MISTS *over the* CHANNEL ISLANDS

a NOVEL *of* WORLD WAR II

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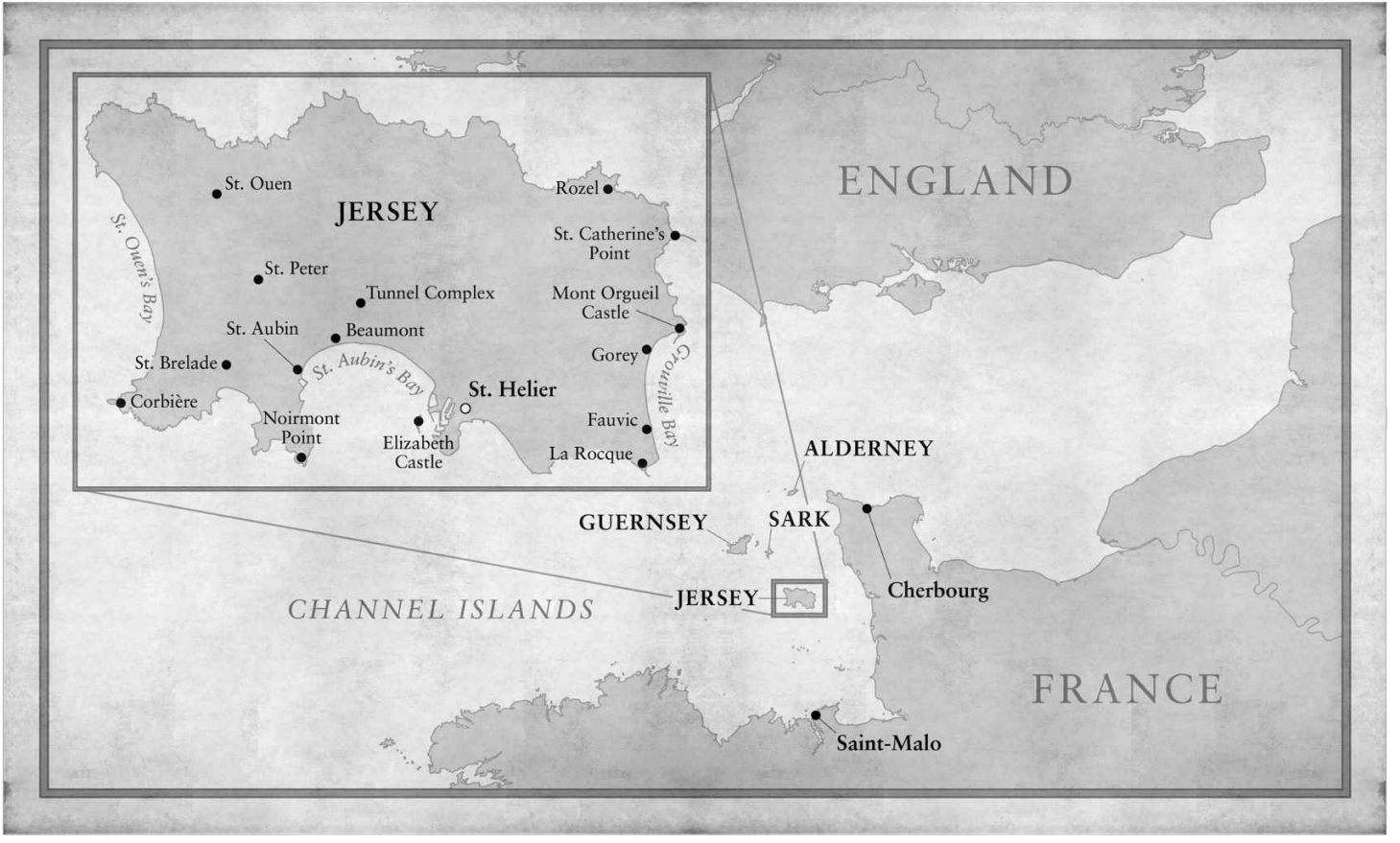
In loving memory
of my mother-in-law,
Diane Sundin,
who shone the light of Jesus
to all who knew her.



CHAPTER 1

ST. HELIER, JERSEY, CHANNEL ISLANDS
THURSDAY, JUNE 20, 1940

Words failed Dr. Ivy Picot, so she sketched her father with gray-flecked hair, packing to go to war.

In his office, Dad buckled his medical bag. "Have no fear."

"Perhaps I should fear the Germans, but I don't." Ivy drew her father's rounded cheeks and chin, so much like hers. With the fall of France certain and the Channel Islands too distant for Britain to defend, the British troops and Jersey Militia were evacuating. "I'm proud of you. The militia needs their medical officer."

Dad engaged Ivy with a gaze as soft as the black leather of his bag. "I meant you mustn't fear for the medical practice."

Ivy stifled a wince. Since she was a woman and only one year out of university, patients often asked for the "real doctor." Would they trust her without Dad's experience behind her?

"You come from a long line of Doctors Picot, and you may be the finest yet." Dad's brown-eyed gaze drilled into her. "Come along."

Ivy set her sketch pad on Dad's desk—her desk for now. How long until he returned?

Would the Germans invade the Channel Islands or ignore them as inconsequential? Could Hitler resist planting his flag on British soil? What would happen if they came? The horrifying stories from Poland and the Netherlands and Belgium . . .

Ivy shuddered and followed her father into the waiting room of the surgery. Since the Nazis loved to provoke panic and despair, staying calm seemed an appealing act of defiance.

Dad slipped on his overcoat. "Fern will be a good help to you."

"She will." Ivy pinned on her hat. In April, her older sister had taken their mother's place as receptionist when Mum went to England to care for her ill father.

"You're each strong where the other is weak. Don't forget that."

Ivy's only strength lay in medicine. Even then, she relied on her father's wisdom. A fluttery sensation filled her stomach. How could she run the practice without him?

"You're ready, Dad?" Charlie clomped down the hall, his face alight. "I wish I could fight too."

Ivy pulled her twelve-year-old brother to her side, resisting the urge to brush back the shank of black hair hanging over his brow. "Let's finish school first, shall we?"

Charlie screwed up his handsome face. "The war will be over by then."

Ivy certainly hoped so. "Are you sure you don't want to evacuate?"

"I'm not afraid of the Nazis." He pulled himself tall but barely cleared Ivy's shoulder. "Besides, you need a man around the house."

Charlie's voice had yet to change, but Ivy gave his narrow shoulders a squeeze.

"If you evacuated, Ivy . . ." Dad said.

If she evacuated, Charlie would too. "And who would care for our patients?"

"Indeed." A sad wisp of a smile rose. "War makes for difficult choices."

How unfair that Dad should have to make those difficult choices twice in one lifetime. "I know—now I know."

Dad's gaze swept the walls of the ground floor of the family home, La Bliue Brise, where he'd been raised, where he'd raised his own family, and where he practiced. "In times of peace, we choose amongst many good and pleasant paths, but in times of war . . ."

Ivy's throat tightened. "No path is good or pleasant."

"Not pleasant, no." He aimed one finger at Ivy. "But you can still choose the good. You must."

She managed a nod. What could possibly be good about Nazi soldiers coming to their beautiful island?

Dad picked up his luggage and led the way out onto Bath Street.

In the skies above, puffy clouds edged with light played in the cool breeze, oblivious to the turmoil below.

Bill and Fern Le Corre came down the road with their twin seven-year-old sons. Billy and Freddy scampered to Dad and hugged him, then Ivy.

"We don't want to go to England." Tears swam in Billy's dark eyes. "Mummy doesn't want us to leave."

"But Daddy says we must," Freddy said.

One look at Fern's quivering chin and Bill's stony chin, and Ivy took her nephews' hands and led them down the street toward the harbor. "What a lovely adventure you'll have. Your grandmother can show you where she played as a girl before she came to Jersey."

Ahead of Ivy, Fern clutched her husband's arm and tipped up her exquisite heart-shaped face. Her eyelashes fluttered over her wide-set eyes. "Please stay, Bill. I need you."

"Then come with me. Stay with your mother."

"I will not leave Jersey. It's my home. And Ivy needs me to run the practice. Right, Ivy?"

Ivy did, but she wanted no part of their discussion, so she told the boys to count the houses they passed to distract them from their parents' ongoing argument.

"I'm in the militia." Bill strode with a military bearing as if to prove his point. "It's my duty to fight for our island."

"How can you fight for our island by leaving it?"

"We already discussed this. I refuse to stay when I can fight for Britain."

"At least let me keep my boys. They're all I have." Fern's voice warbled.

Those boys had reached their limit with counting, so Ivy had them look for their chums on their way to the docks.

So many children. Schoolchildren, like Billy and Freddy, evacuating alone. Younger children with their mothers. Men of military age, off to enlist in the British Army. All jostling each other, hefting luggage, skirting the mass of abandoned cars. Ivy clutched the boys' hands so she wouldn't lose them in the crowd.

Alexander Coutanche, the Bailiff of Jersey, had urged people to stay, but hundreds filled the Weighbridge area by the docks and circled the gardens around the statue of Queen Victoria.

"My decision is final," Bill said to Fern. "The boys are evacuating to England for their safety. Join them or don't. That's your decision."

Fern jerked her head to the side.

"Come now." Bill's voice sweetened. "May I have one lovely smile before I leave?"

Ivy ripped her gaze from their farewell, hugged her nephews, and sent them to Charlie for one last hug from their beloved uncle.

She fell into her father's embrace and absorbed his scent of wool and pipe tobacco and disinfectant, his strength and wisdom and cheer. Somehow she had to make do without him. Somehow she had to relieve his worries, his guilt about leaving. "I'll miss you, but we'll be fine."

"I know you will." Dad's voice went gruff. He spun away to hug Fern, and then he and Bill led the boys down Albert Pier extending over the turquoise waters.

Fern's face wobbled between grief and anger, and Charlie's between grief and stoicism.

Ivy linked arms with them, one on each side. "We'll make do. We will. As long as we look after each other."

Something too manly and resolute crossed Charlie's face. "And choose the good."

The family. The practice. The patients.

"Yes," Ivy said. "We'll choose the good."

AMSTERDAM, THE NETHERLANDS
THURSDAY, JULY 2, 1942

The Gestapo knew how to follow a man far better than Gerrit van der Zee knew how to avoid being followed.

The sensation of being watched heated the back of Gerrit's skull, and he walked right past the door to his own apartment building.

Sixteen months had passed since he and his best friend, Bernardus Kroon, had dissolved their resistance group. Sixteen months since he'd done anything warranting arrest.

Yet that familiar heat persisted. If the Germans had arrested one of his former colleagues, they could have extracted names under torture.

Gerrit's grip tightened on his attaché case. Every time he had turned a corner on his way home from work, he'd discreetly scanned the street behind him. But discretion created blind spots.

His next movements had to be smooth, swift, and innocent. He couldn't afford to step into a Gestapo trap, but he did want to go home.

To still his mind, he counted to ten.

Stopped. Glanced at a house number. Frowned. A quick back-and-forth as if lost.

Spun on his heel and retraced his steps.

What had lain behind him now lay before him. No one on the street stopped. No one ducked into a doorway. No one stood reading a newspaper.

Two businessmen passed, discussing a supplier who owed them a shipment. A young mother carried a bundle on one hip and a

baby on the other. An elderly couple leaned on each other as they shuffled over the flagstones.

The back of Gerrit's skull cooled, and he strode on, casually surveying the neighborhood.

When he reached his building, he studied the house number while checking out the side of his eye in case anyone had doubled back.

No one had. He exhaled, slipped inside, and shut the door behind him.

A man stood by the staircase, a gray homburg shielding his lowered head.

Gerrit's heart seized, and he groped for the door handle. He'd walked into a trap after all.

The man lifted the brim of his hat, revealing Bernardus Kroon's pale blue eyes and ruddy complexion.

The air rushed from Gerrit's lungs. "Ber—"

Bernardus pressed one finger to his lips, then pointed upstairs.

Only the most important of reasons would compel Bernardus to break their silence, so Gerrit led his friend up to his flat.

In early 1941, Dutch Nazi thugs had murdered Dirk de Vos, the editor of their underground newspaper. With the Germans cracking down on the Dutch resistance with arrests and executions, Gerrit and Bernardus had shut down the group and parted ways.

Inside the flat, Bernardus tossed his hat on the coatrack, went to Gerrit's phonograph, and lowered the needle. Strains of Mozart's Clarinet Concerto in A Major frolicked in the air.

Bernardus's shoulders slumped, and he rolled his eyes at Gerrit as he sat in one of the two armchairs by the stove. "You need better records."

"You need better taste." Gerrit allowed a little smile and pulled the second chair closer to his oldest friend. "You're alive."

"So are you. No mean feat nowadays."

"Which is why we aren't supposed to meet."

Bernardus flicked up the smile he always gave when he disregarded Gerrit's advice. "Have you joined another resistance group?"

Gerrit stilled, his hands clasped on his knees. In the resistance, no one asked or answered questions about his work. The less everyone knew, the better. In case of arrest and torture.

But this was Bernardus, so he swallowed hard. "No."

"I'm involved again."

Gerrit raised one hand to hush his friend.

Bernardus raised one hand to hush Gerrit's reservations. "In France."

"France?"

"Something's wrong here in the Netherlands." Bernardus mashed his lips together. "Too many arrests. I think the Gestapo has infiltrated the resistance groups."

Gerrit groaned. Thank goodness he'd retired from that line of work.

Bernardus fiddled with the tin model of a catapult on the side table. "Remember Pierre Lavoie from university?"

"Yes."

"His construction firm in Paris needed a geologist, so they hired me last summer. The job allows me to travel all over France. To meet people. I've met men drawing maps and diagrams of German fortifications to send to the Allies."

Gerrit's stomach hardened. "You shouldn't tell me this."

"Yes, I should. We need you to—"

"Absolutely not."

Bernardus raised one eyebrow of pale blond. "You didn't let me finish."

"I don't need to." Conviction kept his voice low. "I won't get involved again."

"It's time."

One shake of his head. "Look at all we did, all we risked—for nothing. We spoke out against the Germans, and they're still here,

stronger than ever, more oppressive than ever. We spoke up for the Jews, and the Germans are deporting them by the trainload to camps in the east—men, women, little children."

"Yes, but—"

"All those good men and women on our side—they're dead. They're in concentration camps. They're in hiding."

Bernardus's gaze narrowed to a pinprick. "Or they're too scared to lift their heads."

Gerrit drew back his chin. "I'm willing to risk my life. But only if some good will come of it."

"Which is why I'm here." Bernardus set his elbows on his knees. "We want your experience as a civil engineer to draw diagrams and maps."

Gerrit let out a scoffing chuckle. "I doubt the Germans would let me close enough to their fortifications."

"They would if we were employed by a firm contracted with Organisation Todt."

"Org—absolutely not." The German quasi-military organization built gun emplacements and defensive works along the Atlantic coast.

Bernardus shifted in his seat. "My French firm doesn't qualify for a subcontract with a German OT firm, but the German firms are desperate. Most of their men are in the military, so they need men like us."

Gerrit stared at his friend, but Bernardus still stared back. "You want us to work for—I'd never."

"I know this sounds like a wild plan, but—"

"Wild, yes. Helping the Germans build fortifications that prevent the Allies from invading? When an Allied invasion is the only thing that can save us from the Nazis?"

Bernardus sat back and rubbed his hand over his chin. "They're building them with or without us. And very possibly with us as forced labor. At some point they'll conscript us to dig ditches or work in a factory in Germany—where we could do no good

whatsoever. Or we can use our professional skills and my resistance network to send intelligence to the Allies."

Gerrit's mouth tightened. "While wearing a German uniform."

Bernardus rubbed his chin over and over. "Everyone thinks the Allies will invade next spring."

"I certainly hope so."

"The Germans are strong and entrenched and growing stronger. The Allies need all the information they can get. You and I can—"

"You." Gerrit jabbed a finger at his friend. "You alone. I will not be a part of this."

Bernardus glanced down to the side table, to Gerrit's collection of tin and cast-iron gadgets. He picked up a scrap of paper, filled with Gerrit's diagrams of those gadgets. "This is why we need you. I have the connections. I have skills the Germans need. But I don't have your knowledge of engineering, your skill in precision drawing."

Something strange stirred in Gerrit's head. Yes, he could make precision drawings and maps—enjoyed doing so. But not for the Germans, and he shook the stirring out of his head.

"I need you for another reason too." Bernardus picked up a cast-iron mechanical bank and fingered the lever. "The Germans trust the Dutch in general, which is why the firm is willing to consider us. But they said I don't have the right political affiliations."

Gerrit murmured in sympathy, even as an odd note of disappointment twanged in his chest. Neither of them belonged to Nazi organizations. Quest finished.

Iron clinked on iron as Bernardus played with the bank. "The firm needs civil engineers more than they need geologists. They agreed to hire me if I recruited an engineer with the proper affiliations."

"I don't—"

"You do." Pain rippled across Bernardus's face. "I heard about Cilla."

Gerrit slammed his eyes shut, his mind shut. The recent news of his cousin's death had devastated his family. "I don't believe it."

"That she died?"

"That she died in the service of Germany. She couldn't. She was on our side." Gerrit had recruited Cilla to infiltrate the *Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging*, the Dutch Nazi Party, since Cilla's wayward sister, Hilde, was a member. Cilla had provided vital information for their underground paper at exceptional risk.

Gerrit pried his eyes open. "Cilla could never serve Germany. Something is wrong. It doesn't ring true."

Bernardus huffed out a sigh. "I don't know what to think. She disappeared after Dirk's death, ja? Time passes. People change. Hard times make people do things they ordinarily wouldn't consider. Like joining Organisation Todt." He let out a wry chuckle. "Can you imagine wearing a German uniform?"

"No." Yet that strange stirring resumed, stirring enough to be named.

Purpose.

Gerrit shoved out of his chair. In the past sixteen months, his life had been safer, but it didn't fulfill.

Bernardus set the bank down with a thump of iron on wood. "Regardless of what you think, the Germans think Cilla was on their side. They know Hilde is on their side. And you have no affiliations on any side. The Germans are free to color you Nazi black instead of Dutch orange. They are very interested in you."

Air inflated Gerrit's cheeks, and he strode to the phonograph playing the final intricate scales of the concerto. His left hand flexed and stretched, flexed and stretched. "Can you guarantee the diagrams would aid the Allies?"

"I guarantee."

It was a wild idea. Beyond wild. So why was he considering it? "How much time do I have?"

"I leave for Paris tomorrow morning. I can give you tonight to think about it. Pray about it. You would need to apply for travel papers straightaway."

Pray about it? Bernardus was a man of prayer. He remembered

Gerrit as a man of prayer. But so much had happened. Or rather, so little had happened.

At the center of the phonograph, the arm bounced and bounced. Without a track to run in, the needle produced no sound, no music.

Gerrit lifted the arm and set it in the track on the outside rim, and music again flowed. "I'll apply for papers in the morning."

CHAPTER 2

ST. PETER'S PARISH, JERSEY
THURSDAY, AUGUST 13, 1942

At Uncle Arthur and Aunt Opal's dairy farm, Ivy parked her bicycle outside the farmhouse of rosy Jersey granite. "Uncle Arthur? I came to patch you up again."

"It's nothing to bother about." Uncle Arthur emerged from the barn, also of granite. "You shouldn't have come all the way out here. Not that you aren't welcome, mind."

Yet Ivy noticed a hitch in Uncle Arthur's step. "Since I'm here, I might as well look."

"No escape now." Charlie trotted out of the barn. He'd taken a summer job at the farm, mainly because the Germans allowed extra rations for laborers. Regular rations didn't provide enough for a growing fourteen-year-old boy, even with Fern and Ivy surreptitiously slipping him extra portions.

Uncle Arthur pulled off his cap and entered the house. "Opal? Ivy's here. Your doing, I suppose?"

"Of course." Aunt Opal set a plate of potatoes on the table and motioned for Charlie to sit and eat. "Ivy and I are conspiring to keep you alive, cruel and conniving women that we are."

With a dramatic sigh, Uncle Arthur flopped into a wooden

chair at the table. "If only your ravishing beauty hadn't enticed me into marrying into a medical family."

Aunt Opal kissed the top of her husband's head and brought a pot to the table. "Water's been boiled and cooled for you, Ivy, and I have clean bandages. I'm afraid I have only a sliver of that awful green French soap."

"It'll do." Jersey had run out of soap in the early months of the occupation, and the Germans sent a low-quality soap that didn't even lather. After Ivy washed her hands at the sink, she sat at the table and opened her bag. "No use hiding. Show me."

Much grumbling emanated from Uncle Arthur's square face, but he rolled up his trouser leg and propped his foot on an empty chair.

An unbandaged, three-inch laceration cut across his calf. Ivy palpated the red, raised edges. "As soon as you get a cut, you must cleanse it with water and soap if you have it. Then bandage it to keep it clean. With our poor diets, we can't fend off infections as we ought. Simple cuts are taking six weeks to heal."

Uncle Arthur groaned, this time closer to acceptance.

Ivy cleansed the wound with soap and water. Over the past two years of the German occupation, the Jersey Medical Society had met monthly to discuss the worsening health situation. The "occupation ulcers" developing from simple cuts. The cases of life-threatening sepsis. And the scarcity of medications.

"This will sting." Ivy opened a bottle of iodine and painted the wound area.

Uncle Arthur hissed through his teeth.

"I'll visit again tomorrow. In the meantime, keep the wound clean and bandaged." She glanced up to Aunt Opal.

Aunt Opal patted Charlie's shoulder. "Charlie and I will tie him up if we must."

Charlie swallowed a bite of potato, pan-fried without any fat. "May I, please?"

Uncle Arthur gave his nephew a mock glare. "Cheeky lad."

Charlie pinched his own cheek. "The cheekiest."

Ivy chuckled and pinned a strip of fabric around her uncle's calf. Uncle Arthur would surely miss Charlie when the boy returned to school at Victoria College in a few weeks.

Uncle Arthur tugged down his trouser leg. "Would you like to hear the latest news?"

In June, the Germans had confiscated ten thousand wireless sets in Jersey. Losing the news on the BBC made the islanders feel more isolated than ever, with only censored news allowed in the *Jersey Evening Post*.

Ivy didn't want to know where Uncle Arthur had hidden his wireless, but she did want the news.

Uncle Arthur rested his sturdy forearms on the table. "The Germans have already told us about their advances on Stalingrad."

"Of course." German victories received full coverage.

"But they didn't tell us American pilots are arriving in England. The BBC did."

Charlie's dark eyes darted around. "Then they can send soldiers. Then they can invade."

"Someday," Uncle Arthur said. "And soon."

Ivy managed to smile. Although the Channel Islands had surrendered to the Germans without bloodshed—other than a couple dozen poor souls killed in Luftwaffe air raids to Jersey and Guernsey—the Germans certainly wouldn't allow the Allies to land at so low a cost.

Aunt Opal cleared away the extra bandages. "Remember not to spread the news. If you must, speak in Jèrriais."

"*Oui, ma bouonnefemme*," Uncle Arthur said in the local patois. Before the war, Jèrriais had fallen into disuse, but it was regaining popularity. Since it was descended from an ancient Norman tongue, it sounded a bit like French—but not enough for a French speaker to follow.

"*Mêfie-té*," Aunt Opal said.

"I'm always careful." Uncle Arthur clapped his hands to his knees. "Come, young Charlie. Let's see to those cows."

"Thank you." Charlie handed Aunt Opal his plate. "Ivy, tell Fern I'll be home in an hour."

"I will." Ivy glanced at her wristwatch. How had she lost track of time again? "Oh no. I'm late. I told Fern I was low on iodine solution, so she rang Carter's Chemist's. They were to have a bottle ready for me an hour ago."

"Carter's?" Aunt Opal washed Charlie's dish. "The Picots have always used Island Drugs."

"Mr. Johnson retired and closed his shop last week." Ivy packed the empty iodine bottle in her medical bag next to her sketch pad. If only she hadn't stopped to draw that sweet patch of bell heather. "I must rush. Fern scheduled two appointments in the surgery late this afternoon."

Charlie rolled his eyes. "Without Bill and the boys, Fern has only us to boss around."

"Oh, hush. She's trying to keep the practice afloat. And I *am* always late." Ivy kissed her aunt and uncle goodbye and rushed outside.

She pedaled hard down narrow roads bound on each side by unforgiving granite walls. If only she could drive to save time.

Not long after the Germans arrived, they'd requisitioned Ivy's brand-new car. As a physician, she'd been allowed to keep Dad's older-model car and to receive a petrol ration, but a small one, best reserved for night calls and emergencies.

She turned left onto Route de Beaumont, cutting close to the corner.

A lorry came straight at her. Ivy veered to the left and rammed sideways into the wall. She cried out, planted her feet, and grabbed her left wrist.

"Watch where you're going," a soldier shouted in a German accent from the lorry. "Stupid girl."

Ivy knew better than to tell him to drive slower. Far too many islanders had died due to reckless German drivers.

She palpated her throbbing wrist. Nothing broken—except her wristwatch.

"Oh no." She'd never be able to get it repaired. The jewelers' shops had closed long before, with no stock and no spare parts. Now punctuality would be even more difficult.

Ivy mounted her bicycle and crossed the road. The previous summer, the Germans had switched traffic from the left to the right.

She coasted downhill through verdant hills, lightly forested, bright with sunshine and flowers and begging to be sketched.

Around the bend came the sound of harsh voices and tramping feet.

Ivy slowed down.

Ahead of her, men trudged along the road, five abreast, some wearing civilian clothes, some wearing an unfamiliar army uniform. Torn. Ragged. Colors muted by filth.

A filth that penetrated Ivy's nostrils. The smell of unwashed bodies and dirt and bodily fluids—and disease.

A pudgy German soldier marched up to Ivy, waving a truncheon.

Ivy gasped and yanked her bicycle off the road, onto a drive heading into the valley.

The motley column marched past her, dozens upon dozens of men.

The guards wore the brown uniform of Germany's Organisation Todt, which built the hideous fortifications marring Jersey's landscape. They'd brought in hundreds of foreign workers, mainly Spaniards and Frenchmen, but these men now marching up Route de Beaumont had a Slavic look about them. And the uniforms—they were Soviet.

Ivy's breath snagged. The Nazis considered the Slavic peoples to be "subhuman," and from the condition of these men, they treated them accordingly.

But these were human beings created in God's image, and she refused to let revulsion or pity warp her face, only concern.

One man, with wheat-colored hair and a scar across his cheek and brow, met her gaze with a desperate look. "Please, miss. Can you spare any food?"

She had none. "I'm sorry. I have—"

A truncheon slammed down on the Russian's shoulder, and he stumbled.

Ivy cried out.

A guard shook his victim's arm and barked at him in German, waving the truncheon in Ivy's direction.

The Russian wore red epaulettes on his double-breasted smock—an officer, most likely. With his head bowed, he glanced at Ivy from under a strong brow. "He says to tell you, to tell your comrades, that if you feed us, you must be prepared to join us."

Somehow Ivy nodded. "I am so sorry, sir."

The guard scowled at her and shoved the officer back into formation.

The formation that kept marching. Dozens—no, hundreds of men. Many with makeshift bandages. With rags in place of shoes.

Ivy kept her chin high, kept giving the men the same look of sorrow mixed with respect, even as tears tingled on her cheeks.

She'd been trained to soothe suffering. And now she could do nothing at all.

Ivy turned onto King Street, delayed by who knew how long, aching from the memory of the bedraggled Todt workers.

In the once-thriving shopping area, too many shops were boarded up—those that sold goods that were no longer attainable. Most other shops were open only three days a week, with queues to buy the weekly ration of six ounces of meat and three ounces of sugar and two ounces of butter.

After King Street turned to Queen Street, Ivy locked her bicycle

to a bench, a necessity with rampant thefts, and she removed her medical bag. Losing that would be even worse than losing her bicycle. She could never replace the instruments.

Inside Carter's Chemist's, Miss de Ferrers was working today, rather than Mr. Carter.

Ivy approached the counter. "Good afternoon. I'm Dr. Picot."

"I'll bring your iodine as soon as I finish compounding this ointment." On a marble slab, Miss de Ferrers wielded a skinny spatula in a figure-eight motion through the clump of ointment. She wore her curly auburn hair tucked up in rolls, and lines of concentration radiated around her mouth. Not a pretty face, but intriguing with deep-set eyes and a pointed chin.

Ivy resisted the urge to fetch her sketch pad. "I'm glad I could finally meet you."

Miss de Ferrers cut her a quick glance, revealing hazel in her eyes. "Why? Because I'm the only lady chemist in Jersey and you're the only lady doctor?"

"Well . . . yes." Why did Ivy feel that was the incorrect answer?

A huff of a chuckle. Miss de Ferrers scooped the ointment into a squat glass jar and swirled the tip of her spatula inside, creating a tiny peak. "I apologize, but I have no taste for feminine friendships."

Ivy's jaw froze open, and she guided it closed. Pain pinged in her chest for the woman who must have seen only the ugly side of feminine friendship—and for herself, because she missed the beautiful side.

At Oxford, there were only twelve women in Ivy's year of medical school. They'd banded together to support and help each other. They'd become lifelong friends.

The chemist set down the ointment jar, picked up a bottle of brown-black iodine solution, and handed it to Ivy. "That will be two shillings, please."

Concealing her sigh, Ivy paid Miss de Ferrers with the new two-shilling banknote printed in Jersey due to a shortage of coins.

After saying goodbye, she cycled along Queen Street. Yes, she had lifelong friends, but they were in England. She couldn't see them, couldn't talk to them, couldn't even write them. And her childhood friends in Jersey? Whilst Ivy had been away at university, they'd married and had children and formed new circles with no room for her.

How she missed Dad and Mum. Messages passed between them through the Red Cross, but only about twice a year, with a limit of twenty-five words, and delayed by several months.

At least Ivy had her aunts, uncles, sister, and brother.

Ivy pedaled up Bath Street to La Bliue Brise, painted white with peacock-blue shutters and door.

Fern had saved the home—and the medical practice.

The Germans had requisitioned La Bliue Brise, as they had many other homes in Jersey. But Fern had marched up to the German *Feldkommandantur*'s office at Victoria College House and offered her home instead. Not as large, but with a lovely view of the ocean from the top floor. She'd also made the case that preserving the medical practice would keep the islanders healthy, which would keep the occupiers healthy too.

The field commander had accepted Fern's offer, and Fern had moved back into her childhood room. Ivy enjoyed both her sister's company and her help with the housekeeping.

Ivy pushed her bicycle through the back door and locked it in the supply room. Sounds emanated from the kitchen. "Fern? I'm sorry I'm late. I—"

"Charlie told me about the foreign workers blocking the road," Fern called. "He's washing up. I sent your patients home. I only hope they'll understand."

"I hope so too." Ivy entered the kitchen.

Over two years had passed since Mum had last fried Jersey Wonders in this kitchen. Now with butter and cream and flour rationed, Wonders were only a memory. Yet Ivy could almost smell the twisted loops of sweet dough, could almost hear her mother humming.

At the table, Fern chopped vegetables. "The Jersey grapevine says over one thousand workers arrived today. They're from Ukraine. Some were captured fighting with the Red Army, some are partisan fighters, and some are conscripts."

Ivy picked up a knife and peeled a pretty little Jersey Royal potato. "Many are no older than Charlie, and all are in the most pitiable state."

"I doubt that." Fern smiled at her and dropped the vegetables into the pot on the stove. "That soft heart of yours."

"Ivy's right." Charlie leaned against the doorjamb. "I saw them too."

"Make yourself useful, young man." Fern tossed him a potato.

Instead of peeling it, he studied it with a pensive look. "I enjoyed being useful this summer, making wages and helping the family."

Fern smoothed a sable curl back from her cheek. "Much appreciated with the practice doing so poorly."

Ivy's shoulders stiffened as she diced the potato. What more could she do? She couldn't force patients to trust a young lady doctor. At least the flood of patients leaving the practice in the first weeks after Dad left had stopped.

"It made me determined to do my bit." Charlie puffed out his thin chest. "When I'm in school, not only do I not earn money, but my school fees add another burden."

Ivy's cheeks tingled as the blood drained from her face. "It's never a burden."

Charlie's lower jaw jutted out. "As the man of the house, I need to contribute, not take. Yesterday I was hired as a deckhand on the SS *Ormer*."

Ivy's knife clattered to the table. "A deckhand!"

"The *Ormer*?" Fern stared at Charlie with her lovely mouth hanging open.

Charlie strode to the table and peeled his potato, but his dark lashes fluttered. "It's a cargo boat. It carries Jersey potatoes to

Saint-Malo and returns with food and supplies from France. Not only will I earn money, but I'll help the people of the Channel Islands."

"Oh, Charlie." Ivy waved her hand toward Victoria College, the finest boys' school in Jersey, where Charlie was a top pupil. "You can't leave school. You have three more years."

"In a fortnight I turn fifteen, the school-leaving age."

"That's for other boys," Fern said. "Not boys like you."

Charlie's knuckles protruded as his grip on the knife intensified. "Why should boys like me lounge around learning Latin when other boys my age are helping their families? It isn't right that Ivy's supporting the three of us."

Fern gasped. "I work too."

"You work for Ivy. She's the only one bringing in money."

"We don't mind. We get by." A horrible spinning sensation, and Ivy pressed her hand to her stomach. "Charlie, please don't give up your dream. You want to be a doctor. You've always wanted—"

"How can I?" He thumped the potato on the table. "Most of the boys and masters from the college evacuated. We have a shell of a school. And where can I study medicine? There are no universities in the Channel Islands. This war—it's never going to end. I might as well work."

"Please don't." Ivy's vision blurred. "We've always dreamed . . . Dad and you and I—"

"I know. I'm sorry." Charlie's gaze softened. "We'd always planned that I'd join the practice, and when you had children, you could practice part-time."

Fern turned back to her stew and clucked her tongue. "You needn't worry about that. Ivy isn't having children."

Ivy gaped at her older sister. "I'm only twenty-five. I'm hardly a spinster."

"All the eligible men abandoned the island." Fern lifted one dainty shoulder. "Unless you want to marry a Ger—"

"Never!" Women who dated enemy soldiers might have new

clothes and extra food, but they were shunned and despised for good reason.

One corner of Fern's mouth buckled. "You had your chance at Oxford. Such a shame."

Warmth rose up Ivy's neck, and she averted her gaze.

"The more I think about it . . ." Fern stirred the stew. "Charlie is right."

"Fern!" Ivy said.

A triumphant smile rose on Charlie's face. "Of course, I'm right."

"Yes." Fern gave a sharp nod. "I've been concerned about Victoria College all summer, ever since the Germans took five of the masters as hostages. They wouldn't have done so unless the men were subversive."

"Subversive?" The Germans had arrested prominent citizens to force the surrender of two brothers who criticized the German seizure of wireless sets.

"They're not subversive," Charlie said with a sigh. "That's not why I'm leaving school."

"For the money." Fern's spoon banged around in the pot. "Not only will we save his school fees and add his wages, but he'll travel to France. He can buy goods we can't buy here, like medical supplies. You always complain about shortages, Ivy."

Ivy didn't care about that. She cared about Charlie. "What would Dad and Mum say? They'd be heartbroken. What would you do if one of your boys left school?"

"My boys aren't here." Each word a pointed barb. "Neither are Dad and Mum. I'm the eldest, and I say Charlie takes the job."

Charlie's expression—instead of brightening at Fern's support—darkened. "It isn't your decision. Either of you. It's mine. I'm old enough to leave school. I'm old enough to take a job. And I've done so."

With Dad gone, Ivy was the caretaker of the family dream. And it was slipping through her fingers.