



## THE ISLAND

The sea was black as ink and the small fishing boat, travelling under a loose sail, moved slowly across its glass-flat calm. Ahead of them the island was barely visible through the early morning mist, but he could just about make out the cliffs that ringed its southern tip. Normally they were a hard grey, but thanks to the soft rain that clung to the sea mist they were darker still – foreboding, even to someone who knew them well.

The tall man standing beside the wheelhouse knew the island, and the waters around it, well enough, even if it had been four years since he'd last set eyes on the place, and he knew the skipper was right to be cautious. Many was the vessel that had come to grief on the hidden reefs and rocks that lurked underneath the mirrored waters over which they travelled.

The skipper corrected his course to avoid Wrecker's Spine, the string of jagged rocks that reached out from the cliffs towards the mainland but was invisible when the tide was this high. The tall man glanced across at the skipper, who nodded.

'I could take you round to the long beach, easy enough. There's no one on the island as would see you at this time. None as you need worry about, anyway.'

'The Maiden's Whisper is safest all the same.'

'It's a long climb and the rain will have turned to ice on the rocks. I wouldn't call it safe.'

'I'll manage.'

The skipper cleared his throat and spat, and the tall man knew he'd not mention it again.

A seal's head broke the surface not twenty yards off the boat's bow, causing the faintest of ripples. The seal looked directly at the tall man, its intelligent gaze making it seem almost human. The fishing boat slipped past and the seal, motionless, watched the man go.

'You'll have to get your feet wet and push me off,' the skipper said. 'It won't be too hard, not with the sea like this.'

The tall man began to take off his boots, placing them in his pack, along with his socks and trousers. There was no point in getting wetter than he had to. After all, there was no certainty that the appointment would be kept that day, or even the next. He might have to rest up in the cave for a while and he wouldn't be able to light a fire. But he was used to cold and he would make do. He had biscuits

and cheese to eat, as well as some chocolate, and the skipper's wife had given him a thermos of tea before they'd left the harbour.

'Thanks for all you've done for me.'

The skipper nodded. 'It's the right thing to do.'

Ahead of them the black sea lapped against the strip of grey pebbles the fishermen called the Maiden's Whisper. He helped the skipper lift the boat's keel as it drifted in, kissing the pebbles with a long, slow rattle.

'Quick now. I'd best be off before the mist clears.'

The tall man took the skipper's hand and felt the man's rough skin against his own smooth palm, not hardened much by the blood he'd shed.

'May God go with you,' the skipper said. He pushed the sail over and the fishing boat moved slowly away.

Despite the freezing water that came up to his waist, the tall man stood and watched until the fishing boat disappeared into the fog. God would not be accompanying him on this journey. They had no time for each other now, God and he. He turned and made his way up the shore. There he dried himself with his spare shirt and dressed. He was cold, but would soon warm up.

It was only then, when he looked up at the cliffs and followed, with his eye, the narrow track that led up to the cave, that he shivered.





## 1. DONOVAN

The officer sitting in the small waiting room had papers in his pocket that announced him as Captain Robert Donovan, 1st Battalion, the Connaught Rangers. It was close enough to the truth.

He had returned from France that morning, landing at Dover at dawn and taking the train up to London. It had been a rough crossing and he was glad to be back on dry land. He was less glad to have been ordered to report directly to the man he worked for, but, examining the young woman opposite him, decided there must be a purpose to his presence. And hers, most likely.

She was attractive, with grey eyes, a long nose and a firm, slightly pointed chin. Her complexion was pale and clear, and the occasional glance she cast his way seemed to indicate intelligence, as well as annoyance. He supposed he was

being rude, staring at her. It was hard, after France, to adjust to England and its conventions. After the trenches, the idea of politeness seemed more than a little absurd, but he supposed he'd have to make an effort.

He looked down at the cigarette he had absentmindedly lit a few moments before, observing the slight tremor in his fingers with equanimity. Lighting it had probably been a mistake.

'Do you mind?' he said, as he exhaled a thin plume of smoke. He tried smiling, conscious of the unaccustomed strain it caused his cheek muscles.

'Do I mind what?'

Her voice was as he had expected. Educated. Serious. Definitely annoyed.

'If I smoke?'

'Shouldn't you have asked that question ten minutes ago?'

Donovan considered this. He looked at the low table between them and saw two butts in the ashtray. She might have a point.

'Probably.'

There was a loud bang and a flash, which momentarily lit up the room. The window rattled.

'Maroon,' Donovan said when he saw her flinch.

'I beg your pardon?'

'A maroon.'

'And?'

'It's a type of signal rocket. Not a German bomb.'

'I didn't think it was.'

'A lot of people do.'

A couple of air raids and the city was in a state of outraged terror. Apparently bombing, gassing and wholesale homicide had a time and a place in a war. It was good to know there were rules, he supposed.

'I'd introduce myself,' he said, 'but it's frowned on.' He circled the cigarette in the air to indicate their surroundings. 'Very hush-hush sort of a place.'

Her mouth pursed in irritation, before she glanced towards the door – as though someone might be listening. Which they might well be. Then she lowered her head back down to the book she was reading.

He glanced at the title. It wasn't the sort of book he'd have expected her to read and he found he liked her all the better for it.

'Any good?'

She looked up, seemingly surprised he had spoken to her again.

'The book,' he said.

'It's diverting,' she said, and turned another page.

'I see. Diverting.'

He blew three perfect smoke rings, which hung in the still air before curling in on themselves.

Two small red marks appeared on her perfectly pale cheeks. He wondered why she was there in the room, with him. It was almost certainly intentional. He had sat here a number of times and had never seen anyone else except Miss Wilkins, the secretary to the man he'd been summoned by. That was the way it should be done, in his opinion.

So, if she was meant to be here, then the question was

why. She seemed a little young for this line of work – not much older than twenty-three, although her earnestness might make her seem a little older. To judge from the long, straight blue dress and the neat jacket, she might well work in one of the Whitehall offices, but surely not this one. He allowed his eyes to take in the initialled brown leather briefcase that rested beside her chair – perhaps she was seeking employment here. It was possible.

He lit another cigarette and decided to probe. It would pass the time.

‘I wouldn’t describe it as diverting, myself.’

Her eyes had stopped moving along the lines and her plump lower lip was now almost completely sucked in.

‘*Kate Plus Ten*, that’s the book, isn’t it? Edgar something, beginning with W.’

‘Wallace,’ she said, looking up at him – there was some steel in her grey eyes now. ‘I’m surprised.’

‘What? That I can read?’

She hesitated. ‘No, I’m sure you can read. Most officers can.’

Which made him smile.

‘Oh, I like that sort of book,’ he said. ‘Kate was a good character and the theft of the train was clever. I’m surprised by you, though. I would have thought you would have had more refined tastes.’

She regarded him down the length of her nose. ‘I am so sorry to have disappointed you.’

‘Not at all,’ he said. ‘I read it twice but, you see, I have very low tastes. Some Sherwood Forester left it in an officer’s



dugout near Villers-Faucon, which was kind of him. We were there for a week and there was a fair amount of shelling. Took my mind off it.'

She sighed but then allowed him a small smile. 'Why do you persist in attempting to make conversation? There's a perfectly serviceable view over St James's Park with which to occupy yourself.'

He looked out the window. The lake had been drained and the lawns filled with temporary buildings for civil servants. He raised an eyebrow.

'It's not what it was.'

'It's not so bad. The palace is clearly visible. There are people to look at. Who aren't me. And not all the trees have been cut down.'

He nodded gravely. 'All the same.'

She closed the book and he found himself being examined in turn. He saw her eyes take in the medal bar on his chest, almost certain she understood the significance of the fabric rectangles. It was, as it happened, one part of his current cover that was completely accurate. He'd have refused to claim medals he hadn't earned.

'Strategy is the comfort of heroes,' he said in a quiet voice.

She looked quizzical.

He lit another cigarette. 'First line of the novel. Now, that made me smile – sitting in a trench near Villers-Faucon.'

'Isn't that on the Somme?' she said. 'Villers-Faucon?'

'It is.'

'My brother, Arthur, died there. Last year. In the big offensive.'

Well, that took the fun out of the conversation.

‘We think he died there – officially, he’s missing. But his commanding officer said he was last seen lying gravely wounded in a trench that was subsequently overrun. That we shouldn’t hold out hope. And we’ve heard nothing since.’

He nodded. The CO had been right to caution against optimism.

‘I am sorry for your loss,’ he said.

Before he had to go through the motions of trying to comfort her, C’s secretary came to the door. It was probably just as well – he wasn’t very good at that sort of thing.

‘Miss Cartwright? Would you follow me, please?’

He watched her leave and decided he knew one tiny part of C’s intentions.

Because he’d been in that trench when Arthur Cartwright had lain dying from gas exposure. And he’d had to leave him there.



## 2. KATE

Captain Sir Mansfield Smith-Cumming RN – otherwise known as ‘C’ – rose, with a certain difficulty, as Kate Cartwright entered.

‘Please sit down, Miss Cartwright. Miss Wilkins, some tea? And could you bring some of those delicious ginger snaps.’

As she sat, Kate couldn’t help but glance at the papers and photographs spread out across C’s wide, leather-topped desk. She turned her attention quickly to the bookcase, however, once she realised that the photographs were of plans for some kind of mechanical device and were marked ‘Top Secret’.

When Wilkins had left, C examined her. He resembled an owl, she decided – an impression heightened by his large round spectacles.

‘Do you like ginger snaps, Miss Cartwright?’ he said eventually. ‘I’m very partial to them.’

It was not how she had imagined her mysterious meeting with the head of the Secret Intelligence Service would begin.

‘I quite like them,’ she said. She presumed his intention was to throw her off balance – although you could never be certain with the SIS. Perhaps he really did like ginger snaps. In any event, it seemed to be the correct response – C’s broad face lit up with a broad smile.

He continued standing, leaning against the table now at a slightly awkward angle. She recalled being told he had a prosthetic leg – a car accident in which his son had died.

‘Ewing tells me you have settled in well in Room 40. Is that the case?’

‘I believe so. The work is fascinating, as are my colleagues.’

The work was repetitive and while her fellow codebreakers were certainly clever, they were also, by and large, either wildly eccentric or terminally awkward.

‘He has you working on weather reports mostly, doesn’t he? Isn’t that what he starts people off on?’

She said nothing, presuming the question to be a test of her discretion.

C smiled. ‘And before that you worked in the scientific department of the Ordnance Department, on new weapons. I imagine, by comparison, Ewing’s work is very dull. A bit like doing the same jigsaw puzzle over and over again. And I can’t help but wonder if a young woman of your obvious

ability shouldn't have the opportunity to do something a little more active.'

She wondered if it was a question or a statement. It wasn't entirely clear.

'Well?'

A question then.

'I am, of course, happy to serve in any capacity.'

This was apparently an incorrect response – C scowled. He stood away from the desk and glowered down at her.

'It's like getting blood out of a bloody stone,' he said.

'I beg your pardon?'

'It's quite simple, Miss Cartwright. Would you like to do something more active or not?'

She wondered if she was supposed to be intimidated. In any event, the situation was now clearer and, if being active meant an end, even temporarily, to deciphering weather forecasts for Heligoland, Dogger and Fisher, then she was game.

'I should be delighted to do something more active.'

C scowled once again but this time there was something of a twinkle in his eye.

'An excellent choice, Miss Cartwright. Eventually.' He picked up some of the papers from the desk. 'I understand you and your parents have been invited to spend some time with the Highmounts at Blackwater Abbey over the winter solstice.'

'Yes, but—'

'No buts, Miss Cartwright. I am aware that you have refused. I presume you decided the war effort requires you

to spend Christmas in London with your fiancé, rather than on a remote island off the coast of Devon with your parents and their close friends, Lord and Lady Highmount, attempting to contact the dead. Which is, I believe, the intent. Is that correct?’

She opened her mouth to speak, but before she could formulate her response, C continued.

‘I mean no offence to your parents or indeed the Highmounts, Miss Cartwright. There are so many dead after three years of war and if they wish to attempt to contact their lost ones, I would not stand in their way. I have explored the possibility of contacting my own son through a medium, although when I had one of my men look into the woman in question, I was satisfied that there was little point in proceeding. That is not to say I do not keep an open mind. I always keep an open mind. But I understand you yourself have no sympathy with spiritualism. Which is, one might think, surprising.’

She wondered what C knew, and who he knew it from. That he knew something was clear, from the triumphant arch of his left eyebrow. Damn.

‘I believe spiritualism has no basis in scientific fact,’ she said. ‘And that any supposed contact with the dead is either the work of charlatans or some kind of group psychological disorder.’

‘Are you suggesting that all persons who experience contact with spirits from the afterlife are suffering from a psychological disorder?’

He was being deliberately provocative. Well, let him. If

C thought she was going to admit to regularly seeing ghosts, or whatever they were, he was much mistaken.

‘I do not believe such people are suffering from a psychological disorder, as I am sure you do not either. If you did, I should be forced to take offence.’ This seemed to amuse C, which gave her a little bit of confidence. ‘I do believe, however, that it is possible that people wishing for something enough may delude themselves into experiencing a shared, yet false, projection of that occurrence. That seems to me to be the most likely explanation.’

‘And yet you have had, I believe, direct experience of such false projections?’

Kate considered the possible sources. It was most likely that C, or one of his people, had spoken to the headmistress of a certain girls’ boarding school on the East Sussex coast at which she’d had the misfortune to be educated. If so, the matter could probably be finessed. If the information came from the Highmounts, however, or a source close to them, things would be more difficult.

‘My direct experience, if I may borrow your words, would be the basis on which that belief is built. However, I have not reached a definite conclusion. There are some matters to which I have not yet achieved a satisfactory explanation.’

‘Very good, Miss Cartwright.’ C nodded his approval. ‘In which case, in the spirit of scientific enquiry, I think you should accept the invitation to the Highmounts’ house party. You may find additional evidence to underpin your conjecture. I understand the house has a certain reputation.’

A reputation Kate knew to be richly deserved.

‘But I have already refused.’

C waved her objection away. ‘The invitation will be extended once again. Your fiancé, young Miller-White – a staff officer over at the War Office, isn’t he?’

She would be very surprised if C did not know the very room in which Rolleston Miller-White worked, not to mention his inner leg measurement. He appeared to know everything else. But there was one thing he did not know.

‘In the Ordnance Department, which is where we met. Captain Miller-White is, however, no longer my fiancé.’

C looked surprised. ‘Really?’

‘It is a recent development.’

‘So not common knowledge then?’

‘No.’

‘Well, in which case I think we shall consider the engagement back on. He’ll accompany you.’

Again, the arched eyebrow. Again, the expectation that she would do as he requested.

She knew the Highmounts well, which C must be aware of. He must be aware, too, why it would be painful for her to attend this weekend.

And then there was the house itself.

Still, C must have a reason and so she must go.

‘It will be awkward. You must know that I was engaged, previously, to Reginald Highmount?’

‘I was aware of that. I am sure the island will hold



certain associations for you and so on. I must ask you to overcome your reluctance. We must presume, if you were invited, that the Highmounts wish to see you. And, more to the point, I also wish you to be there. And for good reason.'

She decided to make one last effort.

'Aside from the Highmounts' feelings, and my own feelings, my parents do not approve of Captain Miller-White.'

C had picked up the photographed plans from the desk and was examining them.

'Very sensible of them,' he said, without looking up.

Rolleston was not to everyone's taste, of course. Nor, indeed, hers, as it had turned out.

'What I meant to say is that if he comes with me there will probably be an awful row. Therefore, may I ask if there is a particular reason you wish me to accept the Highmounts' invitation? And, if so, if it is essential that Captain Miller-White accompany me?'

C's eyes rose to meet her own. He blinked, then leant forward to hand her the photographs of the top-secret plans she had seen earlier.

'Think back to your time with the Ordnance Department and tell me what you make of these.'

She examined the first three photographs, noting that the original plans had been marked with the circular stamp of Highmount Industries.

'They appear to be plans for an aerial torpedo.'

C seemed impressed. 'I wasn't aware you were familiar with aerial torpedoes.'

Impressing C pleased her more than she would have thought. But still.

‘I’m afraid I’m not. The legend refers to the LB4 Aerial Torpedo Mark 3.’

C chuckled. ‘Very observant, Miss Cartwright. You’ll notice each plan is also categorised Top Secret but, as these plans were photographed by one of our agents in the Berlin headquarters of the Imperial German Flying Corps, it seems to be not as top secret as we might have hoped.’

‘I see,’ Kate said, presuming there must be some connection between the Germans’ possession of the plans and the need for her to go to Blackwater Abbey.

‘The guest list for the weekend is interesting. Have you come across Madame Feda or Count Orlov, by any chance? Those are their stage names. Both mediums, apparently, both closely associated with the Highmounts and both with rather indistinct backgrounds. And then there is Elizabeth Highmount, née von Griesinger, who is, shall we say, of more distinct extraction.’

That Elizabeth Highmount was Austrian was not a surprise to Kate.

‘Sir, what is it you want from me?’ she said.

‘You have been vetted, are reliable and intelligent – or so Ewing tells me – and have specific knowledge of recent weapon development. We have reason to believe that whoever passed the plans on will be attending this spiritualist event. The situation is under control, but when your invitation came to light, it seemed a happy coincidence. One that I felt we should take advantage of.’

‘And why is Captain Miller-White required?’

‘Captain Miller-White is an asset to any gathering, I’m told,’ C said with a blank smile. ‘But his new manservant, on the other hand, is another thing again.’





### 3. DONOVAN

When she left, C sat down at his desk, bending the knee of his wooden leg so that his shoe rested on the floor. The shoe annoyed him. It was an expensive affectation, designed to spare other people's feelings. Personally, he didn't care if other people were upset that he'd lost his leg. He was more upset than they would ever be. And if he were to have an unadorned metal foot, surely that would reduce his shoe bills by a substantial amount.

He rang the bell on his desk and his secretary came in. 'Send him in, will you, Miss Wilkins.'

C checked his watch. It was nearly four, which would do. He shouted after her to bring the drinks tray as well.

He allowed his eyes to wander across the papers on his desk and sighed. If he had his way, he'd deal with the situation differently – more directly. He couldn't help but think

that Highmount was very far out of his depth with this business, but Highmount was a personal friend of the Prime Minister. And C was not.

He glanced up to find Donovan standing in front of his desk and wondered how he had managed to enter without him hearing.

‘Take a seat. Miss Wilkins is bringing alcoholic sustenance. You’ll have a glass?’

‘Thank you.’

C grunted. It would be preferable if Donovan showed some deference, but then again, if he were a man to show deference he would probably be less useful.

‘Cigarette?’ C slid the gold-banded box across the table.

‘I’ll smoke my own, if that’s all right. I prefer the French ones when I have them. Bit more body to them.’

‘Indeed. Tell me about Paris.’

It was a sordid tale. A staff officer had become besotted with a Polish cabaret dancer at some burlesque theatre and been persuaded to pass on all manner of information.

‘It’s dealt with.’

‘Anything I need to know?’

‘I don’t think so. A tragic accident. A lesson in the dangers of faulty electrical wiring when water is present.’

Wilkins came in with a silver tray on which sat two cut-glass tumblers, a decanter of whiskey and a jug of water. Not that C intended to add any of the latter. He didn’t believe in watering things down. And anyway, his missing leg was hurting him. Donovan poured some water into his, which interested C.

‘A shame, but just as well,’ C said, when Wilkins closed the door behind her. ‘Better for the family this way.’

Although, as it happened, that was completely the opposite of what C really thought. The problem with corruption among the English upper classes wasn’t that it existed but that it wasn’t dealt with firmly and publicly. If he’d had his choice, he’d have hanged the culprit from the walls of the Tower of London. As an example.

They sat contemplating each other.

‘It’s time we had a discussion,’ C said.

Donovan nodded slowly.

‘Your secondment is coming to an end.’

Donovan smiled but still said nothing.

‘Of course, we could send you back to the army.’

‘I’d rather you didn’t.’

‘And why is that?’

‘There are no odds in the trenches. You can be a thoroughbred or a pit pony – a high explosive shell will kill you just the same. I prefer the mathematics in this line of work.’

‘There’s always Ireland, of course.’

Donovan’s smile was the merest glimmer. ‘Very difficult to tell which side I’d be on in Ireland. Me being Irish and all that. I’m better with the English and the Germans. I know where I stand with them.’

There was an ambiguity in that statement that made C, not for the first time, pause for thought.

‘Anyway, I suspect you have something else in mind for me.’

‘And how do you deduce that?’

‘The girl in the waiting room.’

‘Did you speak with her?’

‘A word or two. I presumed that was the point.’

C nodded approvingly. ‘Well then, what did you think?’

Donovan’s mouth moved from side to side, as he considered.

‘One of yours, is she?’ he finally said.

‘Not exactly. Naval Intelligence. A codebreaker – although they and she pretend Miss Cartwright is only a secretary. I’m told she’s made two or three significant, if small, breakthroughs on the Germans’ new naval code. So she’s bright.’

‘I could tell that much.’

Donovan wasn’t giving much away, but then that was to be expected.

‘Could you work with her, if needs be?’

Donovan examined the lit end of his cigarette in the gloom of the office and nodded. ‘I think so. Strange thing, though. I knew her brother. Briefly. Before he got killed.’

Which did not come as a surprise to C, who had considered the usefulness of this connection earlier that day. He’d known that Donovan would read more into it than there was.

‘Yes, I know. Might that be a problem, do you think?’

‘No,’ Donovan said. ‘On the contrary.’

‘Good. The thing is, she has some technical knowledge, which may be useful for this task I have in mind for you. In addition, it happens that her former fiancé – although he’s been temporarily reinstated for our purposes – is also



involved in the matter, at least peripherally. You may recall a fellow officer by the name of Miller-White.'

Donovan's jaw might have clenched slightly, perhaps. But otherwise there was no evidence of animosity. C was impressed.

'I recall Captain Miller-White,' Donovan said, in a tone so neutral as to be anything but. 'Although what a woman like Miss Cartwright is doing with a fellow like that, I have no idea.'

'He is charming, handsome, ostensibly wealthy, alive and in London. Each of which is a considerable advantage after three years of war. And he was in the same regiment as her brother, which may have coloured her view of him.'

'He's also a scoundrel.'

C chuckled. 'That is certainly true. And possibly more of a scoundrel than even you might suspect. In any event, there is a little operation that we have running at present that may have some implications for a certain country house weekend to which Miss Cartwright and Captain Miller-White have been invited. And while Miller-White's presence is desirable for one reason or another, strange as it may seem, the reason I'd like Miss Cartwright to be present is something else completely.'

Donovan frowned.

'I suppose I should start at the beginning,' C said, reluctantly. 'There are some other people you know involved as well. Most of them, like young Cartwright, dead. Which accounts for the weekend that Lord Highmount is arranging.'

And the presence of Madame Feda, a medium who I believe you came across recently in Paris?'

Donovan nodded.

‘An associate of Major D’Aubigny, but then lots of people were. She had no involvement in his treachery, as far as we could establish.’

‘And yet here she turns up again. In any event, her presence and that of another medium by the name of Count Orlov mean that Miss Cartwright may be a very useful asset.’

When he finished explaining the situation and Miss Cartwright’s unusual attributes, C was delighted to observe that, for once, Donovan appeared entirely dumbfounded.



## 4. KATE

The flat was on the second floor of a new mansion block, close to Sloane Square. It was of relatively modern design – possessing electric lights, hot water and heating from a shared boiler. Before the war, it had been the family's London home and a busy, welcoming place. Now it was empty, more or less, except for Kate. It was the more or less which caused her to hesitate.

She didn't turn the light on at first. There had been a blackout in effect for some time but now, after the recent air raids, people took it seriously. She moved from room to room, closing the heavy curtains. When she had finished, the darkness was utter, and the air had a stillness that seemed to have its own weight.

It was to be expected, she supposed – the sense that the place was empty in some way. She never entertained and

her parents seldom came up to town these days, preferring to stay in Cambridge where her father still lectured – and where bombs had yet to fall. Jenny, the maid, had taken a job in an armaments factory in Woolwich and had been impossible to replace. Which meant that Kate was alone in the flat for weeks at a time.

Except for the presence of her brother.

She stood, listening to the sounds of the building and the city outside, and thinking about happier times. When she turned the light on, eventually, the place seemed unnaturally bright. And full, as always, of Arthur. A coat belonging to him still hung in the hallway and an umbrella with his initials still waited for him in the stand. His bedroom was as he had left it in April of the previous year, the last time he'd been home on leave. But those were only the physical objects; there were less substantial manifestations of his presence as well. His laughter still circled the piano, for example – entwined with a memory of him playing a song from the music halls. And his cigarette smoke still lingered in the dining room, detectable to no one but her. But he was only present in memories. The one spirit she wanted to see had yet to make his way to her. Not even through the mirror.

The FitzAubrey glass. The mirror had been in her mother's family, the FitzAubreys, for hundreds of years and only gave up its secrets to the women of the family – although not her mother. It stood at the end of the corridor, hidden behind a black silk curtain, one that she, the last remaining descendant of the FitzAubrey family with the ability to see its secrets, was reluctant to open.

She went about things as she usually did, taking off her hat and gloves, carefully hanging her overcoat. She moved to the kitchen and put a pot on the stove to boil, then filled a bag to take to the laundry in the morning. Later she knew she would have to pack for Blackwater Abbey – and not only clothes. Her mother wanted her to bring the glass, of all things.

The mirror was the source of all this, she supposed. Of her ability to see what should not be seen. Of her relationship with Reginald Highmount too – he had been fascinated by the possibility that he might be able to scientifically prove the existence of the afterlife. At first, she had been amused by his attempts to photograph the spirits, not least because, well, he could not see them and she could. She was never quite certain whether his interest was what had drawn her to him, or whether he had sensed her ability before it became very publicly apparent to him, and his family, over the course of a long, embarrassing weekend at Blackwater Abbey. It had changed their relationship irretrievably. And not for the better. Perhaps Reginald had felt she had not trusted him. But she had.

She ate a simple supper, in the company of a book propped up against her briefcase, wondering if she should look into the mirror before she departed for Devon. It was unreliable and required interpretation, but sometimes the mirror was surprisingly accurate. And that made it hard to resist.

When she was ready, she walked slowly along the corridor to the black silk curtain, pulled it back and, while she was

removing it from the wall, looked into the fogged depths of the FitzAubrey glass, the mirror that could tell the future and the past. Or a version of them, anyway.

She looked for her lost brother, but once again, she did not find him.

And what she did see could not possibly come to pass.