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Opening extract from

Frozen Charlotte

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Isle of Skye – 1910

The girls were playing with the Frozen Charlotte dolls again.

The schoolmistress had given them some scraps of fabric and ribbon from the sewing room to take out to the garden. They were to practise their embroidery skills by making little dresses and bonnets for the naked porcelain dolls. "They'll catch their death of cold otherwise," the teacher had said.

But there was one girl who wasn't playing with the others. The schoolmistress sighed when she saw her, sat alone, fiddling with her blindfold. The girl complained it was uncomfortable but the doctor had said it was necessary to keep her wound clean. And, besides, the sight of her ruined eyes frightened the other girls.

The schoolmistress got up and went over to her, just as she succeeded in untying the knot.

"Now, Martha," she said, deftly tying it back up again. "Remember what the doctor said."

The girl hung her head and said nothing. She hadn't spoken much since the accident. Not since the doctor had come and Martha had made those ridiculous accusations.

"Why don't you go and join the girls in their game?" the schoolmistress said.

The blind girl shook her head and spoke so quietly that the teacher had to strain to hear. "It's a bad game."

"Nonsense. Come along now and play with the others. I'm sure they can help you if you ask."

She took Martha's hand and tugged her, stumbling along, to where the girls were playing in the sunshine. But when she got there she found that they weren't making dresses for the dolls after all. They were making shrouds. And they'd covered the dolls up with them as if they were corpses. Some of the girls were even making little crosses out of twigs.

"What are you doing?" the schoolmistress said.

The girls looked up at her. "We're holding a funeral

for the Frozen Charlottes, Miss Grayson."

"Well, stop it at once," the teacher replied. "I never heard of anything so ghoulish."

"But, miss," one of the girls said, "they like being dead. They told us."

Chapter One

Now Charlotte lived on the mountainside,
In a bleak and dreary spot.
There was no house for miles around,
Except her father's cot.

When Jay said he'd downloaded a Ouija-board app on to his phone, I wasn't surprised. It sounded like the kind of daft thing he'd do. It was Thursday night and we were sitting in our favourite greasy spoon café, eating baskets of curly fries, like always.

"Do we have to do this?" I asked.

"Yes. Don't be a spoilsport," Jay said.

He put his phone on the table and loaded the app. A Ouija board filled the screen. The words YES and NO were written in flowing script in the top two corners, and beneath them were the letters of the alphabet in that same curling text, in two arches. Beneath that was a straight row of numbers from zero to nine, and underneath was printed GOODBYE.

"Isn't there some kind of law against Ouija boards or something? I thought they were supposed to be dangerous."

"Dangerous how? It's only a board with some letters and numbers written on it."

"I heard they were banned in England."

"Couldn't be, or they wouldn't have made the app. You're not scared, are you? It's only a bit of fun."

"I am definitely *not* scared," I said.

"Hold your hand over the screen then."

So I held out my hand, and Jay did the same, our fingertips just touching.

"The planchette thing is supposed to spell out the answers to our questions," Jay said, indicating the little pointed disc hovering at one corner of the screen.

"Without us even touching it?"

"The ghost will move it," he declared.

"A ghost that understands mobile phones? And doesn't mind crowds?" I glanced around the packed café. "I thought you were supposed to play with Ouija boards in haunted houses and abandoned train stations."

"That would be pretty awesome, Sophie, but since

we don't have any boarded-up lunatic asylums or whatever around here, we'll just have to make do with what we've got. Who shall we try to contact?" Jay asked. "Jack the Ripper? Mad King George? The Birdman of Alcatraz?"

"Rebecca Craig," I said. The name came out without my really meaning it to.

"Never heard of her. Who did she kill?"

"No one. She's my dead cousin."

Jay raised an eyebrow. "Your what?"

"My uncle who lives in Scotland, he used to have another daughter, but she died when she was seven."

"How?"

I shrugged. "I don't know. No one really talks about it. It was some kind of accident."

"How well did you know her?"

"Not that well. I only met her once. It must have been right before she died. But I always wondered how it happened. And I guess I've just been thinking about them again, now that I'm going to stay in the holidays."

"OK, let's ask her how she died. Rebecca Craig," Jay said. "We invite you to speak with us."

Nothing happened.