



The 13th Cohort wishes to see the rise of the 4th Reich. Powerful men and women have found the Spear of Destiny and plan to use its rumored magical properties to create a new Hitler.

THE 13TH COHORT

By K.E. Pottie

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BOOK THREE OF THE CODE NAME SERIES

THE 13TH COHORT



K.E. POTTIE

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Prologue	5
Ali.....	9
Coma.....	32
Just Another Day At The Beach	60
Department 7	81
Operation Redemption.....	118
Secrets	142
Reunion	170
Numbers.....	196
A Perfectly Good Plane	229
The 13 th Cohort	252
The Enemy's Backyard.....	281
Puzzles.....	312
Niederhagen	337
Ruse.....	369
Into the Breach.....	404
Loss	430
Schloss Wewelsburg	455
Betrayal.....	485
Angriff!	519
The True Spear	551
Epilogue	584

ALI-1944

Spring 1944, London. Flowers bloomed, birds chirped, in sharp contrast to the bombed-out buildings that lay in ruin. Alison Abramson perched on the edge of her seat in the BBC broadcasting studio, now housed in an underground bunker.

She had established herself at her dream job with the BBC, having worked at a small local station since 1941, just after her husband Captain Michael Abramson lost his life fighting Rommel's Afrika Korps in the deserts of North Africa.

In 1940, the Battle of Britain played itself out over the skies of England, Ali sent their children, Caroline, Matthew, and the oldest, Eric, to live with Ali's father, David, on the family farm in the Northeast part of England. Now, three arduous years later, hardened by the war, she missed them.

Ali had needed the income to maintain the London home she and Michael loved so much. The flat they owned had escaped the Nazi blitz of early 1940. The Germans had bombarded London with V-1 Buzz bombs and V-2 rockets, but now there was a lull, a respite from those attacks. When this war was over, she would bring her children back to London.

Eric, her oldest, was an old soul. He had a sense of obligation and tried to help whenever he could. His strength of character had astounded Ali from the beginning. He was quick-witted and loved to pull a good prank. Eric was at the top of his class, brilliant in math. His capabilities had not gone unnoticed by MI-6, the Secret Intelligence Service, known as SIS. Ali was proud MI-6 had recruited Eric when he was old

enough to serve, but worried when she hadn't heard from him in some time. Caroline, the middle child, was beautiful, but resilient. She loved horses and wrote to mum every week about how she tamed the latest horse no one dared to approach.

Matthew, the youngest, was a history buff. He listened to the BBC's broadcasts every night, keeping a map on the latest British victories, all the battle lines marked in red. Ali appreciated the fact that if Matthew were old enough, he would have wanted to join the fight. He lacked brawn, but; he tested his siblings by using trickery and brainpower to his advantage.

Matthew loved to tinker. His fascination with weapons, like the British Sten gun and the American M1 Grande, was worrisome to Ali. Her father made certain no ammunition was available for him to get hurt.

The children would put all their letters into one envelope that they would send off to her. She treasured her beloved children's' accounts of their daily activities. When this is all over, we will be together again, she thought. If only Michael were here, we all could once again be happy and together and forget this hideous war.

Her radio show catered to servicemen who hailed from the many countries fighting Nazi tyranny. Every day, more and more soldiers from the outlying British Empire and audacious outspoken Americans landed on English soil to prepare for the eventual invasion of France. The outcome was inevitable, the invasion inescapable.

With so many Americans and their equipment in England, the local folk joked that if it weren't for the barrage balloons, England would sink from the weight of it all.

Every night Ali started her show with the sanctioned introduction.

“This is London, London calling in the home, overseas and European services of the BBC and through the United Nations radio, Mediterranean,” Ali announced as she flirted with the microphone. Setting up the turntable, she placed a Glenn Miller record down and set the needle on the spinning disc.

Ali settled into her studio chair, listening to the upbeat Tommy Dorsey song. Glenn Miller, Tommy Dorsey among others wrote popular tunes that went out from the radio station. She played a mixture of American, French, and British music for the troops. Men in Army camps, on Navy ships, and even in occupied countries, huddled around radios to listen to Ali woo them, helping them forget the war, if only for a few hours. She did what she could to boost the morale of the troops. This was her contribution to the war effort.

Time flies, she thought to herself. I must stop by the market and pick up bread and sausage before I go home. Mr. and Mrs. Lewis are charming, staying open late to help single working mums.

Many wives, whose husbands served abroad and widows, depended on the kindness of such people as Mr. and Mrs. Lewis.

The song ended while Ali daydreamed about her kids and the shop. The needle spun off the record, making a scratching noise, which brought Ali back to reality. She focused on the annoying sound.

Quick as a mouse, she flicked on the microphone switch, announcing, “That was Tommy Dorsey’s, ‘Who’s Scratching at My Door’,” she quipped. “I hope all you boys in uniform enjoyed the great line-up of music tonight!”

Ali removed the record, setting up the next one on the turntable. "This song goes out to all of you dreaming of sweethearts tonight," she told her audience.

After a moment, the soothing sounds of the famous crooner, Bing Crosby, filled the studio. "I Surrender Dear" went out over the airwaves. She reached over and turned off the microphone switch on the console, then cupped her head in her hands and closed her eyes. Ali tried to picture Michael's face, his smile, but couldn't tonight. Steady girl, she thought, wiping the tears away.

Ali spent the next few hours in the darkened studio, with a single lamp over the console as her only light. She loved to play music in the dim shadows of the studio. It was a safe and comforting environment. Yawning, she looked up at the clock on the wall in front of her. Eddie is late tonight, she thought. I hope he hasn't forgotten the time again. She wanted to get to her bed.

The studio lights all flicked on, blinding Ali amid changing a record. It slipped from her fingers, bounced off the floor, and broke in half. "Eddie, I asked you to please not turn on all the lights at once," Ali said, rolling her eyes as she spun around in the chair. "That was my favorite Glenn Miller record!"

"Sorry, lass, I'll remember next time!" Eddie said. "At my age I have a hard time bumbling around in the dark."

"Alright, love," Ali said. "Next time be a dear and let me know when you turn them on, OK?"

"Sure thing, lass," Eddie said.

Edward, "Eddie" MacDonald, was a Scottish man in his early sixties. He loved to play classical music during his show and made public announcements until the wee hours of

morning. A veteran of The Great War, Eddie often commented on how they took care of the Germans during that time. Eddie was benevolent to Ali and because of his kindness, she listened patiently as he told her the same war stories ad nauseam.

Eddie placed his satchel on the console and gave Ali a big hug.

“What was that for?” Ali asked.

“Michael told me you needed one.” He winked.

“Does it show?” she asked.

He saw her reddened eyes and realized she had been crying again, but he passed it off. “I just hug all the young lasses,” Eddie said, chuckling.

“Thank you, Eddie,” she said. Ali turned the console over to him, grabbed her purse and coat, and headed for the door.

As she was walking out, Eddie yelled back to her, “Lass, is this yours?” He held up a white envelope.

“Oh my, yes, thank you,” Ali said, rushing over to him. Her hand trembled as she took it from his grip.

“Are you OK, lass?” Eddie said, noticing her hand shaking.

“I am fine, Eddie,” Ali said. “It’s an old letter from Michael.”

“Ah. I understand,” Eddie said, “We all have made sacrifices in this war, lass. If you need anything, let old Eddie know, OK?”

“Thank you,” Ali said.

As another Bing Crosby song was finishing, Eddie turned around and pulled out a Mozart record from a paper album sleeve. He removed Bing's record, and placed the Mozart recording on the turntable, set the needle on the record, and threw the microphone switch.

"This is London, London calling in the home, overseas and European services of the BBC and through the United Nations radio, Mediterranean. This is Edward MacDonald speaking. Now, we have some news on his majesty and the queen."

Eddie placed a pre-recorded aluminum disc on the second turntable. The networks and individual radio stations had adopted the aluminum discs as the standard medium for recording broadcasts. Eddie set the needle down onto the silver disc.

This is Edward MacDonald: I spoke to a woman who witnessed a V-1 buzz bomb that struck the western area of Constitution Hill, near the palace grounds.

Woman: The explosion was horrific, but I saw his Majesty, the king, walking amongst the rubble. It was wonderful to see him and the queen showing us they had no fear. He even waved to me!

Edward MacDonald: A wonderful sight to see, I imagine. It's inspiring to see our king and queen showing us and the world that they are here, refusing to be bullied by Hitler and his evil cronies.

Ali had lost friends this way and could not stay to hear the rest of the interview.

"Night, love," Ali whispered.

She closed the studio door as Eddie droned on. "And now news from the battle for Monte Cassino..."

Ali bade goodnight to the station crew, Ali maneuvered down the old oak stairs to the doors that opened onto the darkened street as she did every night. Ever since a V-1 buzz bomb had exploded in the vicinity, damaging its frame, the heavy doors had to be lifted to be opened or closed. Since there were no funds to repair them, she had to make do with the inconvenience. She lifted one door and closed it with a push, inserted her heavy iron key and turned it until the lock clicked into place.

Ali pulled her coat tight across her body and drew her collar snug around her neck. The damp spring air was nippy that night. Fog flowed in rivulets, sending a shiver down her spine while mists created eerie shadows in the darkness as people passed by her on the street.

Ali walked the few blocks towards her London flat. As she turned a corner, she realized a man in a dark woolen trench coat and black fedora was following her. The hairs stood up on the back of her neck and her heart raced. It pulsed in her ears. She trembled as she reached into her coat pocket to feel the cold steel of a small revolver. I hope I don't need this tonight, she thought.

Ali switched sides on the street and stopped to see if the man would trail her. As he approached on the other side of the street, his face appeared through the fog and she recognized him as Sergio, the man with the Spanish accent. He glanced down the street both ways and motioned for her to follow him into a dark alley that was on his side of the street.

Ali hesitated, but knew she had little choice in the matter. A short distance in, the man turned on his heel and waited for Ali to approach.

"Do you have the information?" he asked.

"Yes," she said, her nerves frayed. She fumbled with her purse, trying to find the envelope she had almost forgotten at the station. After a few moments of searching, she freed the envelope from the clutter in her purse and handed it to him.

The man snatched the envelope from her grasp, startling her.

"Don't be nervous, Ali," he said. "I will keep my promise to pay you."

Ali said nothing as he pulled the folded paper from the envelope. He scrutinized the text with a small flashlight he drew from his coat pocket.

"So it is true, the invasion of France will be this year, as expected. I commend your effort, Fräü Ali. This will please my German masters with this information," he said.

"Do you have my money?" Ali asked.

"Of course," the man said, handing her another envelope thick with cash.

Ali shoved this envelope into her purse.

"Do you not want to count it?" he asked.

"I trust you," Ali said. "Besides, if it isn't all there, what can I do?"

The man laughed aloud, attracting a bobby who was passing by the side street. The bobby stopped, peered down the alleyway and then started walking towards them, saying, "Clear off now, you two!"

In an abrupt move, Sergio grabbed Ali and pulled her close, kissing her. The bobby chuckled, turning back to the main street to disappear around the corner.

Ali allowed the disgust she felt to show as she shoved him away from her. "What on earth was that," she whispered with an astonishing fury.

"If that bobby had come closer, I would have had to kill him," he said in a low voice. "That gets messy."

"Next time, figure something else out," Ali replied, wiping her mouth with a handkerchief from her purse.

"Next time I want you to provide the exact dates and locations of the invasion," he said. "My superiors are impatient."

"I can't just walk in and ask General Eisenhower when he might conduct an invasion," Ali snapped at him.

"You will serve what you have to," he growled. "It would be unfortunate if anything were to happen to your children."

Ali kept silent, thinking; you leave them out of this. She reached into her coat pocket, gripping her revolver. "I'll get the information, but it takes time."

"If you want to shoot me with that pistol, you will be dead before you get it out of your coat," the man warned.

Ali realized the truth of his words and released her grip on the pistol. She removed her hand from her coat pocket.

"That is better," the man said, softening his voice. "I give you until the end of the month."

"That's only a couple of weeks away. I told you I need more time," Ali said.

"I will find you," he said. "Have the information and remember your children." The man turned and disappeared into the fog.

After he had vanished from sight, Ali bent down, put both hands against the building and threw up against the wall. When she caught her breath, she leaned back against the brick building.

“What have I done?”

A year earlier, in 1943, Major Scotty Smythe summoned Ali to MI-6 headquarters in London.

She was nervous as she sat down in Major Scotty Smythe’s office. It smelled of cigars, whiskey and ash from a potbelly stove tucked away in one corner. Unorganized stacks of papers were piled on the major’s desk. A clock ticked away on the wall and with each passing second, it seemed to grow louder as she concentrated on the sweep of the second hand. The entire scene reminded her of a Sherlock Holmes novel. Did someone report me for not blacking out my windows at night, she wondered. Did I say anything on the radio show that I wasn’t supposed to say? Her mind swirled.

There was a soft knock at the door, and a British major entered the room.

“Mrs. Abramson, allow me to introduce myself. I am Major Scotty Smythe, MI-6,” the officer said. “Mind if we talk. It’s an urgent matter.”

“Am I in trouble, Major?” Ali asked.

“Oh heavens no,” Major Smythe said. “May I call you Alison?”

“Most people call me Ali.”

“And call me Scotty, if you please,” he said. “I have a request from the highest levels for your support in the war effort.”

“My. Please go on,” Ali said.

“Ali, first let me offer my condolences about your husband, Captain Abramson. He was a top-notch officer and his sacrifice for England was a terrible tragedy.”

“Thank you, Major—oh, pardon me. I meant to say Scotty,” Ali said. “Yes, I miss Michael.”

“Which is the reason I have asked you to come in today,” Major Smythe said.

“I’ll do what I can. How can I help?” Ali asked.

“Perhaps you can pay back Jerry,” he said. “Ali, I know of the outstanding work you’ve been doing, keeping the morale of the troops up with your radio show at the local station. But would you like to help the war effort more directly?”

“Anything I can do,” Ali said.

Major Smythe pulled out a piece of paper and a pen and slid them across the desk to Ali.

“I am afraid we must go through protocol before I can discuss this further,” the Major Smythe said. “This is an agreement you need to sign. The Official Secrets Act.”

Ali scanned the document. Words like treason and top secret popped out from the pages. She picked up the pen and signed. Anything I can do to pay back the Nazis for killing Michael, I will do, Ali thought, no matter the consequences.

“Thank you, Ali. I am sure you will do fine. Perhaps we could have a spot of tea, while we discuss the request?” Major Smythe asked.

"That would be wonderful," Ali said.

The major picked up the phone on his desk and called for tea. He then handed Ali an official looking folder. TOP SECRET was stamped in bold red capital letters across its front.

Ali's eyes widened as she opened the folder and scanned the documents inside. When she realized her role, it hit her like a brick. The government wants me to support the war effort. How exciting and scary, she thought.

The major held out his hand to retrieve the folder, which Ali surrendered. He placed the TOP SECRET folder in a drawer.

"Scotty, why me?" Ali asked.

"Because you reach thousands, if not millions, of listeners," Major Smythe explained. "Perhaps even German intelligence, trying to garner what information they can."

"I never thought of it like that," Ali said. "It is a surprise to think the enemy could be listening."

"Which is why we need you," the Major Smythe said.

There was a knock on the door and a secretary in a tight-fitting skirt and blouse brought in a tray of tea, scones, and watercress sandwiches. She set them on the table and nodded to the major.

"Thank you, Agnes," Major Smythe said.

She smiled and closed the door behind her with a soft click.

Major Smythe pushed himself out of the old chair, which creaked as he stood up.

“When this war is over, I will treat myself to a new chair,” Major Smythe said with a smile.

“Yes, when it’s over, of course.” Ali’s voice trailed off, she reminisced about Michael.

At the tray, the major poured them both a cup of tea.

“Milk and sugar?” he asked.

“Please,” Ali said.

“Would you like a sandwich?” Major Smythe asked, handing Ali her cup.

“They look wonderful, Scotty, yes,” Ali said

“I have clotted cream from my uncle, who runs a farm in Cornwall. I also have a bit of jam if you would like?”

“Certainly!” Ali said with a bit too much enthusiasm. “I haven’t had the pleasure of clotted cream or jam, since before the war.”

The major took two scones and gave one to Ali.

“Ah, Earl Grey,” she said as she sipped the hot tea. “It’s my favorite. Don’t you find the Bergamot irresistible.”

“Agreed. I love the aroma,” Major Smythe said, his mouth full of scone and cream.

“If I may, how do I go about doing what you have in mind?” Ali asked.

“We will provide you with messages to announce,” he explained, taking a moment to swallow his food. “All you have to do is read them on the air.”

“Sounds simple enough,” she said. “Who is to receive these messages?”

“That I cannot tell you,” he replied. “And the reason is that if someone tries to get that information from you, you’ll have none with which to provide them.”

“Sounds dangerous and intriguing,” Ali said. “When do I start?”

“Tonight,” he said, opening another desk drawer from which he retrieved an envelope that he handed to her. “These are the messages you will broadcast.”

Ali took the envelope and put it in her purse.

“I will bring these back to our station and do what you ask,” Ali said.

“Ali, you can’t go back to your old job,” Major Smythe said. “I have contacted the BBC. You have an appointment with a colleague of mine there. You will work with the BBC on this project starting tonight.”

Ali gasped. The BBC! Working with the local radio station was simple and off the radar. She had dreamed of making it to the BBC, but never dared to try, for fear of rejection.

“But what should I say to my employer at the radio station?” Ali asked.

“You must tell them you are leaving the job for a greater opportunity,” Major Smythe said.

“Won’t they be suspicious?” Ali asked.

“I will have the manager at the BBC I know, pay them a visit, thanking them for discovering such a wonderful employee with a magical voice,” Major Smythe said.

“I am grateful, Scotty,” Ali said. “Never would I have dreamed I would work with the BBC.”

“You have fans everywhere, including the BBC. The talents you possess have not gone unnoticed,” Major Smythe said.

“I will not disappoint you. Thank you for giving me this opportunity,” Ali said.

“I trust you won’t,” Major Smythe said. “Ali, remember, all you have to do is read those communiqués on the air. Try not to be contrary, use charm and wit as we all know you can do.”

“I will,” Ali said, managing a smile. She was ecstatic! A spy? I never expected I would help the war effort, she thought. How would Michael have reacted to this? He would have forbidden me to do such a thing. But I want to do something!

Ali’s facial expression was obvious.

“Ali, if this is too much for you, we can find someone else,” Major Smythe said.

“No, I can do this,” Ali said. “I was thinking about Michael.”

Ali wanted to pay back the Nazis for killing her husband. She was not a malevolent person, but she wanted to avenge Michael’s death.

“I am sure he would be proud of you,” Major Smythe said.

The major stood up, and Ali followed suit. Walking to the door, he opened it for her and handed her a card. “This is my contact at the BBC. The appointment is at 9:00 sharp. Do not be late.”

“I won’t. Thank you again, Major Smythe—Scotty,” Ali replied.

"You're most welcome, Ali," Major Smythe answered. "Now, let's give Jerry a go, shall we?"

In January 1944, they summoned Ali back to Major Smythe's office at MI-6.

This time, however, she was escorted into his office by an armed guard.

Ali was nervous. The familiar smell of whiskey, old papers, and cigars overwhelmed her senses. The cacophonous clock ticked on. She fidgeted with her purse.

The door opened. Major Smythe entered without a word and sat down in his rickety oak chair. The sound sent a shiver up Ali's neck in anticipation of what they might now ask her to do.

Smythe retrieved a folder from his desk, he opened it and spoke, avoiding Ali's gaze.

"Ali, I have a request for you to —," he said.

"Anything," Ali interrupted.

"Consider what I am about to ask before you say yes," he said.

Ali restrained herself. Her heart raced. What will they ask me to do, she wondered?

The major was blunt, as he was apt to be. No sense beating around the bush, he thought.

"Ali, an agent who works for MI-6, is spying on the Nazis. His name is Sergio Garcia. We suspect he is a double agent, working for them instead of for us," Major Smythe said.

"How can I help?" Ali asked.

"We need you to contact him and give him false intelligence," Major Smythe replied.

Terror struck Ali. Coded messages in a studio was one thing, but contacting a double agent was a whole different matter. "Why me?" Ali asked. "Can someone else, an MI-6 agent perhaps, do this? Can't you arrest this spy?"

"No, not yet," Major Smythe said. "For reasons I can't explain, we need to feed him certain intelligence to determine which side he favors."

Ali was perplexed. "I still don't understand why I should be the one to do this. I have no training in this sort of thing."

"Since he also works for us, we leaked the fact to him you send coded messages to the partisans in Europe," Major Smythe said.

"But why would you do that?" Ali asked. It surprised her he had put her in harm's way. This was something she had not expected, and anger welled up inside of her.

"Ali, Sergio expects you are weak because you are a woman and someone he can threaten and coerce into giving up the information you broadcast," Major Smythe said. "He doesn't know how tough an English woman can be. But just in case, our agents will watch over you, whenever you contact him."

"I have little choice, do I?" Ali asked.

"The Nazis have not given our country much choice, Ali," Major Smythe replied.

"Yes, I understand," she said.

The major handed Ali an envelope.

“Inside are counterfeit hand-drawn maps of locations and codes for the upcoming invasion. Sergio will contact you when you leave the BBC one evening soon and offer you a large sum of money for this intelligence. It’s a game of cat and mouse. Don’t be quick to take him up on his offer. He is dodgy. I will have men tail you and if things get out of hand, we will detain him, at His Majesty’s pleasure.”

Major Smythe reached into his desk drawer and pulled out a small revolver and a box of ammunition.

“Take this for protection. Have you ever fired a pistol?” he asked.

“I grew up on a farm, Scotty,” Ali replied. “I am proficient enough.”

David Abramson, Ali’s father, had taught her at a young age to use weapons of all sorts.

Ali placed the revolver and ammunition in her coat pocket.

Smythe opened the door for her and called for the Sergeant at Arms, seated outside his office.

“Sergeant Watson, please escort Mrs. Abramson out, please,” he said.

“Sir! Right this way, ma’am,” he said to Ali.

Sergeant Watson directed her to an alley behind MI-6 headquarters.

After Ali had left Major Smythe’s office, an intelligence clerk knocked on his open door.

“Come in, Lloyd. Please close the door behind you,” Major Smythe said.

The clerk entered the room, shut the door, and handed the major a large envelope.

“What do you have for me?” he asked the clerk.

“We just received a coded message,” Lloyd replied. “I decoded it for you, sir. It’s from your brother, Captain Smythe.”

Major Smythe broke the seal on the large envelope and pulled out a decoded sheet of paper.

Have arrived in Esterra d' Aneu under the name Emilio Diaz. Will send in reports every week.

White Rabbit

“Well done, Lloyd. That will be all,” Major Smythe said. After Lloyd had left, he concentrated on folding the communiqué into a diagonal inch and a half long tube, bending it in the middle, and working it back and forth until it looked like a miniature log. Then he placed it back in the envelope.

Major Smythe turned his chair towards the potbelly stove in the corner of his office. He grasped an iron poker and stoked the fire, sparking a weak flame. He tossed the fashioned communiqué log inside, closed the door and rolled back to his desk.

Smythe opened one of his desk drawers and pulled out a bottle of good Scottish whiskey that he had saved for special occasions. He poured himself an oversized monsignor helping, as he called it, and put the full shot glass to his lips. He proposed a toast to his brother’s picture in the room’s corner, “God speed, John!”

A few nights later, Ali left the BBC studio earlier than her usual time and stepped out into the cold, foggy London

evening. Tonight was her night to buy groceries. One of her new colleagues at the BBC stood in for her each week so she would have this time.

On her way home, she did not see the dark figure trailing behind her.

She walked about a block to the butcher shop owned by Mr. and Mrs. Harold Lewis and rang the bell. After a few moments, a rotund, balding man in an apron covered in an odd combination of dried blood and flour opened the door.

"Ah, Mrs. Abramson, here for your ration of meat?" he asked.

"Yes, Mr. Lewis. If you would be so kind?" Ali replied.

"By all means, come in," he motioned. "Let's get you out of this chilly night!"

Ali walked up to the counter as Mrs. Lewis was cleaning the shop with a broom.

"Nice to see you again, my dear," Mrs. Lewis said.

"You know," Harold said. "I just got in a small rabbit. I could exchange it for you instead of your usual sausage."

"Oh my," Ali said. "That would be wonderful!"

Harold pulled out the rabbit for Ali to inspect. As she looked it over, he gave her some warm bread fresh out of the oven.

"Yes, that will do, Mr. Lewis," Ali said.

Ali took a coupon book from her purse and removed one coupon that she handed to Harold. After he had wrapped the rabbit up, he escorted her to the door. Before opening the door, he stopped, turned around, and winked at his wife.

“Ah, one moment, Mrs. Abramson,” Mrs. Lewis said, as Harold went back behind the counter.

“Are you thinking the same thing that I am?” Harold asked his wife.

“Yes, Harold,” she replied. She turned to Ali and said, “We could get three onions and I can part with one, isn’t that right, Harold?”

Harold replied. “Why, rabbit wouldn’t be the same without onions!” Harold produced one robust onion that he wrapped in newspaper and handed to Ali.

“Thank you very much, Mr. Lewis!” Ali said. “You are both too kind!”

“Enjoy it, my dear,” Mr. Lewis said.

“Good night, and thank you again,” Ali said.

“Night,” Harold said, closing the door behind her and locking it.

Tomorrow I’ll cook up the rabbit and use some of my potatoes and carrots from my victory garden, Ali thought, walking out of the shop and down the street. Maybe Mrs. Wilson would trade some eggs from her ration for my peas, carrots, and potatoes. We could make a wonderful trifle to go along with the meal. Her stomach growled in anticipation of the cooked rabbit, surrounded by steaming carrots, peas, and potatoes that she would eat the next day.

As she continued to walk, Ali came to the bombed-out shell that had once been the home of a good friend and stood for a moment there, reminiscing. It was serendipitous that her part of the neighborhood had remained unscathed from the V-1 and V-2 rockets, while her neighbors had lost their homes.

She walked on while she pondered these tragedies, and moments later realized someone was following her. Out of the corner of her eye, she could see a dark man wearing a beret and a long, woolen trench coat.

She slowed her pace. I'm being followed, Ali thought. To her horror, the man kept the same distance from her, stopping to gaze into a storefront window every time she slowed down. Ali bent down to adjust her shoe. She strained to identify the man through the wisps of English fog that floated between them.

Ali turned the corner and walked into an uninhabited area of the street, a veritable ghost town with demolished flats flanking both sides. She hated coming through the deserted, bombed-out buildings on these foggy nights, but tonight she was especially in a hurry to get home and enjoy her warm bread. Now she picked up her pace, afraid the man might try to mug her. She patted her coat pocket, reassured that the gun Major Smythe had given her was there.

Homeless men would sometimes mug unsuspecting people, women, in the bombed-out areas of London. Tonight Ali had chosen the shortest route to her flat to satisfy her hunger. There were other ways she walked most nights that took longer and were safer. But now, she had no choice and continued on. I will do this, she thought, be strong.

She ventured a quick glance behind her and sighed. The man disappeared.

As she passed a desolate, dark side street, she glimpsed the man in the shadows. He must have cut through one of the deserted buildings. She shoved her free hand into her coat pocket, feeling the cold steel of the revolver. If he's going to try anything, he will not get far, she promised herself.

“Alison Abramson?” the menacing dark figure asked, appearing from the shadows of the rubble.

It disconcerted Ali to hear her name called out, and she froze for a second.

“Who are you?” she asked, turning to face the shadow. “What do you want?”

“My name is not important at the moment, Alison, but you would be wise to listen to what I have to say,” he said with a heavy Spanish accent.

The realization hit her. Sergio!

She tightened the grip on the revolver. So here we are at last, she thought.

There was no turning back now...



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