



## EXCERPT FROM

# TIME *was* AWAY

### Prologue

It is no more than chance that the young man glances into The Archduke as he hurries past. Candlelight shines on the glasses, parlour palms spread their fronds into the alcoves. Snug beneath the railway bridge, the wine bar looks inviting on this chilly autumn evening.

He has passed the bar before his subconscious has time to make the connection. He stops. For a few seconds, he hesitates. Is there time to go back? And do what? He hurries on, then stops again. If he doesn't go back, he will always wonder if it was her.

He looks at his watch. Quarter past seven. It will only take a minute. The Festival Hall is just a few steps from here. He will easily be at the stage door by twenty past, which is time enough, since he's already in concert dress. Grasping the handle of his viola case

tightly, he turns back the way he came.

Beside the entrance to the bar, there is a menu for the restaurant upstairs. He pretends to study it, then allows his gaze to slide across. The girl is sitting at an angle to the glass, facing away from him. A mass of dark hair falls over her narrow shoulders. Her slender figure seems almost to float above the chair as she leans forward, intent on her companion's conversation.

It must be Hetty, surely. The tilt of the chin, the small, neat nose, that private smile, as though she were laughing inwardly. These are just as he remembers her. She springs up in his mind, long brown arms and legs and sudden, alarming curves, vivid and lovely. It is almost half his life ago. It could be yesterday.

With a start, he notices that her friend is looking straight at him. His feet have forgotten to move onward and he has been standing here in the street, gazing in. His cheeks burn. He hurries away before the girl can turn round.

The Archduke is crowded when he goes back after the concert. The window table is now occupied by two older women and people are queuing along the bar. The girl clearing glasses looks harassed. There is no point hoping someone will remember an earlier customer. The young man walks back down to the river and crosses the footbridge to Embankment. To the east, the dome of St. Paul's glows against the night

sky. The lights along the bank glitter on the sleek, black water.

If only he hadn't been in such a rush earlier, he could have gone in and spoken to her. If the District Line train ahead of his hadn't broken down, he wouldn't have been so late. But then he wouldn't have come into Waterloo at all, wouldn't have passed The Archduke. Still, he should have waited for her to look round. He would have known for certain then. He imagines her jumping up from the table and running to the door, her face alight with pleasure.

Of course, she might not have been glad to see him. In his mind's eye, he watches recognition flicker in her eyes before she turns away.

I failed her, he thinks. It was the only thing she ever asked of me, and I didn't do it. He trudges along, his gaze fixed on the ground in front of him. In every way it is now too late.

*For more information, go to [www.juliaedwardsbooks.com](http://www.juliaedwardsbooks.com)*