New York Times Bestselling Author of
THE ALICE NETWORK and *THE HUNTRESS*

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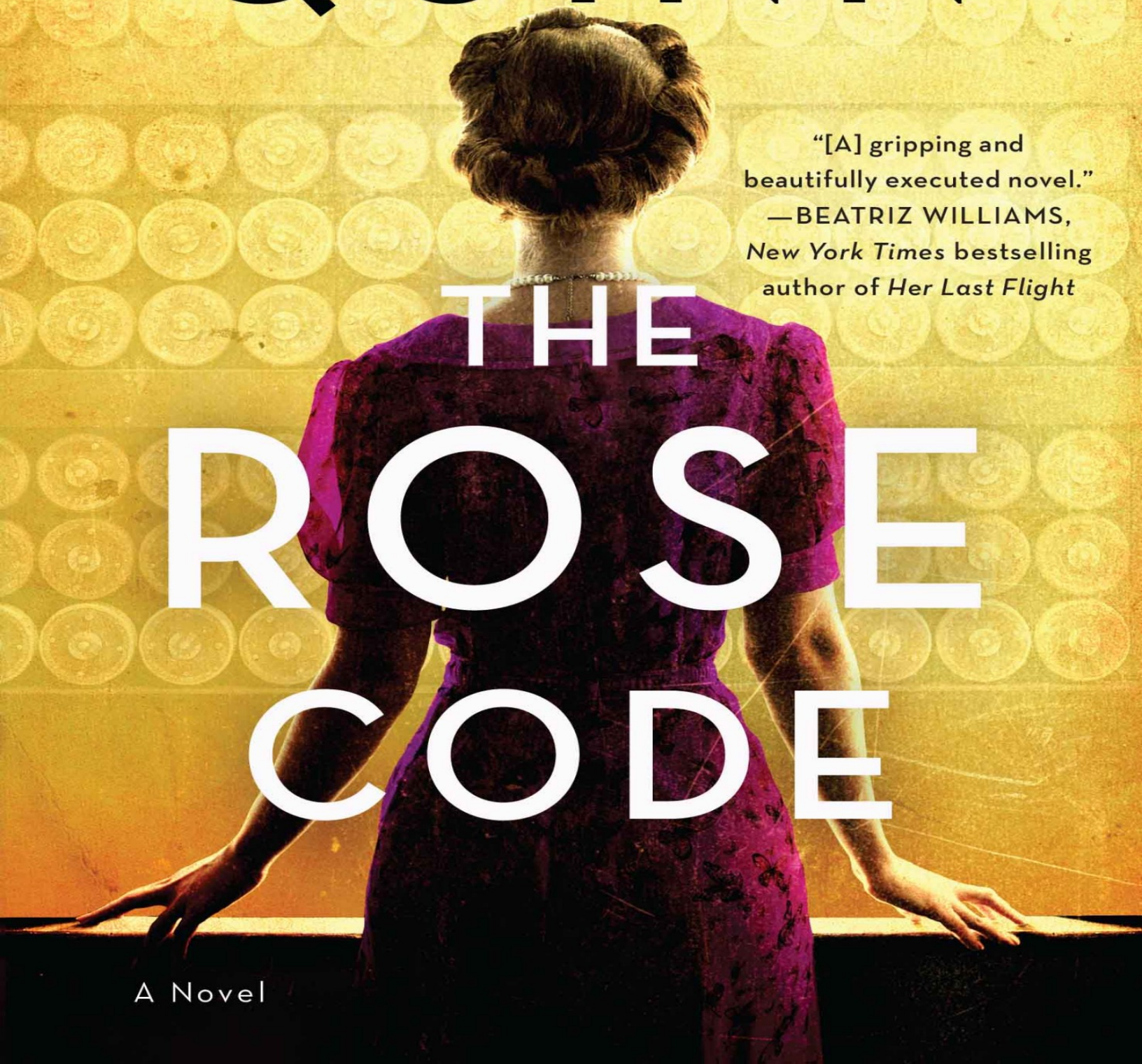

"[A] gripping and beautifully executed novel."
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THE ROSE CODE

A Novel

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KATE QUINN

WILLIAM MORROW
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Dedication

To the veterans of Bletchley Park—you changed the world

Contents

Introduction

In the autumn of 1939, Hitler's advance seemed unstoppable.

German military communications were relayed using hand ciphers, teleprinter codes, and above all Enigma machines—portable cipher devices that scrambled orders into nonsense so they could be relayed via Morse code over radio transmitters, then unscrambled in the field.

Even if the scrambled orders were intercepted by the Allies, no one could break the encryption. Germany thought Enigma was unbreakable.

They were wrong.

Prologue

November 8, 1947
London

The enigma arrived in the afternoon post, sealed, smudged, and devastating.

Osla Kendall stood, twenty-six years old, dark haired, dimpled, and scowling, in the middle of a tiny Knightsbridge flat that looked as if it had been bombed by Junkers, wearing nothing but a French lace slip and a foul mood as she looked at the piles of silk and satin exploding over every surface. *Twelve Days Until the Wedding of the Century!* this morning's *Tatler* had gushed. Osla worked for the *Tatler;* she'd had to write the whole ghastly column. *What are YOU going to wear?*

Osla picked up a rose satin gown whorled with crystal beading. "What about you?" she asked it. "Do you say 'I look simply smashing and I couldn't care less that he's marrying someone else'?" Etiquette lessons at finishing school never touched *that* one. Whatever the dress, everyone in the congregation would know that before the bride came along, Osla and the bridegroom were—

A knock sounded. Osla flung on a robe to answer it. Her flat was tiny, all she could afford on her *Tatler* salary if she wanted to live alone *and* be close to the center of things. "Darling, no maid? No doorman?" Her mother had been appalled. "Move in with me until you find a husband. You don't need a *job*." But after sharing bedrooms with billet-mates all through the

war, Osla would have lived in a boot cupboard as long as she could call it her own.

"Post's come, Miss Kendall." The landlady's spotty daughter greeted her at the door, eyes going at once to the rose gown slung over Osla's arm. "Oooh, are you wearing that to the royal wedding? You look scrummy in pink!"

It's not enough to look scrummy, Osla thought, taking her bundle of letters. *I want to outshine a princess, an actual born-to-the-tiara princess, and the fact is, I can't.*

"Stop that," she told herself as soon as she'd shut the door on the landlady's daughter. "Do *not* fall in the dismals, Osla Kendall." All over Britain, women were planning what they'd wear for the most festive occasion since V-E Day. Londoners would queue for hours to see the flower-decked wedding carriages roll past—and Osla had an invitation to Westminster Abbey itself. If she wasn't grateful for that, she'd be just like those ghastly Mayfair moaners blithering on about how *tiresome* it was attending the social event of the century; what a *bother* getting the diamonds out of the bank, oh, woe is me to be so tediously *privileged*.

"It'll be topping," Osla said through gritted teeth, coming back to her bedroom and chucking the rose dress over a lamp. "Simply topping." Seeing London swanning about in banners and confetti, wedding fever whisking away November chill and postwar gloom . . . the fairy-tale union of Princess Elizabeth Alexandra Mary and her handsome Lieutenant Philip Mountbatten (formerly Prince Philip of Greece) would mark the dawn of a new age, hopefully one where ration laws were finally swatted down and you could slather all the butter you wanted on your scones. Osla was all in favor of ushering this new era in with a slap-up celebration—after all, she'd achieved her own fairy-tale ending by any woman's standards. An honorable term of service during the war, even if she could never, *ever* talk about it; a flat in Knightsbridge paid for by her own salary; a wardrobe crammed with gowns all in the latest go; a job writing entertaining fluff for the *Tatler*. And a fiancé who had put a sparkling emerald on her finger; don't forget him. No, Osla Kendall had no excuse to get in a blue funk. All the business with Philip had been years ago, after all.

But if she could have cooked up an excuse to get out of London—found some way to be geographically elsewhere (the Sahara desert, the wastes of the North Pole, *anywhere*)—during the moment Philip bent his golden head

and made his vows to England's future queen, Osla would have taken it in a jiff.

Ruffling a hand through disordered dark curls, she flipped through the post. Invitations, bills . . . and one square, smudged envelope. No letter inside, just a torn sheet of paper with a block of scribbled nonsense letters.

The world tilted for a moment, and Osla was back: the smell of coke stoves and wet wool jumpers instead of furniture polish and tissue paper; the scratch of pencils rather than the hoot of London traffic. *What does* Klappenschrank *mean, Os? Who's got their German dictionary?*

Osla didn't stop to wonder who'd sent the paper—the old pathways in her mind fired up without a hitch, the ones that said, *Don't ask questions, just get on with it*. She was already running her fingers along the square of scribbled letters. *Vigenère cipher,* a woman's soft voice said in her memory. *Here's how to crack it using a key. Though it can be done without . . .*

"Not by me," Osla muttered. She hadn't been one of the boffins who could crack ciphers with a pencil stub and a little sideways thinking.

The envelope bore a postmark she didn't recognize. No signature. No address. The letters of the cipher message were so hastily slashed, it could have been anyone's handwriting. But Osla turned the paper scrap over and saw a letterhead block, as though the page had been torn from an official pad.

CLOCKWELL SANITARIUM

"No," Osla whispered, "no—" But she was already fishing a pencil stub from the nearest drawer. Another memory, a laughing voice intoning, *These have knelled your fall and ruin, but your ears were far away—English lassies rustling papers through the sodden Bletchley day!*

Osla knew what the message's key would be: LASSIES.

She bent over the paper, pencil scratching, and slowly the cryptogram gave up its secrets.

"STONEGROVE 7602."

Osla drew a breath in as the words crackled along the telephone wires all the way from Yorkshire. Astounding how you could recognize a voice in two words, even when you hadn't heard it in years. "It's me," Osla finally said. "Did you get it?"

Pause. “Goodbye, Osla,” her old friend said coolly. No *who is this*—she knew, too.

“Do not hang up on me, Mrs.—well, whatever your name *is* now.”

“Temper, Os. Feeling out of sorts because you’re not the one marrying a prince in two weeks?”

Osla caught her lip in her teeth before she could snap back. “I’m not faffing about here. Did you get the letter or not?”

“The what?”

“The Vigenère. Mine mentions you.”

“I’m just home from a seaside weekend. I haven’t looked through the post yet.” There was a distant rustle of paper. “Look, why are you ringing me? I don’t—”

“It’s from *her,* you understand me? From the *asylum*.”

A flat, stunned silence.

“It can’t be,” the reply came at last. Osla knew they were both thinking of their former friend. The third point in their shining wartime trio.

More rustling, a tearing sound, then Osla heard a breath and knew that far away in Yorkshire, another block of code had come out of its envelope. “Break it, the way she showed us. The key is *lassies*.”

“‘*English lassies rustling papers through the sodden—*’” Breaking off before the next word. Secrecy was too much a habit with them both to say anything significant over a telephone line. Live seven years with the Official Secrets Act round your neck like a noose, and you got used to curbing every word and thought. Osla heard a pencil working on the other end and found herself pacing, three steps across the room, three steps back. The heaps of gowns across the bedroom looked like cheap pirate’s loot, gaudy and half-submerged in the wreckage of tissue and cardboard, memories and time. Three girls laughing, doing up each other’s buttons in a cramped spare bedroom: *Did you hear there’s a dance in Bedford? An American band, they’ve got all the new Glenn Miller tunes . . .*

The voice came at last from Yorkshire, uneasy and mulish. “We don’t know it’s her.”

“Don’t be daft, of course it’s her. The stationery, it’s from where she—” Osla chose her words carefully. “Who else would demand our help?”

Pure fury in the words that came spitting back. “I don’t owe her one bloody thing.”

“She clearly thinks differently.”

"Who knows what she thinks? She's *insane,* remember?"

"She had a breakdown. That doesn't mean she went loony."

"She's been in an asylum nearly three and a half years." Flatly. "We have no idea what she's like now. She certainly *sounds* loony—these things she's alleging . . ."

There was no way they could voice, on a public line, what their former friend was alleging.

Osla pressed her fingertips to her eyes. "We've got to meet. We can't discuss this any other way."

Her former friend's voice was full of broken glass. "Go to hell, Osla Kendall."

"We served there together, remember?"

On the other end of Britain, the handset slammed down. Osla lowered her own with shaky calm. *Three girls during a war,* she thought. Once the best of friends.

Until D-Day, the fatal day, when they had splintered apart and become two girls who couldn't stand the sight of each other, and one who had disappeared into a madhouse.

Inside the Clock

Far away, a gaunt woman stared out the window of her cell and prayed to be believed. She had very little hope. She lived in a house of the mad, where truth became madness and madness, truth.

Welcome to Clockwell.

Life here was like a riddle—a riddle she'd heard during the war, in a wonderland called Bletchley Park: "If I was to ask what direction a clock's hands go, what would you say?"

"Um," she had answered, flustered. "Clockwise?"

"Not if you're inside the clock."

I'm inside the clock now, she thought. *Where everything runs backward and no one will ever believe a word I say.*

Except—maybe—the two women she had betrayed, who had betrayed her, who had once been her friends.

Please, the woman in the asylum prayed, looking south, where her ciphered messages had flown like fragile paper birds. *Believe me.*

Eight Years Ago

December 1939

Chapter 1

I wish I was a woman of about thirty-six, dressed in black satin with a string of pearls,'" Mab Churt read aloud. "That's the first sensible thing you've said, you silly twit."

"What are you reading?" her mother asked, flipping through an old magazine.

"*Rebecca,* Daphne du Maurier." Mab turned a page. She was taking a break from her dog-eared list of "100 Classic Literary Works for the Well-Read Lady"—not that Mab was a lady, or particularly well-read, but she intended to be both. After plowing through number 56, *The Return of the Native* (ugh, Thomas Hardy), Mab figured she'd earned a dip into something enjoyable like *Rebecca*. "The heroine's a drip and the hero's one of those broody men who bullies you and it's supposed to be appealing. But I can't put it down, somehow." Maybe just the fact that when Mab envisioned herself at thirty-six, she was definitely wearing black satin and pearls. There was also a Labrador lying at her feet, in this dream, and a room lined with books she actually *owned,* rather than dog-eared copies from the library. Lucy was in this dream too, rosy in a plum-colored gym slip, the kind girls wore when they went to some expensive day school and rode ponies.

Mab looked up from *Rebecca* to watch her little sister canter her fingers over imaginary fences: Lucy, nearly four years old and too skinny for Mab's liking, dressed in a grubby jumper and skirt, forever pulling off her socks. "Lucy, stop that." Tugging the sock back up over Lucy's foot. "It's too cold to be running around barefoot like a Dickens orphan." Mab had done

Dickens last year, numbers 26 through 33, plowing through chapters on her tea breaks. Blech, *Martin Chuzzlewit*.

"Ponies don't wear socks," Lucy said severely. She was mad for horses; every Sunday Mab took her to Hyde Park to watch the riders. Oh, Lucy's eyes when she saw those burnished little girls trotting past in their jodhpurs and boots. Mab yearned to see Lucy perched on a well-groomed Shetland.

"Ponies don't wear socks, but little girls do," she said. "Or they catch cold."

"You played barefoot all your life, and you never caught cold." Mab's mother shook her head. She'd given Mab her height, an inch shy of six feet, but Mab stretched into her height with lifted chin and squared shoulders, and Mrs. Churt always slouched. The cigarette between her lips waggled as she murmured aloud from an old issue of the *Bystander*. "'*Two 1939 debs, Osla Kendall and the Honorable Guinevere Brodrick, had Ian Farquhar to chat to them between races.*' Look at that mink on the Kendall girl . . ."

Mab cast an eye over the page. Her mother found it all enthralling—which daughter of Lord X curtsied to the queen, which sister of Lady Y appeared at Ascot in violet taffeta—but Mab studied the society pages like an instruction manual: what ensembles could be copied on a shopgirl budget? "I wonder if there'll be a Season next year, what with the war."

"Most debs'll be joining the Wrens, I reckon. It's the Land Army or the ATS for folks like us, but posh girls all go for the Women's Royal Naval Service. They say they got the uniform designed by Molyneux, him who dresses Greta Garbo and the Duchess of Kent . . ."

Mab frowned. There were uniforms everywhere these days—so far, the only sign there even *was* a war. She'd been standing in this same East London flat, smoking tensely alongside her mother as they listened to the radio announcement from Downing Street, feeling chilly and strange as Chamberlain's weary voice intoned, "This country is at war with Germany." But since then, there'd hardly been a peep from the Huns.

Her mother was reading aloud again. "'*The Honorable Deborah Mitford on a paddock seat with Lord Andrew Cavendish.*' Look at that lace, Mabel . . ."

"It's Mab, Mum." If she was stuck with *Churt,* she wasn't ruddy well putting up with *Mabel*. Plowing her way through *Romeo and Juliet* (number 23 on Mab's list), she had run across Mercutio's "*I see Queen Mab hath been with you!*" and plucked it out on the spot. "Queen Mab." That sounded

like a girl who wore pearls, bought her little sister a pony, and married a gentleman.

Not that Mab had any fantasies about dukes in disguise or millionaires with Mediterranean yachts—life wasn't a novel like *Rebecca*. No mysterious moneyed hero was going to swoop a Shoreditch girl off her feet, no matter how well-read. But a *gentleman,* some nice, comfortable man with a decent education and a good profession—yes, a husband like that was within reach. He was out there. Mab just had to meet him.

"Mab!" Her mother shook her head, amused. "Who d'you think you are, then?"

"Someone who can do better than *Mabel*."

"You and your *better*. What's good enough for the rest of us isn't good enough for you?"

No, Mab thought, knowing better than to say so, because she'd come to learn that people didn't like your wanting more than you had. She'd grown up fifth of six children all crammed together in this cramped flat that smelled of fried onions and regret, a toilet that had to be shared with two other families—she'd be damned if she'd ever be ashamed of it, but she'd be doubly damned if it was *enough*. Was it such a terrible thing, wanting to do more than work in a factory until you got married? Wanting more in a husband than one of the local factory workers, who would probably drink too much and eventually run out altogether like Mab's dad? Mab never tried to tell her family they could make more of themselves; it was fine with her if they were happy with what they had, so why couldn't they leave *her* alone?

"You think you're too good to work?" Mum had demanded when Mab protested leaving school at fourteen. "All these kids around and your father gone—"

"I'm not too good to work," Mab had flashed back. "But I'm going to work *for* something." Even at fourteen, laboring at the grocer's and dodging the clerks who pinched her bum, she'd been looking ahead. She got a clerk's post and studied how the better customers talked and dressed. She learned how to carry herself, how to look people in the eye. After a year's scrutiny of the girls who worked the counters at Selfridges, she walked through those double doors on Oxford Street in a cheap suit and good shoes that had taken half a year's wages, and landed herself a job selling powder

compacts and scent. “Aren’t you lucky,” Mum had said, as if it hadn’t taken any work at all.

And Mab wasn’t done yet, not by a long shot. She’d just finished a scrimped-for secretarial course, and by the time she turned twenty-two early next year she intended to be sitting behind some shiny desk, taking dictation and surrounded by people who said “Good morning, Miss Churt” instead of “Oi, Mabel!”

“What are you going to do with all that planning?” her mother asked. “Get yourself a fancy boyfriend to pick up the tab for a few dinners?”

“I’ve no interest in fancy boyfriends.” As far as Mab was concerned, love stories were for novels. Love wasn’t the point—even marriage wasn’t the point, not really. A good husband might have been the fastest way up the ladder toward safety and prosperity, but it wasn’t the only way. Better to live an old maid with a shiny desk and a salary in the bank, proudly achieved through the sweat of her own efforts, than end up disappointed and old before her time thanks to long factory hours and too much childbirth.

Anything was better than that.

Mab glanced at the clock. Time for work. “Give me a kiss, Luce. How’s that finger?” Mab examined the upheld knuckle where Lucy had run a splinter yesterday. “Good as new. Goodness, you’re grubby . . .” Wiping Lucy’s cheeks with a fresh handkerchief.

“A little dirt never hurt anyone,” Mrs. Churt said.

“I’ll draw you a bath when I get home.” Mab kissed Lucy, fighting irritation at her mother. *She’s tired, that’s all.* Mab still winced to remember how furious Mum had been, enduring such a late addition to a family that already boasted five children. “I’m too old to be chasing after babies,” Mum had sighed, watching Lucy crawl about the floor like a crab. Still, there hadn’t exactly been anything they could do about it except manage.

For a little while longer, anyway, Mab thought. If she landed a good husband she’d wheedle him into helping her sister, so Lucy would never have to leave school for a job at fourteen. If he’d give her that, Mab would never ask for anything else.

Cold slapped her cheeks as she hurried out of the flat into the street. Five days until Christmas, but no snow yet. Two girls in Auxiliary Territorial Service uniforms hurried past, and Mab wondered where she’d sign up if service became compulsory . . .

“Fancy a walk, darling?” A fellow in RAF uniform fell into step beside her. “I’m on leave, show a fellow a good time.”

Mab shot him the glance she’d perfected at fourteen, a ferocious stare leveled from below very straight, very black brows, then sped her pace. *You could join the WAAF,* she thought, reminded by the fellow’s uniform that the Royal Air Force had a Women’s Auxiliary branch. Better than being a Land Girl, stuck shoveling cow shit in Yorkshire.

“Come on, that’s no way to treat a man going to war. Let's have a kiss . . .”

He sneaked an arm around her waist, squeezing. Mab smelled beer, hair cream, and an ugly flicker of memory pushed upward. She shoved it down, fast, and her voice came out more of a snarl than she intended. “Bugger off —” And she kicked the pilot in the shins with swift, hard efficiency. He yelped, staggering on the icy cobbles. Mab pried his hand off her hip and headed for the Tube, ignoring the things he called after her, shaking off the shiver of memory. Silver linings—the streets might have been full of handsy soldiers, but plenty of soldiers wanted to take a girl to the altar, not just to bed. If there was anything war brought in its wake, it was hasty weddings. Mab had already seen it in Shoreditch: brides saying their vows without even waiting for a secondhand wedding dress, anything to get that ring on their finger before their fiancés went off to fight. And well-read gentlemen rushed off to war every bit as fast as Shoreditch men. Mab certainly wasn’t going to call the war a good thing—she’d read her Wilfred Owen and Francis Gray, even if war poetry had been deemed too indelicate for “100 Classic Literary Works for the Well-Read Lady.” But she’d have had to be an idiot not to realize that war was going to change her world beyond rationing.

Maybe she wouldn’t need to get a secretarial post after all. Could there be war work somewhere in London for a girl who’d come tops in typing and shorthand, some post where Mab could do her part for king and country, meet a nice man or two, and look after her family?

A shop door banged open, releasing brief strains of “The Holly and the Ivy” from a radio inside. By Christmas of 1940, Mab thought, things might be entirely different. This year, things had to change.

War meant change.