



All is Fair

DEE
GARRETSON

Swoon READS

SWOON READS • NEW YORK

A SWOON READS BOOK

An imprint of Feiwel and Friends and Macmillan Publishing Group, LLC
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010

ALL IS FAIR. Copyright © 2019 by Dee Garretson. All rights reserved.
Printed in the United States of America.

Our books may be purchased in bulk for promotional, educational, or business use. Please contact your local bookseller or the Macmillan Corporate and Premium Sales Department at (800) 221-7945 ext. 5442 or by email at MacmillanSpecialMarkets@macmillan.com.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2018944892
ISBN 978-1-250-16869-6 (hardcover) / ISBN 978-1-250-16868-9 (ebook)

Book design by Liz Dresner

First edition, 2019

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

swoonreads.com

To Ann Braithwaite
Always a good friend

ALL IS FAIR

[illegible][illegible][illegible]

of horror spread across my friends' faces. I turned to see the heavy door opening with a groan.

Miss Climpson, the overlord of Winterbourne Academy, stood in the doorway. I braced myself for the wrath about to fall upon us, sentencing us to the perpetual writing of lines for our offense, but instead she just said, "Thomasina, I need to see you in my office. The rest of you girls, go to bed."

Dorothy, her eyes wide, gave me a look that meant either *Run for your life!* or *I'll cry at your funeral*. Pretending not to notice, I raised my chin and walked out of the pantry, not wanting the others to think I was a spineless ninny.

But as I followed Miss Climpson down the long central hall of the academy, I became a spineless ninny. My feet dragged more and more as we approached her office. Her door, the portal of despair, was open. Miss Climpson's dark lair with the grim portraits struck terror in the hearts of all the students at the school and I was no exception, though at sixteen I shouldn't have been scared of one tiny old woman who barely came up to my shoulder.

I knew she was going to lecture me about being a poor role model. She'd done it many times before, and it always started the same way: *Now, Thomasina, the girls follow your lead; therefore, you should be a good leader. You should want to make your parents proud of you, even if your marks are not as good as they should be.* Many more "shoulds" would follow, and I would be sufficiently contrite, until the next time.

"Come in and sit down," she said. Her voice was warm and gentle, a tone we usually heard only when Miss Climpson spoke

to parents. At those times, her grandmotherly charm was as sudden and shocking to us girls as a gramophone turned on in a quiet room.

I felt chilled as soon as I walked in. Miss Climpson never had a fire lit, even on the most frigid of days. Girls said it was so cold that dust motes froze in midair. With the shortage of housemaids since the Great War had begun, I could imagine dust accumulating until it would eventually look as if a snowfall had struck the office.

War with Germany was giving the former housemaids a choice to have far more exciting lives as nurses and ambulance drivers. If I were a housemaid with a choice between being stuck at Winterbourne cleaning under Miss Climpson's thumb or dodging shells while speeding around in an ambulance, I would have chosen ambulance driving too. The danger would have been worth it in return for doing something to help the war effort.

The headmistress had a strange expression on her face, one I couldn't place. It took me a moment to realize the woman was at a loss for words. When Miss Climpson motioned for me to come farther into the room, I saw it. A telegram envelope lay in the center of the desk, the pale yellow of the paper stark against the almost black wood.

I felt sick. It hadn't occurred to me that it would be a telegram. My brother, Crispin, had been missing for months now, and I'd mostly stopped expecting he'd be found, except when I'd pass too close to the old looking glass in the dark corner of the hall. Then time would stop in the wavy light, my heart would skip, and I could almost see Crispin making faces back at me. He loved

practicing his silly voices in looking glasses before reading aloud to us. In one of his letters at the beginning of the war, he'd written that he read to his men from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* to keep their spirits up. I supposed that Crispin playing the Mad Hatter in a dugout made as much sense as anything else in the war.

I made myself move to the desk and reach for the telegram, but then drew back my hand. What if it wasn't Crispin? What if it was my father? It wasn't as if each family could make one sacrifice and then be safe from having to make any more. If something had happened to my father, would such news come by telegram, or would someone in the Foreign Office come in person? Winterbourne didn't have a telephone.

I felt a buzzing in my head and then the desk in front of me shrank as if it were moving far away, growing smaller and smaller. I wondered why the room had grown so hot and begun swaying back and forth like a cabin on a ship.

"Thomasina!" The headmistress took my arm, leading me over to a chair and practically pushing me down into it. "Put your head in your lap so you don't faint." I did as I was told, feeling Miss Climpson's hand on my hair. It reminded me of my mother comforting me when I was a child, and that gave me the strength to sit up as soon as the buzzing stopped. The desk was back to its normal size, the telegram still there.

"Take all the time you need, dear. It may not be as bad as you fear."

I wanted to believe her, but it still took all my willpower to pick it up and open it.

2 April 1918

Thomasina,

Your old father has a request. A friend has written that your cousin is ill. She needs you to come home to Hallington right away. Have your things sent as well. Get help from Mrs. Brommers if you need it. She will be glad to give it. To communicate with me, wire the Foreign Office if the situation worsens. Best you don't tell your cousin you are coming. We're at Thornhill but don't know for how long. Once home, let us know of your safe arrival. Give my best to Julius. Remember, two are often better than one.

Father

I tried to clear my mind of the fear the sight of the telegram had given me so I could concentrate, but I was confused. This telegram was far longer than most, and it read like a joke. First of all, even though I had a cousin, Eugenia, she didn't live with us. She lived in Scotland. It was also impossible to imagine Eugenia ill. The woman walked miles a day on her "nature rambles," her storklike figure a common sight for everyone for miles around her home. She never took to her bed for any reason.

Second, I didn't know a Mrs. Brommers, nor had I ever heard of a place called Thornhill. And who was the "we"? My mother was in America helping my uncle, whose wife was ill. My sister, Margaret, was in London.

Third, my father would never refer to himself as an "old

father.” People often commented on how Reese Tretheway still looked much as he had in the days he was a valued secret agent for the British government, tracking spies across Europe.

And last, the only Julius I had ever heard of was Julius Caesar, because my father had read all his writings and subjected us to many of the man’s sayings. There were so many of them, I thought the man must have spent half his time sitting about thinking up pithy quotes to outlast him.

“Is it bad news, dear?” Miss Climpson asked gently.

I handed the telegram to her.

“I’m sorry your cousin is ill,” the headmistress said after she read it. “This is most irregular, but I suppose we should follow Lord Tretheway’s instructions. I’ll make arrangements to get you home as soon as possible.”

I was barely listening, still thinking about the strangeness of the telegram. A memory of my father’s voice tugged at me. He was sitting beside my bed, trying to get me to look at him. I was facing the wall, angry that he was insisting I stay in my room to recover from scarlet fever. *It’s like a game*, he coaxed. *All spies must know ciphers and codes. Don’t you want to learn some? You’re a clever girl. Perhaps someday you can be a code breaker in the Foreign Office—the first girl ever to have such an important job.*

A thrill of excitement ran through me. The telegram was strange because it was a cipher, and I knew just how to decipher it. I needed to get to my room to read it in private.

“Yes, I have to go home,” I said to Miss Climpson. “Right away.”

3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 1

3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 1

often better than one. That meant I needed to take the second word of each sentence and read the result.

I wasn't going to explain it all to Miss Climpson, though. She'd think I'd come down with a case of brain fever. "May I go pack?" I asked. "I'd like to take a train in the morning."

"Of course, dear." Miss Climpson hesitated, as if she was going to say something else.

But I wanted to get out of there before she could ask questions. "Thank you, Miss Climpson." I darted out of the office, knowing she wouldn't dash after me. Miss Climpson didn't dash.

Dorothy was waiting for me when I got back to our room. "What is it?" she cried, grabbing my hands. "You look strange. You're so pale. Are you ill? What did she say? Tell me!"

"I need a pencil." I pulled away and rummaged around in the clutter on my desk, knocking some books to the floor. My hands felt shaky. "I got a telegram from my father that has a secret message in it. I need to write it out." I knew I was talking too fast, but I couldn't help it.

Dorothy clapped her hands and then practically danced over to her own desk. "This is so exciting! You're so lucky to have a father who was a spy!" She took a pencil from her own desk. "Sit at my desk. Yours doesn't have any room to write on it."

I sat down and opened the telegram, underlining as I read it again. *Your OLD father has a request. A FRIEND has written that your cousin is ill. She NEEDS you to come home to Hallington right away. Have YOUR things sent as well. Get HELP from Mrs. Brommers if you need it. She WILL be glad to give it. To COMMUNICATE with me, wire the Foreign Office if the situation worsens.*

Best YOU don't tell your cousin you are coming. We're AT Thornhill but don't know for how long. Once HOME, let us know of your safe arrival. Give my best to Julius. Remember, two are often better than one.

Dorothy was hovering over me. "What is the message? Let me see or read it out loud."

I took a deep breath so I could calm down. "It says 'Old friend needs your help will communicate you at home.'" I read it again, trying to make sense of it.

"An actual mysterious message!" Dorothy squealed. "I can't believe it!"

Dorothy's excitement made my own suddenly change to apprehension. This wasn't a game. My father was a very serious man even in normal times. Something had to be very wrong for him to contact me with a cipher telegram when he had the whole Foreign Office at his disposal. "I can't think of any of his old friends I could help. I can't do anything special."

Dorothy snapped her fingers. "It could be because of your languages! An old friend needs something translated. You are better at languages than anyone here at school, and you know all those ones most people here don't speak."

I did have an odd knack for languages, just like my father, but that couldn't be the reason behind the telegram. "I doubt it. My father could translate everything I could. The country is full of people who know all sorts of languages."

Folding the telegram, I got up and looked around the room. I had to concentrate. One step at a time. First, I had to get home. "I need to pack. I don't know when I'm coming back. I don't know what to take."

Dorothy picked my geometry textbook up off the floor. "You should take your schoolbooks. You can keep up with some of the work at home."

I shuddered. "No, you know I won't open them." Unlike Dorothy, I was fairly hopeless at most school subjects, mainly because I couldn't get myself to study. I'd be even less likely to at home, with the garden calling to me. Besides languages, gardening was my only other talent. Mr. Applewhite, the gardener at Hallington, acknowledged that I could coax any flower to bloom, though no one but the two of us seemed to think it was much of an accomplishment. But whatever was behind my father's telegram, it wouldn't involve gardening.

By the time I'd finished packing it was very late, but morning still took forever to arrive. Either the bed had gotten lumpier or I really was coming down with brain fever. I spent most of the night running through all our acquaintances in my head, trying to think of old friends I could help. None came to mind.

Dorothy had begged Miss Climpson to accompany us to the railway station and Miss Climpson had agreed, surprising us both. Once we were there, Miss Climpson bustled about. "We'll attempt to find you a compartment without soldiers in it," she said as we scanned the carriages for an empty seat. The train was so packed with men in uniform, I doubted that would be possible. I just wanted to sit somewhere, anywhere, so I could be on my way.

Dorothy linked her arm through mine and whispered in my ear, "Maybe you'll be lucky and get stuck in a compartment full of very handsome soldiers."

"I don't usually have that kind of luck," I whispered back. "I'll

be stuck with some gossipy ladies or a family with a fretful baby.” Even if there were handsome soldiers, I wouldn’t know what to say to them. Since the war, I’d mostly been at home or at school, not going anywhere where one might stumble upon a handsome man. The only one I actually knew was my brother’s friend Andrew, my first crush, whom I had followed around for so many years that it had become something of a family joke.

“Here’s a spot!” Miss Climpson called as an entire family exited a compartment. She gestured for me to get in. “Now, if soldiers join you and they become impertinent, you know what to do—get up and ask the conductor to find you a different seat.”

“Yes, Miss Climpson,” I said, not intending to do any such thing. Sadly, I couldn’t imagine any soldier would even notice me in my unsophisticated school uniform and coat, with my hair in a plait and my shoes so sensible and ugly they would make any girl want to weep. My sister, Margaret, always said it was a pity my hair was neither straight nor curly, just wavy, and the color neither here nor there, just brown to match my eyes. I hadn’t inherited my siblings’ striking looks of black hair and blue eyes. When I was a little girl, Margaret had teased that I was a changeling baby brought by the autumn fairies in a basket full of oak leaves and acorns.

“You’ll write, won’t you?” pleaded Dorothy “It will just be beastly here without you. Here, I was saving these, but I want you to have them.” She pushed a packet of pear drops into my hand. “I know they aren’t your favorite, but they are better than nothing.” She gave a sniffle and wiped a tear from her cheek. I knew she loved pear drops, and her gift was very sweet, I thought.

“Dorothy, you are being much too dramatic,” Miss Climpson

scolded. "It's not like Thomasina is being sent off to the Far East. Lincolnshire is not the ends of the Earth." The train's whistle blew and the headmistress added, "We should get back to school. Do you have everything, Thomasina?"

"I'll be fine, Miss Climpson. Thank you for coming to the station." I hugged Dorothy. "You have to write too. No excuses."

"I will." The whistle blew again.

"Come along, Dorothy. Goodbye, Thomasina. Safe journey."

I settled in, happy that I still had the compartment to myself so I could have one of Dorothy's pear drops. Miss Climpson always lectured that ladies didn't eat in train compartments, which I interpreted to mean that they didn't eat in front of strangers. Someday I'd travel by train as a regular person, not caring whether anyone thought I was a "proper lady" or not, and then I could eat as much as I wanted in front of everyone.

I quickly popped a pear drop into my mouth, knowing the compartment wouldn't be empty for long. Ever since the war had started, the trains were always full, and the smell of soldiers' uniforms lingered everywhere, a mix of damp wool, boot polish, and cigarette smoke. Every soldier smoked, and the air in the trains and stations was thick with it.

I supposed I'd be tempted to take up smoking too, if I had to face the trenches. In Crispin's last letters before he disappeared, he had written of the nightmare of mud and stink and death. It was a letter addressed to my father, one that Father wouldn't let me read, though I had gone into his study when he was out riding and read it anyway. The despair in the words bled from the page until I dropped the paper back on the desk, feeling a

chill in my fingers. If I hadn't recognized the handwriting, I wouldn't have believed Crispin had written it.

Trying not to think about him, I looked out the window to wave at Dorothy. The whistle sounded and Dorothy's face grew even more woebegone. I knew what would make her more cheerful. I opened the window and leaned out. "We will go to my castle and grow turnips together happily ever after!"

Miss Climpson looked first shocked and then disapproving, but Dorothy at least broke into laughter.

I closed the window and sat back down, only then realizing there was a young man standing in the doorway grinning at me. My ears turned hot. They always did when I was embarrassed. I knew they would be red too, which made it all the worse, so there was no way I could pretend I hadn't been yelling ridiculous things out the window. I dropped my gaze, but not before I noticed his eyes. They were somewhere between blue and green, and lovely. His hair was too long, though, and unruly, sandy blond and waving every which way.

"You have a castle?" he asked with an American accent. That explained the longish hair and the fact that his skin didn't have the winter paleness still cloaking everyone else.

"No. It was a line from a play," I said, as if it was perfectly normal to yell lines out train windows.

"That's too bad. I'd like to see some castles while I'm here." He motioned to the seat opposite me. "Is this seat taken?"

"No."

He came in and sat down, looking around the compartment as if he'd never been in one before. I wondered if he was even

supposed to be in first class. His jacket was old, and I could see his sleeves were frayed at the cuffs. He had traces of grease on his hands, as if he'd been working on some machinery. I found myself staring at his odd boots, well-worn leather with a swirling design. I recognized them—they were actual cowboy boots. My American uncle had a pair like them. What was a cowboy doing on a train in Oxfordshire? In general, Americans were rare outside England's cities, but American *cowboys* were as rare as hens' teeth, as our cook would say. I looked out the window so I wouldn't keep staring.

A woman pushing a man in a wheelchair came to a stop on the platform right outside the compartment. I couldn't help but look. The man's head and face were completely covered with a linen cloth so his features were hidden. He wore his soldier's cap on top of the cloth. I wondered if the cloth hid some terrible mustard gas burns to his face, or if he no longer wanted to see the world. My father had told me some of the shell-shocked couldn't stop seeing horrors in even ordinary things.

The woman leaned down and spoke to the man before walking over to talk to a porter. The man's head turned toward my window, and though I couldn't see his eyes, I was afraid he saw me staring. I didn't know what to do. Waving would have been ridiculous. I placed my hand on the window, hoping he hadn't seen me acting so foolish before. I knew being at school allowed us more time than most had to push the war away when we wanted. Others never could. I felt ashamed that I'd spent my time thinking how exciting it would be to drive an ambulance, not even considering who I'd be transporting.

“Do you mind?” A deep voice startled me. I turned to see two officers standing in the compartment’s doorway, one of them motioning to the empty seats.

“No,” I said, trying to act as though I traveled by myself all the time. The American just shook his head.

I knew by their uniforms that the men were naval aviators, probably stationed at the military base at Cranwell, near my home. The older aviator had a solid country-gentleman air about him, but the younger officer was handsome in a way my mother would describe as “sleek as an otter” with his small black mustache, oiled black hair, and smooth skin. I thought the man had overdone the hair oil, however. He looked positively wet.

When they had seated themselves, the younger man held out a silver cigarette case engraved with a coat of arms and asked, “Would you like a cigarette?”

His voice sounded familiar. I looked at him again, but couldn’t place him. I knew the correct way to answer his question. Dorothy instructed all the girls in what to say to men, should we ever have a chance to converse with any. Having two brothers who talked freely gave Dorothy copious amounts of information that she passed on to the more sheltered of us at Winterbourne. According to Dorothy, if I took one, men would assume I was fast, because nice girls either didn’t smoke or only smoked in private.

“No thank you, I don’t smoke.” As soon as I added the last part, I wished I hadn’t. It made me sound like a prim schoolgirl.

I glanced over at the American to find him contemplating me with amusement, as if he didn’t quite believe my words.

The men purposely ignored the American, and the rudeness

puzzled me. They should have offered him a cigarette as well. Perhaps they thought he looked out of place in first class too. When the two aviators began to talk to each other, I realized they were showing off a bit.

"I'd like another little jaunt like the last one," the older one said. "Watching the fireworks when that ammunition shed blew was quite a show."

"That was a first-rate stunt," the other said. "More of it to come, I expect, though I'd like a new bus before we go up again. My old wreck has one too many bullet holes in it. I half expect it to fall to bits around me."

I couldn't help but look at the American again. He still appeared amused, like he was watching a performance. When he caught me watching him, he had the nerve to wink. I willed my ears not to turn red again, pretending I was actually staring over his right shoulder, thinking lofty thoughts about . . . something other than the way one curl on his forehead looked as if someone should brush it back. Since I couldn't think of a single actual lofty thought and I felt the telltale warmth in my earlobes, I forced myself to open my book and pretended to read.

When I heard one of the officers say the word "Hallington," I looked up. His next words made me think he was talking about my house.

"Smith's group is going to be housed in the new huts there," the younger one said. "Lucky fellows. Beautiful place, much better than our flatlands, and close to Cranwell."

"Have you met him—Smith?" the other asked.

"Yes. He is more of a regular chap than I thought he would

be. One certainly can't call him a shirker. I was surprised he had such a noticeable stutter. At least, being who he is, the boys won't give him a rough time for it."

"Excuse me," I said, closing the book. I knew it was impolite to break into a conversation, but was unable to stop myself. "Are you talking about Hallington Manor? In Lincolnshire?"

"Yes, it's near our base," the younger one said. He leaned forward. "Say, I thought I knew you. You're Lord Tretheway's daughter, aren't you? Lady Thomasina? Hallington is Lord Tretheway's place," he explained to his friend. "I'm Harold Rigall, Captain Rigall." He held out his hand to me. "I met you with your family at my sister's wedding years ago. I danced with your sister, Margaret, though I think she was just taking pity on me. And this is Squadron Leader MacElvoy."

"How do you do?" I replied. I couldn't remember Harold. I remembered all the lovely food because it was before the shortages got so severe, and I remembered how happy my parents had looked dancing, though my mother wasn't very good at it. She had never been a good dancer, but my father didn't care.

Crispin had been there too—the last time I had seen him. It occurred to me that it was the last time all five of the family were together, but of course we hadn't known that then. We hadn't known that our world would suddenly turn upside down, though we'd be expected to carry on as if nothing could defeat us. Some days all I wanted to do was go outside and scream as loudly as I could about how unfair it all was. Crispin should have been at Oxford studying literature, putting on theatricals, and going to fabulous parties. He and Andrew would both have been at

Oxford, and on holidays they would have come home and livened up the whole house with their presence.

One of the men coughed, and I realized they were waiting for me to say something. "I haven't been home recently. Do you mean to say there will be men in the park at Hallington?" I tried to picture the grounds full of buildings for military quarters. There had been talk of it for over a year, but I hadn't known the plan had turned into reality.

"They are already there. About a hundred fellows just starting flight training. Any word of your brother?"

I shook my head just as the whistle blew and the train began to slow for the stop at Northhampton. I could feel myself closing up; I didn't want to talk about Crispin with strangers.

"Chin up and all that," Captain Rigall said, "though I expect you get tired of hearing such advice." I was relieved when he switched topics. "And is your sister at Hallington? I was so sorry to hear about her husband's death." His question was casual, but his eyes betrayed a keen interest in my answer. I wasn't surprised. Margaret had always cut a wide swath through crowds of adoring men, even as a widow.

"No," I said. "She's in London."

The man's shoulders sagged a bit. "Oh. Pity. When you speak to her, give her my regards, would you?"

"Of course."

"Good enough." The two men stood up. "Very nice to have a word with you. Makes me remember some pleasant times." They left without even acknowledging the American.

I felt like I had to apologize for them, but before I could, the

American stood up too. "I'm off as well," he said. "Goodbye. I suspect we will meet again very soon. In fact, you may be surprised by exactly how soon." He grinned again as he left the compartment. I heard him start to whistle and recognized the melody from a popular tune. *So send me away with a smile, little girl, brush the tears from eyes of brown.*

I watched through the window as he got off the train. He looked back and motioned for me to lower the window. When I did, he called out, "Don't you have any lines you want to yell at me?"

I don't know what came over me, but another line from the play popped into my head. The prince's true love had tried to send him away, sacrificing their happiness. "I'll give you up because your homeland needs you!" I shouted.

People turned to look at me, and I realized what I had done. I sank back down in the seat, out of view. I could hear Miss Climpson's voice in my head: *Thomasina, you know why you never get good marks in Deportment. I do wish you would try harder to control yourself.* Since the headmistress wasn't with me, I gave myself a failing mark for the day.

The whistle sounded. The compartment seemed very empty now. I should have been glad the American had gotten off the train—he probably winked at every girl he met. He looked like trouble, and that was one thing I didn't need, not with some important war work ahead of me, whatever it was. Nevertheless, I told myself I'd have something to tell Dorothy in the first letter I wrote her. It would make an interesting story.

As the train pulled away, I noticed an elderly man selling

newspapers was waving one about, trying to drum up business. "German arrested in Lincoln!" he shouted. "Spy cut telegraph wires! Read all about it!" I wished I'd noticed him before and been able to buy a paper. We girls had smuggled newspapers into school whenever we could after Dorothy told us Miss Climpson was keeping news from us about all the spies that were infiltrating Britain.

Even though my father had told me most of it was nonsense and people were just looking for reasons to be frightened, I wasn't so sure. That's what he would tell me, after all, because he would think I wasn't old enough to know the truth. Maybe the telegram proved he'd changed his mind about me. I would show him that I too could do my part. Too fidgety to sit still, I got up and stuck my head out the window, as if that would make the train go faster, though I knew I had several more hours until I got home.

3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 1

MISS CLIMPSON HAD sent a wire to the house with the arrival time of the train, which meant Lettie, one of the housemaids, would be there to meet me with the pony cart. Since my father was living at our London house to be closer to his work, he had the motorcar with him, and the household relied on Lettie and the cart. Lettie had started out as a scullery maid before moving up to housemaid and sometimes lady's maid, but once the men joined up, she had taken over many of their jobs. She had grown up on a farm, so she knew how to do all sorts of marvelous things I wished I could do.

I spotted Lettie's bright blue tam-o'-shanter first. My mother had given her the hat and Lettie loved it, so she wore it every chance she got. It looked good on her too, contrasting against her black curls.

She waved when she saw me getting off the train and came forward to take my bag, chattering away. Mrs. Brickles, the cook, grumbled that Lettie was as talkative as a magpie and she couldn't get a thing done when Lettie was gossiping in her kitchen. I suspected Mrs. Brickles couldn't get anything done because she was too busy gossiping back. No one was sure who would win in a contest between the two.

I took a moment to give the pony, Sunny, a pat, waking him from a doze, and then climbed into the cart. As we drove, Lettie told me all the doings of the neighborhood. I admit I was only half listening because my thoughts kept straying to the American. I wondered where he was at the moment. Probably winking at some other girl—some girl who didn't have important war work ahead of her. I doubted the mysterious old friend from the telegram was already at Hallington waiting for me, but I had to ask Lettie anyway. "Do we have any guests at the house?"

"No," Lettie said, sounding confused. "Are there supposed to be guests?"

"No, I was just curious." In all the flurry of the telegram and packing and getting home, I hadn't thought about why the telegram directed me to go to Hallington instead of meeting my father in London. Why would someone come to the country instead of somewhere more convenient? "Has my father been

home recently?" I asked. I realized I didn't know if he was even in England.

"About a month ago, just for a day and a night," Lettie said, flicking the reins. Sunny snorted but didn't pick up his pace. "Very secret meeting that night. The drive was lined with motorcars. Mr. Norris came with your father and acted as footman, and he was the only one allowed in the Tapestry Room to serve. Lady Margaret and her friend weren't even invited. They had trays in Lady Margaret's room, though they dressed up like they were at dinner. Such pretty clothes! We were all asked to stay in the servants' hall."

The news that my sister had been home was surprising, but not as surprising as the news about Mr. Norris. "Mr. Norris hasn't acted as footman for years!" Mr. Norris was my father's valet, and had been with him for as long as I could remember. Before the war, only young men were footmen, so it was difficult for me to envision the middle-aged Mr. Norris in the role.

"He acted as one that night, livery and all, and he wouldn't tell us a thing," Lettie said. "He kept his lips buttoned up like he'd been sworn to secrecy. Mrs. Brickles couldn't get a useful word out of him, though she tried her best. She was in a right temper with him."

"Who came to the meeting?" I asked.

"No one told us," Lettie said. "They tried to be very secret, but Mrs. Brickles and I worked it out. First of all, the chauffeurs wouldn't come in for a cup of tea. They stayed outside by the cars. I've never heard of that before. And there were soldiers stationed at all the doors."

“Soldiers! So someone important was in the house.” Just my luck that I had missed being at home. Even though I knew my father would never give away details about a secret meeting, being there while it was happening would have been exciting.

Lettie dropped her voice, glancing up and down the road as if it were teeming with listeners. “I think one of them was the prime minister. Imagine that! Of course, we haven’t told anyone. Not for us to give away state secrets. We’ve never said a word outside the household about any of the meetings your father has. My brother says there are some down at the White Bull who have tried to pry information out of him, thinking I’d tell him and he’d pass it on!” She flicked the reins again. “Get on there, you old dobbin!”

Sunny turned his head and glared at her exactly the way a person would, but he didn’t go any faster. Lettie didn’t seem to notice. “Those motorcars driving through the village draw a bit of notice. I tell anyone who asks that they’re just letting their imagination run away. It won’t be me who gives it away. Too much gossip in the neighborhood as it is.”

I knew my father’s work with the government was the only reason the house hadn’t been turned into a convalescent home or a hospital. Most of the other large homes had long since been put to use. Though my father had never told me, I had figured out that the meetings at Hallington occurred when someone in the government needed a place outside London where they wouldn’t draw attention.

“I wish they’d come to meetings more often,” Lettie said.

“Isn’t that a lot more work for you?”

“Yes, but then the house isn’t so empty. When I hear a noise, I know it’s a guest. If no one is there and I hear a noise . . .” Her voice trailed off.

“What kind of noises have you been hearing? There are all sorts of creaks and pipe clangs in such an old house.”

“I know, miss, but sometimes the noises don’t sound right. Hannah, the new housemaid, says it must be ghosts, but she does go on so. I’m not sure I believe her, though sometimes I do feel like there is a presence in the house that shouldn’t be there.”

I’d never heard Lettie be so fanciful before. “Don’t worry, Lettie. I’ve never heard tales of ghosts at the house.” I didn’t add that I’d always wished we had at least one ghost. It didn’t seem fair to live in a big house and not have one mysterious lady in white or a spirit who dragged around a chain. “At least now that I’m home, it won’t be so empty,” I told her. “And if there are any strange noises, I’ll find out what is causing them. I’m sure there is a simple explanation.”

A distant roar came from above. I looked up to see a squadron of aeroplanes in the distance. “You’ll get used to that,” Lettie said as she turned the cart into the drive. “They go by all the time from Cranwell. They’ve also built an encampment in the park, so you’ll see lights all night.”

I felt a pang of jealousy at the sight of the aeroplanes. Even if my father would ever allow me to fly, with the war on, there were no aeroplanes or opportunities available for teaching girls. Someday I would learn, though. The war couldn’t last forever.

When we were almost to the front door, I saw a curtain move in an upstairs window, in what had been Crispin's room. But Crispin's room, along with most of the other rooms in the house, had been closed off. I wondered if someone had gone in to air out the room and forgotten to make sure the window was shut tight, making the wind move the curtain. I'd ask Miss Tanner, the housekeeper, to check it.

I didn't like going into Crispin's room. I didn't like seeing the old hourglass that sat on his desk. He'd found it in the attic and declared it a perfect prop for his Father Time character in one of our Christmas theatricals. We'd all laughed as he crept about the makeshift stage wrapped in an old sheet, carrying it and croaking, *Gather ye rosebuds while ye may, Old Time is still a-flying; and this same flower that smiles today tomorrow will be dying.*

I didn't realize that Lettie had brought the cart to a stop at the front door until the pony stamped his hooves and blew air out of his nose.

"I'm sorry, Lettie. I was woolgathering," I said, jumping down, "and I'm keeping Sunny from his stall."

As they drove away, I walked up the steps and into the hall, immediately aware of how quiet it was. I'd known the staff would be in the lower part of the house and the upstairs would be empty, but I'd expected some sound. Then I realized what was missing: Someone had forgotten to wind the hall clock.

A noise from the morning room almost made me drop my bag. Before I could react, my sister, Margaret, walked into the hall. "Mina? What are you doing home? Is something wrong?"

I was just as surprised as she was. She was supposed to be in

London. "I've come home from school," I said, as if it was perfectly normal. "Didn't Miss Tanner tell you?"

"You didn't get expelled, did you?" she asked.

"No, of course I didn't get expelled." Leave it to Margaret to assume the worst.

"So why are you here? Does Father know you've left school?" She sounded almost angry.

"Yes." I had to think of a reason fast, so I said the first thing that popped into my head. "There was a measles outbreak and classes have been suspended temporarily. Some girls stayed on, but I'm sure I can make myself more useful here. It's obvious Mr. Applewhite needs help. The gardens look abandoned." I had noticed as we came up the drive how unkempt the gardens had become with only elderly Mr. Applewhite to care for them. Both of the undergardeners had been called up the previous year.

"You'd rather muck about in the garden than have fun with your friends away from all this war nonsense?"

I didn't understand why she still seemed angry. "Yes, I would." I tried to sound as if I meant it. "What are *you* doing here?" I couldn't imagine a reason for my sister to leave London. Margaret avoided Lincolnshire at all costs, saying it was too deadly dull for words. I noticed that she didn't look herself. My sister had always been thin, but now her thinness seemed brittle, and there were shadows under her eyes. "Have you been ill?"

"No, I couldn't bear the city any longer. I came home for a few days about a month ago and when I went back to London, I realized I couldn't stay." She walked over to one of the tables that edged the walls and moved the vase on it a few inches. "London

is nothing like it used to be. Knowing there could be a zeppelin raid at any time set my nerves on edge. You can't imagine the horror of them overhead." She turned back to me. "And I've found I'm terrible at nursing. There, I've said it. I can't bear to see people in pain. Poor souls are better off without me. I thought I could be of more use here." Her eyes dropped away from mine and she became very intent upon examining her nails.

I knew that gesture meant she was lying, at least about being of more use here. She never realized how easily she gave herself away. I'd find out the truth eventually. Margaret was not only bad at telling lies, but also bad at keeping secrets, and I was very, very good at discovering them. Once I'd learned my father had been a spy, I'd wanted to be one too, and practiced by tracking my subjects throughout the house and grounds. It had always driven my older siblings mad.

Margaret patted her hair. "And I'm in desperate need of a new lady's maid. I can't believe how awful I look! I thought while I was here I might hire one from among the local girls, even if I have to train her. I couldn't find anyone in London after mine quit to work at a munitions factory. I don't know what came over that woman."

I didn't comment on this, but I wasn't surprised. My sister never kept maids for long. When Margaret was a child, my mother had always described her as the "just so" child—everything had to be in order and as she expected, or a flood of tears followed. Since Margaret had lost her husband, her desire for order had only grown. Even though she annoyed me at times, I felt awful for her. The world Margaret wanted to live in had never existed, except maybe in books. I suspected that's why her room still

held her collection of Mrs. Molesworth's stories, her childhood favorites of happy families and happy places.

I wondered if Margaret's return had anything to do with my telegram. Would my father involve her too? "Does Father know you are home?"

"I mentioned it, but he is so busy, he may not have paid attention," she said. Once again she examined her nails. She was lying again, which meant she hadn't actually told him she was coming home, although I couldn't think of a reason why.

The door to the lower level opened and Miss Tanner, the housekeeper, came into the hall. "I'm sorry I wasn't in the hall to meet you, Lady Thomasina."

"Hello, Miss Tanner," I said. "It's quite all right." It still jarred me to see her, because Miss Tanner was so unlike every other housekeeper I'd met. The woman was far younger than most for such a senior position at a large house, though it was hard to tell exactly how old she was, because she wore her hair pulled back in a severe bun and dressed in dark, old-fashioned clothes. The first time I'd met her, I decided she would make a wonderful character in a gothic novel—the sinister housekeeper hoarding her secrets.

At least the woman was extremely efficient. I had to give her that. I didn't know where my father had found someone in the middle of a war who was so frighteningly unflappable, but with the family scattered, the house needed a Miss Tanner to keep it running.

"Did you know Mina was coming home?" Margaret asked her. "Why didn't you tell me?"

Miss Tanner's mouth twitched, but her expression didn't

change. "I'm sorry, Lady Margaret. I assumed you knew. Yes, I received a telegram this morning."

"Well, I didn't." Margaret put a hand to her forehead. "I've got such a headache. I'm going upstairs for the rest of the afternoon. I'll have a tray in my room for dinner, Miss Tanner. Oh, and please talk to the new maid. The girl talks too much. If she brings up my tray, I don't want to engage in a long conversation with her."

"Yes, Lady Margaret," Miss Tanner said. "I'll speak to Hannah. May I take your bag up to your room?" she asked me.

"Thank you, no. I can carry it," I said, following Margaret up the stairs. She disappeared into her own room without another word, and I went into mine. I noticed the chill first, and then the fine layer of dust that covered everything. The room had never been dusty. I set my bag down, took out a handkerchief, and wiped off the dressing table and the top of my bookcase. The silence upstairs was even worse than it had been downstairs. It was as if time had stopped at the house, or gathered into itself to shut out the war.

I didn't want to stay in my room, but I couldn't make the staff set up the dining room just for me if Margaret was having a tray in her room. I'd have one too. If I could have, I would have just eaten something simple in the kitchen, but I knew Miss Tanner would never allow it.

I took a tour of the gardens to see how much work needed to be done. It was as bad as I feared. I vowed to start first thing in the morning.

When it grew dark, I went back inside and read until Lettie brought up the tray. She was quiet and I noticed that she looked

very tired, so we didn't talk much. I suspected she wanted to get back downstairs and finish whatever chores Miss Tanner had set for her so she could go to bed.

After dinner, I paced around my room on pins and needles, hoping someone would appear, someone who I could help. I reread the telegram to see if I had been too quick to think I'd deciphered it correctly. But no matter how many other ways I tried to find a different message, there was nothing else there.

As I was getting ready for bed, a noise from the hallway startled me. I opened the door to find Jove, my father's old retriever. When I let him in, he immediately heaved himself up on my bed, turning around a few times before curling up. I wrinkled my nose. "You don't smell very good," I said to him. He ignored me and gave a contented little dog sigh. I knew he was lonely without my father, and since I was lonely too, I decided we could keep each other company. I missed my own little terrier, Bella. She'd been gone over a year, but I still sometimes thought I could hear her trotting down the hall.

Another noise came from outside my window, a faint noise I couldn't identify. I went to the window, but couldn't see anything in the moon's glow except the distant lights from the camp in the park.

As I was about to go back to bed, a movement below caught my eye. Someone was running away from the house, heading to the woods on the east side. I couldn't see clearly enough to tell anything about the person, beyond that it looked like a man, and a young man at that, moving quickly. There shouldn't have been a young man here. We no longer had any men on the staff except

old Mr. Applewhite and Mr. Norris, who was only here when my father was home.

I pulled my wrap around me more tightly. Had Miss Tanner checked all the doors and windows? It had been the butler's job, but it hadn't occurred to me to wonder who had taken over the task. There were so many doors and windows, and so many unused rooms. The man was gone now, but what if he came back? What if it was someone who had tried to break in to steal something, someone who knew how little staff we had now? What if he was the source of Lettie's strange noises? I tried to think what to do, knowing I'd feel ridiculous waking Miss Tanner if it turned out to be nothing. I decided I could check myself.

Jove lumbered off the bed and came over to me, wagging his tail. "What do you think, boy?" I said to him. The dog nudged my hand so I would pet him. That little motion and the dog's presence made me feel better. "Come along, Jove. We're going to investigate."

As I went out into the hall, the dog walked next to me, wagging his tail. I figured that even as old as he was, if there was something strange about the house, he'd know and react. Or at least I hoped he would.

The stillness of the house wrapped around me and made me creep down the stairs as if I had to be quiet. It struck me that there was something else odd about the house. The scent of lavender that normally filled the place was gone. My mother grew a border of lavender to make into potpourri, and it was a tradition for us to spend a day picking it and hanging it to dry. The scent had disappeared, and the house just smelled of stale air.

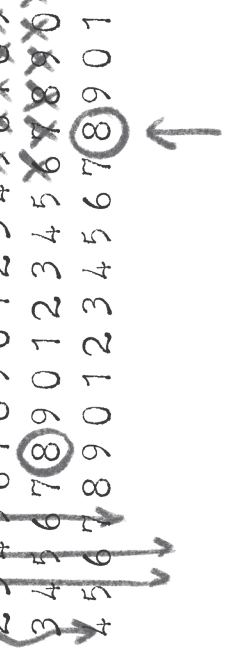
Downstairs, there was no sound at all, except Jove's wheezy breathing. I told myself everything was fine. I stood for a moment listening, and when I heard nothing, I decided to check the terrace door first.

The door was secure and there was no movement outside, not even a breeze stirring the leaves. "Nothing to worry about here, Jove," I said, knowing I was talking to the dog for my sake, not his. "Let's go check the library." Then the moon came out from behind a cloud and I caught sight of a glint from something lying on the terrace.

I had to know what it was, so I opened the door and walked outside. Jove came with me. He reached it first, sniffing it. Before he could drool all over it, I picked it up. It was a battered wristlet with a broken leather band. My first thought was that it must be Crispin's. The other men on the estate all used pocket watches.

Crispin had been one of the first men I knew to take up the new military wristlet, a band for the wrist that held his pocket watch. He said he'd quickly learned it was too hard to get out a pocket watch while in a trench under fire. But he would have been wearing it when he disappeared.

An owl hooted. I looked out into the dark and decided I'd rather examine the wristlet inside. I shoved it in my pocket and went back into the drawing room, running right into a solid figure. I let out a shriek and stumbled backward.



CHAPTER FOUR

“**LADY THOMASINA!**” It was Miss Tanner’s voice. I would have expected the housekeeper to be in bed hours ago, but she was still wearing one of her standard black dresses.

“I-I didn’t realize it was you,” I stuttered, my heart pounding.

“Is anything wrong?” Miss Tanner asked. “It’s very late.”

I had never realized how narrow Miss Tanner’s eyes were behind her wire spectacles, narrow and dark and a little frightening. “I saw a man running away from the house,” I said, taking a step back, “and I wanted to make sure all the doors and

windows were locked.” For some reason, I didn’t want to tell her about the wristlet.

The housekeeper stood very still for a moment and then asked, “When? Where did you see him?”

“I saw him from my window. He was running across the east lawn and into the woods, just a few moments ago.”

“Are you sure it wasn’t just a trick of the moonlight?”

“No, I’m sure I saw someone.” Miss Tanner didn’t look like she believed me, so I added, “He was wearing some sort of cap,” as if that detail would make him more real.

The housekeeper clasped her hands. “You shouldn’t worry. I check all the doors and windows each evening. It may have been someone hoping to find a way into the kitchen to steal food. Some of the soldiers who have been invalided out of the army can’t seem to settle back into normal life at regular jobs, and I’ve heard many just roam the countryside. I’ll make sure the constable knows so he can warn the neighbors. Men like that won’t stop at trying the doors of just one house.”

“That’s terrible,” I said. “I mean, it’s terrible that former soldiers are going hungry. I thought there were organizations trying to help them.”

“There are, but there aren’t enough for all the ones in need. Now, if there’s nothing else, would you please excuse me?”

“Of course.” I felt a yawn stealing over me. The housekeeper disappeared into the gloom and I made my way upstairs, Jove next to me. I put my hand on his head. “He won’t come back, will he, boy? And I’m sorry I said you were smelly earlier. You can stay with me every night.”

Back in my room, I took the watch out of my pocket and held it under the light. The glass on the front of the case was so scratched, I didn't know how anyone could easily tell time with it. The band had a peculiar odor. I brought it closer to my nose. It smelled of cucumbers for some reason, and reminded me of the lovely soup Mrs. Brickles made on hot days.

Something tugged at my memory, but I couldn't think of exactly what it was. I tried to read the name of the manufacturer. It was just barely visible: *Helma Wasserdicht*. I knew what "wasserdicht" meant—it was German for "waterproof." It wasn't Crispin's. The pocket watch he'd put in his wristlet had said *Harrods* on it. I took the watch off the band and turned it over, wondering if it had an inscription on it. There was nothing there, so I put it back in place.

I couldn't help but think about what the man selling newspapers at the train station had yelled about a German spy in Lincoln. But Lincoln was miles away, and a German wristlet meant nothing. My father had a German pocket watch. Germany was renowned for its watches. I didn't want to be someone who overreacted. Maybe the hungry soldier had taken it off a dead German, though the thought of that brought bile to my throat.

I hadn't known soldiers did that until I overheard Crispin telling my father that he'd had to reprimand one of his men for taking a cigarette case off a body they'd stumbled across. My father's quiet response had been that Crispin should overlook it as much as possible. "Not every rule has to be enforced in the middle of combat," he'd said. The soldiers' world was so far from mine, I couldn't even begin to put myself in their place.

I went back to the window. It had begun to rain, a light rain, the kind that Mr. Applewhite called a mizzle. It was so dark that I couldn't see anything. I closed the curtain, something I never normally did. It made the room feel safer. I lay down, listening to Jove's snuffly breathing. It was a little strange that the housekeeper had been walking through the house so late at night. Perhaps the woman just didn't need much sleep. I could imagine Miss Tanner deciding to sleep only a certain number of hours and to do it efficiently as well. No insomnia for her.

The next thing I knew, a knock on the door woke me. A maid carrying a tea tray entered. I was so groggy that it took me a moment to realize it was morning. I didn't recognize the maid, so I knew it must be the new girl, Hannah. Jove slipped out the door like he'd been waiting for it to open.

"Good morning, Lady Thomasina." Hannah set the tray down on the table by my bed. I was surprised to see it. My mother had decided that before-breakfast tea trays were unnecessary for the duration of the war, since it was just more work for the servants.

As if the girl could read my mind, she said, "Mrs. Brickles thought you'd like a tea tray this morning as a special treat since you had such a long traveling day yesterday." The girl looked younger than me at first glance, with her small stature, the wisps of blond curls escaping from her cap, and her heart-shaped face. When I studied her more closely, however, I realized she might have been older, perhaps eighteen or nineteen.

"Please thank Mrs. Brickles for me." I noticed a small nose-gay of violets on the tray. "Did you pick these flowers?" I picked them up and held them to my nose so I could catch their delicate

scent. Mr. Applewhite and I had decided that the violets at Hallington gave off a far better scent than other violets.

"Yes, miss," the girl said. "The house seems so empty, and I just thought it would give more life to your room if there were flowers about. I like them too. My mum has a little garden of her own, and I've always been one for pretty flowers. She grows sweet peas that fill the whole house with the nicest scent. I would have gotten you some real flowers from the garden, but I'm scared of that old gardener. He guards those flowers like a dragon guarding his treasure."

It was a good description of Mr. Applewhite's attitude toward the flowers, though I'd never thought of him as fierce. He was a tiny man, wrinkled from years of outdoor work, given to talking to his favorite plants to coax them to grow. I'd learned everything I knew about plants from him.

Hannah went over to the window and opened the curtains. "My mum says flowers belong inside as much as they do outside. Someday I'm going to have a garden and a house so I can bring flowers inside too." The girl was as chatty as Margaret had said. If the housekeeper had taken her to task for talking too much, it didn't seem to have made much of an impact.

"Wait until June when the gardens are in full bloom," I told her. "We'll make sure we sneak lots of bouquets inside when Mr. Applewhite isn't looking."

"That would be nice." Hannah gave a little squeak and pointed at the clock on the mantel. "I should go now. I have to start dusting before Miss Tanner complains. She's very persnickety."

The woman was persnickety, but I didn't think it would be

appropriate for me to agree with Hannah. “Thank you again for the flowers.”

After she left, I gulped down my tea, wanting to get outside to see if there were more clues to the identity of the person I’d seen last night. When I went to the wardrobe to find something to wear, it held nothing except some old frocks of Margaret’s. Apparently my mother had carried through on her plan to get rid of items that were too small for me, but had not replaced them with anything new.

Margaret’s castoffs were all of the garden party variety, not suitable for anything except standing about wishing one could eat the whole tray of muffins rather than just the one that it was polite to take. And none of them suited me. Margaret had excellent taste for what looked good on her, but none of her clothes were right for me in style or color. I grabbed one anyway. My choices were that, one of my school uniforms, or a dress meant for funerals. I put it on, catching sight of myself in the looking glass. Yes, definitely not suited for wielding a trowel, but it would have to do.

As I was trying to get my hair under control, I heard barking outside. Jove never barked except when someone or something who didn’t belong came onto the property, which usually meant the occasional lost hiker. Few people had the time to hike with the war on. I felt a little twinge of unease. What if the intruder was back?

The barking increased. I hurried outside just in time to see Jove running across the front lawn, ears flattened and tail down. He was too old and too wheezy to run that fast. It couldn’t be

good for him. I ran after him, calling for him to stop. As I drew close to the road, I wasn't watching the ground, so I didn't see the muddy spot where the grass thinned. My feet went out from under me and I sat down hard on the ground. It hurt, and a few words I wasn't supposed to use slipped out of my mouth.

When cold water seeped up around me, I realized I was in a shallow puddle. I tried to get back up but slipped again, managing to get the front of my dress muddy to match the back. More bad words. They didn't make me feel better. I was a wet, muddy mess.

Scrambling back up, I saw that Jove was near the edge of the property. Whoever or whatever he'd been chasing was not in sight. I yelled for the dog to stop, knowing he was near the road, but a squadron of planes coming from Cranwell drowned out my voice. Jove crossed the road and continued into the field on the other side of it.

I ran into the road, still calling for him to stop. Then, to my horror, an automobile, an open roadster, came around a sharp curve only feet away. The driver slammed on the brakes and swerved off the road, barely missing a tree.

I skidded to a stop, nearly falling down again. My throat tightened until I saw both people in the car were still upright and moving their heads. "I'm so sorry!" I yelled.

A man in a uniform got out. His hair was short and he looked tired, so much more tired than when I had last seen him, but I knew him. "Andrew!" I flung myself at him and hugged him, forgetting I was covered in mud.

"Mina?" he said. Putting his hands on my shoulders, he moved

me a bit away from him. He stared at my face. "I didn't recognize you at first," he said. "You've grown."

Someone laughed behind him and I turned my attention to the young man still in the car. He grinned. My heart did an odd little skip. It was the American from the train.

"Yes, the young lady is quite grown," the young man said, hopping easily over and out of the car, not bothering to open the door. He was dressed in a suit now, though he still wore the cowboy boots.

As he stood there staring at me, I realized that I must look a fright with all the water and mud on me. I could feel my ears turning hot, which meant red too. Just what I needed—bright red ears to go with the gray-brown mud. "I fell when I was chasing Jove. It rained and it was slippery and then I fell again trying to get up." I didn't know why I was going into such detail. The American was smiling as if it was funny I'd fallen. I saw then that I'd gotten mud on Andrew's uniform.

"Why is he with you?" I asked Andrew. I knew it was rude of me to be so blunt, but I couldn't get over my shock. I hadn't expected to ever see the American again.

"Mina, this is Lucas Miller," Andrew said. "He's over from America. Lucas, Lady Thomasina Tretheway."

"We've met," Lucas said. "In a way. I know the young lady doesn't smoke and she wishes she could grow turnips and she doesn't live in a castle. Back in Oklahoma, that would be enough to call ourselves friends."

"I don't understand. You've met?" Andrew sounded completely confused. "How?"

“We shared a compartment on the train, though we weren’t properly introduced,” I said, not even attempting to explain about the turnips and the other nonsense. I looked at Lucas. “In England, asking someone to yell out the window at them isn’t considered an introduction. I was just being polite when I responded. Etiquette lessons, you know: Always yell at people when asked.”

While I was speaking, Jove came back and immediately went to Lucas, wagging his tail as if greeting a long-lost friend. What was wrong with the dog? He was supposed to be suspicious of strangers, especially cheeky Americans.

“Very polite of you,” Lucas drawled as he petted the dog. “So we have been introduced now, haven’t we? How do you do, your ladyshipness?”

I was about to tell him he didn’t need to call me that when the creaking of a cart’s wheels warned me someone else was coming along the road. I looked toward the sound and spotted the county gossip, Mrs. Underdown, in her pony cart. As usual, the woman sat bolt upright, dressed in one of her vaguely nautical ensembles in homage to her late husband, the admiral. She lived in the village but found reasons to drive her cart everywhere on various missions of goodwill, guiding her little shaggy black pony as if commanding a battleship. Thank heavens she hadn’t seen me hugging Andrew. It would have been all over the neighborhood by nightfall.

“Lady Thomasina! I heard you were back,” Mrs. Underdown said as she pulled up. “Good heavens! Is everything all right?” she asked, looking me up and down and then glaring at Andrew. Her

expression changed when she recognized him. "Lord Andrew, forgive me. I didn't realize it was you."

"How are you, Mrs. Underdown?" Andrew asked.

"Fine, very fine. Quite busy, in fact." She was staring at the American, and I could see the curiosity in her eyes.

"Let me introduce you. Mrs. Underdown, this is Lucas Miller," Andrew said.

"How do you do?" she said. I knew she was waiting for more information. I was too.

Andrew didn't give it. "It's very nice to see you again," he said instead. "I'm sorry we can't stay to talk, but we must get on our way. War work, you understand." That was the polite way of saying she shouldn't ask any more questions.

Mrs. Underdown mimed zipping her lips. "Oh, war work. Hush, hush. I understand. Of course you're on your way to Cranwell. Where else would you be going? I didn't know you were an aviator, Lord Andrew. And you, young man, are you an aviator too? I didn't know there were any American aviators at Cranwell."

So much for not asking any more questions. Both Andrew and the American looked at a loss for words, and guilty too, for some reason.

"Lucas designs aeroplanes," Andrew said suddenly. "He's quite a genius at it," he added, stumbling over the words and blinking several times as he said them. I stared at him. He wasn't telling the truth. Andrew had always been nearly as bad at lying as Margaret. When he and Crispin were in trouble, Crispin had been the one to try to talk their way out of it, because Andrew couldn't

keep his voice steady when he told an untruth. Lucas didn't look much older than me and he didn't look like a genius, though I confess I'd never met one. So which part was the untruth? Designing aeroplanes? Being a genius? Or both?

Of course Mrs. Underdown didn't question Andrew. She would believe anything he said, no matter how absurd, because he was the son of a marquis. Rank had many privileges. "Are you staying at Cranwell or at Hallington?" she asked.

"Hallington," Andrew said. "Cranwell is short on space. It's wonderful that Lord Tretheway is always so welcoming to old friends." His eyes were fixed on mine.

Old friend needs your help. Andrew was the old friend in the telegram. I don't know why it hadn't occurred to me that it would be him, except that the phrasing "old friend" made me think it was someone we hadn't seen for a long time, or someone who was actually old. The fact that it was Andrew was wonderful.

Mrs. Underdown smiled like she'd been given a present. "How lovely," she said. "Lady Thomasina, I'm so delighted you and your sister are both home. So unexpected! But it's turned out to be very convenient timing. Now that you are both home, I'll call later today to discuss something very important with the both of you."

"Margaret is here?" Andrew sounded horrified at the news. I didn't understand why. He and Margaret had never been great friends, but they had tolerated each other.

"Yes," I said. "It was unexpected, from what I understand." I wanted to take back the words as soon as I saw Mrs. Underdown's eyes narrow and her mouth twitch. I knew that look. I'd seen it many times, whenever Mrs. Underdown realized she hadn't been

told everything. The woman would want to know why Margaret's arrival had been unexpected, and she'd stop at nothing to find out. She was ruthless at ferreting out information.

I really wanted to know why Andrew and Lucas had come to Hallington, and I needed to get rid of Mrs. Underdown so I could ask. "I think I'm catching a chill," I said, adding in a shudder for effect. "I need to get back to the house to change."

But my ploy didn't exactly work as I had hoped. "Of course, Lady Thomasina!" Mrs. Underdown said. "How thoughtless of me to keep you standing here. Climb in the cart and I'll take you right to your front door while Lord Andrew and Mr. Miller deal with the automobile."

I'd completely forgotten about the vehicle. "It isn't damaged, is it?" I asked, feeling guilty.

Andrew surveyed the automobile. "I don't think so." He motioned to Lucas. "Let's see if we can get it back on the road."

I climbed into the cart as the two of them went back to the automobile. Jove stayed with them, sticking close to Lucas as if the American was his new owner. Ungrateful animal. If Jove had been chasing the intruder, he'd completely forgotten about him, or decided he'd properly secured the grounds by chasing the man off.

On the short ride up the driveway, Mrs. Underdown chatted away, but I could hardly force myself to listen. I looked back and saw Andrew's car turn into the drive. I wanted to jump down from the cart and run, just to get rid of some of the excitement that was filling me up. Andrew was here, and the American too, and I'd finally be part of something important.