

ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS

ELLORA'S CAVE
Quickies

Shelley Munro
Unforgettable

An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



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Unforgettable

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UNFORGETTABLE

Shelley Munro

Dedication

For the men and women who have lost their lives while fighting for our freedom.

They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old;

Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.

At the going down of the sun and in the morning

We will remember them.

—Laurence Binyon, 1914

Chapter One

London 1941

There was no way around it.

She'd have to tell her fiancé the truth—that she didn't love him and had only agreed to accept his proposal because she'd buckled under parental pressure. The facts didn't exactly show her in a good light, but it was never too late to stand up for herself, to start as she meant to go on.

All she needed was a spine.

Margo grimaced. Her mother was a formidable opponent. In the past, it had been easier to agree with her—she hadn't needed a backbone of steel.

The clear notes of a trumpet blared, forcing her back to the present. A piano tinkled a bright and gay tune while a husky voice crooned words of bluebirds and Dover. Chatter and laughter, some tinged with desperation, spilled from inside the dancehall. Anything to forget the horrid war for a few short hours. Margo paused on the threshold with her two friends, letting her eyes adjust to the brighter light after the blackout conditions on the street outside.

"Lots of soldiers," June, one of her Women's Auxiliary Air Force or WAAF friends, said after scanning the room. They checked their coats into the cloakroom. "I hope we're not too late and all the good dancers are taken."

"Ooh, flyboys," Caroline said, a gleam of excitement lighting her eyes when she spied the blue uniforms.

Margo laughed. "Thank goodness men aren't rationed. Otherwise we would be in trouble."

"Good men are so scarce, they might as well issue ration coupons. It's all right for you," June said. "You're engaged."

Margo straightened the smart blue jacket of her uniform. Absentmindedly, she twirled the ring on her left hand. Two years ago none of them would have considered attending a dance dressed like this, let alone without an escort. The war had changed everything. It had certainly changed her life.

"Come on, Margo! Stop fiddling with that ring. Let's dance." June's excited smile lit up her plain face, taking it to beautiful.

Engaged. Margo couldn't believe she'd actually said yes to Peter. She didn't love him as a wife should love a husband. What she felt was more friendship, which wasn't the same thing at all. The backs of her eyes stung suddenly and Margo blinked rapidly.

Johnnie.

Her slim frame tensed as Johnnie's image slipped into her mind. His short dark hair with its rebellious curl. His serious brown eyes. She could almost feel his strong muscular body and the way his muscles rippled beneath her hands when they'd stood close and danced. And his smile, the one that made her insides twist and melt and long for his touch, his kiss. Her breath eased out on a depressed sigh, her mind returning to Peter. Blond where Johnnie was dark. As different as the blackout conditions of the night were from the bright sunlight of a summer's day. The engagement had made her parents happy. Peter's parents were ecstatic. Even Peter appeared excited. Margo was having trouble summoning the same joy when it felt as though her life were running out of control. Friendship was no basis for a marriage, despite how happy it had made their parents. Following her friends through the press of bodies, she gave the gold diamond ring one last self-conscious twirl.

Johnnie.

It was still Johnnie.

Margo swallowed. The last time they'd met they'd argued. Bitterly. A shard of pain darted through her chest. This was silly. She'd already shed enough tears over Johnnie. As her parents had pointed out, a relationship between her, Lady Margo Harrington, and the gardener's son wasn't the done thing. They'd made their opinions clear. Gossip

had rippled through the small village on the outskirts of the family estate. She'd embarrassed her parents, and finally after many arguments and tirades, she had bowed to pressure and stuttered out a lie so Johnnie would leave.

"Isn't this smashing?" Caroline's right foot tapped to the beat of the music. "I'm so glad we came."

"Would you like to dance, ladies?"

Two soldiers stood in front of them, tall and handsome in their khaki uniforms, Australians judging from their accents.

Margo gestured at June and Caroline. "You two dance."

June frowned. "Are you sure?"

"She's so pretty she won't be alone for long," one of the Australian's drawled in his cute colonial twang.

Margo bit back a smile at Caroline's theatrical shiver. "Shoo! Go now before one of the other women snaps them up."

Without much more persuasion, her friends moved away onto the dance floor, blending in with the rest of the couples dancing to the words of the popular Vera Lynn number.

Margo moved away from the door, hoping to find a wall to blend in to. She hadn't wanted to come tonight but June and Caroline had refused to let her stay at their lodging alone.

A new song started, one with a faster beat. Her friends stayed out on the floor with their partners.

"Would you like to dance?" An Englishman smiled uncertainly and Margo liked him for his shyness. Johnnie had been hesitant the first time he'd approached her to dance. Brought up to be a lady, she'd inclined her head and accepted despite the impropriety of him asking. Scandalous, according to her mother.

Caroline and June kept saying she needed to stand up to her parents. Maybe they were right, but despite her parents' faults, she loved them. After her older brother had drowned a few years ago in a boating accident down at Cowes, it was understandable they were overprotective. At least she'd managed to leave home and become a WAAF despite their objections.

"Thank you. I'd love to dance."

The man beamed and offered her his arm. They strolled over to join the couples doing a quick step on the highly polished floor. Margo stepped into his arms and made small chat to put the man at ease, just as she'd done with Johnnie. They moved in time to the female singer crooning about love and laughter.

Feeling the weight of a stare, Margo glanced over to her right. Her feet faltered.

"Johnnie," she whispered, positive she was seeing things.

"I beg your pardon?" her partner asked.

Margo blinked several times before risking another glance over to the corner of the room. Disappointment seared her when she spied the face of a handsome stranger.

"I thought I saw someone I knew," she said, forcing a bright smile. "A friend from the village where I live."

"Would you like to go over to see them?" her partner asked.

Margo caught the hint of disappointment in his face. "I was imagining things," she said. "Besides, I'd rather dance."

The soldier's shy smile made her glad and they danced together mostly in silence, although Margo found out he was on leave and his armored brigade was heading off the following week.

The song ended and Margo felt a tap on her shoulder.

"May I have this dance?"

That voice. Margo's breathing stalled. Her heart hammered, thumping so loudly she wondered if she might faint. Slowly, she forced herself to inhale. Hardly daring to hope, Margo spun around to face the male behind her.

Johnnie.

Goodness, it really was Johnnie. Margo swallowed, a hundred thoughts flitting through her mind. There was so much between them, so much hurt and bitterness she was surprised he was even asking her to dance. But so relieved. Remembering her manners, Margo thanked the soldier she'd danced with and turned to Johnnie, eagerly searching his face. He looked thinner, his face etched with lines that hadn't been there when they'd parted. His eyes were the same deep brown that made her melt inside but his smile was absent. And his beautiful dark hair was ruthlessly short. There was no curl left. Margo found herself wanting to say something gay and witty, something to make him smile.

Instead, she remained silent, slipping into his arms and moving close. The heat from his body warmed her through, melting the icy coldness that had encased her since their last harsh words. Margo breathed in his scent, the clean aroma with the faint hint of soap and musk bringing back a rush of memories. Good times. Happier times when they were in love and enjoying spending each snatched moment together.

"How are you, Johnnie?"

Johnnie's hand tightened on her shoulder momentarily before guiding Margo into a turn. "I'm fine," he said finally, his husky voice sending shards of longing skipping through her body. In that instant, she wished things were different.

Johnnie drew Margo closer than propriety allowed, desperate to feel her brushing against him. Since they were in London rather than the village hall, there were no old biddies to disapprove or whisper behind their hands. He'd hardly believed his eyes when he'd seen Margo enter the dancehall. Before he'd had a chance to make his way across the crowded room, a soldier had asked her to dance. Now that he had her in his arms, he wasn't sure what to say, not with memories of their last meeting and the harsh

words they'd hurled at each other still fresh in his mind. So instead of trying to talk, he danced in silence, storing up precious moments for next month when they shipped out to North Africa.

Margo wore her golden hair restrained tightly in a roll at the back of her head with curls framing her face. Instead of her normal stylish dresses, she wore a WAAF uniform, but other than that, she hadn't changed. Her soft blue eyes glowed while her pink lips tempted a man to steal a kiss. Johnnie had stolen a few in his time and he knew how soft her lips were, how good they felt when they pressed to his skin. His groin brushed her hip and his cock reacted in a predictable manner, drawing tight. Johnnie let his breath ease out. God, he couldn't leave the bitter words between them. He had to make things right before he shipped out. The reality of this war meant he might not make it back to England. He didn't want regrets stalking him on the battlefield along with the ever-present fear.

The last bars of the song ended and their footsteps slowed.

Johnnie didn't want to let go. "Come for a walk with me." He paused, waiting for her answer, knowing he was acting with impropriety, but he didn't care.

Margo bit her bottom lip, hesitating before finally nodding. "Yes."

Johnnie didn't give her a chance to change her mind. He grabbed her hand and forced his way through the other dancers. He headed for the door. The first thing he was going to do was kiss her. The urgent need for a kiss throbbed through him. Johnnie wanted to see if his memories matched the sweet taste of her lips. Thoughts of Margo had sustained him through training and the fighting, even though they'd parted badly.

"Wait. Johnnie!"

Johnnie slowed his footsteps, albeit unwillingly. She'd changed her mind. Anger warred with extreme disappointment.

"Can we walk a little more slowly? I can't keep up with you."

"Sorry." Relief brought a smile. Johnnie slowed, his hand tightening on Margo's. Something bit into his palm and he lifted their linked hands to the light.

A flash of gold and the sparkle of a large diamond caught his gaze. Her left hand. Her ring finger.

"You're engaged," he snapped, his tone accusing.

"I-I...yes." Her voice was hesitant, her eyes timid when she finally looked him in the eye.

Johnnie staggered as if he'd taken a severe kick in the ribs. Hell, it felt like it, the pain reverberating in the region of his heart. His breath wheezed out between tight lips. "Who?"

"Peter Wooster."

He dropped Margo's hand, the sense of betrayal like a bullet tearing through his flesh. "You didn't wait long before finding a replacement." Johnnie hated the trace of bitterness that had crept into his voice and shut his mouth before he said anything else.

"It wasn't like that." Margo attempted to take his hand again and like a fool, he let her. Perhaps he should let her rip open his heart again as well. It wouldn't take much.

The music blared and a group of four soldiers and their escorts let out a roar of raucous laughter.

"We can't talk here," she said.

"There's nothing left to say." A man had his pride after all.

"I want to explain," Margo insisted, her golden hair glinting in the light. "I'll just get my coat."

"I checked mine as well." Johnnie pulled his cigarette case from his pocket while they waited for their coats and offered it to Margo. She took one with her slender fingers and after replacing the silver case in his pocket, he pulled out the matching lighter. Both gifts from Margo during happier times.

Johnnie watched avidly when she placed the filter between her pink lips before silently shaking his head. Sad. After offering her a light, Johnnie ripped his gaze away from her delicate mouth. He wanted to taste her so badly.

Margo grasped his hand again and tugged. “We can’t talk in here,” she repeated, after puffing out a perfect smoke ring.

Johnnie silently acquiesced. On seeing her tonight, his second thought was to talk to her to help ease the bitter memories. His first thought had bordered on the carnal. While Margo’s engagement was a shock, he shouldn’t really be surprised. Johnnie allowed Margo to tug him outside into the blackout of wartime London.

They strolled down the footpath, heading away from the dancehall, smoking their cigarettes in silence. The white markings on the curb helped guide them through the darkness along with the faint light from the tissue-shrouded torch he retrieved from his coat pocket. He flicked it off and on and kept it aimed at the ground in accordance with blackout regulations. Gradually, the music faded until all they could hear was the sound of their footsteps. A vehicle drove past, traveling slowly in the darkness. The silence between them lengthened into uncomfortable. Pausing, they both ground out the cigarette stubs before moving on.

A double-decker bus lumbered down the road, crammed with passengers trying to get home. They walked for another ten minutes. The moon crept from behind a cloud, slowly emerging to highlight a bomb-struck Georgian mansion. *A bomber’s moon*, Johnnie thought as he switched off his torch and returned it to his pocket. He slipped his arm around Margo and guided her around the bricks and rubble littering the footpath and part of the road. Glass crunched beneath their shoes with each step. Johnnie caught the scent of lavender that wafted from her skin and fought the urge to lean closer. What he was thinking—that they could have a future—was stupid. He’d only make a fool of himself and leave himself open to more pain.

Without warning, a familiar sound filled the air—the drone of approaching bombers. The air sirens sounded, an eerie piercing whine that alternately rose and fell in pitch. It was becoming a nightly litany.

“Where’s the nearest bomb shelter?” Johnnie demanded. They wouldn’t have time to make it back to the dancehall. Urgently he peered through the moonlit darkness,

attempting to locate somewhere safe for them to wait out the bombing. Searchlights probed the sky, scanning for the planes before they dropped their bombs. The dark silhouettes of barrage balloons, used to stop bombers flying low, were visible in the searchlights.

At his side, Margo glanced both up and down the street, trying to spy safety in the inky black of the night. "Three streets over at the underground station," she said finally.

Johnnie frowned up at the sky before scanning the area for alternatives. "We'll never make it."

"There are houses at the end of this street. Most of the residents have moved away. If we're lucky we might find an empty Anderson shelter."

"How do you know?"

"My friend June used to live near here. Her parents moved to the country to live with relations."

Johnnie grasped her hand, urging Margo to move faster while anxiously searching their surroundings.

The bombers and their escorts seemed to come closer and closer. A bomb dropped, the whistle when it fell making the hair at the back of Johnnie's neck prickle in alarm. The flicker of a fire lit the night, the acrid stench of smoke strong on the air. Incendiary bombs. They were close. Too close. He increased his speed, desperate to get them both to a safe place.

"Over there," Margo said, her words hoarse and barely discernable. Her hand trembled in his but thankfully she kept her head and didn't panic.

Johnnie glanced in the direction she pointed and made out the dim outline of a shelter. The Anderson, named after its inventor Sir John Anderson, stood to the side of a fully intact brick bungalow. Now that his eyes were more accustomed to the night, he picked out a pot of marigolds and another of sweet william standing beside the Anderson. When they neared, he caught a whiff of their sweet scent. Rows of carrots and onions grew along the roof while marrows, potatoes and a pungent mint plant

grew on the sides. The healthy plants made Johnnie wonder if the owner occupied the shelter. Hell, he hoped not. Perhaps the near miss of a previous bombing had scared them away since one wall was all that remained of the neighboring building. Johnnie stopped in front of the shelter, praying it was empty and not damp or so flooded it was unusable.

He tapped on the metallic doorway after squeezing past the earth-filled boxes that protected the entrance. "Hello?" His breath eased out in relief when there was no reply. He eased the door cover away and shone his torch briefly before flicking it off and slipping it into his coat pocket. "In here. It's empty." He ducked his head inside before turning back to Margo. "It's not too damp."

Anderson shelters were government issue and built to withstand almost everything except a direct hit. Johnnie hoped this one would save their lives.

A bomb hit a few streets over, the whine and subsequent explosion on impact sent a shudder of horror through him. Another fire burned in the distance, brightening the sky. His heart pounded and a fine film of sweat broke out on his forehead. He tried not to think about the comrades who had fallen during the height of battle or the piece of shrapnel that had ripped a gouge in his arm. He really did, but the cries and pained moans of his friends, the coppery stench of blood, the pungent smell of guns firing continuously and the wet, muddy uncomfortable foxholes flashed through his mind unbidden. A jagged throb sprang to life in his left biceps, as if the injury had just occurred. Johnnie trembled, his jaw clenched tightly to bite back his pained moan. He'd been one of the lucky ones — one of the men who had returned home.

Johnnie swallowed, shrugged off the flashback. "Hurry, Margo. Before another one hits." Already the *ack-ack* roar from the antiaircraft guns thundered through the night and a third fire several streets over illuminated the way for the bomber pilots. "Quick."

Margo slipped past him in a wave of lavender and he crawled in after her, covering the entrance and shutting out the nightmare scene outside before standing to his full height. At their center point Andersons were six feet high, just high enough to give him

an inch of clearance, and large enough for up to six people at a tight squeeze. The interior of the shelter was inky black and he fumbled for his torch. It slipped from his trembling hand, rolling away before he could catch it. Johnnie clenched his fingers tightly, breathing deeply before he searched the floor. The interior smelled musty and a little damp. A blast of chilly air from near the entrance nipped at his face, bringing a shiver.

"Ouch!"

"Are you all right?" Johnnie sought reassurance since he couldn't see her. He wanted to draw her close and hug her. He wanted to kiss her. He wanted confirmation he was alive.

"Apart from a ladder in my last good pair of silk stockings and the bump on my head," Margo said. "Do you think there will be some candles somewhere? I hate the dark."

Johnnie remembered. He remembered a lot of things about Margo. Her silky skin. The shape of her breasts beneath his hands and how soft they felt when they'd cuddled and kissed. His cock reared, pressing against his fly when carnal hunger sluiced through him in a breath-stealing wave.

"I dropped my torch. I'll find it in a jiffy." After forcing out the hoarse, panicked words, Johnnie groped around the damp floor and found nothing. Bloody thing must have rolled. He reached farther over to his right, his hand connecting with a warm feminine leg. Johnnie froze before his brain kicked in and he jerked his hand away. "Sorry." Her warmth made him realize what he'd missed since she'd told him they couldn't see each other again. A trace of bitterness crept out before he had time to halt it. "Why?"

Margo gasped, the small sound loud in the confined space. She edged away from the husky voice until a low, narrow bed halted her retreat. Her legs gave out and she sat, her heart aching with the pain of the day they'd said goodbye. She knew what he

wanted to know. "I was devastated when we broke up." It was nothing less than the truth.

"Could have fooled me."

Johnnie wasn't going to make this easy. Margo hesitated, closing her eyes briefly. She understood his bitterness because she hadn't handled the breakup well, hadn't told him the truth. She'd let him believe there was someone else. Guilt nipped at her. The coward's way. Margo sighed. The feelings hadn't gone or faded. If anything, her love for him was stronger. Enduring. When he'd taken her into his arms back at the dance, it had been like walking back into the past, the good times.

Margo swallowed, wondering what to say. Johnnie's breathing was soft and rapid, his masculine scent bringing memories. Good memories. Bad memories. She shivered violently when the whistle of another bomb sounded, much closer this time. The continual noise, the screeching whistles and explosions brought fear stalking. She started at a particularly loud explosion. Thank goodness she was with Johnnie.

"Are you cold?" Johnnie didn't wait for an answer but sat on the bed and drew her close, fitting her against his chest and wrapping his arms around her. She had no idea how he knew where she was but was so glad of his heat, the strong life-confirming beat of his heart beneath her cheek. His touch brought hope that they'd survive the night.

"That better?" he whispered.

Actually, no. It was ten times worse. His breath whispered across her temple, teasing tendrils of her hair. Margo shivered again and Johnnie ran his hands up and down her arms. Even through the cloth of her uniform tiny licks of heat shimmied over her body. His warm hand cupped her hip. It was intimate, just as she'd dreamed it would be—a taste of how it would feel when their naked bodies rubbed against each other. Her breath caught as her nipples drew tight, pressing painfully against the cups of her brassiere. Prickly heat thrummed low in her belly and she shifted a fraction, attempting to ease the tension. Her buttocks tilted back but that wasn't any more comfortable since something prodded her.

Johnnie groaned. "Keep still," he muttered, grasping her hipbone a little more tightly and easing away from her at the same time. "Damn, where is that torch?"

Blood pooled in her cheeks along with enlightenment. "Sorry. I...does it hurt?"

"What kind of question is that? Ah, here it is."

Clear relief tinged his voice. Margo frowned. He didn't want her to touch him.

He flicked the torch on, illuminating the interior of the small shelter. Aside from the bed they were sitting on, which took up much of the space, there were two wooden chairs. Spare blankets sat in a tidy pile on top of the closest chair. A bucket sat near the entrance, no doubt used as an emergency toilet facility. At the far end a box sat atop a wooden stool. Margo presumed the owners kept a few basic nonperishable food supplies in there since the outside advertised shredded wheat. She caught the flicker of relief on Johnnie's face when he was able to move along the bed to grab the candles sitting at the far end near the box she thought contained food. It brought a pang of pain, a cruel twist to her heart.

After they'd announced their engagement, Peter had wanted to take things further. There was a war on, he had explained. None of them knew what might happen. Something had made Margo balk at becoming intimate with Peter. Maybe it was the fact it was the only thing she had any control over. The speed of their engagement and the ensuing wedding plans were happening so fast they were making her dizzy. With Peter, resisting temptation was easy, but now, alone in the shelter with Johnnie, she wanted to explore, to take liberties of her own.

"I..." Margo trailed off in confusion. She still had feelings for Johnnie. She could admit it to herself. Although Peter was nice, spending time with him was more like being with a brother. Half an hour alone with Johnnie had shown her the difference. Heat pooled in her face. She wanted to strip off his clothes and explore every inch of skin revealed.

"No, it doesn't hurt," Johnnie growled. Still sitting, he picked up the box of matches that sat near the candles. A flame flared bright, driving away more of the shadows

when he lit one of the candles. "It's uncomfortable, but it's not going to kill me. Any man who feeds you that line is only after one thing." Johnnie's gritty voice was full of distaste. Margo sighed. He was an honorable man, loyal to his friends and honest.

Above them the roar of aircraft and the whistle of falling bombs continued. "They sound closer, almost overhead." Worry tinged Johnnie's voice. Concern for her and their situation. It warmed Margo. Impulsively, she slipped the engagement ring from her finger and pushed it deep into her pocket. It was something she should have done long ago.

An explosion sounded nearby, close enough to make the ground shudder. Terror backed up Margo's throat and with a cry, she closed the distance between them, burrowing closer to Johnnie's chest, drawing from his strength.

"It's okay," he murmured, cupping her head with one hand. Tension of a different kind immediately hit Margo. Going with instinct, she pressed her lips to his neck. He tasted salty and she caught a hint of his shaving soap. "Margo." His hand gripped her shoulder painfully tight. "Don't."

"Why not?" Her voice sounded breathless—in fact, she didn't seem like herself at all. If they were going to die tonight, at least she'd know love.

Chapter Two

Johnnie shuddered, a soft groan emerging from between his clenched teeth. His eyes were haunted. "Because I don't have a scrap of willpower when it comes to you. If you kiss me again..."

Margo's eyes widened in understanding. She leaned closer and pressed her mouth to his neck again. He swallowed, his throat working at the touch of her lips. "You don't need any willpower," she whispered, pulling back to look him straight in the eye.

The whoosh of a bomb covered the pounding of her heart. Margo jumped in fright, giving a shaky laugh when the explosive noise receded. The ground beneath them shook and a nearby building tumbled, the crash of falling bricks and mortar making her start again. Something solid thumped into the side of the shelter, the earth and plants surrounding the sides and roof absorbing most of the impact. Her teeth bit into her bottom lip to stem her panicked cry. If anything, the close call solidified her decision. Johnnie could do what he wanted and she'd do as she dreamed.

"Kiss me, Johnnie." Margo released her abused lip and ran her tongue over it, noting Johnnie watched avidly. "Please kiss me."

"You're engaged," he said in a hoarse voice.

In answer, she took his hand in hers, showing him without words that she'd removed the ring.

"Taking off the ring doesn't make it right," Johnnie said, but he looked torn, his anguish tugging at her conscience.

It was the right thing to do. Especially since she thought about Johnnie all the time, had cried when she'd learned he'd joined the army and left to fight. A part of her had died each time she read the names of casualties published in the paper, the names of men in the same division as Johnnie. She'd prayed every night before she went to bed

that Johnnie would come home. "I don't love Peter. I like him but I don't love him. I'd already decided to call off the engagement."

"What about your mother?"

Margo flinched. The man knew how to wound, to cut deep. Her mother was going to be a big problem. A sick sensation danced around the pit of her stomach just from thinking about facing her mother. Margo inhaled sharply and lifted her head so her chin jutted up with determination. "I am going to find a backbone," she said.

"Good luck with that. It didn't work last time."

A film of tears suddenly covered her eyes. "I didn't try hard enough last time."

"Margo, please don't cry."

"I'm not." She sniffed and before she knew it, the tears overflowed. "There wasn't another man, Johnnie. There's never been anyone else I cared about, not the same way I care for you."

"Margo." Her name was a groan of pain mixed with the old humor.

Margo sniffed again and scrubbed a hand over her damp face. At least her tears had a positive result. Johnnie pulled her into his arms and held tightly while murmuring nonsensical things about the stupid war. When she stopped crying, Johnnie placed a gentle hand under Margo's chin and raised her head so he could look at her. "You're still beautiful even though you've been crying." He sealed the words with a slow, heart-stirring kiss and she knew then he'd changed his mind. Somehow, she'd said the right words, the right things. They were going to make love.

Instead of fright taking hold, her mind danced with excitement. Her arms crept around his neck and she let every scrap of love she felt for Johnnie flow into the kiss. Their lips clung together before he nuzzled and sucked at her mouth, kindling a slow-burning fire inside. She melted into him, pliant and open to his desires, loving the mastery of him, the way he held her so gently yet quivered with leashed power. Their kiss moved from sweet and tender to hot and carnal. The pressure of his lips was harder, his tongue sweeping inside her mouth. Margo mimicked his actions, glorying in

the old familiarity of his kiss. They explored each other's mouths with lips and tongue, the contrasting hardness and softness until the need to breathe finally drew them apart.

Margo felt much warmer, the chill in the shelter no longer biting at her hands and legs. Her heart pounded faster than normal while she was acutely conscious of her body and the drape of her clothes.

"Are you sure?" he asked. "I don't have any gumboots. Condoms," he added when he noticed Margo's confusion. "What if – ?"

"I want this, Johnnie. More than anything in the world." Besides, the increasing din outside told her this particular bombing raid would be an extended one. If they survived, they wouldn't leave the shelter until the morning. Besides, she loved Johnnie. Margo shied away from the idea that an impending baby would help her cause. Her mother would have to agree to their marriage if she were pregnant. She might not like it but she'd have to live with it.

Coward.

Margo squeezed her eyes shut for an instant before opening them again. If they made it through the night, the first thing she'd do was visit her parents. A baby would be a convenient trap, but always at the back of her mind she'd wonder if Johnnie had really loved her or if he had merely done the right thing. She loved Johnnie and wanted his love in return. If he didn't love her...

Johnnie searched her face and obviously saw what he was looking for. He shrugged off his khaki coat, uniform jacket and shirt and tossed them aside, leaving his chest bare. His lightly tanned skin gleamed in the candlelight.

"You're beautiful." Margo pressed a kiss to the middle of his chest, drawing his scent deep into her lungs. She ran her fingers across his warm skin and toyed with a flat masculine nipple, worrying it into a stiff point. Her gaze drifted across a ragged scar on his biceps. "What happened to your arm?"

"Caught shrapnel. I was lucky." His tone said he didn't want to discuss it. "You've seen me before when we went swimming down at the waterhole."

"Not the same. I wasn't allowed to touch then. I wanted to touch so badly, to discover if your skin was as silky as it seemed. She ran her hands over pectoral muscles and lower to skim his rib cage and belly. His skin burned fiery hot beneath her fingertips and his heart thudded just as fast as hers.

"Why don't you take off some of your clothes?"

"Yes," she sighed. She wanted him to touch her intimately, to brand her flesh with his lips, his hands and his cock. Margo shuddered at the thought, her nipples pebbling to stiff points. Her skin prickled all over and pressure seemed to gather between her legs.

Johnnie helped her remove her coat and tossed it on a chair. She unfastened her jacket with trembling fingers that didn't seem to want to work.

"Let me," he whispered.

Margo let her hands drop to her sides and waited for Johnnie to deal with her clothing. She half expected him to hurry like the man her friend Caroline had slept with a few weeks ago. He didn't. Flecks of gold shone in his eyes while he slowly unfastened one button after the other. His hands were warm through the thin blouse she wore beneath her jacket. Johnnie peeled the jacket away and threw it on the chair with her coat. Next her blouse. He undid the delicate buttons carefully, opening the shirt until her plain white brassiere showed. Pausing, he traced the edge of one cup with his finger, dipping down into her cleavage. The intimate touch sent an electrical current surging through her body, so intense a gasp whispered from between her lips. She wanted more. Once before she'd let him touch her breasts. The memory of it rushed through her now, bringing a needy throb and moisture between her legs.

"More. Please, Johnnie. Give me more."

"Since you asked so nicely." Instead of removing her shirt, he dipped his head and used his tongue to follow the same path his fingers had taken. The wet rasp of his tongue brought a moan. It surged up her throat from deep in her chest. This...it was so intimate, so right.

He reached behind her back and flicked the closure to her brassiere. It popped open, letting her breasts spill forward and allowing Johnnie to peel the cups away. For an instant Margo thought about how easily he'd flicked open the closure on her brassiere. A hint of jealousy came before he distracted her with his mouth. He sucked gently on the fullness of one breast, nipping and soothing the sting with the flat of his tongue.

He lifted his head and smiled. "Last chance to say no. I don't want you to have regrets."

Regrets? Outside, the continued assault of the bombs rained down on the city. The noise surged and retreated like waves at the Brighton seaside. Regrets? No, she didn't have any regrets, and she wasn't about to say no. Margo struggled to sit upright and then stood. She kicked off her shoes and shrugged out of her blouse and brassiere. The zipper at the back of her skirt slid down easily. She wriggled her hips and the navy blue skirt slipped down her legs, leaving her bare apart from her white panties, her garter belt and stockings. Slowly she unclipped her stockings and rolled them down her legs one at the time, conscious of Johnnie watching avidly the entire time. Finally she stood proudly in front of him, trying to hide the shimmer of nerves. This was what she wanted. *Johnnie*.

"You're beautiful. I never imagined." A grin flashed across his face, lighting up his eyes for an instant before fading into serious. "No, I did picture you, but the reality is far better." He stood and reached out to cup the weight of one breast in his hand. "I want to see you. All of you. Take off your panties for me."

Margo hesitated briefly, her gaze shooting to meet his. A test. It was a test. He flicked his fingers over her nipple, sending a frisson of excitement racing from her breast to her...her... Golly, she might as well say it. Her pussy.

"Margo?"

Heat raced to her cheeks, intensifying when he slipped his hand down, sliding it across her belly. He traced along the elastic band of her panties while he waited for her answer.

Margo sucked in her stomach, plucked up her courage, unfastened her garter belt and whisked her panties off before she could change her mind. She scooped up the silky lingerie and set it on the chair with the rest of her clothes before turning back to face Johnnie.

"Beautiful. I knew it." The awe in his voice brought confidence along with a smile. The whine of a bomb overhead made the smile fade. Reality intruded again. She shivered, suddenly feeling the cold and damp.

"You're cold," Johnnie murmured. "The bed has blankets on it. Let me warm you." But instead of tugging back the blankets, he kissed her, his lips moving slowly across hers. Tiny kisses, tantalizingly brief, followed by the slow slide of his tongue. Her breasts brushed against his hard chest. Margo sucked in a breath and wondered why she hadn't done this before. His touch, his gentleness, made her feel so alive, feel so feminine, and yet so aware of the danger.

Margo slipped her hands around his neck and let one drift down his back, savoring the smooth, warm skin beneath her fingertips. Her hands cupped his butt and she drew him closer so his cloth-covered erection brushed against her naked skin. "Johnnie."

Johnnie could hardly believe he was alone with Margo and about to make love to her. It was all his dreams come true. The sensation of her rubbing against him brought a groan. It would feel even better when he removed his trousers and underwear. "Lie down." Johnnie let go of Margo to tug aside the blankets on the bed. She sat then stretched out on the narrow bed. Johnnie wondered whether he should undress now or wait. It wouldn't do to frighten her. Hell, he didn't think he could take it if she changed her mind now. He needed her so badly. Her tenderness. Her softness. After the things he'd seen... Johnnie shrugged away the thought before he went into flashback. It happened a lot and he just coped the best way he could.

After a brief and silent debate over clothes or no clothes, he stooped to remove his boots and socks. Seconds later he'd removed the rest of his clothes. He thought about blowing out the candle but selfishly he wanted to take away visual memories along with the rest. He grinned briefly because he caught the startled expression on her face when she'd scanned his naked body, his erection. Johnnie joined Margo on the bed. It was a tight squeeze. Call it cozy, but it was also a slice of heaven.

Her arms swept around him and she shifted slightly to give him more room. "You're so soft and smell like flowers," he whispered. It was much better than the stench of death and the sweat of terrified soldiers. He dipped his head to smell her hair. Anything to block the memories. Johnnie tugged the blankets over them and kissed her. There had been a few women since Margo, women he'd slept with, but they'd never made him feel this way – like it was all new.

"Can I touch you?"

"Yes," he said, after nibbling at the tender skin of her neck.

Margo bit her lip. She glanced at him before averting her gaze. If he weren't mistaken, she'd blushed. "Anywhere?"

"Ah." Battling to hide his amusement, he took her hand and pressed it to his engorged erection. Her hand trembled, brushing the sensitive head and causing a predictable reaction from his cock. It jumped and she jerked her hand away in surprise. "Curl your hand around my cock," he whispered. He'd let her explore in her own time, even if it killed him.

"It feels so smooth and warm." Margo took him at his word and ran her hand along his rigid length. Her timid movements were more arousing than those of an experienced lover. The slow slide of her hand over the tip of his cock made his heart quicken, his balls pull tight.

"Hold my cock firmly and move your hand," he murmured. His eyes almost crossed at the flare of pleasure when she followed his instructions. Johnnie moved closer so he trapped her hand between their bodies and she had to stop the exquisite

torture. He kissed her tenderly, carefully, wanting to arouse her so she hungered as much as he, so she enjoyed her first experience.

Margo wasn't cold any longer. Her skin burned. Everywhere Johnnie touched her burned. And he'd let her touch him. She shivered at the sensation of his cock digging into her belly. She knew all the mechanics, and thanks to Caroline and June, she knew some of the smaller details that her mother had skirted when she had discussed men and women and babies in the same sentence.

Johnnie moved down the bed, sliding against her body. The friction sent a primitive throb through her veins. She stirred restlessly. More. She needed much more. Then he cupped one breast in his hand. This time he took her nipple into his mouth and drew hard and deep while teasing her other nipple with his fingers. The twin sensation was incredible, bringing a gush of dampness between her legs. It was almost as if a gossamer cord connected her breasts to her pussy. Each tug of his mouth at her breast brought a prickle of intense pleasure. She kissed him, his mouth, his eyelids, his neck, luxuriating in spending time with him and being able to touch as she wanted. This close to him, she noticed the shadows beneath his eyes, as if he hadn't been sleeping well. It made her want to know what he'd been doing while they'd been apart, but she didn't ask. She didn't want to know about other women. Instead, Margo delighted in the abrasive stubble beneath her fingers and lips. She inhaled his familiar scent and ran her hands through his short dark hair while mourning the loss of his beautiful curls.

When Johnnie let go of her nipple with an audible pop, she opened her mouth to protest.

"Patience," he said in a husky voice, seeming to sense what she was going to say. He shuffled even farther down the bed, his warm breath drifting across her stomach. His tongue flickered out and dipped into her bellybutton.

"I don't want to be patient," Margo said. "It feels like I've waited forever."

"Are you nervous?"

"Are you?"

Johnnie sighed, glancing up at her with a frown on his face. "I don't want to hurt you."

"You won't. You're my friend," Margo said, guessing he didn't mean pain in the physical way. It was nothing less than the truth. They might have hurt each other and she'd lied to him, telling him there was another man, but she knew he'd never use her in a dishonorable manner. No matter what her mother tried to tell her, Johnnie bore a streak of integrity a mile wide.

"I don't want you to have regrets."

"Shut up and kiss me," Margo said, biting back a smile. Surely that was meant to be her line?

Johnnie hesitated, as if he were arguing with himself before pressing a kiss a few inches below her bellybutton.

"Spread your legs for me," he said in a husky voice.

Another test. Margo didn't hesitate, anticipation thrumming through her body. She shifted on the bed, her heart thudding while she waited for his next move.

Johnnie pressed kisses to her upper thighs, the outside and the tender skin of her inner thighs. He smoothed his hand down over her pelvic bone, his fingers combing through her pubic hair. She could hardly believe she was allowing him to touch her this way, yet it didn't seem wrong. Margo tensed when his finger trailed lower still with a gentle butterfly stroke that barely touched her flesh. An intense burst of heat shot through her even at that slight touch. She gasped when his stubble-covered cheek chafed her thigh. The surge of sensation was like holding her hand over a naked flame. He slid his finger through her moist folds, bringing a tremble. His touch made her greedy. It made her want to touch him in return. Margo ran her hand over Johnnie's head, ruffling his short spiky hair and holding him close to her body.

"That's it, sweetheart."

Margo's heart swelled. He hadn't called her sweetheart for a long time.

Johnnie slid his hands under her backside and lifted her hips.

“What—?”

Johnnie lowered his mouth and licked delicate nether lips. He licked the moisture that had pooled between her legs.

“Ooh,” Margo whispered. It was wicked. Wonderful.

“Should I stop?”

“No,” Margo wailed. Her breasts were swollen and heavy while tension clawed at her insides.

Johnnie chuckled, the burst of air hitting her core. Margo tensed at the surge of pleasure. He licked her again with long, luscious strokes of his tongue, driving her higher and higher. She didn’t know whether to hold still or to move. Instead, she panted, breathing hard when he licked across the sensitive nub hidden in her folds. He repeated the move and suddenly hot pleasure spilled over. She gasped, the waves rippling through her pussy.

“Oh Johnnie,” she whispered when he lifted his head.

“Did you like that?” Johnnie moved up the bed to kiss her. Her fingers curled around his shoulders as he feasted on her mouth. She tasted her juices on his lips and felt his erection, rigid and trapped beneath their bodies. Finally he lifted his head and gazed down at her. His cheeks appeared flushed while his eyes glinted with gold. Her heart did a distinct flip-flop and knocked against her ribs when he suddenly rolled her and she found herself on his chest looking down at his handsome face.

“Yes, I liked that,” Margo said. “I liked it very much.” She remembered her mother talking about making love and compared it to her friend Caroline rhapsodizing about being intimate with a man. Now she knew which version to believe.

“I’m glad,” Johnnie said, and he kissed her again, delving into her mouth, nibbling at her lips and teasing her into laughter. He fondled her body with luxurious strokes, running his hands down her back and over her bottom. He suckled at her breasts until

she was breathless and the gossamer cord tugged at her pussy again. Margo rocked against him, the tension he'd released before rising again and wetness surging between her legs.

Johnnie pushed his thigh between hers and wordlessly wedged her thighs apart. Margo nibbled at the side of his neck and sucked lightly, reveling in the groan she wrenched from his throat.

"God, Margo." He nuzzled at the softness of her breast and flicked one nipple with his tongue. He glanced up at her, his eyes shimmering with unspoken words. Margo swallowed the sudden lump that clogged her throat. Did he still love her? He had once, but he was so different now. He didn't laugh and joke like he used to. War had changed him.

War had changed them all.

Johnnie rolled her over again and positioned himself between her legs, his cock poised at her entrance. He pushed inside her pussy, pausing to kiss her again. "I'll make sure I go slowly," he promised.

Margo smiled, her inhalations deep and a trifle unsteady. He stretched her, making her very aware of his size. There was a sense of discomfort. He shifted, a subtle movement that pushed him deeper. The discomfort tipped over into pain. Margo gasped, a sharp sound that echoed inside the shelter.

Johnnie paused. "Are you okay?"

"Yes." Margo's reply held uncertainty and a trace of worry. But no matter what the pain, she wasn't going to stop. She wanted to fly again, and this time she wanted to soar with Johnnie. "Please, don't stop."

Johnnie sought her gaze and held it. She caught the flare of desire in his eyes and wanted to continue more than ever. He dipped his head and Margo lifted a hand to smooth her fingers over the sensuous curves of his lower lip. His eyes gleamed brighter, full of laughter before he opened his mouth and sucked her finger inside. He rasped his tongue across her fingertip. Desire, liquid and molten shot through her so quickly her

head whirled. As quickly as he'd sucked her finger into his mouth, he released it to nip at her earlobe, taking her mind off the mechanics of sex until he pushed a little deeper.

He pulled back and the tight sensation faded. Margo gulped, breathing hard, unwilling to tell him to stop but worried about him continuing.

"Are you sure this will work?"

Johnnie let out a chuckle that ended more like a groan. He kissed her tenderly, stroking his tongue into her mouth. At the same time, he tugged and pinched her nipple, distracting her from the ache in her pussy. Margo arched her back, the sensations fizzing through her like sparkling lemonade. Johnnie kept kissing her until he filled her senses—all of them. She tasted his mouth, trembled at the heat emanating from his body. It was like coming home even though making love to him was uncharted territory. Without warning he thrust hard. The fullness ratcheted up again into pain. Johnnie stilled but never stopped kissing her. Gradually the pain receded and she relaxed a fraction. Johnnie withdrew and thrust into her pussy again. The aches disappeared until all she felt was the sense of fullness and his leashed power when he stroked smoothly into her.

Margo arched upward since that seemed to intensify the sizzle of pleasure. Oh yes. She sighed while Johnnie groaned against her neck, his breath warm and moist. He thrust again, increasing his pace until he pounded into her body. Margo wrapped her arms around him and held tight. Johnnie thrust and froze, fully impaled inside her body. She felt the pulse of his cock deep inside her pussy. Tension still thrummed between her legs and her heart thudded. It didn't matter. She was exactly where she wanted to be—with Johnnie.

"Margo," Johnnie whispered. His eyelashes lowered, screening his expression. Tension of a new sort filled the shelter. Did he think she had regrets? *Never*. "Sorry. I couldn't hold on any longer."

Margo stared, her gaze gliding over his face, his lean cheeks and tight mouth. His heartfelt words didn't stack up against anything Caroline had said. Her friend had told

her that sometimes she didn't climax at all and the whole event was a big yawn. "It doesn't matter."

"It matters." He reached between them and slid his fingers through her moist folds. Margo flinched at the squelching sound but Johnnie ignored it and stroked across her clitoris. The blood rushed through her veins and she bit back a cry as her climax broke over her. She soared again, her womb clenching and tightening around Johnnie's cock.

Gradually she relaxed, melting in the hard bunk in a boneless heap. Smiling, she touched Johnnie's cheek in a tender gesture. "That was amazing."

"Good." He started to speak and hesitated.

A bomb exploded nearby, bringing the battle raging outside back into focus. The drone of the approaching bombers and the whistle of the bombs when they landed continued unabated. In the morning when they left the shelter, they'd have to pick their way through the debris and dodge bombs that hadn't exploded on impact. The smells were the worst. The previous week warehouse fires had raged out of control for hours, pungent fumes from paint and the sweet aroma of tea filling the air.

Margo tensed for an instant before relaxing. There was nothing they could do. They'd just have to stay here in the shelter and wait things out. It could have been worse she supposed. She might have been stuck with the girls from her digs. The way they screamed and shrieked through each bombing, Margo was glad she was here with Johnnie.

"I don't want you to have regrets." Johnnie pulled out of her and brushed a loose tendril of blonde hair away from her face. "Can I take the pins out of your hair?"

"Now that you mention it, there are pins digging into my scalp." Margo chewed on her bottom lip, wishing they could stay joined for longer. They were both hot and a little sweaty but it didn't matter. The sense of closeness was what she craved. She hadn't thought she'd ever see Johnnie again, let alone become intimate with him.

Johnnie slipped his fingers through the silky golden strands and inhaled deeply, taking the lavender scent into his memory, something good to pull out when he

returned to war. He wondered if she regretted making love with him. She hadn't answered him, but then she hadn't run off screaming into the night. Perhaps he'd stop worrying and just enjoy the moment.

One by one, he pulled out the bobby pins and unrolled her hair from its victory roll style, lightly massaging her scalp. Her contented purr told him how much she was enjoying his attentions when in truth he was doing it for himself. He could hardly believe they'd made love. Hell, he loved this woman. Walking away was going to be difficult. After removing the last clip and setting them carefully aside, he spread her hair around her head like a halo. He drew her against his chest, holding her tight and savoring the slice of normalcy.

The assault of bombers kept coming in a never-ending wave. Margo trembled and he ran a soothing hand down her naked back. She shivered again but this time he didn't think it was fear. Johnnie cupped her buttocks, tugging her closer to his groin. Just the thought of having her again sent blood crowding into his cock. Johnnie held back a groan of pure pleasure when the tip of his cock brushed her hipbone. God, he wanted to love her again. Johnnie brushed a kiss across her shoulder while wondering if Margo would let him. He ran his hand across the soft curve of her buttocks and ran his finger between them. How far would she let him go? She squirmed a little but didn't argue or shove him away in disgust. He rubbed his finger across the puckered rosette of her anus.

Ah, that got a reaction. He repeated the move.

"Johnnie?"

"Hmmm?" He brushed his finger lower still, pressing on the tender nerve endings. She was so wet, her flesh moist and easing the slide of his finger.

"I'd like to touch you."

Johnnie paused, her request surprising a grin out of him. He hadn't expected her to admit to as much curiosity. Hell, he'd half expected screams and sobs even though she'd said this was what she wanted. But then Margo had never behaved the way he

expected. From the moment she'd said yes to his stammered request to dance, she'd mystified him. His smile widened. He flopped over and lay flat on the narrow bed. He placed his hands under his head like a pillow. "Your turn."

"Really? Without waiting for his answer, she clambered on top of him, straddling his body. She leaned over him, dangling her breasts in front of him. He took advantage, glorying in her sharp intake of breath when he suckled her. One hand crept from beneath his head to touch the silky skin of her bare hip. Her scent, her softness, and the trail of her fingers across his chest sent an intense burst of heat straight to his cock. The hard ridge pressed into her upper thigh leaving a wet mark on her pale skin. Every muscle in his body contracted when she lightly grasped him in her hand.

"Move your hand," he croaked. "Just like I showed you before."

She fisted her hand and followed his instructions exactly. "Like this?"

"Yeah." Johnnie swallowed, desperate to love her again. He smoothed a hand over her inner thigh and let his fingers wander higher. He probed her moist folds and teased her clitoris until she made a keening sound. "Guide my cock inside you," he whispered.

Her moves were cautious and a little clumsy, but gradually she positioned herself and sank slowly down onto his cock. Her blue eyes flickered closed and her head tipped back. Johnnie grasped the sweet dip of her waist and pushed upward until he buried himself in her hot, wet core.

"Are you okay?" he asked.

"Yes." Her wide blue eyes regarded him closely. "What do I do now?"

"Move up and down," he said, trying not to laugh. He failed and actually chuckled out loud. Sex had never been like this before – fun and containing laughter.

Margo's chin lifted and a flicker of humor shone in her eyes. "Are you laughing at me?"

"Never," he said in a solemn voice.

A screaming whistle filled the air, wiping the levity from them both, reminding them of the danger, the chance of death.

Margo gritted her teeth and Johnnie gripped both hips, silently directing her to move up and down, riding his cock. Her pussy clasped tightly to his dick, her juices easing his way. Johnnie let his hands slip to her backside and watched her through narrowed eyes, fighting to contain the pleasure and to make it last. She rose and fell, swaying slightly, her creamy breasts bouncing and attracting his attention. Johnnie pinched one nipple between his fingers, extracting a gasp. He grinned until she rose and fell on his cock again. An ache sprang to life in his balls and when she clasped him so sweetly, gripping him tightly, he thought he might lose it.

“Touch yourself, sweetheart.” When she hesitated, he took her hand and showed her. She rocked, setting up a steady and seductive rhythm. His mouth felt dry, his heart thudded while his entire body was on fire. She looked so beautiful swaying above him. Sexy. It was hard to believe they were actually together.

Johnnie drew a breath, deep and unsteady. He couldn’t hold on much longer. Raw need gripped him. A familiar tingle gathered at the base of his spine. Johnnie reached up to kiss her, angling his mouth over hers. With a cry of surrender, she convulsed around his cock, the walls of her pussy squeezing him sweetly, milking him to completion.

Margo melted onto his chest and he wrapped his arms around her, savoring the scent of lavender, soap and musk. Johnnie closed his eyes and waited for his breathing to return to normal. If anything, tonight had proved he still loved Margo. He sighed inwardly. There was so much history between them, so much heartache. And then there was Margo’s mother.

Chapter Three

When Margo stirred hours later, the candle had burnt out and the interior of the shelter was pitch black. A heavy weight held her firmly in place. For an instant panic claimed her before she remembered it was Johnnie. His warmth helped combat the cool air that seeped through the walls of the shelter. Margo lay there for a bit longer, enjoying the intimacy and the soft whistle of his breathing. The bombing had stopped. Blissful silence.

Time to return to reality.

"Johnnie." She gripped his shoulder and shook him lightly. "Johnnie, I think it's morning."

"Already?" he muttered.

"I can't hear anything apart from your snoring."

"I don't snore."

Yes, he did, and she loved the imperfection.

Johnnie shifted but instead of moving, he rolled and trapped her fully beneath him. It was so dark she couldn't see a thing but unerringly he found her mouth and stole a kiss. It was quick. It was tender. And with it, he purloined the last little bit of her heart.

Margo wound her hands around his neck and held tight. His erection stabbed into her stomach, bringing a realization. She didn't want to leave yet, not without making love one more time. Caroline had mentioned a few things, things she wanted to try before they returned to reality.

She pressed an open-mouthed kiss to the tender skin of his neck, licking the light sweat and held his head to snare his attention. "We don't have to go yet, do we?"

"Did you have something else in mind?" His chuckle surprised her and brought an answering grin.

"Yes." Margo wriggled from beneath him and pushed him flat on his back. "I want to explore." She grinned down at him before bending her head to lave one flat nipple. She nipped, glorying in his groan. There was more to come, much more according to Caroline. Gradually, she worked down his body, licking his hipbone and circling his bellybutton with her tongue. She nuzzled the delicate skin of his inner thighs and stroked his sac. Finally, she knelt between his parted legs and grasped his swollen shaft in her hands. Smooth and hot to the touch, it pulsed beneath her fingers. Fascinated, Margo smoothed her thumb across the flared head of his cock. She leaned closer, breathing in his earthy masculine scent while excitement pulsed inside. Seconds before she took his cock into her mouth their gazes met. A flare of desire lit his eyes, silently urging her onward. Her lips closed around the tip of his erection while her fingers danced up and down his shaft. His hips jerked, a pent-up breath whistling between his lips.

"That feels so good," he whispered, his hands lacing through her hair and gently massaging her scalp.

Margo licked across the broad head, watching his face the entire time. His eyes were full of heat and they made her heart beat faster, harder. Her pussy pulsed in response, tightening and weeping cream, making her squirm with need. *Soon*. This was just as fulfilling. She smiled around his cock and continued to lap at the head while she lightly massaged and explored his balls. He moaned when she lapped at the underside of his shaft so she repeated the move, loving his dark groan of response. Drops of pre-cum leaked from the slit at the end and she cleared them away with a flick of her tongue and sucked. Her finger delicately traced the seam between his balls before pressing firmly on the strip of skin behind. He jumped, his body stiffening a fraction then relaxing. Repeating the move with her finger, she sucked, laving her tongue over his tip again, gauging his reaction. He groaned, his breathing ragged. Tenderness

flooded Margo when he gave a soft curse. How had she ever thought she could marry Peter? It had always been Johnnie for her.

Always.

“Margo, you—” A raw and guttural groan escaped. His balls drew tight and his entire body shuddered. His hips jerked, pushing his shaft deeper into her mouth. Her hair fell over her face and trickled across his thighs like fine silk. Using warm suction she teased him higher until he trembled even more. Suddenly he grasped her shoulders and pushed her away from his pulsing erection.

“What are you doing?” Margo didn’t have to pretend confusion.

“Prolonging things a fraction,” he whispered before he drew her on top of his body. Their lips met, slow at first. His hand smoothed over her ass, dipped into the crack between and massaging her rosette.

She wriggled wanting him to go faster, to soothe the ache in her pussy. Instead, he surprised her with a sharp tap across her backside. “Ooh!” Margo froze when a ripple of pleasure echoed the sting on her ass. Her breath hitched, only to ease out in disappointment when nothing else happened. “More,” she said finally.

Johnnie’s chuckle held amusement. He smacked her again, the crack of hand meeting flesh loud in the confined shelter. Heat gathered in the cheeks of her bottom along with a rippling surge of pleasure. A third smack drove the sensation higher while astonishment grew that such a thing should make her feel so excited. Such gratification. While need still thrummed through her body, Johnnie rolled them so they spooned on the narrow bed. He fingered her nipple, rubbing it between finger and thumb until a groan broke past her lips and she pushed her ass hard against his groin. His cock brushed against her heated flesh, making her long for his possession.

“No more teasing,” she whispered.

His warm breath stirred a tendril of hair and sent a flicker of hot pleasure that spilled straight to her core. “No more teasing.”

Margo expected him to turn her over but he didn't. Instead he parted her legs and pushed slowly into her sheath while remaining behind her. It felt different and she wasn't sure if she liked it because she couldn't see his face. But the sensations, the pleasure that swooped to her pussy, made her forget not seeing him. Her eyes drifted closed and she concentrated on Johnnie, the slow push of his cock into her pussy, the stretch and the shot of pure sensation when his hand curved over her hip and slipped between her drenched folds. He set up a slow rocking motion that made the bed creak and the bedcovers rustle. Margo drifted in a cocoon of warmth, her heart full to bursting with both love for the man who held her and the glorious sensations that rippled across every nerve ending. His finger grazed across her swollen folds, pushing her higher and higher. Gradually his pace increased. Flesh slapped flesh and the clawing tension exploded through her sensitized body. Johnnie pressed a rough kiss to her shoulder, his breath coming hot and raw. He stilled suddenly and she felt the explosive contractions of his cock jerking inside her body. He wrapped his arms around her, cuddling until their breathing eased to normal.

"I guess we'd better go," he said finally, rolling away and standing in a fluid movement. She heard his curse when he stubbed his toe on the chair that sat near the door.

A crack of light pierced the gloom when he tugged at the steel door cover, easing it aside.

"It's still early."

But their time together was over. She hadn't even asked him when his leave ended or if he wanted to see her again. Margo slipped off the bed and stood. Without looking at Johnnie, she started to dress. Her muscles ached and throbbed when she struggled back into her uniform. Beside her, Johnnie didn't say a word. The silence between them lengthened into painful. The backs of her eyes ached and she knew she'd start crying without much provocation.

Johnnie's clothing rustled while he dressed. He sat on the bed and pulled on his socks and shoes before standing again. "I'll wait for you outside."

Margo attempted to swallow the large lump that had formed in her throat. They were acting like strangers. Surely this wasn't how it was going to end?

She dressed, rolled on her stockings and shoved her feet into her shoes. Heavy at heart, she trudged out to join him.

Debris covered the street they'd walked down last night. Bricks, mortar, glass and roof tiles. Dust was heavy on the air and lay in a film over everything within sight. They walked side by side until they had to separate to clamber around the ruins of a fallen building. Lovers and strangers. At least that's what it felt like to Margo.

"When does your leave end?" she asked, forcing the words out.

"I need to return on Saturday."

No inflection in his voice or indication as to how she should act. "I...I...are you going to visit your parents?" Johnnie's father still worked for Margo's parents as a groundsman.

"Yes."

Yes? Was that it? Margo wanted to shake him. After the intimacy of the previous night, he was now a stranger she didn't know. The pressure behind her eyes increased. Her hand trembled inside her coat pocket. "Will I see you again?"

"You're engaged to Peter Wooster."

His words were a lash, flaying and laying her soul bare. Johnnie spoke nothing less than the truth. In the eyes of her family and friends, she was engaged. Johnnie was right to remind her.

They continued the walk toward the dancehall.

"How come you were at the dance?" she asked.

"I went with some of the men in my unit."

"Wouldn't they have missed you last night?"

"No. We'd agreed to make our own way home. What about you?"

"I went with my friends Caroline and June." Margo worried her bottom lip. "They're probably anxious," she conceded.

A pall of smoke hung over the city, pressing into Margo's lungs. Not far from the shelter, men bustled around a gas main fractured by the bombing. Flames shot into the sky. An overturned bus leaned drunkenly against a brick wall. Johnnie and Margo walked past in silence, neither of them mentioning the exposed fireplace of the house a few doors down from where they'd sheltered or the incongruity of the intact mirror hanging over the mantle.

A crater in the middle of the road had halted traffic while a UXB or unexploded bomb created havoc in the next street over. The bomb disposal unit was in attendance and Margo prayed the bomb would do no further damage. Dust shrouded the posters advertising war savings and extolling people to grow their own vegetables while a fire still burned out of control in the distance, plumes of putrid black smoke rising into the air.

When they rounded a curve in the road, both of them came to an abrupt halt. The dancehall where they'd danced together the previous night had taken a direct hit. Even though it was still relatively early, a large number of men and women hovered around the ruined building. Rescue workers dug frantically in the rubble. The wail of an elderly woman made the hair at the back of Margo's neck prickle. Smoke tainted the air and a man sat on the ground, an expression of shock on his dust-covered face.

"Do you think they cleared the building in time?"

"I hope so." Johnnie didn't sound too convinced, and after looking at the crowds and hearing the sobs and muted voices, Margo knew people were trapped inside.

"Margo! Margo! You're here. You're alive!"

Margo's head jerked up. Peter. What was Peter doing here? Before she had a chance to ask, he'd grabbed her and wrapped his arms around her so tightly she wondered about her next breath.

"I thought you were dead. I thought...oh Margo!" Peter pulled away to look at her. "Where have you been? I had to ring your parents to tell them the bad news."

"I made it to a shelter," she said, avoiding his gaze and glancing at a crew of men who were attempting to dampen down the last of the burning blaze.

"Margo!" Her friend Caroline ran up to them, looking the worse for wear. White plaster dust covered her WAAF uniform and her right hand dripped blood.

"You're alive," Caroline said, hugging her so hard Margo could scarcely breathe. A sob emerged. "June's dead. She didn't make it. They've taken her away." Caroline's shoulders shook and her wet tears dampened Margo's face.

"June's dead?" Margo whispered in shock. A lump formed in her throat and she tried to extricate herself from Caroline's desperate grip to grab her handkerchief.

Life was so short.

She needed to talk to Johnnie, to tell him she loved him and wanted to spend the rest of her life loving him and making up for leaving him, for being a coward. When she was finally able to turn, Johnnie had disappeared. He'd walked away without saying goodbye. The ache behind her eyes became too much and tears trickled down her face. Pain squeezed around her heart like a tight fist. After everything they'd shared together, Johnnie had walked away.

"Caroline, you need medical attention. Let me take a look at your hand," Margo said.

"Can't someone else do it?" Peter asked. "Look, there's a nurse. She can take care of your friend and I'll take you home."

Margo glared at Peter with a sense of disbelief and took her friend's hand in hers. "I'm not leaving Caroline."

"But I came all this way when they told me at the hostel that you'd gone to the dance and hadn't returned. Your parents are beside themselves."

"I will ring them as soon as we get back to the hostel," Margo said. Caroline's hand didn't seem too bad and the bleeding had slowed. She dabbed it carefully with her handkerchief. "Caroline, press that down and the bleeding should stop."

"But when are you coming home? I don't know why you joined the WAAF. There was no need for it," Peter said. "You belong with me at Raventhorpe. I don't understand why you keep putting off the wedding."

Something inside Margo snapped. Joining the WAAF was the best thing she'd ever done. It had brought her independence, let her see how smothered she'd become living at home.

"Peter, I'm sorry." She reached into her coat pocket and drew out the engagement ring he'd given her six months ago. The stone glittered in the light but Margo didn't think about keeping it for an instant. "I can't marry you."

"But the invitations have gone out," Peter blurted.

"What invitations?" Steel tinged her voice while her hand clenched around the ring, the stone digging into her palm.

"For our wedding. Our parents thought a late summer wedding would be perfect. We decided on the last Saturday in July," Peter said.

Margo shoved the ring at him and when he just stood there, she grabbed his hand and slapped it into the middle of his palm. "I can't marry you." She hesitated before going with the truth. "There's someone else. There always has been." This time she wouldn't act like a coward.

Peter's brows shot upward and he gave a snort of disbelief. "Not the gardener's son?"

"I'm sorry, Peter. I haven't treated you well but I don't love you—"

"Love! This isn't about love. This is about joining two families, business opportunities and keeping our estates intact. What's love got to do with it?"

Margo's mouth dropped open while shock kicked her in the gut. He didn't love her either. She'd been a well-bred convenience. Anger followed swiftly on the heels of outrage. "Then you won't mind it being called off. Caroline, are you up to walking back to the hostel? It doesn't look like the buses will be able to get through with all the damage. We can contact June's family from the hostel after I've rung mine."

"I can walk," Caroline said.

"You can't walk away from me," Peter spluttered.

"Just watch me." Margo turned her back and walked off with Caroline hobbling at her side.

* * * * *

A few days later, Margo walked down the long winding driveway of Harrington Manor, taking in the neatly trimmed hedges and smooth green lawns surrounding the large Georgian house. Looking at the regal splendor made Margo wonder if her parents even knew there was a war.

Her mother had offered to send the car to pick her up from the railway station. Margo had refused, mindful of the way it looked to others—the display of wealth in times of rationing. Besides, she'd wanted to plan what she'd say to Johnnie. She refused to let it end this way. She loved him and now she was a free woman—it was time to tell Johnnie. Make him believe.

But first she had to face her parents.

Margo increased her pace. She'd get past the difficult confrontation at the outset before she went in search of Johnnie. Missing Johnnie—that's what she worried about most. What if he'd decided not to come home after all? Margo clenched her hands at her sides, her fingernails digging into her palms at the thought of not seeing him again. He couldn't leave. A lump grew in her throat while the back of her eyes prickled. Somehow, she had to see him before he left again.

"Breathe," she muttered when her chest tightened. Otherwise, she'd never get through the coming confrontation. Margo swallowed, attempting to shove her nerves away at the same time, and hurried around the bend in the drive. She came to an abrupt halt by the hedges that edged the bright green sloping lawn.

Johnnie.

Margo found herself in front of him, her gaze devouring the glistening planes of his bare chest while he trimmed a hedge. The clippers stopped their rhythmic *clack-clack-clack* and they stared at each other, saying more with a look than a thousand words. Johnnie had missed her as much as she'd missed him. He loved her—she just knew it, and the knowledge made her confidence grow.

"Johnnie."

"Margo." He didn't sound too welcoming and would have turned away. She grasped his sweaty forearm and yanked him back to face her.

"I'm not engaged to Peter any longer." Urgency shaded her tone. Their love was something worth fighting for and she wasn't going to let him walk away without a battle. "I told him I wouldn't marry him because I didn't love him. I love you, Johnnie."

The sound of applause rang out from behind them. Margo whirled around, angry at the interruption. *Her mother*. Oh just fine and dandy. Her mother had an impeccable sense of timing as always.

"Margo," her mother said, pursing her lips in disapproval. She wore a smart navy and white suit with a small navy hat perched on top of her upswept hairdo. "Peter is waiting in the house. I believe you owe him an apology."

Margo straightened, fiercely proud of her WAAF uniform despite her mother's disparaging glance. "No, I do not owe him an apology. Peter and I are not getting married." She ignored the wobble of nerves inside her stomach and the slight tremble of her voice. This was too important for failure.

"Rubbish, the church is booked for the last Saturday in July. The invitations have gone out."

Margo cringed at the waste of paper during rationing, more troubled about that than the thought of gossip. It made her realize she'd changed. She really didn't care what people thought. "Mother, I am not marrying Peter."

Her mother sniffed, sticking her nose high in the air. "You can hardly marry him."

"He hasn't asked me," Margo said, but she hoped he would. "Johnnie, can we talk later?"

Johnnie looked from mother to daughter in bemusement. Margo had told him she was going to get a backbone but he hadn't really believed. So far, she was doing well and holding her own. He nodded slowly, unsure of what to think or to even hope. "I'll be at home." God, when he'd seen Peter standing in the rubble of the dancehall, he'd thought it was the end. He'd thought—hell, he didn't know what he'd thought. All he knew was that after spending the night with Margo, he wanted to do it again. Unfortunately fear had frozen him. He hadn't known what to say or how to show her he cared. Then Wooster had grabbed her attention and it had been too late. Johnnie had left. He'd tried to tell himself he had one night of memories, that it would be enough.

But today, after seeing Margo again, he knew he'd lied to himself.

He loved her.

He'd always loved her.

And damned if he was going to let Wooster win Margo back. If Margo was willing to try, then so was he, no matter how wide the social chasm between them.

Margo nodded, giving him a smile that boosted his confidence. He returned to clipping the hedge with renewed hope.

Half an hour passed. Johnnie had almost finished trimming the hedge for his father when footsteps on the gravel driveway made him look up. A slow smile spread across his lips and he straightened. "Margo."

She strode toward him.

"Margo. Margo! You can't walk out like that. If you don't come back now, don't bother coming back at all. I'll wash my hands of you!" Mrs. Harrington screeched. Her face was scarlet with anger and the unprecedented rage after her daughter. "I'll fire his father. Don't think I won't."

Johnnie froze, fear blooming inside. He set the clippers down and stared at Margo's mother in silent horror. His father loved this job. At his age it would be difficult to find another.

Margo came to an abrupt halt. She whirled around to face her mother. "You won't fire Johnnie's father because no one else will work for you. I am not a child. I will not marry Peter no matter how much pressure you apply or which blackmail methods you choose. I am an adult, capable of making my own decisions."

"He won't marry you," Mrs. Harrington spat.

Johnnie opened his mouth to speak but Margo beat him to it. "Maybe not," she said. "But that doesn't change my decision about Peter. Goodbye, Mother." Margo turned away and stalked toward him, coming to a halt a few inches away. The scent of lavender wafted from her warm skin and Johnnie knew he'd always think of her when he caught a whiff of the plant.

He cleared his throat. "She's wrong, you know. I'd like to marry you." He lifted his hand and cupped her cheek, his heart thumping at the warmth of her skin and the love in her blue eyes. "But not straightaway." Even as he said the words, he worried about losing her and cursed himself as a fool.

"We need time to plan," she agreed without a blink. "But I want to commit to you. Can we get engaged? It doesn't have to be official. It can stay between the two of us, but when you leave, I want to know you're mine and I'm yours."

Johnnie closed his eyes for an instant, fighting the emotion that threatened to spill over into unmanly tears.

"Johnnie?"

He opened his eyes and smiled, feeling like a weight had lifted from his shoulders. "I'd like that very much. I love you, Margo. I always have since the first time we danced together after my friend Thomas dared me to ask you. Will you wait while I clean up and come for a walk with me?" Johnnie knew just the place, a private clearing near the river where they could celebrate their love without interruption. He'd ask his mother for a blanket and something to eat and drink.

"I'd love to walk with you." Margo threaded her arm through his and after he'd picked up the clippers, they walked toward his parents' cottage.

* * * * *

Johnnie set the cane picnic basket down at the base of an old oak tree and spread the blanket over the grass before turning to smile at Margo. "I love you."

The tinkle of river water filled the air, fighting with the buzz of an industrious bee in the bramble bushes at the end of the clearing. Dappled sunlight spread patterns over a grassy patch in the middle and highlighted the golden strands of Margo's hair. Her blue eyes sparkled and she radiated happiness. Knowing he was responsible lightened his heart and lessened the fear he felt about returning to the squalor of war.

"I'm glad about that." A naughty twinkle in her eyes gave him a second's warning. "Show me."

"I intended to show you but thought we might eat first."

"Pooh, there's plenty of time to eat," Margo said. "I have to return to London tomorrow and you're going back to join your regiment the day after. We need to make the most of every moment."

Johnnie couldn't argue with her logic. The thought of leaving her—god, he hoped she didn't change her mind. But then nothing was certain in this life. He'd trust her to keep her word and pray she'd wait for him, pray he survived this next battle.

Margo slipped her shoes off and unfastened her jacket. She stripped down to her underwear and when she started to remove that as well, Johnnie stayed her with a hand on her shoulder.

"Let me." He shrugged out of the shirt he'd hurriedly donned after a quick wash and removed his boots before drawing her down to the blanket. Her breasts rose and fell rapidly and she'd blushed despite removing her clothes willingly. Johnnie liked her diffidence and he loved the fact she'd taken him as her first lover. He intended to be her last.

He pushed her down on the blanket and started to explore, wanting to take his time and look his fill. He pressed his lips to the wildly beating pulse at her throat and carefully unfastened her hair so he could arrange the long, golden strands over her breasts. The lavender scent grew stronger and he inhaled deeply. Johnnie traced the soft contours of her body, learned what made her moan with pleasure and the ticklish spots. He rolled her stockings down her legs and removed her panties and brassiere, exploring, tasting and gently biting each bit of newly exposed flesh. His calloused hands slid across silky skin, cupped full, creamy breasts and teased her nipples to stiff points.

His cock hardened and his balls started to ache insistently but still he kept things slow and easy. He leaned over her and explored her mouth, savoring the way she shuddered helplessly and moved her hips against him in silent demand. His hand drifted down to the intimate juncture of her body. He parted her legs and lazily teased her clitoris with delicate precision.

"Johnnie," she whispered in soft protest.

"I want to make it last."

"We have all afternoon," she reminded him.

Smiling at her impatience, he stood to remove his remaining clothing. He retrieved a condom from his pocket and rolled it on. When he intercepted her interested look, he

said, "I don't want to force you into marriage. I like children but later when everything is settled. Us. The war."

"It might be too late."

"Maybe. You'll tell me if we're going to have a baby?" Johnnie watched her carefully, only relaxing when he saw her instant acceptance.

"Of course." She confirmed it in words and stroked her hand over his hot, hard cock. The sensation spiked a shudder of pleasure.

Johnnie entered her moist pussy with one seamless thrust, savoring the flex of her body and the tight fit. It felt so good because he was with Margo. He paused, his heart bursting with happiness when she grinned at him. He grinned back. "I couldn't stop thinking about you, even though we'd broken up."

"I didn't treat you very well. I really am sorry."

"You're unforgettable, sweetheart. I really do love you." Johnnie held his love tightly and thrust into her pussy again. Their lips met, their tongues surging and retreating and echoing each thrust. He quickened his pace, unable to go slow with the clawing need pulsing through him, drawing his balls tight. *His*. She belonged to him just as he was hers. Increasingly urgent hunger swept through them both. They clung together, bodies heaving, a unified gasp of pleasure echoing through the sunny clearing. They loved each other with their bodies and souls, confirming their commitment in actions as well as words. They made memories until they could be together again.

Unforgettable memories.

About the Author

Shelley lives in Auckland, New Zealand, with her husband and a small, bossy dog named Scotty.

Typical New Zealanders, Shelley and her husband left home for their big OE soon after they married (translation of New Zealand-speak: big overseas experience). A year-long adventure lengthened to six years of roaming the world. Enduring memories include being almost sat on by a mountain gorilla in Rwanda, lazing on white sandy beaches in India, whale watching in Alaska, searching for leprechauns in Ireland, and dealing with ghosts in an English pub.

While travel is still a big attraction, these days Shelley is most likely found in front of her computer following another love—that of writing stories of romance and adventure. Other interests include watching rugby and rugby league (strictly for research purposes *grin*), being walked by the dog, and curling up with a good book.

Shelley welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her author bio page at www.ellorascave.com.

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