CODE NAME

ELIZABETH WEIN

First published in paperback in Great Britain 2012
by Electric Monkey an imprint of Egmont UK Limited
239 Kensington High Street
London W8 6SA

ISBN 978 1 4052 5821 0

www.electricmonkeybooks.co.uk

48794/1

A CIP catalogue record for this title is available from the British Library

Typeset by Avon DataSet Ltd, Bidford on Avon, Warwickshire
Printed and bound in Great Britain by the CPI Group

‘Passive resisters must understand that they are as important as saboteurs.’

SOE Secret Operations Manual,
‘Methods of Passive Resistance’

Part 1

Verity

Ormaie 8.XI.43 JB-S

I AM A COWARD

I wanted to be heroic and I pretended I was. I have always been good at pretending. I spent the first twelve years of my life playing at the Battle of Stirling Bridge with my five big brothers, and even though I am a girl they let me be William Wallace, who is supposed to be one of our ancestors, because I did the most rousing battle speeches. God, I tried hard last week. My God, *I tried*. But now I know I am a coward. After the ridiculous deal I made with SS-Hauptsturmführer von Linden, I know I am a coward. And I'm going to give you anything you ask, everything I can remember. Absolutely *Every Last Detail*.

Here is the deal we made. I'm putting it down to keep it straight in my own mind. 'Let's try this,' the Hauptsturmführer said to me. 'How could you be bribed?' And I said I wanted my clothes back.

It seems petty, now. I am sure he was expecting my answer to be something defiant – 'Give me Freedom' or 'Victory' – or something generous, like 'Stop toying with that wretched French Resistance laddie and give him a dignified and merciful death.' Or at least something more

directly connected to my present circumstance, like 'Please let me go to sleep' or 'Feed me' or 'Get rid of this sodding iron rail you have kept tied against my spine for the past three days.' But I was prepared to go sleepless and starving and upright for a good while yet if only I didn't have to do it in my underwear – rather foul and damp at times, and SO EMBARRASSING. The warmth and dignity of my flannel skirt and woolly jumper are worth far more to me now than patriotism or integrity.

So von Linden sold my clothes back to me piece by piece. Except my scarf and stockings of course, which were taken away early on to prevent me strangling myself with them (I did try). The pullover cost me *four sets of wireless code* – the full lot of encoding poems, passwords and frequencies. Von Linden let me have the pullover back on credit straight away. It was waiting for me in my cell when they finally untied me at the end of that dreadful three days, though I was incapable of getting the damned thing on at first; but even just dragged over the top of me like a shawl it was comforting. Now that I've managed to get into it at last I don't think I shall ever take it off again. The skirt and blouse cost rather less than the pullover, and it was only one code set apiece for my shoes.

There are eleven sets in all. The last one was supposed to buy my slip. Notice how he's worked it that I get the

clothes from the *outside in*, so I have to go through the torment of *undressing* in front of everybody every time another item is given back to me. He's the only one who doesn't watch – he threatened to take it all away from me again when I suggested he was missing a fabulous show. It was the first time the accumulated damage has really been on display and I wish he would have *looked* at his masterpiece – at my arms particularly – also the first time I have been able to stand in a while, which I wanted to show off to him. Anyway I have decided to do without my slip, which also saves me the trouble of stripping again to put it on, and in exchange for the last code set I have bought myself a supply of ink and paper – and some time.

Von Linden has said I have got two weeks and that I can have as much paper as I need. All I have to do is cough up everything I can remember about the British War Effort. And I'm going to. Von Linden resembles Captain Hook in that he is rather an upright sort of gentleman in spite of his being a brute, and I am quite Pan-like in my naïve confidence that he will play by the rules and keep his word. So far he *has*. To start off my confession, he has given me this lovely creamy embossed stationery from the Château de Bordeaux, the Bordeaux Castle Hotel, which is what this building used to be. (I would not have believed a French hotel could become so forbiddingly bleak if I had

not seen the barred shutters and padlocked doors with my own eyes. But you have also managed to make the whole beautiful city of Ormaie look bleak.)

It is rather a lot to be resting on a single code set, but in addition to my treasonous account I have also promised von Linden my soul, although I do not think he takes this seriously. Anyway it will be a relief to write *anything* that isn't connected with code. I'm so dreadfully sick of spewing wireless code. Only when we'd put all those lists to paper did I realise what a huge supply of code I do actually have in me.

It's jolly astonishing really.

YOU STUPID NAZI BASTARDS.

I'm just damned. I am utterly and completely damned. You'll shoot me at the end no matter what I do, because that's what you do to enemy agents. It's what *we* do to enemy agents. After I write this confession, if you *don't* shoot me and I ever make it home, I'll be tried and shot as a collaborator anyway. But I look at all the dark and twisted roads ahead and this is the easy one, the obvious one. What's in my future – a tin of kerosene poured down my throat and a match held to my lips? Scalpel and acid, like the Resistance boy who won't talk? My living skeleton packed up in a cattle wagon with two hundred desperate others, carted off God knows where to die of

thirst before we get there? No. I'm not travelling those roads. This is the easiest. The others are too frightening even to look down.

I am going to write in English. I don't have the vocabulary for a warfare account in French, and I can't write fluently enough in German. Someone will have to translate for Hauptsturmführer von Linden; Fräulein Engel can do it. She speaks English very well. She is the one who explained to me that paraffin and kerosene are the same thing. We call it paraffin at home, but the Americans call it kerosene, and that is more or less what the word sounds like in French and German too.

(About the paraffin, kerosene, whatever it is. I do not really believe you have a litre of kerosene to waste on me. Or do you get it on the black market? How do you claim the expense? '1 lt. highly explosive fuel for execution of British spy.' Anyway I will do my best to spare you the expense.)

One of the first items on the very long list I have been given to think about including in my confession is Location of British Airfields for Invasion of Europe. Fräulein Engel will confirm that I burst out laughing when I read that. You really think I know a damned thing about where the Allies are planning to launch their invasion of Nazi-occupied Europe? I am in the Special Operations

Executive because I can speak French and German and am good at making up stories, and I am a prisoner in the Ormaie Gestapo HQ because I have no sense of direction whatsoever. Bearing in mind that the people who trained me encouraged my blissful ignorance of airfields just so I *couldn't* tell you such a thing if you *did* catch me, and not forgetting that I wasn't even told the name of the airfield we took off from when I came here, let me remind you that I had been in France less than 48 hours before that obliging agent of yours had to stop me being run over by a French van full of French chickens because I'd looked the wrong way before crossing the street. Which shows how cunning the Gestapo are. 'This person I've pulled from beneath the wheels of certain death was expecting traffic to travel on the left side of the road. Therefore she must be British, and is likely to have parachuted into Nazi-occupied France out of an Allied plane. I shall now arrest her as a spy.'

So, I have no sense of direction; in some of us it is a TRAGIC FLAW, and there is no point in me trying to direct you to Locations of Any Airfields Anywhere. Not without someone giving me the coordinates. I could make them up, perhaps, and be convincing about it, to buy myself more time, but you would catch on eventually.

Aircraft Types in Operational Use is also on this list of things I am to tell you. God, this is a funny list. If I knew

or cared a damned thing about aircraft types I would be flying planes for the Air Transport Auxiliary like Maddie, the pilot who dropped me here, or working as a fitter, or a mechanic. Not cravenly coughing up facts and figures for the Gestapo. (I will not mention my cowardice again because it is beginning to make me feel indecent. Also I do not want you to get bored and take this handsome paper away and go back to holding my face in a basin of ice water until I pass out.)

No, wait, I do know some aircraft types. I will tell you all the aircraft types I know, starting with the Puss Moth. That was the first aircraft my friend Maddie ever flew. In fact it was the first aircraft she ever had a ride in, and even the first one she ever got close to. And the story of how I came to be here starts with Maddie. I don't think I'll ever know how I ended up carrying her National Registration card and pilot's licence instead of my own ID when you picked me up, but if I tell you about Maddie you'll understand why we flew here together.

Aircraft Types

Maddie is properly Margaret Brodatt. You have her ID, you know her name. Brodatt is not a Northern English name, it is a Russian name, I think, because her grandfather came from Russia. But Maddie is pure Stockport. Unlike me,

she has an excellent sense of direction. She can navigate by the stars, and by dead reckoning, but I think she learned to use her sense of direction properly because her granddad gave her a motorbike for her sixteenth birthday. That was Maddie away out of Stockport and up the unmade lanes on the high moors of the Pennine hills. You can see the Pennines all around the city of Stockport, green and bare with fast-moving stripes of cloud and sunlight gliding overhead like a Technicolor moving picture. I know because I went on leave for a weekend and stayed with Maddie and her grandparents, and she took me on her motorbike up the Dark Peak, one of the most wonderful afternoons of my life. It was winter and the sun came out only for about five minutes and even then the sleet didn't stop falling – it was because the weather was forecast so unflyable that she had the three days off. But for five minutes Cheshire seemed green and sparkling. Maddie's granddad owns a bike shop and he got some black market petrol for her specially when I visited. I am putting this down (even though it's nothing to do with Aircraft Types) because it proves that I know what I'm talking about when I describe what it was like for Maddie to be alone at the top of the world, deafened by the roar of four winds and two cylinders, with all the Cheshire plain and its green fields and red chimneys thrown at her feet like a tartan picnic blanket.

Maddie had a friend called Beryl who had left school, and in the summer of 1938 Beryl was working in the cotton mill at Ladderal, and they liked to take Sunday picnics on Maddie's motorbike because it was the only time they saw each other any more. Beryl rode with her arms tight round Maddie's waist, like I did that time. No goggles for Beryl, or for me, though Maddie had her own. On this particular June Sunday they rode up through the lanes between the drystone walls that Beryl's labouring ancestors had built, and over the top of Highdown Rise, with mud up their bare shins. Beryl's best skirt was ruined that day and her dad made her pay for a new one out of her next week's wages.

'I love your granddad,' Beryl shouted in Maddie's ear. 'I wish he was mine.' (I wished that too.) 'Fancy him giving you a Silent Superb for your birthday!'

'It's not so silent,' Maddie shouted back over her shoulder. 'It wasn't new when I got it, and it's five years old now. I've had to rebuild the engine this year.'

'Won't your granddad do it for you?'

'He wouldn't even give it to me until I'd taken the engine apart. I have to do it myself or I can't have it.'

'I still love him,' Beryl shouted.

They tore along the high green lanes of Highdown Rise, along tractor ruts that nearly bounced them over

drystone field walls and into a bed of mire and nettles and sheep. I remember and I know what it must have been like. Every now and then, round a corner or at the crest of a hump in the hill, you can see the bare green chain of the Pennines stretching serenely to the west, or the factory chimneys of South Manchester scrawling the blue north sky with black smoke.

'And you'll have a skill,' Beryl yelled.

'A what?'

'A *skill*.'

'Fixing engines!' Maddie howled.

'It's a skill. Better than loading shuttles.'

'You're getting paid for loading shuttles,' Maddie yelled back. 'I don't get paid.' The lane ahead was rutted with rain-filled potholes. It looked like a miniature landscape of Highland lochs. Maddie slowed the bike to a putter and finally had to stop. She put her feet down on solid earth, her skirt rucked up to her thighs, still feeling the Superb's reliable and familiar rumble all through her body. 'Who'll give a girl a job fixing engines?' Maddie said. 'Gran wants me to learn to type. At least you're earning.'

They had to get off the bike to walk it along the ditch-filled lane. Then there was another rise, and they came to a farm gate set between field boundaries, and Maddie leaned the motorbike against the stone wall so they could eat

their sandwiches. They looked at each other and laughed at the mud.

'What'll your dad say!' Maddie exclaimed.

'What'll your gran!'

'She's used to it.'

Beryl's word for picnic was 'baggin', Maddie said, doorstep slices of granary loaf Beryl's auntie baked for three families every Wednesday, and pickled onions as big as apples. Maddie's sandwiches were on rye bread from the baker's in Reddyke where her grandmother sent her every Friday. The pickled onions stopped Maddie and Beryl having a conversation because chewing made so much crunching in their heads they couldn't hear each other talk, and they had to be careful swallowing so they wouldn't be asphyxiated by an accidental blast of vinegar. (Perhaps Chief-Storm-Captain von Linden might find pickled onions useful as persuasive tools. And your prisoners would get fed at the same time.)

(Fräulein Engel instructs me to put down here, for Captain von Linden to know when he reads it, that I have wasted 20 minutes of the time given me because here in my story I laughed at my own stupid joke about the pickled onions and broke the pencil point. We had to wait for someone to bring a knife to sharpen it because Miss Engel is not allowed to leave me by myself. And then I wasted

another 5 minutes weeping after I snapped off the new point straight away because Miss E. had sharpened it very close to my face, flicking the shavings into my eyes while SS-Scharführer Thibaut held my head still, and it made me terribly nervous. I am not laughing or crying now and will try not to press so hard after this.)

At any rate, think of Maddie before the war, free and at home with her mouth full of pickled onion – she could only point and choke when a spluttering, smoking aircraft hove into view above their heads and circled the field they were overlooking as they perched on the gate. That aircraft was a Puss Moth.

I can tell you a bit about Puss Moths. They are fast, light monoplanes – you know, only one set of wings – the Tiger Moth is a biplane and has two sets (another type I have just remembered). You can fold the Puss Moth's wings back for trucking the machine around or storing it, and it has a super view from the cockpit, and can seat two passengers as well as the pilot. I have been a passenger in one a couple of times. I think the upgraded version is called a Leopard Moth (that's three aircraft I have named in one paragraph!).

This Puss Moth circling the field at Highdown Rise, the first Puss Moth Maddie ever came across, was choking to death. Maddie said it was like having a ringside seat at the

circus. With the plane at three hundred feet she and Beryl could see every detail of the machine in miniature: every wire, every strut of its pair of canvas wings, the flicker of the wooden propeller blades as they spun ineffectively in the wind. Great blue clouds of smoke billowed from the exhaust.

'He's on fire!' screamed Beryl in a fit of delighted panic.

'He's not on fire. He's burning oil,' Maddie said because she knows these things. 'If he has any sense he'll shut everything off and it'll stop. Then he can glide down.'

They watched. Maddie's prediction came true: the engine stopped and the smoke drifted away, and now the pilot was clearly planning to put his damaged rig down in the field right in front of them. It was a grazing field, unploughed, unmown, without any livestock in it. The wings above their heads cut out the sun for a second with the sweep and billow of a sailing yacht. The aircraft's final pass pulled all the litter of their lunch out into the field, brown crusts and brown paper fluttering in the blue smoke like the devil's confetti.

Maddie says it would have been a good landing if it had been on an aerodrome. In the field the wounded flying machine bounced haplessly over the unmown grass for thirty yards. Then it tipped up gracefully on to its nose.

Unthinkingly, Maddie broke into applause. Beryl grabbed her hands and smacked one of them.

'You gormless cow! He might be hurt! Oh, what shall we do!'

Maddie hadn't meant to clap. She had done it without thinking. I can picture her, blowing the curling black hair out of her eyes, with her lower lip jutting out before she jumped down from the gate and hopped over the green tussocks to the downed plane.

There were no flames. Maddie scaled her way up the Puss Moth's nose to get at the cockpit and put one of her hobnailed shoes through the fabric that covered the fuselage (I think that's what the body of the plane is called) and I bet she cringed; she hadn't meant to do that either. She was feeling very hot and bothered by the time she unlatched the door, expecting a lecture from the aircraft's owner, and was shamefully relieved to find the pilot hanging upside-down in half-undone harness straps and clearly stone-cold unconscious. Maddie glanced over the alien engine controls. No oil pressure (she told me all this). Throttle, out. Off. Good enough. Maddie untangled the harness and let the pilot slither to the ground.

Beryl was there to catch the dragging weight of the pilot's senseless body. It was easier for Maddie to get down off the plane than it had been for her to get up, just a light

hop to the ground. Maddie unbuckled the pilot's helmet and goggles; she and Beryl had both done First Aid in Girl Guides, for all that's worth, and knew enough to make sure the casualty could breathe.

Beryl began to giggle.

'Who's the gormless cow!' Maddie exclaimed.

'It's a girl!' Beryl laughed. 'It's a girl!'

—

Beryl stayed with the unconscious girl pilot while Maddie rode her Silent Superb to the farm to get help. She found two big strong lads her own age shovelling cow dung, and the farmer's wife sorting First Early potatoes and cursing a cotillion of girls who were doing a huge jigsaw on the old stone kitchen floor (it was Sunday, or they'd have been boiling laundry). A rescue squad was despatched. Maddie was sent further down the lane on her bike to the bottom of the hill where there was a pub and a phone box.

'She'll need an ambulance, tha knows, love,' the farmer's wife had said to Maddie kindly. 'She'll need to go to hospital if she's been flying an aeroplane.'

The words rattled around in Maddie's head all the way to the telephone. Not 'She'll need to go to hospital if she's been injured,' but 'She'll need to go to hospital if she's been flying an aeroplane.'

A flying girl! thought Maddie. A girl flying an aeroplane!

No, she corrected herself; a girl *not* flying a plane. A girl tipping up a plane in a sheep field.

But she flew it first. She had to be able to fly it in order to land it (or crash it).

The leap seemed logical to Maddie.

I've never crashed my motorbike, she thought. I could fly an aeroplane.

There are a few more types of aircraft that I know, but what comes to mind is the Lysander. That is the plane Maddie was flying when she dropped me here. She was actually supposed to land the plane, not dump me out of it in the air. We got fired at on the way in and for a while the tail was in flames and she couldn't control it properly, and she made me bail out before she tried to land. I didn't see her come down. But you showed me the photos you took at the site, so I know that she *has* crashed an aeroplane by now. Still, you can hardly blame it on the pilot when her plane gets hit by anti-aircraft fire.

Some British Support for Anti-Semitism

The Puss Moth crash was on Sunday. Beryl was back to work at the mill in Ladderal the next day. My heart twists up and shrivels with envy so black and painful that I

spoiled half this page with tears before I realised they were falling, to think of Beryl's long life of loading shuttles and raising snotty babies with a beery lad in an industrial suburb of Manchester. Of course that was in 1938 and they have all been bombed to bits since, so perhaps Beryl and her kiddies are dead already, in which case my tears of envy are very selfish. I am sorry about the paper. Miss E. is looking over my shoulder as I write and tells me not to interrupt my story with any more apologies.

Over the next week Maddie pieced together the pilot's story in a storm of newspaper clippings with the mental wolfishness of Lady Macbeth. The pilot's name was Dympna Wythenshawe (I remember her name because it is so silly). She was the spoiled youngest daughter of Sir Somebody-or-other Wythenshawe. On Friday there was a flurry of outrage in the evening paper because as soon as she was released from hospital, she started giving joyrides in her other aeroplane (a Dragon Rapide – how clever am I), while the Puss Moth was being mended. Maddie sat on the floor in her granddad's shed next to her beloved Silent Superb, which needed a lot of tinkering to keep it in a fit state for weekend outings, and fought with the newspaper. There were pages and pages of gloom about the immediate likelihood of war between Japan and China, and the growing likelihood of war in Europe. The nose-down

Puss Moth in the farmer's field on Highdown Rise was last week's news though; there were no pictures of the plane on Friday, only a grinning mugshot of the aviatrix herself, looking happy and windblown and much, much prettier than that idiot Fascist Oswald Mosley, whose sneering face glared out at Maddie from the prime spot at the top of the page. Maddie covered him up with her mug of cocoa and thought about the quickest way to get to Catton Park Aerodrome. It was a good distance, but tomorrow was Saturday again.

Maddie was sorry, the next morning, that she hadn't paid more attention to the Oswald Mosley story. He was there, there in Stockport, speaking in front of St Mary's on the edge of the Saturday market, and his idiot Fascist followers were having their own march to meet him, starting at the town hall and ending up at St Mary's, causing traffic and human mayhem. They had by then toned down their anti-Semitism a bit and this rally was supposed to be in the name of Peace, believe it or not, trying to convince everybody that it would be a good idea to keep things cordial with the idiot Fascists in Germany. The Mosleyites were no longer allowed to wear their tastelessly symbolic black shirts – there was now a law in place about public marching in political uniforms, mainly to stop the Mosleyites causing riots like

the ones they started with their marches through Jewish neighbourhoods in London. But they were going along to cheer for Mosley anyway. There was a happy crowd of his lovers and an angry crowd of his haters. There were women with baskets trying to get their shopping done at the Saturday market. There were policemen. There was livestock – some of the policemen were on horseback, and there was a herd of sheep being shunted through also on the way to market, and a horse-drawn milk cart stuck in the middle of the sheep. There were dogs. Probably there were cats and rabbits and chickens and ducks too.

Maddie could not get across the Stockport Road. (I don't know what it's really called. Perhaps that's its right name because it's the main road in from the south. You should not rely on any of my directions.) Maddie waited and waited on the edge of the simmering crowd, looking for a gap. After twenty minutes, she began to get annoyed. There were people pressing against her from behind now, as well. She tried to turn her motorbike round, walking it by the handlebars, and ran into someone.

'Oi! Mind where you're pushing that bike!'

'Sorry!' Maddie looked up.

It was a crowd of thugs, black-shirted for the rally even though they could get arrested for it, hair slicked back with Brylcreem like a bunch of airmen. They looked

Maddie up and down gleefully, pretty sure she would be easy bait.

'Nice bike.'

'Nice legs!'

One of them giggled through his nose. 'Nice —.'

He used an ugly, unspeakable word, and I won't bother to write it because I don't think any of you would know what it means in English, and I certainly do not know the French or German for it. The thuggish lad used it like a goading stick and it worked. Maddie shoved the front wheel of the bike past the one she had hit in the first place, and knocked into him again, and he grabbed the handlebars with his own big fists between her hands.

Maddie held on. They struggled for a moment over the motorbike. The boy refused to let go, and his mates laughed.

'What's a lass like you need with a big toy like this? Where'd you get it?'

'At the bike shop, where d'you think!'

'Brodatt's,' said one of them. There was only one on that side of town.

'Sells bikes to Jews, he does.'

'Maybe it's a Jew's bike.'

You probably don't know it, but Manchester and its smoky suburbs have got quite a large Jewish population

and nobody minds. Well, obviously some idiot Fascists do mind, but I think you see what I mean. They came from Russia and Poland and later Roumania and Austria, all Eastern Europe, all through the nineteenth century. The bike shop whose customers were in question happened to be Maddie's granddad's bike shop that he'd had for the last thirty years. He'd done quite well out of it, well enough to keep Maddie's stylish gran in the manner to which she is accustomed, and they live in a large old house in Grove Green on the edge of the city and have a gardener and a daily girl to do the housekeeping. Anyway when this lot started slinging venom at Maddie's granddad's shop, Maddie unwisely engaged in battle with them and said, 'Does it always take all three of you to complete a thought? Or can you each do it without your mates if you have enough time to think it over first?'

They pushed the bike over. It took Maddie down with it. Because bullying is what idiot Fascists like best.

But there was a swell of noisy outrage from other people in the crowded street, and the little gang of thugs laughed again and moved on. Maddie could hear the one lad's distinctive nasal whinny even after his back had become anonymous.

More people than had knocked her down came to her aid, a labourer and a girl with a pram and a kiddie and

two women with shopping baskets. They hadn't fought or interfered, but they helped Maddie up and dusted her off and the workman ran loving hands down the Silent Superb's mudguard. 'Tha's not hurt, miss?'

'Nice bike!'

That was the kiddie. His mum said quickly, 'Oi, you hush,' because it was a perfect echo of the black-shirted youth who had pushed Maddie over.

''Tis nice,' said the man.

'It's getting old,' Maddie said modestly, but pleased.

'Ruddy vandals.'

'Tha wants to get those knees seen to, love,' advised one of the ladies with baskets.

Maddie thought to herself, thinking about aeroplanes: Just you wait, you idiot Fascists. I am going to get me a bigger toy than this bike.

Maddie's faith in humanity was restored and she pushed her way out of the crowd and set off down the cobbled back lanes of Stockport. There was no one here but kiddies playing street football in screaming bunches, and harassed big sisters with their hair tied up in dust cloths, ungraciously shaking out rugs and scrubbing front doorsteps while their mothers shopped. I swear I shall weep with envy if I keep thinking about them, bombed to bits or otherwise.

Fräulein Engel has been looking over my shoulder once again and has asked me to stop writing 'idiot Fascist' because she thinks Hauptsturmführer von Linden will not like it. I think she is a bit scared of Capt. von Linden (who can blame her), and I think Scharführer Thibaut is scared of him too.

Location of British Airfields

I can't really believe you need me to tell you that Catton Park Aerodrome is in Ilsmere Port because for the last ten years it has been just about the busiest airfield in the north of England. They build planes there. Before the war it had a posh civil flying club and it has also been a Royal Air Force base for years. The local Royal Air Force squadron has been flying bombers from that field since 1936. Your guess is as good as mine, and probably a lot better, as to what they are using it for now (I don't doubt it's surrounded with barrage balloons and anti-aircraft guns). When Maddie pulled up there that Saturday morning, she stood for a moment goggling gormlessly (her word), first at the car park, which contained the biggest collection of expensive cars she'd ever seen in one place, and then at the sky, which contained the biggest collection of aeroplanes. She leaned against the fence to watch. After a few minutes, she worked out that most of the planes seemed to fly to a

kind of pattern, taking it in turns to land and roar away again. Half an hour later she was still watching, and could tell that one of the pilots was a beginner and his machine always bounced six feet in the air after touching down before properly connecting with the ground, and another one was practising absolutely insane aerobatic manoeuvres, and another one was giving rides to people – once round the airfield, five minutes in the air, back down, hand over your two shillings and swap your goggles with the next customer, please.

It was a very overwhelming place in that uneasy peacetime when military and civil pilots took it in turns to use the runway, but Maddie was determined, and followed the signs to the flying club. She found the person she was looking for by accident – easily really, because Dympna Wythenshawe was the only idle aviator on the field, lounging by herself in a long row of faded deckchairs lined up in front of the pilots' clubhouse. Maddie did not recognise the pilot. She looked nothing like either the glamorous mugshot from the papers or the unconscious, helmeted casualty she had been when Maddie left her that Sunday past. Dympna didn't recognise Maddie either, but she called out jovially, 'Are you hoping for a spin?'

She spoke in a cultured accent of money and privilege. Rather like mine, without the Scottish burr. Probably not

as privileged as mine, but more moneyed. Anyway it made Maddie instantly feel like a serving girl.

'I'm looking for Dympna Wythenshawe,' said Maddie. 'I just wanted to see how she's getting on after – after last week.'

'She's fine.' The elegant creature smiled pleasantly.

'I found her,' Maddie blurted.

'She's right as rain,' Dympna said, offering a languid, lily-white hand that had certainly never changed an oil filter (my lily-white hands *have*, I would like you to know, but only under strict supervision). 'She's right as rain. She's me.'

Maddie shook hands.

'Take a pew,' Dympna drawled (just imagine she's me, raised in a castle and educated at a Swiss boarding school, only a lot taller and not snivelling all the time). She waved to the empty deckchairs. 'There's plenty of room.'

She was dressed as though she were going on safari, and contrived to be glamorous about it too. She gave private instruction as well as joyrides. She was the only woman pilot at the aerodrome, certainly the only woman instructor.

'When my darling Puss Moth's mended, I'll give you a ride,' she offered Maddie, and Maddie, who is nothing if not calculating, asked if she could see the plane.

They had taken it to bits and carted it home from

Highdown Rise and now a team of boys and men in greasy overalls were working at putting it back together in one of a long line of high workshop sheds. The Puss Moth's lovely engine (this is Maddie talking; she is a bit mad) had only HALF THE POWER of Maddie's motorbike. They had taken it apart and were cleaning the bits of turf out of it with wire brushes. It lay on a square of oilcloth in a thousand gleaming pieces. Maddie knew instantly she had come to the right place.

'Oh, can I watch?' she said. And Dympna, who never got her hands dirty, could nevertheless name every cylinder and valve that was lying on the floor, and let Maddie have a go painting the new fabric (over the fuselage she'd kicked in) with a mess of plastic goo that smelled like pickled onions. After an hour had gone by and Maddie was still there asking what all the parts of the plane were for and what they were called, the mechanics gave her a wire brush and let her help.

Maddie said she always felt very safe, after that, flying in Dympna's Puss Moth, because she had helped to put its engine back together herself.

'When are you coming back?' Dympna asked her over oily mugs of tea, four hours later.

'It's too far for me to visit very often,' Maddie confessed sadly. 'I live in Stockport. I help my granddad in his office

in the week and he pays for my petrol, but I can't come here every weekend.'

'You are the luckiest girl alive,' Dympna said. 'As soon as the Puss Moth's flying again I'm moving both my planes to the new airfield at Oakway. It's right by Ladderal Mill, where your friend Beryl works. There's a big gala at Oakway next Saturday, for the airfield's official opening. I'll come and collect you and you can watch the fun from the pilots' stand. Beryl can come along too.'

That's two airfields I've located for you.

I am getting a bit wobbly because no one has let me eat or drink since yesterday and I have been writing for nine hours. So now I am going to risk tossing this pencil across the table and have a good howl

Ormaie 9.XI.43 JB-S

This pen does nt work. Sorry ink blots. Is this test or punishmt I want my pencil back

[Note to SS-Hauptsturmführer Amadeus von Linden, translated from the German:]

> The English Flight Officer is telling the truth. The ink given her was too old/too thick to use and clotted badly in the pen nib. It has now been thinned and I am testing it here to affirm that it is acceptable for writing.
>
> Heil Hitler!
>
> SS-Scharführer Etienne Thibaut

—

You ignorant Quisling *bastard*, SS-Scharführer Etienne Thibaut, I AM SCOTTISH.

The comedians Laurel and Hardy, I mean Underling-Sergeant Thibaut and On-Duty-Female-Guard Engel, have been very jolly at my expense over the inferior ink Thibaut found for me to write with. He ruddy well had to thin it with *kerosene*, didn't he. He was annoyed when I made a fuss over the ink and he didn't seem to believe me about the clogged pen, so I became *rather upset* when

he went away and came back with a litre of kerosene. When he brought in the tin, I knew straight away what it was, and Miss E. had to throw a jug of water in my face to stop my hysterics. Now she is sitting across the table from me lighting and relighting her cigarette and flicking the matches in my direction to make me jump, but she is laughing as she does it.

She was anxious last night because she didn't think I'd coughed up enough facts to count as a proper little Judas yesterday. Again I think that she was worrying about von Linden's reaction, as she is the one who has to translate what I write for him. As it turned out he said it was an 'interesting overview of the situation in Britain over the long term' and a 'curious individual perspective' (he was testing my German a bit while we talked about it). Also I think he hopes I will do some ratting on Monsieur Laurel and Mademoiselle Hardy. He does not trust Thibaut because Thibaut is French and he does not trust Engel because Engel is a woman. I am to be given water throughout the day while I write (to drink, as well as to prevent hysterics) *and* a blanket. For a blanket in my cold little room, SS-Hauptsturmführer Amadeus von Linden, I would without remorse or hesitation rat on my heroic ancestor William Wallace, Guardian of Scotland.

I know your other prisoners despise me. Thibaut took

me to . . . I don't know what you call it when you make me watch, is it *instruction*? To remind me how fortunate I am, perhaps? After my tantrum yesterday, when I had stopped writing and before I was allowed to eat, on the way back to my cell Scharführer Thibaut made me stop and watch while Jacques was being questioned again. (I don't know what his real name is; *Jacques* is what the French citizens all call each other in *A Tale of Two Cities*, and it seems appropriate.) That boy *hates* me. It makes no difference that I too am strapped securely to my own chair with piano wire or something and gasp with sobs on his account and look away the whole time except when Thibaut holds my head in place. Jacques knows, they all know, that I am the collaborator, the only coward among them. No one else has given out a single scrap of code – let alone ELEVEN SETS – not to mention a written confession. He spits at me as they drag him out.

'Little Scottish piece of shit.'

It sounds so pretty in French, *p'tit morceau de merde écossaise*. Single-handedly I have brought down the 700-year-strong Auld Alliance between France and Scotland.

There is another Jacques, a girl, who whistles 'Scotland the Brave' if we are taken past each other (my prison is an antechamber to the suite they use for interrogations), or

some other battle hymn associated with my heritage, and she spits too. They all detest me. It is not the same as their hatred for Thibaut, the Quisling turncoat, who is their countryman and is working for the enemy. I am your enemy too, I should be one of them. But I am beyond contempt. A wee Scots piece o' shite.

Don't you think it makes them stronger when you give them someone to despise? They look at me snivelling in the corner and think, '*Mon Dieu*. Don't ever let me be like *her*.'

The Civil Air Guard (Some Figures)

That heading looks terrifically official. I feel better already. Like a proper little Judas.

Suppose you were a girl in Stockport in 1938, raised by loving and indulgent grandparents and rather obsessed with engines. Suppose you decided you wanted to learn to fly: really *fly*. You wanted to fly aeroplanes.

A three-year course with Air Service Training would have cost you over a thousand pounds. I don't know what Maddie's granddad would have earned in a year back then. He did fairly well with his motorbike business, as I have said, not so well during the Depression, but still, by our standards then, anyone would have considered his a good living. At any rate it would have cost him most

of his year's earnings to buy Maddie one year of flying lessons. She got her first flight free, an hour's excursion in Dympna's restored Puss Moth on a glorious clear summer evening of crisp wind and long light, and saw the Pennines from above for the first time. Beryl got to come along for the ride, since she had been as much involved in Dympna's rescue as Maddie had, but Beryl had to sit in the very back and couldn't see so well and was sick into her handbag. She thanked Dympna but never went for another flight.

And of course that was a joyride, not a lesson. Maddie couldn't afford lessons. But she made Oakway Aerodrome her own. Oakway came into being in parallel with Maddie's crush on aeroplanes – I want bigger toys, she'd wished, and hey presto, a week later, there was Oakway. It was only a fifteen-minute motorbike ride. It was so spanking new that the mechanics there were happy to have an extra pair of capable hands around. Maddie was out every Saturday that summer tinkering with engines and doping fabric wings and making friends. Then in October her persistence suddenly, unexpectedly paid off. That is when we started the Civil Air Guard.

I say *we* – I mean Britain. Just about every flying club in the kingdom joined in, and so many thousands of people applied – free flight training! – that they could only take about a tenth of them. And only one in 20 of those

were women. But Maddie got lucky again because all the engineers and mechanics and instructors at Oakway knew and liked her now, and she got glowing recommendations for being quick and committed and knowing all about oil levels. She wasn't straight away any better than any other pilot who trained at Oakway with the Civil Air Guard. But she wasn't any worse either. She made her first solo flight in the first week of the new year, between snow flurries.

Look at the timing though. Maddie started flying in late October 1938 . . . Hitler (you will notice that I have thought better of my colourful descriptive terms for the Führer and carefully scratched them all out) invaded Poland on 1 September 1939 and Britain declared war on Germany two days later. Maddie flew the practical test for her 'A' licence, the basic pilot's licence, six months before all civil aircraft were grounded in August. After that, most of those planes were taken into government service. Both Dympna's planes were requisitioned by the Air Ministry for communications and she was mad as a cat about it.

Days before Britain declared war on Germany, Maddie flew by herself to the other side of England, skimming the tops of the Pennines and avoiding the barrage balloons like silver ramparts protecting the sky around Newcastle. She followed the coast north to Bamburgh and Holy Island. I

know that stretch of the North Sea very well because the train from Edinburgh to London goes that way, and I was up and down all year when I was at school. Then when my school closed just before the war, instead of finishing elsewhere I went to university a bit suddenly for a term and took the train to get there too, feeling very grown-up.

The Northumbrian coast is the most beautiful length of the whole trip. The sun still sets quite late in the north of England in August, and Maddie on fabric wings flew low over the long sands of Holy Island and saw seals gathered there. She flew over the great castle crags of Lindisfarne and Bamburgh to the north and south, and over the ruins of the twelfth-century priory, and over all the fields stretching yellow and green towards the low Cheviot Hills of Scotland. Maddie flew back following the 70-mile, 2000-year-old dragon's back of Hadrian's Wall, to Carlisle and then south through the Lakeland fells, along Lake Windermere. The soaring mountains rose around her and the poets' waters glittered beneath her in the valleys of memory – hosts of golden daffodils, *Swallows and Amazons*, Peter Rabbit. She came home by way of Blackstone Edge above the old Roman road to avoid the smoke haze over Manchester, and landed back at Oakway sobbing with anguish and love; *love*, for her island home that she'd seen whole and fragile from the air

in the space of an afternoon, from coast to coast, holding its breath in a glass lens of summer and sunlight. All about to be swallowed in nights of flame and blackout. Maddie landed at Oakway before sunset and shut down the engine, then sat in the cockpit weeping.

More than anything else, I think, Maddie went to war on behalf of the Holy Island seals.

She climbed out of Dympna's Puss Moth at last. The late, low sun lit up the other aeroplanes in the hangar Dympna used, expensive toys about to realise their finest hour. (In less than a year that very same Puss Moth, flown by someone else, would ferry blood deliveries to the gasping British Expeditionary Force in France.) Maddie ran all the checks she'd normally run after a flight, and then started again with the ones she'd run before a flight. Dympna found her there half an hour later, still not having put the plane to bed, cleaning midges off the windscreen in the late golden light.

'You don't need to do that.'

'Someone does. I won't be flying it again, will I? Not after tomorrow. It's the only thing I *can* do, check the oil, clean the bugs.'

Dympna stood smoking calmly in the evening sunlight and watched Maddie for a while. Then she said, 'There's going to be air work for girls in this war. You wait. They're

going to need all the pilots they can get fighting for the Royal Air Force. That'll be young men, some of them with less training than you've got now, Maddie. And that'll leave the old men, and the women, to deliver new aircraft and carry their messages and taxi their pilots. That'll be us.'

'You think?'

'There's a unit forming for civil pilots to help with the War Effort. The ATA, Air Transport Auxiliary – men and women both. It'll happen any day. My name's in the pool; Pauline Gower's heading the women's section.' Pauline was a flying friend of Dympna's; Pauline had encouraged Dympna's joyriding business. 'You've not the qualifications for it, but I won't forget you, Maddie. When they open up training to girls again, I'll send you a telegram. You'll be the first.'

Maddie scrubbed at midges and scrubbed at her eyes too, too miserable to answer.

'And when you're done slaving, I'm going to make you a mug of best Oakway Pilot's Oily Tea, and tomorrow morning I'm going to march you into the nearest WAAF recruitment office.'

WAAF is Women's Auxiliary Air Force, auxiliary to the RAF, the Royal Air Force. You don't *fly* in the Women's Auxiliary Air Force, but the way things are now you can do almost any job a man does, all the work associated with

flying and fighting: electrician, technician, fitter, barrage balloon operator, driver, cook, hairdresser . . . You would have thought our Maddie would go for a job in mechanics, wouldn't you? So early in the war, they hadn't yet opened up those jobs to women. It didn't matter that Maddie already had a deal more experience than a lot of boys; there wasn't a place for her. But she'd already learned Morse code and a bit about radio transmission as part of her training for her pilot's 'A' licence. The Air Ministry was in a panic in August 1939, scrambling for women to do radio work as it dawned on them how many men they'd need to do the flying. Maddie joined the WAAF and eventually became a radio operator.

Some WAAF Trades

It was like being at school. I don't know if Maddie thought so too; she didn't go to a Swiss boarding school, she was at a grammar school in Manchester and she certainly never thought about going to university. Even when she was at school, she came home every day and never had to share a room with twenty girls, or sleep on a straw mattress made up of three bricks like a set of settee cushions. We called them biscuits. You were always so tired you didn't care; I would cut off my left hand to have one here. That fussy kit inspection they made you do, where you had to lay out

all your worldly belongings in random but particular order on the folded blanket, like a jigsaw, and if anything was a millimetre the wrong way you got points off your score – that was just like being in school. Also all the slang, the 'square-bashing' drilling exercises, and the boring meals and the uniforms, though Maddie's group didn't get issued proper uniforms at first. They all wore matching blue cardigans, like Girl Guides (Guides don't wear Air Force blue cardigans, but you see what I mean).

Maddie was stationed at Oakway to begin with, very convenient to home. This was late 1939, early 1940. The Phoney War. Nothing much happening.

Not in Britain anyway. We were biting our nails, practising.

Waiting.

Telephonist

'You! Girl in the blue cardigan!'

Five girls in headsets looked round from their switchboards, pointed to their chests and mouthed silently, *Me?*

'Yes, you! Aircraftwoman Brodatt! What are you doing here? You're a licensed radio operator!'

Maddie pointed to her headset and the front cord she was about to connect.

'Take the damned thing off and answer me.'

Maddie turned back to her switchboard and coolly plugged in the front cord. She toggled the appropriate keys and spoke clearly into the headset. 'The Group Captain is through to you now, sir. You may go ahead.' She took off the headset and turned back to the troll who was waiting for a reply. It was the chief flight instructor for Oakway's Royal Air Force squadron, the man who had given Maddie her flight test nearly a year ago.

'Sorry, sir. This is where I've been posted, sir.' (I did say it was like being at school.)

'Posted! You're not even any of you in uniform!'

Five dutiful Aircraftwomen First Class straightened their Air Force blue cardigans.

'We've not been issued full dress, sir.'

'Posted!' the officer repeated. 'You'll start in the radio room tomorrow, Aircraftwoman Brodatt. The operator's assistant is down with influenza.' And he lifted the headset from her console to perch it precariously over his own large head. 'Put me through to the WAAF administration unit,' he said. 'I want to talk to your Section Officer.'

Maddie flipped the keys and plugged in the cords and he gave her posting orders over her own telephone.

Radio Operator

'Tyro to ground, tyro to ground,' came the call from the training aircraft. 'Position uncertain, overhead triangular body of water to east of corridor.'

'Ground to tyro,' answered Maddie. 'Is it a lake or a reservoir?'

'Say again?'

'Lake or reservoir? Your triangular body of water.'

After a short silence, Maddie prompted: 'A reservoir has got a dam at one end.'

'Tyro to ground. Affirm reservoir.'

'Is it Ladyswell? Manchester barrage balloons at ten o'clock and Macclesfield at eight o'clock?'

'Tyro to ground, affirm. Position located. Overhead Ladyswell for return to Oakway.'

Maddie sighed. 'Ground to tyro, call on final approach.'

'Wilco.'

Maddie shook her head, swearing unprettily under her breath. 'Oh my sainted aunt! Unlimited visibility! Unlimited visibility except for the dirty great city in the north-west! That would be the dirty great city surrounded at 3000 feet by a few hundred silver hydrogen balloons as big as buses! How in the name of mud is he going to find *Berlin* if he can't find *Manchester*?'

There was a bit of quiet in the radio room. Then the

chief radio officer said gently, 'Leading Aircraftwoman Brodatt, you're still transmitting.'

—

'Brodatt, stop there.'

Maddie and everyone else had been told to go home. Or back to their various barracks and lodgings anyway, for an afternoon's rest. It was a day of such appallingly evil weather that the street lamps would have been lit if it weren't for fear of enemy aircraft seeing them, not that enemy aircraft can fly in such murk either. Maddie and the other WAAFs in her barracks still hadn't got proper uniforms, but as it was winter they had been issued RAF overcoats – men's overcoats. Warm, and waterproof, but ridiculous. Like wearing a tent. Maddie clutched hers tight in at the sides when the officer spoke to her, standing straight and hoping she looked smarter than she felt. She stopped so he could catch up with her, waiting on the duckboards laid over the concrete apron because there was so much standing water about that if you stepped in a puddle it came over the tops of your shoes.

'Was it you talked down my lads training in the Wellington bomber this morning?' the officer asked.

Maddie gulped. She had thrown radio protocol to the wind to guide those boys in, bullying them through a ten-minute gap in the low-lying cloud, praying they would

follow her instructions without question and that she wasn't directing them straight into the explosive-rigged steel cables that tethered the barrage balloons meant to deter enemy aircraft. Now she recognised the officer: it was one of the squadron leaders.

'Yes, sir,' she admitted hoarsely, her chin held high. The air was so full of moisture it made her hair stick to her forehead. She waited miserably, expecting him to summon her to be court-martialled.

'Those boys jolly well owe you their lives,' he said to Maddie. 'Not one of them on instruments yet and flying without a map. We shouldn't have let them take off this morning.'

'Thank you, sir,' Maddie gasped.

'Singing your praises, those lads were. Made me wonder though; have you any idea what the runway looks like from the air?'

Maddie smiled faintly. 'I've a pilot's "A" licence. Still valid. Of course I haven't flown since August.'

'Oh, I see!'

The RAF squadron leader set off to walk Maddie to the canteen at the airfield's perimeter. She had to trot a little to match his stride.

'Took your licence here at Oakway, did you? Civil Air Guard?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Instructor's rating?'

'No, sir. But I've flown at night.'

'Now that's unusual! Used the fog line, have you?'

He meant the fierce gas lamps that line the runway at intervals on either side so you can land in bad weather.

'Two or three times. Not often, sir.'

'So you *have* seen the runway from the air. And in the dark too! Well —'

Maddie waited. She really didn't have any idea what this man was going to say next.

'If you're going to talk people down you'd damn well better know what the forward view from the cockpit of a Wellington bomber looks like in the landing configuration. Fancy a flight in a Wellington?'

'Oh, yes please, sir!'

(You see — it was just like being in school.)

Stooge

That is not a WAAF trade. That is what they call it when you go along in an aircraft just for the ride and don't meaningfully contribute to a successful flight. Perhaps Maddie was more of a backseat driver than a stooge.

— 'Don't think you've reset the directional gyro.'

— 'He told you heading 270. You've turned east.'

– 'Look sharp, lads, northbound aircraft at three o'clock, one thousand feet below.'

Once the electric undercarriage failed and she had to earn her keep by taking her turn at the hand pump so they didn't have to crash-land. Once they let her ride in the gun turret. She loved that, like being a goldfish alone in an empty sky.

Once they had to lift her out of the plane after landing because she was shaking so badly she couldn't climb down herself.

Maddie's Wellington joyrides were not exactly clandestine, but they weren't exactly cricket either. She was counted among the S.O.B. – Souls On Board – when the lads took off, but she certainly wasn't authorised to be there chivvying along the novice bombing crews as they practised low flying over the high moors. So various off- and on-duty concerned people came pelting out of offices and the men's and ladies' tea huts, coatless and white-faced, when they saw Maddie's RAF mates chair-lifting her in their arms across the runway.

A WAAF friend of hers called Joan and the guilty squadron leader reached her first.

'What's wrong? What happened? Is she hurt?'

Maddie was not hurt. She was already badgering the Wellington crew who carried her to put her down.

'Get off, everyone will see, the girls will never let me forget it –'

'What happened?'

Maddie struggled to her feet and stood shivering on the concrete. 'We got fired on,' she said, and looked away, burning with shame at how much it had taken out of her.

'Fired on!' barked the squadron leader. This was in the spring of 1940 – the war was still in Europe. It was before the disastrous May when the Allies fled retreating to the French beaches, before the siege that was the Battle of Britain, before the thunder and flame-filled nights of the Blitz. In the spring of 1940 our skies were alert, and armed, and uneasy. But they were still safe.

'Yes, *fired on*,' echoed the Wellington pilot in fury. He was white as a sheet too. 'By those idiots manning the anti-aircraft guns at the Cattercup barrage balloons. By *our own gunners*. Who the hell's training them? Bloody daft trigger-happy morons! Wasting ammo and scaring the blue bleeding daylights out of everybody! Any school lad can spot the difference between a flying cigar and a flying pencil!'

(We call our jolly Wellingtons 'flying cigars' and we call your nasty Dorniers 'flying pencils'. Have fun translating, Miss E.)

The pilot had been as scared as Maddie, but he was not shaking.

Joan put a comforting arm round Maddie's shoulders and advised her in a whisper to pay no attention to the pilot's language. Maddie gave an uncertain and forced laugh.

'Wasn't even sitting in the gun turret,' she muttered. 'Thank goodness *I'm* not flying into Europe.'

Signals Branch

'Flight Lieutenant Mottram has been singing your praises,' Maddie's WAAF Section Officer told her. 'He says you've got the sharpest pair of eyes at Oakway –' (the Section Officer rolled her own eyes) '– probably a bit of an exaggeration, but he said that in flight you're always the first to spot another aircraft approaching. How do you fancy further training?'

'In what?'

The Section Officer coughed apologetically. 'It's a bit secret. Well: very secret. Say yes, and I'll send you on the course.'

'Yes,' Maddie said.

—

To clarify a remark someone made earlier, I confess that I am making up all the proper nouns. Did you think I

remembered all the names and ranks of everybody Maddie ever worked with? Or every plane she ever flew in? I think it is more interesting this way.

That is all I can usefully write today, though I would keep on blethering about nothing if I thought that by doing it I could avoid the next few hours' cross-examination – Engel struggling over my handwriting and von Linden picking holes in everything I've said. It must be done . . . no point in putting it off. I have a blanket to look forward to afterwards, I hope, perhaps a tepid dish of kailkenny à la guerre – that is, cabbage and potato mash without the potato and with not very much cabbage. I have not got scurvy yet anyway, thanks to France's infinite supply of prison cabbage. Heigh ho –