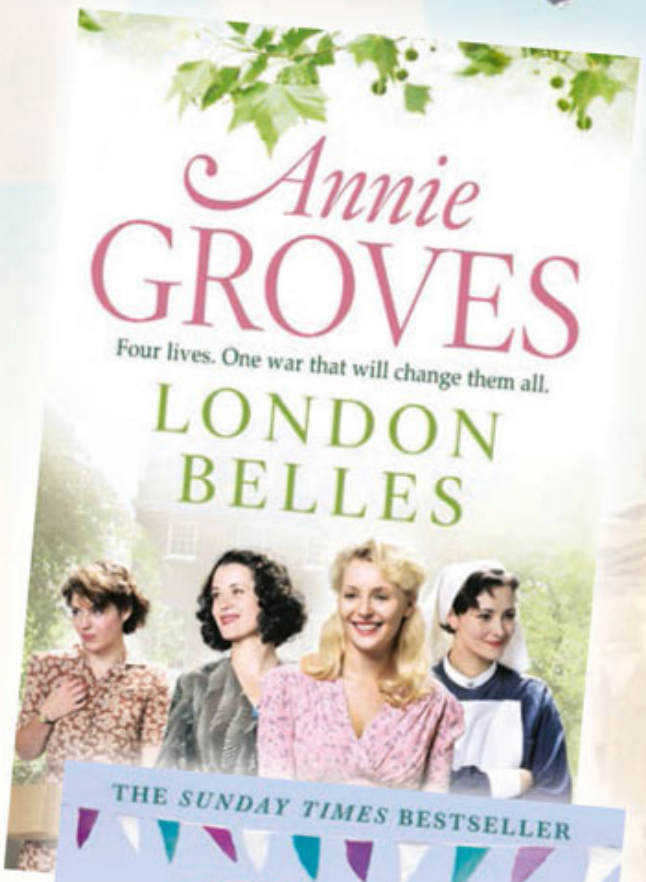
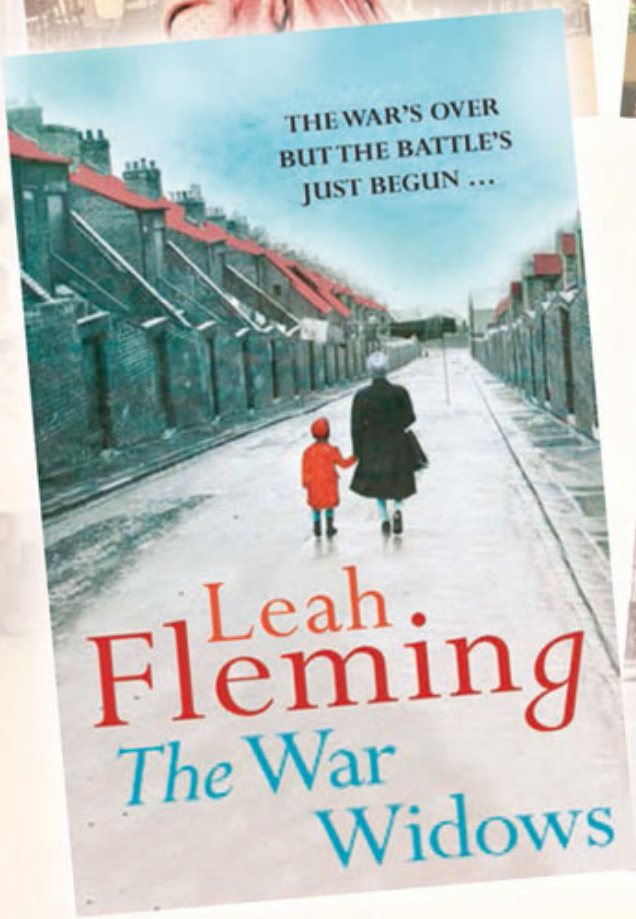
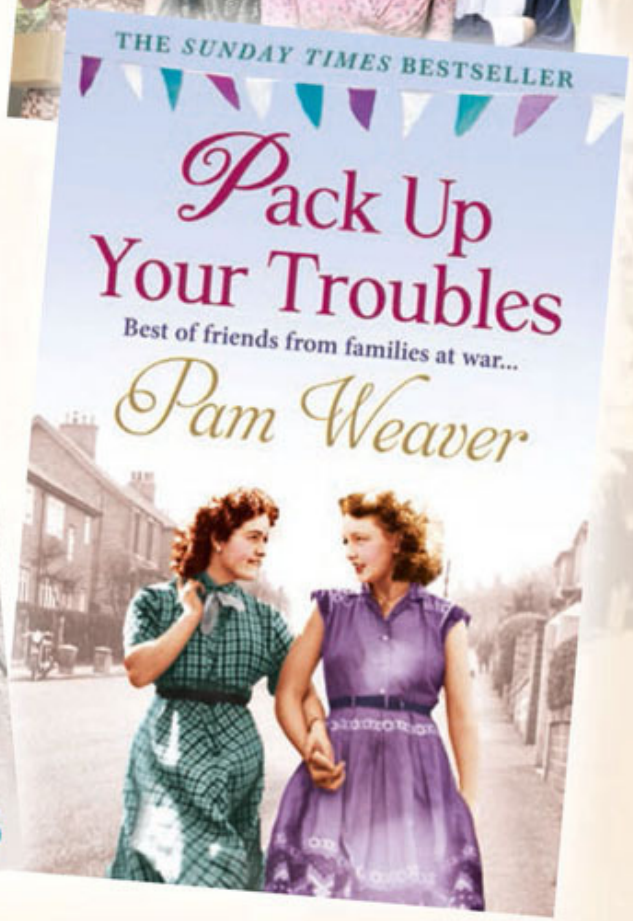
WOMEN ON THE HOME FRONT:

FAMILY SAGA 4-BOOK COLLECTION









Annie Groves

Women on the Home Front: Family Saga 4-Book Collection

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Four family sagas in one ebook collection – filled with love, tragedy and heartbreak, these moving stories are set against the backdrop of World War Two.Includes ‘London Belles by Annie Groves, ‘Pack Up Your Troubles’ by Pam Weaver, ‘The War Widows’ by Leah Fleming and ‘Coronation Day’ by Kay BrellendLondon Belles – Four lives. Four loves. One War. On London’s Blitz torn streets, the bonds of friendship run deep. Forged together by the utter devastation of WWII, Tilly, Sally, Dulcie and Agnes are the four young women living on an ordinary street, who will endure hardship and heartache.Pack Up Your Troubles - Thrown together at the VE Day celebrations, Connie and Eva are the best of friends. But they are torn apart when they discover they come from feuding families. Determined to overcome years of hatred, they resolve to find out what has kept their families at war for so long. But will their friendship survive the shocking truth?The War Widows – Nothing ever happens in sleepy Grimbleton. Until two strangers – both claiming to be the fiancée of a dead soldier – arrive in town. Enemies at first, Susan and Ana soon find themselves united in grief. Can they help each other to find happiness after the heartache of war?Coronation Day – The toughest street in London due for demolition. Can Tilly, the tough, uncompromising head of the Kiever family help heal some of the rifts of the past – or will this be one street party they will remember for all of the wrong reasons?

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LONDON BELLES by Annie Groves
PACK UP YOUR TROUBLES by Pam Weaver
CORONATION DAY by Kay Brelland
and
THE WAR WIDOWS by Leah Fleming



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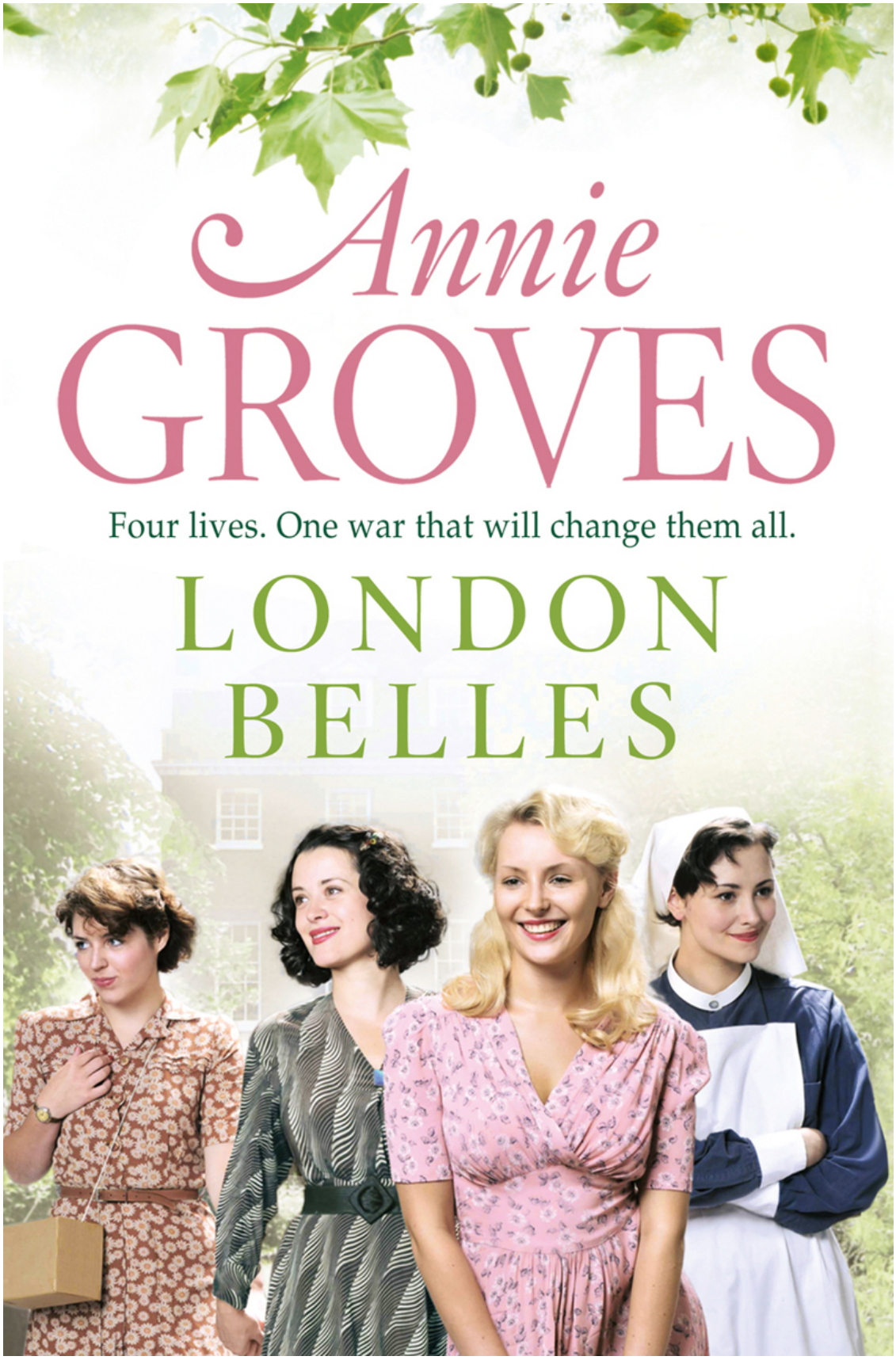
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ANNIE GROVES
London Belles



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I'd like to dedicate this book to all those who throughout WW2 made do, mended and somehow kept together the fabric of everyday life.

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Part One
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Chapter One

‘So what are you going to do now that old Bert has finally gone, Olive? I mean, you won’t have his pension any more, will you? Your Tilly might be working up at the hospital as an assistant to the Lady Almoner, but I dare say she isn’t bringing in very much,’ Nancy Black sniffed.

As Olive knew, Nancy had a keen interest in the business of her neighbours and an even keener nose for ‘problems’ of any kind. She was the kind of person who liked spreading doom and gloom; the kind of person who would complain about the noise children made playing innocently together in the street and then go on to extol the virtues of her own daughter and only child. Some people were inclined to call her a bit of a troublemaker but Olive always tried to give her the benefit of the doubt.

The afternoon sunshine sparkled on the immaculately clean windows of Article Row, the narrow byway that wound between the close interweaving of London streets, within the boundaries

of Chancery Lane to the west, Farringdon Road to the east, Fleet Street to the south and from High Holborn to Holborn Viaduct to the north.

Nancy stood, leaning on the broom with which she had been sweeping the short path to her front door whilst she waited for Olive's answer to her original question about the loss of her father-inlaw's pension.

The row of fifty narrow three-storey houses, with the addition of their attics and cellars, clinging together as though for mutual protection, had been built, so it was said, by a wealthy East India merchant in the seventeen hundreds, whose fortune had been saved for him by the keen eye of a poor articled clerk working for a pittance for his lawyer. In recognition of his good fortune the East India merchant had had Article Row built, with the houses in it to be rented out for peppercorn rents to help the struggling. After he had lost his money in the South Sea Bubble débâcle, his estate, including the Article Row houses, had been sold, as a result of which Article Row was one of the few places in Holborn where an ordinary working-class family man bringing in a steady wage might buy his own home. Separated by class and stature from the inhabitants of the Inns of Court, and artistic, some said slightly louche Bloomsbury beyond, and by respectability from their poorer neighbours towards the East End and the river, Article Row was a world almost unto itself, its inhabitants living by their own set of rules and observances, one of which was that a front path must always be spotless.

Across the road from the front of the houses were the blank windowless high walls of a succession of buildings that housed various small businesses, some of which employed inhabitants of the Row. These ivy-covered brick walls gave the Row a vague semirural aspect, much cherished by some of the long-standing residents, who felt that Article Row being one single row of houses gave it a special air of gentility.

'Well, I've been thinking about that, and what I've a mind to do is take in lodgers.' Olive looked her neighbour firmly in the eye as she delivered this information. Married at eighteen, widowed a year later when her husband, weakened by the dreadful rigours of the First World War had died from TB, Olive had learned as a young wife how to deal tactfully but firmly with bossy members of her own sex.

Olive had spent all her adult life living under the roof of her husband's parents, who had taken them in when Jim, their only child, had been poorly, and Olive and Jim's daughter, Tilly, only a baby. Although Olive would never have said so to anyone, especially a gossipy and sometimes forthright neighbour like Nancy, it hadn't been easy for her, left motherless at sixteen, and an only child herself, to deal with a strong-willed mother-in-law who adored her only son. Olive's mother-in-law had not been above hinting that Olive had seized her chance to improve her lot in life by marrying her son, and that that marriage had drained him of what strength he had left, thus hastening his death.

Jim, though – dear kind, gentle person that he had been – had always sworn that their love for one another had given him strength and the desire to hold on to life, especially once he knew that there was to be a baby. How he had loved Tilly. And his mother had softened towards Olive once she had become a grandmother.

Olive had repaid her in-laws' kindness by nursing first her mother-in-law through ill health to her death, and then more recently her father-in-law, Bert.

A better daughter-in-law than Olive it would be impossible to find, her late mother-in-law had been given to saying in her later years.

'Lodgers?' Nancy queried sharply now, breaking into Olive's thoughts, her narrow face beneath her greying hair taking on an expression of pursed-lipped disapproval. 'Well, I don't know about that. That's not the kind of thing we do round here. I don't want to disappoint you, Olive, especially with you needing to replace Bert's pension – after all, no one can live on fresh air – but I'd think twice if I were you. After all, you don't want people thinking you're lowering the tone. Of course, if you was to think of selling the house, then I reckon that my daughter and her husband might be willing to take it off your hands.'

Aware that Nancy was trying to manipulate her, Olive smiled pleasantly and pointed out, 'There's plenty of houses in the Row already owned by a landlord and rented out.'

'Yes, but they're respectable types. After all, most of them work in the civil service for the Government, and they're decent families who rent the whole house, not just a room. You get all sorts when you just let out a room: young men – and young women – behaving like they shouldn't. There could be all sorts of goings-on going on.' Nancy sniffed again, her pursed mouth becoming even more prune-like with disapproval. 'Anyway, I don't know how you could take in lodgers, seeing as you've only got two bedrooms, same as the rest of us, and there's you and Tilly living there already.'

'There's the attics: that makes two more,' Olive pointed out calmly. 'I've made up my mind to give it a try, Nancy. Like you said, our Tilly doesn't bring in that much.'

'You could go back cleaning, like you did before Bert got took bad. There's still plenty staying on in the Inns of Court, despite all this talk of war.'

'Well, that's another thing, Nancy,' Olive responded, playing her trump card. 'Tilly's been telling me that the Lady Almoner, up the hospital, has been saying that if there is a war then anyone with spare rooms is going to have to take in other folk on the Government's orders, and to my way of thinking it's better that I let my rooms now whilst I've still got a chance to choose who I have living in them.'

For a few seconds Nancy was silent. But never one to give up on an argument she wanted to win, she announced triumphantly, 'Well, I'm not saying that I don't admire you for thinking of it, but you'll have to be careful, you not having a man around. You don't want the wrong sort. Like I said before, this is a respectable street and you'll have some saying they don't want anyone lowering the tone.'

Yes, and you'd be one of the first to complain, Olive thought wryly.

Nancy shook her head. 'And as for there being a war, well, I'm telling you now there won't be one. It's all just talk, you mark my words.'

'I hope you're right, Nancy,' Olive answered quietly.

Olive knew perfectly well that her plans to let out her spare bedrooms to bring in the money they would need to live on now that her father-in-law had died, and his pension with him, would be all over the street within a couple of hours. It was all right for Nancy, Olive thought wryly. She had a husband who brought in a good wage from his work at a factory where they made artificial limbs, close to Barts Hospital, a business that had boomed, thanks to the Great War. Of course, Nancy would have been delighted if she could have persuaded her to sell her house to Nancy's daughter, who was married with a child of her own, Olive knew. But Olive loved the neat little house in Article Row she had inherited from her father-inlaw, and had no intention of selling it.

'So how are you going to get these lodgers then?' Nancy wanted to know, obviously still eager to disapprove of Olive's plan.

'I've thought of putting a notice in the papers, and probably in the bakery, if Mrs Macharios will let me.'

'The bakery? But that's run by them Greek foreigners. We don't want any of them coming living here in Article Row, thank you very much.'

Olive suppressed a small sigh. She liked the Greek family – members of Holborn's Greek Cypriot community – who owned and ran the small bakery two streets away.

'The Macharioses aren't just foreigners, Nancy, they are refugees. And very nice and pleasant they are too. Besides, you won't get any of their girls wanting lodgings, because they are very strict with them and keep them at home until they get married, you know that.'

Nancy gave another sniff. 'Refugees, is it? We've got a sight too many of them already without getting involved in a war with Hitler that will bring in some more.'

Olive kept her peace. She suspected that in the eyes of most of the other inhabitants of Article Row, she herself was something of a 'refugee and a foreigner' since she had not been born and brought up in the area. She personally liked the mix of people living in the small houses that filled the narrow

backstreets of the area: Greeks, Italians, Jewish people, flood tides of the lost and desperate, washed up by the Thames and left to make lives for themselves as best they could, clustered together in their small communities, clinging to the ways of the countries and homes they had left.

Nancy's sharp tongue, though, was a small price to pay for the pleasure of living in Article Row, Olive admitted half an hour later as she poured boiling water onto the tea leaves she had spooned into her warmed teapot. Olive's kitchen was her pride and joy. The upstairs of the house was filled with the heavy late-Victorian furniture that her in-laws had inherited from their parents, but after her mother-in-law's death, Bert had allowed Olive to modernise the kitchen and the front room, even paying for the new gas oven, and the coal-fuelled stove, which not only heated the kitchen but provided hot water as well.

In addition to her gas oven, Olive had a whole wall filled with cupboards just like some she'd seen in the newspaper that had seen on display at the Modern Homes Show. Bert had always had an eye for a bargain and a clever tongue for getting himself a good deal, and he had bartered with a friend of a friend who worked at a wood yard, and who knew someone who could knock up the cupboards for them at a quarter of the price of some fancy factory.

Olive had painted them herself, a really pretty duck-egg blue, which went with the kitchen's cream walls, and the curtains of pale blue, apple green and white gingham. Ever so proud of her kitchen, she was. Her heart swelled with pride every time she walked into it. From the stone sink under the window she could look out into the garden – a long narrow strip, at the bottom of which was the blank brick wall that separated her garden from that of the house beyond. The floor of Olive's kitchen was covered in a good practical mosaic-patterned linoleum that didn't show the dirt. Not that there was any dirt on Olive's kitchen floor – certainly not. She swept and washed it every single day. Very house proud, Olive was, putting her back into whatever task she took on. That was something that, like her domestic skills, she had learned from the grandmother, who had taken her in after her mother had died and her father had then disappeared from her life. Not been very lucky in their dads she and her Tilly hadn't. But she'd been determined right from the start to make sure that her daughter had the very best mum she could possibly have and that she would grow up knowing how loved she was.

That was why, over the years, Olive had gently but determinedly turned down several men who had tried to court her, some perhaps for her own sake, but some, she suspected, because of what they had hoped she would bring them, be it a good housewife and a stepmother for their children or, in one or two cases, the hope of the inheritance she might one day get from her in-laws. Well, that day had now come and if there was one thing that Olive was determined on it was that she wasn't going to have any man coming along and disrupting her routine or her life.

It was ten to five. Tilly would be home soon. Tonight, after they'd had their tea and listened to the news, they could sit down together and talk about her plan to let their spare bedrooms.

'Come on, Tilly, it's finishing time. Thank heavens. I've never known the Lady Almoner be as sharp as she was today. We've got more than enough work on our hands here without her giving us even more,' Clara Smith grumbled as both girls pulled the covers onto their typewriters, the office clock having reached five o'clock.

Clara and Tilly were the most junior members of the Lady Almoner's office staff, Clara being the previous 'dog's body', as she referred to Tilly's role, before Tilly herself had been taken on. Clara was just coming up for nineteen, whilst Tilly was just a few weeks short of her seventeenth birthday.

'We can't blame her for us having to type up all these new lists,' Tilly pointed out patiently. 'The Hospital will need them if there's a war and patients have to be moved.'

'A war. I'm sick and tired of all this talk about a war,' Clara complained, 'and all these things the Government keep making us do, like buying blackout material, having to have gas masks, putting up Anderson shelters, and the like. My dad's only gone and joined the local ARP, and with all the drills we're having to do here anyone would think we were at war already.'

'I know,' Tilly agreed, 'but the Hospital hasn't stopped making plans in case there is a war, no one has, and the Government has said that if Hitler invades Poland, they won't stand for it.'

The girls looked at each other in bleak and sober silence, their shared apprehension showing in their tense expressions.

'They're still calling up the lads for that six months' National Service training,' Clara admitted reluctantly. 'My Harry's had his notification.'

In April the Government had passed a law to make it obligatory for all young men of twenty and twenty-one to undergo six months' military training.

Clara tossed her head so determinedly that her carefully curled brown hair bounced.

'Well, I know one thing,' she announced. 'If there is to be a war, my Harry better look smart and get an engagement ring on my finger before it starts. Him and me are going to the Hammersmith Palais tonight, seeing as it's a Friday. Are you doing anything?'

Tilly shook her head. Her mother considered her too young to go out dancing at places like the Hammersmith Palais, which was where all the boys went to size up the girls.

Five minutes later, on her way down the staircase of St Barts' main hall, Tilly paused as she always did, unable to stop herself from gazing in awe at the paintings. It had been Clara who had told her importantly during her first week at Barts that the Biblical murals had been painted by William Hogarth and were over a hundred and fifty years old. But that was nowhere near as old as the hospital itself. Barts had been the very first hospital to be established in London, though the original buildings had been replaced in the eighteenth century. Tilly marvelled to think how old the hospital was: hundreds of years. She had found the sheer size of the place a bit overwhelming at first, and feared getting lost whenever she was sent to one of the wards to get the details of a patient from the sister there, but she could find her way around with relative ease now.

Tilly felt that she was very lucky to be working at St Barts, which had a special place in the hearts of Londoners, and whose nurses liked to claim was London's very best hospital. And to be working for the Lady Almoner too. There was never a day when Tilly didn't think gratefully of her old headmistress, who had recommended her for the job, her being a second cousin or something of the Lady Almoner. Miss Moss, her headmistress, had come to number 13 Article Row herself to tell them about the job. Tilly's eyes filled with tears now when she remembered the happiness and pride she had seen on her mother's face when Miss Moss had told them that she considered Tilly to be the right kind of person for the job, because she had been a good hard-worker at school, clean and neat, with a sensible head on her shoulders, and Miss Moss knew that her mother had sent her off to learn shorthand and typing after she had left school instead of her having to get a job in a factory. Tilly hadn't really known what a hospital Lady Almoner was but Miss Moss had explained that it was someone who was in charge of the social care of a hospital's patients – everything from finding out who a patient's relatives were, if they came into hospital because of an accident, to making arrangements for a patient to be looked after properly at home once they were discharged. From making up and sending out bills, to dealing with all those charities and insurance companies who provided funds for patients and their health care – running the Almoner's office, Miss Moss had explained, involved an awful lot of administration work, the kind of work for which Tilly, with her shorthand and typing skills, would be ideally suited.

Tilly knew she would never forget how hard her mother had worked to get the money together for her secretarial school lessons, taking in laundry and sometimes even cleaning rooms at the nearby Inns of Court.

Tilly was proud of her mother and she knew that her mother was proud of her. Having pride in yourself and your work was something her mother had taught her from an early age. Tilly and her mother were much closer than many of the girls she had been at school with were to their mothers, but then those girls had had siblings, and . . . and fathers. Tilly caught her breath. She had never known her own father, just as she had never known what it was to be part of a large family.

The hall was busy with comings and goings, nurses in their crisp uniforms walking at that swift pace that nurses had, that was almost as fast as running but without actually doing so, porters pushing patients in wheelchairs, doctors, white coats flapping, heads down, one hand clasping papers, stethoscopes round their necks, Consultants, in their smart suits and their bow ties, and, of course, the patients themselves.

All sorts came to St Barts to be treated, from the poorest to the wealthiest, and Tilly's heart swelled with joy at being part of such a wonderful organisation, with its proud history of caring for those in need.

As she passed under the main entrance to the hospital she hesitated and then turned back to look at the painted head of Henry the Eighth, before joining the teeming mass of Londoners homeward bound after their day's work.

* * *

Tilly wasn't the only one passing through Barts' main hallway to pause and consider the history of the ancient building and all that it stood for.

Sally Johnson paused too, still acutely conscious of her new Barts uniform, with its distinctive high nurse's hat. She still half expected to look down and see that she was wearing her old and dearly familiar Liverpool hospital uniform. She could feel forbidden tears pressing against her eyeballs, her eyes themselves gritty and tired, and not just from the long shift she had just worked. She missed Liverpool, her home city, so very much. She missed the smell of its salt air, the sound of its voices, the humour of its citizens, the familiarity of its places and faces . . . She felt . . . she felt like an outcast, alien, a person cut adrift from all that mattered most to her, but she had had no choice other than to leave. She couldn't have stayed. Not after what had happened. Not after such a betrayal. The very thought of it caused her pain as sharp as a surgeon's scalpel felt, but without the comfort of anaesthetic. That it should have been her best friend who was responsible for her agony only made the pain harder to bear.

Right now, though, instead of thinking about the past, she decided she should be thinking about the present and the future. She had been granted temporary accommodation in a nurses' home close to the hospital, but as she was on only a short-term contract – she hadn't decided yet whether or not she would stay in London – she needed to find lodgings reasonably close to the hospital. She was, though, Sally freely admitted, perhaps too particular about where she was prepared to live. In Liverpool she had lived at home as soon as her initial training had come to an end, and it would take somewhere very special indeed to come up to the high standards of cleanliness and comfort her mother had always maintained. A small spasm of pain tensed Sally's body. Those at home in Liverpool who had known her as a happy, fun-loving, sociable girl who loved going dancing at Liverpool's famous Grafton Ballroom, who was a keen tennis player and who had a wide circle of equally lively young friends of both sexes, would probably hardly recognise that Sally now in the withdrawn unhappy young woman she had become. Sometimes Sally barely recognised herself any more, she admitted, dragging her thoughts away from her own unhappiness to the miserable situation the country now faced.

In the event of the country going to war against Germany plans had already been made for most of the hospital staff and the patients to be moved out of London, partially for safety, and partially to make sure that there would be operating theatres and beds available for the injured should the city be bombed. Only a skeleton staff would remain here in London with Barts doctors and surgeons travelling between the evacuated patients in the country and the hospital here in the city. As a temporary member of Barts' staff, Sally had volunteered to stay in London for the duration of her one-year contract. Right now she felt that she preferred the anonymity of working hard in a busy city where people came and went without their lives really touching, to making close friends.

It wasn't easy, though, to think about making a new life and home for herself here in London when her heart yearned for Liverpool and her home. No, not *her* home any more. Her home, like her

father, now belonged to someone else who had far stronger claim on them than she did, despite all the false protestations and pleas that had been made for her to stay.

Stay? When she had been so betrayed? Now she *was* going to cry . . .

She stared up at the Hogarth scenes as though in doing so she might be able to force back her emotions, oblivious to the fact that she herself was being watched until a quiet male voice beside her remarked, thoughtfully, 'As a surgeon I can never pass this painting without reflecting on Hogarth's skill in understanding the needs and desires of the human race.'

Sally whirled round, dumbstruck with chagrin at the familiar sound of the voice of one of the hospital's most senior consultants, the world-famous plastic surgeon Sir Harold Delf Gillies. Sally recognised his voice so easily because only a matter of days ago she had been on theatre duty when the great man had operated for the benefit of his students on a young child with a hare lip. Now overcome with self-consciousness and the fact that so great a personage should deign to speak to her outside the operating theatre, she could only nod her head.

'There is a great deal to be learned from history,' Sir Harold continued. 'It is said that when Hogarth learned that St Bartholomew's Founders were going to engage an artist from overseas because they could not afford the fees of a British artist, he immediately offered to provide the hospital with two paintings free of cost, thus echoing the same charitable impulse that had led to the hospital coming into being in the first place, and possibly with the same practical eye for the future, knowing that just as the Founders' charitable donations to the hospital would carry their names and their charity into the future, so his paintings would be here for us to see and marvel over. It is a foolish or perhaps overproud man – or woman – who does not sometimes reflect on how history will judge them.'

Knowing the pioneering work Sir Harold had undertaken, Sally could only swallow hard and nod again.

'You have a natural bent for theatre work, Nurse, and I think the temperament for it.'

Sally was still trying to come to terms with the gift of his compliment several minutes after he had gone. Merely to have had the famous surgeon speak to her was more than any well-trained nurse ever expected, never mind being recognised by him and then praised for her ability.

It wasn't so much Sir Harold's praise that lingered on in her thoughts as she made her way to the nurses' home where she was living, though, as much as his comment about how a person might be judged.

Did her father ever worry about how he might be judged? Did her ex-best friend?

'Take in lodgers?' Unwittingly repeating the words of their neighbour, Tilly stared at her mother in astonishment, over the deliciously scented and gently steaming serving of fish pie that Olive had just dished up for her.

Her mother was a wonderful cook, and even though they were C of E, not Catholic, they always had fish on Fridays. Fish pie with lovely creamy mash, parsley sauce and peas was one of Tilly's favourite meals. Now, looking at her mother, her shiny almost black curls – which Tilly had inherited from her, along with her sea-green eyes and pale Celtic skin – caught back in a neat bun, a faint flush warming her skin, Tilly felt the urge to protest that she didn't want them to have any lodgers, and that she had been looking forward to it just being the two of them after the long years of her mother nursing her in-laws.

But before she could do so her mother told her gently, as though she knew what she was feeling, 'We have to, Tilly, love. Bills don't pay themselves, you know, and without your granddad's pension coming in, I'd have to go back to cleaning or taking in washing, and I reckon that I'd be better taking in lodgers than doing that.'

'But it will mean you looking after them, Mum, just like you did with Gran and Granddad.'

Olive shook her head, dislodging a small curl from her bun, which she tucked back behind her ear. At thirty-five, her figure as neat as it had been the day she'd met Tilly's father, she was glad that Tilly had inherited her own looks from the Irish side of her family, and her own trim figure with

them. Though with that kind of beauty, Olive would never want Tilly to use her looks in the cheap kind of way that some young women did. A pretty face could bring trouble on a girl who didn't stick to society's rules. Even here, on respectable Article Row, there had been daughters who had been married with unseemly haste, and babies born 'at seven months' whilst weighing as much as any full-term infant. Not that Olive was in any hurry to see Tilly married. Her own experience as a young wife, a young mother and then a young widow meant she felt it was more important right now that Tilly was equipped with the means of earning her own living because you never knew what the future might hold. Of course, Olive would never share those views with anyone else. Good mothers were expected to want good marriages for their daughters, not financial independence.

'No, what I'm thinking, Tilly, is advertising only for respectable female lodgers, young women who will keep their rooms tidy and look after them.'

'But we've only got two spare bedrooms.'

'And an extra bathroom – don't forget about that. I know I said at the time that I couldn't see why your grandfather wouldn't have his bed moved downstairs to the front parlour, which would have been much easier for me, but now I think having that will help us to get the right kind of young women wanting those attic rooms.'

Olive went over to her daughter, smoothing her curls back off her face and dropping a kiss on her forehead as she told her, 'You'll see, it will all work out for the best.'

'But what if there's a war, Mum, and the lodgers and us get evacuated?'

Olive's expression firmed. 'No one's going to evacuate me from this house, Tilly, I can tell you that, and we don't know yet that there will be a war.'

'But what if there is?' Tilly persisted. 'I'm not a child any more, Mum. I read the papers and listen to the news. There's all that blackout material you bought for us to cover the windows with, and our gas masks. No one's said anything about us handing them back, have they? And boys are still having to do their military training. Clara in the office said only tonight that her Harry is going to be starting his soon. I don't want you worrying about things and not telling me, Mum. I want to share them with you.'

Olive smiled both sadly and proudly, as she stroked the silky darkness of her daughter's hair.

'You're right,' she agreed. 'You aren't a little girl, you're a young woman, Tilly, and if there's to be a war, then we'll deal with whatever it brings us together.'

They smiled at one another, and then Olive added briskly, 'Meanwhile, as soon as we've finished eating and washed up, you and me are going to sit down and write out an advertisement to let the attic rooms. I was thinking that if you could get permission to type it on your typewriter at work then it would look properly businesslike and attract the right kind of lodger. Now eat your fish pie before it goes cold.'

Later that evening, in her bedroom, cold-creaming her face before she went to bed, Olive paused. There would be those Olive knew who would disapprove of her plans and even be opposed to them. A small tremble, part apprehension and part determination, ran through her body. Her father-in-law had been fond of boasting that he had got this house at a good price because of its number – thirteen. Thirteen was lucky for some, he had often said, giving a wink as he added, 'Especially for those who have the good sense to make their own luck.'

Now with the respectable silence of the Row settling round its inhabitants, Olive hoped desperately that it would be lucky for her as well in her new venture. Because if it wasn't then she would face having to sell the house, and she and Tilly would have to take a step down in the world.

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