

≡ HEROINES OF WWI ≡

A PICTURE
of HOPE

LIZ TOLSMA


BARBOUR
PUBLISHING

DEDICATION

To Jonalyn, my beautiful, precious treasure from God. While there are still many in this world who would deem your life unworthy, you are most special to us. There is nothing unworthy about your joy, your laughter, your kindness, your loving spirit, or your hardworking attitude. How empty our lives would be without you. Even if the world overlooks you, Dad and I never will. And neither will God.



IMPORTANT NOTE TO READERS

Throughout the book, I use the term “*Mongoloid*” for children with Down syndrome. While the word carries negative connotations today and is not used, it is period correct for 1944. As a mom of a child with an intellectual disability, I’m highly sensitive to any derogatory terms used for people with special needs and did not come to my decision to use *Mongoloid* lightly; however, I did want to be true to the times. You will see that the characters in the book have nothing but love and compassion for the children with Down syndrome and do not use the term in a demeaning way. My intention is not to offend but to inform in a historically accurate way.

*I shall betray tomorrow, not today.
Today, pull out my fingernails,
I shall not betray.
You do not know the limits of my courage,
I, I do.
You are five hands, harsh and full of rings,
Wearing hob-nailed boots.
I shall betray tomorrow, not today.
I need the night to make up my mind.
I need at least one night,
To disown, to abjure, to betray.
To disown my friends,
To abjure bread and wine,
To betray life,
To die.
I shall betray tomorrow, not today.
The file is under the windowpane.
The file is not meant for the window bars,
The file is not meant for the executioner,
The file is for my own wrists.
Today, I have nothing to say,
I shall betray tomorrow.*

—“I Shall Betray Tomorrow” by Marianne Cohn, c. 1943

≡ CHAPTER ONE ≡

Monday, May 22, 1944
Normandy, France

“Shh.” Jean-Paul Breslau peered over his shoulder at the group of men he was leading through the western French bocage and into a small patch of trees. Overhead, scattered clouds allowed only a few dots of starlight and a thin stream of moonlight to illuminate their way through the stands of beeches, the earth fragrant with a recent rain.

But they were making too much noise, stomping through the woods, speaking in more than a whisper, even laughing. The Nazis were smart. On to them. They knew the resistance, the Maquis, was busy working in this area.

American planes were supposed to drop much-needed supplies and arms in this area tonight. Of all the various resistance efforts Jean-Paul had been involved in over the past several years, these parachute drops were the most dangerous. The Germans heard the low-flying planes. They spotted the white silks as they floated to the ground in the pale light.

Especially here in Normandy, mostly farmland, there was little area in which to hide.

Tonight his skin prickled more than ever. Maybe because Henri had fortified himself with a good deal of cognac before they'd set off. Jean-Paul shouldn't have allowed him to come, but they needed every able body to lift the boxes and get rid of any evidence of a drop before the Germans discovered the spot.

“No one's about.” Henri spoke in a normal tone of voice, though he

did slightly slur his words.

Jean-Paul turned and shushed him again. "Don't get us killed."

"No problem there, boss."

Henri was always the troublemaker. The least trustworthy of them all. But Yves had taken sick and Gerard's wife was about to give birth. Jean-Paul's hands had been tied. "Stay here. You can be the lookout."

"Suits me." Henri slumped against a tree while Jean-Paul, Luc, and Pierre slipped deeper into the woods. It remained to be seen if Henri would even stay conscious much less be an effective lookout. His state of inebriation made a risky mission even more dangerous.

The ground underneath Jean-Paul's feet rumbled, setting off a rumbling in his chest. The American planes were close. He and his men had to hurry to make it to the clearing in time for the drop. He motioned his companions forward.

Even in the dark he knew these woods like the back of his hand. Ever since he was a small child, he'd played in this thicket, inventing games about pirates and robbers and the American cowboys he'd seen in the cinema.

Never in his life had he dreamed that in his own backyard he'd have more adventure than he could handle.

They stumbled to the edge of the tree line as the plane zoomed overhead. He gazed up when the cargo bay opened, and the box attached to the chute floated to the ground.

It struck with a thud, the chute drifting over it almost like snow. Jean-Paul and the others hurried forward.

A moment later, light flooded the field from all directions. "*Halten sie.*"

Jean-Paul's body went cold. He blinked against the brilliance that burned his eyes. Though he couldn't make out any shapes, there must be a ring of Germans around them.

And in front of their enemy was all the evidence they needed to shoot Jean-Paul and his compatriots on the spot. No questions asked. His breath caught in his throat, cutting off oxygen to his lungs.

One man dressed in a brown uniform with tall black boots stepped from behind the light and into the center of the ring, clutching a rifle that he trained straight on Jean-Paul's heart.

Jean-Paul raised his hands.

"What is it we have here?" The Nazi spoke perfect French.

Jean-Paul couldn't pretend not to understand him. "My friends and I were out for a walk when we saw a low-flying plane. We decided to investigate."

"Is that so? And you expect me to believe it?"

"*Oui*, for that is the truth. Imagine my surprise when the plane dropped this box."

"I'm sure it puzzled you a great deal." Though Jean-Paul couldn't make out the man's face, there was no mistaking that he was tall and broad. A well-honed German prepared to fight.

Two more Nazis stepped from the shadows. Who knew how many soldiers there were around them. Perhaps more hiding among the trees.

If only he hadn't left Henri behind. Then they would have four to fight these Germans. Even so, no matter how many of them there were, they were unarmed. It was too dangerous to carry weapons in case they got picked up.

Like now.

But a few guns would have given them a chance to get away.

A burst of anti-aircraft fire filled the sky, pounding against Jean-Paul's eardrums. A brief whistle. Then a loud bang, and a large fireball lit the night.

Non, non. They had gotten the plane. Those poor Americans had no chance of survival.

"I know what's running through your mind, Jean-Paul."

He whipped around to discover Henri sauntering into the clearing, the glow of a cigarette brightening as he took a drag.

"Too bad about the Americans going down. At least their death was swift."

"Henri? You're part of them?" Too many of his countrymen were collaborators. Too few were maquisards, resistance fighters.

"You underestimated me, *mon ami*. I'm not the slow, stupid man you think I am. And yet, knowing so little about my background, you took me into your circle and told me all your secrets. Even as we speak, homes are being raided and the remainder of the group arrested."

Jean-Paul had trusted the wrong man, and now it would exact a high price. His life didn't matter, but others had wives and children who needed them.

"I told you not to allow him into our inner circle." The harsh whisper

came from Pierre on Jean-Paul's left. "What a fool you were."

"We all were."

"What's going to happen to my parents?" Venom filled Pierre's shouted whisper.

And to Jean-Paul's mother. But he couldn't dwell on that. They had a problem right in front of them. "Don't say anything more, Pierre." Thankfully, Luc had the good sense to stay quiet.

This is where their training came in. If they didn't open their mouths, they couldn't incriminate themselves.

Henri swung around and came nose to nose with Jean-Paul. "Let Pierre talk all he wants. We don't need confessions. I have all the information they need."

"Are they paying you?"

Jean-Paul's hasty question got him a slap on the side of his head from Henri, multiplying the stars in the sky. "That's enough from you."

"I hope it's enough for you. Will it bring you everything you've ever dreamed of? Can you live with yourself and the blood that's on your hands?"

Henri sucker punched Jean-Paul in the stomach. His breath rushed out, doubling him over.

"I said enough. No more talking. Not from any of you." He turned to the Germans. "Come and get them. And there's sure to be a nice gift for you inside the box as well. Now it's time to deal with these traitors."

Jean-Paul fell to his knees.

His carelessness was going to cost many people their lives.

Including his own.



Wednesday, May 31, 1944

"But Eisenhower won't hear of it." Martha Klein sat at the bar of the Dorchester Hotel in London and swirled the honey-gold liquid in her glass which glittered underneath the lights. Piano music flitted from the baby grand in the corner of the lounge.

Having seen too often what drink did to both men and women and the monsters it could turn them into, Nellie Wilkerson nursed her

sugarless cup of coffee. “We can’t let the military brass stop us from being on the ground to cover the invasion of France.”

“But what can we do?” Frances Cannes, on Nellie’s left, held the delicate stem of her wineglass between her fingers. “If the military won’t let us in, there’s no other way. It’s not like we can take a commercial flight to Paris.”

Martha laughed, but Nellie bit the inside of her lip. She hadn’t fought her way here, overcoming hurdles and busting through road-blocks, to be stymied now. The biggest story of the war, maybe of her entire life, was about to unfold.

There was no way she was going to be kept cooped up in a London hotel room, no matter how luxurious it might be, while the men got the stories, the bylines, and the recognition.

Martha sobered, at least until she had a little more alcohol in her system. “If I don’t miss my bet, you, Miss Wilkerson, have an idea up your sleeve.”

If only she did. “We can’t just give up. I’m going to write to the military authorities again. Even Eisenhower must listen to Mamie from time to time. And you know how persuasive I can be.”

Frances jiggled her foot, shaking Nellie’s chair along with her own. “We’ve already written him and used every argument we could think of to get him to relent. I’m afraid he’s dug in his heels.”

Nellie scraped back her stool and stood. “Where’s your intrepid spirit? No wonder men don’t take us seriously. Not when we throw up our hands and return to our kitchens as soon as they deny us something. I know neither of you is like that.”

Martha downed the last swig and also came to her feet. “You’re right, Nellie. We can’t give up without a fight. If our boys did that, think where we’d be now.”

Frances, still clasping her wine, stood in solidarity with them. “Exactly. One way or another, we have to convince the men in charge to let us report this invasion as well.”

That was more like it. Nellie could write the letter alone and make the plea herself, but it would carry more weight and have a better chance of making an impact if three of them signed it.

Half an hour later, they huddled over a table in the hotel’s lobby, a lush Oriental rug covering the marble floor under their feet, red

columns and tall potted palms alternating against the sides of the long room. Nellie ground her pen into the paper with the last period. "There. What do you think?"

Frances leaned back in the sage-green stuffed chair and sighed. "Read it to us one more time. But I think we're there."

Nellie held up the paper so the light from the tall lamp behind her illuminated the words. "'Dear Esteemed General Eisenhower.'"

"I like that." Martha nodded so that her platinum-blond curls bobbed. "Butter him up from the very beginning."

"You don't think it's too over the top?" Nellie asked. The last thing they wanted to do was come off like whining, begging, nagging women.

"It's perfect." Martha waved for Nellie to continue.

"'As we write this letter in a hotel lobby in London, the buzz around us is about the imminent Allied invasion of France. Several hundred of our male journalistic counterparts possess press passes and have secured spots on ships to take them across the English Channel. However, because we are women, we have been denied this same privilege.

"'We ask you to right this wrong immediately and to allow us to be included in the expeditionary force. We are well aware of the risk and the danger that such an assignment poses but are willing to put ourselves in harm's way in order to report on the landing.

"'You may well ask why would we want to do this? It is not for the fame or the fortune that we seek permission to go along with the troops to France. On the contrary, we are requesting this of you to benefit the American public.

"'Many wives, mothers, and sisters have sent their beloved husbands, sons, and brothers across the ocean to fight for their freedom. Every day, they wonder and worry. What is happening? Are their boys safe?

"'When word reaches them of the invasion, their worry will only increase tenfold. Because the newspaper reports of the battle will be read by these women, who better to write about it than women?

"'We will not resort to begging for your permission or call in favors to win us spots with the male journalists. All we ask is that you, sir, consider this. The hearts of the American women long to know, but they cannot know for themselves. Their eyes long to see, but they cannot see for themselves. Their ears long to hear, but they cannot hear for themselves.

“Allow us to be their eyes and ears. Allow us to tell them what they desperately need to know—that America is winning their war and that their husbands, their sons, and their brothers will return to them triumphant.”

If that didn't stir General Eisenhower to action, nothing would.

Somehow, someday, Nellie was going to be with the forces when they landed in France.

☰ CHAPTER TWO ☰

Tuesday, June 6, 1944

Nine thirty-two in the morning. That time would be seared into Nellie's memory forever. Journalists from the United States, Canada, and other parts of the world sat around several radios in the Dorchester lobby, waiting. Holding their collective breath.

All morning long, the skies above London had been busy, the hum of bombers filling the air, a giant swarm of bees buzzing overhead.

Each and every one of them knew the planned invasion had begun. Those fortunate enough to have been allowed to embed with the troops must already be there, witnessing what Nellie prayed was the turning point of the war.

And here she sat in London.

But then 9:32 rolled around. John Snagge, in the usual understated British fashion, announced the official word to the world.

Allied boots were trodding French sand.

That was all the information he gave. Nellie clenched her teeth until her jaw ached. They needed more details. How were the landings going? What kind of resistance were they meeting?

How many casualties?

She paced from one end of the marble lobby to the other, quite some distance. There had to be more. Her eyes ached to see it for herself.

Frances and Martha weren't around. At least, Nellie couldn't spy them from the crowd.

The air was close and heavy with blue cigarette smoke, choking her. Without returning to her room for her coat, she stepped into the raw, cold English morning. With this fog, it was surprising they had gotten planes off the ground and ships across the channel.

However they had managed it, they'd done it. Bully for them. That sounded sarcastic, even in her thoughts. Arms chilled, she wandered the streets for a while. Some sat in cafés, pinned against radios, awaiting more word. How agonizing if you knew a loved one was in the fray.

She wandered past Hyde Park and stopped near the Stanhope Gate and the Cavalry Memorial. This statue, constructed of guns captured in the Great War, had snagged her attention during her time at the Dorchester. St. George rode on horseback, treading over the dreaded dragon.

Ironic that it was sculpted just twenty years ago to commemorate the end of one war. The "war to end all wars" so many had said. Yet here they were again. The ever-present drone of aircraft continued, mixing with the little bit of motor traffic there was on the street.

She made her way down Constitution Hill, which separated Green Park and Buckingham Palace Garden, lush and verdant with the wet, late-spring weather plaguing the city.

Moments later, she stood in front of the palace where King George and his family resided. The entire royal household had been so brave throughout the war, never cowering, never running away, never shirking their duty. Princess Elizabeth even recently enlisted as a mechanic and driver in the Auxiliary Territorial Service.

If not for the Royal Standard flying over the palace, it might have been empty for all she knew. A group of soldiers huddled outside the gate. Officials came and went, but that was it. No crowds today. No cheering, even though they had news to celebrate.

That news came at too high a price.

She wandered a bit more, through Trafalgar Square, named for a victory in the Napoleonic Wars. If the Allies managed to win, perhaps London would one day erect a statue in commemoration of this victory. High on a Corinthian column, Admiral Nelson overlooked the scene.

Nothing extraordinary was happening here. The action was across the channel. That was where she should be. She sighed and turned toward the hotel. If only she could be at the docks when the wounded returned.

Now, that was an idea. She restrained herself from sprinting all the

way back to the hotel. Once there, she changed into a pair of pants, a crisp white blouse, and a leather bomber jacket. Her poor mother would be having apoplexy about her choice of clothing, but it was much more practical for reporting. After packing a bag in case she couldn't make the last train back to London that night, she purchased a ticket and boarded the train to Southampton.

By the time she arrived, night was falling. With her pack slung over her shoulder, she made her way to the docks.

They swarmed with activity, ships coming and going, many Landing Ship, Tanks—LSTs—converted into floating hospitals, bringing to English shores those who had been lucky enough to survive the battle but unlucky enough to suffer wounds. Some of the injuries were grisly, the litters stained red with blood. She turned away at the sight of mangled legs and open abdomens.

Farther down the dock was a large ship, perhaps one that had once carried passengers. In contrast to the gray transport vehicles, this one was painted all white with red crosses on its twin smokestacks and along its side.

A hospital ship. The *Prague*.

Like a flash from an incendiary bomb, an idea struck her. This could be her chance to get close to the fighting.

In the middle of the chaos, she approached the plank leading to the ship. Maybe no one would notice.

But someone did.

"Excuse me, ma'am." A military policeman in a brown uniform and a brown and orange hat approached her. "Where are you going?"

"I'm with the press." She flashed her pass quickly, so he couldn't see that she didn't have war correspondent credentials. "I'm here to interview some of the nurses."

Probably busy with a thousand other tasks today, he didn't check too closely before he waved her away and turned his attention to another landing craft approaching, loaded with more wounded.

What kind of beating had the Allies taken?

She made her way across the deck where great cans labeled **WHOLE BLOOD** sat, then climbed below deck where scores of bunks had been made with crisp white sheets, gray wool blankets, and fluffed pillows.

Not long after boarding, she ran into a nurse, so young she must have

just graduated from school, her uniform snowy white, her cap in place. “Can I help you?” Her voice held an unmistakable Midwestern twang.

If she told the woman she was a journalist, she would have to leave before the ship departed. But if she was a little bit more vague... “I’m horribly late, as you can tell, and I need to find my uniform so I can get to work.”

“You are rather late. We’ve finished about all the work already.”

“I’ll make it up to you. If I can just change.”

“Of course. Let me show you around. I’m Doris Lattimore. And you are?”

“Nellie Wilkerson.”

“Welcome aboard.”

Doris led Nellie on a thorough tour of the ship, including where all the supplies were stored, where the canteen was, and where the operating theater was located. Once finished with that, she found a bunk and a uniform for Nellie.

By the time she had slipped out of her pants and bomber jacket and into the dress, the ship’s engines roared to life, and the floating hospital was underway, headed for France. Just where Nellie longed to be.



Unable to sleep in the narrow bunk on the rollicking ship, Nellie climbed to the deck. Not that she’d be able to see anything, but perhaps some fresh air would be good.

She had wrapped her bomber jacket around herself, and it was a good thing she had. Even though she stood against the wall, the rain drove at her and the wind howled around her. Ah, this was the adventure she had craved. She lifted her face to the rain and allowed it to pelt her.

Goose bumps rose on her arms, and she shivered. If she was going to be a good war correspondent, she couldn’t be afraid of the elements. She couldn’t complain if she was cold, wet, or hungry. The boys out there fighting for her freedom weren’t complaining, so she wouldn’t either.

This was the perfect night to test her mettle. Could she meet whatever she was facing head on and without fear?

The *without fear* part was hard. Who knew what awaited her? She’d been afraid one horrible night so long ago, and evil had triumphed. She

couldn't allow that terror to control her again or stop her from doing what was right.

At last, shivering so hard her teeth rattled in her head, she turned back inside. A few of the British crew moved about. The American medical staff slept. And they said the English were the unflappable ones.

By the time she was showered and dressed, the new day had begun. She and Doris and a few of the other nurses she had spent some time with last night ate breakfast together. No one questioned her presence on board the ship.

A British crewman entered the dining room. "We're nearing the coast."

France.

At last.

Nellie left her tray on the table and followed a group of women to the deck. She couldn't stifle the gasp that rose in her throat at the sight before her.

As far as the eye could see, boats of various sizes and descriptions clogged the water, worse than any New York City rush-hour traffic jam. The smaller boats with square fronts zipped around between shore and the large vessels, sending salty sea spray in front of them.

Here and there came the flash of large guns shooting over the cliffs beyond the shore. Overhead came the drone of airplanes, the sight of them masked by the low-hanging clouds. Adding to the noise were the frequent booms of detonated mines.

Detonated by equipment. Detonated by men who didn't stand a chance of surviving such a blast.

Nellie moved to the rail and clutched it. What a scene, like nothing she could have imagined. Barrage balloons floated over the shore like gray elephants dancing in the wind.

And then she made the mistake of glancing down at the choppy sea. Gray sacks floated in the choppy waters. She squinted. No, those weren't sacks at all. They were soldiers, floating facedown in the water, their heavy packs pulling them below the waves.

A day in the water had left them bloated, their arms and legs dangling in the sea.

Nellie turned away. Breakfast hadn't been a good idea.

But she didn't have a chance to dwell on that, because the first

Landing Craft Transport, or LCT, pulled alongside the *Prague*. The open, rectangular box bumped against the *Prague's* side. Crewmen came aside Nellie on the deck and lowered what might pass for open coffins. The soldiers on the landing craft filled the boxes with the wounded, and the men manning the ropes hoisted them aboard the *Prague*.

Nellie stepped back so the real nurses could triage the injured. The very first brought up was a German who shouted what sounded like curses at the top of his lungs. Though they attempted to subdue him, he fought them off, even though blood oozed from a bandaged head wound.

Nellie pushed her way through. "Shh. They are here to help you." Though she didn't speak German, her soft words whispered into his ear must have been enough to soothe him.

He gazed at her with wide eyes, startling in their blueness, and she nodded and smiled at him.

As if everything would be all right. But would it?

More and more men were hauled on board, and Nellie lost sight of the German soldier. She lifted a quick prayer for his healing before heading off to bring water and blankets to the wounded and to offer them a word of encouragement.

It wasn't long before the metallic stench of blood filled her nostrils, overpowering even the saltiness of the water beneath her.

All day she worked, with only short breaks to relieve herself. Doris was at her side most of the time. Because she was supposed to be a nurse, Nellie had hidden her camera and didn't snap any photographs. But the images were imprinted on her mind.

Her white uniform was now stained with blood, as were her hands and even her shoes. She'd never be able to wash it off, even if she scrubbed her hands until they were chapped.

At one point, with hunger gnawing at her stomach, she sent several cabin boys to make some sandwiches so they wouldn't faint from lack of food. Never had roast beef tasted so good. Even the glass of water she drank was the best she'd ever had.

Still the wounded came, filling up bed after bed. Those winter-white sheets were now stained crimson. When she got a few minutes, Nellie changed from her dress into her much more comfortable and practical pants and jacket. The coat was baggy enough that she managed to tuck

her camera underneath it.

At about ten in the evening, as the sun dipped to the horizon behind them, Nellie, Doris, and some orderlies and other medical staff climbed into one of the coffin-like boxes, lowered themselves onto an LCT, and set off for the beach to collect more wounded.

Nellie turned to Doris, spray from the waves coating her lips with salt. “How can there be any more survivors this long after the battle?”

Doris gazed at her with wide eyes. “They just don’t stop coming. When I signed up for this, I never imagined it would be quite so intense. So. . .so brutal. Is this what men do to each other?”

“Unfortunately, yes.” Nellie had seen it firsthand. Even her father was tainted by evil. Hatred for other men. There was so little good in this world. But that was why she needed to be here, getting these stories. So that they might plant in the hearts of men the hope of evil being defeated once and for all.

“I don’t know how I’m going to make it until Germany falls. If it falls. I saw plenty in my nurse’s training. Nothing like this. How are you managing to stay so calm?”

At least Doris hadn’t realized that she wasn’t a real medical professional. “I don’t know. We have jobs to do. We just do them. After the war, we’ll have time to think about our experiences.”

The LCT approached the shore and beached itself. Its front ramp fell open, allowing Nellie to stroll onto dry land. But this place where children had played in the sand, families had picnicked, and young lovers had bathed in the sun was no more. Abandoned tanks and trucks littered the place. Red flares lent the entire scene an eerie glow.

Doris clicked her tongue. “Look at this beach. It’s amazing anyone survived.”

Nellie surveyed the scene the best she could. “It must have been horrific.”

She, Doris, and the others moved up a marked path, one that had been cleared of landmines. As they left Omaha Beach, the scene changed. Sand gave way to grass, sweet and fresh and summery, a reminder that what was destroyed could be built again.

And so it would have to be for the village there. Either the retreating Germans or the advancing Allies—likely a little of both—had reduced Vierville-sur-Mer to rubble. Just days ago, it had been a charming town.

Now the handful of residents paid a steep price for their liberation.

All night long, they tended to the wounded and loaded the LCT over and over again with patients to be transported to England. Nellie didn't even have time to be tired or hungry.

By dawn, Nellie's backpack heavy and her eyelids heavier, the *Prague* was filled once again to capacity with wounded. She and Doris sat against the stone wall of what had been the village's church, waiting for their turn on the LCT.

Nellie had no intention of returning to the *Prague* though. This was her opportunity to tell the women at home the story of the invasion and the Allies' progress. She had a chance to be their eyes and ears. To show them just what their boys were fighting for. And dying for.

Her stomach churned as the deception she'd been living the past day turned bitter on her tongue. "I have something to confess."

Doris drank from her canteen. "What?"

"I'm not a nurse."

Doris sputtered, sat up straight, and stared at Nellie. "What do you mean? You've been working with us this entire time."

"Only getting water and blankets and the like. I didn't dispense any medication or anything. I'm a photographer for the *Chicago Tribune*. Eisenhower refused to allow any women journalists in France. I hadn't planned on stowing away, but it just worked out. No one questioned me."

"And so you snuck on board?"

"I'm sorry for deceiving you, but I'm not sorry for being here. I hope I was helpful to you."

"I guess you were." Doris sighed. "You worked as hard as any of us."

"So you're not mad?"

"I'm steamed. But I kind of understand. If they hadn't allowed nurses here, I would have done whatever I had to do to get on that ship."

Nellie released a pent-up breath. "I do have a favor to ask."

"And that is?"

"I'm going to slip away and join the American troops. My work here isn't finished. It hasn't even started. I haven't snapped a single photograph. Please, don't say anything to the others when you get back."

"It's going to get you and maybe even me into a big pot of hot water if they find out how you got here."

"I'm so sorry about that." Nellie touched Doris's hand. "I hope you

don't get reprimanded because of me. You didn't know who I was or what I was planning on doing."

"Will you be okay? It's dangerous here."

"I'll be fine. And thank you. When you get home, write to me at the *Tribune*. I'd like to make this up to you. You're a swell gal."

"You'd better get going before I change my mind."

Nellie stood, hugged Doris, and slipped into the hull of the church and out the other side. While the medical staff was still about, she hid among the gravestones in the churchyard. Doris's voice carried on the light breeze, though Nellie couldn't make out the words. At last, the footsteps of her companions faded away. Still she crouched behind a large, weathered stone with an angel perched atop it.

An hour or so passed before she crept toward the beach as the *Prague* set sail for Southampton.

Without her.

The time had come for her to get to work.

≡ CHAPTER THREE ≡

Thursday, June 8, 1944

The cold dankness of the prison cell seeped into Jean-Paul's bones. He'd sat here for how many days? And how many more would he endure before his end came?

So far, there had been no interrogations. No beatings. No torture. Nothing. Just emptiness. And perhaps that was the worst torture of all. Insanity would set in. By then he'd be so starved for any type of human contact, he would tell the Germans everything he knew.

Then again, with Henri turned against them, there was no need for that.

How could Jean-Paul have been so stupid? In these uncertain times, you didn't dare trust anyone. Not a soul. Not even your own mother. Because you never knew who was working on the Nazis' side.

Shouldn't he, of all people, know that?

But because Henri was the friend of a friend, Jean-Paul had allowed him into the innermost circle without many questions. He had proven himself. Until now.

The perfect German operative.

Jean-Paul rested his aching, feverishly hot body against the chilly stone wall and closed his eyes. For a long time, he poured his heart out to God. He spoke to his *Père* about his loneliness, about his fright, about his remorse. He prayed for his men's safety and that of his mother.

At some point, he must have fallen asleep, because a great commotion