"A haunting love story. . . . With beautiful prose and picturesque descriptions, Amanda Barratt draws on the true life events that shaped the romance between Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Maria von Wedemeyer. . . . Infused into every page is a faith that not only Dietrich but Maria was willing to stand on, no matter the cost."

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"It is not often I have the sublime pleasure to read a novel that lingers with me long after I've finished the last page and closed the book. Amanda Barratt's stellar writing creates a world that, based on truth, also demonstrates such intimate knowledge of her characters as to make them living, breathing, thinking human beings. This is a kaleidoscopic emotional journey through heart-stopping moments of danger and risk faced by two star-crossed lovers. Their tale will take you from weeping over war's futility to awe at one man's unwavering faith and conviction.

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—Kate Breslin, best-selling author of *For Such a Time*

My Dearest Dietrich

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A Novel of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Lost Love

Amanda Barratt

KREGEL PUBLICATIONS

My Dearest Dietrich: A Novel of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Lost Love

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To those who spoke out for the voiceless
and paid the ultimate price.

"Blessed is the heart with strength to
stop its beating for honor's sake.
Blessed is the match consumed
in kindling flame."
—Hannah Szenes, 1921–1944

For Your glory, Lord.

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Character List

The Bonhoeffer Family

Dietrich Bonhoeffer—A thirty-six-year-old theologian who now works as a double agent in the conspiracy against Adolf Hitler.

Dr. Karl Bonhoeffer—An eminent psychiatrist and Dietrich's father.

Paula Bonhoeffer—Dietrich's mother.

Klaus Bonhoeffer—Dietrich's older brother. A lawyer and a member of the conspiracy against Hitler.

Emmi Bonhoeffer—Klaus's wife.

Children—Walter, Thomas, and Cornelie.

Ursula Schleicher, née Bonhoeffer—Dietrich's older sister.

Rüdiger Schleicher—Ursula's husband and part of the conspiracy.

Children—Renate and Hans-Walter.

Christel von Dohnanyi, née Bonhoeffer—Dietrich's older sister.

Hans von Dohnanyi—Christel's husband. Lawyer in the Abwehr (German Military Intelligence) and key member of the conspiracy.

Children—Klaus, Christoph, and Bärbel.

Sabine Leibholz, née Bonhoeffer—Dietrich's twin sister. Was forced to escape Germany due to her husband's (**Gerhard Leibholz**) Jewish ancestry.

Children—Marianne and Christiane.

Lotte—The Bonhoeffers' maid.

The von Wedemeyer Family

Maria von Wedemeyer—The eighteen-year-old daughter of a Prussian landowner whose family is anti-Nazi, though both her father and brother serve in the Wehrmacht.

Major Hans von Wedemeyer—Maria's father.
Ruth von Wedemeyer, née von Kleist—Maria's mother. Sometimes called "Ruthchen."
Ruth-Alice von Bismarck, née von Wedemeyer—Maria's older sister.
Klaus von Bismarck—Ruth-Alice's husband.
Max von Wedemeyer—Maria's older brother and a soldier in the Wehrmacht.
Hans-Werner von Wedemeyer—Maria's younger brother.
Christine von Wedemeyer—Maria's younger sister.
Lala von Wedemeyer—Maria's younger sister.
Peter von Wedemeyer—Maria's younger brother.
Ruth von Kleist-Retzow—Maria's maternal grandmother.

The Conspirators

Admiral Wilhelm Canaris—Head of the Abwehr. Working closely with Hans von Dohnanyi to overthrow the Nazi regime.
General Hans Oster—Member of the Abwehr and leading figure in the German resistance.
General Ludwig Beck—Leading figure in the resistance against Hitler.
Wilhelm Schmidhuber—Member of the Abwehr who participated in the Operation 7 plot to smuggle fourteen Jews into Switzerland.
Henning von Tresckow—Maria's uncle. Heavily involved in the plots to assassinate Hitler.
Fabian von Schlabrendorff—Maria's cousin. Involved in the plots to assassinate Hitler.
General Paul von Hase—Military commandant of Berlin, Dietrich's uncle, and conspirator.

Other Characters

Eberhard Bethge—Dietrich's best friend.
The Vogel family—Maria completes her required national service by working as a nanny for this family.
Manfred Roeder—Judge in charge of interrogating Dietrich and other arrested conspirators.
Oskar von Scheffler—Gestapo police detective and acquaintance of Maria.
Corporal Knobloch—Guard at Tegel Prison.

Prologue

February 1945
Flossenbürg, Germany

Overhead, there was no sky.

Or rather, it was unlike any sky Maria had glimpsed before. Unvarnished gray, almost white. If the sun ever existed, it had long since fled, leaving rays void of color and cheer in its wake.

The road ahead stretched long and straight. At its end, a great brown building squatted, bricks and roof providing the vista's only color. Everything else . . . white. Endless white. Snow on the ground. Billowing smoke. Swirling flakes raining down.

What those papery flakes represented, what they had once been, Maria couldn't bear to think of.

Nein, she must keep to her purpose. Any deviation would be fatal to her sluggish mind, her leaden feet.

"Dietrich." The word whispered from her half-frozen lips. "Dietrich."

Just keep thinking of him. That would keep her warm.

It had started as a girlish game of hers, running his name over and over in her mind, turning each syllable, toying with the letters, as she went about her daily duties.

Now it was the cord that kept her body upright, her limbs moving, and her numb fingers clenched around the handle of the heavy suitcase. With each step, the case jostled against her shin.

"Dietrich . . ."

Just a few more steps.

"Dietrich . . ."

Finally she reached the half-moon-shaped entrance. A guard—weathered face etched with severe lines, black SS cap straight upon his close-shaven hair—looked her over as if she were an apparition. To him, she probably

was. A fraülein of only twenty, approaching the gates of a concentration camp on foot. Only she didn't feel twenty. The weight of these past months, years, had bestowed upon her the mind of a woman three times that.

"*Guten Morgen*, Fraülein." He gave a stiff nod, his shoulders broom-handle straight.

Oh, honestly. They weren't in a ballroom, for pity's sake. It was cold enough to turn water into icicles in seconds. Her fingers had become claws around the case's handle. Her hair was in tangles, her nose redder than the armband wrapping the man's right bicep.

Still, she needed something from this man. And it was better to smile than to make enemies. Hadn't the Tegel months shown her that?

"*Guten Morgen*, Herr Officer. I'm here about a prisoner."

His gaze sharpened into even grimmer lines. Undoubtedly, this specimen of SS training had at one time been some mutter's little boy, some sister's playmate. Given the girl fits of exasperation, as Max had in their childhood days. Brought a whole new meaning to the word *dummkopf*, yet done it all so charmingly that she could only throw her hands up . . . then laugh and ply him with *kuchen*.

She'd have to appeal to that, the little boy hidden beneath the skull and crossbones insignia.

"You've got to help me." It was all too easy to weave desperation through the fabric of her words. Desperation, something Germany—mighty, Führer-led Germany—did not condone, yet its people made bedfellows with. "I've walked seven kilometers here, and I'll have to return on foot. Please, Herr Officer. I need answers. The man I'm searching for . . . he's my fiancé."

Success. He'd softened somewhat, perhaps at the memory of his own sweetheart. Of happier days when love was a thing to rejoice in, laughter an everyday sound.

"*Ja*. You have a name?"

She nodded. "Bonhoeffer. Dietrich Bonhoeffer."

"Wait here." He moved, as if to turn. Then snapped a glance over his shoulder. "Come inside." A stiff motion with his black-gloved hand. "You look cold."

Forcing her feet to move was accomplished only by sheer willpower. They made their way inside a large and dark room. A fire—color and warmth at last—lit a large stone hearth.

"You . . . um . . . can warm yourself over there. I'd offer *kaffee*, but we're low at present."

The warmth beckoned, and she crossed the floor, her boots leaving a watery trail in their wake. She crouched in front of the flames, much the

same way the family dog had during long winter nights at Pätzig. For what seemed like an hour, she sat there. Finally, blessed warmth returned to her hands, and she pried them from around the leather handles. Though the tingling and burning that ensued made tears prick her eyes, at least she wasn't frostbitten.

The presence of warmth made another of her needs starkly apparent. When had she last eaten? Her hollow stomach—where had the rosy-cheeked girl who devoured plateful after plateful of strudel, gone?—gurgled in protest.

Yet this need of hers, so weak and human, could wait. It was Dietrich—not theologian Dietrich, or brilliant Dietrich, nor even Tegel Dietrich, but the Dietrich she loved with full and startling intensity—who mattered most at this moment.

She sensed someone watching her and turned. The guard stood beside the cluttered desk, one hand resting on its top, looking at her, not with detachment, but with something else altogether in his eyes. It couldn't be pity. Not from a member of Hitler's trained, lauded, and equipped forces. Not from a man who viewed death as often as a scullery maid saw dirty dishes. Yet . . . yes, there was pity in those veiled eyes.

Somehow she managed to force her legs to stand.

"Well?"

"I'm sorry, Fraülein. I have no record of anyone by the name of Dietrich Bonhoeffer."

"Are you sure?" Where else could they have taken him? They gave her no word in Berlin, no one knew here. How could one man simply disappear, even in the chaos engulfing war-torn Germany?

"I checked. Our records are meticulous." He stiffened, as if challenging her, a red-nosed, disheveled fraülein, to question him. Then, softening again, added, "I'm sorry your journey has been wasted. These days . . . it is easy to misplace people."

The hours of walking, the cold, the frustration bordering on despair, boiled within her like a kettle left on the stove much too long. "I didn't misplace him." She spat out the words, quick bursts of rage, before regret could worm its way in. "Your kind took him. An innocent man and the best that ever breathed air." Snatching up the suitcase, she spun on her heel, strode from the building and down the road, before the man could follow and arrest her for unpatriotic talk. They seemed to be arresting everyone these days for the slightest offense—Hans, Rüdiger, Klaus.

Dietrich.

The road ahead seemed to mock her, each step one that must be fought

for, triumphed over, before she could reach shelter. Frigid air bit through her threadbare coat, slashed across her thin stockings. Tears, those renegade signs of weakness, flooded her eyes and sped down her cheeks. She swiped them away with an impatient hand. Nobody cried anymore. There was just too much sorrow and not enough time.

She slipped her numb fingers into the pocket of her coat, fingertips brushing a folded piece of paper. One of Dietrich's letters to her. Its words echoed in her mind:

> *The thought that you are concerned would be my only concern. The thought that you're waiting with me, lovingly and patiently, is my daily consolation. All will come right at the time appointed by God. Join me in looking forward to that time. . . .*

"I'm trying, Dietrich. I'm trying to believe that there *will* be a time. That one day we'll again sit in Grossmutter's parlor, and you'll play the piano, and we'll be happy. Happy not because there's anything in particular to be glad about, but because we're together. That's all that matters. We'll be together."

There. Think of that. Though she hadn't succeeded at the camp, the war would soon be over. This horrible, godforsaken war that had claimed the lives of one too many good men. But the memory of Dietrich and his words rose in her thoughts again: *"Nein, Maria. Nothing is ever godforsaken. He is in everything . . . In the giving and taking of life. In all of our moments, even this one."*

She kept talking aloud, if only to keep her senses alert.

"*Ja*, Dietrich. You're right. You always are, you know. It still amazes me that you chose me, the silly girl who couldn't understand theology, who coaxed you into playing American music. I'm not that girl anymore, you know. How can I still be? After all these years have brought, I've changed, you've changed. But know this. Wherever you are . . ."

The exertion of her pace, the cold scraping her lungs stole her last words. But as she trudged down the endless road, the suitcase heavier than ever, the sky above gray and lifeless and empty, she let them fill her heart.

I love you.

Chapter One

May 31, 1942
Sigtuna, Sweden

A dictatorship is like a snake. If you step on its tail, it will bite you.

The words played through Dietrich Bonhoeffer's mind as the taxi trundled through the streets of the ancient Swedish royal city. He stared out the sun-streaked window, his reflection an overlay. Nausea churned through him. But it was no longer due to yesterday's turbulent flight from Berlin to Stockholm. Nein, he'd recovered from that quickly enough.

The sensation of being observed, followed, occasioned a queasiness of an entirely different nature. One not easily shaken away.

The cramped taxi interior was rife with stale cigars and desperation—the former belonging to the profusely sweating driver, the latter his own, albeit concealed.

He'd worked too hard over the past few days for some hitch to prevent this meeting from going off according to plan.

The taxi jolted to a halt in front of the Nordic Ecumenical Institute. Dietrich paid the driver—who barely nodded—grasped his suitcase with one hand, and opened the taxi door with the other. Afternoon sunlight warmed his face, the air pure and fresh.

With practiced calm, he scanned his surroundings, taking in the several-story, stone building, the manicured lawn, and wide steps leading to the front door. Had he been followed? Or was the sensation of a spider crawling up his neck due to pent-up nervous energy? A figure ambled around the back of the building, wearing a worn cap and carrying a toolbox.

Only a handyman.

Not the Gestapo.

Dietrich strode toward the door, black oxfords crunching on the gravel. He climbed the steps and gave a firm rap to the tarnished gold door knocker.

Would Bishop Bell still be here? Or would the hour trip from Stockholm to Sigtuna to see the Bishop of Chichester have been undertaken for nothing?

A fresh-faced maidservant opened the door.

"Yes?"

"A visitor here to see Bishop Bell and Harry Johansson, if I may." Dietrich shifted the suitcase in his palm, posture erect, conscious of the clipped syllables that marked him as bearing an accent from the Führer's country.

There were few reasons for a German not in uniform to be visiting neutral Sweden. The last thing he needed was undue attention.

"Follow me please." The girl opened the door, motioning him down a narrow, dimly lit hall. Thankfully, she hadn't inquired his identity.

Though the papers within his suitcase didn't weigh much more than a loaf of bread, the knowledge of their existence made the case seem lined with lead.

The girl opened a door, revealing a room paneled in wood and cluttered with bookshelves and a well-used oaken desk. But what drew Dietrich's attention was the gray-haired gentleman sitting, large hands loose between his knees, in a wing chair near the window. The conversation between him and the lanky blond man sitting on the edge of the desk drew to an abrupt halt. Both gazes swung in Dietrich's direction. Bell's eyes widened in shock.

"Hello, George." Dietrich smiled. He hadn't seen his friend since the spring of 1939. Much had changed in his life—and in Germany—in the interim.

"Dietrich!" Bishop Bell rose to his feet. He opened his mouth, as if to exclaim over the unexpectedness of his arrival, but Dietrich spoke up first.

"You haven't changed a bit." Though nearing sixty, Bell looked in robust health, the space of years adding a few lines around the eyes, a few inches to his girth, but little else. Pressing on, Dietrich continued. "And this must be Mr. Johansson. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, at your service." He held out his hand to the Swede, and the man shook it heartily.

"Pleasure to make your acquaintance, sir." Johansson's smile was equal parts congenial and curious.

After a few minutes of pleasantries, Johansson left the room, leaving Dietrich and Bell alone. The second the door clicked, Bell's facade changed into stark astonishment.

"Whatever are you doing here? I heard you were in Norway on your way to the front lines." He sank down heavily into his chair.

"You mean what other reason would I have for being in Sweden, now of all times?" Dietrich took an unoccupied seat, placing his suitcase beside it.

In another time and place, he'd have relaxed in the comfortable easy chair, stretched out his long legs, and settled in. Not today. The pressure of what he'd come to relay made him sit stiff and straight. "It's a long story. In short, I'm officially employed by the Abwehr."

"You work for Germany's Military Intelligence?" Bell leaned forward, gaze darting to and fro, as if unable to grasp the weight of Dietrich's words.

"In a word, *ja*, I do." There wasn't much time. Someday after the war, when he and Bell could meet again, he'd explain everything. Right now, he need only hit the high points. "My brother-in-law, Hans von Dohnanyi, is at the heart of my involvement. And the conspiracy." It was only a word.

But a weighted one. Laden with so many implications . . . so many lives.

On instinct, he scanned the room, checking for telephones that could be tapped, open windows where anyone could overhear.

Under the Malicious Practices Act, communication with England or any enemy government wasn't only dangerous. It was treason. Punishable by execution.

A treason he committed with all his might and main.

Heart pounding, he leaned forward, voice cut to a whisper. "It's not just a conspiracy. There are plans . . . plans in place for the overthrow of the German government and the assassination of Adolf Hitler."

Bell's sharp intake of air sliced the atmosphere like the whistle of a bullet. "It's true then," he breathed.

"Never more so," Dietrich said. "And we need you, George. I traveled from Berlin with the express purpose of meeting with you to ask—beg—you on behalf of my friends in Germany to aid us in getting word of our plans to the British government. When—if—the coup succeeds, those involved want to know that Britain will be willing to negotiate peace. With your contacts in the House of Lords, you can speak to Anthony Eden. As foreign secretary under Churchill, Eden can help us, if only he can be convinced." Dietrich's words came faster now, rushing out of him. "Hans and General Oster believe that many more officers under Hitler could be convinced to join us if they could be certain we had the support of the British government. In the way of gaining such support, you could do a great deal for us."

Bell pressed a hand against his lined forehead. "Of course. Of course. I'll do my utmost. But the secret memorandum you sent to me last year . . . none of them took it very seriously. They reject the idea that anti-Nazi forces in Germany could have any effect, except after complete military defeat."

"Field Marshals von Bock and von Kluge don't agree. They're determined,

along with General Beck and General Oster and others, to see the government overthrown after Hitler's assassination. Until that event takes place, we cannot gain much headway."

"Field Marshals von Bock and von Kluge," Bell murmured, as if committing the names to memory. He nodded. "Give me all the names and information you can, Dietrich. I'll use it to the best of my abilities. You know as well as I that Churchill is vehemently opposed to any discussion of peace. He wants the war won, and at all costs. After these long years of fighting, the lines between Germans and Nazis have become blurred. Almost to the point of being indistinguishable. And can you blame them? London has been ruthlessly bombed . . . hundreds of civilians killed. They've endured great losses dealt by the hands of Hitler and his generals. It's little wonder they're cautious at the idea of this 'resistance.'"

Dietrich stood and paced toward the window, staring out but seeing little of the vista of blue sky and sunlight. Instead, the faces of the hunted and defenseless rose before him, an endless line of specters who would forever haunt him. Those Germany had ordered euthanized because they believed their state of health decreed them unworthy of life.

And the Jews. God's chosen ones. No matter he stood in a room in neutral Sweden, he could not ignore the fact that, by order of the Führer, millions of them were being systematically murdered, crammed into railcars like cattle shipped to the slaughterhouse. Women. Children.

Souls.

He swung back around, facing Bell. A swirl of dust motes floated in the sunlight, the rays landing on Bell's thinning gray hair. His friend would aid their cause, get the truth to those at the top. But would he succeed at convincing them?

"Only a few know of my involvement," he said quietly. "Many believe because I'm part of the Abwehr that I've deflected, turned away from standing with the Confessing Church." He swallowed. "Germany has sinned, George. We must all pay the price of bringing the nation to repentance. Christ calls us to suffer on behalf of others. My suffering involves putting aside qualms of conscience. I lie. I create falsified memorandums to disguise the true nature of my journeys."

"And participating in plans that involve murder?" Bell met Dietrich's gaze. There was no censure in the man's eyes. Only a demand for honesty.

Dietrich nodded. He would not allow himself to squirm beneath such talk, however uncomfortable it made him. "Perhaps that, too, is part of Germany's punishment. That we are forced to resort to such means." He resumed his seat, drawing out his suitcase to gather papers for Bell to take

with him. "We've gone too far for any other course of action. It must be done."

His brother Klaus's words resurfaced, their refrain an eerie cadence in his ears, as Dietrich prepared to expound on details of the conspiracy, relaying things that, if known, could lead to deadly consequences as fast as the time it took for a Gestapo finger to squeeze the trigger.

If you step on its tail, it will bite you.

Chapter Two

June 8, 1942
Klein-Krössin Manor
Pomerania, Prussia

Ah . . . the memories he had of this place.

Dietrich approached the cottage, afternoon sun warm on his face, the twitter of birdsong high on the air. Klein-Krössin had always been a haven for him, a small corner of serenity. A place for thinking and writing, long conversations accompanied by *kaffee* and firelight.

After the wearying travel to and from Sweden, he needed this respite more than ever.

He'd have knocked—had Ruth von Kleist-Retzow not thrown open the door first.

"Dietrich. How good to see you!" Though Ruth's hair had long since turned white as the snowy alps, and her skin boasted more than a few lines and furrows, the brightness of her smile put to shame a hundred electric bulbs.

"Ruth." He embraced the woman, then held the door for her to reenter the house. Inside the small foyer, it smelled just as a home ought. Clean, like soap and polish. Welcoming, like strudel and sauerbraten.

"You look tired, Dietrich." The woman's keen eyes missed nothing.

"The Abwehr keeps me busy." Though Ruth had more than a slight inkling about the true nature of his activities, such things weren't spoken of in broad daylight, even in the relative safety of Klein-Krössin. "And besides, who isn't tired these days?"

"Well, you're free to stay as long and often as you choose." Shoes tapping on the gleaming wood floor, Ruth led the way into the parlor. It was a room used and loved; its state both tidy and disordered. Though everything was spotlessly clean, photographs cluttered the mantle—Ruth's many

children and grandchildren, and pillows and throw-blankets adorned the two floral-upholstered sofas. A window set ajar let in summer's fragrance and the sound of muted honking—Ruth's beloved geese.

If he hadn't already come to terms with the *why* of his lifestyle—what man of his age and capabilities was exempt from use in battlefield service for the Fatherland?—enjoying such luxury would have brought with it a hefty measure of guilt. But he was being used by God, a task a thousand times more important than any job dictated by the Führer. Used to minister, to write, to conspire.

The last he could never forget, not even at Klein-Krössin.

"I can only manage a week at the most, this time. But I hope to get plenty of work done while I'm here."

"You're still writing *Ethics*?" Ruth motioned for him to sit on the sofa opposite her.

"Ja." Whenever he had the time and God provided the inspiration. Dietrich always made good progress in the writing studio Ruth had fixed up for him in her attic. It was there he'd finished *Nachfolge*, a book that had received more acclaim than he'd expected, even in America where it was known by the title *The Cost of Discipleship*.

Of course, nothing bearing the name of Dietrich Bonhoeffer was printed in Germany these days.

"So tell me, Ruth, how are you doing?"

The lady opened her mouth to respond. But footsteps, quick and clattering, cut her off.

A girl stormed into the room. *Ja*, stormed was the only way to describe it. Mud splattered the front of her skirt and blouse, dotted her nose. She wasn't tall in stature; neither was she particularly petite. But what she didn't own in height, she made up for with indignation.

"You wouldn't believe what that *dummkopf* Friedrich Schiller did! Remember those strawberries I gave to Greta just this morning? I found him in front of the butcher's, attempting to take them from her. I tried to get the basket away from him, but he pulled and pulled. And you once said he was such a *Liebling. Liebling!* If that boy is this much trouble at nine years old, I shudder to think of what a terror he'll be at fifteen." She planted both fists on her hips.

Dietrich sat motionless, trying to suppress a chuckle. Of course the situation wasn't at all humorous—a boy stealing a girl's fruit. But the way this fraülein, whoever she was, looked so royally indignant warranted a bit of mirth.

"I see." Ruth's smile was almost too patient, as if she'd witnessed such

outbursts before. "I'm sure you gave him what he deserved, dear. In fact, I pity Friedrich Schiller for having the misfortune to meet with your wrath. I doubt he'll come back for another helping anytime soon."

The girl nodded. A strand of honey-colored hair dangled down her cheek.

"But, Maria, it isn't good manners, as you well know, to barge into the room in such a helter-skelter fashion. Especially when we have company."

It was as if she suddenly noticed his presence. The girl—Maria—clapped both hands over her mouth. Shock and mortification raced through her eyes in rapid succession.

For a moment, no one said a word. Maria stared at him. He looked steadily back. Ruth glanced between them both, hands folded in her lap as calmly as ever.

Finally, Maria pried her hands away from her mouth.

"Grossmutter, who is that?" She pointed at him as if he were some sort of unwelcome spider.

Ruth laughed in that silvery way of hers. Before she could make introductions, Dietrich stood and crossed to where the girl was.

"Allow me to take the liberty of introducing myself. I'm Dietrich Bonhoeffer. And you are?" He smiled, wanting to ease her discomfort. After all, it wasn't her fault she'd fallen in the mud or been unaware of his arrival.

Her chin angled slightly. She had an arresting face, almost girlishly round in its angles and planes, yet proud and startlingly lovely. "Maria von Wedemeyer."

Now it was his turn to be shaken. Gone were the long braids and shapeless pinafores he remembered about the little girl he'd attempted to take on for confirmation classes. The Maria before him, with her expressive blue eyes and upswept, albeit tousled, hair, was twelve years old no longer.

He cleared his throat, realizing she expected him to say something along the lines of polite conversation. "It's . . . um . . . very nice to meet you. Again."

She held out her hand, though it, too, was a bit muddy. He took it anyway, unable to unglue his gaze from her face. She appeared recovered from her earlier outburst and gazed back, unblinking. Her fingers clasped his, not hesitating or limp, but warm and decisive, and it was probably longer than necessary before he found his senses and pulled away.

Maria faced her grossmutter. "Why did you not tell me Pastor Bonhoeffer was arriving this afternoon?"

Ruth laughed again, as if the whole situation were as entertaining as a comic opera. "Why? Would you have made more of an effort in your appearance?"

Maria shrugged, a flash of laughter in her gaze. "Oh probably. It's a good thing I refrained from dragging Friedrich Schiller in here by his ear. He's a good deal muddier than I at the moment." She grinned, as if accustomed to giving her grossmutter what for.

"Why don't you go and change, Maria." Ruth inclined her head toward the door.

"Of course." Maria turned her attention back to him, a flush suffusing her cheeks. "My apologies for my sudden entrance, Pastor Bonhoeffer. It's a habit of mine while here at Klein-Krössin."

He couldn't help but smile—nein, grin. It loosed something inside him, giving into the impulsive urge that made his lips tug upward. "It's quite all right, Fraülein von Wedemeyer. It was a good attempt you made, trying to help Greta."

"Even if it didn't work out the way I wanted. But as Goethe says, 'He who goes not forward, goes backward.'" With a little wave, she turned and left the room. Dietrich stared after her, this muddy, Goethe-quoting girl who'd swept into the room, disordering it—and him—in a matter of seconds.

Once Dietrich resumed his seat, Ruth began, "You must excuse my granddaughter. I realize now that I neglected to tell her you were arriving this afternoon. She's so high-spirited, that one. If she weren't leaving tomorrow, I fear your days here would be anything but peaceful."

Dietrich held up a hand. If he let himself listen to more of Ruth's elaborations on her granddaughter, he would be foolish enough to admit just how diverting he'd found the past moments of conversation. He produced a properly pastoral, though entirely truthful, reply. "I admire anyone seeking to defend the defenseless. Even if she did go about it in a rather . . . interesting manner."

Ruth laughed. "That's one thing our Maria is. Interesting. She just graduated from school, you know. Elisabeth von Thadden's academy in Wieblingen. I expect they tempered her antics somewhat. But she'll be company for the both of us tonight. Now, if you'd like to bring your cases in from the car, I can show you to your usual room."

"Please don't trouble yourself." Dietrich stood. "I hope I've stayed here often enough to dispense with the formalities. You rest here, and I'll see to my own luggage."

Ruth acquiesced, and Dietrich left the room. As he collected his bags and carried them upstairs, he couldn't deny the smile that crossed his face at the thought of an evening spent in the company of a fraülein who got covered in mud while defending little girls and sassed her grossmutter with laughter in her eyes.

Well, she'd certainly presented herself as a grand, grown-up lady. All elegant attire and polite how-do-you-dos.

Maria's cheeks still flamed with mortification. She'd embarrassed herself in front of Pastor Bonhoeffer as a child. Now she had to go and repeat the mistake.

She gave a critical glance at her reflection in the guest bedroom mirror. Mud no longer speckled her nose, thank goodness. But her face was still round, her hair such a straight, unremarkable shade of blondish-brown. At least the lavender dress with its white lace collar was presentable. And she'd managed to braid her hair and coil it into a bun, the way her friend Doris always styled hers. Of course, forever-daring Doris had since bobbed her own effortlessly curly locks.

Oh, for goodness' sake, Maria. This is your grossmutter and her theologian friend. Pastor Bonhoeffer's no American film star.

Nein, but there was something . . . interesting about him. Different. She'd noticed it, even as a girl. And when he'd greeted her this afternoon, with that half smile playing across his features . . .

You're being a dummkopf*, Maria. Pastor Bonhoeffer has to be over thirty-five.*

And a thoroughgoing academic in the bargain. The history Grossmutter once relayed to her recalled itself to mind. He'd earned his doctorate in theology at the age of twenty-one and gone on to pastor in Spain, complete a postdoctoral degree, study in America, lecture at Berlin University, and actively participate in maintaining ecumenical communication between foreign churches. After the Führer attempted to dissolve any church not consistent with National Socialist ideology, Pastor Bonhoeffer became one of the foremost leaders in the Confessing Church—a group that fought desperately both to counter the false teachings of the Reich Church and to keep alive a church founded on Scripture's doctrine rather than Herr Hitler's. He'd taken advantage of the isolated backcountry of Pomerania to train young pastors in the truth of the Bible instead of the widely accepted heresy of Hitler's Reich Church—an illegal practice that could have been shut down by the Gestapo at any time. Eventually that was what had happened.

Ja, the man kept a hectic schedule. And was, come to think of it, probably older than thirty-five.

Her grossmutter's connection with Pastor Bonhoeffer had come about when he'd transferred his group of young Confessing Church pastors-in-training to a rambling manor house called Finkenwalde, near Grossmutter's

second home in the town of Stettin. The two formed an instant bond forged by similar ideas. Grossmutter consequently took up regular attendance at the Finkenwalde chapel. She'd seized every opportunity to bring along her many grandchildren, which had led to "the confirmation class incident." Maria winced.

Flicking a final glance at her appearance and dismissing her thoughts with as much haste, she smoothed down the front of her dress and made her way downstairs, careful not to skip—a rather bad habit of hers.

Pastor Bonhoeffer stood in the parlor, hands behind his back, gaze on the window.

He turned at her entrance. Doris would probably call what he did next a "double take." Had she altered her appearance so drastically he didn't recognize her? She hadn't been covered in *that* much mud.

Because he couldn't possibly be looking at her the way men did at Doris. They always stared at her friend with unabashed admiration. Those same men usually spared Maria all of three seconds of their attention.

Since he stared at her, she decided to peruse him. Light blond hair. Dark gray suit and navy pinstripe tie, his tall, solid frame filling the well-made coat. To be honest, he didn't look at all like a stodgy theologian, but rather like the sort of man it would be difficult to best on a soccer field. Though his gold-rimmed glasses were perhaps at variance to that, giving him a somewhat scholarly air. Like the kind of man who pondered deep topics one moment, but wasn't afraid to laugh the next.

"*Guten Abend.*" He gave a crooked smile.

She dipped a nod. "Likewise. Where is Grossmutter?"

"Having a word with the cook. Apparently, whatever it was we were having for dinner wasn't put in the oven on time." He said all of this with a smile, as if minor inconveniences didn't annoy him in the least.

"So what are we to do till then?" What exactly did theologians do for fun? She wasn't sure she was up to a discussion of some weighty tome.

His glance—he had such intense, almost startling, blue eyes—turned toward the window again. "It's nice outside. We could . . . take a walk?"

"I'm not sure Grossmutter is up to long distances." Though it did look inviting out of doors. The sun had reached the point where its honey warmth turned to streaks of gold and umber. And she could smell the clean sweetness of the air coming in from the partially open window.

"She already told me she had other matters to take care of. She said she wasn't up to much entertaining tonight, but that we were to join her for dinner in an hour or so and occupy ourselves until then."

"So she suggested just we two go?" Maria couldn't help the laugh that

escaped. So like Grossmutter to give her granddaughter the company of a theologian for entertainment. Of course, this *was* Grossmutter, a born-and-bred Prussian aristocrat who'd named her guest rooms Hope, Joy, and Contentment.

"If you'd rather not . . ."

"I didn't say that," she hastened. Perhaps a bit too quickly. "That is"—she added a smile—"a walk would be lovely." There. Wouldn't Doris be proud?

He motioned for her to precede him, and they made their way into the garden—a bower of neat paths, shrubbery, and blossoms in bloom. War or no war, Grossmutter loved her flowers. She'd attempted to pass the interest on to her granddaughter, but even now, Maria couldn't tell the difference between one variety and another. Except that some were purple, others red, some smelled better than the rest, and whenever she gathered a rose—her favorite—she invariably pricked her finger in the process.

He fell into step beside her, hands behind his back. "So did you ever take confirmation classes?"

She nodded. "A year later. Not with anyone as well-known as you, of course. I think Grossmutter still cringes upon remembrance of the occasion. Her twelve-year-old granddaughter making an idiot out of herself in front of the celebrated Pastor Bonhoeffer." She gave a rueful smile. "I'm glad I can't recall all the stupid things I said."

"I don't remember anyone making an idiot out of themselves. Except, perhaps me." His smile was earnest. "As I recall, some of your answers to the questions I posed were quite interesting."

"I can assure you I've learned a few things since then. Although you probably couldn't tell, based on my performance this afternoon." She picked a tiny purple flower, twirling it in her fingers.

"Really, Fräulein von Wedemeyer. Depreciation isn't becoming. I thought what you did today was . . . very fine." He met her gaze, and she marveled again at the depth of his. Full of purpose, clarity, and, even rarer, hope. These days, hope seemed to be more rationed than *kaffee* and sugar, despite the impassioned speeches people made on the radio and the lavish victory parades they threw.

Pastor Bonhoeffer had always been different. She remembered the earnest way he preached from Sunday services at Finkenwalde. Once, rather bored by the lengthy sermon, she'd sat absolutely still and counted how many times he said the word *God*. Sixty-eight in all. Of course, following lunch that afternoon, that same serious pastor had proceeded to cheerfully trounce everyone at table tennis. She'd always been too intimidated to play.

She tilted her head to look at him. How different he seemed now, simply a man walking beside her instead of the great pastor in the pulpit. And she, no longer the little girl relegated to playing with her brothers and sisters, could be free to converse with him on equal terms.

Tonight had the texture of hope in it, brought on perhaps by the presence of this man who seemed to emanate it. As if the fragrance in the air and the shades of the sky gave them permission to temporarily forget about all that went on in the world outside Klein-Krössin.

Maybe . . . even gave a theologian permission to have some fun.

"I've never met anyone who's been to America. What was it like?"

"Who told you I've been to America?"

"Grossmutter did. She's always talking about you."

"Is she now?" Pastor Bonhoeffer's gaze flickered with amusement. "Doesn't that get rather dull?"

He was teasing her. Maria grinned. "*Ja*. It does rather."

He chuckled. "I'm sorry I'm not a very interesting person."

"Oh, but you are," she hastened. "Your trip to America interests me a great deal. What did you do there?" She couldn't help the burning curiosity. Though most would think it unpatriotic to be so interested in a country that fought against their own, fascination filled her whenever she heard the name.

"Well, I studied." Their steps slowed, until the pace they kept could hardly be called a pace at all. "At Union Theological Seminary."

"Did you enjoy it?"

He hesitated, as if choosing his words with care. "It was different. Of course, that's to be expected, considering they are separated from us by an entire ocean, speak a different language, and live in very different ways. But as more time went on, I found many things to admire."

"Did you hear any of their music? Swing, I think they call it?"

She learned then that theologians could do more than smile politely. He grinned like one of Doris's boyfriends, as if she'd said something altogether delightful.

"Many times. It was all rather . . . exhilarating. But do you know where I found the music I enjoyed most?"

"Where?" They reached a small stone bench, and sat down at almost exactly the same time.

"There was this church I attended. Abyssinian Baptist. Church in America is an entirely different experience than here in Germany. At least at that church it was. The rest of them, well, most of what I heard could hardly be called a sermon at all. But there . . ." His words trailed away, and he gave a self-conscious shrug. "You don't want to hear all of this, I'm sure."

"Oh, but I do. Tell me about it." Honestly, there was something very attractive about conversing with someone who had done and been to places she'd only heard of. Someone who *knew* so much.

"I think it had a lot to do with the excitement of the congregation. People looked forward to coming; it wasn't just something they did for social reasons. And the preaching. It was there that I learned, perhaps for the very first time, what it was to be not just a theologian but an actual Christian. Someone who took the gospel out of dusty pages and ancient cathedrals and applied it to day-to-day life and everyday people, while still maintaining the truth of that gospel without attempting to dilute it into something weak and popular." A fire of enthusiasm lit his eyes, and he leaned toward her as he spoke.

"We do that at Pätzig, I think. When one of our tenants is ill, we don't just pray for them at morning devotions, but we take them soup in the afternoon." She spoke quietly, lowering her gaze to her clasped hands, still holding the limp flower. She let the flower fall to the ground, feeling foolish. He'd probably think her analogy silly.

"Exactly! That's just my point. It's taking the Sermon on the Mount and not simply reading it as if it were a novel or any other book but living it out in all circumstances and with all people. Of course we can't do any of it in our own strength."

His words . . . they weren't theology as usual. Maybe if she listened to him more often, she'd have a greater appreciation of the subject.

The sun had turned to a ball of crimson, a chill finding its way onto the evening air. She must have rubbed her arms to stave it off, as he instantly stood.

"You must be cold wearing that summer dress." He looked her over, then gave an embarrassed smile, as if he'd admitted something scandalous. Was it the dress? Did he find her pretty in it?

The notion made her stifle a laugh. "You sound like Max. He insists whenever we go on a particularly arduous ride or walk that I wear what he calls 'proper clothes.'"

He held out his hand. She placed hers in it and stood, her fingers enveloped for the briefest of moments in warmth and strength, leaving a trail that lingered long after he let go.

"You must miss your brother very much."

Her throat tightened. She pressed her lips together, gazing out at the vista of gently rolling hills of green. Perhaps one could never fully erase reality. There was a war going on, and it was ridiculous to pretend, even for a little while, that there wasn't. "*Ja*, I do. But isn't that what every woman

does these days? Misses the men in her life? Living for the mail delivery, wetting her pillow with tears, praying and begging God that they may be restored to her?"

He nodded, slowly. And she wondered vaguely why he was here when most others of his age and abilities were being used in service of Führer and Fatherland.

"I know it's hard, Fräulein von Wedemeyer. It's always difficult to be parted from those one loves most."

She forced back the knot in her throat and gave a small smile. There would be time enough for sorrow and missing in life outside Klein-Krössin. Right now, she wanted to stay in this special world, if only for a few more hours. "I remember from when I was a little girl that you were good at music. Would you . . . that is, I would like very much to hear some American songs. If you can play any, that is." The moment after she made her request, hot embarrassment filled her cheeks. Now what would he think of her?

But he only laughed and motioned her to precede him inside. "I'll play for you. One song, at least."

Grossmutter sat in the parlor, glasses perched upon her nose as she read in the dusky lamplight. Maria hesitated. Would he still play for her with Grossmutter looking on? But Pastor Bonhoeffer immediately crossed to the piano and opened the lid.

"You like music, don't you, Ruth?" he called across the room.

Her grossmutter gave her a wondering glance, but Maria only smiled. Steps light, she hastened toward the piano. He took a seat, fingers lightly resting on the keys. She waited, almost breathless, as he gently touched one, a low, soft note filling the stillness.

Then he began to play. From memory, it seemed, the notes taking wing from his fingertips and soaring high onto the air. Maria breathed them in, letting her ears feast upon the sound, the way one savored the scarcest scrap of strudel, or the last drop of *kaffee*. It was the sort of song a girl could dance to, and she almost did just that. Would have, had it been a record on the gramophone and her grossmutter not present.

She did sway back and forth, eyes closed, humming along softly. In this music, there was no war, or sorrow. A bit of unhappiness, perhaps. And longing. For joy and love and other things forbidden.

Did Pastor Bonhoeffer, man of brilliance and theology, hear the same cadence to the notes as she? Somehow, though she couldn't be sure, she sensed he did.

The tune died away. He turned, met her eyes. Smiled—something won-

derful in it. Though the song had been a gift given to her, perhaps he'd taken equal pleasure in the unwrapping.

Nein. Not perhaps. He truly had. The smile proved it so.

And as Maria lay awake that night, staring out her window at the inky sky, she let the moment linger. Replaying the music and his smile over and over in her mind, until the familiarity of each second became as real and ever-present as her own breathing.