

PANDEMIC

An Extract from 'A Diary of a Lancashire Lass'

I started feeling unwell yesterday. I knew something was up when I awoke coughing. My sister Emily lay beside me in a huddle as usual. I hope this evil thing doesn't get to her. She's far too young to understand.

There's just the three of us now. Fred died last week. He got up one morning, went off to coal yard and never came back. Mr Grace says he just fell over with a fever. Fred was full of life. When he wasn't at the yard, he'd be making sure we were all right. And on his afternoon off, he'd go and watch Clarets at Turf Moor.

Mum has not been well either, but she carries on washing for Mr Prendergast. Without Fred's wages, it's getting tough for us. The rent man says he won't call for a month to allow us time to grieve and get on our feet, but I can't see an end to this.

You might ask where our Dad is? Dad and his brothers went off to war before our Emily was born. Mum received a note from Ministry that Dad was not coming home. I'm not sure what happened, but my friend Katy says her Dad was shot at by the Bosch. I think Bosch is the name for the Kaiser's army. I can still see Dad walking up Nelson Street. Mum doesn't talk about it.

Mum has mended my summer dress in time for Church on Sunday. I caught it on the stile at Craggy Cross. I didn't mean to. Mum was not angry with me. She knows I go there to gaze at valley. I met Billy there the other day. He gave me a posey of cornflowers and buttercups. I think he likes me.

'Eh Rosie, how's doing?'

'Hello Billy. I'm fine. Just looking at meadow.'

'Eee, the valley looks grand from 'ere.'

'Aye. You off to work at Mill soon?'

'Aye, I think so. Ma needs me to earn money for my keep. What with our Sam away in Ireland and all that. Not sure when Sam will be back. Mr Prendergast says Mill workers will have to wear cloths over their nose and mouth soon. They're calling illness a pandemic flu.' I hope the world knows how to deal with a pandemic in a hundred years' time?'

Billy looked at the river, drew a heavy intake of breath and said, 'Our Dad died yesterday.'

'Sorry Billy.'

'Bloody gas got him after all. At least he came 'ome, but he wasn't same.'

I looked down at the ground. 'Mum won't tell us what happened to our Dad. He just didn't come back.'

The warmth of the sun filled our hearts and hillside looked radiant on other side of river.

'I wonder how this valley will look in hundred years' time?' said Billy.

'It's the one place I can tell the change of the seasons,' I said smiling at Billy.'