



As Dawn Breaks

↔ A NOVEL ↔



KATE
BRESLIN

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To our families

Whether we are born to them, create them, or choose them
along the way, love and acceptance are what bind us.



For the women working in munitions during WWI

May their hard work and sacrifice in saving a nation
and their fighting lads never be forgotten.

By the tender mercy of our God,
the dawn from on high will break upon us,
to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the
shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace.

Luke 1:78–79 NRSV

Prologue

AYLESBURY PRISON
BUCKINGHAMSHIRE, ENGLAND
EARLY MARCH 1918

Only by searching the bowels of hell would he find the devil. “The prisoner’s cell is this way, Captain. If you’ll follow me.”

Marcus Weatherford pulled his gaze from the shadowy confines beyond the barred gate to glance at the uniformed warden. Then with a backward nod to his companion, the two men followed the warden into the gloom.

As they passed a checkerboard series of locked doors along the dimly lit hall, Marcus again prayed their mission wasn’t in vain. Would the prisoner, only four months into a two-year sentence for forgery, be willing to cooperate? More importantly, were MI5 and Scotland Yard on the right track, or was this another fool’s errand?

“Here.” The warden halted in front of a door with a small, barred window. Marcus stepped forward to peer into the cell. “Unlock it and leave us.”

“I’ll need to remain just outside here, sir.”

“As you wish.” Once the door was opened, Marcus and his companion entered the sparse room. The inmate sat on the narrow bed, attempting to sew a button onto a plain white shirt.

The afternoon's gray light flooded in through a tiny window at the back of the cell.

Ashen and thin, the prisoner set aside the shirt and rose from the bench. Defiant blue eyes held his gaze. "Who are you?"

"Detective Quinn with New Scotland Yard." Marcus turned to indicate his companion. "And I'm none of your concern at the moment. We've come to make a deal *if* you have the right answers to a few questions."

The insolent expression thawed. "What questions?"

"Do you know a man called Thomas Brown?"

"Never heard of him."

"What about Rhymer?"

The blue eyes flared, and Marcus leaned in, his pulse thumping. "What do you know?"

The prisoner's head cocked slightly. "Why should I trust you?"

"Because you have little choice. Quinn and I can stay and hear what you have to say and perhaps make a deal. Or we can leave you to go back to your . . . buttons." Marcus nodded toward the crumpled shirt on the bed.

A breath expelled from the sullen mouth. "I had a brother Thomas, but the name Brown means nothing. He likened himself to Thomas the Rhymer, from an auld Scots fairy tale told to us as bairns." The eyes clouded. "Thomas died years ago, somewhere across the world."

"Perhaps not." Marcus fished from his pocket a small, frayed paper tag penned with a set of numbers. He held it up for inspection. "Recognize this?"

The prisoner's pallor flushed. "Where did you come by that?"

"An abandoned flat in Paris. It's stamped *Ezekiel House*, an orphanage on the outskirts of Glasgow. Is it yours?"

"Aye. The tags were marked with our room and case number. 'Tis how they identified us." The prisoner's eyes lifted. "You said you found the tag in France?"

Marcus almost smiled. Another puzzle piece fitted into place. The orphanage had verified there was a brother Thomas and, after

combing through Glasgow's old police records, Marcus found the boy described as having dark hair and blue eyes, much like the prisoner. "If your brother *is* alive after all these years, what proof can you offer to make a positive identification?" He tucked the tag into his jacket pocket. "Otherwise, no deal."

Instead of answering, the prisoner's lips compressed into a flat line. Marcus struggled to hold on to his patience. They needed confirmation.

When the silence stretched on, he turned to Quinn. "I think we're finished here—"

"Wait." The prisoner stepped forward. "Thomas had a red birthmark above the hairline."

"Where on his head?"

The blue eyes gleamed. "Put me in the same room with him and I'll show you."

Marcus did smile then. The police report also described a portwine birthmark. They now had their irrefutable witness. "Our deal is a full pardon in exchange for your help in identifying Rhymer, the man we suspect is your long-lost brother, Thomas."

"A pardon? Just like that?"

"Just like that." Marcus frowned. "But be warned: Any betrayal on your part will constitute treason to the Crown." He leaned in. "That means death."

The prisoner's nostrils flared. Marcus didn't back down. "Do you understand and agree to the offer?"

"Aye."

"I'll make the arrangements." His pulse thrummed. "Speak of this to no one."

He gave the prisoner a final warning glance and left with Quinn.

Now they could prepare for the next stage of the trap—capturing Rhymer, the saboteur MI5 and Scotland Yard had been working feverishly to find. And once they made an arrest, they would have the proof needed to arrest the real mastermind . . .

A man scheming to bring Britain to its knees by killing thousands of its citizens.

1



NOTTINGHAM, ENGLAND

MONDAY, JULY 1, 1918—FOUR MONTHS LATER

*H*er final moments of freedom. Like the rattling gasps before death.

Rosalind Graham's throat constricted as she surveyed her sanctuary for the last time. In a matter of days she would receive her sentence; a prisoner, denied the right to an opinion or to make her own choices. Fated to live out her life in bondage, concealed beneath the sanctified guise of marriage.

"Rose, you didn't hear the whistle? Shift's over and I'm due back at the Mixing House before I can clock out. I want to speak with you before you go off and leave me forever."

Seated inside her small overhead crane, Rose gazed down at the jaundiced face of her co-worker, hailing her from the factory floor. Like most girls filling shells at the No. 6 Chilwell National Shell Filling factory, Tilda Lockhart had contracted the yellow skin and bleached hair of a "canary girl," as they were fondly called, from handling the explosive powder TNT.

Rose's job of moving the filled shells by crane onto railcars for shipment had spared her such physical consequences. Yet the grief in her best friend's upturned face matched the anguish in her own heart. "Wait for me, Tilly, I shall be down soon."

"I'll meet you over by the changing rooms."

Rose drew a deep breath once her friend departed, and gave her little world a last, lingering look. She stepped nimbly from

the open crane and grabbed at the thick rope to shinny down to the factory floor. Her bruised arms ached with the burden of her weight—another reminder of Julien’s private “talk” with her last evening on the kind of wife he expected.

She bit her lips to stave off a sob. Even now the church near Aunt and Uncle’s estate in Leicester was being readied for Saturday’s nuptials. In five short days, any and all freedom would become forfeit.

She’d imagined having more time—time to experience life and its wonders, to be able to seek out a man she truly loved and with whom she could start a family. Pity’s sake, she wasn’t yet twenty-one years old! What terrible sin had she committed that she must become the property of a man as much a bully as her uncle?

You know the reason, Rose. See no evil, hear no evil. She mentally shoved the maxim aside. What good was wisdom when it came too late?

Her boots soon touched the floor, and she trudged toward the building’s exit to go and say good-bye to her friend.

The munitions factory had become her refuge, a place to hide from her uncle’s watchful eye while she enjoyed her work in aiding the war effort. Here she could laugh and be easy with Tilly and others that she considered the salt of the earth—not like the silly, snide upper-class girls from her boarding-school days. And she was able to earn her very own wage.

Except you haven’t a farthing now, have you? Stepping outside the building into the bright July sun, Rose shoved her hands into her pockets. She considered again the most recent betrayal by her uncle who was also her *guardian*, a word she’d once naïvely likened to angels when she and her little brothers came to live with the Cutlers after their parents’ death.

But Sir Ridley Cutler of Cutler Enterprises, the second largest weapons manufacturer in Britain, was as far from being heavenly as his ruthlessness could take him.

And now he’d stolen all her savings. Her last hope for independence.

She blinked against the glaring light, still aching with the mem-

ory of awakening last night to discover Aunt Delia in her room, removing the money from Rose's secret hiding place in the closet. When she'd climbed out of bed, Aunt quickly turned, and the hurt and indignation had stuck in Rose's throat seeing the tiny woman's genuine fear. The wide, dark eyes seemed to say, *Please go back to sleep and say nothing or he will hurt me.*

Her pity had won out and she'd settled back into bed until after her aunt had quietly left the room. Rose had thought to confront Uncle Ridley this morning over his coercing Aunt Delia, but she dared not anger him, not after his recent threat against little Douglas and Samuel. They were only eleven and eight years old, for pity's sake! She shivered again at the notion Uncle would actually take them out of boarding school and ship them off to some orphanage overseas if she gave him trouble . . .

Marching across the cobbled paths between buildings, Rose headed toward the changing rooms. What a fool she'd been, playing up to his vanity months ago so that he would allow her to work at Chilwell. Likely her uncle knew her scheme even then but said nothing. After all, what better publicity for his weapons company than to have his own niece become a munitionette for the war? And then, on the eve of *her very last day of work*, he'd bullied her poor aunt into stealing her funds!

His theft only tightened the noose already around her neck. The same way he'd moved up her December wedding to Julien and then threatened the welfare of her brothers if she disobeyed.

Now you are good and trapped. Rose clenched her teeth. If she could only turn back the clock! Never would she have ventured into her uncle's library weeks ago and happened upon his dealings with Julien. . . .

"You're looking more angry than sad on your last day, Rose, but I'm glad to see a spark in your eyes."

Tilly stood outside the building, a clipboard shielding her eyes from the sun. "Let's go in where hopefully 'tis cooler."

Upon entering the shadowy interior, Rose paused once more to reclaim her sight.

A steady stream of first- and second-shift workers were entering and leaving through the changing room doors, the air an odd mix of fragrant soaps and powders from the women who had bathed and changed, and the pungent stench of sulfur clinging to those who had not.

Passing by the doors, the sounds of high-pitched female laughter rang from within as she and Tilly took up the bench seat just outside the room.

“So tell me, lass. After seeing you brood outside, can I hope you’ve decided to call off this farce of a wedding?” Tilly pulled off her work bonnet, revealing splotches of greenish-white hair. She wiped her damp brow. “’Tis time you came to your senses.”

“Nothing so brave as that.” Rose offered a weak smile. “I was just giving myself another good scolding. I should have hidden my money in a tree instead of a hatbox. Only a fool underestimates my uncle.”

“Dinna blame yourself! ’Twas *his* crime, not yours. Sir lofty Cutler with his millions, and still he robs his own niece—and he makes your poor aunt do the dirty work!” Tilly shook her head. “’Tis shameful and I dinna care if he *is* knighted. He probably paid for that title.”

Touched by the show of support, Rose reached to squeeze Tilly’s hand. After today she might never see her dear friend again. “Promise me, you *will* be at the church on Saturday? I . . . I will need you there more than I can say.”

“You know that only death would keep me away, lass.”

Tilly’s blue gaze had turned suspiciously bright, and while the words were meant as a fervent promise, Rose worried. Her friend’s complexion of late had turned even more sallow.

Tilly Lockhart was the strongest woman Rose had ever known, but the ill effects from TNT exposure were taking their toll. “Are you unwell, friend? You *would* tell me?”

“Dinna fash, I’m more than fit. ’Tis just this devilish heat.” She tugged at the neckline of her boiler suit, revealing a glint of purple and silver against the white shirt collar beneath.

Rose gasped. “Is that a brooch you’re wearing? How did you slip it past the inspector this morning?”

“Not so loud!” Tilly cast out a furtive gaze. “I didna wear the pin during inspection.”

“Then how . . . ?”

“I hid it in here.” Tilly poked a finger into her greenish hair, which was pulled into a bun.

Rose frowned. “You take too many chances, Tilly. You will be fined or get the sack if you are caught wearing it. The rules are clear—”

“No jewelry, hair grips, matches, or cigarettes.” Tilly sighed. “Believe me, I know the rules and risks, and how easily one could light off this tinder house.” Her brow creased, eyes turning somber. “But I . . . had my reasons.”

“What reasons?”

“I wanted you to see it. ’Twas my mother’s and my only memory of her since she died birthing me. I’ll never be parted from it.” She cast about another quick glance, then pulled back her neckline to reveal the lovely jeweled thistle of amethyst set into silver. “’Tis our national flower, yours and mine.” She tilted her head. “You are Scots, after all, despite your fancy speech and all that proper Sassenach schooling.”

Eyes fixed on the brooch, Rose refrained from comment. Tilly didn’t know all of Uncle’s conditions in allowing her to be here. He wanted no “peasant speech” in his home, nor would the Earl of Stanton, her future father-in-law. A slip in diction would cost her the job.

“The amethyst *is* beautiful.” She glanced up at her friend. “But you could have avoided the risk and shown this to me at our lockers this morning.”

Tilly shrugged. “Maybe I feel a bit reckless. You’re leaving, so it doesna really matter what happens to me now.”

“Do not say that!” Rose turned to face her squarely. “You will always matter to *me*.” She reached for Tilly’s hand. “I would have got the sack months ago if not for you. Do you remember? I fell off that silly ladder as I started climbing up into my first crane.”

Tilly grinned. “I told the instructor it was because the rungs were oily and he should take more care.”

Rose smiled. “You knew all along I was clumsy in those new boots. You even pretended to wipe away ‘the oil’ and then gave me a boost back onto the step.”

“You were just nervous.” Tilly shrugged. “’Tis quite a change coming from fancy dresses and boarding schools into a world of boiler suits and climbing ladders.”

And finding my first true friend. Rose’s eyes misted, recalling her first day at Chilwell. Seated alone on the bench beside her locker, she’d been nervous and afraid; the first whistle had already sounded and she was still finger-combing her hair after forgetting to put a brush into her toiletry bag before work. Being forbidden the use of metal hair grips, she couldn’t seem to manage the thick unruly locks long enough to stuff them up beneath her work cap. With the clock ticking, she imagined failure before even starting her job—and being sent home to Uncle, who would mock her for thinking she could ever become a munitionette.

Tilly had appeared then, brush in hand, and after several brisk strokes deftly twisted and knotted Rose’s curls into place so that they fit perfectly beneath her bonnet. The two had shared a smile before they rushed toward the changing room doors, laughing when they reached the timekeeper only seconds before the final whistle sounded. “You have been like a sister to me from the first day we hired on together,” Rose said softly.

“Aye, we’re the orphan twins,” Tilly joked. “Though thankfully, *you* were saved from the streets.” Suddenly her face crumpled. “Never forget me, Rose Graham.”

“Never.” Rose leaned to embrace her, and Tilly’s grip on her was almost painful.

After a moment they sat back, and Tilly gave a loud sniff before she recovered. “The truth is, I’m soon to leave the factory myself.”

“You?” Rose blinked. “Where will you go . . . Canada?” Tilly often spoke of sailing across the Atlantic to that country one day.

“You can still come along, ’tis not too late.” Tilly’s eyes searched

hers. “Son of an earl or no, you dinna have to marry him. He’s a brute by all accounts, and trust me, you canna ken what freedom is until you’ve lost it.”

Her words only increased Rose’s anguish at her upcoming nuptials. “I would go with you if I could, Tilly, but I must stay for Douglas and Samuel.”

“You said yourself the lads are doing well at school. They have each other. But you, Rose, your life will become an iron cage.”

“Please stop.” Her hands curled against her lap. “There are things . . . I cannot change.”

“All right then,” Tilly said softly. “But when you *can* change things, come take shelter with me across the sea. You’ll always be welcome.”

Rose knew that day would never come. Still, she managed to nod.

“Now, you’ve distracted me from my other purpose.” Tilly straightened. “As you seem determined to go through with this marriage on Saturday, you must have a proper bride’s showing of the gifts. I went home at lunch, and all is ready. There’s to be a party at my house after the shift, so you must come.”

“A party?” Rose’s eyes widened. “For me?”

Tilly nodded, her features determined. “Take my bicycle—’tis red now, since I found an auld can of paint in the shed, and you ride on ahead. Remember how to get there?”

“A block past Attenborough station on the right.” Rose had visited Tilly’s cottage only once before, when Uncle’s chauffeur took ill and she was allowed to ride the forty-minute train in from Leicester.

“Aye, ’tis just a mile away. Once I finish here, I’ll round up some of the lassies and we’ll meet you.”

Rose senses hummed. A real party with friends! Then she remembered Miles Luther awaited her outside in the Rolls and her enthusiasm dimmed. “Oh, Tilly! I wish I could, but Luther—”

“Och, dinna mind your uncle’s sheepdog.” Tilly handed her the clipboard with paper and a pencil. “Write Luther a note. Say

you must work three extra hours. 'Tis for the lads at the Front, so he willna suspect and go tattling to 'Sir Cutler.' Tell him to come back and collect you at nine o'clock tonight."

Pencil in hand, Rose stared at the blank sheet. What if her lie was discovered? Luther might spot her riding the red bicycle toward Tilly's house. She didn't dare defy Uncle, not when Douglas and Samuel would pay the price. She tried handing back the clipboard. "No, I really cannot take the chance."

"'Tis your *last chance!*" Tilly frowned as she crossed her arms, refusing the offering. "Trust me, Rose. No one will find out. How long has it been since you've had an hour or two of enjoyment? We'll have ginger biscuits and tea and play cards. You can even fetch my brass tub from the shed and have a cool soak before the rest of us arrive."

Rose set the clipboard back in her lap. Tilly was right. Her last chance at freedom before Julien closed the door on her life. And with Douglas and Samuel away at school, there was no one else on earth with whom she'd rather spend this time.

She scribbled her note to Luther.

"I'm glad to see you're a brave lass after all." Tilly's tone had eased. "I'll have the dust boy, Jeremy, take the note to Luther at the front gate while you slip out the back."

Pulse racing, Rose returned the clipboard and note to her friend. Tilly's relieved smile matched her own. They could postpone their good-byes for a few more hours.

"One more thing." Tilly plucked from beneath her boiler suit collar the thin chain of spark-resistant brass that held her factory-numbered disk. A metal key also hung from the chain.

"Tilly, that key is—"

"Against regulations, aye." Tilly flashed a look of sufferance. "But you willna get into my cottage any other way . . ." She paused at the sound of approaching female voices. A pair of floor supervisors walked in their direction. "Here." Tilly pressed the chain with the key into Rose's hand. "Now give me yours, so I'll have a tally disk to show at the gate when I leave."

“Won’t the gate guard know the difference?”

“Ha! Auld one-eyed Griggs pays no mind. He just writes down the number and says ‘Pass.’ Be quick now. I canna be late to meet my . . .”

Rose’s hand shook as she quickly palmed Tilly’s chain, then removed her own and gave it to her friend. Once the supervisors had passed, she caught up with Tilly’s note of hesitation. “Meet whom?”

“Not important. Just a final task to finish.” Slipping the chain over her head, Tilly stood as she tucked it beneath her uniform. “I’ll be along with the others before you know it.”

Her smile seemed at odds with her pale face and sorrowful eyes, and Rose’s worry returned. “Tilly, there is something you are not telling me. Are you all right?”

“Dinna fash about me.” Picking up the clipboard, she held it to her chest. “I’m too braw to be sick or put down easily. Remember, I grew up on the streets of Glasgow. Not even the cheeky London lassies I oversee in the Pressing Room dare to give me guff.” She looked away. “If I seem sad, ’tis because I’m already missing you.

“But enough blethering.” She drew in a breath and smiled. “We’ll enjoy the hours we have left. Now go and have a soak in the tub, and dinna let Winston into the cottage. He’s likely been in the neighbor’s sty again, the daft dog.”

Despite her misgivings, Rose grinned. “I’ll see you there.”

She watched her friend leave for the Mixing House, before entering the changing room where several first-shift factory girls still bathed and dressed. Swiftly, Rose peeled out of her boiler suit and, garbed in her chemise, padded barefoot into the washroom to join her co-workers, who would be scrubbing away the day’s traces of chemicals before leaving the factory.

Even with all her current troubles, or perhaps because of them, her heart thrummed as she imagined the upcoming revelry. It was ages ago, during her childhood in Edinburgh, that she’d last had a real party.

The austere halls and grand rooms at Leicester were devoid of

any such frivolities. No birthdays or balls, especially with the war on. Only at Christmas when she, Douglas, and Samuel were not at school did Uncle Ridley install a holiday tree, and only then so he could entertain his business associates. Her aunt would always slip Rose a pretty ribbon from her sewing box and give candies to the boys.

The bittersweet memory of those small tokens made her smile as she finished scrubbing.

Christmas was the only time Aunt Delia defied her husband.

Back at her locker, she dressed while a middle-aged co-worker rummaged through a locker a few feet away.

“’Ay luv, ’ave ye any Oatine Cream?”

Rose turned at the question.

The woman looked perplexed. “I ’ad a full tin ’ere, but I’ve searched and it’s gone.”

Oatine Cream was a popular face lotion, advertised to keep a munitionette’s skin soft and healthy after being exposed to the harsh chemicals at the factory.

It also happened to give Rose hives. “I am sorry, I do not use it.”

“Well, ain’t that grand.” The woman scowled. “I spend my earnin’s on pricey cream so’s it’s get pinched from my locker. One o’ those dodgy Scotch, no doubt.”

Rose stiffened at the remark. It wasn’t the first time someone had disparaged her northern heritage. Perhaps a lesson was in order. “I still might be able to help,” she said. Tilly used the cream.

She went to her friend’s locker and opened it—and drew back at the pungent fragrance. Roses? When had Tilly started wearing perfume?

Delving through the clutter, Rose located her friend’s array of toiletries. “Here we are.” Reaching for the face cream, she noticed beside the tin a small red box with French gold lettering. She leaned in for another whiff. Definitely roses. Did Tilly have a beau?

Closing the locker, she offered the tin. “You may borrow this.”

The woman’s face brightened, and when she took the cream, Rose smiled and said, “I’m certain my Scots friend will not mind.”

The woman hesitated, eyes wide. “Thank ye.”

At least she had the good grace to blush. Satisfied, Rose returned to finish her toilette and mulled over the possibility Tilly had an admirer. Her friend’s earlier remark came to mind. “*I canna be late to meet my . . .*”

Sweetheart? Rose smiled at the fanciful thought. Tilly wouldn’t keep him a secret. But the perfume?

She stared at her friend’s locker. What if it was meant for *her*? The flower scent *was* roses.

Suddenly her eyes burned. Tilly’s kindness and generous heart knew no bounds; she’d arranged a party tonight in Rose’s honor, with tea and biscuits and other favors. Why should she be surprised that her friend also wanted to present her with the lovely French perfume?

And then all too soon we will part from each other. Her lips compressed as she leaned against her locker. Once she crossed a chasm of no return with Julien, her dear friend would cross an ocean. How could she face the miserable future without Tilly?

Closing her eyes, Rose prayed as she’d done so often in the past few months, asking for some sign of deliverance. *Lord, please tell me how to carry this burden.*

As if awaiting an answer, she remained still for several seconds. But only the echo of feminine laughter and the slam of a locker door met her ears.

She would beg Tilly to remain in England! With the war on, Julien’s flights back and forth to France were frequent, and since Rose had accepted Uncle Ridley’s edict to wed, his watchfulness over her would surely lessen. She and Tilly could still have their friendship.

Her hopes glimmered. She would speak with her friend tonight at the party.

Quickly, Rose finished dressing and left the changing room to head for the factory’s exit.

The tall, grizzled Griggs stood heads above the many first-shift workers who were leaving through the back gate. Clad in his worn

infantry uniform and wearing his black eye patch, he made entries in his ledger as the line moved slowly forward.

As her turn came, Rose tried to steady her breathing. Her fingers fumbled for the brass disk on the chain, and she held up the numbered ID.

Griggs gave it a glance before his single bloodshot eye focused on her. Seconds passed as she held the air in her lungs, and she thought she might suffocate. Behind her, workers bent on leaving grumbled impatiently.

Her hand with the disk began to shake. *Lord, please help me!*

A group of boisterous second-shift workers suddenly entered the back lot, and one of them called to Griggs in greeting. The old guard turned from her to raise a hand in their direction, then quickly scribbled her ID number into his ledger. "Pass."

Nervous laughter bubbled up, popping out as a high-pitched squeak before Rose was able to quash it. Keeping her head down, she dared not look at Griggs as she hurried past him and through the gate.

Tilly's red bicycle was easy to spot amidst the hundreds of black two-wheeled conveyances crowding the lot, and soon Rose was on her way riding toward the town of Attenborough.

She pedaled hard toward the railway station, the exercise releasing her pent-up anxiety. Luther must have received her note at the front gate by now. Would he decide to wait for her the three extra hours . . . or return to the estate?

As her bicycle flew past leafy green poplars and tall oaks, past the parched lawns and rows of brown-and-gray houses abutting the street, she couldn't help darting an occasional glance behind her. If he did discover her on his return to Leicester, the stocky chauffeur would haul her bodily into the car and take her home to face her uncle's wrath.

She shoved away the worrisome thought as she passed the rail station, heaving a sigh when Tilly's white cottage came into view. Riding up onto the dried lawn, she dismounted and leaned the bicycle against the wood siding.

Fishing the chain with the key from her blouse, Rose jogged in an unladylike manner up the short flight of steps to the porch. She crouched to insert the key—but found the door already unlocked when the knob turned easily. Tilly had forgotten to secure the cottage after lunch.

Rose straightened and began pushing the door open when a low growl sounded behind her, followed by a rapid staccato of yips.

Smiling, she turned. “You must be Winston . . . Ugh!” She held a sleeve to her nose. The dog was covered in awful-smelling mud. “You’ve been in the pigsty again, haven’t you?”

The small terrier’s pink tongue lolled to one side of a dirty mouth while his dark eyes gleamed with mischief. She held her breath as she raised the hem of her skirt, hoping he wouldn’t jump up and soil her clothes.

Winston saw an opportunity—and darted between her feet into the house.

“Get back here, you rascal!” Dropping her hem, Rose whirled around and followed the dog inside, then spied his dirty paw prints trailing across Tilly’s polished floors. “Oh no!”

Winston paused to look back at her, his muddy stub of a tail wagging as if daring her to chase him. Determined to outsmart the animal, Rose quickly scanned the parlor before spotting Tilly’s white apron tossed over the back of a chair. She retrieved the smock and held it in front of her, creeping slowly toward the dog and talking softly. “There’s a good boy. All you need is a thorough scrubbing, and I know where Tilly keeps the tub.”

She waited to pounce as Winston gave a yip and another wag of his tail. He started back toward her, and Rose reached out with the apron to grab him—

The roar of thunder rocked the cottage on its foundation. Tilly’s furniture danced around the room at the same instant glass shattered from the windows in all directions.

Rose flew backward, feeling the bite of the shards in her flesh as she crash-landed several feet away. She clutched for the frantic terrier, curling up with him on the parlor floor.

German Zeppelins? Blood pounded in her ears as she craned her head, looking toward the broken windows, but she could see nothing. Her arms hugged the squirming dog to her chest.

Breathless, she waited for the next attack, and after another distant explosion echoed through the cottage, there was silence. She managed to sit up, holding on to the dog lest he walk on broken glass.

Gradually, she became aware of more noises—whistles and people shouting. Scrambling to her feet, she rushed toward the open door and released Winston to run outside.

Dozens of Tilly's neighbors clogged the street, crying and pointing toward the station. Rose left the cottage, walking across the lawn to follow their direction—and stared in horror at the enormous black cloud billowing upward into the sky.

Not the train station.

She fell to her knees in the dry grass. The devastation at No. 6 Chilwell was glaring even from a mile away. The remnant of factory buildings and tall stacks became a dark blur amidst the gray-green smoke spreading outward and heading into the town of Attenborough.

Tilly. Rose joined the neighbors who had started rushing forward, praying as she ran toward the place that had once been her sanctuary.

All around them the toxic gray haze had begun to settle, casting shadows against the leaves on the trees and tiled rooftops of row houses facing the street. Her lungs filled with the acrid smoke, and as she began to cough, she fished the handkerchief from her sleeve.

Drawing nearer to the destruction, she and the others had to dodge pieces of the wreckage littering the street while other debris continued raining from the sky. Rose screamed as she recognized the unspeakable carnage landing near her feet, and she tried to run even faster. *Dear Lord in heaven, so many bodies . . .*

By the time she reached the factory she was faint, her lungs burning. The opened west gate provided access, and she and the others headed inside. Whistles and bugles blared behind them as local ambulances and police lorries sped past.

Desperate to find her friend, she plunged into the mayhem. Hundreds of panicked workers, many of them wounded, swarmed to escape the factory's complex. Fires burned unchecked as volunteers frantically worked to extinguish the explosive flames.

She cried out at the sight of a co-worker—a fellow crane operator—severely burned and being lifted onto a stretcher and taken into an awaiting ambulance.

Lord, please let me find her! Rose pressed on toward the Mixing House, where Tilly had said she must finish a final task before leaving. The caustic air tasted bitter, her burning eyes tearing up as she picked her way through the rubble toward her destination.

She hadn't gone far when she paused beside the damaged rail of a metal platform overlooking the factory. Her sudden, sharp breath stung her raw throat.

Over half of Chilwell was gone. Completely destroyed. And the Mixing House—

She grabbed for the steel rail, her watery gaze fixed on the patch of scorched earth—all that remained of the building where her friend had been. “*Nooo!*”

Viciously, she rubbed her eyes with the grimy handkerchief. But when she looked up again, she saw only the horrible empty . . . nothing.

Rose lowered her head and stared listlessly at the ground near her feet. A glint of glass caught her eye and she bent to pick up the debris. Dizziness swarmed her, noting the silver now covered in soot while the glass—a purple jewel—remained pristine.

Attached to the brooch was a charred piece of dirty white cloth. Part of a collar . . . *'Twas my mother's. I'll never be parted from it.*

A deep sob tore from her chest. She would never see Tilly again.