

A Time of Shadows

A Story set in World War 1



For Katie and Emily

By Old Grandad

April – May 2014



This story is rather different from any of the others I have written for Katie and Emily. It is darker in tone than other stories because it is based on fact. Sr Edith Cavell was the Director of the Berkendael Clinic in the rue de la Culture in Brussels when the war broke out. Her work as it is described in the story is substantially in keeping with the historical record. The time frames and numbers of soldiers saved and returned to Britain through Holland are correct. In the story, Sr Cavell acts in concert with Mr Mycroft Holmes; in reality, her work appears to have been quite spontaneous - the result of decisions she made from moment to moment as desperate soldiers made their way to her door.

The British were very quick to make Edith Cavell into a martyr and to use her death for propaganda purposes. Even so, her courage and sacrifice are extraordinary by any standard. Baron Moritz von Bissing, the Military Governor of Brussels who sought the death penalty for Sr Cavell, is an historical figure. His comment that he wished he were able to shoot more old English women is authentic. Ambassador Brand Whitlock is also an historical figure. In his efforts to support the work of the Berkendael Clinic and to win a reprieve for Sr Cavell he showed himself to be one of the most noble diplomats to have served his country in that terrible time.

Other characters are not historical. Pierre, Katie and Emily, Danny and Arthur are inventions but there were men, women and children just like them in the real life drama of war. Unfortunately, the presence of children like Arthur on the battlefield is an historical fact although the youngest servicemen in World War 1 appear to have been in the Royal Navy where there was a long tradition of child sailors.

There is some dispute about the number of Allied servicemen whom Sr Cavell helped to escape. Part of the reason for the confusion is obvious: it was dangerous to keep any record that might fall into the hands of the Germans and incriminate the circle who assisted Edith Cavell in her work. A second reason is that the person best placed to know - Sr Cavell herself - would not cooperate with the Germans on this and on many other matters. She readily acknowledged that she had assisted Allied servicemen to escape and tried to take the whole responsibility on her own shoulders but as for cooperating with them and answering their questions, that she would not do. The surviving court record shows that Sr Cavell said only one hundred and forty words in her defence. With little concrete information to go on, the Germans guessed that it was about one hundred and fifty men. Her most recent biographer believes that it was probably ten times this number.

Edith Cavell's sacrifice was honoured by King George and Queen Mary who were deeply moved by the dignity of her death. Her life and sacrifice became an emblem of the courage of English women. Among the memorials to Edith Cavell close to home are a bridge in New Zealand, a stained glass window in the cathedral church in Brisbane and a House bearing her name at St Aidan's Anglican Girls' School in Corinda.



Chapter 1: The War Comes to Curzon Street

In the early morning, the streets of Brussels were eerily quiet. Emily stood on the little balcony at the tall windows of the first storey of the clinic, looking across the tree tops to the elegant stone buildings of the street towards the railway station. She could hear the wind moving the leaves of the oak trees that lined the street. Somewhere in the distance a church bell was ringing. The trams that normally ran down the street were nowhere to be seen and Emily could see that the shop windows were shuttered and bolted. The great city was still.

When the girls had arrived from England only a week ago, the same city street had been like an ants' nest that had been overturned. There was constant traffic then- buses, lorries, military vehicles coming and going at all hours and cabs working constantly to move the sea of men and women hurrying about. Much of the traffic, however, had been pedestrian: ranks of French, Belgian and British soldiers marching south and east. They marched with their officers, their uniforms stained with perspiration and their faces drawn and anxious. To Emily's great surprise, it was the sense of smell that dominated the busy city: the manure in the streets deposited by huge numbers of horses moving the wagons and the guns, the fear and anxiety in the air and the smell of thousands and thousands of unwashed bodies hurrying towards the battlefield. The city itself, however, looked serene and beautiful; glorious August sunshine made the old city seem relaxed and timeless. That was how the girls had found the city when they arrived; all of that had turned to ashes in the last seven days.

The first worrying change was in the flood of refugees: in those first days, there were single men and women and whole families pushing their few possessions in a wheelbarrow or a baby carriage. The refugees staggered on blindly at all hours of the day and night- uncertain where to go but fearful of pausing too long in any place. The first artillery shells fell on the city causing panic. Now the columns of soldiers who marched in columns around the fleeing people were grim and exhausted. Then there were more soldiers, staggering back from the battlefield. Emily had seen lorries loaded with wounded men, fleeing to find a place where they could be treated in safety. The chaos of that retreat didn't stop for a moment; it continued in a grey flood through the night. And now the streets were deserted. Emily's heart felt tight in her chest. She lifted the watch pinned to her blouse. Katie should have been back hours ago. If she didn't return, Emily didn't know what she would do.

Only three weeks ago, the girls had been finishing a holiday in Brighton. The news from Europe was increasingly grim but that summer was the best the girls could remember in England and the sunny days were beautiful. Only at the end of July did the crisis in Europe suddenly involve England. Then the war came; it was on them like a thunderstorm. Both the girls had been shocked and a little frightened for what was to come but if they were very honest, they were also excited. England was at war and suddenly, the girls' world had turned upside down.

At the Royal Free Hospital where Emily worked, many of the younger male doctors suddenly left their places to go into the army. In the past few years, as doctors who had trained with her left to work away from the hospital, Emily had had to take on more and more responsibilities for teaching the younger doctors - those who were still in training. It was a part of the job she loved. Emily was confident and very gentle; her patients loved her. She never forgot, however, how she had had to struggle when she began her training and she was particularly keen to help the few young women who came into the man's world of Medicine. With a strong woman doctor to encourage them, these women would find the world of the hospital a more welcoming place than she had done.

It was the same story at Katie's school. Durwood Street School was just resuming after the summer holiday and Katie listened in the staff room at morning tea as three of the young teachers announced that they were leaving to enlist in the army. They were excited and promising everyone that they would beat the Kaiser's army in no time at all. It seemed that the air of the holiday still hung over them as they made their farewells.

No one was more excited to be leaving than Danny Rogers whom Katie had helped so much last term as he began to teach at Durwood Street School. Katie had warmed to Danny straight away; it didn't hurt, of course, that Danny was young and handsome with straw coloured hair and intense blue eyes that showed intelligence and spirit. In a way, they were both outsiders. Katie never forgot that she came to England from Hong Kong. London may have been her home now but she never lost her sense of being a stranger there. Danny was the same. He came from Somerset: he was really a country boy at heart. His father was the vicar of the village church and his family had lived in the big house in the village for hundreds of years. But this wasn't the only thing that set Danny apart from the other teachers at Durwood Street. Danny had been to university in Cambridge. He read a great deal and listened to men and women who wanted to bring change to the England they knew - the England where a few people were rich and most of the people were poor. Danny had wanted to become a teacher, he told Katie, to help children and to make England a better country.

When he had graduated from university, Danny could have gone into government service or into one of the great professions such as the church or law or commerce. Instead, he had volunteered to come to a school in the slums. Danny was eager and keen - but it all turned out to be much harder than he thought it would be. At Durwood Street, Danny had been astonished at the children's faces pinched by hunger and their bodies stunted by poor food and hard work. He was horrified by the crowded, sunless streets in which the families lived and the terrible violence he sometimes saw outside pubs and in the streets. He hated the smell of unwashed people and stagnant water. And the children in his class, he quickly found, weren't the least bit grateful to him for coming to their school. Didn't they know, he told Katie, that he could have had lots of easy and well paid jobs? Instead, he had

come to their school - and his reward was that children were often unruly, ill-mannered and unappreciative.

Katie listened carefully and by gentle suggestion she helped Danny to listen and learn. From his first day at school, she had helped him settle into the school routine and plan his lessons. She had listened to him when things had been difficult and all the hard work he put into his lessons seemed to come to nothing. Over long cups of tea after hard days in the classroom, Katie had tried to help him feel comfortable with the boys and girls of his classroom. On some very difficult afternoons when Danny's heart was breaking with the pain of his job, Katie would simply take him home to Curzon Street where Emily became another friend who knew what he was struggling with. Big pots of tea and endless rounds of marmalade toast helped to comfort the intense and idealistic young man. Katie was willing to give Danny lots of her time because she loved the simple goodness of Danny's wanting to help - that's what she wanted to do too, of course. Katie also knew how hard it was for some teachers to love the tough boys and girls of the East End school. When he was discouraged, Danny sometimes spoke of the children as if they were savages from darkest Africa. It took Katie the whole term to help him see the children in another way - as real people with strengths and weaknesses.

At first, Danny thought that the boys and girls didn't like him because of his accent. He spoke in the refined, educated speech of someone raised in the country who had gone to a famous school and to a great university. Surely the boys and girls wouldn't resent him just because he spoke well? No, Katie said, that wasn't the case at all. Katie had an accent too: it wasn't as posh and as formal as Danny's accent but it was a long way from the sharp clip of the East End streets - and the boys and girls still loved and trusted Katie. One Friday afternoon when nothing had gone right, Katie and Danny sat in a tea shop and she listened yet again to Danny's great hopes and high ideals. "Tell me," he pleaded, "what is wrong with what I'm doing? I've watched you, Katie, with your class. I see how much the boys and girls respond to you - how they want to learn from you. In my class, no one seems to do their homework. The boys especially want to fall asleep on the desk and sometimes the class is like a can of wriggling worms! The boys and girls don't even seem to like me." And then Danny shyly let slip that he had written to his old college at Cambridge - and they had replied that they would be happy to have him back as a tutor. Katie was horrified that Danny might be lost to the school in this way. It was time, she decided, for some hard talk.

The students in Danny's class may have been ungrateful and inattentive, Katie suggested, because they prickled at the way Danny seemed to judge them and their way of life. Danny protested: "I love my boys and girls! I want to help them escape from their poverty and the slums. I want them to be able to change and be better! That's why I have come to Durwood School. I could be doing something very well paid and much more important! If I wanted to stay a teacher, I could work in a school like the one I went to - where the boys wanted to learn and respected their teachers. Instead, I want to help the poor - but they just seem so ungrateful."

"Danny," Katie said gently, "you may say you love your boys and girls, but how well do you know them?"

Danny was puzzled: of course he knew his students!

Katie went on gently: "Do you know that Evelyn in your class doesn't do her homework for you because she spends every moment at home caring for her little brothers and sisters since her mother is sick? She cooks and cleans and does the laundry for the five people

who live in the one room of a house that her family shares with another poor family. It's a wonder that she comes to school at all. And do you know that Freddie is lazy in class because he takes his little sister late at night into the streets away from his drunken father- and so he is always tired? Do you know that many of the boys and girls are restless because they haven't had anything to eat for breakfast - and many of them have no lunch? It's not enough to love the boys and girls of the school as a group - you have to love them as individuals."

And at this moment, Danny was punctured like a balloon. He felt foolish and bewildered and wounded and in that moment of despair, he began to cry. The tea shop was full of busy people but they were all kind enough not to notice the sad young man with the intense blue eyes and the straw coloured hair crying into his handkerchief while his companion - a tall young woman with the kindest face - rubbed his shoulder in comfort.

From that moment, Danny listened- and it was never again as difficult or as baffling as it had been at first. The next morning, Katie walked Danny through the streets of Whitechapel, introducing him to the Mums and Dads and to the big brothers and sisters of the boys and girls in his class. Katie gently helped Danny to see the families of Durwood Street as brave and hard working - and cheerful even when times were terrible. They needed his help if they were to live better lives as adults - but they could also be helpful to Danny as he tried to match his high ideals to the real world. And Danny's classroom slowly became a happier place. No one made a fuss about all this but Katie's heart swelled with pride when the Headmaster called her into his office one afternoon to thank her for helping Danny to settle into Durwood Street School- and for quietly helping him to be a much nicer young man than he had been.

Now, as Danny packed up his desk, putting his books and notes into two cardboard boxes, he told all his friends about the great adventure awaiting him in France. "How can you stay here - when everything's happening across the sea in France and Belgium?" he said with a grin. "Why, it's going to be the most fun our generation could ever have and I'm not going to miss it for anything!"

"What about the boys and girls in your class?" asked Katie. She tried to keep a smile on her face, but deep down she was very sorry that Danny was so keen to leave them. His great hopes for changing the world seem to have vanished overnight. An enthusiasm for the war had trumped his hunger for social change.

"Just as well they'll have you to look after them," Danny said with a grin. "And anyway, I'll be back by Christmas time."

Danny was actually back the very next day: he called proudly at the school to show everyone his smart khaki uniform - with his lieutenant's pips on his shoulder. He shook hands with the Headmaster, stepped into his class to receive their cheers and then called in hastily at the staff room. Katie couldn't help but hug him - and then she burst into tears, hardly knowing why.

Danny was touched by her reaction but a little embarrassed as well. It was probably just as well that he had to report to Army Headquarters at Horseferry Road that afternoon and had a ready excuse to leave. Danny and Katie had become good friends over the last six months. She knew other young men who had volunteered to fight but none of them had

such a good heart as Danny did. And Katie couldn't help but feel protective towards the young man. For all the bluster and enthusiasm of the young men who were enlisting, Katie knew that the war was no game and that the loud boasts about being home for Christmas were unlikely to come true. Struggling to stay cheerful, however, Katie hugged Danny again and made him promise to write to her.

"Which I will certainly do - when I have a moment to spare from beating the Germans!" said Danny with a laugh. Here he was suddenly more serious and took Katie by both hands. "And Katie, thank you kindly for all you have done for me here. I won't forget it - or you." Then he was gone and Katie felt like doing nothing better than sitting down and having a good, long cry. Before she could do that, however, she realised that she was going to be late for her class if she didn't move quickly. It wouldn't do to appear before her class in tears. There was only an hour and a half before school was over for the day and she could go home to Emily and be completely miserable in the quiet of Curzon St. The war had only been going for three days, Kate reflected bitterly, and already she was hating it. She was suddenly ashamed that only three days ago she herself excited by what was happening.

As she told Emily over dinner about that awful afternoon, Katie wondered how it could have gotten worse after Danny left -but it did. Katie lost her temper: something that had never before happened to her at Durwood Street. Of course this would probably not have happened if Katie hadn't just said goodbye to Danny but what happened at the end of the last lesson of the day simply broke her heart. She couldn't talk about it with Emily without sobbing - and burning with shame.

It happened like this. The bell had long rung and most of the boys and girls had packed up and gone. After the sad time with Danny, Katie herself was keen to go -she needed a cup of tea and she really wanted to begin working on the pile of exercise books on her desk that she would have to mark before first lesson the next day. There was nothing like good hard work to tranquilise troubled feelings, she thought. One of the boys, Arthur, loitered behind, however, and dawdled out to Katie's desk. Arthur was the little brother of Wally Beavers - the bright young man who had been Katie's best pupil in that first year of her life at Durwood Street. Years of teaching Wally and Arthur had made Katie very sensitive to moments like this when they wanted to share something. It was always best, she had found, to be patient and wait for the little boy to begin. Katie quietly smiled at Arthur in encouragement and was astonished when Arthur pushed out his arm to shake hands.

Arthur and Wally were very obviously brothers: both boys had the same curly brown hair, intelligent, bright brown eyes and wonderful smile. At thirteen, Arthur was already growing up, looking wiry and fit and larger than Wally had been at that age. Arthur was in his last year at Durwood Street and Katie and Wally were already talking about what they could do between them to make sure that he had the same chances for more study that Wally had enjoyed. In a just world, there was nothing that Arthur couldn't do. He was hard working, clever and showed wonderful character. He had plenty of pluck and determination, Katie knew; he had quietly stepped into Wally's shoes as Mr Sherlock Holmes's special agent in the East End when Wally had gone off to school in Wimbledon.

Katie took Arthur's extended hand and held it: even though Arthur smiled broadly, it was a solemn moment. "I'm off, Miss. I wanted to say goodbye," said Arthur.

“Where are you going?” Katie asked in surprise, a cold, awful feeling gripping her heart. Without knowing why, Katie held on to Arthur’s hand.

“Why, I’m going to enlist,” said Arthur cheekily. “I know I’m only thirteen but I look older and I’m sure I’ll be able to squeeze in somehow. I don’t want to miss out. They say it will all be over by Christmas anyway. It’s a great chance for a boy like me.”

Katie’s reaction simply astonished Arthur. When Danny had said the same thing two hours ago, she was astonished at his naiveté but Danny was an adult and could make decisions - even foolish decisions- for himself. He was protected by his class and background; he would go off to the war as an officer. But Arthur was only a little boy and Katie was not so much saddened as enraged. Danny had told her again and again how unjust England was - how unfair it was that some few people were wealthy while most people struggled and were poor. Katie knew that it was true and she knew in her heart of hearts that even though Arthur was only a little boy that he was a little boy from a poor family. No one would protect him from himself - and he would probably find someone in the army recruiting office who would wink him in and put him into a uniform. No one would dare to do that to the boy of a wealthy family.

“No!” cried Katie savagely. “No! No! No! Arthur Beavers, you mustn’t do this. Think of your poor mother. She’ll not want you to do this, I know. She needs you here -safe and well. Stop this nonsense at once!”

Arthur blinked back his astonishment and tried to make light of his teacher’s reaction, “Steady on, Miss. I don’t intend to get myself killed. And by enlisting, I can help my Mum. All my pay can go to her. I won’t need more than sixpence in France.”

“Arthur, this is madness. You’ll be no good to your mother dead. I won’t let you do this!” Katie had taken his hand and held it; now Arthur gently took his hand back and tried to smile his way through the pain of this extraordinary and unexpected encounter with his teacher.

“Thank you, Miss, for all you’ve done for Wally and me. You’ve been so good to both of us, I know. When this is all over, I’ll come back and show you my medals, I will.” Then Arthur did something that was way beyond his years and which only made Katie the more miserable: he hugged his teacher and together, the two of them cried as they saw Arthur’s childhood slip away like smoke and the wickedness of the world crowd in around them. And then Arthur was gone and Katie left to pack her things and make her own miserable way home. She felt exhausted by the strain of the day and ashamed that she had lost her temper with Arthur. Tomorrow, she told herself, she would apologize to the boy. Deep down she knew how Arthur felt. Everyone seemed prepared to make a sacrifice for their country - and Katie wanted to do her bit too. It would be hard to replace the three young teachers who had already volunteered to go away and fight. Perhaps her part would be carrying extra work at school while these men were away. It seemed little enough compared with what Danny and Arthur were doing but at that moment she couldn’t think of anything else she could do for the King.

Katie told Emily the whole story over dinner. They were both feeling saddened by seeing friends go away and Katie was feeling particularly broken down by her reaction to Arthur’s wanting to join the army. She had had adventures with Wally, of course, in which both of them had been in dangerous - even life threatening- situations. In the great adventure of the Star of Hind diamond, Wally had risked his life to save Katie’s - and he did all this when he was only as old as Arthur was now. It wasn’t the physical danger that frightened Katie. That much she could face. Instead, it was having to come up against the shadows and darkness of the war itself and the wickedness it represented - and feeling that no

matter what she did, the war would just roll over her and the people she loved. This was a cruelty that could reach out and strike you down no matter how brave or determined you might be. Katie knew in her heart that before it was finished, the darkness of war would swallow up Danny and Arthur and thousands of men and boys like them. There was much to think about and Katie couldn't know where these thoughts might have taken her when there was a firm knock at the door and the girls were surprised to find a grim looking Mr Mycroft Holmes on their doorstep.

Both the girls knew immediately that something very serious was afoot. Mr Mycroft Holmes never called to see them; he was much more comfortable operating from the cool splendour of the offices of the Diogenes Club. And Mr Mycroft Holmes never made contact unless he needed something. As the war crisis had deepened through July, Emily had twice wished aloud that she could have a moment of Mycroft Holmes's time. He would know, Emily was sure, how seriously things stood and whether the noisy confidence that the war would end quickly was well founded. One look at Mycroft's face quickly settled that issue. Katie did her best to be cheerful and sensible; their Chinese housekeeper Yi Mu, brought a new pot of tea to the table and then, at Katie's urging, a bowl of soup. When the fragrant chicken and rice soup arrived, it looked to both the girls as if Mycroft might have missed breakfast and lunch. Despite their curiosity, the girls waited while Mycroft ate the soup and then he turned to them with a crooked smile.

"Forgive me, Ladies, for intruding on you in this way. It's been very busy in the government as you might imagine in the last few weeks as the country drifted to war. Now we are in the fighting, it's even more intense."

Mycroft paused; it seemed to both the girls that he was uncertain how to proceed. This was so unlike Mr Mycroft Holmes that Katie was chilled by his concern. "Some teachers at Durwood Street- and even some of the boys - are going off to fight," said Katie sadly to give Mycroft time to collect his thoughts.

"And there were doctors from my hospital volunteering for the army," said Emily. Then there was a long silence before Emily went on: "How can we help you, Mr Holmes. You must know that we will do anything we can."

Mycroft smiled sadly. "If my brother knew that I were here he would fall on me like thunder," he said with an attempt at a smile. "You know him when he gets into that mood, I'm sure. He seems to think that he's the only one who can whistle you up to have adventures. The thing is that Sherlock is probably right because I have to ask you to do something that will put you in terrible danger: indeed, it will put your lives at risk. He paused again then went on: "Miss Katie, what's this I hear from John Watson about your driving a motor car?"

It was such an unexpected way to take the conversation that Katie laughed. A moment ago, Mr Holmes seemed on the point of sharing some terrible state secret; now he had shifted gears and turned the chat back to the safe topic of the last lovely summer before the fog of war descended on them. Katie chuckled despite the seriousness of the moment, remembering the fun of the country roads of Hampshire where Lady Maud Fife had taught her to drive a Rolls Royce motor car while Maud's husband, the Marquis of Fife, cheered from the back seat. "It's true," said Emily with a little steel in her voice. "I hope you're not one of these men, Mr Holmes, who thinks a lady can't do something as simple as drive a motor car!"

Mr Holmes laughed and said simply, “Forgive me, Dr Emily! I didn’t mean to swagger. But it does make a difference to what I ask of you now that I know for sure that Katie can indeed drive. Do you have your licence, Miss Katie?”

“Indeed I do,” said Katie. “Before this wretched war broke out, I was planning to show it to all the teachers in my staff room. But since the war has driven every other thing from our minds I haven’t even thought to tell anyone.”

Mr Holmes stood and walked to the windows looking out over Curzon Street. The evening traffic had slowed and it seemed quiet and peaceful. Outside, the last of the lovely twilight lingered on long after dinner in these high summer days of August. The girls waited for him to go on. “Once again, I have to ask you to treat what I must tell you in absolute confidence. I trust you both and know that you won’t share any of this with anyone - with no one at all. Can you give me your promise?”

“Of course,” said Katie. She was becoming more and more concerned by Mr Holmes’s manner. Emily added gently, “Mr Holmes, please go on. I think you know Katie and me by now. I have already told you that we will do anything we can to help.”

There was another long silence before Mr Holmes went on. “The newspapers have been full of the war - of the bravery of our navy, of the pluck of the British Expeditionary Force being sent to France and the courage of our allies- the French, the Russians and the Belgians. If you were to read the newspapers, you might think that this was all going to be easy.”

“One of the teachers was boasting today that the war would be over by Christmas,” said Katie.

Mr Holmes snorted bitterly. “That is all foolishness, Katie. By Christmas, even the noisiest newspapers will be shocked and shamed by the number of young men who are dead. This will take a long time, I fear, and we have to prepare for that. The fighting is in Belgium and France at the moment. Can I ask you both to go to Belgium for me?”

“Into the fighting?” asked Katie. “Whatever could we do? I mean, Emily is a doctor and I suppose she could be very useful but I think I might be just in the way of anyone or anything doing something really useful.”

“His Majesty’s government,” said Mycroft Holmes cautiously, “has to accept that the Germans will certainly defeat the Belgian army now defending Brussels and will occupy the city before the French can drive them back. In fact, it will be all that the French can do to hold the German army in front of Paris. Most of Belgium - perhaps all of it - will soon be under German occupation. It is essential that the government have some people in place once the occupation begins to do important work - vital work- behind the German lines. Will you go to Brussels for me - and remain there after the Germans arrive? What you can do then will be vitally important.”

Emily blinked. She had twice in the conversation told Mr Holmes that she would do anything to help that he might ask of them. She hadn’t for a moment thought that he would ask them to go to a place where they would have to live under German military rule - and do secret work that was dangerous. Emily looked at Katie and took her hand. She felt suddenly cold and frightened - and wishing that her dear Mother and Father were closer.

Even if she couldn't tell them frankly what was being asked of her, it would be something to feel the warmth of their arms around them at this moment.

"The story is this; of course you must listen before you can give me your answer," said Mr Holmes. "But I have to stress.."

Katie stopped him gently, taking his hand. "My sister has already told you our answer, Mr Holmes. Let me tell you that today I saw a friend in his new uniform, heading off to France to fight without the least idea of what he is doing. And I spoke sharply to a student I love who is silly enough to want to do the same thing. He is only thirteen years old and brave and kind and foolish all at the same time. Many, many men are offering themselves to the King and women are making their own sacrifices. Well, we may be special in that you have warned us what to expect and we know the danger better, perhaps. But I fear that my friend in the King's uniform and my students would still make the same offer of themselves even if they did know what was coming and weren't acting just on foolhardy loyalty and pluck alone. Am I right, Em?"

"Please just go on, Mr Holmes," said Emily.

"Thank you, Miss Bland and Dr Bland," said Mycroft Holmes. "I am sorry. I need to be very sure in my own mind that I am not asking you to do anything you do not understand. Then let me begin again. When the Germans occupy Belgium, there will be brave people who want to continue the struggle against the conqueror. One of them is an English woman, a nursing sister named Miss Edith Cavell. Perhaps you have heard of her, Emily?"

"Indeed I have," said Emily. "She is one of the Nightingale nurses. I met her several times. I understand that she runs a clinic or nursing school of some kind in Brussels. But neither Katie nor I is a nurse."

"No, you're right there, Emily. But Germany has no women doctors as I understand it. Your cover would be as a Nightingale nurse under Sr Cavell's direction. The nursing school is being converted into a clinic and attached to it will be an ambulance station. That's why your driver's licence is so important, Katie. Together, you can form a team running an ambulance. It might be wise not to be too frank with anyone about your being a doctor, Emily. It may be very useful for you on occasions to have the Germans underestimate your competence."

Emily gave a bitter laugh; before she had won a position of respect at the Royal Free Hospital, she was sadly used to having British men underestimate her competence! "Will Sr Cavell know who we are?" asked Emily.

"Sr Cavell is a wise woman," said Mycroft Holmes. "It will be much safer for everyone if you are honest with her and completely trusting in her common sense. She will trust you and you must trust her. That is enough."

"I think," Katie said with a stab of pain, "that I owe my Headmaster some explanation. When I left school this afternoon, he was trying to work out a way to cover classes with three fewer teachers. Now it will be four teachers he must replace."

"If you go to Brussels, Katie, the only explanation we can offer anyone is that you are going as an ambulance driver. Your connection with me must be known to no one. You will be paid from my office, both of you, although your salary will be held in trust here in England. Have you made a will, either of you?" asked Mycroft.

Emily gave another bitter smile. “That is a sobering but sensible question, Mr Holmes, given your warning about danger but the answer is yes. I don’t suppose one of us could write to our parents, telling them what we are about?”

“Write by all means and tell them the truth: that you have volunteered to work in Brussels at a clinic, Emily; that you will be driving an ambulance, Katie, and that you will be treating civilians wounded by the war. Anything more you will have to tell them only when you are home and the war is over.”



Chapter 2: Sr Cavell's Clinic: August 1914.

For the next thirty minutes, Mycroft Holmes gave the girls directions on how to proceed. He had already prepared their documents and the letters that would open doors for them all the way to Brussels. Katie glanced at Emily as Mr Mycroft Holmes unpacked his briefcase; on the table he carefully spread passports, train tickets, Letters of Introduction to the British Embassy in Brussels and separate envelopes with English pounds and French and Belgian francs. Mr Holmes had never doubted, Emily thought, that Katie and Emily would accept his invitation to go into certain danger! The girls' biggest concern at that moment, however, were not German guns but explaining to the Medical Superintendent of the Royal Free Hospital and the Headmaster at Durwood Street School that they would not be reporting for work just at a time when every person was needed. Mr Holmes dismissed this airily. His office would contact the school and the hospital; they would certainly accept a quiet word from the Prime Minister that the girls were needed for vital war work.

Neither of the girls slept much that night. Katie wrote to her parents, telling them all that she could and then sat up, packing and repacking her case, unwilling to turn out the light because the next day must bring them so many unwelcome changes. At midnight, Emily knocked on her door and the two sisters went down to the kitchen and made a pot of tea and sat and talked for a whole hour. Their train was leaving at 10 am; there would be plenty of time to sleep then before tackling the uncertain work waiting for them at the end of the railway line. They packed lightly as instructed by Mr Holmes but both of the girls took sensible shoes and their heavy winter coats and hats. Neither of them had any idea how long they would be working at the clinic. The excited soldiers had promised to be home for Christmas but the girls knew what a forlorn hope that was. When winter came, they would be thankful that they had brought some warm things.

After a fitful sleep, the morning was all busy excitement. Yi Mu cried bitterly when the girls tried to explain that they were going into the war zone and didn't expect to be home at any time soon. Indeed, the folly of what they were doing only came home to them with Yi Mu's disbelieving reaction. She hugged them close and kept remembering things that they couldn't leave without: first, a canister of Oolong tea then a jar of ginger. Katie couldn't wait for another thing to be added to her portmanteau and at the very end just as the taxi was expected, Katie realised that without her there, Yi Mu wouldn't be able to access money to pay for housekeeping. She gave Yi Mu all the money in her purse and then wrote three cheques, leaving the amount blank for Yi Mu to fill in. She also gave Yi Mu Mr Mycroft Holmes' address; if the girls were long returning, Mr Holmes would settle any expenses that Yi Mu might incur. All of this only made Yi Mu the more anxious; it was, she felt, as if the girls were going away never to return. Her tears made the morning all the more difficult to manage. Then taxi was at the door and the final hugs were delivered on the pavement outside the home the girls had loved; as they drew away, both of them wondered when they would ever see it again.

They needed all their resilience for the next stage of the journey. The station for the boat train at Victoria was crowded with soldiers, many of them saying goodbye to sweethearts and loved ones. A military band was playing stirring music. Most of the men were as light hearted as Danny Rogers had been, cheerfully hugging the women who tearfully said goodbye and promising to come home safely. They were bossed about by their nervous officers - most of them only young men themselves- who did their best to get the soldiers aboard and settled before the train slipped away from London for the coast at Dover. Most of the cabins were crowded and it was with a little surprise that the girls found that Mr Mycroft Holmes had managed to secure them a lovely first class sleeper cabin all to themselves. There was a beautiful lunch provided in the First Class dining room - a treat that they shared with several senior officers and distinguished looking men. Katie and Emily seemed to be the only women travelling alone and some of the officers gallantly invited them to join them for lunch. There was delicious fish for lunch with a dessert of strawberries and clotted cream - and a bottle of champagne. At another time, all of this would have been great fun. For a moment, the journey to Belgium seemed like an extension of their summer holiday - until they reached France when the cruel reality of the war suddenly struck them in the lines of refugees who haunted every road and railway station as the train rolled north from Calais.

Late that afternoon, the scene at the station in Brussels was chaotic. As soon as the train pulled in, anxious people trying to flee the city rushed the carriages and it was only with difficulty that the girls managed to struggle down from their carriage clutching their cases. People were shoving through the crowded space of the platform; Katie noticed with horror that much of the platform had been taken up with ranks of wounded men waiting to be evacuated on the train. Using the best French they could recall from their schoolgirl days, they looked for a taxi - only to be claimed in the middle of this difficult negotiation by a gruff Belgian man in a sober black suit and driving cap. Mr Holmes's last act of kindness before the girls found themselves at the nursing school was to whistle up Monsieur Renault, the chauffeur at the British Embassy, who saw them safely to Sr Cavell's school on the rue de la Culture with their luggage - and their precious envelope of Belgian francs- intact.

The girls never forgot their first meeting with Sister Edith Cavell, the Director of the Nursing School. The woman was as old as their own mother, perhaps, with steel grey hair pulled back and tied under the white veil that nurses wore in those days. Her grey uniform was crisply starched and severe; over the long skirt she wore a white apron that covered her chest and fell almost to the floor. Her most striking feature, however, was her strong and intelligent face that looked severe and cool- until she smiled, took their hands and kissed each of them warmly. Then her grey eyes twinkled and while she never lost the air of authority and calm, the severity was matched by a deep kindness that reminded them again of their own mother so far away. She appeared with the porter as soon as the embassy car arrived in the street and she had the girls and their luggage inside quickly - "You are very welcome, ladies. I had a message from Mr Holmes that two special people were arriving this afternoon. Dr Emily, we have met once or twice I think when I was at the Royal Free Hospital to speak to the nursing staff. It's lovely to see you again. But let's get inside - away from busy eyes who might be interested in us," was all that she would say on the street. Katie, who always had an acute ear for accents, warmed immediately to Sr Cavell's gentle Norfolk speech.

Once inside the door, however, she hugged them both and directed the porter, M. Moulin, to carry their cases to the nurses' quarters on the second floor. She herself led them to an office at the end of the first floor corridor. The scene here on the first floor was as busy and as intense as the railway platform had been - but with order, purpose and method imposed on it. Nursing sisters in their grey uniforms tended to injured or wounded men, women and children who lined the corridor in a makeshift clinic while their families

waited forlornly in the shade of the cobbled courtyard of the house. Most of the patients themselves waited in grim silence for the sisters to do their work although the sound of a crying child or the groaning of someone being treated for a gunshot wound troubled the scene and made Emily pause as she passed. In the distance, the girls could hear artillery. The battle was coming closer by the hour.

Sr Cavell responded immediately to Emily's surprise at finding the corridor used in this way. "Our regular clinic and hospital wards are full, Emily. The corridor is the only place we can treat the walking wounded," said Sr Cavell. "Can you please come with me; as soon as we have talked, we can all be at work."

The little office to which Sr Cavell led them was an oasis of order in the busyness of the clinic and the girls were delighted to find that tea things were set out on a side table. Despite the warmth of the summer day, the little stove in the corner of the office had been lit to boil a kettle. "Let's have some tea," Sr Cavell said cheerfully. "Goodness knows how much longer we'll be able to get tea; we might as well enjoy it while we can." As she poured, Katie found the letter that Mr Holmes had given them to hand to Sr Cavell; she took it and read it through, her face a picture of concentration. The girls drank their tea in silence; Emily was restless - anxious to get out and work. Katie guessed this and wondered what she could do to help.

When Sr Cavell had finished reading, she stood and crossed to the stove, dropping the letter into the coals and watching while it caught fire and burned brightly. She caught the surprise on the faces of Katie and Emily and then smiled. "It's tiresome, isn't it? When the war started there were ten German girls training with the sisters here. They left as soon as it all started but they were good girls whom I loved and trusted. The fact is, I don't know what will happen in the next few days - and I cannot even be certain of the loyalty of everyone under my roof. It doesn't pay to leave anything around that might make our task more difficult if it were to fall into the wrong hands. So no diaries, no letters - nothing incriminating at all. And we all watch what we say in front of others. Is that clear?"

"Mr Holmes has already warned us about that, Ma'am," said Katie. "And given us the barest idea of what you do here - and how we are to help. But what do you know about us?"

Sr Cavell smiled warmly. "I like that: sometimes it will be safer for all of us if we have only 'the barest idea' of what each of us is doing. We have to trust one another completely but much of that means doing what I ask of you without asking too many questions. What do I know about you? Well, I know that you have come here at Mr Holmes's invitation knowing that the situation in the city is hopeless and that the Germans will soon arrive. Most young women, I would think, would be too frightened to take such a step. Mr Holmes was here a fortnight ago before the crisis broke. Guessing how all this would end, he came because he has agents and interests in the city he needed to protect. He warned me then that the Germans would occupy the city and he asked me to do what I most wanted to do anyway - stay on and protect my nursing sisters as much as I could. He promised to send me help - and here you are."

"Dr Emily, you cannot imagine how glad I am to have you here. The regular doctors who teach here and who treat the patients in our hospital have been overwhelmed by the demands of the city hospitals - at least, those of them who are not in uniform in the field. We haven't had a real doctor here for days now - although it is remarkable what my nurses can do when there is no one else to do it for them. Under normal circumstances, we have only twenty beds in two wards - we're only large enough to provide opportunities for my

nurses to learn their profession on the spot. Until recently, the nursing school was mostly a residence for sisters who live and take their classes here but who do their practical work in the big hospitals in the city. All that has had to change. The resources of the city hospitals are stretched to bursting. You saw the refugee families in the corridor; we have another forty patients in makeshift wards through the hospital building. I have fifteen nurses right now to care for the patients. That's down from the thirty I really need to staff the place properly. Until your arrival, Katie, we had no ambulance driver - although we do have our own ambulance, thanks to the generosity of the American Embassy. A charity in the United States provides the fuel we need to run the car- and the porter at the Embassy keeps the motor in good condition. Many of our patients have walked here; others have come on lorries or carts."

"Are we the only English staff?" Emily asked.

"Yes, we are. Most of the others are Belgian," said Sr Cavell, "although there are several French nurses as well. Most of the nurses are still trainees, of course: that is how the hospital was founded and why I was appointed as the Matron - so that Belgian nurses could learn the procedures that have made the Nightingale nurses the best in the world. We have been supplying major hospitals in Germany, Belgium and northern France with fully trained nursing sisters for seven years. When the war started, there were over thirty nurses here. Several of the Belgian sisters have had to leave to care for families; one or two of the others have chosen to leave. I expect that several more- the French women, at least- will leave before the Germans arrive. They will be needed in France."

"But you won't leave?" said Katie. She saw Sr Cavell's face cloud over and a great sadness possess her for just a moment before she recovered her normal brisk cheerfulness.

"You saw the corridor out there?" Sr Cavell said. "When we have finished our tea, I'll take you to the wards. You'll see for yourself what needs to be done. And if I go, there is no one to direct the work of the nursing staff. What will happen to the patients then? No, I am staying - as Mr Holmes must have told you." Sr Cavell stood up and shared the last of the tea in the pot, refreshing the leaves with more water from the kettle.

"Are you frightened?" asked Emily. "I know I am." Her voice was as even as Emily could make it but her eyes showed courage as well as candour. Katie had noticed that Emily was always more honest in moments like this than she could be.

"Well, you are wise to be frightened," said Sr Cavell with a thin laugh. "But I must say that I feel a great deal more comfortable now that you are here with me. And how brave you are - coming to Brussels at this moment when everyone who can leave is doing so! The British Embassy is being evacuated this evening. Almost everyone else in the English community is being moved out to Paris. I would guess that you were very lucky to have the services of M. Renault's Rolls Royce this afternoon; it just goes to show how persuasive Mr Holmes can be - even in the middle of an international crisis."

"What will happen when the Germans arrive?" asked Katie.

"We don't know the answer to that question," said Sr Cavell. "It may be that they will arrest us as enemy aliens and put us in prison- although Mr Holmes thinks that it is much more likely that we will be allowed to stay and continue working as long as we do so quietly and follow every order they give. Which, of course, is exactly what I intend to do," she said - although the broad wink she gave to Emily told a rather different story.

“Mr Holmes was reluctant to say very much about what he wanted us to do that might be dangerous,” said Katie.

“No doubt you will learn that soon enough. But just being here is dangerous enough,” said Sr Cavell with a sigh. “You have probably heard the sound of artillery drawing closer; the big German guns have begun to shell the railway yards and supply dumps. Some of the shells have fallen in civilian areas. But it is when the guns cease that the real dangers will be upon us. This week I have heard such terrible stories about what the Germans have done in places where they have come. They are enraged that the Belgians have offered them any resistance at all - they expected to march in and through Belgium to attack the French without complaint. They are a nation of bullies. Anyone who resists the Germans suffers a terrible fate. There are stories of homes and villages burned and men, women and children killed in cold blood. We are about to find out, I am afraid, if those stories are true. No one knows how long the broken Belgian army and their few French and British allies can hold out but it may be that we will meet our first Germans in a week. Now, can I ask you please to wash up and change into your uniforms? Can we meet back here in a quarter of an hour?”

Before she could say any more, there was an anxious tap at the door and a young woman in the same grey uniform and white veil was at the door asking Matron in rapid French to come at once to the ward. Sr Cavell stood and the girls immediately left the tea things and headed back through the press of the corridor and up the stairs. Their trunks had been left in a room with two cot beds, a wash stand and a wardrobe. Kate went down to the kitchen to find some hot water and then the girls dressed quickly. Two uniforms had been put out and Emily added her white lab coat and stethoscope to her grey dress. Neither of the girls wore the white veil but Katie carefully pinned her long hair back. Then it was downstairs to begin work.

That afternoon passed in a haze of feverish activity. Emily went with Sr Cavell to the wards and was soon very busy arranging surgery for patients- some of whom had waited days to see a doctor. Katie had been given the keys to the ambulance - a large, Ford van painted white with prominent red crosses marked on both sides and on the roof. Sr Cavell asked her to take M. Moulin as her guide and to go out into the city and buy as many medical supplies as the precious envelope of Belgian francs could command. Katie had learned to drive that summer on country roads in Hampshire; it was quite a different matter to drive in the hectic streets of a city at war but Katie simply gripped the wheel and drove slowly until she grew in confidence. M. Moulin, she quickly learned, knew the city well - and trusted her with every part of the motor car except the horn. This he blew constantly as they wove through the crowded streets. It made for a tense and noisy journey. The trip took Katie right across town. Some of the shops to which M. Moulin directed her had already been looted; others were boarded up, their stock completely sold out. It took some hours and a great deal of initiative to collect soap, bleach, bandages, antiseptics, anaesthetics, splints and surgical tools. At Sr Cavell's special direction, she bought all the opiates she could find. Katie guessed that these powerful pain killing drugs that comforted anyone who had to face surgery would be in great demand as the clinic continued its work.

Katie usually began the job in each shop, using her best French and showing very good manners but M. Moulin was the really accomplished shopper. He would listen to the shopkeeper's response, then step in quickly if he wasn't happy. By turns he could be

charming, cajoling, wheedling and threatening - using language which Katie could only describe as “colourful” to order and collect the precious supplies that would run the clinic. Katie met other people trying to buy much the same goods as she was. Two nuns who were travelling on foot seemed to be using the same shopping list as Katie and she quickly learned that their clinic was struggling to treat refugees as well. Katie also realised that while there were charities in the city trying to meet the flood of need, there were also sinister men and women trying to corner materials that would soon be priceless. Katie didn't stop shopping, however, until there wasn't a sou left in the envelope and the ambulance itself was packed with things needed for the grim days ahead.

Back at the Clinic, Katie sorted and stored the material and realised with a stab that she had worked through the afternoon until darkness had fallen. The notice on the kitchen wall advised that there was a regular meal break at 7 pm at which Sr Cavell presided but that time was long gone. In the kitchen, she found a pot of soup on the stove and took some to Emily who was just finishing with the last of the patients in the ward. It was a Belgian soldier whose shoulder had been broken by a gunshot wound. His blue uniform was soaked with blood and Emily had had to cut it away to get access to the wound. Sr Cavell came to see how her new doctor was doing and she was delighted by the way Emily had begun work without complaint or fuss. It was exactly how she worked herself.

“Why has this young soldier ended up here?” Emily asked as she began to wash the instruments she had used. “Surely he should have been treated in his own dressing station and then in a field hospital?”

“The trouble is,” said Sr Cavell, “that the fighting is moving so fast. When he was wounded, this young man was separated from his regiment; they have long ago retreated south and east. He couldn't keep up and they have left him behind. Apart from the refugees you have already seen, most of the patients in my ward are Belgian and French soldiers who have lost their way.”

When this last job was done and the patient dosed with one of the opiates Katie had bought, the two girls could stop and draw breath. Emily's lab coat was stained with blood. Both the girls were exhausted. As they ate their soup, they realised with a bitter laugh that only the night before they had been dining in the first class carriage of the boat train to Calais! Before they could go to bed, however, Katie wanted to write a note to her parents; she had no idea how many days remained before all letters would cease. As Katie worked on her letter to Hong Kong, Emily wrote to Mr Holmes. Her letter was written in a kind of code in case it were intercepted before it could reach England. In her letter, Emily took the part of an empty headed girl writing to her uncle, telling him that they had arrived at their spa resort, that they had met their landlady - and that all the Belgian francs he had given them had been spent. Perhaps, she added, he might send them some German marks as they would be needed soon. Katie read it through with a grim laugh. Katie's letter to her parents was short but honest. They had arrived in Brussels and it was unlikely that they would be able to send more letters- at least for a little while. They could say no more about what they were doing. They would always remember who they were - and what they owed their country. Katie told her parents that they would see them again - in happier times when the world had recovered from the darkness that had fallen over all of them. Even though they were exhausted, the girls insisted on walking their letters to the post box near the station so that they could go in the mail as soon as possible.

And this was the pattern of their lives over the next six days. At first light, Katie and M. Moulin went out shopping- sometimes for medical supplies but often for vegetables that could be turned into soup for the nurses and their patients. And Katie began real

ambulance work too, driving the soldiers who had been treated in the clinic to the railway station and waiting until they were able to board one of the crowded trains headed towards France. Every day the military officers who manned the station warned them that this may be the last train to leave before the Germans arrived. In her halting French, Katie pleaded and cajoled the Belgian officers into taking her wounded young men. Slowly, the number of men crowded into the wards cleared a little. As fast as Katie and M. Moulin could drive men who were recovering from surgery to the station, however, almost as many other soldiers arrived on the doorstep. There were deaths, too, that helped to clear the wards. Sometimes the soldiers and refugees who came were so badly wounded that nothing Emily could do could save them. When this happened, Katie and M. Moulin had the grim job of driving their bodies to the city morgue and unloading them there. In the saddest cases that broke Katie's heart, some soldiers died without any identification on their bodies. They went to the morgue with the simple note: *Known only to God*.



Chapter 3: Unexpected Patients at the Berkendael Clinic .

Five days after Katie and Emily had arrived in Brussels, it was clear that the end was very close. The sound of the German artillery was constant and now the calls for the ambulance were to collect wounded soldiers who had staggered into the city from the battlefield. Katie was becoming much better at negotiating the city streets on her own, navigating from familiar landmarks and remembering the short cuts that M. Moulin took them down. It was well that she was growing more confident in the city because Sr Cavell had set M. Moulin off on his own secret mission; now, Katie always took one of the Belgian nurses with her to give immediate medical care to any wounded person they might meet.

In this week of waiting, Katie wished that she had first come to know this great city at a time of peace. Even though she enjoyed the grand squares and avenues, she loved most of all the cobbled streets and close ways of the old city. The elegant buildings of Brussels were less imposing, less imperial, somehow, than London. If one took away the scars and sounds of war, Katie thought, this would be a lovely place. But the signs of war were everywhere and everyday more assertive. The sound of artillery sometimes distant and then frighteningly close thundered at all hours. The movement of refugees and soldiers through the city gave the place the sense of a gigantic ant's nest that had been stirred up by some malevolent child. Every face in the street was drawn and anxious. Katie knew from conversations with local people that now that the Germans were so close, people almost ached to have them arrive so that the agony of waiting could be over.

On one expedition in her ambulance on their sixth day in Brussels, Katie collected her first British soldiers. She had been sent out with Pierre, M. Moulin's teenage son, to collect vegetables and butter from villages outside the city; the city markets had offered almost nothing for sale for days now and the shortage of fresh food loomed as just another of Sr Cavell's many problems. With that shopping job finished, Katie was driving the ambulance down a street near the Gare Bruxelles Nord when a young man suddenly stepped out in front of the ambulance and flagged it down. The man was with two others who were obviously wounded and Katie realised that the stained khaki uniforms belonged to British troops. Without thinking, she swung the ambulance van to a halt beside them. All three men were covered in grime. One young soldier - the one who had stepped out in the street - was almost carrying his mate who had an ugly wound to his thigh. With him was a third soldier whose arm was covered in blood; someone had fashioned a sling by tying three handkerchiefs together. This man's head was also wrapped in a dirty bandage. They were the first British soldiers Katie had seen coming back from the line and she greeted them with a smile and a cheerful "Good afternoon there. How do you do?"

“Blow me down, Bert! Have we died and gone to heaven? We need a hand after catching it from Gerry and I stick my hand out as if I was hailing a cab in Piccadilly and an angel pulls up. An English girl! You’re a sight for sore eyes, Miss! Here, son, can you give us a hand with Freddie here?” Pierre was out of the van quickly and Katie was grateful for his initiative in supporting the most wounded of the three men. The only one of the three young men who was not wounded struggled to support his friend- introduced as Freddie- while Pierre opened the doors to the ambulance and sat the man on the stretcher tray. In a moment, Katie had Freddie lying down among the tangle of turnips, carrots and potatoes - the treasures that Katie and Pierre had managed to buy from the farms they visited. Freddie’s rifle was stored carefully beside him in the van. Bert, the soldier whose arm was in the sling, climbed gingerly up to squat beside his mate. Pierre climbed in next, leaving the able bodied soldier to join Katie in the front of the van. Even without much experience, Katie could see that Freddie was badly injured and that Bert was in considerable pain. The excitement of the three men at the arrival of an ambulance driven by a young woman who spoke English was enough to lift their spirits, however, and steel them for the short drive to Sr Cavell’s clinic.

As Katie drove the three kilometres back to the nursing clinic, the young soldier introduced himself as Corporal Jack Evans of the Royal Fusiliers. He quickly told his story in the sharp accent that Katie recognised from Whitechapel. Jack Evans and his mates were among the first British soldiers on the Expeditionary Force rushed into the battlefield in Belgium. “It was absolute chaos, Miss, and that’s a fact. We were supposed to be relieving a French unit that had been hammered and were pulling back but no sooner were we in the field than the Germans were behind us as well as in front. They had broken through and we were caught between them. Our lieutenant was killed almost immediately, trying to get us into position where we could hold the line; then our captain went too. The sergeants steadied us but as we tried to retire, Freddie was shot and Bert with him. I couldn’t leave them and our medics couldn’t reach us; we took shelter behind a low stone wall for most of the night and when we ventured out at first light, both the Gerries and our own boys were gone - although the ground was covered in dead from both sides. We walked towards the town and it’s taken us all day to reach here. We haven’t seen anything of our own boys. If you hadn’t found us, I don’t know what we might have done. Freddie’s hurt bad. He can’t walk; I’ve carried him most of the way. Can you find us a doctor? As soon as he’s settled, I can go and try to find someone who will take us back to the British lines.”

When Katie reached the clinic, she drove the ambulance into the courtyard and parped the horn. Almost immediately, Sr Cavell was with them, assisting Jack and Pierre to carry Freddie into the surgery where Emily was finishing the grim work she had started at first light that morning. Her last patient had just gone and the Belgian nurses who were assisting her in theatre had left too, exhausted by the day. Emily was thinking about how nice some lunch would be when Freddie was delivered to her. She was still dressed in the white gown that surgeons wore; she pulled down her mask and said simply: “An English uniform!”

“Our first”, said Sr Cavell, “but it certainly won’t be the last, I’m sure. When you are finished here, I think his friend will need your treatment too. Can I pull on a gown and help you?”

Emily nodded her thanks. Sr Cavell had realised at once the seriousness of the man’s condition; Emily would appreciate her help as she began the delicate work of probing the

livid wound. While this was happening, one of the Belgian sisters collected Bert and took him to another part of the clinic where his wound could be cleaned up and assessed.

Jack was reluctant to leave the mate he had carried for hours but Katie took his arm and assured him that Freddie was in good hands. “Make that a second miracle today, Miss,” said Jack with a grin. “First, I meet an angel in an ambulance just when I need her and second, Freddie meets a lady doctor - and a pretty one too- to treat his leg! If you could find me a cup of tea, that will count as miracle number three!”

Katie laughed and led Jack down to the kitchen. Strictly speaking, this was an area out of bounds to patients but Jack wasn't a patient and Katie was so excited to hear Jack's familiar accent that she put out strong, sweet tea and a bowl of soup for both of them. They sat at the kitchen table and Katie heard again the details of the battle and the terrible night in which Jack had kept his friends alive. The last kindness that Katie could do was to draw off a big can of hot water and take Jack to the patients' bathroom where he could clean up. Katie herself found a dressing gown and some pyjamas and led Jack to a corner of the ward where there was a spare cot. A moment later when she came to check him, he was fast asleep. Katie then went back into the theatre where Emily and Sr Cavell were still at work, collecting all the bits of the English uniforms that she could find in a big wash tub. She would have clean clothes for the boys to wear as soon as their uniforms could dry on the courtyard line.

Later that evening when the demanding work of the hospital day was mostly done, Katie was asked by Sr Cavell if she would be able to drive at night. There was an urgent job that needed doing before the Germans arrived in the city. And here Katie learned what M. Moulin's own secret mission that morning had been. Calling on churches and shelters all over the city, he had managed to put together enough civilian shirts, trousers and jackets to kit out the wounded Belgian and French soldiers who were sheltered in the nursing centre. “I have no idea what the Germans will do to captured enemy soldiers,” said Sr Cavell grimly. “By rights, they should be interned in camps where they are safe and well cared for but there's no knowing if the Germans will honour that understanding. And anyway, it's my guess that most of the soldiers we are sheltering would rather go home to their families than into prison camps in Germany. As soon as the Germans see a Belgian uniform, my chances of protecting anyone are limited indeed. And they will come looking for them, I'm sure. To the big hospitals first, of course, and then to smaller places like ours.”

“What do you want me to do?” asked Katie.

“We can't move the badly wounded ones, of course,” said Sr Cavell. “But then the Germans can't do that either, I suppose. They will probably decide that it would be easier to leave those soldiers here until they are well enough to travel into captivity. We can certainly do something with many of the others, however. It's my guess that Brussels will see our first Germans tomorrow - Sunday at the very latest. Most of the road traffic is going south and east - towards France. The Germans will be very busy in that direction. They won't be nearly so careful with people heading back towards Occupied Belgium. If we can get the soldiers who can still walk or who are recovering into a safe place away from here for a week or so, the Germans will arrive and perhaps move on. Then, in the quieter days, we can get individual men away to their families.”

“Do you want me to drive some of the patients to another clinic then?” asked Katie.
“Where could be safer than here?”

“We have thirty patients right now - well, thirty-three since you found Freddie, Jack and Bert in the street. About half of them are recovering well enough and won't need a lot

more nursing care. The Sisters of Mercy have a boarding school in Turnhout which sent all its girls home when the fighting started. It's quiet and a little out of the way but they will probably see their first Germans when we see ours. I'm hoping that the Germans will leave a community of nuns alone once they realise that there's nothing they can steal or carry away. Sr Johana, the Reverend Mother there, is a friend - I have taken several of her graduating students as trainee nurses here at Berkendael. I am sure the sisters will take in some of my soldiers - especially if I can deliver the boys with potatoes and turnips. It's a forty kilometre drive and we can only take about five of the soldiers at a time. If we set out once it gets dark, with three trips, we could transfer most of our walking wounded there. You've already done a hard day's work, Katie, but we have to do this now or it will be too late."

Katie was exhausted but she smiled her willingness to do anything that Sr Cavell asked of her. In the five days since she arrived in Brussels, Katie had grown to love the Matron of the little hospital. She could see how hard Sr Cavell worked and how much she cared for the sisters and the patients who were her responsibility. She never complained or grumbled and seemed to be constantly on her feet in the clinic, encouraging, comforting and cheering others along. The only thing that seemed to annoy her, Katie noticed, was selfishness or neglect on the part of an exhausted sister. Even then her kindness was obvious as she helped the sister to remember that they were nurses who had promised to care for those in need. Katie checked her watch; it would not be dark for another two hours. There was just enough time to clean up the ambulance and drive across to the American Embassy where the kindly porter, M. Duclos, provided the fuel to keep the ambulance on the road. Three trips during the night to Turnhout would take a whole tank of gasoline.

The early evening was usually a busy time in the wards as the patients were fed and the nurses themselves had their evening meal. Tonight, however, the urgency to move the young soldiers to safety meant that none of the nursing staff had anything to eat until the first ambulance load had gone. Sr Cavell directed the nurses as they moved all the young soldiers who could make the trip to Turnhout into one of the ground floor classrooms to wait. The few things that each man had were packed and checked and the blue military uniforms that the soldiers had kept were exchanged for the old and shabby civilian clothes that M. Moulin had scrounged. Dressed in their new clothes, the Belgian and French soldiers lost some of their confidence and pride. Now they looked broken and shattered by the calamity that had overcome their country. No matter how cheerful Sr Cavell tried to be with everyone, the atmosphere in the clinic was tense. The nurses were reluctant to say goodbye to the young men they had taken in, nursed and protected; the soldiers themselves were anxious about leaving the place that had been -until this moment- safe and welcoming. As darkness fell, Sr Cavell called Katie and made her drink a cup of thick soup. It would be some time before she had a chance to relax that night.

Right on 9 pm, Katie drove out of the courtyard gate into the summer night. Sitting beside her in the ambulance was an excited Pierre Moulin. For Pierre, the night was one long adventure and Katie was grateful for his cheerful company and high spirits. The back of the van was crammed with five soldiers; they were crushed awkwardly together, sitting up in silence in the space normally used by only one person. A light rain was falling and the streets, once busy with the life of the big city, were now mostly deserted. There were soldiers and checkpoints at most of the intersections but the ambulance was now a familiar sight in the Brussels streets and the soldiers waved them through. Katie said her prayers as she confidently rolled the ambulance down the street towards the open countryside and Turnhout.

The journey took over an hour through the outskirts of the city, then through fields and orchards with little villages every few miles along the forty kilometre route. In other circumstances, this might have been a happy and welcome excursion. Now, with the precious cargo aboard and the flash of artillery fire close on the horizon it was an anxious and nerve wracking journey. At last Pierre called on Katie to stop the van. The great, grey bulk of the convent school could be seen at the end of a long avenue of poplar trees. It was, as Dr Cavell promised, out of the way and isolated from the nearest village.

As soon as Katie brought the ambulance to a halt, two nuns dressed in black and white habits were out the door, directing Katie to bring the van around the back into a courtyard. The van was clearly expected. The Reverend Mother herself welcomed them and Katie was hugged and kissed in the lovely Belgian way by the old lady whose happy smile calmed her nerves and gave her confidence. One of the sisters handed Katie and Pierre a welcome cup of tea as the men silently slipped from the van and into the dimly lit convent. In minutes, Katie and Pierre were headed back down the drive and turning towards Brussels.

When Katie turned the van back into the Berkendael Institute, Sr Cavell was visibly relieved. It was Emily's turn to hug her sister and find her a sandwich which Katie enjoyed while the van was packed again with the second load of soldiers. This time, the drive through Brussels to the Turnhout road was slower. The Belgian soldiers manning the checkpoints were clearly nervous and warned Katie that the Germans might be on the road ahead of them. At one point, Kate had to pull over on the country road while anxious looking French soldiers on horseback with heavy artillery guns being hauled by draft horses rattled by. The journey that had taken only an hour the first time Katie made it now took almost double that and Reverend Mother was greatly relieved when they finally arrived. It was a little easier going back but that only alarmed Katie more. The checkpoints and road blocks had been dismantled and the French soldiers manning them were gone. Katie was sure at one moment that the soldiers she saw setting up a machine gun post in the street were wearing black and grey uniforms but they made no attempt to stop her. It was 3 am before she could set out again with the last load of soldiers.

This last journey was the most harrowing part of that whole long, vivid night- a night that Katie would never forget. The journey was complicated too by the fact that at the last minute, Sr Cavell had wanted to send six soldiers with Katie instead of the five who had made the first two trips. This meant that Pierre had to be left behind to create one more space in the front of the van. Katie knew the way herself by now but the return journey would have to be made on her own. She had grown to love Pierre's constant cheerfulness and cheeky energy. He was so like the best of the boys in her class at Durwood Street - and having him with her would have calmed her and given her a confidence she didn't feel. This mattered less on the journey out, of course, but it was chilling to see everyone leave the van to escape into the convent building leaving her quite alone. Exhausted and frightened, she hugged the Reverend Mother before standing up straight, choking back her fears and setting out again. Dawn was breaking as she guided the van up the avenue of poplar trees at the convent and headed back towards Brussels.

At first things went well. The country roads were empty and she made good progress until she reached the city itself. Here the streets were silent. Even though it was a Sunday, there should have been trams and taxis about and people hurrying to mass. Instead, the city was mostly deserted. In the clear light of day, the changes which the night had brought were now obvious to her. In the hours between her first trip to Turnhout and the last, the Allied armies had melted away, surrendering the city to the Germans. Their unmistakable grey uniforms were on every street corner now. Katie noted ruefully that

the sinister grey uniforms of the conquerors were much more smart and elegant than the dishevelled uniforms of the defeated allies.

She had to slow to allow columns of marching soldiers to pass in front of her van. Most of the soldiers were orderly - even respectful. Some officers touched their caps in salute as she passed. On a street corner near the Gare Bruxelles Nord, some German soldiers were brewing tea in makeshift stoves on the footpath; others had found champagne and were having a party - spilling across the road and laughing. They were excited to be the conquerors of the fallen city. Many of the young soldiers looked curiously at the ambulance van as it nosed its way through the streets which were empty of civilian traffic but rapidly filling with military lorries and motor vehicles. Through it all, Katie didn't flinch. She worked to ease the fear out of her heart and struggled not to react to the curious faces under the spiked helmets she saw all around her. Her face was fixed into a creased smile. Occasionally, she waved as young soldiers stepped aside to let the ambulance pass.

It was slow progress but she was almost home. In just a couple of kilometres she would be safe. Katie just ached now for a cup of tea and Emily's hug to bring her security and comfort. Then, just as she neared the high gates of the American Embassy, a small group of soldiers stepped in front of the van and flagged her to the side of the road. An officious German officer holding a pistol thumped on the side of the van. He wrenched the door open and barked an order in his hard accent. The other soldiers stood ready, their guns raised. Katie could do nothing more than step out of the van.

She was tired and frightened; the night had been exhausting and she was so close to home and the relative safety of Berkendael. Katie prickled; the behaviour of the abusive German officer was so unnecessarily rude. At that moment, she was prepared to believe everything she had ever heard about bad mannered German men. Only that can explain what she did in the next few moments.

Katie gritted her teeth and twisted her mouth into an angry line. The German officer was a bully - and she had learned early in her time at Durwood Street School how to deal with bullies. She slammed the ambulance door as hard as she could. The officer flinched as she stepped straight up to him and shouted loudly in his face. Katie had no German and she suspected that the young officer had no English but it was very clear just how angry and aroused she was. She shouted that this was an American Red Cross ambulance; that it was the property of the Embassy of the United States of America; that America was a neutral country in the war and she had more right to be on the road than German soldiers who had smashed their way into this country. The German soldiers behind their officer looked at first alarmed and then amused as he was roundly abused their pompous officer. Katie's anger was making the German officer suddenly more respectful but it is impossible to say what might happen if the man remembered that he had the pistol in his hand and guns at his back.

And at this moment, the most extraordinary thing happened. The gates of the Embassy opened and the porter, M. Duclos, rushed to the little scene. M. Duclos spoke rapidly in French, his hands gesticulating wildly; the young German tried to concentrate to catch something of what was being said but he could only shake his head at the torrent of language from the agitated Belgian. And appearing on the kerb with M. Duclos was another young man and Katie's heart stopped. It was Wally Beavers - her Wally: the little boy from her first class at Durwood Street whom she had fed and loved and supported and who had rescued her from Professor Moriarty when she was a prisoner on board the *m.s. Chiko Roll* in the Isle of Dogs. He stepped forward confidently and put out his hand to shake with the startled German Officer.

Wally spoke in confident and fluent German, indicating with his hand the American Embassy behind him with its large brass plaque and stars and stripes flag flying at the gate. And while he spoke, he was gently taking Katie's hand and lifting her back into the ambulance, closing the door to the van on her as he spoke. He was so confident and so assured that while Katie couldn't follow the German, it was clear to her that Wally was setting her up to escape. The German officer blushed and then changed character completely. He removed his hat, bowed to Katie and clicked his heels. Then he said in perfect English, "I am sorry, Frauline. You must forgive me...."

Katie never heard the end of the apology. Wally had her arm at the elbow, steering her back to the ambulance and into the driver's seat. With a confident swagger, he slapped the side of the van as a way of dismissing her and he was reaching into his jacket pocket to produce a packet of American cigarettes which he shared out among the German soldiers. Then Wally confidently produced a silver lighter and lit the young soldiers' cigarettes. With shaking hands, Katie started the van. It laboured heavily and then after a terrible moment stirred to life and she was off, weaving her way through the columns of German soldiers. Her last sight of Wally in her rear vision mirror was of a very relaxed handshake as he left the officer and his group. Katie's heart was still thudding as she nosed the ambulance van into the courtyard of the rue de la Culture and found herself in Emily's welcoming arms. Sr Cavell was with her as well, guiding Katie into her office. The Matron poured tea and Emily listened intently while Katie told her story of the extraordinary night and her rescue outside the American Embassy. And she listened as Sr Cavell shared the news that the German authorities had imposed martial law on the great, fallen city. There was now no chance of escape.



Chapter 4: Breakfast at the Metropole Hotel

Exhausted and hungry, Katie wanted nothing more than the chance to wash up and go to bed. Emily had slept only fitfully through the night and felt just as exhausted. Katie had just put the tea cups in the kitchen sink when Sr Cavell came into the kitchen with a beaming Wally Beavers. Wrought as she was by the events of the night, Katie couldn't control her relief - or her tears. She hugged the embarrassed young man, remembering him as a child and wondering at the transformation to confident, audacious adult. It was clear that some years as Mr Mycroft Holmes's young protégé had given Wally's core courage and pluck a very sophisticated exterior finish.

"I've got the taxi waiting outside, ladies, and the meter is running. As good as Sr Cavell's breakfasts must be, I think it might be nice to treat ourselves," he said gallantly.

"Wally, are you mad?" laughed Katie. "The city has just fallen to the Germans and there are sinister grey uniforms on every corner. Where are you going to buy breakfast on a day like this?"

"Unless I'm much mistaken, the new masters of Brussels will have picked out the poshest hotel in town as their base so we're off to the Metropole Hotel. It will be serving breakfast until 10 am so we will have to move if we are going to make it before they close the dining room. As you can see, I don't have a grey uniform so we'll have to play by the hotel rules. I'll give you three minutes to wash up, ladies."

Although Sr Cavell was clearly included in the invitation, she shook her head sadly. Someone had to stay and run the hospital - even if it did have fewer patients than it had yesterday. She was happy to give the girls time with their old friend - and she was already exercising the caution that she would soon impose on everyone in the hospital. She would ask no questions of the girls - and they would ask none of her. Katie and Emily already knew that Mr Holmes was using the Berkendael Clinic in some way; presumably that was why he had sent the girls into this dangerous situation in the first place but neither of them had dared to speak about this directly with Sr Cavell. And they noticed that Wally was eager to have a few minutes alone with her while they went to wash their hands and faces before setting out for the splendour of the dining room at the Metropole Hotel .

The sheer lunacy of going out for breakfast on such a bleak and horrible day made the whole exercise frivolous and exciting for the girls. And because they were both so tired, they set out in the taxi with a febrile edge giving the whole experience the sense of a dream from which they might awake at any moment. At one stage early that morning, Katie fully expected to be a prisoner of the German police; now she was headed for breakfast in the grandest and most expensive hotel in the city. The doorman at the hotel

looked grim but brightened when they arrived. He nodded a greeting and then rolled his eyes dramatically towards the foyer. Katie could guess at why he felt so troubled: the foyer and dining room were crowded with the same dismal grey uniforms that filled the streets. The feeling in the foyer was relaxed, however - almost jovial. Young officers laughed and smoked; they had the confidence and swagger of conquerors.

With Wally leading the way, the haughty Maitre D' found them a table near the piano and both the girls were astonished to find bacon, eggs, cheeses, fish and marmalade on the menu - all of which things had disappeared from the shops days before the girls arrived. There were German officers at almost every table and some of them gallantly rose and tipped their hats as the girls entered trying to affect a confidence they simply didn't feel. At Wally's prompting, they smiled a greeting and a little bow in response to this unwelcome gallantry. Emily responded with a nervous giggle.

"Mr Holmes would call it "hiding in plain sight"," said Wally with a chuckle. "I would think that the safest place in the city this morning is right here in the middle of the enemy. It pays to be bold. My cover is that I'm with the American Embassy. The Ambassador has broken every rule and given me an American passport in my own name. It seems that Mr Holmes spent a year at Harvard with Mr Brand Whitlock, the Ambassador. He is prepared to help England as long as he can't be seen to be doing so."

At this moment, the waiter approached to take their order and both the girls -despite their exhaustion- ordered a full English breakfast. Wally - who had been eating very well for the last week as a guest of the American Embassy- could only smile. The porridge came almost immediately and for a little while, the three friends were quiet as they did justice to the excellent oatmeal. Once the waiter had removed their plates and brought their sausages, bacon and scrambled eggs, they could turn to more important topics.

"Is it very dangerous- what you're doing?" asked Emily. It seemed a ridiculous question as she asked it because here they were sitting eating breakfast surrounded by enemy soldiers: nothing could be more dangerous than that.

"Dr Emily," said Wally, as he looked grimly across the dining room, "every other young man of my generation is in the King's uniform, facing these fellows in the battlefield. Yes, it is dangerous. If I am captured I will be treated not as a soldier but as a spy. That means the difference between confinement in a prison camp and being shot to death in some German prison cellar."

"The same applies to us too, doesn't it," said Katie quietly. "Mr Holmes was very clear on that point."

"And it's my job to see that that doesn't happen, Miss Katie," said Wally with half a smile. "We are a country at war. That means we all have to do things that we might not even dream of doing."

Before Wally could continue, she felt him freeze and she looked up sharply. Standing in front of her was a young German lieutenant; it was, she realised, the same man who had stopped Katie's ambulance that morning in the street outside the American Embassy. This time, however, he was grinning broadly and extending his hand to Wally who stood to shake hands. "Pray introduce me to your charming breakfast companions, Herr Beavers," said the officer. He clicked his heels and reached down to take Katie's hand and raise it to his lips. A smile animated his cold face as he tried to swagger his way in front of his friends who were watching closely. Katie had never experienced such gallantry and if the handsome young man were wearing a uniform of any other colour and cut she would probably have allowed her heart to flutter. As Katie said afterwards as she was describing the moment to Sr Cavell, she felt as if she had just had a warm greeting from a deadly reptile.

“Miss Bland and Miss Emily Bland,” said Wally affecting a good Harvard accent, “may I present Lieutenant Dieter von Neurath. These two good ladies are working at the Berkendael Institute. But I think you have already met Herr von Neurath, Miss Bland?”

Katie nodded; the Lieutenant coloured slightly but spoke in lightly accented English, “Forgive me, Miss Bland. On the first day of our conquest, I was alerted to the presence of enemy aliens in the city. I was foolish to imagine someone as pretty as you are could be an enemy of any kind. I was also too foolish to assume that a woman driving an ambulance could not be a lady.”

It was now Katie’s turn to be embarrassed as she remembered the mouthful of unladylike language with which she had confronted the young soldier. She wondered now how much of the abuse he had understood; she had assumed [wrongly] at that moment in the street that the lieutenant spoke no English. “Sir,” Katie said, “I think I must owe you an apology for abusing you this morning. You will have to forgive me: I am quite unused to being held up by a gentleman with a pistol in his hand.”

At this point, Wally intervened to deflect the conversation. “Herr von Neurath, I am sure that Miss Katie will forgive your waving your pistol about. She may be less willing to forgive your interrupting the first good breakfast she has had in quite some time.” Wally looked anxiously in the direction of the bacon and eggs and the German soldier bowed and went to withdraw. He added ominously, “I have heard of your clinic, Miss Bland. Will you allow me to call on you there some time - when your breakfast is not in danger of getting cold?”

Katie bowed her head; a visit by the lieutenant to the clinic was exactly what Katie wanted most to avoid. “You will understand, Sir, that in the present circumstances, we are very busy. But perhaps things will be less hectic in the weeks ahead now that the battlefield has passed us by.”

The German clicked his heels, bowed to both the girls and shook hands again with Wally, then he was gone back to his mates at a distant table. With that distraction gone - and with most of the breakfast disposed of in the same way, Wally could move to the real reason for his visit.

“I understand that you wrote to your uncle, Dr Emily, complaining that all your Belgian francs had been spent. As it turns out, you were wise to get rid of these when you could. I have something that might be just as useful in the weeks ahead. Given the cover of the American Embassy, people will not be surprised if you have to pay for things with American dollars.” Here, Wally pushed an envelope across the table and Emily slipped it into her handbag.

“You can expect some visitors in the next few days,” said Wally. “A young Belgian woman who is organising a string of contacts across occupied Belgium for Mr Holmes may come seeking work as a nurse. Can you please take her in and fit her up with a uniform?”

“That’s for Sr Cavell’s to decide,” said Emily at once. “We can’t do anything that might compromise her leadership of the clinic.”

“I spoke to Sr Cavell while you were getting ready to come out with me. You would be wise to leave Sr Cavell to do her job - but in her own way she is working just as closely with Mr Holmes as you are. She told me that you have taken in three British soldiers.”

“We have,” said Emily. “One of them is badly wounded. He won’t be able to travel for some time - even if I can manage to save his leg.”

“I am certain that these three will not be the last British soldiers whom you find to help. All over Belgium and Northern France there are British soldiers like the ones you have helped - wounded men separated from their battalions and left behind on the battlefield. Soon there will also be British pilots shot down over German territory. That’s where your ambulance comes in, Katie. It’s just over one hundred kilometres to the border with Holland - that’s the closest place to which British soldiers can go with any chance of getting back to England. Using your cover as an ambulance driver, you can drive them there and meet my people at the border. Are you willing to do this?”

Katie was silent then ventured a quiet reply. “This was Mr Holmes’ intention all along, wasn’t it? That’s the reason he wanted me as well as Emily.”

“That’s the reason that the two of you are so valuable to Sr Cavell. But both of you have to understand just what you are doing. It’s one thing to pick up stray British soldiers in the days before the Germans arrive; it’s quite another to take those soldiers to safety. You must have heard some of the stories about what the Germans have done to people in their path who have offered any resistance. Some of those stories have been made up by newspapers in Paris and London to make their readers frightened or angry. But some of the stories are true. Lieutenant von Neurath may kiss Katie’s hand, Dr Emily, and click his heels for you but he will arrest you and kill you without a moment’s thought. I’m sorry to be so brutally honest but there is still the chance to leave now. I can take you with me to the Dutch border this afternoon and no one will think any the less of you.” Wally sounded cold and formal as he delivered this warning but both the girls waved it away.

“I couldn’t leave St Cavell now that I have met Freddie, Bert and Jack,” said Emily. “Do you think I could live with myself if I ran back to the safety of England if there are more English boys wounded and needing help here? Every time I met a soldier in uniform in the London street my face would redden with shame.”

“And I’m with Emily,” said Katie flatly. “This is our war too. And who knows, I might come to enjoy having my hand kissed by reptiles like Dieter von Neurath.” Wally grinned and then acknowledged the waiter who brought the bill in a little leather folder. He reached for his wallet only to see the folder scooped up by the same German officer whom Katie had just dismissed.

“Will you allow me to pay for your breakfast, Herr Beavers? I think that the German Reich has a very flexible account here at the Metropole. No doubt we will soon have similar arrangements with the Ritz in Paris and Claridge’s in London before Christmas.” He smiled at his own joke but Emily bristled at this and might have said a great deal but she took her lead from Katie who stood and bowed her thanks.

“You are all kindness, Herr von Neurath,” she said. “Thank you sincerely. Will you excuse us? We would love to stop and talk but there are patients at the Berkendael Institute who need our care. And if you are indeed going to make it to Claridge’s before Christmas perhaps you need to go back to your work too.”

The German officer coloured a little but took Katie’s hand. “I hope that you will allow me to call on you at the Clinic?”

Katie smiled but said nothing except, “You are wonderfully kind to have treated us to breakfast. Herr Lieutenant.”

Wally stepped in here to cover the awkwardness and lead them out to the taxi rank. It was only when they were safely inside the taxi that Katie could explode with wounded indignation.

“Calm down, Katie,” said Emily. “Lieutenant von Neurath may be very useful to us yet - if only to supply the odd meal at the Metropole. That was the best breakfast I’ve had since we left England”

“Yes, but it’s not your hand he was kissing,” said Katie with a shudder. Back at the Berkendael Institute, they said good bye to Wally. He waited just long enough for Katie to write a postcard to her father. The card said almost nothing but the picture side of the card showed the sunny scene in the Grande Place in Brussels in happier times before the war. The message to her parents was in the photograph, of course, and not in the simple greeting carefully written beside the Hong Kong address. Once Wally had gone, the girls counted the money Wally had given them and then asked Sr Cavell if they could put the envelope in the office safe. They all knew that they were going to need every penny they could raise in the months ahead.

Katie made the ambulance journey out to the Sisters at Turnhout twice more in the next week. Even though the village was out of the way, its isolation was valuable for other reasons. The railway platform at Turnhout, for example, was less vulnerable to German patrols than those of the Gare Bruxelles Nord in the centre of the city. Sr Johana had quietly prepared the recuperating French and Belgian soldiers to slip away in ones or twos to their homes in the occupied part of Belgium or France. Their escape became much easier to organise when Mademoiselle Louise Herget arrived late in the evening two days after Wally had left them; she brought more money, a box of the precious opiates that Emily needed- and a pistol. Best of all, she brought a folder full of blank identification cards that could be filled in with a fictitious name and address. Now the escaping soldiers could pass safely through railway stations and roadblocks where German soldiers checked every traveller. The Reverend Mother explained quietly to Katie that Sr Sourire, one of the more colourful sisters in the convent, had had an interesting life before entering the Order. [And here, Mother Johana winked broadly.] For each of the escaping soldiers, Sr Sourire could create a new identity, assemble a photograph and fake an official stamp that a German soldier would accept with even the most searching scrutiny. Katie wondered - not for the first time- what skills those nuns might have been hiding from the world beyond the walls of their cloister. Thanks to Sr Sourire, the girls’ dormitory at Turnhout soon emptied itself of the original soldiers; their places were quickly filled with others whom Katie brought in her ambulance from the Berkendael Institute. There was never any warning for these rescue missions. Katie might have done a day’s work assisting in the wards when the call came - usually to M. Moulin. Pierre would appear at her elbow and wink. She would quickly find her hat and scarf and be on the road. Even though she was growing in confidence, she always liked to take Pierre with her. He was good company; with his help, Katie’s French was improving every day and her knowledge of the back streets and by ways of Brussels was improving just as much.

At the end of that week after making the journey out to Turnhout for the fourth time, Katie was sharing a cup of tea with Mademoiselle Herget and Emily in Sr Cavell’s office. It was late and the clinic was quiet. The day had been long and exhausting; Katie was just about to go to bed when Pierre came to the door. Without being told, the teenage boy had guessed that the new nurse could be trusted completely so he felt he could speak in front of all the women. Kate’s ambulance was needed just at that moment, he said. And Katie trusted the boy completely and followed him without a word.

It was threatening rain as they set out but by the time they had reached their destination, a steady drizzle had obscured visibility all round and made the fallen city seem even more miserable. Pierre directed them out into the suburbs and finally to a goods yard away from the railway stations that were now patrolled by German soldiers. Katie parked the ambulance and they walked in the rain and the shadows away from the glare of the few lights still left burning in the cavernous sheds of the goods yard. "They are in here, Miss," said Pierre. He whistled a warning before taking Katie into a dark shed and lighting a match.

In the sudden glare of the match light, Katie recognised the distinctive khaki uniforms immediately. There were four British soldiers this time. Two of them had dirty bandages around their heads; all of them were exhausted and filthy. Their wounds were less grave than those of the first British soldiers Katie had rescued but she could see that the men were at the absolute end of their strength and resources. Then the match burnt out and the shed was again in darkness.

"Are all of you able to walk?" Katie asked.

"Oh my God - an English voice! And a lady too. Sure we can walk, Miss, although I hope you're not taking us too far - unless you have some water or a bowl of soup about you. We've been walking for three days without a bite to eat and little enough to drink. The boy with you found us under a railway bridge and bought us here. Even when we staggered in, we couldn't be sure that he wasn't coming back with the Gerries. None of us thought he'd be back with a lady like you." Katie recognised the gentler accents of a country boy - so different from the hard cockney of Jack and his mates.

"Come on then," said Katie briskly. "It's not far. If we are stopped by anyone, say nothing at all. And let's walk as quietly as we can. I think the nearest German patrol will be at the railway station but they may come out if they hear a noise. Of course it helps that the weather is suddenly dismal. Let's go."

In the ambulance, Katie made the soldiers lie down in the back of the van. It was a crush and none too comfortable but it did allow Pierre to cover them with a couple of blankets. A German patrol might just miss them if they were stopped. They saw plenty of German soldiers as they drove slowly back but apart from an occasional wave, they made the journey back without interruption.

Sr Cavell was waiting for them and with Emily, quickly assessed the seriousness of the two head wounds. Emily quietly prepared to treat a nasty open wound to the scalp of the youngest of the soldiers but these wounds were nothing like the life threatening wound that had disabled Freddie. All the same, there was much to do before anyone could go to bed. Katie had become quite experienced now in stripping soiled uniforms off modest young men and sending these boys through the showers. With the khaki uniforms soaking to loosen the blood and mud that made them stiff with grime, Katie found clean clothes from the store that M. Moulin continued to collect. [It didn't pay to ask too many questions about where these things came from, Katie had learned. M. Moulin would simply give a very expressive Gallic shrug and roll his eyes.] While all this was happening, Sr Cavell and Mademoiselle Louise were warming a pot of soup and toasting the delicious bread that French people love so much. The party that formed in the kitchen that night was jolly and cheerful. Outside, the grim city was now patrolled by German soldiers; inside the kitchen of the Berkendael Institute, British soldiers who had been broken and

hungry found comfort and hope. At that moment, Katie and Emily wouldn't have traded their dangerous assignment for all the comfort and security of their home in Curzon Street.



Chapter 5: An Unwelcome Visitor at the Berkendael Clinic

With seven British soldiers now at Berkendael Institute, Sr Cavell had had to develop new procedures for hiding these men safely. The khaki uniforms, for example, couldn't just be washed and hung out to dry. Some of the taller apartment buildings around them looked right down into the Institute's courtyard; it would take all Sr Cavell's ingenuity to explain where these khaki trousers and shirts came from. So it was that M. Moulin's job as porter grew to include operating the incinerator that usually only consumed the discarded dressings and bandages. It became a real challenge to manage the smoke and explain it to neighbours. Katie suggested another solution: if the trousers and shirts were in good condition, couldn't the khaki clothes be dyed another colour? She experimented with various dyes before settling on a particular shade of brown and another shade of olive green. M. Moulin became an adept at trading the newly cleaned up pants and shirts for safer civilian clothes; in fact, M. Moulin was having considerable success in turning up 'hard to get' substances for the clinic. Sr Cavell found that this was another area of her work where it didn't pay to ask too many questions. M. Moulin's built up quite a stock of salvaged underwear, socks and jackets. As autumn came on, he also managed to find Emily a very warm scarf and hat which came in handy when she had to operate in an unheated surgery.

There was the additional problem, however, that could not be resolved by all M. Moulin's resourcefulness. The most obvious of these arose in mixing the British escapees in with the French and Belgian soldiers. Now that the Germans were policing the city, it would be much safer if the English soldiers were quarantined somewhere less easy to find. One afternoon, M. Moulin, Pierre and Katie rearranged an old classroom in the upper floor of the Institute in the wing facing away from the street and into a tiny alley. They moved in ten beds and then stacked wardrobes and lumber in front of the beds; M. Moulin cunningly added a door that was set between two of the wardrobes so that a casual observer might think that the stack of surplus furniture actually filled the room instead of simply forming a screen to hide the beds behind. This became the ward for British soldiers.

There were other changes as well. Sr Cavell continued to teach and train the sisters who were at the Institute but as students graduated and were quickly sent off to work in big hospitals, no new students were admitted. Every one of the nurses at the Berkendael Institute must have known what was happening but no one, Sr Cavell hoped, was going to betray them. All the same, it was wise to have as few people as possible in on the dangerous secret. The job of nursing the wounded soldiers left behind became even more demanding as it was done by fewer and fewer women.

Finally, M. Moulin had the job of taking the identification tags that all soldiers wear into battle to a place of safety. Soldiers escaping from the Institute and carrying documents newly forged for them by Sr Sourire could not be searched and found to have dog tags

identifying them as French, Belgian or British soldiers. Sr Cavell regularly gathered the identification tags and hid them in a safe place in the Institute- the cistern of the toilet in the nurses' bathroom. When soldiers were ready to leave to escape, M. Moulin would make that the day he drove the ambulance with Katie over to the American Embassy to have the vehicle refuelled or repaired. Without a word, he would hand the leather bag containing the precious dog tags to the porter, M. Duclos. He passed them directly to Mr Whitlock, the Ambassador and from there, they were sent in the diplomatic post to Paris and London. While the United States was a neutral country, the Germans would allow their mail to go unsearched. By the time the ambulance was refuelled, M. Duclos would drop the leather bag on the passenger side of the van. This was a complicated [and sometimes dangerous] operation but it was the only reliable way that the national governments could account for their missing soldiers - and, it was hoped, be ready to receive them back through their embassies in Holland.

Over cups of tea late in the evening when the wards were quiet, Sr Cavell told the girls frankly how concerned she was for the clinic. The presence of the British soldiers in their makeshift ward behind the row of cupboards was, she said, little different from the situation posed by having French and Belgian soldiers downstairs. The Germans would certainly arrest them if they knew the soldiers were here; sheltering enemy soldiers was plainly illegal in German occupied Brussels. Taking them from the clinic to the convent - and then to the Dutch border- made a serious crime even worse. The problem, Sr Cavell insisted with a fearful pain in her voice, was that too many people had to know what was going on. For a start, there were the Belgian sisters themselves in the clinic. There were the Sisters at Turnhout; the Reverend Mother and Sr Sourire clearly knew the risks but the other sisters must be wondering who these men were occupying their students' dormitory. Despite Ambassador Whitlock's caution at the American Embassy, some staff there must also know what was happening. It would take only one unguarded comment by any one of these people to bring the Germans to the doors of the clinic.

"I know what would happen to me as the Matron of the Clinic," Sr Cavell said bluntly. "If things unravel, I couldn't protect you and I fear that no one here would be safe - not the sisters themselves, good M. Moulin or even little Pierre. Mademoiselle Herget is facing a particular danger because she could be betrayed by someone in her network right outside our little group here. We have to think of how to limit the possible damage."

"How can you do that?" asked Emily. "We accept the dangers facing us, I know - but I can imagine how hard it would go on people like M. Moulin or Pierre."

"I need to talk to our sisters," said Sr Cavell at last. "I have to tell them something of what I am doing and ask them either to stay or to leave us without betraying the trust." And at dinner the next night, that is just what the Matron did. Sr Cavell asked Katie and Emily to stay with the patients while this was done; they waited anxiously in the wards while Sr Cavell told them what most of them knew anyway. When the Belgian sisters returned from their meeting, some of them were red eyed with crying but not a single one asked to leave. They told the Matron simply that their loved ones were in the Belgian army; most of them had had no contact with their menfolk since the city had been occupied. Every wounded or lost soldier whom Sr Cavell took into her protection might be a brother or a sweetheart. Sr Cavell could count on their support and their discretion. Then the sisters gathered around their Matron and cried with her. They may have been defeated and occupied by a cruel enemy but they would defy that cruelty to assert their dignity as Belgians, as women and as nurses. Sr Cavell felt at that moment that the difficult situation could be managed for a little time at least.

Two important things happened in the week after the second group of British soldiers was received that made their adventure all the more complex.

The first of these happened quite unexpectedly when Katie was driving back from the convent at Turnhout late on a November afternoon. She had delivered four British soldiers into Sr Sourire's hands; two days later she would call and collect them and their new identity documents for the first run to the Dutch border. Pierre had come with her and as they drove home, they chatted about how the city was changing. Many things had disappeared from the shops and winter was coming on; it would be a sad Christmas. The sky was leaden and Katie was anxious for both of them to be home and off the streets.

Pierre saw the men first. They were huddled in a doorway on a street that was almost deserted; the men were out of the light - almost in hiding. Even as she drove slowly down the street concentrating on the badly lit road, Katie registered the grey uniforms that marked the men as belonging to the German army of occupation. "Mademoiselle, un moment, s'il vous plait?" said Pierre. Katie had grown to trust Pierre implicitly. [On a couple of occasions his quick eyes and cunning sense of imminent danger had sent them down one road away from German patrols that were stopping every vehicle.] She pulled to the kerb in the empty street and Pierre was quickly out of the ambulance van and back to the doorway. He seemed to be away for some time; Katie was becoming increasingly anxious and keen to be home. Then Pierre was at her window, his face grim and determined.

"They need us, Mademoiselle. One of them is badly hurt," said Pierre.

"Surely they can go to a German hospital?" said Katie.

"They are too frightened to do that, Miss Katie. "They need our help."

When the ambulance nudged its way into the dark courtyard of the Berkendael Institute that evening, Sr Cavell was waiting anxiously. This was, after all, Katie's first delivery of British soldiers to the convent. Her heart rose when she saw the familiar vehicle but she was puzzled when Katie and Pierre emerged looking grim and beckoning her to the rear of the van.

Sr Cavell checked the ambulance and then turned to Katie. "Germans," she said simply.

"I'm sorry, Matron," said Katie. "I didn't know what to do. They need us just as much as the others. One of them is badly wounded. The others are terrified. I couldn't leave them in the street."

Sr Cavell said nothing but opened the back door of the van as M. Moulin quietly closed the gate fronting the street to seal off the courtyard from anyone passing by. The thin evening light fell on three frightened faces. The fourth young German was unconscious on the stretcher in the well of the ambulance van, his face very pale and a bloody bandage was wrapped around his head. His mates were crowded around him looking fearful and very young. To Katie, they seemed not much older than Arthur Beavers - her pupil at Durwood Street School who had joined up to serve the King with such a blithe spirit. "Well", said Sr Cavell sadly, "I was wondering when we would find our first strays in grey uniforms."

Perhaps we'd better bring them in. Katie, can you tell Dr Emily that she is needed immediately?"

M. Moulin and Pierre assisted the German soldiers down out of the van. They stood awkwardly for a moment taking in their new surroundings before responding to Sr Cavell's anxious call. With a tenderness that impressed Katie, the three young German soldiers carried their wounded comrade into the operating theatre. They left him there reluctantly and went to wait in the corridor outside. Sr Cavell scrubbed up to assist Doctor Emily; she closed the door, leaving the frightened German soldiers with Katie. With a cheerfulness that she hoped would inspire confidence and obedience, Katie began the now familiar routine of stripping the filthy uniforms off the young soldiers and getting them through the showers. Once the German boys were clean and warm and dressed in a selection from M. Moulin's wardrobe, Katie could assemble them at the kitchen table and serve soup and hot tea. The boys were famished and their colour and confidence returned a little as the simple supper was served. It was good timing; the other soldiers in hiding had already had their dinner and Katie wanted to keep the new arrivals as far away as possible from the secret ward behind the cupboards.

It turned out that one of the German boys, Heinrich, was a teacher like Katie. He had spent holidays in England before the war and spoke good English. Once Sr Cavell and Emily joined then, he was able to share their story.

And it was, they found, very familiar. Three weeks ago, the young soldiers had been in the fighting first in Belgium and then in northern France. From the beginning, the battle had been chaotic. The four friends- all in the same platoon- had tried to stay together to help one another survive the horrors of the war. They had been in the front line and there had been terrible hand to hand fighting and artillery bombardments. A shell had hit their platoon late at night while they attempted to dig a trench. Their sergeant and corporal had been killed in the blast; one of their number, Jan, had been wounded in the head. All of them had been stunned and scattered; when morning came, they were alone in the shattered battlefield. Their unit had moved on and it took them some time to find that they were quite alone in a field churned to mud by the artillery fire. That night they had sheltered in a barn; on the one time that they had ventured out, they had been seen by a French patrol and shot at. Now, however, their greatest fear was not the French and British soldiers but their own army officers.

"You are deserters then," said Sr Cavell. Her voice was not critical or hard but it did convey profound pity and compassion.

"Why can't you simply report to the German hospital?" asked Emily. "I have done my best to treat Jan but a big military hospital will have much better treatment facilities than we have here. And the army can contact your parents and tell them that you are safe. They will be very anxious about you - they may even have been told that you are missing on the battlefield, presumed dead."

As this, Heinrich began to sob quietly. "The Matron is right. We are deserters - although we never meant to be. We only wanted to protect Jan and when we couldn't find anyone from our unit - or from the German army on that first morning- we just set off for home. We managed to find an empty wagon in a train going north towards Germany but it stopped in Brussels. If we are found by the German military police, we will be shot as traitors. If you don't help us, I don't know what we will do."

"Would that really happen?" Emily asked. "I mean, assuming that everyone who is lost on the battlefield is a deserter?"

“I would think that much the same rules apply in all the armies” said Sr Cavell sadly. “And as for what would happen to soldiers in those circumstances, I would guess that much would depend on which officer found them first.” She turned to Heinrich and said simply: “Of course you can stay here. The clinic would never turn away soldiers who need care - no matter what nation they come from. Come on, Katie; let’s see if we can find some beds for these young men. They look as if they need a good night’s sleep.”

It was impossible the next day to keep the secret of the German soldiers from everyone else in the Berkendael Clinic. The Belgian sisters were not very happy to have to attend to enemy soldiers but Sr Cavell was adamant that their duty of care included everyone in need. She called all the sisters together at morning tea and once again gave anyone who wanted to leave the opportunity to do so. No one did and while they might shake their heads in wonder at their Matron’s noble eccentricity, the sisters loved her too much to leave her now. Despite her trust in her sisters, Sr Cavell did try to make sure that the Germans did not find out about the British soldiers in the ward behind the cupboards. The French and Belgian soldiers almost certainly realised what was happening, however. This made Katie’s job in driving the first group of British escapees to the Dutch border all the more important.

Before that happened, however, there was a second complication in the fragile life of the clinic: Lieutenant von Neurath called on Katie as he had promised he would. His visit could not have come at a worse time. Katie was planning to drive to Turnhout that afternoon to collect the first group of British soldiers who would then be driven on to the Dutch border. She wanted a quiet morning; there was no doubting the danger in which she was about to put herself. The ambulance was already fuelled and ready to leave when Sr Cavell came with a grey face to find her. “There’s a German officer asking for you, Katie. Will I send him away?”

Katie’s heart stopped. She knew who it was and thought at once not of the British soldiers behind the cupboard wall but of the German soldiers now in hiding in a ward fitted up from a classroom. The safety of everyone depended on keeping the special work of the clinic secret from the Germans. It wouldn’t do to antagonise this officer, however, - or give him an excuse to bring soldiers to search the clinic. Katie also knew that a sympathetic German officer might be of use to the clinic at some time in the future. She quickly washed her hands and face and found Herr von Neurath waiting patiently in Sr Cavell’s office. He stood as Katie entered and clicked his heels gallantly as he made a bow. The Matron had found him a cup of tea and she was chatting in her own accented German with the handsome young officer. Katie knew Sr Cavell well enough, however, to register the tension in her relaxed good manners. Her look to Katie signalled a simple message: “Be careful!”

It seemed so unfair, Katie thought. Lieutenant Dieter von Neurath was tall, young, blond and very good looking. He looked wonderfully romantic in his beautifully cut grey and black uniform. In ordinary circumstances she would have been delighted to have such a fine fellow with an aristocratic family name and a good education coming to call on her! Occupied Brussels was not “ordinary circumstances”, of course; Katie thought that must explain why instead of being pleased she was frightened and anxious. At their first meeting, Katie hadn’t liked the lieutenant and tense as she was anticipating the afternoon’s danger she would have loved to have sent him away. She would also have loved to tell him exactly what she thought of the German attack on Belgium and France but she remembered the way Wally had treated the soldier and she stepped up as confidently as she could.

“Herr von Neurath” said Katie, extending her hand with the best smile she could muster. “I’m pleased you could come to the clinic.”

“Fraulein Katie,” said the officer with another bow. “It is good to see you again. I hope that this is not an inconvenient time to call?” As he spoke, he took Kate’s hand and kissed it gallantly.

“I am a working girl, Herr von Neurath,” she said with an attempt at a laugh. “I am usually on duty - and I am always busy. The clinic has lost many of its staff since August and I find myself doing things I had never expected I would ever be called upon to do.” This much was very true - although probably in a way that the lieutenant could not imagine.

“Are you too busy to come out for lunch?” the German asked. “The weather has turned cool but it’s nice and warm at the Metropole. I am sure that Matron Cavell can do without you for a couple of hours.” He smiled - and continued to hold Katie’s hand.

“I am sorry - I do have to work at noon, Herr von Neurath,” she replied, easing her hand from his. “Otherwise I would be delighted to accept your invitation.” If she went for lunch, Katie could imagine a long and painful afternoon that would leave her late setting out for Turnhout. There was no safe way of warning the Reverend Mother, Sr Sourire and the five British soldiers of the reason for any delay. Katie couldn’t imagine keeping all these people waiting because she was dining in the elegance of the Metropole Hotel.

Katie was keen to keep the valuable connection alive, however, and said with more confidence than she felt: “It is only 10 am, Sir. Perhaps we could have lunch together some other day. But I would dearly love a cup of coffee and I suspect that the Metropole can still serve the real thing despite the shortages that have come since September. And yes, it is cool, but not so unpleasant that we couldn’t walk the two kilometres to the hotel. Will you allow me a moment to pick up my coat and hat?”

Lieutenant von Neurath was clearly disappointed but he smiled weakly. Of course, Fraulein Katie,” he said. “Let’s make it coffee today - and lunch at another time. Please don’t hurry; we have all morning.”

And so it was that Katie and Lieutenant von Neurath walked in the thin November sunshine through the streets of Brussels to the Metropole Hotel. At first, they walked in uncomfortable silence until they stopped at a corner for German military traffic rattling past. Here, Lieutenant von Neurath extended his arm and Katie took it as they crossed the street. Once safely across, however, the lieutenant kept hold of her arm and Katie suppressed a shy smile. Remembering her manners, Katie hazarded a comment about the weather; the German soldier asked about the possibility of rain later in the day. Then, after another silence, the lieutenant asked her about her home and was intrigued when Katie began to explain about Hong Kong. In turn, he told her about his family home - a castle in Thuringia with fields of wheat, sleek cattle and orchards of apples and cherries. By the time they had reached the hotel, their early awkwardness was slipping away. Dieter was a nicer person, Katie thought, when he stopped being Lieutenant von Neurath.

But Katie couldn’t relax. She noticed how pinched and strained many faces were as they passed in the streets; many citizens of Brussels, she knew, were hungry now. And she couldn’t help but register the sneers of hatred she received from many people as they passed by. “What was a respectable woman doing walking about the streets of the city arm in arm with a German officer?” these faces seemed to say. If Herr von Neurath noticed the same bitter expressions he never made any mention of them but Katie could see the anger and contempt of ordinary Belgian people and her own face burned in a kind of shame. She couldn’t explain to anyone why she was prepared to meet the enemy in a public place. All

the same, she was pleased that she hadn't used the end of her last tube of lipstick and the very last dab of the scent she had brought from London in August as she rushed to get ready to go out with Dieter. She knew that she looked positively dowdy - and she hoped that her own thin face and tired eyes might persuade the Belgian citizens that she was suffering with them.

There was an armed German guard on the hotel entrance now. No one but German officers were allowed to enter; this made Katie all the more embarrassed. Lieutenant von Neurath accepted the salute of the soldier on guard who swung open the gleaming glass and polished wood doors to allow them to pass from the cool of the street to the warmth of the elegant hotel foyer. The hotel coffee shop was now a sea of black uniforms; the only Belgians here now were servants waiting on tables or elegantly dressed women who had wasted no time in becoming friendly with the new German masters. Katie hated to think that she was also one of these women.

The coffee came and with it a tray of the most delicious pastries. It took all of Katie's control not to wolf them down; as it was, Dieter smiled at the way she picked up a chocolate croissant as if it were some kind of precious treasure. Food like this, Katie explained, had disappeared from regular shops in Brussels months ago. "It's mostly vegetable soup for everyone at the Clinic now, Herr von Neurath," she said airily. "Is that ever on the menu here at the Metropole?"

Dieter coloured and pricked a little at Katie's reminder that the German soldiers occupying the city were probably not sharing in any of the privations facing ordinary Belgians. Instead, he smiled and deftly changed the subject, pressing her to continue to talk about her family and her work. For good reasons, Katie was reluctant to do either of these things. Instead, she gently turned the conversation back to Dieter himself. Gentlemen, Katie had long ago learned, were never so happy as when they were talking about themselves. So Dieter talked about his years at University studying Literature and Philosophy; he talked about his commission in the Prussian Army just when he was about to start teaching at the university. He talked about his billet in Brussels- he was staying in a room in the Metropole where many of the German officers were accommodated. No matter how Katie framed the question, however, the lieutenant would not talk about what he actually did in his work for the Occupation Forces. This was an interesting conversation, Katie thought, with both of them avoiding the topics that the other wanted most to hear about.

As Dieter talked, Katie was slowly disposing of the plate of pastries. These went quietly into a napkin on her lap and then into her handbag. If Dieter noticed, he was too much of a gentleman to say anything. Katie gently led the conversation back to the issue that was tormenting her at night: the fate of the German soldiers whom they had rescued from the street. An opening in the conversation presented itself when Dieter himself let slip that one of his duties was writing to the parents of young men in his battalion who had been killed or captured in the fighting. Such a kindness on his part seemed quite unexpected in the haughty and proud officer whom Katie had first met and she told him sincerely how much each heartbroken parent must value such a letter.

"Herr von Neurath," Katie said tentatively, "what kind of letter do you write to the parents of soldiers who have somehow failed in their duty - who might have broken down in the battlefield and been lost."

Lieutenant von Neurath was suddenly cold and distracted. He paused awkwardly for some time and then went on: "The older officers tell me that we have never fought a war like this, Fraulein Katie. They remember a time when battles stretched over days - not

months- and that a man had only to be brave and obedient for that little time. But now, Germany demands much more of its sons. I know that the war as we are fighting it is a hideous trial of the heart and the spirit. Men must be brave and obedient for weeks and months at a time. It is not wonderful that some men - even good men - fail in this test. But in the circumstances you describe, you must know that the broken soldier is a deserter. The military law requires that such a man be executed by the comrades he has deserted." Katie was sure, at this moment, that she detected something more than cold, controlled anger in the Lieutenant's voice. She wanted to believe only ill of this man but his blush indicated something more - something genuinely human and warm.

Katie swallowed, encouraged by what she had read in the Lieutenant's handsome face to press on. "Suppose that you came upon some German soldiers in exactly the circumstances I have described - young men who were bravely doing their duty until they were broken down and separated from their comrades by the changing line of the battle itself. What advice could you give such young men that would save them from a terrible and shameful death?"

There. Katie had said it. She was taking an awful risk: even the most obtuse German officer could see that Katie was not asking some hypothetical question - and Dieter had already shown himself to be acute and intelligent. He looked across the table at Katie for a moment and then surprised her by his extraordinary reaction. Instead of pressing her for details, he signalled to the waiter to bring more coffee and another dish of pastries. Katie coloured. He had caught her out in both things but seemed gentlemanly enough not to notice in either case. When the table was settled, Dieter spoke quietly, choosing his words with great care.

"What you have described, Fraulein Katie, would be a dangerous situation for everyone concerned. It would not be just the deserters themselves who were in danger of the firing squad." Here, Dieter looked at her intently and Katie fought to return his look rather than look away. "Since you ask a hypothetical question, however, I will try to return a purely hypothetical reply. The only way for the soldiers you have described to avoid a conviction for desertion in the face of the enemy would be to return somehow to Germany and there to enlist again as a volunteer in the Imperial Army. Returning to Germany has its dangers but there are probably places at the border where a man dressed in civilian clothes could cross. Once back in Germany, the soldier should not seek out his family as if to look for shelter; instead, he should apply immediately at a recruiting station for enlistment as a volunteer. Once his application has been accepted, he should tell his commanding officer the truth and seek to have any charge against his character dismissed. My guess is that there would be no recrimination. Germany has lost too many brave young men already to be able to throw away more lives. But of course, the situation you describe is hypothetical. Do have another pastry; you seem to have really enjoyed them, I see."

With morning tea over, Katie walked back to the Clinic with Lieutenant von Neurath. It had been a strange morning - a mixture of comforting hope and troubling challenge. Dieter von Neurath had listened to her and spoken honestly. Katie was clearly excited to have been given a way to assist the young Germans to escape with their lives - although she made a mental note to ask Sr Sourire if her skills and stationery extended to German documents as well as Belgian ones. Sr Cavell would be pleased to have Katie's advice on what could be done with one part at least of the clinic's growing community. But she was equally troubled by having to revise her hard and uncompromising ideas about Lieutenant von Neurath. He might be a nicer person, she feared, than she had hoped. She wasted no time when she arrived back at the Berkendael Clinic in disposing of the treasure she had carried away from the Metropole Hotel in her handbag. The pastries went straight to the British

soldiers behind the cupboards- saving only one that went to young Pierre. All of them, it seems, appreciated the treat enormously.



Chapter 6: At the Dutch Border

It was almost noon when Katie turned into the grey courtyard of the clinic. After disposing of the pastries and reassuring Emily that she had supped with the enemy and come away safe, Katie went straight to find Sr Cavell. She was surprised to find the Matron's office door closed. This was an unusual situation: one of the great mysteries of the clinic was the fact that even while the work of the clinic was a dangerous secret, Sr Cavell's door was always open and the Matron herself seemed to be everywhere and available at all hours. Katie knew that the closed door must indicate something serious but nothing was more important than her mission to the Dutch border that day. Straightening her uniform, Katie stepped up to the door and knocked.

Sr Cavell opened the door carefully and her look of concern gave way to relief when she saw Katie. Her face relaxed and she took Katie's hand and drew her into the office, closing the door behind her. The reason for her caution was sitting at the desk, a tea cup in front of her; Mademoiselle Louise Herget smiled warmly and stood to hug her. "I was beginning to fear the worst," said Sr Cavell. "I was frightened that once you were in the Metropole Hotel and the offer of a real lunch were made that you might weaken!" she laughed.

Katie smiled: "I won't say I wasn't tempted. There was real roast beef on the *plat de jour*."

Sr Cavell turned to Mademoiselle Herget. "You will understand now about the closed door, Katie. For everyone's sake, it is important that as few people as possible know about Mademoiselle Herget's presence here. She won't be long here anyway: she's going to escort you and our cargo to the border this afternoon."

Katie smiled. Once a date had been set for the first delivery of British soldiers to the Dutch border, there were a hundred details about how this might be managed that Katie wanted to ask. Instead, she had wisely trusted Sr Cavell to work these out. How would they know where to go? What would they do if they met a German patrol? What would happen on the other side once the soldiers had escaped? When Katie had raised some of these questions with her sister as they lay in the darkness at night, Emily had been sensible and reassuring. It wasn't necessary for them to know all these things until the time came. It seemed obvious: secret work behind enemy lines depended on secrecy.

Katie had often wondered about what part Mademoiselle Herget played in the double life of the Clinic. She had appeared with Wally soon after the Germans had arrived and on at least one other occasion, Katie had seen her at the clinic with Sr Cavell. She seemed to

come and go, usually late at night and always without any fuss or acknowledgement. It was no surprise to learn then that Mademoiselle Herget would be accompanying her that afternoon.

“I know that you like to take Pierre with you on your runs to Turnhout, Katie,” said Sr Cavell, “but this is quite the most dangerous thing that we have done so far and although Pierre is as lion hearted as any boy can be, I have to remember that he is only a boy. If it all goes wrong, the Germans will make no distinction between adults and children in their punishments. Perhaps on some other run - when there is no alternative. Tonight, we have Mademoiselle as our pilot.”

“Can you be ready in an hour, Katie?” Mademoiselle Herget asked.

“Certainly, Mademoiselle. I’ll go and put some warmer clothes on directly.” Katie stood and slipped away, conscious that her knock may have interrupted something between Sr Cavell and Mademoiselle Herget that needed to be finished before the work of the day and night could begin. In her room, Katie found her warmest jacket and hat. She was dressed, as usual, in the uniform of the clinic; it would give her confidence if she encountered a German patrol but might not be very warm if she had to leave the ambulance van and walk any distance. Realising with a shudder that if things went wrong that she would not be returning to the comfort of this room, Katie tidied her things, making sure that there was nothing that might compromise or embarrass anyone. Katie had just enough time to write two hurried notes to her parents. The first was a letter that said almost nothing except that she was well and doing her duty. She slipped the note into her pocket. The second was a simple note of farewell; it would be the note sent if the run to the border ended in disaster. With this done, Katie felt strangely comforted. She left the letter on Emily’s bed. If the worst happened, Emily would send it on somehow. She found her sister in the ward, told her about the letter and kissed her. Then it was time to go.

A misty rain was falling now and when Katie arrived at her ambulance van, she found that M. Moulin and Pierre had already loaded it with its precious cargo. Under Emily’s care, Freddie’s leg had begun to heal well but he could only walk with difficulty on crutches. He was lying down in the well of the van. Bert’s head wound was also settled; Jack was his usual cheerful self. They sat on either side of their mate. Jack was obviously excited by the prospect of escape and this gave his usual good humour an edge. They had already made their thankful farewells to Emily and were keen now to be going. All three soldiers were wearing an assortment of M. Moulin’s cast offs; their hair had grown longer during their stay in Berkendael and they no longer had the confident swagger and bearing of soldiers. Mademoiselle Herget appeared also, dressed like Katie in the uniform of the clinic and carrying a black handbag. She opened it briefly once they were in the van and Katie was not surprised to see a revolver there. Sr Cavell took Katie’s hand and smiled awkwardly. With more cheer and hope than she was feeling, she kissed the three soldiers goodbye and hugged Katie as if she were her own daughter. Then they were off into the afternoon gloom.

The drive to Turnhout was uneventful. The countryside was grey in the autumnal cool and dripping with the drizzle that clothed the whole scene in a shroud and brought on an early evening. There were no more refugees on the road fleeing the battlefield but there were signs everywhere of the fighting that had passed through this area only months before. In some places the landscape had been scorched and disfigured by artillery shells. Buildings in towns at rail crossings had been shattered. There were abandoned and wrecked tucks and gun carriages still lying in ditches where they had been pushed during the evacuation

of the Belgian and French armies and the arrival of the Germans. And in fields beside the road were the hurriedly dug graves of soldiers from both sides who had been killed in action. The few people on the streets as the van passed looked troubled and care worn. Katie thought bitterly at how many people were suffering because of the cruel war. Her spirits rose, however, when the van turned from the road into the long drive of popular trees that marked the entrance to the convent school. On their first visit to the convent, the poplar trees had been in yellow leaf; now they were bare and stained black by the drizzle. Katie had made this journey several times, however, and in her mind, the real danger wouldn't start until after they had cleared this familiar ground.

The Reverend Mother was at the van in a moment; they were obviously expected and she directed Katie to park the van in a large barn behind the convent complex. Here they could unload well out of sight of the road. Jack, Bert and Freddie were a little awed by the Sisters; they had little experience of nuns in full black habits but they quickly regained their spirits when mugs of hot tea appeared. Katie only realised how tightly wound she was when the tea arrived and the Reverend Mother passed her a mug that had the unmistakable bite of scotch whiskey. "Just to warm you up, my dear!" she said with a smile.

The little party adjourned to Mother's office on the ground floor of the convent school. Katie, Mademoiselle Herget and Mother chatted about the world of peace before the war while Sr Sourire led off the three British soldiers. Once again Sr Sourire showed in the brisk way she worked that she would have made an excellent criminal if she had chosen that vocation over the church. She had already assembled identity documents for each of the British soldiers, giving them Dutch names and identities; all that was needed now was a photograph to paste on the identity card. One by one, she took the English escapees into a tiny studio in one corner of a science laboratory in the school. The English soldiers changed their coats about: it wouldn't do if they appeared in their documents exactly as they were dressed on the day they were stopped by a curious German patrol. While Sr Sourire developed the photographs and completed her work, Mother Johana fed them all with a rich soup and settled them to wait. The rendezvous on the Belgian side of the border was scheduled for 11 pm.

Katie took this time with Mother Johana and Mademoiselle Herget to hear how the escaping Belgian and French soldiers had fared. The news was encouraging indeed. In most cases, the Sisters had been able to move the escapees on quickly. So far, she believed that all of their escapees had made it home safely. "And these three English boys will get away safely too," said Mother Johana, "provided that you can make the connection at the border."

"That's my responsibility," said Mademoiselle Herget. "Of course this is the first time we've done it, but I think it can work as we planned it. I was at the border last week to rehearse for tonight."

"Don't tell me anything about that, my dear: there's no need for me to know anything about what you do. All we are doing here is caring for God's creatures in need. If I have curious Germans knocking at my door I want to be able to tell them truthfully that I know nothing. I think, perhaps, that I should make sure that Sr Sourire cleans up her darkroom carefully every time she uses it. Artists can be very careless, you know, about some practical things."

Katie grinned bitterly; she doubted whether the Germans would make the kind of nice distinctions that Mother Johana hoped for. Katie used the moment, however, to share with

both Mademoiselle Herget and Mother Johana the news about the German soldiers that Katie had collected and taken back to the clinic. Mademoiselle was alarmed at this; it was an additional complication to something that was already dangerous enough. The Reverend Mother, however, knew exactly what Katie and Sr Cavell were doing. “We have to make no distinction, you must know, between those who need our care and those who deserve it. To turn away wounded and frightened men just because they are German would be an offense to the love that built these walls.” The Reverend Mother took Katie’s hand and squeezed it gently. “But let’s settle one great trial tonight before we concern ourselves with other dangers down the road. It must almost be time for you to be going.”

There was a different mood in the van as they left the comfort and security of the convent and headed north. The country here had escaped the war damage and in the darkness of the showery night, the silence and the gloom seemed to speak of an earlier time - before the war that was tearing into the heart of Europe. They passed quiet villages where the houses were all in darkness and where fields and orchards were barely visible in the dimmed headlights of the van. The moon tried every now and again to break through the scudding cloud. Katie knew from the road signs that the border was near.

“Slow down and turn here,” Mademoiselle Herget said, when the road sign to the right announced the village of Roosendaal. Mademoiselle Herget directed Katie to turn in the centre of the village and drive towards the parish church.

“Park over here, Katie. Now, turn off your lights,” Mademoiselle Herget said, ‘then turn them on again and off again quickly.”

Katie’s heart was racing. She did as she was told, waiting anxiously to see what might follow. “Get out of the van now,” said Mademoiselle Herget, “and walk towards the porch of the church.”

Katie had never imagined that the delivery would take this turn but she stepped from the ambulance van as quietly as she could, pausing only to whisper a warning to Jack, Freddie and Bert. The procedure they had rehearsed was that in case of real danger, they would scatter into the darkness if they could. Katie prayed that they would not need to do this on their very first run to the border. Her heart was thumping as she stepped gingerly up the gravel path through the dark towards the darker outline of the great grey church. At the porch, she strained to see anything and almost shrieked aloud when she felt a gloved hand reach out and take her by the shoulder.

“Don’t cry out, Miss Bland. I’ve got you.”

Katie’s heart leapt up and she swung into the waiting arms of Wally Beavers. He hugged her tightly and she relaxed a little. Of course, she thought, someone who knew us would be here to meet us this first time.

“You’ve done brilliantly, Miss Katie, to find the boys and bring them so far. Let’s get them out of the van and away to safety. The German patrols pass this way every thirty minutes; we need to move fast.” And here Katie realised that Wally was not alone. There were three other young men with him and together they moved as quickly and as silently as they could back to the ambulance van and its precious cargo. The English escapees were

out of the van as quickly as they could go, Jack and Bert still helping a frail Freddie to walk.

“My Dutch friends here will take us the three kilometres through the woods to the Dutch town on the other side of the border,” Wally said. “It feels as if it’s coming over to rain again; if Freddie can’t make it alone, we have a stretcher here to carry him. I’m sorry we can’t talk now. Give my best to Dr Bland and to Sr Cavell.”

Wally had a few words with Mademoiselle Herget and shook hands with each of the English soldiers. Each of them now wanted to say their thanks to Katie who was doing her best not to cry as they made ready to slip away. At the last moment, she remembered the letter she had written to her parents and asked Wally to post it for her.

“We’ll be in England in two days’ time,” he said cheerfully. “I’ll post it then.” The Dutch boys were anxious to be going; they obviously knew the regular circuit of the German guards this close to the border and they wanted to be gone. A final wave - and then Katie and Mademoiselle Herget were alone in the rain and the tears that Katie had worked so hard to hold came tumbling out. Mademoiselle Herget took her gently by the shoulder and then turned them to home.

The escape had gone exactly to plan. In an hour, they were passing the convent school at Turnhout and in another hour they were driving through the silent and poorly lit streets of Brussels. They were twice stopped by German patrols who checked that the ambulance was empty but waved it through when they saw the plate announcing that it was a donation from the Embassy of the United States of America.

At the Berkendael Clinic, Emily and Sr Cavell rushed to greet them. Katie was exhausted and numb. She recovered some of her spirits as she drank a cup of tea and told the story of meeting Wally in the darkness of the church porch. She also mentioned the goodness of the Sisters - and the good news about the escape of the Belgian and French soldiers whom Katie had driven in the ambulance van to Turnhout. Dawn was breaking as she finally climbed the stairs to the room she shared with Emily.

Katie slept most of the next day; when she came down for breakfast at tea time, she found that Mademoiselle Herget had gone. In the evening, she walked with Emily through the grim city; after the agony of the last day, the two sisters needed time together. Katie told Emily every detail of the flight to the border, then they talked at length about how their lives had changed in the last four months. Both of them wondered at how simple and naïve their lives had been before the war - and how their hopes for the summer had come to ashes. Their walk took them to the centre of the city; they stood on the road opposite the Hotel Metropole, watching the German officers coming and going with Belgian women on their arms. Katie shuddered at the thought that others might think that she was a collaborator like these women. She told Emily about the conversation with Lieutenant von Neurath and in doing so, she dared to hope that Dieter was willing to help them in some way at least.

The next day, things were mostly back to normal. Katie came down to breakfast wishing that she could have one more cup of the delicious coffee from the Metropole Hotel. Beside her breakfast plate, however, was something that all the grandeur of the Metropole Hotel could not supply: a postcard that had been delivered in the morning mail. It showed two happy Dutch girls posed beside windmills and tulips. The simple message on the back read: *Having a jolly holiday in Amsterdam but going overseas tonight. W.*

In the next week, Katie was twice woken from sleep by Pierre standing urgently beside her bed. He didn't need to make any explanation now; Katie knew that he would only wake her if there were British soldiers to be rescued. On the first of these occasions, Pierre directed the ambulance to a ruined arsenal on the western outskirts of the city. It had been destroyed by retreating Belgian troops leaving only the shattered walls standing and most of the roof caved in. In the one sheltered corner left intact, Katie found six Scottish soldiers- three of them badly wounded and all of them cold, exhausted and hungry. Their faces in the yellow glare of the flashlight she carried were unshaven, haggard and drawn. There was no way Katie could fit the six men in the van and this would mean two anxious trips through the predawn gloom.

The spokesman for this broken and sorry little group was their corporal, Fergus, who brightened up as soon as he met Katie. They had been on the run for six weeks and they were, Fergus asserted, "about fit to lose it all."

"The lad with you there, Miss, came and found us after some of his mates stumbled upon us. He couldn't speak English no more than we can speak French. I thought when he left us he meant us to hope that he would bring back help. But look at what he has come back with! Now that you're here, Miss, I'm sure things will be looking up for the boys. We never thought that a wee lass would step in and shine a light on our darkness! Ye cannae take us all, I know, so perhaps you might take Cameron first. He's doing poorly as you can see."

Pierre had sensibly brought a water bottle with him and Katie noticed with tears in her eyes that each one of the six soldiers took a drink and passed it to a mate so that everyone had a little. She made a note that she would bring more water on her return. She had taken to bringing a flask of something much stronger with her as well on these missions and the joy on the face of the first of the soldiers as he tasted the Scotch whiskey was worth every penny of the cost of the precious stuff.

On the first trip, Katie took the worst of the wounded. Cameron, a young Scot with a cruel wound to the shoulder and neck, could no longer walk. Between them, Katie and Pierre made him as comfortable as possible, lying on the stretcher. Two of the others with head wounds were crowded in beside him in the van. Katie had no idea how bad their injuries were but she guessed that Emily would want to begin treating the wounded as soon as possible. The other three [including Fergus] were left in the darkness. They would not be collected for another agonising hour.

Katie was horrified at the condition of the men. They had been sleeping rough for almost six weeks without proper food or a change of clothes. Katie fought to control her nausea at the smell of the men's wounds and unwashed bodies. Even Pierre - normally so relaxed about all such things- wrinkled his nose in disgust. While Emily and Sr Cavell began the delicate surgery on infected wounds, Kate and Pierre began the routine of stripping off stinking clothes and finding enough hot water and razors to turn these grizzled ruins back to what they had been three or four months ago: youngsters who worked on farms and fishing boats. The boys were exceptionally modest when all this began and Katie thought it best to leave Pierre to manage the business of supervising the wash. She set herself the task of carrying the cans of hot water needed to affect this change from the kitchen range to the stone bathroom.

By the best of good fortune, M. Moulin had the day before come home with a precious sack of fine flour and a big jar of raspberry jam. These staple things had almost disappeared

from shops in the city and no one at the Berkendael Clinic was obtuse enough to ask where M. Moulin had found these treasures. That morning, the Clinic cook had turned the Black Market shopping into pancakes. It was amazing how much better the Scottish boys looked and felt after being washed, shaved and fed the pancakes. Katie organised another cot in the hidden ward behind the cupboards so that the six men could camp together and she made time to sit and listen to each of them talk about the shame of their being lost and abandoned on the battlefield. It took a long time to do this properly but Emily stressed to Katie that this kind of care was just as important to the men's recovery as any medicine a doctor could administer.

This comfortable arrangement was further strained three days later when another five English soldiers were added to the escapees camped behind the cupboards in the upstairs classroom. This time there were two officers with the group; they were as harried and as broken as any of the enlisted men who had sought sanctuary and considerably less cheerful than men like Jack and Fergus. It was now a much tighter squeeze in the little ward where the British soldiers were assembled and it was also clearly impossible to keep their presence hidden from the whole staff. Sr Cavell wondered again how long their audacity in sheltering British soldiers in plain sight of the enemy could last. Someone unfriendly would see something; more likely, someone foolish or indiscreet would say something without realising the danger they were causing. All of them, she knew, were living on borrowed time.

Katie spent hours of every day with these men, listening to their stories, sharing their pain encouraging them to hope for a future. In the weeks leading up to Christmas and in the days beyond it, there was a steady stream of English soldiers at Berkendael -and a constant flow of men out to Turnhout, to Holland and then to safety in England. Even though she knew that it was dangerous to do so, Katie kept a careful record of the names of the men whom they helped. She kept the list in her prayer book and every time she drove her ambulance to the American Embassy to refuel, she gave the names to the Ambassador's secretary. Over time, the number of escapees grew steadily. By Easter, Katie calculated that Sr Cavell and the clinic had helped over one hundred English soldiers to escape. Sometimes Mademoiselle Herget would accompany her and Wally would be waiting in the church yard to receive them; often, however, she drove alone and Mademoiselle Herget would be in the church porch. The drive never became routine; it never lost its sense of danger. Every time that Emily watched her sister driving away in the late afternoon with a load of escapees she wondered with a shaft of pain whether this would be the last journey that they would make.

Looking back later on that dismal winter, Katie and Emily wondered how it took so long for the Germans to appreciate what was happening under their very noses. Sometimes there were as many as forty men in hiding at the Clinic and there were times when there was simply not enough room for all the fugitives to stay in the rue de la Culture in safety. When this happened, it was too dangerous for Katie's ambulance to work like a taxi service around the occupied city: other ruses were necessary. Mademoiselle Herget had established a string of safe houses in the city - many of them near the Clinic- in which soldiers could be boarded out for a few days until the escape routes could accommodate them. On these dangerous journeys when an inquisitive German patrol or Belgian policeman could bring their whole work to an end, several of Mademoiselle's lady friends would come to the Clinic dressed up as if they were going out on the town. Dressed in the best of M. Moulin's castoff clothes, three or four soldiers at a time were escorted from the Clinic- always at the busiest time of the day- and always by a lady who would play the part

of a girlfriend. Anyone looking on would think that this was a group of friends out on a date. A few Belgian policemen soon worked out that something was amiss but they just as quickly played along - often escorting the little group to safety. So much courage was called for in these moments and the girls were always comforted by the pluck of the Belgian people but both of the girls dreaded these excursions and they were always anxious until the girls returned giving the all clear.

Sr Cavell had been intrigued by the advice that Lieutenant von Neurath had given to Katie on how to manage the German soldiers whom the Clinic had taken in. Once they were able to travel, Katie sent the young men on their way with forged documents - and strict instructions to destroy these once they were safely back in Germany. Then they were to follow the simple strategy of dispersing to their home cities and reporting to a recruiting station under their correct names. That way they could avoid the accusation - and the deadly consequences- of a charge of desertion. Twenty young German soldiers made their escape in this way.

Through the whole of that winter and the spring that followed, Lieutenant von Neurath was a visitor at the Berkendael Clinic. He would often come unannounced in the afternoon to invite Katie to tea and by degrees -and despite herself- Katie grew to like the young man. Sr Cavell encouraged the visits. The lieutenant often brought treats like real coffee, cream and wine that everyone could enjoy; more importantly, he gave the Clinic a kind of protection from the local Belgian police who were watching for anything unexplained - like people coming and going at odd hours. The ambulance and the American Embassy provided them with some protection but the little community lived every day on the edge of a volcano that threatened to erupt and sweep them away.

Katie never relaxed with the handsome young lieutenant; she never forgot that one unwise word on her part might undo them all. She knew that Dieter was fond of her but he was a German officer of the army of occupation. Once, early in their friendship, Dieter had gone to kiss her as he delivered her back to the Clinic after tea. Katie had turned away, her heart torn and her face red with embarrassment. Dieter recovered himself and turned the attempted kiss into a gallant bow. After that, he never pressed her beyond the formal but friendly relationship that they had begun in the early winter. There were times, however, when Katie felt lonely and frightened and on those days she was delighted to have Dieter hold her arm as they walked. Their crippled, wounded relationship became just another reason to hate the times in which they lived. At another time, perhaps, away from the fog of war, she would have welcomed Dieter's attention. He was just the kind of young man whom Katie could have grown to love. But not now. The unreality of their friendship was made most clear by the fact that Katie couldn't talk about what she did at Berkendael although Dieter was certainly interested in the Clinic and asked her about it frequently - particularly early in their friendship. Katie became an expert in deflecting his questions. In the same way, Dieter couldn't talk about what he did in the heavily guarded, grey building on the rue Sainte Catherine that was the headquarters of the German Army. From time to time, he mentioned casually that he had been at Spa - the resort town in central Belgium famous for its waters. Katie knew without being told that this could mean only one thing: Spa was the headquarters of the German General Staff and the place from

which the Kaiser himself came to consult with his generals. Dieter was obviously close to the most important people in the German government.

Katie's aching heart was not helped by a chance encounter in the street just before Christmas. Katie had quickly worked her way through all the francs, the dollars and the deutschmarks that Mr Mycroft Holmes had given her to bring to Belgium. Medical supplies, however, had quickly disappeared from shops in Brussels after the Germans arrived so there was little enough that she could buy for the Clinic even with ready money. Their salvation came, as it often did, in the person of Mr Brand Whitlock, the American Ambassador. Mr Whitlock had a strong web of contacts in the United States; even though America was a neutral country, there were church people and charities in the United States anxious to help the wounded and the distressed in countries occupied by the Germans. To keep the Germans cooperative and to preserve the fig leaf of neutrality, Ambassador Whitlock made sure that some of the material collected went to German clinics as well. His sympathy, however, was clearly with the Belgians and with Britain and France. When supplies in the clinic ran short, Katie would write a note to the Ambassador. He would invite her to call on him next time she brought the ambulance to the Embassy to be refuelled. The Ambassador loved to have Katie stay for afternoon tea and on these occasions he made sure that there was plenty to eat. Katie thought tea at the Embassy was almost as grand as the table at the Metropole Hotel but it was much more pleasant to be able to enjoy real coffee without being surrounded by black and grey uniforms, Katie thought. When she returned to the Embassy yard, the ambulance would be stocked with boxes of dressings and surgical items, all of them stamped with the familiar flag of the United States. There were food parcels too; Katie made sure that some of these went to the sisters at Turnhout. On these visits, M. Duclos, the concierge at the Embassy, always asked how she was going and how it was that she seemed to use so much fuel just running around Brussels. "It must be because you are a lady driver," he would sigh mournfully. Katie would smile and say as little as her good manners - and her French - allowed her to.

On one such trip to the Embassy, Katie found herself driving through the centre of the city. A traffic policeman stopped her at the crossing next to the Metropole Hotel and Katie saw Dieter in front of her, his back to the ambulance. If Katie had been less well mannered, she might have parped the horn to catch his attention. But that was quite impossible because Dieter's attention was fully absorbed by a vivacious, dark haired young woman who was on his arm. She stood for a moment as the soldier on duty opened the big doors, and Katie had a clear view of her elaborate hair style and heavily made up face. Then the woman turned and kissed Dieter on the cheek with a familiarity that tore Katie. Then the policeman on duty was waving her forward and Katie was driving the ambulance down the street, tears in her eyes and her heart breaking.

When she told Emily about what she had seen that night, Katie did everything she could to excuse Dieter's behaviour. Perhaps the young woman was not a hungry and desperate Belgian woman prepared to comfort German officers in return for a hot meal. Perhaps she was Dieter's sister or a cousin from Thuringia - although when pressed, Katie had to admit that she didn't think that Dieter had a sister and she had no idea whether he had cousins in Thuringia or anywhere else. No, Katie had no reason to be hurt or angry, she said hotly. Dieter was not to blame. He was a man, after all, Katie said darkly. And it was Katie - not Dieter - who had made sure that theirs was only a friendship and nothing more. Dieter had never kissed her or told Katie that he loved her. He was free to take up with anyone - even hungry Belgian girls with big hair who wore lots of lipstick. Katie was free to make her own friends as well - and she would, too, just as soon as the men she loved weren't all running

off to fight in the war. Emily listened to all this very carefully, making no comment other than to take Katie's hand and hold it. It wouldn't have helped Katie for Emily to tell her exactly what she thought about German officers in general and Dieter von Neurath in particular. Katie went off to bed that night hating the war more than she had ever done until that moment.

But whether or not the girl Katie had seen was a serious attraction, Dieter continued to call upon her. It took all of Katie's control to be polite and friendly on the first occasion after she had seen Dieter entering the Metropole with the dark haired girl but she managed. If Dieter noticed any coldness or change in Katie's manner he certainly didn't mention it. In a very little while, their friendship reverted to what it had always been- a guarded kind of fondness on both sides. In March, Dieter called to show off his new uniform: he had been promoted to Captain. He was proud of his new title but this time his manner was troubled and Katie wisely allowed him time to relax, to compose his thoughts and explain himself. They walked silently in the gloom of the late winter day on their way to the Metropole Hotel but Dieter steered them away from the place when they reached the bare park opposite. It was too cold to sit down so they walked on the gravel paths that skirted lawns still covered with frost. "Miss Katie," he began, "you asked me on one occasion what a German soldier might do if he had been separated from his regiment and lost on the battlefield. I gave you an answer which I gather you were able to apply in a practical situation."

Katie's cheek burned. She had raised the matter cautiously with Dieter and never mentioned it again; Dieter's raising it now seemed threatening- even sinister. Katie didn't know what she might say here so she remained silent. Dieter went on after a long pause: "You can relax, Katie. I learned last week that one of the soldiers you helped to return to Germany was pressed by the Military Police to explain how he managed to make his return safely. The police can be persuasive, if you understand me. The man's enlistment was accepted without question but because the same recruiting officer had met another soldier in similar circumstances not long before he was curious and called in the police. The soldier named the Berkendael Clinic as the place where he was hidden for a time until he could make his return."

"Herr von Neurath," said Katie carefully, "your original advice to me was welcomed and has proven to be wise." She paused, trying to find the words to ask what she really wanted to know. Finally she went on: "What advice can you give me now?"

Katie's heart was racing. Why would Dieter raise this with her now? Her thoughts went back to the beginning of their friendship when he was altogether too interested in what she did at the Clinic for her to be truly comfortable with him. The most hopeful answer was that he wanted to warn her; it may be, however, that he was trying to trap her into making some admission. And what else did he know about the work of the Clinic? If Sr Cavell had sheltered German soldiers she would surely not have turned away British and French soldiers in need.

Before any of these questions could force her to say anything, Dieter took her hand and turned her to face him. "Katie, I will not trifle with you. I am not trying to trick you. The fact is that I know more about what happens at the Clinic than you might think. I have had people watching the place for some time; I know who comes and goes. I know where you

go. You ask for my advice? My advice would be for you and Dr Emily and Sr Cavell to go straight to Holland as soon as you can. The agents watching the Clinic are reporting to me. As long as they are doing that, I can be cautious about what I do with the information. I have kept this secret for some months. Sadly, this has become a little more complicated now that I have been promoted to Captain. Another officer will take over my brief to watch places like the Clinic. You must be very careful and if I were you, I would trust no one."

Katie's first instinct was to ask Dieter to tell her more - her heart was burning with questions to which she wanted answers. But Dieter had obviously said as much as he felt he could and there was no doubting the warning he had delivered. There were still five British soldiers behind the cupboards; in fact, Katie was to do another run to the Dutch border that evening. Even if she and Emily wanted to, they couldn't leave these men in the greatest danger. And the most awful question was the one that Dieter had dropped like a stone into the stillness of her heart: someone in or around the Clinic was not to be trusted. Katie hoped for a moment that Dieter was lying - or at least, exaggerating his knowledge. But she could see his earnestness and she knew that her eyes had probably confirmed the truth to Dieter - no matter how lightly she dismissed his warning. With a supreme effort of will, Katie turned and smiled at Dieter and extended her hand to him. He kissed it gallantly. "I will always remember your great kindness," she said. "Whatever you do, Sir, I know that you will simply be doing your duty. I hope you will understand that I will do the same."

Before Dieter let go of her hand, he said one more thing that turned Katie's heart to water. "There's an interesting community of sisters in a convent at Turnhout. I think you may know some of them." He smiled gently, waiting for Katie to respond but she remained silent. Katie was certain that Dieter could probably hear her heart pounding. He went on, "The good sisters supply missionary teachers to convents in the Congo, I believe. You could probably suggest to one or two of these sisters that they might like the climate in Africa; it will be healthier for them there than here in Belgium, I think."

Katie took her afternoon tea at the Metropole Hotel that afternoon with her whole heart racing. She and Dieter spoke of the weather, of English cathedrals and German sausage dogs. Together they managed to act as if nothing had been said to trouble their friendship. The delicious looking pastry tasted like ashes in Katie's mouth, however, and as soon as it was decently possible, Katie stood and excused herself. Dieter escorted her to the footpath and went to walk her back to the Clinic. Katie begged to be allowed to make the short walk on her own - the better to think about the thing that Herr von Neurath had said to her. He bowed gallantly and kissed her hand, attempting a thin smile as he rose from the bow. Then Katie was alone on the street, watching the handsome figure of Dieter as he walked quickly along the footpath under the bleak, leafless chestnut trees towards Rue Sainte Catherine.

She wanted to cry, to take Emily and get as far away from Brussels as she could. She was angry with Mr Mycroft Holmes for asking this of her and Emily: from what Captain von Neurath had told her, her life was in danger. And so, of course, were the lives of Sister Sourire and Mother Johana and the good and gentle woman she had come to regard as her second mother. Leaving the Clinic would mean leaving Sr Cavell - and if she did that, who would drive the ambulance and treat the injured soldiers when they needed surgery?

Katie sat with all this through the bustle of the late afternoon preparations to drive the next five British soldiers to safety. As was their usual routine by now, Sr Cavell made sure that everyone - Katie, Pierre and the escapees themselves- had as good a lunch as the straightened circumstances of the Clinic could supply. If the Clinic itself could find food for hungry men this was one less thing to ask of the Sisters at Turnhout. Despite herself, Katie couldn't help but look around at every face in the Clinic and wonder who had betrayed them to the Germans. Despite Captain von Neurath's confident statements, Katie doubted that Pierre, M. Moulin or any of the nurses would willingly betray them. Each of them had played a part in helping the British, French and Belgian soldiers to escape; they could not betray Sr Cavell without putting their own lives in danger. No: it was much more likely that someone had said something unguarded to a family member or friend - and that this had been passed along to the Germans. All of these thoughts troubled Katie as she tried to follow her own routine of refuelling the ambulance van at the American Embassy that afternoon. M. Duclos, the concierge, chatted with her amiably, wondering aloud as he usually did where Katie might take her ambulance that required so much fuel. Finally she was able to get away and begin the long drive to the border. Katie wondered how much longer this would all be possible. For a start, the return of spring would make for longer days and shorter nights. The escape route worked best in darkness. It would be impossible to unload in the village near the Dutch border in broad daylight. All her worries, however, would have to wait until her return to Brussels. Only then could she share with Emily and Sr Cavell what the Captain had told her. It would all have to wait until the morning.



Chapter 7: Dark Shadows Gather Around the Clinic

To Katie's great relief, the delivery that night went like clockwork. With the ambulance loaded with five young soldiers, [Welsh boys this time from a mining district in South Wales], Katie made the longer part of the journey to the convent at Turnhout and waited while Sr Sourire prepared the escape documents. So far, none of the English escapees had been challenged by a German patrol but the faked documents gave everyone a level of comfort in case the Dutch escorts mismanaged dodging the German soldiers who patrolled the area. Mother Johana always welcomed her and tonight, Katie had brought as a treat the last of the real coffee supplied by Ambassador Whitlock. Katie shared it with the Reverend Mother and in defiance of the war and all the pain it had brought, the two of them chatted about the simplest things of life -their work as teachers, the return of warmer weather, the unexpected dampness of the early spring - and the prospects for the first tulips in a week or so.

In the warmth of the convent kitchen, Katie thought briefly of sharing her anxiety with the Reverend Mother but remembered how determined the good nun was not to know the details of the operation in which she was already deeply involved. She waited while the documents for the Welsh boys were completed, then loaded the ambulance again in the barn. Then it was an uneventful run to the border to meet Mademoiselle Herget. If she were meeting Wally, Katie thought, she could have raised with him the warning given by Captain von Neurath. Katie felt feverish having to contain the warning and go about her routine as if nothing were weighing on her mind - nothing more, of course, than engaging in a dangerous activity which might mean death if she were discovered. She would be pleased when she could have time with Emily and Sr Cavell; she needed their guidance and understanding now. Pierre was with her on this occasion, however, and while she couldn't talk about the warning with him, his droll common sense was a wonderful distraction. Katie was so glad of his quiet company after her tumultuous day.

How Pierre came to be with her at all was a sign of his juvenile persistence. He had come on the first runs to Turnhout but once Katie had her routine established she had been determined that he would not endanger his own life recklessly. Pierre was as sulky as any teenager can be when this was put to him and accepted her judgement with a very ill

grace. Katie did a number of trips alone without incident but Sr Cavell had reluctantly agreed to let him accompany Katie on these missions only after determined pleading on his part.

It was a simple, practical matter, Pierre said. He knew that Mademoiselle Herget was rarely available to make the drive from Brussels because she had become the most common agent to meet the escapees in the church yard at Roosendaal. Pierre also knew that Sr Cavell was determined that Katie couldn't go without someone in support: this would mean that she would have to drive back from the Dutch border alone. His last argument proved to be the most persuasive: it made no sense at all to argue that his participation in the escape route put his life at risk. He was the one who had found most of the escaping soldiers anyway: that was more than enough to see him sentenced to death in a German military court. One evening he came with his father to see Sr Cavell and pleaded with her to be able to go with Katie; with a characteristic shrug, M. Moulin reluctantly gave his consent. Sr Cavell knew that for Pierre, this was a personal matter. His older brother, Guillaume, was lost in the Belgian army somewhere- either dead on the battlefield or a prisoner in Germany. Pierre burned to do something - anything- to hit back at the conquerors. He had proved his usefulness and his courage many times already and in the end, Sr Cavell had given in. Tonight, Katie was very pleased that she had.

The delivery had one small complication. Mademoiselle Herget had asked Sr Cavell to allow Pierre to make the border crossing with them this night. Her reasons for doing this were purely practical: the escape route through the oak forests and marshes required an experienced Dutch guide. Even in daylight the journey was difficult; at night, it was almost impossible. Mademoiselle Herget insisted that the time might come when they would have to make an emergency journey - without the time to set up Dutch guides to meet them. Katie would have to wait at the ambulance van until Pierre made the crossing and returned. Katie could see the logic of all this but the wait in the darkness, behind the parish church at Roosendaal were the longest two hours of Katie's life. Her mood wasn't helped by the cool auteur Pierre radiated as he finally stepped out of the darkness beside her and smoothly suggested it was time to be moving.

Katie and Pierre arrived back in the city as dawn was breaking. For much of the return journey they had travelled in silence. Pierre struggled to stay alert and engaged, knowing that Katie needed his energy to stay awake and focussed through the night. Katie needed his support, too: she knew that her return would not bring rest. She had to tell Emily and Sr Cavell exactly what Dieter had said to her. That couldn't wait. She could hope for a quieter day, however. For the very first time since October when they had taken in their first lost soldiers there was no one sheltering at the Berkendael Clinic. The Clinic was also quieter because the Belgian and French nursing sisters had gradually been called away to other placements. Experienced nurses were in great demand and as the numbers of official patients at the Clinic had shrunk, it became impossible for Sr Cavell to keep more than a handful of sisters with her. The burden of nursing the sheltered soldiers, then, fell more and more on Sr Cavell herself.

Katie was driving down the rue de la Culture -almost home- when she saw a German roadblock set up ahead, flagging down every car and cart that went past. Pierre called the warning and Katie pulled the vehicle to the curb. Fortunately, the first tram of the morning carrying workers into the city rumbled past them and their van was hidden from the patrol for just a moment. Katie quickly turned and sped off in the opposite direction.

It was a foolish reaction, she knew. She hadn't broken any law; there was nothing in the ambulance that might incriminate them. Still, the fewer close encounters with German patrols, she thought, the better. The worst thing about having to make this detour was that it added to the length of the long drive but Pierre, who knew the city intimately, directed her to turn right at the first corner and then to ease down the length of the rue Sainte Catherine.

Before the war, the rue Saint Catherine had been an elegant street of government offices and apartment buildings. Now it had an altogether different air. Katie knew that the magnificent grey stone Royal Naval Headquarters on this block had been appropriated by the German Army as their centre in Brussels. The place had acquired a sinister reputation and most ordinary Belgians would avoid the street if they could. Pedestrians were anyway discouraged in the rue. There were armed guards in the grey uniforms of the Imperial German Army on all the corners and at the entrance door fronting the street. It was not uncommon for Belgian pedestrians to be forced to wait on the footpath for German soldiers to come and go.

Katie was concentrating on the road, anxious only to be home. Pierre, always alert and sharp, had to call her attention to the unremarkable moment at the door. "It's M. Duclos," he said to Katie. "And Mademoiselle, isn't that Herr von Neurath with him?" Katie turned just in time to see the two men on the steps of the German Headquarters, framed by the guards on either side of the door. Could she be mistaken? She had a clear view of both men. The street was almost deserted in the early morning light; it seemed impossible but it was true. Katie saw M. Duclos extend his hand and take something from Dieter. Then he touched his hat to the German officer and pulled his hat down to cover his eyes as he slipped from the doorway out into the street.

"M. Duclos must have Embassy business with the German officers, I expect," said Pierre. But there was a caution in his voice and Katie knew at once what the interaction must really mean. Dieter had boasted about his inside information on the secret work of the Clinic; he plainly expected Katie to look for a traitor among the men and women of Berkendael. It was a clever distraction; Katie would never have looked at the American Embassy for the source of the information to Dieter. But now it made sense and it was comforting- deeply comforting. It had troubled Katie terribly to imagine that someone she had trusted and loved at the Clinic might betray them. She wondered for a moment whether Dieter's warning could be relied upon; he hadn't been truthful about the source of his information, after all. And how did Dieter know about the involvement of the Sisters at Turnhout? M. Duclos could hardly have known that part of the story.

All of this would have to wait until she could sit with Sr Cavell and Emily. At this moment, Katie most needed a cup of tea. When she nudged the ambulance through the courtyard door and parked the van in its usual spot, Emily was at the door in a moment to meet her, standing with a steaming cup of tea in her hand. It was exactly the kindness that Katie needed at that moment and she took it gratefully. Emily had another cup ready for Pierre and the three friends stood in the chill of the thin spring morning and drank the tea as if it were the finest champagne. "I need to talk with you and Sr Cavell," Katie said. Emily lifted an eyebrow in inquiry and Katie nodded. "I'll see if I can find the matron. She sat up with me for most of the night; she was asleep when I looked in on her an hour ago."

"Don't wake her," said Katie wearily. "But can we sit for a little while soon? I need to talk so that my thoughts come clear. Just at the moment, I feel as if I can't think anything

straight. Is there enough tea for another cup? If Dieter ever asks me to the Metropole again, I swear I'll steal a whole pound of the best tea I can lay my hands on."

Emily smiled and took the two tea cups. She knew what the routine was and left Katie and Pierre to finish their work with the ambulance van. Emily knew that her sister wouldn't leave the van until she had helped Pierre clean the passenger area carefully. As she stripped the linen from the stretcher bed, she pulled the whole thing out and with Pierre taking one end, they laid it carefully on the cobbles. Pierre hopped in the back and checked that nothing untoward was there. He had to make sure that the English soldiers they had just delivered to the Dutch border hadn't left anything incriminating behind. The last thing they needed at the Clinic now was a visit from curious German soldiers who might want to inspect the van carefully. Katie stood watching but Pierre waved her away. He would take the soiled linen to the laundry and before he went to his own bed he would wash and clean the van. This was once M. Moulin's responsibility but Pierre had more or less taken over the whole part of the rescuing job from his father. It was, he always said, his way of supporting his missing brother, Guillaume.

Katie only had time to boil another kettle for more tea when Sr Cavell herself appeared. She put out her hands and drew Katie to her, kissing her on the cheek in the lovely Belgian manner - three quick pecks that seemed to Katie so much more welcoming after a night's dangerous work than a simple handshake. She was tired but cheerful; even so, she immediately picked up on Katie's unspoken anxiety. She listened as Katie told her story - first of the warning from Captain von Neurath and then her chance witness to the encounter between M. Duclos and Dieter on the steps of the Military Headquarters. Sr Cavell listened to it all and then shook her head sadly.

"I have involved you both in this dangerous business," said Sr Cavell with a bitter smile. She took the girls by the hand and went on: "And your Captain von Neurath is right, I'm afraid. Our lives are in danger; if the Germans know about the secret work of the clinic and the work of the Sisters at Turnhout then every one of us will pay with our lives. I hear the most terrible stories about what the Germans have done to innocent men, women and children so that they can terrify others into obeying them. And we are not innocent, are we?"

"Should we do what Captain von Neurath says then?" asked Emily. She couldn't believe that Sr Cavell would meekly give up and flee to Holland.

"That is a decision each one of us must make for ourselves," said Sr Cavell. "In this case, no one should make anyone do anything they do not want to do - or hold anyone here who believes that they wish to leave. But what about you? You are young and have so much to live for and look forward to. If you leave tonight as Captain von Neurath has said, you will already have done a mighty work for England of which you can be very proud."

Katie would have loved Emily to speak first; her own heart was so full. But Emily looked at Katie with hope and affection, then nodded, willing her sister to speak for both of them. "Sr Cavell," said Katie after another long pause, "Captain von Neurath told me what danger we were in - but that is something we have all known from the moment we began this. We are doing what Mr Holmes asked us to do. Every day, brave young men have to face sudden danger in the field - we see what that does to them when they are lost and abandoned and turn to us for help. They cannot lay down their rifles and return to families and loved ones at home. If anyone suggested that they should, they would be named a coward. I would only consider leaving Brussels if you were to come with us."

Sr Cavell laughed a genuine, happy laugh and squeezed the hands of the girls who had worked so hard with her.

“And I, Miss Katie, will never leave until the Germans go - as I wish they would with all my heart. Is that how you feel, Dr Emily?” asked Sr Cavell anxiously.

“I’m not leaving, Sr, until Mr Holmes shows me the route,” said Emily. “But I do think we should warn the Sisters.

“With that I agree completely,” said Sr Cavell. “Katie, perhaps the three of us could motor down to Turnhout sometime soon and say some prayers together. The Sisters will know what to do. In actual fact their work might be less important in the future. I understand from the newspapers that the Germans are constructing an electric fence along the whole Dutch border. Our plans may have to change there. Now what was the second piece of information that was so important?”

Sr Cavell’s reaction to the suspicious behaviour of M. Duclos was to grimace and smile. “Of course: the perfect person to bribe and suborn. You can be certain, Katie, that your ambulance is not the only thing that M. Duclos keeps his eye on and reports on to Captain von Neurath. M. Duclos would note every person who comes to the door of the Embassy. I’m also certain that he probably has the job of taking the mail to the post box: if so, that would certainly go via the Imperial German Military Headquarters. I think we might ask Ambassador Whitlock to afternoon tea one day soon. Now, since none of us is going to Holland this evening - and we have no special guests at all behind the cupboard- perhaps it might be a good idea to have a hot shower and a quick nap.”

Katie always thought of that cool spring day in April as the beginning of the end of their work at the Berkendael Clinic. They knew that their time was up: indeed, every extra day they could continue their work and every British soldier smuggled out after that moment was a bonus - someone who would never have escaped without their help. The three friends could not know that there were other escape routes organised by brave men and women directing soldiers and airmen to safety in Holland and Switzerland. These groups had no contact with the others and for these people there were times of great danger and constant loneliness as they risked their lives. In London, Mr Mycroft Holmes knew where all the pieces fitted. Mademoiselle Herget carried money and forged documents to all of them and was often present at the crucial moment when local Belgian and Dutch resistance leaders set off through woods and fields to the border and safety. The electric fence certainly slowed some of the traffic but Roosendaal, the particular village that was the conduit for Berkendael escapees, used dense oak forest and marshland as their route into Holland; it was the kind of country where only an experienced person would venture and where it was impossible to build and maintain an electric fence.

Indeed, the next four months saw fewer calls on their work although the toll of rescued soldiers grew by late summer to one hundred and fifty. The first escapees in the autumn of 1914 were mostly soldiers lost in the confusion of the fighting around the Belgian city of Mons. Later, most of the lost soldiers had been cut off and left behind on the battlefields around Ypres. Whatever the circumstances, the story was dismally the same in every case. The British soldiers were frightened, broken, dispirited and often wounded. They were always traumatised by the battle and each one had a story to tell of the incredible noise, blood and stink of the battlefield. Emily’s skills in field medicine improved quickly although it was often weeks between a soldier’s injury on the battlefield and their finding their way to the Berkendael Clinic and she found she had to deal with serious infections and fevers. Thanks to the American Ambassador, she always had the best medical equipment that could be obtained.

Often it took weeks of nursing care before a wounded soldier was well enough to attempt the escape. Even so, in the year that the girls spent in Brussels, seven British soldiers died in the clinic and in these terribly sad circumstances a different procedure was put into place. Pierre would quietly find Fr Stirling Gahan, an English priest in the city, who came to the Clinic to comfort the dying man and later to read the burial service. Sr Cavell, Katie and Emily stood silently at these times - often the only witnesses to the last moments of a brave young soldier. The ambulance then came into use for quite a different purpose; M. Moulin and Pierre would accompany Katie and the body to the convent at Turnhout where the two men, father and son, prepared a grave and Mother Johana said prayers in French. Afterwards, Sr Cavell would write to the dead soldier's parents to let them know what had happened in the last days of their son's life. M. Moulin would take the letter, together with the soldier's identification tags, to Mr Whitlock at the Embassy; eventually, the precious letter and identification tags would find their way to England.

And so the spring became summer. Captain von Neurath became Major von Neurath in July; he continued to call on Katie and she gradually began to look forward to lunches at the Metropole Hotel. Katie became adept at carrying off all sorts of treats from the table- although Ambassador Whitlock became a much more reliable source of tea and coffee than the hotel dining room. The conversation that had so frightened Katie in April was never repeated and Dieter never alluded to it. Katie couldn't help but like the handsome young man who was kind and attentive to her but who never again tried to kiss her or press her into any kind of commitment. "If only the war were over," Katie would often think as she walked back to Berkendael Clinic after these little moments of luxury in her otherwise grim and dangerous life.



Chapter 8: Final Delivery:

High summer brought sad memories for both the girls. They had arrived in Brussels in August 1914 -just as the city was about to fall to the Germans. They had been present when the proud conquerors strode into the broken nation of Belgium and they had been witnesses to the dark pall imposed on the beautiful old city by the German military uniforms. Their greatest sadness in the summer of 1915 was that the weather was once again so beautiful: clear, sunny skies and warm days that were made for ice cream and lolling about on holidays. Instead, this was a time of grief and shame for a proud people. Twelve months ago, Sr Cavell, Katie and Emily had begun the dangerous job of rescuing the stranded Allied soldiers and treating wounded German soldiers who were in need. Now, the high summer had returned. They had been warned that the German authorities were watching the Clinic; every day the girls prayed that their work would continue for just a little longer. They knew, however, that the future for them and the Clinic was bleak.

Katie was woken one morning in early August by a grim faced Emily. "I think you had better come down to the surgery straight away," was all that she would say. "I'm needed there now. Please be quick." Katie washed her face and dressed quickly before slipping downstairs. The door to the surgery was closed and locked- always a sign that what was happening called for discretion. Pierre answered the door as soon as she knocked.

Emily had set up her surgery in the courtyard room with the biggest windows. Electricity was uncertain now and Emily much preferred natural light when she could get it. Her work at the operating table this morning was lit by bright summer sunshine. When Katie arrived, Emily and Sr Cavell were anxiously bending over a British officer whose unshaven young face was lined with pain and grime. He was stretched out on the white linen, his muddied boots still on his feet and his dirty pack slung under the table. The soldier's head was swathed in bloody bandages and his arm was in a dirty, makeshift sling. Katie was only able to identify him as British because he retained odd pieces of his uniform. Beside him a young British soldier who was no more than a child was telling their story in a strong Cockney accent. He turned as Katie entered the room and his face was transformed. He still looked hungry and broken but his fear had given way to astonishment and transparent joy. He flashed Katie the most wonderful smile and stammered out, "Bloody hell! It's Miss Bland." Then the boy was in her arms, all pretence at adulthood swept away. The boy's face pressed against Katie's chest as he sobbed and laughed at the same time. Katie held him and comforted him, stroking his matted hair and rubbing his neck. Finally the boy drew away and looked Katie full in the face.

The soldier boy was Arthur Beavers. And the young wounded officer stretched on the examining table was Captain Danny Rogers. Katie made the introductions to Sr Cavell and Dr Emily as graciously as if this were a Sunday morning outside church. She then repeated the introductions in French for Pierre. Danny was exhausted and delirious but once Arthur had composed himself, he gave the two women a bow and a cheerful grin and solemnly

shook hands with Pierre. Even though Danny's situation was obviously serious, all three women were touched by Arthur's infectious optimism and spirit. Giving comfort to people they might know from England had to happen sooner or later, Katie thought.

Katie had often thought of Danny and of Arthur; they were among the people she always prayed for by name as she finished the day. Until this moment, however, she had never put the two together. Katie had always hoped that Arthur's plans to enlist even as a child had come to nothing but Wally had told her once as they chatted on one of his visits to Brussels that Arthur had been accepted into uniform and was, he thought, somewhere in France. He knew nothing else. Because the girls were in enemy occupied territory, regular mail deliveries were almost impossible - even through the American Embassy. They had odd snatches of news from Wally when he visited and they were able to follow the course of the war from Belgian and German newspapers. Living in isolation from family and friends was just another hardship that the girls had long ago had to accept.

Katie took in the present situation very quickly. Danny needed surgery and Emily and Sr Cavell would not want to do that with an audience. Katie gestured for Pierre to accompany her and she took the two boys to the kitchen where the cook was looking forlornly at the few ingredients in the cupboard and wondering how it would ever turn into breakfast. Everyone was on short commons now, of course, as the war bit harder and harder into normal supply lines. Pierre could see the dilemma. What was needed at this moment was a real celebration - something more than the few rolled oats and dry goods in the pantry would allow. He spoke quickly to Katie in French and she nodded, reaching for a jam jar on the kitchen shelf to retrieve a tiny roll of the last precious dollars given to her for emergencies by Ambassador Whitlock. Pierre soon had his hat on and was headed up the Rue de la Culture to shop on the Black Market. It was illegal, of course, but the only place these days where one could buy butter, bacon and eggs.

With Pierre gone, Katie could hug Arthur and try to give some comfort to a child who had clearly suffered enormously in the year since she had seen him. She made them both a cup of tea and Katie was happy to listen to Arthur as he drank the tea as if it were the nectar of the gods. There was obviously a long story to tell and Katie decided to wait until Emily and Sr Cavell were with them. Just for a start, it was enough to have Arthur seated at the kitchen table - a reminder in his smile and his cheerful voice of the world as it used to be - before the war and all their present danger. There were some practical things that she should be doing, of course, including running a bath and finding him some clean clothes. This was normally Pierre's job with the newly arrived escapees but Katie led Arthur to the big wardrobe in the garden shed where Pierre kept his collection of civilian cast offs. Just as she was despairing of finding anything that would fit the boy, Pierre came through the door with a stick of butter, half a dozen eggs, a bag of sausages and a whole kilogram of bacon. This treasure had taken the very last of their dollars but everyone would have something good to eat that morning.

Pierre's arrival solved another problem. Katie was dreading taking Arthur to the bathroom. She guessed that the young man would be naturally modest with his old teacher and reluctant to hand over all his clothes to be washed before he himself went into the tub. Pierre guessed this and affecting the most confident Gallic swagger, waved Katie out of the room and closed the door to the bathroom firmly. By the time the cook had turned Pierre's Black Market treasure into a breakfast that could grace the dining room of the grandest English hotel, Pierre and Arthur had emerged clean and sweet. The English boy was dressed in some of Pierre's things and he looked altogether better for the transformation.

Back in the surgery, Sr Cavell had stripped away Danny's filthy uniform and washed him clean of three months of dirt and grime. The wound in his shoulder had begun to heal itself although Emily was by no means certain that Danny would recover the full use of his left arm. The head wound was more serious and showed signs of an infection that had gone untreated but it too had begun to heal. If Danny had been able to see a doctor early, Emily knew, he would certainly have been sent back to England and the services of a skilled surgeon who would be able to cut bone and rebuild. It was beyond anything she could safely do at Berkendael. Emily guessed from his condition that the infection in the head wound had settled; certainly, the fever that would have accompanied it had gone. Arthur, it seems, had the management of the wound at its most dangerous time. What she could do now was give Danny what he most needed to help his own body to recover: lots of rest and plenty of good food and nursing care. Emily cleaned the wound on his head and changed the bandage. Then she reset the arm with a clean sling and made Danny as comfortable as she could with the opiate pain killer that would take away much of the present stress. When he was asleep, Emily and Sr Cavell joined the group at the table for a late but very welcome breakfast.

"Pierre," said Sr Cavell grandly in French, "You have outdone yourself. I don't think that even Miss Katie has anything as fine as this when she dines with Major von Neurath at the Metropole Hotel."

"I'm sure she does," said Pierre airily. "After all, that's where I bought all this. It's the only place in Brussels where bacon is to be found. The Belgian cook in the kitchen there is making a very tidy fund on which to retire when the Germans are finally driven out. I think that the Black Market is a little less dark when it's the Germans themselves who are being swindled."

For a little while, everyone -including the cook- settled on the breakfast in front of them. Katie quietly kept topping up Arthur's plate. When the company had finished eating, the cook cleared the plates, settled a big tea pot on the table and excused herself to do the washing up. Then it was time for Arthur to tell his story. Katie introduced the subject. : "So, Arthur: it was just as I feared. You found someone at the Recruiting Centre who would accept you even though you were clearly underage."

"Yes, Miss - the third Centre I went to that afternoon took me in. I collected a box on the ears and a kick up the pants from sergeants at the other two who wanted to send me home to my mother. Of course I know now what you wanted to tell me that last afternoon of school but if I had stayed in England, God knows what would have happened to Danny - that is, to Captain Rogers. Because I had to go out of my way to enlist - out of the East End where people knew me and my family- I ended up in a West Country regiment. We trained in England for about a month and then we were on the train to France and absolute bloody hell. Sorry, Miss Bland - I shouldn't swear. And I didn't, you know, until I was in France. It was the closest place to hell this side of the grave- swearing's the least of your worries. I know it can't have been easy living in Brussels under the Germans but I don't know how to describe what it's like in the trenches. You're always filthy with the mud all around and underfoot all the time. You live in it and soon, with lots of men about - it stinks. And the noise of the artillery is constant and deafening too. There are hours of doing nothing but waiting and then suddenly the whistle blows and you're face to face with German troops coming at you over the barricade or you're running through barbed wire and machine guns

towards the German lines, watching your mates fall beside you. We were in the fighting in front of Paris for a month before they could rotate us out and give us a spell.”

“By then, there wasn’t much left of our platoon. We arrived in France with twenty boys and by the end of the first month, there were only eleven of us left intact. Our lieutenant and our sergeant were gone and every one of us felt torn apart. For a week or so we could have a break, clean up and eat some hot food before they put us back into the fighting. I had my fourteenth birthday while I was out of the line and received my first mail from home at the same time. There was a funny sort of note from Wally saying nothing about where he was or what he was doing so I guessed that Mr Mycroft Holmes had him somewhere. They sent us back for another month of fighting - same ground and same result: more mud and lice and shit and more young blokes dead or wounded. It took two weeks this time to rest us and get us ready to go back in. The regiment I was in was so cut up that they had to patch us into another one to make us up a full strength. This time we were sent East, headed for the fighting in Eastern Belgium near Ypres.”

“You can imagine my surprise when I found myself in Captain Rogers’ platoon. It took him a moment to recognise me but once he did, he claimed me like a long lost friend. To be honest, Miss Bland, I didn’t much like Mr Rogers when he was teaching at Durwood Street. I was always glad that I was in your class and not his. He meant well, I’m sure, but he seemed to be out of his depth and grumpy with it - as if he didn’t really like us kids from the East End. But when I met him in the march up to the Front in May, he was like a different person. He was quiet and reserved, as if he had forgotten how to smile, but for all that he was genuine and really kind. The war had changed him. Well, I guess it changes all of us. Some of us it makes coarse and foul mouthed and unfeeling; Danny became decent and good. Like you, he was furious that I had been accepted into the army even though I was under age. He wanted to send me home but I wouldn’t go. Then he wanted to fix me up as some batman to a senior officer so I would be out of the front line, as it were, but I told him I didn’t volunteer to shine the shoes and wash the smalls of some toff in uniform. So Danny had me moved into his platoon and we looked after each other from that moment. After six weeks of terrible fighting, our trench was over run one night and most of our boys were killed or run off. One of the Germans came at me with a pistol and I thought I was a gonner but Danny weighed in and took him on. In the end, he was the one shot in the head and the shoulder as we stood and fought in our trench. I went down beside him and supported him until dawn broke and we found ourselves among the dead. We had to lie still a whole day - Danny moaning and in agony for just a drop of water. No one came near us: the battle had moved on. When it was dark, I helped Danny up and we struggled a mile across the field into a deserted farmhouse where I could get him a drink and wrap a bandage around his head. And we’ve been on the move ever since.”

“Once I realised that we were behind enemy lines, the game became moving at night and staying off roads as much as we could. Farmers helped us when they could; one kind farmer let us stay in his barn a whole week so Danny could get strong enough to move again. He gave me milk and cheese for Danny but everyone was fearful of German field patrols who were killing civilians who sheltered soldiers. We had to move on. At last, six weeks after we were knocked out of the lines we made it to a rail yard and I could get Danny on board a wagon. That’s how we got here to Brussels. Pierre here found us somehow. And now we’re here. For the first time in six weeks I’m clean and full of food. I can relax a little because Danny is getting good care. And for the first time in a year I’m comfortable and not frightened every minute of the day.”

There was the most complete silence in the kitchen as Arthur told his story. Many, many times Katie and Emily and Sr Cavell had heard stories just like this told at the same table but they were always struck by the humility and the dignity of the young soldiers who spoke lightly of their most extraordinary courage. At this moment, Katie's heart was swelling with love for this boy and pride at what he - a boy from the poorest part of London- had managed to do. She took his hand and held it tightly. Arthur was a child but he had done a man's work in the trenches. He was only fourteen years old but he had stayed with his commanding officer in the most desperate and dangerous circumstances in which he could easily have escaped himself. His faithfulness and honour were something he just took for granted. What he had found remarkable and wanted to talk about was not his spiritual strength but his physical weakness - he spoke first of the smell and the sounds of the battlefield that had worried the boy so much. He never mentioned his own courage or his honour in horrible circumstances.

An hour later and Arthur was asleep in the little ward behind the cupboards. He would only leave Danny, however, once he had seen for himself that the man was safe and comfortable. In the kitchen of the Berkendael Clinic, Katie sat with a cup of tea and explained to Sr Cavell all that there was to tell about the two young men now in their care. The older woman listened patiently and said when Katie was done, "it sounds as if young Captain Rogers has learned a great deal in the last year. What you began to teach him at Durwood Street he has learned in full measure from one of his own students. He's a good man, Katie - and Arthur is a very good man! And you say that he is Wally Beavers' brother! The war has brought pain and misery, for sure, but it has also brought to light great courage and decency. Wally and Arthur would be among the best Englishmen I've ever met."

In the week that followed, Danny recovered some of his strength and much of his cheerfulness. He began to sit up and to eat and even to walk about a little in the sunny courtyard of the clinic. His appetite returned and he spent hours just sitting and talking with Katie, Sr Cavell and Pierre who loved having a fluent French speaker at hand. Katie gave just as much attention to Arthur. Dressed in Pierre's clothes, he could accompany Katie on walks through the city. It was wonderful after being in uniform on the battlefield and then harassed and chased through Occupied Belgium that he could be a boy again and just enjoy exploring and pottering about.

Katie and Emily always remembered this week as something of an idyll - a lovely pause before the great storm broke around them. A week after Arthur and Danny had come to Berkendael, they were awakened just after midnight by someone knocking at the door of the clinic. M. Moulin went to answer the knock and admitted a distraught looking Major von Neurath. He was dressed formally and he tried to be formal and correct as a way of hiding his anxiety. Soon, Katie and Emily and Sr Cavell were all in the kitchen as the major walked up and down uncomfortably, his hat in his hands, struggling with what to say. Finally, after searching anxiously for the words that would not come easily, Dieter gripped the edge of the table and looked down.

"Katie," he said, "some weeks ago I warned you that my office had been informed about the work that the Clinic here has been doing to help French, Belgian and British soldiers to escape. My suggestion then was that you go to Holland as soon as you could."

Katie had known that this moment would come someday soon; she had never expected that the Dieter himself would come to arrest them. "Her von Neurath," she said calmly, "the Clinic has never turned away anyone in need. You know that some of the men we

have helped have been German soldiers. Are you come to arrest us now? It's 1 am; we would have been here in the morning, you know."

"Katie, I have been walking the streets of Brussels for two hours, struggling with what I should do." Dieter walked about the kitchen as he talked. His hands were agitated as he tried to calm himself. "I had dinner this evening in the company of the Military Commander of the city, Baron von Bissing. He boasted to the table that a dangerous nest of enemy agents has been exposed operating within a clinic here in Brussels. He named you, Sr Cavell, as the principal agent but he said that the ambulance operated by the clinic and a female doctor here were also enemy agents. To the company he acknowledged the good work I had done in running the organisation to ground. In fact, I have been sitting on the information for six weeks, hoping that you would leave of your own free will before you could be arrested. The problem is that I am being promoted to join the Imperial General Staff at the Emperor's headquarters at Spa. My successor has taken my desk and the information on your work. He has taken the information straight to Baron von Bissing - crediting me with exposing the nest of spies."

"And just by coming here now, Herr von Neurath, you are risking your own life," said Sr Cavell. "Do you know when the arrest will be made?"

"It's to be done quietly," said Dieter, "so that local people aren't aroused or alarmed: Belgian police rather than German soldiers. But the arresting officers will take you all straight to the rue Sainte Catherine. It's going to happen at dawn tomorrow. I must tell you that Baron von Bissing has already decided that you will all be shot."

The room was absolutely silent and then the quiet was broken by the terrible sobs of the brave young man who had come to warn his friends of what they must face. Sr Cavell nodded to Katie who stepped forward and drew the broken Dieter into her arms, hugging him gently as he tried to compose himself. Emily and Sr Cavell stepped back a little and gave Katie and Dieter a few moments. It was Katie who spoke first. "I hate this war, Dieter. When it is over, we will talk about this morning and I will be able to thank you properly for your courage and decency in coming here now. But you must go. It won't do to be found anywhere near us - at any time of day or night. Sometime soon, I hope, sometime soon." Katie couldn't say any more; her heart was too full.

Dieter stood up and shook hands with Sr Cavell and Emily - who for just a moment was willing to think well of Dieter von Neurath. Then with one last sad look at Katie, he put his shoulders back, bowed, clicked his heels and left the room, slipping silently past M. Moulin out the gate and into the rue de la Culture.

"How much petrol is in the ambulance, Katie?" Sr Cavell asked conversationally as she put the kettle on the stove.

"The tank is half full, I think," Katie replied. "There's not enough petrol to get to the Dutch border and back, I wouldn't think."

"Well, it only has to make a one way trip," said Sr Cavell with a grim smile. "Come on: we all have to move very quickly indeed. Pack just your most essential things. I'll rouse Arthur and Captain Rogers. Katie, will you ask M. Moulin to come to see me immediately?"

Katie and Emily had often wondered how their adventure in Brussels would end but neither of them thought that they would be struggling in the predawn darkness to choose which

things to take with them. Despite the extraordinary sadness and danger of the moment, neither of the girls cried or became flustered - although both of them said silent prayers. The night was warm and mild but both the girls put on their winter coats and filled the pockets with the few items of jewellery they had brought from England with them. Katie took all the letters her parents had written to her; Emily quickly filled the little brown leather bag that carried her stethoscope and her basic medical kit. Both girls put on their best walking boots which looked odd under their nurses' uniforms. Ten minutes later, they were downstairs assisting Danny to dress and making sure that they had their best stretcher in the ambulance. They would need it for the border crossing; Danny was quite unequal yet to hard walking through rough country.

The little group silently assembled at the ambulance. Danny was safely on the stretcher in the well. Arthur had climbed in beside him. Now that the moment had come, the enormity of what they were doing struck them. "I haven't had any time to write a note Ambassador Whitlock," said Katie anxiously. "I should at least try to thank to him and apologize for leaving the ambulance at Roosendaal."

"I'll tell him," said Sr Cavell gently. "I'm sure I'll see him where ever I am kept."

And then Katie and Emily knew for sure what they had always suspected: that they were to make this last journey alone - without the dear woman whom they had grown to love so deeply. Sr Cavell blinked back tears but she smiled as well. "Mr Holmes told me that he would send me two good girls. He was very right. Please tell him how this finished - although I think that Major von Neurath's visit is going to have to remain our secret. " And here she took Emily in her arms and kissed her before turning to Katie.

"I won't try to persuade you to come with us," said Emily. "You always said that you wouldn't leave until the Germans left Brussels. I knew that you meant it. I don't know what to say now: but I think you know anyway what I want to tell you."

Katie said nothing, her heart so full that she was close to tears - and absolutely determined that she would have the ambulance in the rue de la Culture before she gave way to her feelings. Instead, she hugged her dear friend and kissed her. "I would have liked to have said goodbye to M. Moulin," said Katie.

"I have asked him to go to the American Embassy to tell Ambassador Whitlock what has happened," said Sr Cavell. "It may be that he can get a message to Mr Beavers. Oh, and I've been saving this for just such a moment," said Sr Cavell. She reached into the pocket of her uniform and withdrew an envelope. "There are enough American dollars here to pay anyone who might meet you on the other side of the border to get you to Amsterdam. It will be hard travelling with Captain Rogers; you may need all of this. Besides, the less cash sitting around here tomorrow morning, the less the Germans can take from us. "

It was exactly the kind of practical detail that smoothed the next awful moments. Katie got into the driver's side of the van and Emily climbed in beside her in the front seat. Pierre scrambled in on the opposite side of Arthur. In the absence of M. Moulin, Sr Cavell swung the great wooden gate open and Katie nudged the vehicle slowly into the darkness of the rue de la Culture. Then they were on their way, their hearts throbbing with sadness and the almost hysterical hope that by daybreak they would be on the other side of the Belgian border and in safety.



Chapter 9: Night Watch

The band of fugitives was not to know it but the next half hour was the most dangerous part of the journey. There was a chance, of course, that they could be stopped at any time along the route to Roosendaal but the German presence in the centre of Brussels was much more obvious than it was in the country and every street corner could harbour a German checkpoint. Katie willingly took direction from Pierre who knew every short cut and backstreet in the city. They didn't relax until the city was well beyond them and the warm, Flemish countryside enveloped them.

Most of the journey was made in silence - although Pierre and Arthur made remarkably good progress as they slid between English and French. Danny was intrigued by the good natured cool the two boys sustained - as if fleeing an occupied city just before a dawn raid was the most natural thing in the world. Katie was less sanguine. She knew that if Baron von Bissing knew about their work at the Clinic, he may also know the details of the escape route they used and that he would soon have soldiers there to take them down. It was still dark when they arrived at the churchyard at Roosendaal although the first grey light of dawn was showing in the east.

The big test now was Pierre's ability to guide the little group on the escape route. Without the Dutch guides, they would have to rely on Pierre's recall of the two trips he had made previously. More important than knowing each copse and fen, the Dutch guides had known the regular route of the German patrols through the area. Katie recalled that the patrol came by every half hour; it wouldn't do to set out and meet the patrol coming towards them. She suggested that they park the ambulance and hide, wait for one patrol to come by and then move in the half hour window between one patrol's leaving and the next one arriving. It seemed the best plan that they could think of so Katie unloaded everyone into the churchyard and drove the ambulance back into the town to park it well out of sight.

The plan almost came unstuck soon after it began. Emily, Pierre and the two British soldiers withdrew into the church porch as Katie drove away; they watched for her return only to see the patrol - five young soldiers in grey uniforms - come marching up the street towards them. If Katie had set out as she had planned, she would have met them coming towards her. But Roosendaal was a little village and the regular appearance of the ambulance in the church yard had certainly been noted by alert local people who guessed its purpose. No one was more alert than the Curé Bertrand, the local parish priest, who was up early to walk to church to say the daily mass. He needed no explanation from Katie as

to what was happening and he cheerfully smiled and put his finger to his lips in warning. Fr Bertrand knew the patrol's cycle and quickly swept Katie into the shelter of the Rectory just in time. He met the patrol and as he always did, cheekily invited them to join him in the church for mass. They just as cheerfully declined the welcome and the priest sent them on their way with a wave. When the patrol was out of sight, the Curé was able to deliver Katie safe and sound to her friends in the church porch. Katie solved one very simple practical problem by leaving the keys to the ambulance with the Cure. With a smile, he promised to complain bitterly to the patrol the next morning that an ambulance van was cluttering up the street outside his quiet rectory.

It was certainly time to go. Arthur and Katie took the first turn at carrying Danny on the stretcher. Everyone knew that Pierre would need all his energies finding the way to Holland in the next few kilometres. The little band was no sooner out of the porch and heading towards the safety of a copse of oak trees when they noticed a man walking purposefully out of the forest towards them. There were two other men behind him. The little party froze in fear, then Arthur cried out first, recognising his brother who was now running towards them. If Arthur had not been carrying the ambulance stretcher with his friend in both hands, Wally would have swung him into the air like a child and hugged him tightly. At this moment, both the girl knew that their immediate danger was over.

Two days later, they were all in England. Captain Danny Rogers was safely in a military hospital in London where the senior surgeons marvelled at the care that the young man had received from the boy who had never left his side and who almost certainly saved the young officer's life. Danny would carry the wound on his neck and shoulder for the rest of his life but with good care he would recover all of his mobility and most of his health. Arthur went home to Whitechapel with his big brother for some well deserved time off. After a week or so, both boys accepted the girls' invitation to join them in their house in Curzon Street. It was more comfortable than the tiny home in Whitechapel but more than that, the friends who had shared such danger together wanted more than anything to have one another's company for a little while. Pierre was delighted to be able to spend time with Arthur and the boys would go every day together to see Danny in the convalescent home in Russell Square where he was lodged.

Soon after their return, they were invited to call on Mr Mycroft Holmes who met them in an office in Whitehall and who spent a very long time hearing their story while a young stenographer recorded every word. Katie spoke honestly about her relationship with Dieter von Neurath but Mr Holmes instructed the stenographer not to make any record of the friendship. As well, all reference to Dieter's warnings were expunged from the record; Katie guessed that the reason for this was the great danger that Dieter would be in if any word of what he had done ever reached German ears. When all of them had reported as clearly as they could what had happened, their statements were put together with all the names of the British soldiers whom Sr Cavell and the girls had helped to escape. A digest of the report went to the Prime Minister and, Katie and Emily soon learned, to the King himself.

Of course what the girls wanted most was word on Sr Cavell - and here the news was not good. She had calmly waited with M. Moulin that morning after Lieutenant Rogers, Arthur,

Pierre and the girls had gone. The two of them went carefully through the Clinic, collecting anything at all that might incriminate anyone - particularly Ambassador Whitlock or Dieter von Neurath. M. Moulin set the incinerator going and Sr Cavell burnt all the financial records of the Clinic and all the correspondence she had had with Mr Holmes. Then she had a final cup of tea with M. Moulin who had decided that this might be a good time to visit his cousin in Antwerp. He was gone well before the Belgian police surrounded the Clinic and banged noisily on the door.

In prison, Sr Cavell made no attempt to mislead her captors. She herself, she insisted, was entirely responsible for the life and work of the clinic and she readily acknowledged that she had helped Allied soldiers to escape. Her cool, calm and gentle manner infuriated Baron von Bissing who put Sr Cavell before a military court and charged her with aiding the enemy. Sr Cavell readily agreed that that was exactly what she had done for a whole year of German occupation of the city; no matter how she was bullied, however, she would not implicate anyone else in what she had done or tell the German authorities how many soldiers had been rescued or how the soldiers had been assisted over the border. To threats and warning, Sr Cavell remained calm and dignified. She was, even her German captors admitted, completely composed and courageous. In late August, Sr Edith Cavell was sentenced to death.

Ambassador Whitlock did everything he could to save his friend. He pressed the German authorities to spare her, arguing that if Sr Cavell were put to death, people all over the world - but particularly in the United States - would hate Germany and see it as a country that murdered brave, patriotic women. The German authorities in Brussels were implacable: Baron von Bissing, the Military Governor of the city, was determined. He wished, he told Ambassador Whitlock, that he had "other old English ladies to shoot as well." When he heard this, the Ambassador stopped his pleading. He knew that nothing could touch such a stone hearted man.

All of this Mr Holmes shared with the girls who found themselves at once furious and broken hearted. Katie always wished that she had tried harder to plead with Sr Cavell to come with them on the morning of their escape but Emily was more realistic. "She was our friend for a whole year, Katie," she would say. "We both knew from the beginning how she would behave. And if it hadn't been for your friend, Major von Neurath, we would be there in a prison cell too. We may not be old English ladies, but Baron von Bissing would have been delighted to kill us as well."

A fortnight after their return, Wally quietly went back to his important work in Holland. The girls knew that they couldn't write to him and they just hoped that he would pop up again at the most unexpected moment- as he had done in the woods outside the church in Roosendaal. The last thing he did before he left was to persuade Mr Mycroft Holmes what a treasure he had in Arthur and Pierre. They had showed again and again their courage and pluck. They were exactly the kind of boys that Mr Mycroft Holmes was always looking for and Mr Holmes was able to use some of his considerable influence to prevent Arthur from being drafted back into regular uniform. Before the war was over, Arthur and Pierre were to have many more adventures together - most of them behind enemy lines.

Katie went back to her school; Emily went back to the Royal Free Hospital. It was so difficult to rebuild their old lives after the agony of the year in Belgium but as Emily said, she could now look every man in uniform in the street in the eye and know that she had done her best for her family and her country. Katie wrote a long letter to her parents - the letter she had always wanted to write in the darkest days in Brussels - and Mr Holmes read

it through and was happy to send it on to Hong Kong. Katie did not name Dieter von Neurath but she hinted that she wished the peace could come quickly for a great many reasons.

Katie knew that the King had read Mr Holmes' account of their time in Brussels because one October afternoon, she received a note - hand delivered to her at her school - bearing the unmistakable Royal Crest on the elegant creamy paper she had seen before. It was a simple, personal note from Her Majesty the Queen, asking Katie and her sister to call upon her the next morning at 6 am. An automobile would call for them at 5.45 at Curzon Street. Katie's heart lurched as she read the note. She didn't need to be told what it meant. For an anxious moment, Katie scratched around on her desk to find writing paper and an envelope so that she could reply.

The city was quiet as the girls made their way through the dark London streets in a Rolls Royce motor car to the great palace gates. Mr Mycroft Holmes was waiting there for them and took them to the Queen's morning room. Queen Mary stood as the girls were announced and took their hands. She nodded to Mr Holmes and he bowed and left. The girls had met the Queen on other occasions - happy times when she had come to encourage the young men and women from Hong Kong studying in the great city. But this time was different. None of them knew what to say that could offer comfort. All that Queen Mary could say was, "Mr Whitlock has advised the King that it will be early this morning." The girls stood silently with the Queen who was too moved to say anything more. Each one of them prayed silently.

At this moment, Sr Cavell was being driven from her prison cell through the streets of Brussels in a German military vehicle to a field outside the city. Dressed in her nurse's uniform, Edith Cavell went with great courage and dignity to a wooden post where she was stood in front of twelve young soldiers armed with rifles. She was quickly blindfolded and stood up straight. In a moment, she was dead. The German authorities refused Ambassador Whitlock's request that he take Sr Cavell's body away. Instead, she was quickly buried in a grave dug beside the field and the young soldiers were dismissed. Baron von Bissing duly reported her death to the German Emperor who, it was said, completely approved of what had been done.

Four years later, Katie and Emily stood with Pierre, Arthur, Danny, Wally and Mr Holmes in Norwich Cathedral. Both the King and Queen were present as Sr Cavell's body was returned to England and buried with great honour and dignity in the cathedral church among other great men and women who had served their country in peace and war. Also in the great church were some of the one hundred and fifty British soldiers who had escaped from Brussels with the help of Sr Cavell; indeed, these were the men who carried the coffin draped in the Union Jack on its last few journey from the cathedral door to its place of honour in the sanctuary. These young men more than the politicians and dignitaries who crowded the church knew what Sr Cavell had done -and what she was. Even now, much of what had happened at the Berkendael Clinic was a secret but the Queen made a special point after the service of finding Pierre and Arthur to thank them personally for what they had done. Emily and Katie lingered in the church when all the others had gone. "She always said that she would leave Brussels only when the Germans

had gone,” Emily said with a sad smile. “And she has come home now.” Katie took her hand and together the girls walked out into the thin English sunshine, remembering the friend with whom they had shared a tumultuous year of service to the frightened, wounded and brave young men of France, Belgium, Germany and Britain who for a little while had been their brothers. They would never forget.



King George and Queen Mary at a Memorial to Sr Edith Cavell 1919