portchester that had their eye on Joe Lambert, but he was far too shy for all that malarkey, and, although he quite liked Jessica Bishop who lived down Medina Road, he still had not plucked up the courage to ask her out yet - unlike Tommy, who had no problem with asking girls out. Tommy had more girlfriends than he had had hot dinners. He was slightly chubby and smaller than Joe, even though he was almost two years older, but he was cheeky and charming, and the girls loved him.

‘What time d’you call this? ... And take off those muddy boots,’ Audrey Lambert scolded them as they walked through the front door.

‘Sorry, Mum, we’ve been celebrating. It’s not every day Pompey wins the cup.’ Joe was beaming at her while doing as he was told and taking off his boots. Audrey looked tired. She had been up half the night looking after Maureen’s baby, who had a touch of colic.

Maureen glared at her brothers as they walked in the front room. ‘Can you lot shut up! You’re gonna wake the baby in a minute. It’s taken me hours to get her off to sleep ... I’ve got no life of me own, not like you two, who’s been out partying at some stupid football match all afternoon.’ At the age of sixteen, she had shocked everyone when she came home pregnant,

and rumour had it the baby's father was a sailor from Portsmouth. Audrey had told everyone in the neighbourhood her daughter had married young and her husband was away at sea - not that anyone believed the story, of course.

'Shouldn't have got yourself knocked up then.' Tommy laughed, challenging his sister. It gave him great pleasure in winding her up whenever possible.

'Come 'n' sit down and eat your tea, all of you - now!' Audrey demanded, raising her voice as she brushed a lock of chestnut-coloured hair from her green eyes.

Maureen looked perplexed as they sat down at the dining table. It was as if she were struggling to try and work something out, and finally she looked at Joe and frowned. 'I dunno who Pompey were even playin' against. Come to think of it, who really cares anyway? I mean, why is football so bloody important to you two?' She felt annoyed that she had even spent a few moments thinking about it. If there was one thing she hated, it was football: a bunch of grown men running around kicking a ball, and when it went in the net they all hugged and kissed each other. Yuck! She shuddered at the thought.

'Oh, for gawd's sake, Maureen, it were Wolverhampton, everyone knows that.' Joe glared back at her in frustration.

'And it's important to us because we love it,' Tommy added, with sarcasm in his voice and a fake smile, siding with his brother.

'What did I tell you about swearing, Maureen? Nice girls don't swear, do you 'ear me?' Audrey chided, and she placed a plate of bread and jam on the table.

'What you talking about, Mum? she ain't a nice girl,' Tommy smirked.

With fury in her eyes, Maureen stood up, her fist clenched leaning over the table, and, just as she swung her arm in Tommy's direction, Audrey caught her flying fist in mid-air.

'Now sit down and stop this at once ... the pair of you,' Audrey shouted. She was exhausted and could not be doing with their carryings on. She had dark lines around her tired green eyes. The sleepless nights of caring for baby Nancy and the worry of a possible war breaking out were taking their toll.

At that moment they all looked up to see Frank walk through the lounge door. His big muscular frame filled the doorway. He too had been to the match.

‘What a result, lads, hey?’ He walked past the boys and gave Audrey a peck on the cheek before he sat himself down at the table ready for his tea. His hair was a mixture of grey and blond streaks, and his face looked rugged and weather-beaten from working outdoors. He had large smiling deep brown eyes, surrounded by laughter lines, as Audrey affectionately called them. He had an easy-going nature; everyone loved Frank Lambert.

As usual the family had eaten their dinner at lunch-time, which was normally a good substantial meal. Supper was served later in the evening which was usually a cooked snack such as eggs on toast, and tea was invariably bread with home-made cake that Audrey had baked that day. The boys nodded in agreement with their father as they devoured their mother’s freshly made tea cake.

‘I saw our Ed at the match. We went for a drink in Pompey after the match. It was bedlam getting out of the place ... It was packed, Audrey.’ Frank helped himself to the bread and jam in the centre of the table.

‘Was it? Packed with football-mad men, I suspect.’ Audrey rolled her eyes and Maureen nodded in agreement.

‘Well, ain’t nothing wrong with that. It’s good to see so many people enjoying themselves, it makes a change. Everyone you speak to these days is talking about bleedin’ ‘Itler and war.’

‘Do you think there will be a war?’ Joe asked his father with a look of concern. Tommy joined in the conversation. ‘The way that ‘Itler’s is carrying on, I’m sure there will be a war,’ he said, taking a large bite from the slice of tea cake he was holding, forcing the rest of the cake to crumble away on to his plate.

Frank glanced up at him. ‘You’re most probably right, son – most probably right.’ He took a gulp of his tea to wash down the last slice of bread and jam.

Maureen moved closer to her father, sitting down on the spare old wooden chair next to him. ‘Will we be safe ‘ere, Dad?’ she asked with an obvious note of fear to her voice.

They all looked at Frank, even Audrey, searching his face for the answer. There was a moment of endless silence before he spoke. Like everyone, he was just as much in the dark, and this time he did not have the answer. Who could predict what Hitler would do next? It seemed likely he was not going to keep his promise and would invade Poland anyway. They were all in this together, the nation and the whole world, it seemed.

‘Well, we are safer than those poor sods in Portsmouth,’ he finally replied, after giving it a great deal of consideration.

‘Some of those poor sods, as you call ‘em, are our family,’ Audrey piped up, pouring him a cup of tea from the teapot with a colourful tea-cosy.

‘Don’t you think I know that, Audrey? We’ll just ‘ave to help ‘em best we can ... But I’m thankful we don’t live there no more.’ He took a large bite of tea-cake and pushed it to one side of his mouth so that he could continue talking. ‘You know, moving from Summer Street to here was the best decision we ever made ... Look around you ... we got a nice ‘ome, don’t we?’ His words were muffled by his munching. He looked around the room with pride. All he had ever wanted to do was provide for his family. He worked long and hard hours on the land to put a roof over their head and food on the table, and he was proud of it, and even more so now he had moved them away from down-town Portsmouth, and drunken sailors who had made his daughter pregnant. He was more than happy to be living in Portchester and especially now, with the threat of war hanging over them.

‘Still the same old tatty furniture, but it’s a darn site bigger than the house in Summer Street, I’ll give you that,’ Audrey agreed.

Baby Nancy let out a cry from upstairs and Maureen rolled her big brown eyes and pushed a blond curl from her face. ‘I’ve just sat down for me tea,’ she moaned.

‘Go and get her and bring her down ‘ere. I’ll watch her after I’ve brought the washing in, so you can eat your tea in peace,’ Audrey said, taking a sip of her tea. Maureen got up reluctantly and made her way upstairs to get the baby.

Audrey placed her cup carefully down on the table and eyed Frank closely. ‘There’s talk about evacuating all the kids and mothers with babies,’ she whispered softly in hopes that Maureen would not hear her. Her eyes were still fixed on Frank, and Joe and Tommy listened with interest, their eyes suddenly lighting up. ‘Do you think we should send our Maureen and baby Nancy?’ Audrey asked.

Frank shook his head. ‘No, there will be no need for that. As I said, it’s safer ‘ere than Portsmouth, and they’re building those Anderson shelters everywhere now.’

‘I think they’d be safer if they go, Dad.’ Tommy nudged Joe in the ribs for help.

‘I agree, Dad: it might be for the best,’ Joe added, in a desperate attempt to convince him. It would be heaven on earth if they could get rid of her and that screaming baby of hers too.

‘They will be fine here ... enough said on the matter.’ Frank, looking annoyed at them all, got up from the table and wandered over to his favourite threadbare arm-chair. He picked up the day’s newspaper. It was rolled and crunched up, resting precariously on the arm of the chair. Maureen had used it to swat a fly earlier that afternoon, and the remains of the fly were still splattered over the back page.

Audrey went out to the back yard and looked up at the sky. There were some ugly black clouds forming in the distance. Looks like rain, she decided as she went about taking in the washing. She felt something smooth and furry around her right ankle and glanced down to see Tabby the cat weaving himself lovingly around her. She reached down and smoothed him. ‘I s’pose you’re hungry.’ He began purring loudly as if in answer to her statement.

She reached up for Maureen’s yellow dress and the baby’s little white socks and tears began to well up in her eyes. What was going to happen to them all? She could not bear the thought of Joe and Tommy being sent off to war. What would happen to Maureen and the baby? Would they really be safe in Portchester? It was not that far away from Portsmouth. It was only a short bus ride away. And what about the rest of the family who were still in Portsmouth? There was Shirley her sister and her two girls, Mum and Dad who were too old to travel anywhere now, Ed and Betty

‘It’s just not right,’ she mumbled under her breath. Everywhere one went, there was only one word on everyone’s lips: war. How can one man be responsible for so much misery? How dare he turn people’s lives upside down? How dare he storm into those countries and try to take them over? The whole of Europe was getting dragged into all this terrible misery - and not just Europe, but as far away as Russia too. He’s a lunatic, that flaming maniac, Adolf Hitler, she thought angrily as she strutted into the house with the washing-basket under her arm and Tabby following hungrily behind her.

# Two

Emma Howlett had just finished piano practice and gently closed the lid of the old grand piano, being careful not to trap her fingers. At the age of sixteen she was already quite a talented pianist. She rushed to collect her light-weight coat, shouting out down the long hallway, 'I'll be home before dark, Mama.' Not waiting for a reply, she dashed outside and was surprised to find how warm the summer air was on her skin. Rain had been forecast, but the sky was bright blue with only the odd white wispy cloud hanging around. It was actually colder inside Bowood House than it was outside. She contemplated turning back and leaving her coat at home but decided against it. It might be chilly later, if the weather forecast was right.

She walked down the street leading from her house and cut through a little path lined with neatly pruned hedges. There was an aroma of roses around - or was it honeysuckle? She could not quite decide, but, whatever it was, it was lovely. The pathway led out on to the grounds of Whittington Manor. Ignoring the front door, as she always did, she ran around the back of the property to the tradesmen's entrance. Going to the front door would mean being greeted by the butler and then she'd have to wait an age while he fetched Sarah. Very often she would be left making polite conversation with Lord and Lady Whittington. Entering through the tradesmen's door was a far better option, and more than likely Annie would be out the back and would be happy to show her directly to Sarah.

Annie was bending over the hot stove and did not see Emma arrive. She was deep in concentration waiting for her vegetable soup to reach simmering point while stirring it continuously.

'Hello, Annie.' Emma wiped her feet on the little black carpet just inside the back door: it was left there for the staff or delivery people to clean their feet. Her rosy cheeks glowed from running and her long dark hair was neatly braided. She looked clean and fresh in a pale pink dress with a white lace collar.

Annie looked startled for a second. 'Oh, 'ello my love, 'ow are you?'

'I'm very well, thank you, Annie. Is Sarah home?' Emma liked Annie. She wished she had a housekeeper, or even a nanny, like her, but her own nanny

had now retired and their housekeeper was far too formal: she spoke only when spoken to and did only what was expected of her - unlike Annie, who was always happy to stop and chat and help whenever she could.

‘Well, I haven’t seen her for a little while, mind, but I think she’s in her room. Wait there while I take me pot off the fire and I’ll find out.’

Emma smiled at Annie. She still remembered Annie from her childhood. She had been five years old when her father had made friends with the Whittingtons. Lord Whittington and the admiral had met at a social function and had hit it off from day one, just as her mother and Sarah’s mother had. Emma was an only child. Her father, a retired Navy admiral, had met her mother late in life, and, although Florence Howlett was much younger than her husband, she had experienced complications during child-birth with Emma and was unable to conceive another child.

Emma walked into Sarah’s bedroom to find her lying on her bed with her head in a medical journal. ‘What are you doing inside on a beautiful day like this?’ Emma enquired with a frown, reaching over to look at what she was reading.

‘I’m just reading. I got these magazines from the newsagent. They order them for me now. It teaches you how to do first aid in this one ... look!’ She smiled, handing Emma the magazine.

‘Disgusting! That’s truly ghastly, Sarah.’ Emma screwed up her nose as she looked at a graphic photo of a woman with a severely burned arm.

‘Oh, you are so squeamish, Emma, really.’

‘So where do you want to go?’ Emma asked, changing the subject and closing the magazine, trying to forget about the horrific picture.

‘Portsmouth Hill, maybe? We’ve not been there for months.’ It had been one of their favourite places to visit for a while, but like most places it became a little boring, and they changed their walks, sometimes to the park or to Portchester Castle.

The girls quickly made their way down to the kitchen to find Annie still busy cooking.

‘Annie, we’re going out for a walk. I don’t know where Mama is, can you please tell her for me?’ Sarah asked, as she tidied up her hair, looking at her reflection in the kitchen window.

‘Your mum is ‘avin’ a lie-down - she’s not sleeping too good at the moment - but I’ll be sure to tell her when she gets up ... And be home before dark, mind,’ she shouted after the girls as they ran across the lawn to the front of the house and started to walk down the gravel driveway chatting animatedly.



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By the time they had reached Portsdown hill their mood had turned somewhat sombre as they spoke about the prospect of war looming ahead. 'Do you think there will be a war Emma? Your father must know more than most, being a retired admiral?'

'He says he has it on very good authority that it doesn't look good, but that's all he says. If war is declared, Father wants us to move to Devon.'

'Devon? How on earth am I going to see you when you're in Devon?' Sarah looked horrified at the idea.

'I don't know, Sarah', Emma sighed. She really did not want to leave Portchester - or Sarah for that matter.

'But why can't you stay here? It's not that dangerous. It's not as if we live in Portsmouth.'

They placed their coats on the grass and sat themselves down. 'With my father's heart-condition, it would be better for him to be away from it all.'

'I suppose.' The thought of Emma's going away was simply too depressing even to contemplate.

They had been so engrossed in their conversation they hardly noticed the view in front of them. From the top of Portsdown Hill, the view spread as far as Portsmouth, the Solent, Gosport, the Isle of Wight and even beyond on a clear day. The hill was covered with grass and heathland, while below, when one looked up the hill, the huge chalk-pits embedded into the hill were in full view. The forts of Portdown Hill stood covered in moss, looking weather-beaten. They were built as a result of the 1859 Royal Commission, to defend Portsmouth from a possible attack from France.

Lost in their own thoughts, neither of them had noticed a boy sitting not too far away from them. He was perched on a large stone and was quietly sketching something on a note-pad. He looked almost as if he were in a trance as his pencil danced back and forth over the paper. He too had not noticed the girls sitting a short distance from him.

Finally Emma spotted him and nudged Sarah gently. 'Look at him, what do you think he's drawing?' They both stared at the boy with curiosity and, as if he could sense them watching, he turned momentarily and glanced at them. The girls quickly turned away, giggling nervously.

'Ask him what he's drawing,' Emma challenged Sarah.

'No, I don't even know him. You ask him.' Sarah was still giggling.

'All right ... I will' Emma stood up and smoothed the creases from her pink dress.

‘No Emma, please don’t. I was teasing!’

Emma cleared her throat with a little polite cough. ‘Excuse me! Sorry to interrupt you.’ The boy turned and looked at her, a little surprised and bemused. ‘Yes?’ He was wondering what she was about to say next.

‘My friend and I were just curious as to what you were drawing.’

‘I’m drawing the view.’ He returned Emma’s smile and then tried to look at Sarah who was hiding behind her. She wished the ground would swallow her up. Emma was enormously embarrassing. The boy’s blond curls were blowing in the wind, and she could see from where she was sitting that he was extremely handsome, which made the situation even more mortifying.

‘May we look?’ Sarah’s cheeks turned scarlet listening to Emma. The boy signalled them both over, and a moment later the two girls were admiring a brilliant drawing of the view in front of them.

‘It’s wonderful!’ Emma exclaimed with enthusiasm.

‘Yes, it is,’ Sarah agreed, nodding her head.

‘What’s your name?’ Emma asked. The boy looked a little awkward and overwhelmed by all the attention they were giving him.

‘Joe Lambert.’ His cheeks coloured almost the same shade as Sarah’s.

‘So are you an artist?’ Sarah enquired, after plucking up the courage to speak and cocking her head to one side to get a better view of his drawing. Joe laughed.

‘No, it’s a hobby, I s’pose. I work on the land with me dad, whenever he needs me, that is.’ He continued drawing as the girls stood and watched over his shoulder.

‘Do you live round ‘ere?’ he asked. He found it easier to talk to them while he was drawing. Looking them in the eye was far too unnerving.

‘Not far,’ they replied in chorus.

‘And you?’ Emma could not resist being nosy. He was very intriguing, and he had a strange accent which made him even more mysterious.

‘I live down Portsdown Road.’ He shuffled on the uncomfortable rock and then continued to draw again.

‘Do you draw people?’ Sarah asked out of curiosity. Her father once knew an artist, and she could remember looking at his portfolio. Many of his portraits were of people, some of them famous, some not, but it had impressed her how he had managed to capture their features so well.

Joe turned and looked at her. Her voice was as soft as silk. He gazed up into her pretty hazel eyes. She was the most beautiful girl he had ever seen, even prettier than Jessica Bishop, he decided.

## *Whittington Manor*

‘I could draw a picture of you ... if you like,’ he offered shyly.

‘Now?’ Sarah blushed profusely at the idea.

‘Well, it’s a little late now, gotta go home for me tea soon. I could tomorrow if you like, though.’

She hesitated for a moment and smiled at him. It would be exciting to have him draw her portrait. ‘All right, that would be very kind of you.’ He chuckled at the way she spoke. She did not sound as if she were from around here; far too posh, he thought.

‘What time?’ she asked nervously. Their eyes met again, and there was an unfamiliar chemistry between them that neither of them recognised. It was almost as if they already knew each other, yet they had never met. It was odd but wonderful at the same time.

‘Anytime tomorrow afternoon ... Say after dinner?’ Sarah was puzzled for a moment and then realised that he had confused dinner-time with lunchtime. She agreed, smiled at him and turned around to walk down the hill with Emma.

‘Oh, my goodness Sarah, you have just made an engagement with a complete stranger!’ Emma stared at her in utter amazement as soon as they were out of earshot

‘Well I need some fun in my life.’ Her eyes were dancing with excitement.

Joe stood up and started to make his way back home, thinking of the girl with the auburn hair and the pretty hazel brown eyes. Who was she? Where did she come from? He had never seen her before, and he often went up Portsdown Hill. He decided he would not say a word to anyone about her. If he did, no doubt he would have Maureen in tow tomorrow, having a look just to be nosy or annoying, one of the two, or worse than that, Tommy. Oh, my God, Tommy, he would chat her up from right under his nose if he was not careful. No, this was his secret. He just hoped she would turn up the next day.

As he took off his muddy boots inside the house, he suddenly realised he did not even know her name. How could he have forgotten to ask her name? She knew his. Why hadn’t he asked her? He was no good when it came to girls: Tommy was so much better at all that, and then he smiled. This time he had done it. He had a date tomorrow; well, not really a date as such, but it was a step in the right direction, he decided, and his smile broadened.

‘What you grinning about? Your tea’s nearly ready.’ Audrey had spotted him standing in the hallway.

‘Nothing, Mum.’ He sat himself down at the table next to Tommy, who was ploughing his way through a cream cake.

Just then Frank came in carrying a large piece of paper rolled up in one hand and a pencil in the other. ‘What the ‘ell is that?’ Audrey asked watching him pin it up on the wall.

‘This is a map of all the countries, and I’m gonna put a circle round each country that ‘Itler has taken over, so we can keep a close eye on the bugger, if you know what I mean.’

‘We don’t need no stupid map to find out what’s ‘appening, you only ‘ave to go outside and hear everyone talking on the street, to know what’s going on.’ Audrey sat down at the table and poured herself a cup of tea. ‘I saw Rose Gladstone from up the top of the road this morning,’ she said, ‘and she were in bits, crying her eyes out, the poor mare. Her Colin has just gone and joined up, and he’s leaving home in a few days.’ She took a sip of her tea, tutting to herself.

Tommy looked a little sheepish and placed his tea cup down with caution. ‘Mum, I’ve got something to tell you. I went to Pompey today.’

‘Oh, yeah?’ Audrey looked non-plussed as she took a sip of her tea, not aware of the bombshell he was about to drop.

‘I’ve signed up with the Navy. I think it’s for the best.’ Audrey stared at him in disbelief, her mouth open, trying to place her cup down without looking at it. Frank turned around, with his pencil in his hand. ‘Well, that’s a good choice, son, better than the army.’ He turned around again and drew a circle around Czechoslovakia.

“‘A good choice, son.’ Is that all you can say? ‘A good choice, son?’” Audrey shrieked, after Tommy’s words had finally sunk in. She knocked her cup as she stood up from the table, spilling her tea all over the table cloth and then stormed off to the kitchen.

Frank put down the map and rushed after her. He found her bent over the kitchen sink, crying. She reached for her handkerchief in the front pocket of her pale blue pinafore and blew her nose, then turned to look at him with sheer desperation in her eyes.

‘It’s ‘appening already, Frank. Our family is being torn apart.’ He held out his arms to her, and she walked over to him. He held her tightly as she cried in his arms. There was nothing he could say to comfort her, no words like, ‘It’ll all be all right’ or, ‘Don’t worry’: there was nothing anyone could say, the future was far too uncertain.