

1.

## Prologue

‘Sometimes, things happen that we can’t explain. It’s alright because that is how it is meant to be, but everything happens for a reason. Whether you choose to believe this or not I cannot say, but you are reading this for one reason, and one reason only . . . because it was always meant for you.

When the time comes you will know, and understand what you should do, only then will I know you. It will take you the rest of your life, but I promise it will be worth it. Mark my words; they are for you. Understand that ultimately you must complete what you have to do alone. Accept help from others when it comes to you, but never must you give yourself completely.

M.A

She sealed the envelope and placed it in the top right hand drawer of the desk. She would give just one person clear instructions, and there it would stay until the time came.

There would be clues, she would get the signs but the beauty of it all is that she wouldn’t ever know. It was hard, but that is how it was – how it was meant to be. Her whole life seemed to follow the same path and however hard she tried she could never turn off it and take another route. When something struck her as important, she would follow it through, whatever the cost. If there came a special moment, then she just knew what to do – like the time she looked into the eyes of a complete stranger at the bus stop, got talking, and gave him the lifeline of advice he needed. There had also been occasions when she had given things away . . . simply because she felt it was right – like the time she worked on a market stall and gave someone the same odd thing that she herself had always worn, just so they could be the same – and because she felt she should! If it was *meant* to happen, then she would do it. She would always see things through. This habit never left her. It was her life – her destiny. But there was also *life* to contend with.

Things were difficult right now, very difficult in fact. Money was short and she was lonely. She had made a few changes to her lifestyle recently but nothing had made much difference. No matter . . . tomorrow night she had an engagement; she might as well try him out! It was something new, fresh, and different. The date was set, and once she had made up her mind to see something through she never back-

tracked, it wasn't in her nature.

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Not far away, in the same part of the city was a girl who also lived alone.

Hauling herself out of bed, the dream she'd just had still turning over in her mind, she rose and walked softly towards the window. Reaching with both arms aloft she swept open the curtains and the early morning sunlight beamed its welcoming warmth down upon her face. But it had shaken her - really terrified her . . . was she the girl that was always running?

She couldn't look back. Heat seared at her feet, her legs and her back . She knew she must get clear of the raging inferno that swelled behind her but her limbs struggled to move her forward. She hoped to dear God that her dress wouldn't catch fire!

Always it was the same . . . threatening but never actually getting hotter. It seemed as if for every step forward she took, time stood still - holding her back - as if there was a deliberate force at work preventing her from getting away. Then, suddenly she'd panic and feel that contrasting intensity of ice cold fear engulf her: She didn't want to die, she couldn't face a torturous death.

Her breathing would then quicken and immediately she'd be aware of her stride . . . yes - her stride always seemed to be heavy and laboured. She'd try so hard to concentrate, almost grinding her teeth with determination. The one thing that drove her on - she always had hope - the brightness was in front of her. The next thing was always her awakening with a start.

Every night was the same, well, at least most nights were. She didn't have this dream every time her head hit the pillow but certainly it was frequent enough. For Jill, it was occurring far too often. She thought she ought to be used to it by now, surely it was just a nightmare, everyone has their own reoccurring nightmare . . . don't they?

## **The Darkest Light**

The woman sat clasping her head between her hands. She was desperate; she could hear the voice; the time had come. Only for a few seconds was she able to

resist, so powerful was the call. She stood up, and with her gaze fixed, as if concentrating on some imaginary point in front of her, she walked slowly, trance-like, towards the door. Almost without any conscious process of thought she dressed to go outside into the cold night air. Closing the door softly behind her she made her way out on to the street. Her petit hands in their tightly-fitting leather gloves pressed the small brown handbag she was clutching firmly against her waist - just as she was meant to. She fastened the last few buttons of her coat as she made her way along the path - just as she'd been told to. As she stared straight ahead into the dark of the evening her mind was locked hopelessly into the only thing that mattered to her now . . . she had to get there - on time and with every detail executed exactly as it was supposed to have been.

It was a Friday night, early evening, but already quite dark. Just a few folk were about as she went about her business. Lights shone down from the suburban windows, each one shining in a slightly different way; no two abodes are exactly the same and each emittance of light coming from them tells a different story. But behind every window and every door, lives someone special. No two of us are exactly the same. None of this concerned the woman right now; she was on a mission that could not be interrupted, but it went in - those lights beaming down . . . perhaps they were shining just for her, in what were to be her final moments of this life. The voice was clearer to her now - sort of calmer and re-assuring, and she had to follow its' every word.

She passed by the last row of flats and headed out on to the heath. The light was becoming scarcer as the seemingly endless chain of properties began to thin out towards the pathway that was to lead her to her nemesis.

She strode on, desperately. The end of the row was now in view and she could see the last house. Soon she would find herself on the edge of the heath. The lake wasn't far in, trees surrounded it on two sides and a menacing concrete water tower loomed over the south side like a guardian angel watching over. A dark, dark butterfly feeling was forming somewhere deep inside the pit of her stomach, but this was what he had told her she *must* do to overcome *all* of her fears. She took in a deep breath.

'It can't be long now.' She told herself.

Her head was in a different place . . . I mean in a really different place from where she actually was, and that's important . . . very important. You see, in the back of her mind the climax was very near; soon she would break free from something that had haunted her all her life, and, being human, she felt in control of her own destiny. But as she passed those final dwellings along that last line of

houses and flats in that south London suburb, something was bothering her, something else important, but she wasn't quite sure what.

Perhaps, her habit of the last few weeks should have given her a clue. Her evening walks had been her escape - an outlet, and during them she'd felt happy. Sometimes it seemed she'd almost danced her way across the common as if in sheer celebration of being able to have forced herself to pass by the place. She would then take the walk around the estate back towards home. She almost knew why she did this, but it was as if she'd been running on autopilot, like it was something she had to do, and now it was all coming together - to an end . . . surely it was!

Her will was strong, very strong. Once the mindset has been ingrained only the weak falter, and she was not of a weak mind. So, just minutes later it happened: Firstly, the silence; not a soul was close, the moon gave out its eerie glow - perhaps as a fitting backdrop to her finale. Now, the voice in her head was telling her to stay calm, and everything would be alright. She stepped forward and then, down into the deep.

It was the cold that hit her first, just the intense cold. Strangely, the water itself didn't bother her, she had already overcome that fear . . . and it was all that mattered right then as she started to go down, deeper and further in. The intense cold now engulfed her, this really was it . . . she'd all but done it, and nobody could stop her now . . . nobody wanted to, nobody even knew she was there.

Then, just at that critical moment came to her images of that *'life'* that some say will flash before you during your final seconds upon this earth. She sunk herself lower, her face now beneath the surface. She'd done it . . . she really *had* followed it through. Wasn't this just sweet victory?

At that exact moment in her failing mind she saw the light . . . a light shining down at her from somewhere nearby. That image of glowing light now etched itself firmly into her final memory. It was the sign; surely she had missed something important!

Suddenly, panic. It was too late now, she had followed and she had overcome, but now she realised that the price to pay was the ultimate one as she became enveloped by darkness, emptiness, and hopelessness. But something survived. Some will of belief, some ray of hope . . . and hope is a good emotion. This wasn't the end.

In those final seconds she made an immense miraculous final effort, but still she began to lose consciousness. Her mind slipped down through the gears into a state of passing. She heard a voice, a man's voice close by. It was the same voice that she had heard in her head, but now, he was nearby . . . was there still hope?

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2.

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M.A

She sealed the envelope and placed it in the top right hand drawer of the desk where she knew it would be found, and there it would stay until the time came. It was for one person only – she didn't know who – and she might never know! It would be for someone special, but not the person she had addressed it to, they would be merely the messenger. She looked into the mirror as she sat at the dressing table, her long auburn hair hanging over the shoulders of her nightdress. Should she cut a lock of hair and place it in the envelope with the letter – something to mark it? She pondered over this for a moment before deciding not to do it. What would be the point? The letter was the important thing so why distract attention away from it by performing some frivolous ritual. She pushed the drawer slowly shut.

There would always be clues. She would get the signs, but the beauty of it was that often she wouldn't ever know the outcome. It was hard, but that is how it was – how it was meant to be. Her whole life seemed to follow the same path – one that she could never now turn away from. This was all because of something that had happened years ago:

One day, when she was a small girl, she was walking along a country lane, squeezing her Grandfather's hand tightly. They watched the birds darting across from hedge to hedge on that spring morning, and an early butterfly fluttered ahead, settling on the fresh fauna in front of them. As they walked and talked, something was on her mind.

“Grandfather,” she said. “Do you have dreams?”

Her Grandfather laughed.

“Why, of course, from time to time,” he replied. “Do you?”

The girl stopped and faced her Grandfather.

“Yes, I do. I have a very special dream and I've dreamt it more than once.”

“That's not so unusual,” her Grandfather replied, as he began to walk forward again.

“But, it's about me . . . I think – when I'm older.”

“Is it now? Well, that sounds very interesting. I think you had better tell me more.”

“Well. I'm with a friend, in a field, and there is a big aeroplane coming into land. I can hear its engine roaring and I know something isn't right. My friend is with me but he is across the field a little way.” She stopped, as if she had said all that needed to be said, but her Grandfather urged her to say some more.

“Go on. What happened when the aeroplane landed?”

“Well, that's the important bit. It crashed, but first it steered away from me and from my friend.”

“That was lucky then. If it had hit you would probably have woken up with a bang – fallen out of bed or something like.” Her Grandfather chuckled as he ran his fingers through his wispy white beard.

“But there was something else,” she said, “I could see the person flying the aeroplane . . . their face was glowing white.”

The old man stopped and gripped his Grand daughter's arms firmly, looking her hard in the eyes as he spoke.

“You saw a light in the cockpit steering the plane away – then it crashed?”

“Yes, and I keep having this dream. It is alright isn't it Grandfather?”

His steely blue eyes fixed their gaze intently upon her as still he held her arms.

“And you say it feels as if you are much older in this dream? Not my eight-year-old Maddy?”

He smiled, letting loose his grip on her arms.

“It's me in my dream. I know it is, but years ahead when I'm grown up. Did the white light save me?”

“Listen carefully my dear. I'm going to tell you something very important that you must always remember. If it seems important . . . then it probably is, but you won't know for sure until the day comes.”

The old man smiled and gestured to her to walk forward with him.

“Grandfather, what do you mean?” She asked, skipping and bounding to keep up with the elderly man who was now striding forward with a broad smile upon his face.

“Oh, you'll know soon enough . . . *if* it ever comes true.”

“But I don't understand.” She said.

He stopped again and faced her.

“If it is to be, you will know because it will happen, and, mark my words, if it does then you must take your dreams very seriously, because they will become your reality. You will know Maddy. You will always know because something will tell you.”

It had been over two decades now since that dream from her childhood had come true, but the image of that afternoon that occurred when she was in her eighteenth year was etched so strongly into her memory that she couldn't do anything other than follow its meaning.

She had taken a walk across the meadow on a sunny afternoon during wartime Britain, the purpose of which was to meet her friend Herbie Arnold. She'd felt her heart leap as she'd bounded through the swathes of tall green grass. Then, it happened so quickly: There came the roaring scream of an aircraft engine fast descending. She looked up and she saw into the cockpit of the aircraft, just as Herbie came running towards her from the distance. At that very moment she knew it was real – her dream was coming true.

The next thing she remembered was mother and father at her hospital bedside talking all at once about how lucky she had been. When she came to her senses and told them about what she had seen they said she must have dreamt it and that the shock of concussion can play tricks with the mind. She *had* dreamt it, but now, she had also seen it happen for sure: A white figure had appeared in the cockpit of the diving Dornier bomber. It steered the aircraft away from her and Herbie, causing it to crash-land a hundred yards further down in the field. If it had not made that diversion it would have caused her certain death, and most probably Herbie's too.

What happened to her as a small child may have been a dream, but now, she knew this *wasn't* a dream. What she had experienced as a small girl confirmed for her that this was her reality from now on.

Now, whenever something struck her as important, she would follow it through, whatever the cost. If there came to her a special moment, then, she just instinctively knew what to do – like the time she looked into the eyes of a complete stranger at the bus stop: They got talking, and she soon saw that he was severely depressed. Almost without thinking she looked him in the eye and told him they would meet again very soon. She just felt she had to say it. A few weeks later she found herself waiting to board a train at the Clapham junction when all of a



sudden, amongst the commotion she looked up to see him standing there – on the bridge, ready to jump. All she did was gaze up at him, smile and wave. The strange thing was that she had seen this happening too – in a dream.

She sat, still gazing into the mirror as she tugged the bristle-haired brush slowly through her straddling hair. Her mind roamed some more: Once, after a night out her and a friend were walking home. The time came for them to part as the last few hundred yards of their journies would take them on a different route. When her friend said she was heading off down the street to their left she got a feeling . . . *not that way . . . don't go down that street . . .* but she didn't follow this conviction through. She *didn't* stop her friend from heading in the very direction that she had seen spelled danger. After all, how silly would she have sounded? She had absolutely no real knowledge of what might happen.

Five days later her friend came out of hospital having suffered at the hands of muggers. This unfortunate incident took its toll, and as the weeks passed she couldn't help feeling guilty. *Why didn't I follow my gut instinct?* Eventually, she became quite depressed.

There had been other occasions too, like the times when she had given things away . . . simply because she felt it was right. Recently she had got work on a market stall and she had given to some stranger the same article of adornment that she herself wore. Why do this? Just so they could be the same? Really, it was just because she felt she should. If she got that feeling that something was *meant* to happen, then she would do whatever she could to help it on its way. This habit never left her. It was her life – her destiny. But there was also her *real life* to contend with.

Things were difficult right now. Money was short and she was lonely. Jim, her husband was a good man but he didn't understand any of her strange traits. At times she felt distant from him. She had tried to make changes to her lifestyle recently: The evening walks she took alone were with Jim's approval, in fact they were his idea. . . . *'It'll get you out a bit more'*, he'd said, but he was away on business so often he wouldn't be able to show much interest. Would he even really care? For all the long days he worked there never seemed to be much money coming into the household. She sometimes wondered, what was the point of it all – working away all those extra hours? On top of that Jim was always talking about saving money. In an effort to oblige she had tried to cut down on the food bill. On a Sunday she would roast a chicken for the two of them, (he was usually home for weekends), then, she would make soup by boiling the carcass and giblets and adding flour to thicken and turn it into a broth. This kept her busy, but nothing made much

difference to the way she felt. Her life was really quite boring.

*No matter* she thought, as she filed these images of her mundane life away to the corner of her mind. *Tomorrow night might bring something fresh.*

She had an engagement. She might as well try him out; it was something new and different. The date was set, and once she had made up her mind to see something through she never looked back, it wasn't in her nature.

She placed the hair brush carefully down on the dressing table as she took a hard look at herself in the mirror before glancing across the room at her invitingly empty bed.