

## Trailer

It started with the smashed wine bottle. I watched it topple from my trolley and turn in the air before it cracked apart on the tiled floor. I said “shit” a bit too loud for the Saturday morning crowd in Tesco and stared at the jagged green glass in its swelling pool of watery gold.

“Don’t worry about it,” said the checkout girl, waving a supervisor over, “do you want another one?”

I tried to be grateful and apologetic, smiling at both the checkout girl and her supervisor, but an alarming thought had just come to me as I stood looking at the broken glass: I am going to die today. As the wine seeped up to my sandals and between my toes, I felt certain about it and I couldn’t think of anything else. All at once I knew how, where and when.

“God, it’s a bit early for the smell of alcohol, eh?” said the checkout girl. Her name tag said Desdemona, which seemed improbable for someone blithe and ordinary and only eighteen or so. I laughed and agreed and wondered if Desdemona would remember this encounter when she saw my picture in the paper after I was killed.

“Hi honey. How bad was Tesco?”

“It was busy. I felt like a right pillock – I dropped a bottle of wine at the checkout and it went everywhere.”

“Did they give you another one?”

“Yeah, they did actually.”

“Bonus!”

I put the bags down and kissed Gavin on the lips. He put one arm around me and rested his hand on the small of my back, guiding me towards him a little.

“Hmmm, maybe I shouldn’t let you go anywhere this afternoon, if you’re going to be so accident prone,” he remarked.

I turned away to unpack the shopping. “Maybe!” I said, with a lighthearted giggle. Well, what

was I going to do – tell him? Or cancel my plans, stay at home and avoid the crash I'd seen so distinctly in my head? I couldn't bring myself to explain it to Gavin. It would sound ridiculous. He would think I'd lost it. And anyway, for someone who thought they'd just been warned about their own end, I felt pretty calm. Perhaps I didn't really believe it, or perhaps I realised that there's not much can be done about fate, but it didn't occur to me to cancel on Olivia.

The replacement bottle of wine went into the bag of things to take to the party. I'd bought Olivia a cyclamen with butterfly-shaped red blooms because she'd asked for things for her garden. I was worried that I'd bought a house-plant in my ignorance. I had chosen the cyclamen because it looked healthy and colourful. In my premonition about the accident, the plant was one of the things that hit the roof as my car turned over, scattering damp earth all over me.

I tried not to think about it as Gavin and I had lunch. I asked him what time his brother was coming over and which channel the match was on, and felt comforted that someone was going to be there with him when he found out what had happened to me. *If* something happened. I was most likely just getting carried away. Nonetheless, I still told Gavin I loved him before I got in the car that afternoon.

“You're such a softie,” he said back, because we don't normally say it to one another.

And then, as I pulled off our drive and out of the close, my eyes filled with tears. The thought of never seeing Gavin again was too cruel to dwell on. I was going to a party: I couldn't turn up with my mascara smeared and my nose all snotty. Then I envisaged Olivia, waiting for me to arrive, telling the others “but I'm sure something's wrong, she said she'd come a bit early to help me get everything ready, and her mobile's off.” Of course my mobile was off. It had flown off the dashboard in the crash and was now in three pieces, metres apart on the road. And Olivia knew that I never switched my phone off. I saw her sitting at one end of her sofa when the bad news was finally confirmed, her head in her hands and her long hair falling through her fingers, with our friends trying to comfort her while they themselves were too shocked to speak.

What the hell had put me in this morbid mood? I blinked my tears away and jabbed the on

button for the car stereo. After all, what were the chances of something I'd imagined, actually happening? I've had a 'good feeling' about the lottery half a dozen times and rushed out to buy a ticket on the strength of it. Besides, I like feeling afraid every once in a while. And although my usual adrenaline rush comes from my penchant for horror films and rollercoasters, I was prepared to ride this one out. Sometimes I get jittery alone in the house when Gavin's away. It's never come to anything, and I've never minded that sharp thrill of fear. This was the same. Or, if it really was my day to die, there was nothing I could do about it so I may as well keep driving. Maybe just check my mirrors a little more.

The local radio station was playing a whole selection of Radiohead songs, to coincide with them headlining some festival, and I turned it up. I'd tuned in too late to hear much of it, but in time to hear *Street Spirit*; one of my favourites. I tuned to another station as soon as I remembered it was a song about dying. The digital display flicked to the next frequency and the car filled with the chorus of *Who Wants to Live Forever?* by Queen. I grinned. What was next – *Don't Fear the Reaper?* I gave up on the radio and shoved in one of Gavin's CDs. It was a compilation of REM songs, which was fine by me since it was poppy and catchy and not about death.

I indicated to get on the slip road for the motorway. I needed to go two exits to bypass the Saturday traffic in town. I had seen the accident happening somewhere around the junction before the one I needed. The sun came out from behind the clouds that had been threatening rain all morning. I seemed to be driving towards the better weather. In my dream of the accident, I had seen blue sky dotted with a few white clouds as my car had turned over. I'd seen it in that slow motion vision, like the wine bottle smashing apart, and it had reminded me of being on a rollercoaster. That was how I'd kept calm in the moments before the car made impact with the road. I was thinking: *pretend it's only a ride.*

Some high profile people have foreseen their own deaths. Abraham Lincoln for one. He dreamt he saw mourners in his own house and, when he asked who had died, he was told “the President.” How many ordinary people see the end coming and don't let on in case their loved ones

freak out or think they're mad? Just what are you supposed to do with a vision like that? Me, I kept driving serenely towards it.

As I passed the first exit, and began to recognise the section of road up ahead where my premonition had been set, I paid special attention to the cars around me. It wasn't busy: there was a silver hatchback in front, which I was following at a safe enough distance, and a lorry fifty metres ahead. The silver hatchback was a new VW Golf with tinted windows, and I knew it would be involved in the accident in some way. Did I hit the back of it? Or did my car rebound off it before landing on the road? This was the part I wasn't sure about: once my car was in the air, I hadn't seen a thing. But, as I checked my rear-view mirror again, I saw the car that was going to cause the accident heading down the slip road.

It was a sleek black Mercedes and it hit the motorway at seventy or eighty. I was well past the junction by then and I watched it accelerate in the outside lane in my wing mirror. As it gained on me I gripped the steering wheel tighter and tried to keep focussed on the road ahead. What if I ended up causing an accident through not paying attention to the traffic braking in front? The REM CD began playing *It's The End Of The World As We Know It* and my stomach tightened. This was it. If something was going to happen, it was going to happen now.

I glanced at the silver Golf in front. It was indicating to overtake the lorry and was already accelerating into the outside lane. The Mercedes cruised past me and snuck up on the Golf. I sang along with Michael Stipe as I waited to see if the two cars would somehow be the start of a pile-up. The Mercedes was tail-gating the Golf a bit, but the Golf had sped up to increase the gap. Before I could observe them any further they'd passed the lorry and pulled back into the inside lane and out of my view. I didn't totally relax until I took my exit and was on the back roads leading to Olivia's house but, by the time I reached her street, I had cleared the whole thing from my mind.

"Happy Birthday!" I said, as she let me in.

"Thanks," she said, hugging me, "you've timed it perfectly – I've just opened the wine."

I was staying at Olivia's that night. The early hours saw us struggling with the sofa bed and collapsing on it for one last drink while we shared the leftover birthday cake. I was battling the onset of sleep and, as soon as Olivia had gone to her room, fell into a heavy doze from which I was sure I wouldn't wake for hours.

When I awoke it was dark and I felt hot and nauseous. I threw the duvet off and shifted onto my back, where I tried to lie still and take some deep breaths. The room was swimming rather than spinning, and my heart was speeding. I wanted to open a window, thinking that Olivia's house was just a little warmer than mine and that I'd be alright after some air, but I didn't dare to move. My legs had lost their strength and I was trembling. I thought I'd collapse if I tried to stand. What was wrong with me? It surely wasn't the wine – we'd had quite a bit, but I hadn't felt that drunk when I'd gone to bed.

A metallic tang filled the back of my throat and my heartbeat resonated in my ears. I would have to make it to the bathroom across the hall before I was sick. Clutching at the doorhandle and the furniture along the way, I staggered into the bathroom and turned on the light. Sinking to my knees on the tiled floor beside the toilet, I lifted the lid and held my hair out of my face with one shaking hand. My stomach convulsed and I gripped it with the other hand, dreading how much this was going to hurt.

When I wasn't sick right away, I leaned over and pressed my burning forehead against the curve of the sink. Olivia's bathroom was white and gleaming and smelled of lemon. The window was open a crack, letting clean night air through. I began to shiver but I liked it better than being feverish. My pulse returned to an easier rhythm as the pain in my belly subsided and nausea drifted away. I got back on my feet and examined my face in the mirror. I was so white my skin looked like it should be see-through, but hopefully it was nothing going back to bed for a few hours wouldn't fix. As I crept back to the sofa I picked my phone up from the side and checked the time. I had a good few hours to sleep yet before Olivia would get up.

The next morning I felt fine and Olivia suggested that maybe I had eaten something that had

disagreed with me. I set off for home around eleven, wondering what kind of state Gavin and his brother might have left the kitchen in. A night watching the rugby would involve a lot of beers and a takeaway curry. Maybe if I had a leisurely drive back, it would all be spotless by the time I arrived. I switched the radio on as I headed for the motorway, in time to catch the local news. The lead story gave me such a shock that I had to pull over on the hard shoulder to collect myself.

There had been a fatal accident on the stretch of motorway I had turned off of on the way to Olivia's the day before, which by the sound of it must have taken place shortly after I had left. A twenty-six year old woman had been taken to hospital with serious injuries and had died during the night. Police were looking for the driver of a black Mercedes who had fled the scene.

Gavin didn't realise how het up I was when I came into the house with an armful of newspapers. He put his head round the door and gave me a sheepish look, not noticing that the wet cloth he was holding in one hand was dripping all over the floor.

"I've nearly finished clearing up," he said with an endearing grin, "did you have a nice time?"

I was already spreading two different local papers and an array of nationals out over the coffee table. I didn't know how to explain what I had to tell him, and my tears burst out before any words could. He hurried across the room and drew me into his arms. The cloth he was still holding started making a wet patch on the back of my jeans, and he dropped it onto one of the newspapers. I snatched it up before it could soak through the newsprint and render it unreadable.

"What's happened, love?" Gavin asked, staring at me, "why have you got all these newspapers?"

We sat on the sofa and I filled him in on my lucid premonition from the day before and how I'd forgotten about it until I'd heard the news report with its similarities to what I'd foreseen.

"And the woman who died was twenty-six, like me," I wailed, at the end of the story.

"So? It's just a weird coincidence, babe," Gavin said softly, rubbing my knee. "It doesn't mean anything. The way some loonies drive, I worry about accidents on the road nearly every time I drive to

work.”

“I have to read these articles,” I said, gesturing to the papers, “and find out more about it.”

The two local papers had the story on their front pages, and I thought I might find some smaller mentions in the national dailies.

“Okay, let's read them together,” Gavin said.

He picked up one of the locals and I picked up the other. We read in silence for a few seconds before I let out a gasp.

“Oh my god, she was driving a silver VW Golf – that was the car I saw,” I said. Gavin glanced at me as though he wasn't sure whether or not touching me again would be a good idea. I skimmed down a few more lines until the tears in my eyes began to make reading impossible.

“Gavin, she died at the same time I woke up feeling sick. I checked the time. I woke up because she was dying,” I said, flinging the paper aside and burying my face in my hands.

Gavin put his paper down and edged towards me, placing his hand on my back. He was quiet for a minute as I cried.

“Hang on though, didn't you say you saw your car flipping over?” he said at last.

I nodded.

“Well, you wouldn't have survived that, would you?” he pointed out.

“I don't know. The premonition kind of ended there.”

“Yeah, because you would have been dead. I mean, you said you thought you were having a vision of yourself *dying*,” Gavin said, “not getting injured and going to hospital and dying a few hours later.”

I wiped my eyes and nose. “Uh-huh.”

“And anyway, you said you saw it happening on that specific piece of the motorway, that you recognised, and they must have had that accident a few miles further down, eh?”

“Okay, but how come I knew which cars would be involved and stuff?”

Gavin bit his lip and looked away. “I don't know about that. It's pretty creepy. I think it's best

you try and forget about it, or it'll drive you mad.”

I knew Gavin's advice was right, but I couldn't follow it. How do you dismiss something that peculiar? Especially when it involved someone dying. I kept wondering if it should have been me. What if the woman in the silver Golf had died in my place? I told myself that fate didn't make mistakes, and that if I was supposed to have been killed then I would have been, but somehow it didn't satisfy me. Why had I had the premonition?

Gavin discouraged me from talking about it, thinking that the sooner I put it out of my head the happier I'd be, so I related the whole thing to Olivia. We sat in her kitchen and she listened without saying a word, read the newspaper reports, and handed me a mug of tea. My hands were shaking by the time I'd got it all out. Her silence lent it the significance Gavin's well-meant words of comfort had not. She regarded me with her large olive eyes before saying something unexpected that stirred long buried memories.

“Didn't your sister have premonitions?”

“Well...I don't know that they were *premonitions* exactly,” I said, stirring my tea for far longer than it took for the sugar to dissolve. “Grace's weren't clear cut events like the thing I saw – they were more sort of feelings, sensations...I dunno. They used to give her nightmares.”

“Do you remember what she said about them?”

“Not really,” I said. Maybe I could remember, if I hadn't twenty other things racing through my head. I hadn't thought about it in a long time.

There was a silence as we both drank our tea and stared at the patterns in the speckled formica worktops.

“So, what now?” Olivia said eventually.

I sighed into my mug, making the tea ripple. “I can't get it out of my head. I feel *responsible* somehow.”

“Well, you're not,” she said. “Don't be so daft.”

“Yes, you're right, and logic tells me the same. I know Gavin only has my welfare in mind when

he tells me to forget about it but what I keep on thinking is: why did I have a premonition about *her* accident? If it wasn't because it was supposed to be me, then why? Maybe I am suddenly susceptible to these sorts of visions, maybe it does somehow run in my family. But that doesn't explain why I'd see the death of a total stranger. And not just see it, either – experience it almost, like sitting in the front row at the cinema watching a trailer for some violent film, before your eyes or ears have adjusted. It was so...in my face.”

“So, say it *does* mean something, say there's a reason you had this premonition...how would you ever find out what it was?”

“I don't know,” I said, pushing my hair behind my ear and wondering whether to say what had been going around my head. “I want to go to the funeral though. I think I should.”

Olivia put down her tea and looked at me. “Gail, are you sure? Don't you think you'll be imposing on the family's grief? They won't know who you are, and surely you're not thinking of explaining...”

“No, of course not,” I said, “and I wouldn't go to the service. I think I just need to be there, to observe from the back, from a distance. To hear the kinds of things people say about her. Maybe I'll see some connection.”

“Well, if you really think it'll help you put this thing to rest...” said Olivia, but I could tell she wasn't convinced. “How are you gonna find out when and where the funeral is, anyway?”

“I've been watching all the local church and crem announcements, plus the obituaries. I'll know.”

“You've really thought about this, haven't you?”

I nodded. “A bit too much, probably.” She didn't know the half of it.

From saving every news report, including a dozen found on the internet, I knew that Emma Nevin had lived in my hometown all her life and was married to a businessman called Peter. I could find no mention of what she did for a living, but a variety of people in her everyday life had expressed their sorrow at her death: her hairdresser, the neighbours, her gym instructor. The one thing they all

said about Emma was that she always had time to talk. It frustrated me that they didn't say what she liked to talk about. Her husband hadn't spoken to any journalists, but an accompanying photograph of him in one report told me a lot. In it, his eyes were cast downwards and he was frowning, his face unshaven. I felt guilty. Maybe I was supposed to have intervened somehow. The thought wouldn't leave me as I read and reread the newspaper coverage, always throwing it into a drawer before Gavin came home from work and caught me.

The funeral was to be held at a little parish church just outside town. If I left work half an hour early that afternoon, I could be there to catch the end of it. I figured that was all I needed: just to see what sort of people had turned out, what kind of funeral she had, and – some sort of morbid curiosity compelled me – to witness for myself how Peter was doing.

I parked my car around the corner from the church, and saw the hearse as I walked up the street. I hung back, knowing I had no right to be there. I crossed the road and watched from a bus shelter, pretending that I was checking the timetable, as the coffin was brought out from the church and placed in the car. I recognised Peter, looking much smarter in his immaculate mourning suit, as one of the pallbearers. Apart from the other three men carrying the coffin, there was no one else around. The congregation must still be in the church. I walked away from the bus stop, crossed the road further up, and walked around the back of the churchyard to slip in through a gate on the other side.

I could hear no sound of a hymn being sung, and no solemn eulogy being delivered, despite coming as close as I dared to the open church door. I peered inside and saw that the pews were empty. Then I jumped back and drew in a sharp breath as a young female vicar stepped through the door, dignified in her black and white vestments.

“Are you here for Emma?” she asked.

“Um...yes, kind of,” I said, prickling with hot anxiety. “I know I missed the service. I guess I wanted to come and say goodbye...privately.”

“Of course,” she said, gesturing behind her at the empty church. “Take all the time you need if

you want some quiet prayer.”

“Thank you.”

When I didn't move, she waited a moment before taking a step closer and placing her hand on my arm.

“Did you know Emma well?”

I observed her gentle eyes and her open, accepting body language. It was her job to offer comfort. The demeanour was well practised. A tear streaked down my cheek.

“I didn't know her at all,” I said, “but I knew she was going to die.”

Even as I emptied the story out into the space between us, I wondered why I was doing it. She withdrew her hand from my arm and listened. That patient look never withered, but I could tell she thought I was a fruitloop. Had I been a grieving friend, my emotions all wrecked and messy, she would have welcomed the chance to help me. Instead I was some freakish woman who came out of nowhere to confess seeing death, and she would rather not be wasting her time.

“It's just that, seeing her death like that – it's really affected me,” I said. In spite of the futility of telling her, I couldn't stop pouring it out. “I keep going over it in my head. Do you think I should talk to someone about it?”

“You know that you can always talk to God. He will listen, and He knows the truth,” she said, smiling. It was probably her stock line for all the weirdoes. She looked over my shoulder and nodded her head. I looked round. It was Peter.

“Excuse me,” she said to me, walking over to him.

“Thanks for everything today,” Peter murmured, as though he didn't want me to hear. I felt like an intruder. If there had been some way I could leave without walking right between them I would have taken it.

“Of course,” the vicar said.

Peter bowed his head, and looked as though he was about to go. Then he looked up at me.

“Excuse me – did you know my wife?” he asked. I wondered if he had heard any of what I'd

blurted out to the vicar.

“No, no...I just...” I searched for some plausible reason I'd be there that didn't expose me, and failed. “I just came to see the funeral.”

“Who are you?” he asked.

Peter stared hard at me, and for a moment I thought he was considering laying out this insensitive little gate-crasher. I turned to the vicar.

“Well, I should go – leave you to your...”

I never finished the sentence. I started walking and I didn't look back until I got to my car. My back burned from being sure that Peter was staring after me.

And because I hadn't turned around, and I'd sped off towards town in my car, I had no idea that Peter had slipped his mobile from the inside pocket of his tailored suit jacket and made a phonecall.

“It's me,” he said, as soon as someone picked up. He muttered the make, model and registration of my car into the receiver. Followed by the words: “Yeah, I think she saw the accident.”