

High as the Heavens

KATE BRESLIN



BETHANYHOUSE

a division of Baker Publishing Group
Minneapolis, Minnesota

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Published by Bethany House Publishers
11400 Hampshire Avenue South
Bloomington, Minnesota 55438
www.bethanyhouse.com

Bethany House Publishers is a division of
Baker Publishing Group, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Printed in the United States of America

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Breslin, Kate, author.

Title: High as the heavens / Kate Breslin.

Description: Minneapolis, Minnesota : Bethany House, a division of Baker Publishing Group, [2017]

Identifiers: LCCN 2016050055 | ISBN 9780764230363 (hardcover) | ISBN 9780764217814 (softcover)

Subjects: LCSH: World War, 1914-1918—Underground movements—Fiction.

| Women spies—Belgium—Fiction. | Man-woman relationships—Fiction. |

GSAFD: Historical fiction. | Christian fiction. | Love stories. | Spy stories.

Classification: LCC PS3602.R4575 H54 2017 | DDC 813/.6—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2016050055>

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This is a work of historical reconstruction; the appearances of certain historical figures are therefore inevitable. All other characters, however, are products of the author's imagination, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

Cover design by Kathleen Lynch / Black Kat Design

Cover photograph of woman: Arcangel / Malgorzata Maj

Cover photograph of airplanes: Arcangel / Valentino Sani

Author is represented by Hartline Literary Agency

17 18 19 20 21 22 23 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

To my brothers, Michael and Matthew,
and in memory of Steven James—childhood superheroes,
fighting for truth, justice, and saving the world.

For the sanctity of all human life.

For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is his love for those who fear him;
as far as the east is from the west,
so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

—Psalm 103:11–12

CHAPTER 1

BRUSSELS 1917

Like manna from heaven, the words fell from the sky. Evelyn Marche snatched at one of the blue leaflets fluttering down outside the Royal Palace and glanced at the message, though she already knew it by heart.

She tilted her head and tried to catch a glimpse of the plane, now obscured by dark rain clouds in the October sky. The engine's faint whine mingled with the distant boom of artillery fire from the Front, and she was seized with a familiar ache, the memory of another time and place.

She stared at the leaflet in her hand: *Have courage for a little time; we shall soon deliver you.*

It wasn't the first time a daring Allied flyer had braved the anti-aircraft guns at la Grand-Place to bring the citizens of Brussels hope. Three long years had seen many such promises, each one empty to a city beaten down by German occupation and the oppression of war. With every barrage of blue notes came the pain of remembering those she had lost: her uncle, sister, brother . . . and the man she loved.

As the days and months wore on without an end in sight,

the Allies' promises grew wearying and repetitious, and finally maddening in their naïve improbability.

Until today.

Anticipation quickened her pulse as she gazed at the sidewalk, now littered in blue. She had finished her nursing shift at the improvised hospital inside the palace minutes before, and her chance conversation with a patient, a French corporal named Jean Duval, was fresh in her mind.

"We shall soon deliver you . . ." she breathed aloud, and the promise took on new meaning.

She'd found Nicholas and Zoe.

A wave of emotion seized her. Eve would never forget the Germans' assault on the Belgian university town of Louvain three years earlier. The dreadful night her brother and sister disappeared had left her and Mama not knowing if they were buried beneath the city's rubble or, like so many others, forced onto trains bound for Germany's labor camps.

"Your brother and sister were on the train, but they fled near Liège with my cousins and made their way to France."

Eve could still hardly believe it. Her casual inquiry into a patient's family had led to the corporal's account of how his cousins, Armand and Michel Rousseau, had met up with Nikki and Zoe on the train. The four of them had escaped, and with the help of kindly Belgians and French had made their way south to the Rousseaus' family home in Anor, France, not far from the Belgian border. Truly, it was a miracle.

Eve couldn't wait to share the news with her mother, and she quickly gathered up leaflets, stuffing them into the pockets of her apron. At least the paper had some use—Mama saved the blank sides for making her prickings, hand-drawn templates used to create designs for lace making.

With her pockets full, Eve secured her nurse's kerchief, drew her cobalt blue cloak tight against the crisp fall air, and began

to walk the three blocks along rue des Sols toward her aunt and uncle's café. Marie and Lucien Bernard also owned the apartment above Chez Bernard and had welcomed Eve and her mother to live with them after fleeing the destruction of Louvain.

Eve picked up her pace, imagining how happy Mama would be to learn about the children.

Children. They were hardly that anymore. Her brother would turn fourteen soon, while Zoe had celebrated her eighteenth birthday months ago.

Eve checked her wristwatch. Four thirty. If only she'd spoken with the corporal last week when he arrived, instead of this afternoon, just before he left for the POW hospital in Germany. Now the pass office was closed.

She quelled her impatience. Before she even considered obtaining permission to leave Brussels, she would need a plan to cross the border into occupied France, find her siblings, and slip them back into Belgium.

If that were not daunting enough, time now worked against her. According to the corporal, the situation in France was bleak as in Belgium; there too the Germans were conscripting all young men fourteen and older, forcing many to work in the trenches at the Front.

Nikki had only weeks before his birthday. He was a mere child, yet they might put him in the middle of the fighting, where he would have to kill or be killed. . . .

An image from the past pushed its way into her thoughts. *The gleam of a knife . . . a bloodied gray uniform . . . a boy's gray eyes wide in disbelief . . .*

She thrust the memory aside, though the guilt and grief remained. Pausing on the sidewalk, she took deep breaths of the cold air and bolstered her flagging resolve.

Nikki and Zoe were in France, and she would find them and

deliver them back to Belgium. From Brussels, she could arrange to smuggle them out of the country through the Netherlands and on to safety in Britain.

She resumed her trek, and the café soon came into view. As always she tensed at the sight of so many uniforms. Like a gray sea surrounding the linen-covered tables outside Chez Bernard, German soldiers, most of them officers, sat laughing, joking, and smoking cheroots. They seemed oblivious to the war as they filled their bellies with Uncle Lucien's tinned-meat version of *Rindergulasch* and Belgian-styled *Spaetzle*, then greedily washed it all down with frothy mugs of Belgium's Trappist beer.

Her stomach growled at the scent of food as she mounted the outside steps to the apartment. *Keep drinking*, she thought as her glance darted back to the soldiers. In half an hour she would exchange her nurse's apron for that of a waitress. By helping out her aunt and uncle, she had the opportunity to glean useful information from the more inebriated German patrons.

"*Sister!*"

She stiffened and turned on the steps to see several officers waving at her. Recognizing them as former patients, she offered them a slight nod.

Eve strove to maintain her image as Sister Nurse Marche of the Belgian Red Cross, as the role gave her a measure of protection, even while working at the café. She assisted in their surgeries, stitched their wounds, bathed them, and wiped their brows; such intimacies demanded proper boundaries to prevent the homesick and lovelorn soldiers from reading into her actions anything more than sisterly care.

She continued up the stairs, wondering what the night's business might bring. Lately she'd noticed a decline in the number of German soldiers on leave in Brussels. In fact, just that morning she'd learned that many stationed inside the city, including those

in the secret military police and on General von Falkenhausen's staff, were scheduled to depart for the Front.

Making a mental note to report her findings, she entered the apartment. It was going to be an exceptionally long night. After her shift ended at the café, she had to bicycle out to the edge of the Sonian Forest and pick up a scheduled drop. The orders from MI6 in Rotterdam had been clear: *Meet package, 2300 hours. Groenendael Priory.*

The "package" being an agent, Eve wasn't certain if she had to bring him back into Brussels, though she could ride two on a bicycle. Either way, she had to be at the priory by eleven, and by the time she finished she'd be lucky to get more than a few winks of sleep.

She decided to go in search of her mother before changing her clothes. Walking through the foyer and down the short hall, she paused at the kitchen, relieved to find the compact room with its oblong table and mismatched chairs empty of their German boarders.

The occupation had brought thousands of military personnel into Brussels, filling every vacant room and hotel as the kaiser turned the city into his own personal garrison. Many Belgians had been forced to take in soldiers. The two officers currently boarding on the apartment's second level were merely the latest in a string of unwanted guests that made the already small living quarters more cramped.

Eve wondered if Lieutenants Wolfe and Kraus were already having supper downstairs in the café. If so, she would have time to search their room.

She made her way deeper into the apartment. On the right, her aunt and uncle shared the largest bedroom, while across the hall in what used to be a sewing room, Mama spent most of her time.

She paused at her mother's open door. Inside, Louise Marche

perched on a chair beneath the small west window, dressed in her usual dark skirt trimmed in the black crepe of mourning. Her chestnut hair held wisps of gray, and she bent over a worktable lined with dozens of threaded wooden bobbins, several dancing back and forth in a blur between her hands as she wove her newest piece of lace.

“*Bonjour, Mama,*” Eve said. “How are you?”

With a distracted smile, her mother turned squinty hazel eyes in her direction. “Zoe, is that you, *chère?*”

The question, spoken in a high, thin voice, tore at Eve’s heart. The war had changed them all, but especially Mama, once so lovely and full of life. Eve remembered her mother’s laughter as they sat around the family table in Oxford, while her father, Professor Nicholas Marche, entertained his wife and children with the latest amusing anecdote about his students.

Such a long time ago. Before Papa’s death, in a world where war didn’t exist.

Mama had returned her attention to the bobbins, her distracted smile still in place. It was as though her mind had drifted away to that happier time.

“Mama, it is me, Eve.”

“Of course it is.” Her mother glanced up again, and this time she seemed fully focused. “You worry too much, *ma petite*. I sometimes sit here and think of Zoe and Nikki, and I forget for a time.”

A shadow crossed her mother’s pale features before she returned to her task, her knobby fingers flying as the bobbins rolled back and forth against the wooden table.

Minutes ago Eve had been eager to share her news, but now she hesitated. Corporal Duval admitted he hadn’t corresponded with his cousin Armand Rousseau in months. What if Nikki and Zoe were no longer in Anor? With war raging, nothing was certain. They could have fled the city.

Gazing at her mother's features worn down by grief, she decided to wait. Mama had already endured more than her share of heartache. Eve wouldn't give her false hope.

"Did you have your supper?" she asked instead. Her mother barely ate. Ironic, considering that the Bernards received more food than most, though it was meager fare. Uncle Lucien was allowed extra rations for the café, as the menu at Chez Bernard catered to German soldiers, including General von Falkenhau-sen's government staff.

"Mama?" Eve asked when her mother didn't respond.

"*Oui*. Now, *chère*, you must leave me to finish my work. I will have this very special piece of lace ready for Madame Bisette tonight, along with others to sell."

Eve looked at the delicate piece of trim her mother was weaving. She worked with bobbins, in the style of the Bruges lace makers, and it was laborious work. The German officers' wives who frequented Bisette's lace boutique near la Grand-Place were always delighted when her mother's exquisite designs and workmanship appeared in the shop.

As for this "very special piece," a simpler weave that Mama was able to craft much more quickly, Madame Bisette would pass it along to a Dutch textiles merchant in Brussels. From there it would be taken by cargo ship across the Scheldt River into neutral Holland, to the British Secret Service headquarters in Rotterdam.

Eve watched her mother's fingers fly, marveling at the way she could weave into her pattern the information Eve had given her in a code that would reveal critical intelligence to the Allies—the number of German troops, horses, and artillery moving in and out of the Brussels railway station.

"I'll take the lace with me tomorrow morning," Eve said at last. "And I've brought you more leaflets to use for your prickings. A bit wrinkled, I'm afraid, but I'll press them first." She

turned toward the door. “I must get ready for work downstairs. I’ll check in on you later.”

Eve mounted the stairs to the next floor and halted outside the lieutenants’ room. She listened for any sound within, then knocked lightly on the door. Once she was convinced they had gone down to supper, she slipped inside.

Their usual Spartan housekeeping had not changed. The twin beds were neatly made, and two gray uniforms hung inside the armoire. Two sets of boot polish and brushes lay on top of the dark wood dresser, two canvas rucksacks sat in a corner of the room, and two rifles rested against the wall beside them.

Heart pounding, she listened carefully for any sound as she began her search. She slid her hands along the underside of each mattress, then examined the contents of the dresser drawers, the rucksacks, and the closet.

In a pocket of a uniform in the armoire she found a letter to Lieutenant Kraus addressed from General von Falkenhausen’s headquarters in the Royal Palace. Sliding the missive from its envelope, she quickly scanned the typewritten words. Not for the first time, she was grateful for her German classes at Somerville.

The letter contained orders commanding the lieutenant back to the Front at Passchendaele in two weeks’ time. She quickly searched the pockets of the other uniform and found a similar letter addressed to Lieutenant Wolfe. Again she wondered at the recent exodus of soldiers from Brussels. Dare she hope the war was going badly for the Germans?

There was nothing of worth to pass on to the Allies. Eve frowned, replaced the letters, and climbed the final steps to her attic room to change. Apparently they would soon have new German boarders invading their privacy, and there was no telling who they might be . . . perhaps even members of the secret police?

She shuddered at the thought.

“Bless the saints, you’re here at last!” Uncle Lucien’s voice sounded harried as Eve arrived at the café to begin her shift. He stood behind the bar, his thinning brown hair askew and his rounded features haggard. In a low voice he added, “You’d think the Boche hadn’t eaten in a month, the way they’re devouring the goulash and spaetzle.”

Her uncle wiped at his sweaty brow with the hem of his apron. “I’ve been serving while Laurette clears tables,” he said. “We’re not keeping up.”

Laurette was the daughter of their neighbors, the Fontaines. While Monsieur Fontaine didn’t like his daughter working in an establishment that catered to the enemy, his pragmatic wife appreciated the extra money Laurette brought home to the family.

“I’ll start as soon as I speak with Aunt.” Eve plucked a white apron from a peg against the dark wainscoting behind the bar. The tables outside were full, but twice as many soldiers sat inside the café. Accompanying them were a handful of Belgian girls, now ostracized by their countrymen for fraternizing with the Boche.

Eve saw that one girl had tried using powder to cover a dark bruise on her cheek, and she froze as old memories came rushing at her. *Lying in the street . . . the man with the scarred face pressing her down . . . a scream in her throat . . .*

Trembling, she drew several quick breaths and shoved the image from her mind. Few understood that many of these women had little choice; after being raped or assaulted by the soldiers, they remained with them, their need for food and survival outweighing concerns for dignity or reputation.

Eve had received her own share of sneers from the Belgians. In their eyes she not only appeared to be collaborating with the Boche by working at the German-run hospital but also gained by working at her uncle’s business, which catered to the enemy.

In the kitchen she found Laurette washing dishes, while Aunt Marie stood at the cast-iron stove stirring an enormous pot of

steaming goulash and watching a large pan of spaetzle frying in grease. Her aunt's hair had slipped from its coil beneath her blue kerchief, leaving a long honey-colored strand draped against her collar.

She turned as Eve entered. "*Dieu merci*. I'm so glad you're here."

"Uncle said you've been busy."

Aunt Marie huffed out a laugh, then eyed her critically. "You look very nice."

Eve adjusted her white kerchief, then smoothed the worn fabric of her violet skirt. She'd dashed on a bit of rose water as well. "*Merci, Tante*."

Her aunt's gaze darted to Laurette, then swiveled back to her. "And I suppose you must wear that," she said with a jerk of her chin.

Eve glanced down at the Iron Cross pinned to her shirtwaist. "*For your tireless work in caring for the German wounded*," she'd been told when she received the military decoration upon her return to Brussels. Though she suspected the award had more to do with saving the life of her hospital administrator, Major Otto Reinhardt, who was in Louvain when the chaos broke out.

"It's important I wear it, Aunt." The award had made her something of a heroine in the eyes of the German soldiers. They didn't dare try to molest her. The medal was useful for learning secrets, too.

Aunt Marie made a sound of grudging assent. Despite the café's catering to the German occupiers, the Bernards were Belgian patriots. They knew their niece worked for an underground resistance network, and they also knew better than to question her motives.

"The goulash smells delicious. May I please have some?" Eve asked, changing the subject. "Uncle's waiting, so I'll eat quickly."

Her aunt turned, ladled up a bowlful, and handed it to her, along with a spoon.

Eve smiled her thanks. “Has Mama had supper?”

“Laurette took her food up an hour ago and stayed to watch her eat.”

“*Oui.*” Young Laurette stood by the sink, bobbing her white-capped head. “She ate half of the goulash, though she didn’t touch the slice of black bread.”

Eve wrinkled her nose. “The bread contains more sawdust than flour, so I can’t blame her. Still, I’m glad her appetite is improved. Thank you.”

She smiled at the girl, then quickly ate the stew. When she’d finished, she handed the dish to Laurette. To her aunt she said, “May I help with anything?”

“Just take the dirty table linen to Tulle’s *blanchisserie* before he closes.”

“Anything for the soup kitchen?”

Aunt Marie smiled. “There wasn’t much left over from last night’s menu, but I took what we had to the kitchen on rue de la Madeleine this morning.”

Eve nodded. She was glad they could ease the suffering of at least a few starving citizens in the city.

“Anyway, Lucien put your bicycle there, in the *office.*” Her aunt nodded toward the pantry.

“I wish I had a bicycle,” Laurette muttered, rolling up her long sleeves to sink her hands into the soapy dishwasher. “Papa says they are too expensive.”

“Ha! That’s because the Boche took them from us two years ago and sent the rubber tires back to Berlin to make more tires for their artillery guns.” Eve’s aunt gave the goulash several quick stirs. “They allow Belgians to buy back the bicycles at an outrageous price, plus an extra charge for more tires!”

“Why does Eve get to keep hers?” Laurette asked.

“Because I’m a nurse,” Eve said. “If there’s an emergency, I need to be able to get to the hospital or to someone’s home quickly.”

“You’d better get out there and help your uncle,” Aunt Marie cut in, as the bell over the door announced more hungry customers.

“I’ll get to Tulle’s before six,” Eve promised and went to the front of the café.

Some of the German soldiers were already a little intoxicated, including Wolfe and Kraus. Faces flushed, the two lieutenants sat with another pair of officers, rocking back and forth as they sang “Der treue Husar,” a favorite tune.

“Pretty Sister, join us!” Kraus beckoned her to their table, grinning widely beneath his dark moustache.

“*Mehr Bier?*” she asked with a smile, switching to German as she eyed the foursome.

“*Ja!*” they chorused, and Eve left to return moments later with four mugs of the amber brew. She set them on the table and waited as they rummaged in their pockets for the marks to pay.

“We must leave you soon,” Wolfe said, the gravity of his tone at odds with his glassy-eyed look. “We’ve been ordered back to the Front.”

“We’ll miss you, Sister,” chimed Kraus as he scraped the marks from the table and handed them to her. “And your pretty blue eyes, like violets.”

“And hair dark like the Black Forest,” Wolfe said. “Though you always hide it under that ugly kerchief—”

“You will both be missed,” Eve cut in, aware of the speculative looks from the other officers at the table. With a self-conscious gesture she tucked more of her hair beneath the kerchief. “You two have been the perfect boarders.”

She didn’t add that they were “perfect” because they usually passed out in their room each night and didn’t notice her

coming or going. She hoped the next boarders would be as docile as these two.

“When do you leave?” she asked, though she already knew the answer.

“Two weeks,” Wolfe said. He took another drink of beer, then wiped traces of foam from his moustache. “We must make the most of our time left in Brussels, *ja, meine Kameraden?*”

Once again they all broke into song, and Eve slipped away to take care of the other customers. She brought out trays laden with steaming bowls of goulash and heaped plates of golden spaetzle. Her uncle handled the money and washed the glass beer mugs as fast as they came back, and at a quarter to six she was able to leave the café for the laundry.

As was her duty every Monday and Thursday, Eve pedaled her bicycle, loaded with the café’s soiled linen, to Tulle’s blanchisserie on rue de la Madeleine across from St. Magdalene’s church, where she exchanged the used linen for clean.

She was keen to learn if Monsieur Tulle had any information to pass along to the Allies. It seemed the Boche were gearing up for some kind of siege in the next few weeks, as Wolfe and Kraus were to join the ranks of those already at the Front.

The bell above the laundry shop door chimed as she entered. “*Bonsoir, Mademoiselle Marche.*”

A family man whose wife and three grown daughters worked in the laundry, Monsieur Tulle stood behind the counter, his aged hands propped against a sack filled with cleaned, pressed linen for the café. The tall, spindly proprietor watched her approach, his benign expression giving no clue he also worked as an agent for the Belgian underground intelligence network *La Dame Blanche*.

Eve smiled pleasantly. “Any difficulties?”

“An apron torn, but I took extra care to repair the seam.”

The edge in his tone made her pulse quicken. Tulle must have new intelligence on the Germans' troop movements. "I appreciate your attention to detail," she said, and offered him her bundle in exchange for the one on the counter.

Once she returned to the café, Eve stowed her bicycle and sorted through the clean linen to find the repaired apron. She examined the new seam along one side, knowing Tulle's message was carefully sewn into the fabric.

With the excuse of checking on her mother, Eve ran the apron up to her room. She was relieved to see Mama still busy at her worktable.

Tonight after Eve met the agent at the priory in Groenendael, she would return to decode the lists of troops, horses, and artillery Monsieur Tulle had provided. Mama could start another pattern of lace to be sent through Madame Bisette to their Dutch merchant.

Returning downstairs to the café, she was pleased to find Kraus and Wolfe well into their cups. They should sleep soundly tonight, leaving her in peace to do her work.

The curfew for Belgians was seven o'clock, and by ten o'clock all but a couple German soldiers continued to swill beer. Kraus and Wolfe had left an hour before to seek their beds.

Eve glanced at the clock. Twenty minutes before she must leave for Groenendael. She hurried along the last two customers and flipped the sign in the large pane window to read *geschlossen*.

She was locking the door when she was startled by a familiar figure in a Red Cross uniform smiling at her from the other side of the glass.

"Dominic!" Eve opened the door to the tall, beefy Frenchman. "Why are you here?"

"I decided to stop by and wish my favorite nurse *bonsoir* before I head for the hospital." Dom's caramel eyes glowed.

“I don’t suppose a man could still get a beer?” His hopeful gaze turned toward the bar, where her uncle was counting the night’s receipts.

Eve gave him a reproving look. “You’re about to go on shift, Dom. I’ll not contribute to your corruption.” She smiled. “You can have a cup of coffee.”

His expression fell and he sighed. “*Oui*. And I suppose I must settle for what passes as coffee, eh?”

“Sit.” She went to pour them each a cup. Because of the food shortage, even the café’s brew tasted more like the ersatz coffee most Belgians drank. Being British, she preferred her tea, but the war version of that was worse than the coffee.

She carried the drinks to the table and sat down. “I must leave for an appointment shortly, but you’re welcome to stay. Aunt Marie and Uncle Lucien will be here awhile, cleaning up.”

“Appointment?” Dom eyed her intently. “Anyone I know?”

“A package.” Eve kept her tone casual.

“Rotterdam ordered it?”

She nodded. A year ago, Dominic Lesser had helped her to get into La Dame Blanche, so he understood that her errand was for the British Secret Service.

“Where?”

She took a sip of her coffee, then said, “Groenendael Priory.”

“You’re riding out to the Sonian Forest tonight?” His expression darkened. “Watch yourself. There are plenty of German patrols out.”

“I won’t have any difficulties.” She withdrew her Red Cross pass from her pocket and flashed it at him.

“Medical personnel might be exempt from the curfew, *chérie*, but it does not mean the Boche will be on their best behavior.” Concern creased his brow. “You’ll keep that visible, *non*?” He tipped his chin, indicating her Iron Cross.

Eve reached for the medal. “I remember a time when this

worried you.” It had taken the big French orderly months at the hospital to decide she was friend and not foe.

“*Oui*,” he said, and a flush stained his cheeks as he grinned. “Until I finally understood its advantages—once the enemy’s wounded see it, they fall in love with you and tell you all of their secrets from the Front.”

Her mouth twitched with amusement. “It helps.”

“Let me go with you.” He leaned forward and grasped her hand. “I can get the ambulance and drive you.”

Eve gently withdrew from his touch. While Dom’s friendship had helped her through a difficult time in her life, she sensed he wanted more. But three years hadn’t erased her grief.

“Thank you, *mon ami*, but I’ll be fine.” She rose from her chair. “Now I must go. Stay and enjoy your coffee.”

She headed toward the back of the café and found Laurette just saying good-bye. “Aunt, I have business to attend to,” she said once the girl had left. “I’ll return home as soon as I can.”

Aunt Marie knew not to ask questions. “I’ll leave the door unlocked. Be careful.”

Eve nodded and gazed warmly at her. She’d thought to tell her aunt the news about her siblings earlier, but the café was so busy tonight she hadn’t had the chance. She glanced at the clock. Her news would have to wait until tomorrow.

Anticipation hummed in her as she went to retrieve her bicycle. She wanted to believe her brother and sister were still in Anor. She needed only to come up with a means to recover them, and La Dame Blanche might provide her with resources.

Buoyed by the thought, she walked the bicycle back through the café to go out to the main street.

Dom rose to open the door. “Take care of yourself.”

His gruff words sobered her, reminding her of the precarious task ahead.

“I promise.” With a quick wave, she left the café. The crisp

night air smelled of rain, and the Front had quieted for the evening. Eve stood for a moment, enjoying the blessed silence, then reached to adjust the brass carbide lamp on the front of her bicycle. She wouldn't ignite it until she'd traveled beyond the city limits.

She had just started to pedal along rue des Sols when the whine of an engine overhead drew her attention. Eve stopped to study the inky sky, and the noise intensified as the plane flew low over the city.

The sound differed from the one she'd heard earlier in the afternoon. Was this the plane bringing the agent to Groenendael?

Her body jerked as an ear-shattering explosion lit the sky; a second blast followed, then a third as the anti-aircraft guns at la Grand-Place found their target.

The deafening scream of the plane's engine pierced her ears as it burst into a bright fireball above her. She watched in horror as the plane spiraled downward, crashing in Brussels Park a few hundred meters away.

The ground shook, and her racing heart thundered in her chest.

Dom ran out of the café, shouting in French, and German whistles could be heard blaring from la Grand-Place.

"Dom, get an ambulance!" she cried, before pedaling her bicycle toward the inferno.

Eve soon entered the park and took a running leap off her bicycle as she raced toward the burning wreckage. Time seemed to stop while she took in the scene: A man lay beside one of the plane's wings, half of his body on fire. Another man was stretched out prone near the edge of the burning engine. He was dressed in plain clothes, not a uniform, and had a parachute pack slung over one shoulder. Could he be the agent she was to meet?

She rushed to extinguish the first man and saw that he was

already dead, his face burned beyond recognition. His smoldering uniform was that of a British pilot.

Taking no time to consider her actions, she removed the pair of ID discs from around his charred neck, wincing at the hot metal against her fingertips as she slipped them inside her coat pocket.

If the second man was indeed the agent, he might need to “borrow” the identification. She ran to him and grabbed his feet, dragging him clear of the flames. An agent would be a fool to wear his ID discs on assignment—nevertheless, she had to make certain. Crouching beside his body, she began tugging at the back of his collar.

A hand reached up to grab her wrist in a painful grip.

He was alive! “Let me help you,” she hissed in English, and he loosened his grip. Eve slid the pack off his shoulder and tossed it into the flames. Then she gently rolled him onto his back—

Her breath caught, and she rocked on her heels as the earth shifted beneath her. It couldn’t be . . .

Yet in the fire’s light his reddish-blond hair was recognizable, and despite the blood covering his face, she could make out the high cheekbones and patrician nose, the generous mouth . . .

She wet her lips, her senses reeling. Was he flesh . . . or spirit?

Her finger reached to gently touch the achingly familiar cleft in his chin, and he jerked at the contact before his attention focused on her.

She met his gaze, drowning in the remarkable gray pools that had sometimes been dark like rain clouds, and at other times light as the North Sea. His warm hand covered hers, this time in a caress, while tears leaked from his eyes, making tracks along either side of his bloodied face.

Her throat worked as she clasped his fingers. He *was* real—not a ghost at all, but flesh and bone, resurrected from her past. The man she thought she’d lost forever.

Her husband.