



EMBERS
in the
LONDON
SKY

a novel

SARAH
SUNDIN

Praise for *The Sound of Light*

“*The Sound of Light* is an awe-inspiring story set within the beauty, language, and culture of Denmark. Sundin’s craft is inimitable, and her literary finesse radiates from every page.”

Booklist starred review

“Sundin’s prose reveals the deepest emotions of the human heart. Full of gorgeous imagery and metaphor, this novel demonstrates that one person doing the right thing might just save a nation. Each Sundin novel tops the last.”

Library Journal starred review

“Sundin grounds this suspenseful tale in rich historical detail, weaving throughout probing questions of faith as characters struggle to behave in moral, godly ways, especially when it entails risking one’s life for a stranger.”

Publishers Weekly

“This is one of the most thoughtful, yet dramatic, novels set in WWII-occupied territory. A unique and engaging read.”

Historical Novel Society

Praise for *Until Leaves Fall in Paris*

“Sundin is a master at her craft. With meticulous historical research and an eye for both mystery and romance, Sundin rises to the top of WWII fiction.”

Library Journal starred review

“Fast-paced and rich with historical detail, Sundin’s narrative captivates by leaning in to the complexity of what it means to

live by Christian principles in a morally compromised world. This potent synthesis of history, love, and faith will delight romance readers, religious and nonreligious alike.”

Publishers Weekly

“Sarah Sundin delivers another epic tale filled with danger, romance, and all the good feels! If you love WWII books, intrigue, danger, and romance—this book has it all.”

Interviews & Reviews

Praise for *When Twilight Breaks*

“Sundin’s novels set the gold standard for historical war romance, and *When Twilight Breaks* is arguably her most brilliant and important work to date.”

Booklist starred review

“Entertaining, pulse-pounding, with space to ponder some deep questions, *When Twilight Breaks* is Sarah Sundin at her best.”

Life Is Story

“This richly detailed historical adventure romance will be sure to thrill fans of Sundin’s work and be a hit with any fan of inspirational WWII novels.”

All About Romance

Books by Sarah Sundin

When Twilight Breaks
Until Leaves Fall in Paris
The Sound of Light
Embers in the London Sky

SUNRISE AT NORMANDY SERIES

The Sea Before Us
The Sky Above Us
The Land Beneath Us

WINGS OF GLORY SERIES

A Distant Melody
A Memory Between Us
Blue Skies Tomorrow

WINGS OF THE NIGHTINGALE SERIES

With Every Letter
On Distant Shores
In Perfect Time

WAVES OF FREEDOM SERIES

Through Waters Deep
Anchor in the Storm
When Tides Turn

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SARAH SUNDIN



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Sarah Sundin, Embers in the London Sky
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to Arden
Our first grandson
Our very heart



TILBURG, THE NETHERLANDS
FRIDAY, MAY 10, 1940

As soon as she escaped to England, Aleida van der Zee Martens would cut her hair and have her son photographed for the first time.

Sebastian approached from behind. Why couldn't her husband ever wait until she finished brushing her hair? Sometimes he interrupted at seventeen strokes, sometimes at thirty-one, today at forty-three.

He wove his fingers into her hair halfway down her back, and she tensed.

In the bureau mirror, Aleida met his gaze. Warm gray today, not chilled steel.

Regardless, every muscle stayed taut.

He kissed her cheek. "Breakfast in ten minutes, Lay-Lay."

"Yes, Bas." A smile rose. She and little Theodoor would never breakfast with Bas again.

After he headed downstairs to listen to the morning news, Aleida finished brushing her hair. Only seven strokes remained to remove the feel of him. Not enough, but today of all days she couldn't go above her customary fifty strokes.

She set her brush on the silver tray, centered between her comb and her perfume atomizer. At the base of her brush lay her rings. First she put on her grandmother's sapphire ring. Then her engagement ring, which she would sell in London.

Her fingers trembled, and she drew back lest she knock something askew, knock her plan further askew.

With rumors of German troops massing on the Dutch border, she'd decided to move up her plan an entire week.

But it was a good plan.

For the last time, she coiled her hair the way Bas liked.

After Bas left for work, while the cook cleaned up after breakfast and the housekeeper scrubbed the downstairs floors, Aleida would sneak out a suitcase. She'd already hidden her essentials and Theo's in bureau drawers, ready to pack.

When the housekeeper went upstairs to scrub the guest rooms, Aleida would announce she was leaving for her hair appointment, timed for when her mother-in-law across the street was away for her own hair appointment and wouldn't see Aleida and Theo leave with luggage.

Tonight, she and her three-year-old boy would be safe with Tante Margriet and Uncle James in the English countryside.

Yet her fingers still trembled.

A voice climbed the stairs—Sebastiaan's. Shouting orders, closer and closer.

Her chest seized, bile rose up her throat, and she gripped the bureau top. "Not today. Please."

The bedroom door banged open, and Bas wrestled three suitcases inside. "We're leaving in fifteen minutes. Start packing. Only necessities and valuables. Hurry."

"What?" The word poured out in a breathy haze. She did plan to pack—but not with Bas.

He heaved the suitcases onto the bed and flung open his wardrobe. "You have family in England, ja? A cousin? An uncle?"

She'd hoped he'd forgotten. "I—I don't understand."

"Don't get hysterical." Bas folded business suits into the largest suitcase. "The Germans invaded at dawn. Parachutists landed at airfields and bridges. Tanks crossed the border. I can't possibly run a profitable business under the Nazis, but I can in England."

Acid burned her throat, coated the inside of her mouth, corroded her hopes.

Bas flicked up his gaze to her. "Pack or don't pack, but we're leaving in fifteen minutes. Cook is preparing a hamper of food, the chauffeur is warming up the automobile, and I already have visas in our passports. I planned everything."

So had Aleida. Her plan covered every contingency. Except this.



Sebastian cursed and stomped on the brake.

Aleida braced herself on the dashboard. They'd managed to cross from the Netherlands into Belgium, but refugees and soldiers clogged the roads.

Bas ran his hand through thick blond hair. "I have enough petrol to reach Boulogne, but not if I have to stop for these idiots."

A stoop-shouldered woman with a shawl over her head pushed a heaping handcart. She glowered at Aleida.

Aleida ducked her chin. Only three people occupied their large vehicle.

If only she could join those on foot, hide in peasant's garb, and blend into the masses.

Her plan lay in shards on the floor of her mind, and she tiptoed through and poked at the splinters. Could nothing be salvaged? With Bas at Tante Margriet's, where could Aleida and Theo go to flee from him?

A whimper rose from the backseat.

Bas scowled at Aleida.

She offered an apologetic smile. “If I could sit in the back-seat—”

“No.” He slapped the seat between them. “A wife belongs with her husband.”

Theo slumped against the door with his white-blond hair mussed and his perfect little mouth warped by fatigue. He held his stuffed elephant, cupping the floppy trunk against his cheek. More whimpers bubbled out.

“Tay-Oh,” Aleida sang out with a sunny smile. “Tay-Oh. Would Oli like to play a game?”

Theo blinked, sat up, and handed Aleida his best friend.

She held the elephant down in her lap. “Oli, where’s Theo? You’ve forgotten? Please say you haven’t forgotten, Oli.”

Theo shook his head, and his eyes shone. “Oli not forget.”

“That’s right, *Schatje*. Elephants never forget.”

Bas snorted. “Who made up that nonsense?”

Aleida’s mouth tightened. “It’s an English saying. If you want to go to England, you’d better get used to it.”

His gaze knifed into her. She’d pay for that flippancy later.

But now her son needed her. She dangled Oli’s trunk over the seatback and pointed it at Theo. “That’s right, Oli. There’s Theo.”

Giggles poured out, and Theo slid off the seat and scooted behind Aleida. “Where am I now, Oli?”

Aleida swung Oli’s trunk in a loop, then pointed it at her son. “See? Oli will always find you. Oli will never forget—”

“What’s this?” Bas spoke with an air of gleaming anticipation.

On the road, people scattered to each side, cars pulled over, people spilled out, ran.

“Oh no.” Aleida leaned forward, craned her neck up.

Two dark green shapes winged down from the sky, spitting sparks, dragons scorching the earth.

German aircraft!

“Theo!” Aleida sprang to her knees and groped over the seat for her son. She had to get him out to safety. “Come to *Moeder!* Come—”

The car leapt forward.

Aleida almost toppled over the seatback. “What on—”

Bas sped down the road, unimpeded.

“Bas!” She ducked to see out the windscreen. “The planes!”

“They don’t care about refugees, only soldiers. Now’s my chance.” His jaw set in that hard way of his.

The dragons swooped lower, foul breath spinning in silver discs.

“Theo, stay down! Cover your head.” Aleida folded herself low. Her hands formed the flimsiest of helmets. “Stay down!”

The roar of the auto’s engine merged with the whine of the planes. Pops rang out, and Aleida screamed.

The whining and pops veered away.

“Told you we were fine,” Bas said. “I’m the only person on this road smart enough to see it.”

Aleida stayed low, breathing hard, burying her fingers in the hair she’d coiled so neatly.

He expected her to praise him for his insight and courage.

She dug her fingers deeper into the hated hairstyle. Why should she have to praise foolishness? Why should she have to lie to a man who endangered his wife and child? Why couldn’t she get away from him?

Why couldn’t he die?

Aleida choked on that dark thought.

Bas groaned, and the car slowed. “At least I gained a mile.”

She peeked over the dashboard. Refugees dragged carts onto the road, herded animals around . . .

Around a horse and a man sprawled on the road.

Red. So much red.

Aleida gasped and clapped both hands over her face. The Germans did kill refugees. It could have been them.

The car lurched down to the right, and Bas cursed. “Must have blown a tire.”

What did he expect racing at such speeds? But Aleida kept that thought to herself.

Bas eased the car into a line of trees, where dozens of refugees were setting up camp. “You prepare dinner while I change the tire.”

“All right.” Her voice and her legs quivered as she climbed out of the car.

She opened the back door and gathered Theo into her arms. He clung to her. “It’s all right, Schatje. You were so brave.”

Bas shrugged off his suit jacket. “Hold this.”

She shifted Theo so she could take the jacket.

Bas opened the boot of the car and hauled out the spare tire. “Don’t let the jacket out of your sight. Our passports are in there.”

Aleida took a step back. Another.

While Bas changed the tire, she and Theo could walk away. Simply walk away. She could exchange her couture hat and coat for a peasant’s shawl. And keep walking.

With her passport, she could cross the Channel. With Sebastiaan’s, she could block him from following.

“Here’s the food hamper.” Bas set it under a tree.

Aleida jolted out of her dream. What was she thinking? Hasty decisions led to disaster. Like marrying Bas.

She knelt beside the hamper. “Let’s see what Cook packed for dinner, Theo.”

He twisted to see, and she set him down.

Aleida spread a cloth under the tree and arranged bread, sausage, gouda, and mustard.

Bas’s tools still clanked, so she leaned back against the tree trunk. Theo crawled onto her lap, and she kissed his silky hair. Before them, golden barley waved in the fading sunlight.

If only she could tune out the trudging feet and honking

horns behind her and pretend the Germans hadn't invaded the Low Countries and Bas hadn't invaded her plan.

"Green!" Theo pointed up to the leaves with his right hand, the one with no fingers, only five darling little bumps, as if his digits had been sleeping when the order to grow was issued.

"You're so smart, Theo."

"Blue." He plopped his hand close to Aleida's eye.

She laughed and gazed into her son's sparkling greenish-blue eyes. "Just like yours." Thank goodness her son had inherited the van der Zee eyes, not Bas's cold gray.

"Red." Theo tugged down her lips, and he giggled.

She kissed his hand, each darling bump, leaving lipstick behind. "Now your hand is red."

A click.

"That's swell," a man said in American-accented English. He crouched in front of them, holding a camera and grinning. "A swell bunch of photos."

He'd taken pictures of them? Aleida's heart pounded in hope—photos of her son at last?—and in dread.

"I beg your pardon," Bas said in English. He marched over, his face a cool mask. "Did I give you permission to photograph my wife?"

Aleida curled inward and gathered Theo closer.

"Good evening, sir." The dark-haired man tipped his fedora. "I'm with the United Press."

Bas's gaze bored into Aleida. "Was that *thing* showing?"

"I—I don't know." She tugged down her son's sleeve. "I didn't see him until it was too late."

"Give me that camera." Bas held out his hand.

The photographer let out a scoffing sound. "I don't need to do that."

"*Vader* angry." Theo burrowed in Aleida's arms.

He was indeed. The poor American didn't know he'd entered a bear's lair.

“I will tell you what you need to do.” Bas’s fingers clenched and unclenched. “I am a powerful man with powerful friends. If you print those photographs, I will destroy your career.”

The photographer’s lips twisted in disbelief, and he turned to Aleida.

A sob burst from Theo’s mouth, and Aleida begged with her eyes. “Please don’t cross him, sir. Please. You don’t know what you’ve done.”

Dark eyes widened, and the man’s jaw fell slack. “I beg your pardon, ma’am. I promise I won’t print the pictures.”

“If you do.” Bas’s tone rose in a clap of thunder.

“Hey! You have my word.” He raised a hand in surrender and hurried away, shaking his head. “Crazy.”

The thunder rolled Aleida’s way, and Theo wailed and wound his arms around her neck.

“Make it shut up. Now!”

“Hush, Schatje.” Aleida rocked her boy with her gaze locked on the bear. “Hush.”

“I’m sick of the crying.” Bas flung his hand toward the car. “Go to bed. No dinner.”

“Yes, Bas.” Hunger was the least of the punishments she could have received.

She struggled to her feet, climbed into the backseat, and lay down with her sobbing son in her arms.

“Make it shut up.” Bas thumped his hands on the car roof. “Or I will.”

“Hush, Schatje.” Her tears dampened her son’s hair. His welfare—his life—depended on his silence.



Salt-crusted eyes resisted opening. Aleida rubbed them, and faint daylight emerged. Then came the memory of what caused that salt, and she tightened her arms.

Around nothing.

Theo? Had he fallen?

On the floor of the car, Oli lay upside down. His thick gray legs jiggled in the air.

The car was moving.

“Theo?” She sat up.

Bas was at the wheel. He’d put Theo up front with him? How unusual.

But no one sat with Bas in the front seat.

Her mind emptied. Her lungs emptied. Her heart emptied. “Where—where’s Theo?”

“Don’t get hysterical.” Bas honked the horn. “Hurry, you idiots.”

Aleida’s fingers coiled into the seatback. “Where is our *son*? What did you do with him?”

Bas shook his head. “Why do you always get hysterical?”

Of all times, now she had every right to hysterics. “Where is our *son*? Our *son*?”

“I told you to shut him up, but you never do. Is peace and quiet too much to ask?”

“What did you do?” Aleida’s voice ground out.

“Last night, a couple agreed to take him to London for us.”

“You—you gave our son to total strangers?”

Bas shrugged. “You saw it yesterday, mothers shoving their children through car windows.”

Desperate mothers, certain their children stood a better chance in a car than on foot. “But we already have a car. What on earth? Where—how—what were you thinking?”

A horse-drawn cart stopped in front of them, and Bas stomped the brakes.

Aleida scrambled out of the car, her chest heaving. She had to find her son.

“Aleida! Get back here.”

“No!” She ran down the road and wove through the crowd. “Theo! Theo!”

She peered into the open window of a black sedan. No Theo. “Have you seen a little blond boy, three years old, with an English couple?”

“No. No, I haven’t.” A middle-aged woman looked at Aleida with alarm.

A hand clamped onto her arm, and she cried out.

“Get in the car.” Bas jerked her around to face him.

“I will not.” She yanked her arm in vain. Why could she never break free of this man?

Something hardened in her, hardened so brittle it snapped, and she glared into Bas’s thundercloud eyes. “I will not go with you. I’m looking for my son, and I never want to see you again.”

His lips curved up. “Now, why would you want to leave me? I’m the only one who knows the couple’s address in London.”

Air and hope and strength leaked from her chest. She was trapped. The only way to find her son was to stay with the man who’d given him away.

“If you ever leave me . . .” Bas’s grip drilled into her arm, dug grooves between muscles. “Or if you *ever* talk that way to me again, you’ll never again see that monstrosity you call a son.”

A cry spilled out, all her grief for Theo mingling with the burning pain in her arm.

More cries rang out, as if the whole world wept with her.

Someone bumped Aleida.

All around, people scurried off the road.

She gasped. Three aircraft dove down.

“Get in the car.” Bas dragged her down the road. “Your hysterics have cost me too much time.”

He didn’t care about her, didn’t care about his child, only about himself.

At the car, Bas reached for the door handle.

A coiled spring burst inside her. She planted one foot and

spun backward, toward Bas, slammed her shoulders into his arm, broke his grip.

She bolted for the trees.

“Get in the car!” Bas yelled. “One!”

When he reached three, he’d beat her senseless.

Aleida flung herself flat under the trees and covered her head.

The airplanes roared closer, screaming, spitting.

“Two!”

Aleida hunkered low among strangers crying and praying and pleading to live.

Shots clattered along the pavement, a giant chain saw ripping the road in two.

“Thr—” Bas’s voice spiraled up into a squeal, almost girlish.

The aircraft noise died down, but everyone still cried and prayed and pleaded to live.

Bas never finished the word *three*.

Aleida forced herself to stand, to walk. Numb.

Sebastian Martens, a powerful man with powerful friends, lay by his expensive car, his limbs at grotesque angles, his eyes dull as ancient pewter.

So much red.

Aleida had wanted him dead. Now it had happened.

But now, how could she find her son?