



“What are you doing?” screamed Kat, as she threw herself rightwards, rolling over the ground and narrowly avoiding a bullet from Jean Paul’s gun.

“You’re not French!” he snarled, taking aim again. “I can tell by your accent! You’re here to cause trouble. I’ve seen the future and the future is German!”

He’d lied to her! He was a collaborator! The lying swine!

Kat scrambled to her feet and ran. Ran like she’d never run before. Jean-Paul wasn’t prepared to give up the fight, so he gave chase, firing at her as he ran.

Crack! A bullet whistled through the trees to Kat’s right as she leaped over a clump of stones and looked down at her compass in the moonlight.

Whip! Another bullet sped forwards, smacking a tree to her left and passing right through it.

In the background she could hear the German soldier’s boots crunching down on the leaves and yelling out furiously.

“You won’t leave France alive!” shouted Jean-Paul.

A Bridge on Fire

Kat crashed out of the wood and started running across the field, hoping against hope that Oater and the plane would be there waiting for her. It took her thirty seconds to make it to the other side of the field and as she reached the next wood, she heard Jean-Paul's trigger go again but this time without a shot. He'd run out of bullets!

But this didn't stop him chasing her.

With branches and twigs scratching at her face, Kat sped through the trees and sprung out onto the field where she'd been dropped.

And there it was! The Dakota was ready, its engines purring.

"Quick!" shouted Oater, who was kneeling at the open door.

Kat's legs carried her over the wet grass and when she was three feet away she leaped forwards. Grasping the side of the door she started to pull herself inside when suddenly Jean-Paul's hands grabbed her feet and tried to yank her backwards.

"You won't get away with this!" he screeched, pulling wildly and snorting in fury.

Kat felt a tidal wave of anger frothing inside her and with a powerful kick she sent Jean-Paul careering backwards. At that second the German soldiers appeared and were stunned to see a British Dakota in the middle of the field. They raised their guns to fire but at that exact second, a gigantically powerful and ear-shattering explosion ripped through the air, sending out ferocious shockwaves.

Oater took this chance to yank Kat into the plane. He slammed the door shut and issued the command for takeoff. A bumpy, uneven grassy surface does not make for a perfect takeoff but the pilot had taken off from far ropier locations and after picking up a great burst of speed, the Dakota rose into the air.

A Bridge on Fire

“Look what’s left of the Vascombe Bridge,” said Oater, pointing out of the window. Kat looked down and saw a huge scattering of metal lumps, strewn over the road and in the river – a great hulking beast had been brought to its knees.

“Congratulations!” nodded Oater. “Job done.”

For the rest of the flight home, Kat answered a series of Oater's detailed questions about her time on the ground. He made copious notes and by the time this process had finished the plane was touching down at a military airbase.

Oater slid open the door and ushered Kat outside. As she stepped onto the airstrip she saw a large black sedan car parked a short distance away.

She looked at Oater in confusion.

“There’s someone who wants to see you,” was all he said.

They walked towards the car and as they neared it a man in a dark suit climbed out of the driver's seat and opened the back door. The interior was darkened so it was impossible to tell if a passenger was sitting within. The driver motioned for Kat to step inside. This she did and she was stunned to see British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, sitting there, in his trademark Homburg hat and wool overcoat.

“Please sit down,” said Churchill in his familiar, clipped tone, chewing on an unlit cigar.

There they were on the same backseat; Kat Grimeshaw and one of the world's most instantly recognizable figures. The man leading the British war effort. The man who had refused to appease Hitler.

“I've been told you performed an incredibly heroic deed tonight,” said Churchill, shifting his large bulk in the seat.

A Bridge on Fire

"I was in and out," replied Kat modestly, "anyone would have done it."

"Aahh," said Churchill, "that is where you're wrong. It requires deep wells of vitality, stamina and bravery to do what you did and His Majesty's government, not to mention the citizens of our fair island, are extremely grateful for your service."

"I just want the war to be over and the Nazis to be pushed back!" said Kat defiantly. "If they try to invade Britain I'd be willing to fight them anywhere: On the beaches, on the landing grounds, in the fields and in the streets. I'd never surrender to them!"

Churchill stared at Kat with deep admiration and muttered, "Fascinating words!" He pulled a notebook and pen from his coat pocket and quickly jotted something down.

"We may well be in touch again," said Churchill, nodding his head. "Our nation shall never forget what you did in those vital hours."

The chauffeur appeared again and as quickly as it had started, Kat's interview with the Prime Minister was over.

"Incredible!" she said as she rejoined Oater and they walked to a military vehicle on the other side of the plane.

"You'll be driven home by Andersen," said Oater. A female soldier in combat gear gave Kat a wave.

"Has anyone told my parents yet?" asked Kat.

Oater placed his hands on his hips. "I've decided to leave that to you," he replied. "By all means tell them. But if you feel uncomfortable admitting what you've been up to, then just say the weekend was a lot more fun than you expected."

He shook her hand, turned on his heels and marched towards a massive grey aircraft hangar.

A Bridge on Fire

Kat stood there for a few moments collecting her thoughts. If she told her parents the truth they'd probably ban her from doing anything dangerous, however little, ever again. No, there was only one thing for it. She'd say she'd been playing at writing spy codes and learning the art of disguise. That way, if the S.O.E. ever came calling for her again, the mission would be on.

Pleased by her decision, she walked over to the jeep, looking forward to getting home and having a hot bath and a decent night's sleep on a real bed.