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JENNIFER
CHIAVERINI
CANARY
GIRLS

A NOVEL



CANARY GIRLS

A Novel



JENNIFER CHIAVERINI

The logo for William Morrow, featuring a stylized, cursive 'wm' monogram.

WILLIAM MORROW

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Dedication

*To Marty, Nick, and Michael,
with all my love*

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About the Publisher

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Lucy

Lucy rested the heavy sack of vegetables and paper-wrapped meat on her hip, reluctant to set it down at her feet beside her suitcase despite the ache in her arms. She didn't really fear that some hungry villain would dart across the train platform and snatch away her hard-won provisions the moment she relaxed her guard, but with two sons and a footballer husband to feed, she dared not take that chance. London had been in a state of anxious turmoil when she and the boys had departed for Surrey four days ago, and, glancing about Paddington station as they waited to change trains, Lucy could not tell whether things had settled in their absence or had grown more desperate.

Less than a fortnight before, Germany had ignored the British government's midnight ultimatum to withdraw its troops from Belgium, plunging Great Britain and Germany into a state of war. Excited, boisterous crowds had filled the streets of London, shouting and cheering and waving their hats in the air, and at Trafalgar Square, two rival demonstrations had broken out on either side of Nelson's Pillar, one for the war and one against. A vast throng had assembled outside Buckingham Palace, singing "God Save the King" with tremendous sincerity and fervor. The song had dissolved into roars of approval when King George, wearing the uniform of an Admiral of the Fleet, had appeared on the balcony overlooking the forecourt, where the Queen, the Prince of Wales, and Princess Mary had soon joined him.

Lucy and her husband had been at their tan brick, ivy-covered home in Clapham Common at the time, but they had heard frequent shouts of "War! War!" outside their windows, and learned the rest from the papers and neighbors who had ventured out. Lucy had hardly known what to think. In school, she had been taught that another major war in Europe would be highly improbable in the future because modern weapons were so dreadful that they served as a deterrent rather than a threat. But highly improbable was not impossible, and now Great Britain was at war.

The next morning, it seemed that nearly every housewife in England had been seized by an irresistible impulse to fill her cupboards for an imminent siege. Unaware of the rising panic, Lucy had gone out to do her marketing as usual and had been startled to discover other women bustling about, empty baskets dangling from their elbows, strain evident in their pinched mouths and furrowed brows. Long queues had formed at the doors of several of her favorite shops, and hand-lettered signs had appeared in some front windows announcing that the store had sold out and closed early. After waiting in a queue for two hours and finally gaining admittance only to discover little more than a few bits and bobs left over, Lucy made

her meager purchases and set off for home, uneasy. She could manage tea and supper that day, but what about tomorrow and the day after that?

"I hear delivery vans are being ransacked on the streets," Lucy's neighbor Gloria told her later that afternoon as their children played together in the private, enclosed garden all the homes on their block shared. "My sister in Bayswater says her neighbor was on her way home from the shops, arms full up with parcels, when three women, complete strangers, accosted her and accused her of hoarding."

"Hoarding?"

"Exactly! How can it be hoarding if she can carry it all in her own two arms? Anyway, these so-called ladies, bold as brass, helped themselves to my sister's neighbor's groceries. The shops may be empty, they declared, but their families wouldn't starve for others' greed. Then they scurried off and left her to carry the scraps home. Didn't give her a penny for what they took, either."

"That's robbery," said Lucy, aghast. "Where were the police?"

Gloria shrugged. "Guarding the shops or keeping watch for German spies, I should think."

Lucy could only shake her head, speechless. Such madness in their own city. And it was only the first full day of the war.

Unsettled, she returned her gaze to her sons, who laughed and shouted as they passed a football back and forth with the other children. Jamie, the eldest, was slim, black-haired, and fair-skinned like herself, while Simon was ruddy and sturdily built, his square jaw and thick, sandy hair so like his father's. How guiltily grateful she felt knowing that at eight and six years of age, her sons were too young to go to war. At thirty-two, Daniel, though strong and fit and brave, was just old enough that he would not be expected to volunteer. Though her husband loved King and Country as much as any Englishman, Lucy trusted that he would not be tempted to enlist. How could he abandon his thriving architecture firm with his career on the rise? And how could he leave Tottenham Hotspur without their star center forward, so close to the start of the season and with his inevitable retirement drawing ever nearer? Only a few days before, as Lucy had massaged the aches from his hamstrings after a grueling practice, he had confided that he knew his best days on the pitch were behind him. As beloved as he was by fans and teammates alike, eventually he would be replaced by a younger, stronger, swifter man.

But only on the pitch. No one could ever take Daniel's place in their family or her heart.

Lucy had known Daniel all her life, or at least, she could not remember a time before knowing him. In Brookfield, the village in rural southwest Surrey where they both had been born and raised, Daniel had been Lucy's elder brother's friend first. Both boys were three years older than herself, three years wiser and infinitely bolder, although Daniel had always been kinder and more patient than Edwin. It was Daniel who had taught Lucy how to swim in the shallows of the deep, rushing brook that had given their village its name, while Edwin had splashed and shouted with the other boys, ignoring her or perhaps having truly forgotten she was there. Daniel never teased her the way Edwin did, mocking her shyness, jeering when she blushed, tugging her braid sharply whenever she forgot to keep a respectful distance. Daniel was her defender. After one mild rebuke from him, Edwin would roll his eyes and let her be.

Eventually, as the years went by, Edwin outgrew his bullying ways—a fortunate thing indeed, since after university he would become headmaster of the village school. Meanwhile, the other girls discovered what Lucy had known all along: Daniel was the handsomest, cleverest, and most wonderful boy in Brookfield, perhaps in all of Surrey. What silent torment Lucy suffered when her friends sighed over his warm brown eyes and swooned at his smile! She had no choice but to feign indifference rather than reveal how much and how hopelessly she adored him. In this pretense her customary shyness served her well, and her

friends—and Daniel himself—had been none the wiser.

In those days, she could not have imagined that Daniel might one day return her affection. He had always been kind to her, but he was kind to everyone. Sometimes he walked Lucy home from school, carrying her books, but he would have done the same for anyone younger and smaller, and her house was on his way home. When Daniel danced with her on festival days, that, obviously, was because she was an excellent dancer; even boys who equated shyness with dullness enjoyed dancing with Lucy. But none of those other partners lingered very long after the music faded. Invariably, their attention would drift from her bashful, nearly inaudible conversation to light upon another girl, one who could charm and flirt with aplomb. Sometimes, though, when Daniel held her gaze and smiled, Lucy could almost believe she was as charming as those bright-eyed, laughing girls. At a dance or after church or wherever their paths happened to cross, Daniel's face would light up when he spotted her, and they would fall effortlessly into conversation like the nearly lifelong friends they were, sharing observations and confidences and private jokes, with no need to impress each other or anyone who might be watching.

One day in her sixteenth autumn, Lucy was posting a letter to Daniel at university when she was struck by the dismaying notion that perhaps the fondness between them existed only because Daniel thought of her as a younger sister—nothing less, but nothing more. How lamentable if it were true! Even as a child, Lucy had never thought of Daniel as a brother. She already had two: Edwin, of course, and George, the eldest, who was studying medicine in Edinburgh, preparing to join their father's practice.

Lucy loved her brothers dearly, but two sufficed.

Many months later, near the end of the spring term, Lucy was walking in the village with friends when the conversation turned to the absent young men who, they hoped, would soon return to Brookfield for the summer. Naturally Daniel's name came up, and as several of her companions sighed longingly and others began scheming how best to catch his eye, Lucy felt warmth rising in her cheeks. Her friends were all such pretty, laughing, good-hearted girls. Surely one of them would win Daniel's heart before the autumn—

"Oh, would you stop, all of you?" exclaimed Nettie, Lucy's best friend. "Can't you see you're making Lucy absolutely miserable?"

"Nettie, no," Lucy murmured, but it was too late. All eyes were on her, some sympathetic and understanding, others astonished.

"Lucy and Daniel?" said Kathleen in wonder, pitch rising with each word. "Are you in love?"

"Of course not," Lucy replied, shaking her head, forcing a laugh. "Don't be silly."

"You've adored him for ages," countered Nettie, amused. "Deny it if you like. Go on, tell me I'm a liar, if I am."

"A person can be *wrong*," Lucy said carefully, wishing, as ever, that she did not so easily blush, "without being a liar."

Nettie laughed. "Well, I'm neither, at least not now and not about this."

"The rest of us never stood a chance," another girl lamented, smiling. "Lucy has always been Daniel's favorite."

"No, I haven't," said Lucy, startled. "Have I? What do you mean?"

A ripple of laughter rose from the circle of friends. "Oh, Lucy," said Nettie fondly. "How could you not know?"

"Lucy and Daniel," mused Kathleen, nodding. "Well, of course. It's obvious once someone says it aloud."

Lucy begged them not to make a habit of *that*, for Brookfield was a rather small village and gossip spread swiftly. Oh, but how wonderful the phrase sounded, even when her friends teased: Lucy and Daniel.

Whether her friends ignored her pleas and echoed the phrase until it eventually made its way around to Daniel, or whether he came up with the idea entirely on his own, by late summer, he and Lucy had shared their first kiss. Three years later, they were married. Lucy followed Daniel to London, where he was playing for Chelsea and working as a junior architect. In the nine years that had passed since then, he had become a partner in his own architecture firm, the captain of Tottenham Hotspur, an Olympic champion who led England to two gold medals, and a devoted father to the two most wonderful boys in England.

And now that war had come, Lucy would not give up her beloved husband, not even for King and Country.

When Daniel returned home from the office later that afternoon, Lucy raced to the door and flung her arms around him, pressing her cheek against his chest, overcome by a wave of terrible gratitude that she would be spared the grief and loss that would inevitably afflict so many other wives.

The fierceness of her embrace surprised her husband. "What's all this?" Daniel asked, kissing the top of her head. "I'm only a few minutes late. Surely dinner isn't spoiled."

"You know that's not why I'm upset," said Lucy, her voice muffled against his lapel. "Still, it's kind of you to pretend to misunderstand, so *I* may pretend I'm not a coward."

"You're no coward," said Daniel, cupping her chin and lifting her face toward his. "England is at war with a formidable enemy. Concern and, yes, even fear, are perfectly reasonable responses."

He might feel differently when he learned how their fellow Londoners' fear and concern had affected his dinner. Collecting herself, Lucy took his hand and led him to the dining room. "Prepare to be underwhelmed," she warned him as Jamie and Simon darted in, hands and faces freshly scrubbed. The family settled around the table and Lucy served thin slices of pork in onion gravy, with roasted turnips and bread and butter. At first all Jamie and Simon wanted to talk about was the war—the recruiting posters they had seen plastered up and down the street, the older lads in the neighborhood who had rushed off to enlist, and the tragic unfairness that boys their age weren't allowed.

Lucy knew most of the lads her sons had mentioned, if only through her acquaintance with their mothers. "Seems rather rash to enlist so soon," she said, keeping her voice even as she spooned the last of the turnips onto the boys' plates and the pork onto Daniel's. "It's early days yet. One could not possibly know what one is getting oneself into."

"Billy Warren says it'll be over by Christmas," said Jamie. "He says he's got to win valor on the battlefields of France before then or it'll be too late."

"If he don't go now, he'll miss the war," Simon chimed in.

"If he *doesn't* go now," Lucy corrected. "Which sounds like a splendid idea. If it'll be over so quickly, it hardly seems worth the trouble."

"But Mum," said Jamie, brow furrowing, "'Your King and Country Need You.'"

"Not *her*," said Simon. "She's a mum."

"I'm only saying what's on the posters."

Noting Lucy's deepening frown, Daniel quickly changed the subject. Soon the boys were caught up in an eager discussion of football, the team's pre-season training, and the traditional cricket match between Tottenham Hotspur and Chelsea coming up on Saturday. When Lucy thanked Daniel with a smile, his warm brown eyes shone with affection.

Only after the boys were asleep and they were preparing for bed themselves did Lucy tell Daniel about her misfortune at the market and the frightening robbery of Gloria's sister's neighbor. "I'm terribly afraid I'll find nothing but bare shelves when I assail the shops again tomorrow," she said, trying to make a joke of it. "I know everyone says the war will be over by Christmas, but we can't go hungry until then."

"Not everyone says it'll be over by Christmas," Daniel warned, deftly removing one of her

hairpins, and then another, until her dark locks tumbled free from their upswept coil. Facing her, he ran his hands through her hair, spreading it like a silken cloak upon her shoulders.

His touch sent a delicious, warm frisson of pleasure down Lucy's spine, but, with an effort, she kept her focus on the immediate crisis. "Whether it's over by Christmas or Easter or Sunday next, between now and then, we have to eat. What am I to do?"

"What indeed?" Daniel took her hand, sat down on the edge of the bed, and pulled her onto his lap. "There's always Brookfield."

She rested her hands lightly on his shoulders. "Go all the way to Surrey for groceries?"

"Why not? Our families would be delighted to see Jamie and Simon, and what could be better for the boys than a week in the country? As for groceries, I can't imagine they had a run on the shops in Brookfield."

"No, I suppose not." Surely their sensible friends and former neighbors, reassured by the abundance of local farms and their own kitchen gardens, would have stubbornly refused to panic despite the chilling declaration of war.

"You might not even need to visit the shops," Daniel continued, smiling as he kissed her cheek. "My mother would gladly fill your basket with as much veg and cheese and sausages from her own cellar as you could carry."

"I'd need a second basket for my mother's jams," said Lucy, warming to the idea. "And I could stop by Brandt's bakery for a loaf of rye and some of your favorite raisin buns."

"You're an angel," Daniel declared, kissing her. Then his smile faded. "I only hope . . ."

"What?"

"Well, Dieter Brandt—he's German, you know. I hope no one gives him any trouble on that account."

Lucy was so surprised she laughed. "Why should they? He and Mrs. Brandt have lived in Brookfield for ages, since long before you and I were born. Their own children were born there, too, and their grandchildren. Surely by now the Brandts are as English as we are."

"I agree with you, darling, but not everyone will. With war fever sweeping the country . . ." Daniel shook his head.

When he left the thought unfinished, Lucy ventured, "Shall we go tomorrow, then?"

"You and the boys shall." Daniel touched her gently on the nose. "Sadly, I can't get away."

"Of course." Lucy nodded briskly to conceal her disappointment. "The cricket."

"And the Henderson offices," he reminded her. "I'm meeting with the foreman and the owner on Tuesday. If all goes well, we'll break ground next week."

"Very well, then." Lucy sat up straight and squared her shoulders, as best she could, seated on his lap. "The boys and I shall undertake this mission ourselves."

"That's my girl." Daniel cupped her chin in his hand and kissed her.

The next morning after Daniel left for the office, Lucy packed a bag for herself and another for the boys, locked up the house, and set out for the train station. The boys trailed along at her heels, fairly bounding with excitement as they planned their week's adventures. By early afternoon they had arrived in Guildford, where Daniel's father met them and carried them the last few miles to Brookfield in the horse-drawn wagon he used for his carpentry business.

Lucy's mother met them at the front gate of the Evans family home, a two-story brick-and-timber Edwardian residence just off the town square. The medical practice—once their father's, then his and George's both, and now George's alone—took up the front half of the ground floor, with the kitchen in the back. Mum shared the spacious living quarters above with George, his wife, Eleanor, and their two daughters.

It was a lovely homecoming, and the days flew past in a whirlwind of outings in the countryside with the boys and joyful reunions with friends and family, occasionally interrupted by grave discussions of the country's preparations for war. Recruiting posters sprung up like crocuses in the spring on signposts and fences throughout the village, and

every day brought news of more local men who had enlisted.

One night at dinner, George confessed that he had considered joining the Royal Navy as a medical officer, but had reluctantly decided against it. “Even if the war *is* over by Christmas, four months is simply too long to leave Brookfield without its doctor. Unless, of course, I found a substitute—”

“We discussed this,” protested Eleanor. “We agreed you should not go. If this hypothetical substitute has no practice of his own, let *him* enlist and go to France.”

“I never expected to go to France, dear,” said George mildly, peering at her over his glasses as he took her hand. “I supposed I might serve in a hospital for wounded soldiers here in England.”

“We’re going to need more hospitals than what we’ve got,” said Edwin, frowning as he ran a hand through his hair, as dark as Lucy’s, without a thread of the silver-gray that had begun to color their eldest brother’s head and beard. “I hope the government has a scheme to build more. Say, Lucy, that sounds like ideal war work for your Dan. Building hospitals. He’d be a very busy fellow, I should think.”

Lucy sipped water to clear the lump forming in her throat. “If Daniel’s only alternative is the infantry,” she said, setting down her glass, “I’ll be sure to suggest building hospitals, but I should prefer he not enlist at all.”

“Goodness,” her mother exclaimed. “Daniel in the infantry. George in the navy. What nonsense! You three are married men, and you’re not as young as you once were.”

“No need to be unkind, Mother,” said Edwin, feigning injury. “I’m only thirty-two.”

“Precisely. Lord Kitchener called for one hundred thousand volunteers aged nineteen to thirty. That means young, vigorous lads, not men approaching middle age.”

Edwin’s wife laughed. “Edwin, George, and Daniel—especially Daniel—aren’t as decrepit as you suggest. They’re in the prime of life.”

“Quite so, Alice,” said George. “In my particular case, I daresay my experience as a physician—”

“No, dear,” said Eleanor firmly. “You’ll find another way to serve, one that doesn’t require you to abandon your responsibilities here.”

George offered Edwin a helpless shrug. “What can I say? She loves me too much to let me go.”

“Yes, I see.” Edwin turned to Alice. “Darling, *you* aren’t trying very hard to persuade *me* not to enlist.”

“Why should I?” said Alice. “Someone has to go. Someone has to defend poor Belgium.”

“But why me? Aside from my belief that Britain is honor-bound to stand by her allies, and the fact that I’m loath to ask another man to fight in my place while I cower fearfully at home.”

“Because you love your country, of course, and you want to defend England from a German invasion. As a teacher you’re a natural leader of men, and—” Alice smiled dreamily. “You would look absolutely splendid in an officer’s uniform.”

As the others laughed, Lucy managed a smile. She knew that Alice teased Edwin only because he surely had no intention of enlisting. As for George, it was all too true that the army would soon need skilled physicians most desperately. And despite Edwin’s remarks, she could not imagine the army recruiting droves of architects, and how thankful indeed she was for that.

Glancing to the far end of the table, she was relieved to find her sons conversing in hushed, eager tones with their cousins, cheerfully ignoring their elders. Good. There was no reason for them to fear, even for a moment, that their father or uncles might suddenly march off to war.

On the last day of their visit, Lucy packed up the provisions her mother and mother-in-law

had shared from their own pantries and a few other staples purchased at the shops. In the afternoon she stopped by Brandt's bakery for the treats she had promised Daniel, and was taken aback by subtle changes to the storefront. A large Union Jack flew above the entrance, and in the display window, a large sign announcing "Good British Breads & Buns" had replaced the trays of pumpernickel, *Brötchen*, and *Stollen*, and a platter of *Hörnchen* was labeled "Croissants." Inside, Lucy found one of the Brandt daughters arranging loaves, rolls, and sweets in one of the glass cases while another swept the floor, both of them wearing identical lace-trimmed white aprons over their muslin summer shirtwaists and long skirts. The young women glanced up from their work and cheerfully greeted Lucy by name, although their smiles faded slightly when the only other customer left without purchasing anything.

At that moment, Mr. Brandt emerged from the kitchen carrying a tray of fragrant, perfectly browned loaves of rye bread in his thickly muscled arms, his face flushed from the heat of the oven, his thinning blond curls damp with perspiration beneath his white toque. "Ah! Miss Evans," he exclaimed in his rich, accented baritone, setting the tray down on the counter. "Welcome, welcome."

"It's 'Mrs. Dempsey,' Papa," chided the elder daughter, throwing Lucy an apologetic smile.

"Of course, of course." Mr. Brandt chuckled and waved a hand as if to shoo away his mistake. "What would you like today, my dear? This good Suffolk rye bread is fresh from the oven. I know it's one of Mr. Dempsey's favorites."

"And mine too," said Lucy, bemused. She had never heard the baker refer to the bread as Suffolk rye before, and as far as she knew, rye from Suffolk wasn't inherently superior to grain grown and milled elsewhere. Why mention it at all, except to distinguish it from German rye?

She selected a loaf of rye and a half dozen raisin buns, resisting the temptation to ask what had become of the German baked goods that had always been so popular there. As Mr. Brandt boxed up her selections, he inquired after Daniel and the boys, and she asked about his family in turn. "Our Herman and Otto have enlisted in the East Surrey Regiment," Mr. Brandt said, his smile both proud and strained. "They were among the first boys from Brookfield to volunteer."

"How very brave of them," said Lucy, hiding her dismay. Of course the Brandt boys would hasten to prove their loyalty, for their family's sake as much as their own. Only a few days before, the government had announced that all "enemy aliens," including longtime residents like Mr. and Mrs. Brandt, were required to register at their nearest police station. Alice thought the new measure was a necessary precaution to foil German spies, while Edwin predicted that it would burden good, law-abiding immigrants with suspicion and restrictions. "You and Mrs. Brandt must be very proud."

"Ja, we must be, but we miss our sons very much already." Mr. Brandt mopped his brow with a handkerchief and shrugged. "But everyone says the war will be over by Christmas, so they will not be away such a very long time."

"Surely not," Lucy agreed, wishing she believed it.

A day later, Lucy and her sons were back in London, the tasty bread and buns neatly tucked into Jamie's knapsack on top of several jars of jam and a peck of apples the boys had harvested that morning from their grandmother's orchard. Simon carried a somewhat lighter load in his pack, and the remaining supplies filled Lucy's bags. Along with their luggage, it was quite a lot to carry through Paddington station, but Daniel would meet them at their last stop and help them the rest of the way home.

As they made their way through the concourse, Lucy was surprised to see so many men in uniform already, less surprised by the recruiting posters that had multiplied on walls and

posts since she had last passed through. They reached their departure platform with time to spare, and Lucy reminded the boys to keep close to her and stay away from the edge while they waited. Keeping one eye on the clock and another on her sons, Lucy allowed her thoughts to wander, from parting conversations with her mother and brothers, to her eager longing to reunite with Daniel at home, the Brandts' plight, and what she might make for dinner that evening.

"Mum, look!" Simon shouted. "That's not allowed!"

Startled from her reverie, Lucy turned and glimpsed Simon's wide eyes and outstretched arm and Jamie beside him gazing in disbelief. Once assured that her sons were safe and sound, she followed the line of Simon's pointing finger and discovered nearly four dozen men descending the platform to the rails below. Lucy's first thought as she watched them pick their way across both sets of tracks was that they were railroad workers, but they wore no uniforms, just ordinary suits and hats. Upon reaching the other side, the men climbed onto the opposite platform, which had been virtually empty until then, a curious thing for that time of day. There sat a special train bound for Falmouth, according to the sign, but the blinds were drawn and the men made no attempt to board. Instead they assembled on the platform near the parlor car, removed their hats, and began to sing, deeply and with intense passion: "*Deutschland, Deutschland über alles, über alles in der Welt.*"

Stunned, for a moment Lucy could only stare in disbelief as the German national anthem echoed off the stone walls.

The British passengers exchanged looks of astonishment and wild indignation. "What infernal cheek!" a gray-haired woman to Lucy's right scolded, wagging a finger at the Germans.

"Well, I'm blowed," a young man in a straw hat exclaimed, hands clenching into fists as he approached the edge of the platform. "'Germany over All' sung in London—and with a war on!"

Somewhere behind Lucy, a rich baritone voice sang, "God save our gracious King, long live our noble King, God save the King!"

All around, other voices took up the song. "Send him victorious, happy and glorious—"

At the sound of her sons' treble voices, Lucy also quickly joined in. "Long to reign over us, God save the King!"

The two groups sang and shouted their anthems across the tracks at each other, louder and more fiercely with each verse. Then, as suddenly as they appeared, the German men replaced their hats and swiftly dispersed, some disappearing down one corridor, others up one staircase or another. None dared cross the tracks to confront the Britons glaring at them—but perhaps that was because a shrill whistle had announced the arrival of the train.

Lucy's hands trembled as she beckoned to her boys and ushered them aboard. "I can't believe it," Jamie fumed as they settled into their seats. "How dare they sing their national song here! We're at war, and they're in our country!"

"Very disrespectful of them, and imprudent as well," said Lucy, stowing their bags, glancing about to make sure they had all of their belongings. "They could have been set upon by an angry mob of patriotic Englishmen."

Jamie's face lit up. "Do you really think so?"

"No, of course not," Lucy quickly amended. "Not in the middle of Paddington station."

Simon's brow furrowed in serious contemplation. "Mum, do you s'pose they were German spies?"

When Jamie guffawed, Lucy silenced him with a look. "Germans, yes. Spies, no," she said. "Spies would have to be terribly bad at their jobs to reveal themselves so dramatically, don't you think?"

Simon nodded thoughtfully. Lucy smiled and straightened his cap, but the scene had

unsettled her. She supposed she understood why a German abroad in wartime might be moved to burst spontaneously into his national anthem, but this incident must have been coordinated ahead of time. Why enemy aliens would so imprudently declare their loyalties to Germany was one question. Another puzzle was why they had chosen Paddington station for their defiant serenade. Why not Waterloo station? Why not Trafalgar Square?

She pondered the questions as the train carried them on the last leg of their journey, but she was no wiser by the time they reached Clapham Junction. Lucy and her boys quickly disembarked and reunited at last with Daniel on the platform. As they walked home, the boys described the strange event, talking over each other in their eagerness to astound their father.

“I believe I know what that was all about,” said Daniel as he unlocked their front door and the boys raced inside ahead of them. “The Austrian and German ambassadors were expelled from Great Britain. Count Mensdorff was expected to leave London by train today for Portsmouth, and then sail to Genoa.”

Lucy and Daniel followed the boys inside, carried the bags into the kitchen, and set them on the table. “I’m surprised there was no military guard to keep anyone from getting near his train.” Shuddering, Lucy removed her hat and hung it on the back of a chair. “It was such a strange thing to witness. It made the war feel so close. I dread to think how much closer it will come before it’s all over.”

Daniel embraced her from behind and kissed the back of her neck. “Don’t worry about that now, darling,” he murmured, his voice low and comforting. “We’re all together again, safe and sound.”

Sighing softly, she leaned back against his strong chest and relaxed into his arms. She wanted him to promise her that the war would never cross their threshold, but Daniel never made promises he could not keep, nor would she find any comfort in empty reassurances.

In the days that followed, Lucy was relieved to discover that order had been restored to London’s markets and food was reassuringly plentiful. Jamie and Simon prepared for the new school term, or rather, Lucy prepared them for it. After a worrisome few days during which Daniel’s client considered postponing construction until after the war, the crew broke ground for the Henderson offices. To Lucy’s relief, Daniel completed pre-season training with no serious injuries—more aches and pains and fatigue than he cared to admit, but nothing that would keep him off the pitch.

Yet ordinary life unfolded amid a rising war fever and its inescapable consequences. Several football clubs found their training regimens disrupted when their pitches were commandeered by the War Office for military training. Territorial battalions marched and drilled on Everton’s pitch at Goodison Park. Manchester City’s grounds were turned into a stable for more than three hundred cavalry horses.

“It could be worse,” said Daniel, as Lucy rubbed liniment on his lower back after a particularly grueling practice. “Politicians and others are questioning whether it’s appropriate to carry on with football at all in these circumstances. Some teams have had so many players enlist that they’ve scratched their fixtures for the season.”

Lucy felt her breath catch in her throat. “Not Tottenham, surely.”

“No, not Tottenham,” he replied, frowning slightly. “Not yet.”

But evidently not enough men were enlisting, for throughout London, recruiting posters seemed to increase daily in number and variety. Particularly disquieting for Lucy were the specific appeals for sportsmen to enlist, and for women to urge their sons and husbands to answer the call to arms. The press enthusiastically described training exercises and dignitaries’ reviews of the troops at military encampments, often focusing on certain Pals battalions—groups of men from particular towns, schools, or professions who had enlisted together with the understanding, backed by the promise of Secretary of State for War Lord Kitchener, that they would serve together. By the end of September, Kitchener’s scheme had

produced the Stockbrokers' Battalion from the City of London, the Grimsby Chums comprised of former students of Wintringham Secondary School, and more than fifty battalions from towns and cities throughout Britain.

To Lucy that seemed like a great many soldiers indeed, but the call to arms persisted, with heightened urgency. Rumors that conscription might be on the way compelled many young men to enlist while they could still choose a favorite Pals battalion. The women of Britain found their own way to contribute to the war effort when Queen Mary and Lord Kitchener called upon them to knit three hundred thousand pairs of socks for the army by November. Dutifully, Lucy purchased skeins of yarn and took up her needles. Working a few hours in the evenings and in spare moments throughout the day, she could produce a new pair of socks every second day. She and her friend Gloria occasionally knitted together in the garden while their children played, quietly discussing the rumors that not all was going well for the British Expeditionary Force in France. Sometimes rumors were all they had. Thanks to overzealous censors, when it came to reports from the Western Front, the newspapers were often too vague or understated to merit reading.

What the press did make clear was that it would take more than warm, dry socks to sustain the troops and the dependents they had left behind. On Saturday, 22 August, several professional football clubs organized a series of matches to benefit the Prince of Wales's National Relief Fund. Tottenham Hotspur would play Arsenal at White Hart Lane, and Lucy had promised to take Jamie and Simon to watch their father play. She hoped the charitable effort would quiet the grumbling from certain quarters about athletes playing games on manicured pitches while braver, more patriotic men bled and died on the muddy battlefields of France and Belgium. But her hopes plummeted when she and the boys arrived for Daniel's match only to discover a small crowd of mostly older gentlemen demonstrating near the entrance, brandishing signs demanding that football be suspended for the duration. Jamie and Simon stared in astonishment as the gentlemen called out to fans as they approached the turnstile, urging them to go home rather than share in the teams' disgrace.

"That's Daniel Dempsey's wife," one of the men suddenly shouted. Lucy jumped as many pairs of eyes turned her way. "Say there, Mrs. Dempsey! Aren't you ashamed of your husband, running around on a pitch while our country is engaged in a life-and-death struggle? Wouldn't you rather see him a hero in uniform?"

Mortified, Lucy lifted her chin, seized her sons' hands, and marched past the protestors without acknowledging them, breathing a sigh of relief only after she and the boys had passed through the gate. Inside, a large and enthusiastic crowd had assembled, mostly working-class men who evidently did not object to sport in wartime. And why should they? It seemed to Lucy that football provided a welcome distraction from the war, an essential release of tension that sustained morale.

"Why do those men hate football?" Simon asked as they made their way to their seats.

"I don't believe they *hate* football," Lucy replied, "but they see it as . . . an extravagance during wartime."

Those men were not alone, she knew, and their numbers were increasing.

Not even the extraordinary sums footballers raised for the National Relief Fund and other charities could shift the tide of public opinion in the teams' favor. One by one, prominent gentlemen from the military, government, and business publicly condemned the playing of games during a national crisis. Lucy dreaded to see Daniel brooding over their denunciations. "This is the worst controversy the sport has faced since the conflict over paying players first arose," he said, studying a particularly irksome pamphlet.

"Surely it's not as bad as that," protested Lucy. Thirty years before, a few disgruntled teams had accused certain rivals of paying their players, giving them an unfair advantage. Although paying players was not prohibited, opponents contended that it would harm the

sport, forsaking the ideals of sportsmanship and the true spirit of the game in favor of the false idols of financial incentive and profit. Outrage and hostility had fomented through the years until the Football Association had finally split into two factions, professional and amateur. Although in recent years the sides had warily reconciled, some amateur abhorrence for professionalism lingered, despite three decades of evidence that paying players had not ruined the game. Nor had any footballer become wealthy on his earnings. Most professional players earned only a few pounds a week, hardly enough to support oneself or raise a family. Most players earned a living from another trade or profession, trained and played matches in their off hours, and appreciated the extra measure of comfort and security their football income provided. Only a very few footballers were paid enough to forgo other work if they wished, and Daniel was not one of those.

In September, as the fledgling controversy worsened, the Football Association issued a statement declaring that the season would go on as scheduled, but any player who wished to enlist would be released from his contract without penalty, and those who did not enlist would engage in military drill and rifle training as a team. Recruitment posters would be displayed prominently at each team's grounds, and dignitaries would be invited to address audiences during the interval to urge all players and spectators who were physically fit and otherwise qualified to join the army at once.

Yet even those efforts did not quell the grumbling. In October, Lucy and her sons encountered more protestors outside St. James' Park when Tottenham played Newcastle United, men in black wool coats and fine top hats holding signs with slogans such as "Your Country Needs You" and "Are You Forgetting There's a War On?" and "Be Ready to Defend Your Home and Women from the German Huns!" As the season progressed, Lucy and the other Tottenham footballers' wives noted White Hart Lane's dwindling crowds, as recruitment drives claimed some spectators and negative publicity drove away others.

"It's not fair that our husbands must endure such unjust criticism while men in other professions—indeed, in other sports—escape scrutiny," said Minnie Bailey, thoroughly vexed, keeping her voice low so the spectators seated nearby would not overhear. She had been Lucy's closest friend among the wives ever since they had traveled to Stockholm together to attend England's final against Denmark in the 1912 Olympic Games. Minnie's then fiancé, Horace, had been England's reserve goalkeeper; although he had not played, he still shared in all the honor and praise and adoration England's fans had bestowed upon the team.

What a difference two years made, Lucy thought ruefully. Britain's footballers, only recently a source of tremendous national pride, had become the objects of scorn and derision.

"Minnie's right," another wife chimed in. "I don't hear any lords or legislators demanding that golfers, cricketers, and polo players cease playing for the duration and trade in their team kit for a soldier's khaki."

"And yet footballers are condemned, when they've enlisted in greater numbers and raised more relief funds than any other sportsmen," said Lucy.

"It's class prejudice, that's what it is," said Elsie May, sighing. "Football is the people's game, the pastime of the working classes rather than the gentry."

Lucy and the others agreed there was nothing for it but to bear the indignity with grace and support their husbands through it. All would be forgotten after the war ended and life returned to normal.

But as the weeks passed and the controversy smoldered, two distressing truths became evident to Lucy: The Football Association was steadily losing its case in the court of public opinion, and the war was very unlikely to be over by Christmas.

In late November, Daniel told Lucy that a group of Heart of Midlothian players had enlisted together in a new battalion of the Royal Scots being raised by Sir George McCrae, a

former MP for East Edinburgh. “A few days before, the *Edinburgh Evening News* had suggested that the club should be renamed ‘The White Feathers of Midlothian,’” he said, grimacing.

Lucy was aghast. “They ran off to enlist because of some childish name-calling?”

“What better way to silence their critics? The Hearts’ entire first and reserve team joined up, along with members of the board and the staff and nearly five hundred fans. Now players from other Scottish teams are racing to join them before McCrae’s Battalion is entirely filled.” Daniel shook his head and grinned. “What a terrifying sight that would be—hundreds of fierce Scotsman footballers and fans hurling themselves at the unsuspecting enemy. I’ve faced them on the pitch. I wouldn’t want to confront them on the battlefield.”

“I could almost pity the Germans,” said Lucy. Then her thoughts darted to the nearly seven hundred civilians slaughtered by the Kaiser’s army in the village of Dinant, the countless numbers the Germans had killed elsewhere in Belgium and in France, the young British soldiers who had already lost their lives—and she decided that the Germans deserved every moment of terror, in equal measure to all they had inflicted upon innocents.

“Heart of Midlothian are leading the Scottish League,” Daniel said, as if lost in thought, “and yet they’re willing to cast aside their shot at the cup in order to enlist. No dodgy reporter can fault their courage now.”

Uneasy, Lucy made no reply. Daniel’s admiration for the Scottish footballers filled the room with a heavy, haunting presence, and she was afraid to say something that might persuade him to join them.

In early December, Tottenham Hotspur received a letter from the Football Association inviting the club to send delegates to a meeting at the FA offices in Russell Square. “The owner and manager will attend, and I’ve been asked to represent our players,” Daniel told Lucy.

“Sounds like quite an honor,” she said, bracing herself, for a certain intensity in his expression warned her that he had more to say.

“Lucy, darling.” Daniel took her hand, kissed it, and pressed it to his heart. “McCrae’s Battalion may have been first onto the pitch, but we English footballers play to the whistle. The purpose of the meeting is to discuss whether to form an English Footballers’ Battalion for Kitchener’s Army.”

Lucy’s heart plummeted. Daniel was trying to break the news gently, but she knew him too well.

If a Footballers’ Battalion was formed, when the whistle blew, Daniel would take the field among them.

2

January–March 1915

April

In her four years at Alderlea, April had never seen Lady Rylance as flustered and indignant as she was that frosty January morning, moments after her husband's startling announcement.

Not even on Boxing Day a fortnight ago had the mistress been this upset. It was meant to have been the merriest day of the festive season for the household staff, but Harrison Rylance, the eldest son and heir, had spoiled their holiday by stealing away to accept a commission with the Derbyshire Yeomanry. Her duties complete, her half day off barely begun, April was in her shared attic bedroom dressing for the traditional Housemaids v. Footmen Boxing Day football match when the mistress had shrieked so horribly that she might have witnessed a murder in the drawing room, or a maid clumsily overturning an ashtray on the best Persian rug.

A moment later, the staff had been summoned to attend to Harrison's distraught parents and bewildered younger siblings as they came to terms with his patriotic disobedience. April had served brandy and tea and biscuits in the drawing room, silently mourning the cancelled football match, which was always great fun, and the lost Boxing Day afternoon off, which was all but sacrosanct. Eventually Lord Rylance had convinced his wife that their son had done a splendid thing by pledging to serve King and Country and to defend England's honor. "I would accept a commission myself, if not for this blasted leg," Lord Rylance had grumbled, slapping his thigh above the knee, which he had injured years before in a fall from a horse. "I might still, if His Majesty commands."

"Heaven forfend," Lady Rylance had exclaimed, laying a long, slim, beringed hand over her heart. She had embraced her eldest, then held him at arm's length, scolding him with one breath and praising him with the next. How thoughtless he was to have deceived them, but how honorable and courageous he was to answer the call to arms! They were exceedingly proud to have an officer in the family, but if Harrison had only told them his intentions, his father could have arranged a more advantageous commission.

"If I had told you," Harrison had protested, laughing, "you would have tried to stop me."

"Could I have done?" his mother replied, her smile wavering. Then she had pressed a handkerchief to her mouth and fled the room.

While the scene unfolded, April had been obliged to keep her eyes down and expression placid, revealing not the slightest flicker of astonishment, even though she had never seen the mistress so upset. Not that she spent much time in Lady Rylance's company. April occasionally served at table, but most of her work—washing, cleaning, fetching, scrubbing—was done out of the family's sight, beginning before dawn while the family slept until long

after they had retired for the night.

April's mum had not told her what domestic service would be like, perhaps because she did not herself know. A word of warning wouldn't have changed April's mind anyway. The Tipton family desperately needed their eldest children to earn wages, and the position at Alderlea was simply too great an opportunity to let slip by. It had only come April's way because the housekeeper, Elizabeth Wilson, was April's mum's cousin. They had been good chums when they were girls, and had kept in touch through letters after their lives had taken them in dramatically different directions. Mrs. Wilson had achieved a position of respect and authority in one of the most gracious country houses in Derbyshire, while April's mum had followed a well-trod path into marriage, motherhood, and increasingly reduced circumstances.

"This could be your chance at a better life," April's mum had reminded her as she set off for the station, adjusting April's hat, picking a stray thread off her coat sleeve. "Be pleasant, be quiet, work hard, and do everything Cousin Bitsy tells you to do, and you could make something of yourself. You might even rise to become a cook or a housekeeper yourself someday."

"I will," April had replied solemnly, giving her mum a peck on the cheek. Though she was only fifteen, she was terribly eager to go, not because the work sounded particularly exciting, but because it was either domestic service or the mills, and she didn't want the mills. The only other respectable alternative was to stay home and mind the little ones while her elder sister accepted the housemaid position, her mum took in more piecework, and her dad drank his pay away.

It was a long journey by train to Derbyshire, and after that a jostling ride in a farmer's hay wagon to reach the estate. April was weary and disheveled when she finally knocked on the back door of Alderlea, a glorious three-story Elizabethan mansion of buff sandstone and gray slate set amid vast, rolling lawns at the edge of a pretty wood. The tall, golden-haired housemaid who answered her knock looked only a few years older than herself. "Yes?" she asked, friendly enough. "What d'you need?"

"I'm April Tipton," she said. "I'm here to see Mrs. Elizabeth Wilson, please."

"Oh, you must be the new girl." The housemaid opened the door wider and beckoned her inside. "Congratulations or condolences, as the case may be."

"Erm, congratulations, I hope. I don't have the job yet. And thanks."

"Don't mention it." She tossed April a grin over her shoulder as she led her down the hallway to the housekeeper's room. "Here we are at the dragon's lair," she said in a conspiratorial whisper as they halted outside the door. "Good luck."

With that, the maid swept off, leaving April alone in the passageway amid the clatter of dishes and enticing aromas drifting from a kitchen somewhere nearby. Collecting herself, she took a deep breath, knocked on the door, and entered when commanded to do so. Inside, a woman in her middle forties sat at a desk studying a ledger and receipts through wire-rimmed glasses attached to a fine silver chain around her neck. When she glanced up inquiringly, April bobbed a curtsy. "Good day, ma'am. I'm April Tipton," she said, handing over an envelope with her references and a letter from her mum. "Hannah Tipton's daughter."

"Yes, of course." The housekeeper rose to accept the papers, and April tried not to fidget while she read them. Elizabeth Wilson had her cousin's gray-streaked chestnut hair, apple cheeks, and cleft chin, but otherwise April saw no family resemblance. She wore a navy blue wool suit, a crisp white blouse, and perfectly polished, sensible heeled boots, finer clothes than April had ever seen her mum wear. April's mum often smiled, though sometimes tiredly, and she hunched her shoulders, a habit developed from years bent over her sewing. Studying her mum's cousin while she read, April noticed that her expression was stern, her gaze coolly appraising, her posture straight and imposing. April reminded herself that her mum was very

fond of the housekeeper. She must be a good sort, even if the blonde maid had called her a dragon.

The housekeeper invited April to sit, queried her about her schooling and prior work experience, and explained the rules of the household. First and foremost, April was never to call her Cousin Bitsy, not even when they were alone; it was always to be Mrs. Wilson. As the newest maid, April would rank below everyone in the house except the scullery girl, and she must show all due respect. Her workday would begin at five o'clock sharp, when she would rise, wash, put on her day uniform, and light the kitchen fire. Next she would tend to the rooms on the ground floor, cleaning the grates, dusting, polishing, sweeping the hall and the stairs, washing the front steps, and polishing the brass door fixtures. Then she would light fires in the family's dressing rooms and carry hot water to their bedchambers. After breakfast, she would clear and air the bedchambers, turn the mattresses, and make up the beds, then clean other rooms such as the library and the study, lighting fires where necessary. All this must be accomplished by luncheon, when April must be prepared to wait at table if the footmen were occupied with other duties. In the early afternoon, after changing out of her morning work clothes into her more formal uniform of black dress, white apron, and white cap, she would mend and darn, answer the door and the telephone, and announce callers. As evening approached, she would prepare the dining room for dinner and serve at table if needed; afterward, she would bring tea to the drawing room for the family and any guests, and light fires in the bedchambers. In addition to these daily responsibilities, every week April would assist with the laundry and ironing; clean the carpets, wallpaper, and windows; and wash down the paintwork.

"That sounds like rather a lot," April managed to say.

"You'll have Sunday afternoons off."

"Even so," April said without thinking, quickly adding, "That is, thank you, ma'am."

Mrs. Wilson's expression softened a trifle. "You won't be responsible for everything yourself, my dear. You'll share the work with three other housemaids. You met Mary on your way in. You'll meet the others later." Mrs. Wilson rose. "Pending approval from her ladyship, of course."

April quickly stood and tried to smooth the wrinkles from her dress. "I'm to meet Lady Rylance? Now?"

"Don't panic, child. Of course now. If she doesn't like the look of you, you'll have time to catch the train back to Carlisle this evening." Mrs. Wilson studied April for a moment, then sighed. "Just keep your gaze down modestly, clasp your hands in front like so—" She demonstrated. "And don't say anything unless her ladyship addresses you. You'll be all right. Come along, now."

April swallowed hard and obeyed, wishing she had time to wash the dust of travel from her hands and face and arrange her flaxen hair, stick-straight and butter yellow, into a tidier bun. As she trailed after the housekeeper down corridors and up two flights of back stairs, she tried to tuck stray wisps under her cap, but without a mirror, she might have been making a worse mess of it.

All too soon Mrs. Wilson led her into a splendid sitting room, with a marble fireplace at one end, a gleaming piano at the other, and all sorts of lovely gilded and brocaded furnishings in between, warm wood and fabric in shades of sage green and lavender. It seemed that every level surface boasted a crystal or porcelain vase bursting with fragrant flowers. Tall windows adorned with heavy lavender velvet curtains let in sunlight and breathtaking views of the lush forest and rolling hills.

It occurred to April that this single room was larger and more abundantly furnished than her family's entire home. And Alderlea had many more such rooms. How could even four housemaids clean the entire mansion in a single day?

In the center of the room, three women dressed in elegant frocks sat chatting and sipping tea around a low table laden with a tea service and trays of tiny sandwiches and pastries. One woman perched gracefully in a lavender brocade armchair, the two others on the floral, claw-legged sofa opposite her. The woman in the armchair appeared to be in her late forties, slender and fair-skinned, with glossy black hair and an aquiline nose. Her dark eyebrows arched at the sight of Mrs. Wilson entering with April. "Yes, Wilson?" she inquired. "What is it?"

"If you please, ma'am, we've taken on a new housemaid." With a turn of her wrist, Mrs. Wilson indicated April, who bobbed a curtsey. "I'm well acquainted with her mother, and she brings two characters, one from a former schoolteacher and another from her minister. They both attest that she is a hardworking, reliable girl."

April felt the lady's eyes weighing and measuring her. "Is she an experienced maid? She looks quite young."

"She's fifteen, ma'am, the third eldest of eight. This would be her first position, but she has been helping her mother keep house and mind her siblings since she was quite young."

"Hmm." Sighing, Lady Rylance turned to her elegant companions. "It's so difficult to find good servants these days. One has to bring in novices and train them oneself." The other ladies murmured in commiseration. Turning back to Mrs. Wilson, Lady Rylance asked, "What is she called?"

"April, ma'am. April Tipton."

"April?" Lady Rylance's nose wrinkled in distaste. "Oh, no. That will never do. April is too frivolous for a maid. We shall call her Mary."

"We already have a Mary, ma'am."

"Do we indeed?" Lady Rylance put her head to one side, thinking. "Oh, yes, the lanky girl, saucy grin. Well, let's call this one Ann. Unless we already have an Ann?"

"No, ma'am."

"Ann it is, then." April's new mistress bathed her in a radiant smile. "Welcome to Alderlea, Ann. Work hard, be punctual, and we'll get along splendidly."

"Yes, ma'am. Thank you, ma'am," April murmured, heart thudding as she curtsied again, but the mistress and her friends had resumed their conversation and took no notice. Ann the housemaid was quickly forgotten.

Mrs. Wilson inclined her head deferentially to the unwitting ladies and silently left the room. A bit stunned, April followed. "You made a good impression," Mrs. Wilson remarked quietly when they were alone in the hallway.

April murmured a reply, bewilderment giving way to annoyance. She *liked* her name. It was fresh and bright and lively like spring itself, like *April* herself. Lady Rylance might not think it suitable for a girl of her station, but no one had any right to change it.

But if April wanted to keep her new job, she supposed she would have to go along with it.

Mrs. Wilson led April back downstairs to the housekeeper's chamber and instructed her regarding her wages and room and board. Afterward, she summoned the same housemaid who had answered April's knock. "Mary will take you to the laundry and give you your uniforms," Mrs. Wilson said. "After that, she'll show you to your bed in the maids' quarters so you can settle in. You can begin work bright and early tomorrow morning."

With that, Mrs. Wilson dismissed them.

"Come on, then, Ann," said Mary, beckoning April to follow her down the passageway. "Let's get you sorted. What did you think of Lady Rylance?"

"She changed my name," said April woefully. "I'm not really Ann."

The other maid shrugged. "That's all right. I'm not really Mary. My name's Marjorie."

"Let me guess." April stuck her nose in the air, and in a plummy voice intoned, "That's too frivolous a name for a maid."