

A close-up, profile view of a woman's head and shoulders. She has dark hair styled in an updo, adorned with a large, ornate, dark-colored butterfly-shaped hair clip. The background is a soft, textured, golden-brown color. The title 'IN LOVE'S TIME' is overlaid in large, white, serif font. 'IN' is smaller and flanked by decorative flourishes. 'LOVE'S' is the largest word, and 'TIME' is also large. To the right of 'TIME' is the subtitle 'A Novel' in a smaller, pink, cursive font.

IN
LOVE'S
TIME *A Novel*

KATE BRESLIN

"Readers will revel once again in
Breslin's superb chronicling of women's
vital contributions to the war effort."

—BOOKLIST on *As Dawn Breaks*



IN

LOVE'S

TIME

KATE BRESLIN



BETHANYHOUSE

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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.

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For my readers

And for the courageous and talented staff
at Endell Street—doctors, surgeons, nurses, scientists,
orderlies, clerks, cooks, laundresses, and volunteers—
your dedication and hard work proved your success
in establishing Britain’s first all-female-run
military hospital during WWI.

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under
the heavens . . . a time to love. . . .

Ecclesiastes 3:1, 8

1



WHITEHALL, LONDON
MONDAY, AUGUST 5, 1918—2130 HOURS

Would the human destruction never end?
Captain Sir Marcus Weatherford returned the telephone receiver to its cradle. Leaning back in his seat behind the desk, he stared at the tall oak bookshelves lining one wall of his Admiralty office. The leather tomes on government law, rules of the sea, and Britain's war history seemed to mock any peace of mind he might seek.

Tonight, a German Zeppelin struck over Norfolk's coast to the north, and if not for an RAF squadron's ability to shoot her down, the body count of British citizens over the past four years would have increased.

He rubbed the back of his neck. Only a year past his thirtieth birthday and yet he was tired. Four years of the fighting had worn him down. Though he hadn't been on the battlefields of No Man's Land across the sea, he'd performed his silent duty to the Crown, both in Britain and abroad, and sported the scars from more than one bullet to show for it.

How many times had he coached his men—friends and colleagues—with talk of a coming peace? Like the Allied armies,

the Germans were also exhausted; and with the Americans now in the fray, victory seemed plausible. Yet in his bones, Marcus refused to believe it. Not until the sounds of the guns stopped and the men began returning home.

In fact, he rarely considered what he might do after the war. Why torment himself with expectations that would amount to nothing, especially if he was killed during the next mission? At times he'd briefly entertained the idea of taking up life where he'd left off so many years ago, before Oxford and the Royal Naval Academy. Montefalco, his family estate, was in Hampshire, where he'd grown up surrounded by Mother and Grandfather and Fannie, though his baby sister was now a grown woman. Would he like settling down one day, being a family man and taking up farming? Overseeing the yearly harvest of Montefalco's grove of chestnut trees instead of his clandestine assignments?

His mouth curved upward. He couldn't imagine being satisfied with a sedate life of planting and harvesting or picking fruit. Not after years of chasing enemy spies across Europe. *Ah, man, but your sweet Clare could certainly persuade you otherwise . . .*

His pulse quickened. Soon he would see her again. He'd been away from London much during the past few weeks completing his latest assignment, and he'd missed their time together. Perhaps they would steal away to the shores at Margate for the weekend, and afterward play a game of chess. His smile broadened. He enjoyed matching wits with her, and it *was* Clare's turn to win back the white king.

He opened his desk drawer and reached inside for his small framed photo of her. His tension eased as he rubbed his thumb slowly across her smiling lips. How had he been so fortunate last year, finding a woman both smart and beautiful who would tolerate him *and* his frequent absences working for the Crown? And her enchanting two-year-old daughter, Daisy, had instantly claimed his heart—

“Marcus? Ah good, you're still here.”

He glanced up at the opened door and, after replacing the photo, swiftly rose to his feet.

“Take a seat, boy.” His boss, “C”—Captain Sir Mansfield George Smith-Cumming, head of Britain’s Secret Intelligence Service—entered his office and strode toward one of two wing-back chairs across from the desk.

Marcus marveled anew at the man’s smooth gait, despite his wooden leg. The horrible car crash in France four years ago cost him his limb and the life of his only son. Legend held that C dug into his pocket for a knife and finished cutting off his own partially severed leg in order to free himself to crawl to his boy and hold him as he died.

Easing down into the chair, C gazed at Marcus through his monocle. “You’re here past your bedtime.”

“As are you, sir.” C was known to spend most of his waking hours at the Admiralty.

“Well, I’m glad to catch you. Not ready to leave just yet?”

“No rush at all, sir.” C was a man he’d always admired. His own father had served with Captain Smith-Cumming in the Royal Navy before Marcus was born, and then years later when Marcus was old enough, Father introduced him to this enigma of a man who now ran MI6 at Whitehall.

Marcus had decided after Oxford to enlist in the Navy as well. Once he’d made midshipman, C offered him a post at the Admiralty and Marcus readily accepted. His subsequent training in naval intelligence, cryptography, and fieldwork with Scotland Yard had held him in good stead while he’d risen through the ranks, first as a lieutenant and then as a captain on assignment with MI6.

“How is Sir Geoffrey? It has been a while since he and I had lunch together.”

“Grandfather is doing well, sir. Still designing prosthetics for the wounded.”

C nodded and sighed. “Sadly, I imagine we keep him busy—too busy, in fact.”

“Sir, did you wish for me to brief you on the closing of the Kahverengi case?”

“Not exactly.” C hesitated. “While I commend you on that

most successful conclusion to the munitions debacle, I'm here for another reason. I'd planned to discuss this with you in the morning, but since you're still here . . . I have an assignment that needs your immediate attention."

Marcus's weariness evaporated. "Yes?"

"Day after tomorrow, I need you on a ship bound for the Russian port of Archangel. There's been a sighting west of the Ural Mountains." C eyed him through the monocle. "Empress Alexandra and her son, Alexei."

Marcus blinked and leaned back in his seat. Last year, Tsar Nicholas abdicated his throne in the face of revolution. Then just weeks ago, Russian newspapers shocked the world by reporting that the tsar, head of the Romanov dynasty, had been murdered in Yekaterinburg, and his family was relocated to a place of safety.

MI6 inquiries into the whereabouts of the tsarina and her five children, however, had so far proved fruitless. "Sir, I thought our agents there had determined the entire Romanov family was also killed."

"So they did. Until I received this coded telegram." C handed him a yellow sheet.

Marcus scanned the paper, frowning at the sender's initials.

"Sidney Reilly sent that to me yesterday from Moscow," C said, confirming Marcus's suspicions. "He learned of their location but insists on an in-person meeting to hand over the details. I can only surmise he's concerned the Bolsheviks will get wind of it."

Or another example of Reilly's eccentricities. Marcus returned the note. Years before the war, C had recruited the Russian agent to work for Britain, but Sidney Reilly had a reputation as a wild-card. "Why doesn't Reilly go himself to collect the Romanovs?"

"That's a bit of a pinch, I'm afraid. With Lenin back in Russia and the Bolsheviks in power, Reilly's having to stay one step ahead of the Cheka secret police in Moscow. He claims he can get as far north as the city of Vologda and meet you there in a week's time.

I'll wire him back for details." Again C eyed him sharply. "Once you've located the empress and her son, I will inform His Majesty."

Marcus nodded. No doubt King George would rejoice to learn that both the wife and the heir of his cousin Nicholas still lived. "How will I know for certain it *is* the empress and *tsarevich*?" He'd only seen a few old photographs.

"You will be accompanied by Natalya Bryce, Sir Walter's young widow." C smiled. "At one time Natalya was intimate with the Romanovs, and I've asked her to help us."

Marcus raised a brow at his boss. Natalya *was* Russian—a former ballerina who had married Sir Walter Bryce, their embassy man in Moscow, last year prior to his death.

Yet how did that qualify her to take on this covert assignment with him?

"Natalya grew up near Vologda," C said, reading his thoughts. "And from what I know of her and what Sir Walter relayed to me last year, she can handle herself. More importantly, she's able to make a positive identification of the Romanovs. God willing, once she verifies it's them, you can get everyone safely back to Britain."

He steadied his aging hands on the arms of the chair. "There is another reason I'm sending you. An assassination has been planned against Lenin by some of the Allied agents in Russia. Reilly knows when and where this will take place, and I need *you* to get me that information. This could be a boon for us. Cutting off the head of the Bolsheviks would allow the White Army and the Cossacks loyal to the former tsar to retake the government—"

"And get them back in the war against Germany."

"Precisely." C frowned, tilting his gaze. "These two assignments are of equal importance as they relate to one another, Marcus. To put it bluntly, the king wants his family back, and once the Bolsheviks are defeated, he'll most certainly wish to restore the Romanovs to their rightful throne."

Marcus's pulse raced. Peace could be within their grasp. "Understood, sir."

"I should warn you, too, that this is not only an extremely

delicate situation, but it will be a bit dodgier than your previous missions. Recently, we managed to secure Archangel from the Bolsheviks, but the rest of Russia is crawling with them. And while our embassy people in Moscow are fleeing north to Finland to be smuggled out on ships bound for home, you and Natalya Bryce will be going in the opposite direction.”

He paused. “If at any time you decide it’s too dangerous for her, use your discretion to come up with an alternate plan.” C rose from the chair. “Come and see me tomorrow to receive your necessary travel documents and dispatches for the British authority in Archangel. It’s best if Natalya poses as your fiancée on the pretense that you’re both visiting her family in the area of Vologda.”

He angled his monocle at Marcus. “You’ll also need to stop by Barkers on High Street in Kensington and ask for Mr. Price, the jeweler. We use him for this sort of thing, and he knows you’ll be coming.” He reached across the desk, and Marcus rose to shake his hand. “I’ll leave you to it, boy. Enjoy your time in London tomorrow while you can. I hear there’s to be a do at Benningham’s tomorrow night for some of the staff?”

“A dinner, sir. Director Henshaw from Communications is finally retiring.”

“Ah yes, another relic gone.” C sighed again. “Henshaw, like your father, once served with me in the Navy a lifetime ago. I’m told these days the director’s keen memory falls a bit short of the mark.” He turned and ambled toward the door. “It happens to all of us at one point or another,” he called back. “But for my part, I’d prefer this war be ended first.”

“Indeed, sir.” For a moment excitement pulsed through his veins, before frustration seeped in to take its place. His plans to spend time with Clare and Daisy were now dashed.

Retrieving the photograph from his desk drawer, Marcus sighed deeply as he gazed at her lovely image.

What had he once told his young lieutenant friend, Mabry?

Duty and love do not mix.