

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



You are my Sunshine

Katie Flynn

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About the Book

A story of four very different girls, thrown together by war...

It is 1941 and all over Britain WAAFs are being trained to fly barrage balloons. Norfolk-born Kay Duffield is one of them, anxious to do her bit whilst her new husband goes overseas.

Soon she meets shy Emily from Wales; down-to-earth Biddy, fresh from the Liverpool bombing raids, and Jo, whose rebellious nature looks set to land them all in trouble.

Together, the four girls tackle the hardships and dangers of flying balloons. Through good times and bad, through romantic encounters and, ultimately, tragedy, they struggle to do one of the hardest jobs ever undertaken by WAAFs.

About the Author

Judith Saxton has lived for many years in the north-west. A compulsive writer, she started with short stories and articles and many of her early stories were broadcast on Radio Merseyside. She decided to write her Liverpool series after hearing the reminiscences of family members about life in the city in the early years of the twentieth century. She also writes as Katie Flynn. For many years she has had to cope with ME but has continued to write.

Also available by Katie Flynn

A Liverpool Lass
The Girl from Penny Lane
Liverpool Taffy
Mersey Girls
Strawberry Fields
Rainbow's End
Rose of Tralee
No Silver Spoon
Polly's Angel
The Girl from Seaforth Sands
The Liverpool Rose
Poor Little Rich Girl
The Bad Penny
Down Daisy Street
A Kiss and a Promise
Two Penn'orth of Sky
A Long and Lonely Road
The Cuckoo Child
Darkest Before Dawn
Orphans of the Storm
Little Girl Lost
Beyond the Blue Hills
Forgotten Dreams
Sunshine and Shadows
Such Sweet Sorrow
A Mother's Hope
In Time for Christmas
Heading Home
A Mistletoe Kiss
The Lost Days of Summer
Christmas Wishes

Katie
Flynn

writing as
JUDITH
SAXTON

You Are My
Sunshine



arrow books

Dear Reader,

I wrote *You are my Sunshine* several years ago and whenever I see a copy I always think of my friend Bet Carter, because it was through her that I began to look into the lives of the girls who flew the barrage balloons during the Second World War. I had just had my first book about the WAAF published, and had used my own experience as a plotter for that story, though I should add that I was too young for war service, but joined the Royal Observer Corps in the mid-1950s when they were recruiting girls between the ages of 18 and 25 to become plotters and the RAF were staging a mock-air battle above the flat Norfolk countryside. My boyfriend was in Air Sea Rescue in the RAF, so it seemed a good idea to join 'his mob' so that we had more to put in the letters which flew across the sea two or three times every week for more than two years.

I loved the ops room and the excitement, but not the tension; what if I misunderstood the gabble coming into my earphones from excited observers on the ground? So when Brian was demobbed, I demobbed myself as well, and we proceeded to get married, move away from home, and I began to write, using several different names and once more, loving every minute.

Then one day it occurred to me that I might write a wartime series dealing with all the various trades a WAAF could take up, and using the knowledge I had gained. I began to ask people 'of a certain age' what they had done in the War. It was this urge to 'get it right' that prompted me to write to Bet Carter from Crediton, asking her if she would mind telling me about her life as a balloon operator. She was marvellous, a positive mine of information, and what was even better, she was a natural writer,

remembering the little things, which made her letters a joy. I remember her telling me about her last site, a very rural one down on the south coast, and saying, 'To this day, whenever I smell honeysuckle I can see that meadow sloping down to the sea and feel the rough serge of my uniform where it rubbed against the back of my neck.'

She told me about the horrid little dog they inherited on one particular site and how it would go and lie on her bed when it had been up to its elbows (do dogs have elbows??) in river mud. She talked of marching through the streets of London carrying soap and towels to go to the public baths whilst onlookers stared and giggled; and of kit inspections where the girls smuggled one pair of perfect stockings, or shirt collars, or the long and loopy knickers the RAF called 'black-outs' from bed to bed so that the officers did not put anyone on a charge for not having every item of uniform present and correct.

And of course she told me about the balloons themselves: about how it took a full team of girls to control one of the contrary creatures when the wind blew strongly; or how they could not get the balloon bedded down because of heavy rain, mud, or a lack of hands-on. We never met, Bet and I, but we corresponded for sixteen years and though, sadly, she died last year, I think of her often and with great affection. I was especially fascinated by the fact that her last balloon site was situated next door to an artillery battery. Bet married the young soldier in charge, and later they had girl triplets . . . what a marvellously romantic story!

The technical information was fascinating, I learned a lot, including the fact that the girls were taken off balloons around the end of 1943 because of the many casualties; now read on!

All best wishes,
Katie Flynn

For Bet Carter (née Douglas), whose memories of her
wartime work with barrage balloons made this book
possible – and whose evocative prose made me feel as if I,
too, had been there.

Acknowledgements

A great many people, mostly WAAF's, have helped me with this book, in particular Bet Carter, whose article in a daily newspaper started me off on the idea, and Dorothy Pepper Williams, who patiently answered all my questions, drew me diagrams and told me what life had been like on her various sites. I am also grateful to Jean Mitchell, who flew barrage balloons during the war, and told me some of the funny things which took place during her time in the WAAF.

Additionally, the Imperial War Museum did their usual brilliant job and got me a great deal of information, whilst my own branch library in Wrexham, North Wales, and the Central Library in Liverpool, worked extremely hard on my behalf.

And I would also like to thank Canon Richard Hanmer of Norwich for doing his best to answer my questions concerning Christ Church and Eaton Parish Church in the forties.

Since I did the research and began to write this book, I have been smitten with M.E., which is partly why it has taken so long to appear in print . . . and since M.E. fuzzes the brain, I do apologise if I have left anyone out of the acknowledgements.

September 1941

WHEN KAY DUFFIELD HAD walked, beside her father, into the little flint church it had been chilly, with an overcast sky and a sharp wind blowing, trying to drag the veil off her primrose-blond hair, cheekily billowing up under her white silken skirt. Her father had held her arm very tightly and slapped at her skirt and laughed with her, but she had still been able to see a faint trace of apprehension at the back of his warm grey eyes. Yet when she came out again, on Philip Markham's arm, with a big smile from ear to ear and her happiness so great that it was almost tangible, the September sun was shining and the breeze was warm and smelled of chestnuts.

Coming down the aisle, Kay's fingers had rested lightly on her husband's arm and she was warmly aware of how comfortable and at ease she felt in Christ Church. It wasn't a particularly beautiful church but it was the one in which the Duffield family had worshipped for all of Kay's life. She glanced affectionately at the Sunday School corner as she passed it, remembering happy afternoons spent there listening to Bible stories, drawing and colouring, eating peppermints on the sly with her best friend, Tessa. The third pew from the front was the one her parents favoured, the stone font by the West door was the font in which she had been christened and, when she emerged into the

sunshine and looked around her, it was at a scene which was as familiar to her as her own home. The church had no graveyard, no lawns or flowerbeds, because it was surrounded on both sides by Church Avenue, which cut between Christchurch Road and Mile End Road, but the ancient trees with their heavy burden of autumn-tinted leaves had been there for as long as Kay, or her parents for that matter, could remember.

We could have got married in a big, fashionable church in the city, she reminded herself, but I didn't want to, and I'm glad. Christ Church knows me and I know Christ Church; it'll see me from cradle to grave if I'm lucky – and one day I'll have my children christened here, no matter where Phil and I may end up living.

'Look this way, Mrs Markham,' someone called and Kay looked round for Philip's mother and suddenly realised that she was Mrs Markham now. She turned, blushing and smiling, towards the speaker, her mother's brother George.

'That's it, smile, m'dear,' Uncle George said encouragingly, bending over his ancient box brownie and holding up a hand like a traffic bobby to make them keep the pose. 'Keep still, Philip; don't fidget, boy!'

Uncle George had been headmaster of a famous boys' school before his retirement in '38. Now, only three years later, he was back again, teaching in place of the younger men – men like Philip, who had left their jobs to fight for their country. But he had abandoned his school for the weekend and come down to Norwich for the wedding of his only niece. Several cameras clicked when Kay smiled for Uncle George and his daughter, Kay's cousin Betty, came bustling forward to arrange the lace train to its best advantage and to fiddle with the veil depending from the wreath of pearls in Kay's fine blonde hair.

'Let me straighten your veil, Kay,' she said in her bossy, school-prefect's voice. 'The pearls look wonderful – if it's all right with you, I'm going to borrow them for my own

wedding, when Ceddy gets home. They'll look most awfully good on dark hair, too.'

Kay had never been particularly fond of Betty, but now she squeezed the other girl's hand, feeling a spasm of pity for her. Cedric was with the Army in Malaya or Burma, she wasn't sure which; God alone knew when he would come home to marry Betty - God alone knew if he would come home.

'Of course you can borrow the pearls, you know Mummy would be delighted to lend them,' she said warmly. 'You could borrow the dress, too, I imagine. My wing officer gets it from Pinewood Studios whenever a WAAF gets married, so if you were to ring them up, or call in . . .'

'It's a dream dress, but I'm not a WAAF, remember,' Betty said wistfully. 'Wish I was! But there's Daddy, and the school, and the house . . .'

'They're your part of the war effort, Bet,' Philip said. 'How many more pictures is your father going to take, old girl? My brand-new mother-in-law has laid on a marvellous spread back at the house; the chaps and I are longing to dig in, feed our faces.'

Laughing with him, Kay looked around for another blue uniform, another young man with wings on his shoulders. Steve Minton had lived next door to the Duffields for as long as either could remember and the families had been friendly enough but she and Steve had been really close. In fact, the last time their leaves had coincided she had gone dancing with him to the Samson & Hercules, where they had swayed to the music of 'You are my Sunshine', and he had whispered in her ear that it must be their tune, written especially for them. He had lightly kissed the top of her hair and said that when she was around, the sun always seemed to be shining, but then the music had stopped and they had returned to the group of friends they were with. She had been wondering, last night, as she prepared for bed, how Steve would take her marriage. He had always

assumed, she supposed, that he, being two years the older, would marry first, but it hadn't happened that way. So she wanted to gloat a bit – and to introduce him to Philip. Philip was the most important person in her life now, but once it had been Steve, so the two of them must meet, become friends. But not on this occasion, apparently, for though she had spotted Mr and Mrs Minton – Mr Minton was taking a photograph – Steve was not with them, nor, so far as she could see, was he with the various other uniforms scattered about the roadway. Oh, well. Probably he couldn't get even a forty-eight, Kay told herself philosophically; and smiled towards Mr Minton, who had just turned his camera on her, before relaxing and glancing around once more.

There was quite a batch of best blues directly in front of her, she saw. She guessed that the men were Philip's fellow fliers mingling already with the two families and their friends. One of them, a man with ginger hair and a great many freckles, was talking to her mother, a hand on her arm, his head bent earnestly. Sara Duffield was looking up at him and laughing at something the young man had said, calling Kay's father over to introduce the two of them, then glancing over at Kay, giving her a little wave and then pointing significantly to her small gold wristwatch. The majority of the younger guests were in the services and had managed to get a forty-eight, but time flew; if they didn't get moving soon some people would have to leave halfway through the reception.

'Kay? Come on, your mother agrees with me – she wants her guests to have something to eat before they have to rush off home.' Philip squeezed her arm and turned her towards the hired car which would take them back to the house on Unthank Road.

'You're right, Phil, but how like a man to think of food on a day like this,' Kay protested, half-laughing. 'It's a once-in-a-lifetime thing, a wedding! Anyway, the photographers

must be finished now; film is so difficult to get and there will be other weddings.'

Philip squeezed her waist and then slid a warm hand round her chin, turning her to face him.

'Sweetheart, don't I know it? Shall we have a little kiss, just for the cameras? After all, that dress was probably worn by a dozen film stars and today you look like all of them rolled into one.'

'Do you mean I'm fat, because if so . . . ' Kay began, then stopped speaking as his lips met hers. It was a kiss at once gentle and tender yet with a subtle promise of something else, something stronger, more satisfying. Kay's breathing speeded up and she guessed that the white satin bodice of the dream dress would be pulsing to her quickened heartbeat. She put her arms shyly round his neck to a subdued cheer from the wedding guests and let herself enjoy the closeness of him, the warmth.

'Oh, my darling,' Philip breathed as they drew apart. 'I can't wait to get you alone!'

Kay squeezed his hand. 'A whole four days,' she marvelled. 'Just you and me and a Devonshire cottage for four whole days! Oh Phil, it will be heaven!'

*

'You all right there, Bevan?'

ACW Emily Bevan had managed to get a seat on the crowded train, unlike ACW Josephine Stewart, who had just spoken to her. Jo was standing, swaying easily to the movements of the train, looking neat and competent in her best blues, her cap at a rakish angle on her pompadour of smooth, toffee-brown hair. But Emily, squeezed between a naval rating with a lot of badges on his jacket and a fat little man in a worn black overcoat, was alternately pushed this way and that both by the train's movement and by those of her travelling companions. But at least I'm sitting down, she reminded herself, smiling and nodding at Jo. At least I'm taking the weight off my feet for half an hour,

whereas poor Stewart is still upright and likely to be so for a while, yet.

‘Yes, I’m fine thanks, Jo,’ Emily said, mouthing the words so that Jo could lip-read, for the train was noisy and crowded. ‘But I’ll willingly swap if you want a sit down for a bit.’

Jo leaned towards her and shook her head. ‘It’s all right, I’m fine. Besides, it won’t be long now. And for a miracle, the train’s only going to be about forty minutes late.’

Emily nodded and turned her attention to the sooty windowpane. She could just about make out the passing countryside and she could not help comparing the flat green fields and the huge black-faced sheep with those at home.

The Bevans had a sheep farm high up in the mountains of North Wales. Their ewes and rams, however, were skinny, agile creatures about half the size of the saddle-backed sheep which Emily had seen grazing in the meadows of Hampshire and Surrey. But mountain sheep couldn’t afford to grow fat and placid; they had to graze on almost vertical slopes, to survive on what grass they could find amongst the rocky screes. And they had to be able to jump the low stone walls, wend their way amongst the rocks, climb like mountain goats. And their meat was all the sweeter for it, Emily reminded herself stoutly, turning her eyes away from the window for a moment. Welsh lamb was highly regarded, so there was no need to feel defensive because the Bevan sheep were smaller than these fat lowland creatures.

ACW Stewart had fished a magazine out of her pocket and was reading it one-handed, frowning down at the newsprint as she moved and swayed with the train. Emily stared at the other girl. She was very pretty, but Emily scarcely knew her. They had not exchanged more than half a dozen words during their six weeks of basic training until today. Emily had been writing home, sitting on her bed in

the hut when ACW Stewart had come bursting in. She saw Emily and waved something at her.

‘Hey, would you credit it? Kay Duffield’s getting married today, and one of the other girls and me were going up to London to give her a cheer when she and her husband change trains at Liverpool Street. We got permission from the wing officer, which was pretty decent of her, and now ACW Bachelor’s trotting round the perimeter track with a pack on her back because she was a pair of stockings short at kit inspection! And I’d been down and bought our tickets and everything . . . I’m not so keen to go alone, I don’t know London very well.’

‘That’s a shame,’ Emily said, wondering why Stewart was so chatty all of a sudden. ‘But surely there are other people who’d really love to go; have you asked anyone else, Stewart?’

‘My name’s Josephine; Jo to my friends,’ ACW Stewart said a trifle reproachfully. ‘The trouble is, this is our first free afternoon, just about, and everyone’s gone off, or most of them have. So I came in here feeling dreadfully miserable, and there you were, just sitting around, and I couldn’t help wondering . . . you don’t look awfully busy, and a trip to London – with a meal thrown in – might be more fun . . . and Kay is such a dear, I do want to surprise her. What do you say?’

‘I don’t know her very well,’ Emily said doubtfully. She knew ACW Duffield by sight of course, the other girl’s fragile blonde prettiness was memorable and besides, Duffield was a friendly person, even to a quiet little mouse like Emily.

‘None of us know each other terribly well,’ Jo pointed out. ‘But you’d like to come to London, wouldn’t you? Oh come on, Bevan, be a sport. I mean what will you do if you stay here?’

‘Write home; darn my stockings,’ Emily said. ‘There’s not much choice, really.’

‘Well, there’s a ticket to London going begging . . . and you’ve put down for balloons, haven’t you?’

‘That’s right, balloon operative,’ Emily agreed.

‘There you are then!’ Jo said triumphantly. ‘You and I are both going down to Balloon Command to do our training, so we ought to get to know one another before we go. There are only four prospective balloon operatives from this intake, you know. So wouldn’t you like to come and wish Kay all the best?’

‘Kay?’

‘Kay Duffield; you know! Only she’ll be Kay Markham by the time we reach London. She’s going in for balloons, too. We both passed the fitness test and the written papers, so on Monday week we’ll all be off together. In fact, oddly enough it’s just you, me, Kay and Biddy Bachelor, the girl I told you about, who’ve been accepted for balloons. Well, you must remember Biddy – she’s the one who had the awful nightmares when we first joined up. She’s got a Liverpool accent you could cut with a knife what’s more. Come to think of it, we ought to get to know one another, it’ll be easier if the four of us are already pals.’

‘I remember her – poor thing, those nightmares must have been dreadful,’ Emily said. ‘All right, I’ll come with you, then.’ As she spoke the words, Emily knew a great lightening of the heart. She had not enjoyed her basic training, or at least she had enjoyed the work but had felt like a fish out of water in the huts with all the girls jabbering away nineteen to the dozen in English, whilst she listened wistfully, for Welsh was her first language. ‘When do we leave?’

Jo consulted her wristwatch. ‘Now,’ she said briskly. ‘Well, in fifteen minutes, say. There’s a lorry going down to the station so we can get a lift that far. How are you off for money, though? I can treat you to a cheap meal if you’re stony-broke.’

'I've got a bob,' Emily said doubtfully. She sent as much money home as she could, but they were paid so little, and she sometimes had to keep a few bob for extras which the service did not provide, like soap, make-up - when you could get it - and a cuppa in the NAAFI from time to time. In fact that was why she had volunteered for balloons, because the officer who interviewed them told them that the balloon operatives were the highest paid of all WAAF trades.

'Oh, we'll manage. I'm quite well off at present,' Jo said cheerfully, going over to her bed and getting her washing things out of her locker. 'I'll just nip over to the ablutions, shan't be a tick, then we can get going.'

So now here was Emily, who had this very day written a lying letter to her mother telling her how happy she was and how nice the other girls in her billet were, sitting in the train with a popular, pretty fellow-WAAF going up to London to 'give a cheer' to another popular and pretty WAAF. And then she would be going out for a meal - in London, a city she had only set eyes on once in her entire life, if you can count getting off one train at Euston and hurrying on the underground to Charing Cross as seeing anywhere.

Jo shoved her magazine into her respirator case and looked around her. She was a friendly and talkative girl. Emily had often envied her her easy, outgoing nature and now she was clearly hoping for a chat.

'Shan't be long now, I shouldn't think,' Jo said, leaning down at a perilous angle and shouting almost into Emily's wincing ear. 'I adore London, it'll be wizard to be there with no reason to hurry straight through for once.'

There was a young Air Force corporal standing next to Jo. He turned at her words and grinned at her.

'Got a forty-eight?' he asked cheerfully. 'Wish they'd give us leave and not count journey time in it, don't you? It would be a lot fairer on those of us who have a good

distance to travel. I live up north, it takes me most of my leave just to get there and back.'

Jo brightened; Emily, who felt she was beginning to know Jo quite well already, realised that Jo's ploy had been successful. She was about to start a chat with the corporal which would probably last until they reached Charing Cross and might well lead to a pleasant friendship. Jo plainly didn't know the meaning of the word shy, and had never suffered, as Emily did, from a horror that she might say the wrong thing or be thought a fool by her companions.

But Jo was talking again, so Emily listened with interest; perhaps she could learn how it was done!

'No, not a forty-eight, Corp,' Jo was saying cheerfully. 'It isn't leave, just a few hours off until twenty-three fifty-nine tonight, like Cinderella. It's so we can meet one of our pals for half an hour. She got married this morning and she'll be going through London on her way to her honeymoon, so we're going to meet her train, give her a cheer.'

'And they wouldn't let you go to the wedding? Shame,' the young man sympathised. 'Not been in long enough to get a proper leave, I suppose?'

Jo glanced down at her pristine uniform, at the buttons which gleamed with far too golden a hue, at her unscuffed lace-up shoes. Then Emily saw Jo's eyes flicker to the corporal - his uniform was clean and tidy but you could see it was enviably worn. Everyone wanted to look like an old hand, even Emily had secretly kicked her cap round the hut when no one was watching and tried to take the gold off her buttons by using Silvo instead of Brasso; the corporal, however, had not cheated, he had just been in for some considerable time.

'We've just finished our basic training,' Jo admitted. 'We're due a week's leave some time, but not yet. We're being posted on Monday week.'

'Oh aye? What are you doing? Typists? Telephone?'

“Balloon section,” Jo said nonchalantly. “The WAAF are taking over from the chaps as you probably know, so we’ll be off to the Training Centre and then to a site somewhere after that. We’ll have our first leave from there, I suppose.”

‘Balloons, eh? Well, if that isn’t a coincidence – I was on balloons for four months. And didn’t you say “we”?’ The young man looked down at Emily. ‘She’s your oppo, then?’

‘That’s right,’ Jo said, leaning forward and tweaking Emily’s curly fawn-coloured hair. ‘Some feller gave her his seat when he got off at the last station.’ She grinned down at her friend. ‘Not long now, Bev . . . I mean Emily . . . soon be at Charing Cross.’

Emily nodded to show she had heard and pulled a warning face at Jo. They had been told often enough to watch what they said about service matters in crowded places and this train could scarcely have been more crowded. Jo, however, cocked her head and raised her eyebrows, then decided to ignore whatever it was her companion was trying to communicate and turned back to the corporal.

‘Balloons, eh?’ the corporal repeated thoughtfully. ‘I’d not have thought you’d got the strength, not a couple of bits of kids like you.’

Emily, who was barely over five foot tall and knew herself to be slightly built, could not have objected to this description. She was just past seventeen, Jo was probably around the same age, but it was clear that the other girl did not relish being referred to as ‘a bit of a kid.’ Jo drew herself up to her full height – she was around five foot seven inches – and frowned at the corporal.

‘We’ve passed the written exams and the physical, and that was pretty tough let me tell you! You can’t judge by appearances, you know, Emily and I are a lot stronger than we look at first glance.’

The corporal grinned ruefully.

‘Sorry, sorry, tactlessly put,’ he said. ‘But remember, I’ve worked with balloons and I know from personal experience how tough they are. We heard they were bringing in girls, but I thought they’d be . . . well, bigger, more muscular. Someone said they were calling them the young Amazons.’

‘Some of the girls are probably heftier than us, but I doubt if they’re a lot stronger,’ Jo said with remarkable forbearance, Emily thought. ‘If you were a balloon operator, Corp, you’ll know that there’s more than one way to kill a cat.’

‘Ye-es . . . but sometimes it took all of us to bring our Bertha down to close-haul. You girls haven’t got the weight, I can’t see . . .’

Emily unwedged herself from between her two seated companions and staggered to her feet as the train began to slow for the station. ‘Walls have ears,’ she remarked reproachfully, addressing both Jo and the corporal now. ‘You know we aren’t supposed to talk about what we do, you never know who’s listening.’

‘We may not have the weight . . . well, they say they’ll need twelve of us to replace a seven of you,’ Jo said fiercely, continuing with the conversation as though Emily had not spoken. ‘But I think you’ll find, Corp, that we cope with the balloons even better than the blokes did. They told us at basic training that wherever WAAFs have replaced RAF they’ve ended up doing a better job, so put that in your pipe and smoke it!’

‘Hey, less of that,’ the corporal said, but Emily could see he was laughing. ‘Wait till you get on a site, that’s all! It’s hard work, it’s incredibly lonely out there without any station personnel to back you up, and the facilities are pretty basic. No nice hot showers or baths, just a kettle and cold water from a tap a hundred yards away. No station dances, cinemas, other entertainments and precious little free time. Wait until you’re hauling down in a force eight,

or trying to unload the gas cylinders, or just patching whilst she's on close-haul!'

'Close-haul?' Emily said blankly. 'Hauling down?'

The corporal waved a hand. 'Bop talk, you'll soon pick it up,' he said airily. 'The blimp - that's the balloon - the blimp's just like a bag, see, filled with hydrogen gas. The gas makes her want to rise, only she's tethered down, see, so you untie her, gradually winch out the steel cable and up she goes. Now when you bring her down again she'd lash around something rotten if you didn't catch hold of the guys - they're the ropes which trail from the blimp - and heave until you can knot 'em to the big concrete blocks again. That's close-haul and it controls her, more or less, until you want to fly her again. I reckon it sounds easy, put into words, but it ain't. It's hard enough for us blokes . . .' he flexed an arm, '. . . with our steely muscles and that, but for girls . . .' he gave a low whistle. 'I dunno how you'll manage.'

'We knew all that,' Jo said quickly - and untruthfully, Emily was sure. 'But there were only seven of you to a team - there's going to be twelve of us. And what's this about patching? Surely they don't expect us to *darn* the thing?'

'Aye, they do. When she tears you put a canvas patch over the hole, or the gas would all come roaring out. And when you're dodging round underneath her, trying to get the patch in position . . .'

The train jerked and stopped. Outside the window people jostled and pushed, porters wheeled carts piled high with badly balanced luggage, children wailed, dogs barked. It looked as though half the population of London had decided to spend the day on Charing Cross station. Jo grabbed Emily's arm.

'Come on, Emily, we've got to get across to Liverpool Street in less than twenty minutes, so let's hope Kay's train is late, too.' The corporal opened the door and jumped down, then turned to give them a hand. Emily was glad of

it, but Jo studiously ignored him, jumping down whilst he was still steadying Emily and striding away up the platform.

'Wait, Jo,' Emily said, panting along in the rear. 'Oy, Stewart, do wait a mo, my legs are shorter than yours!'

'Hang on, Aircraftwoman,' the corporal called after Jo. 'Don't get on your high horse . . . What's your name? You might be going to the site I served on . . . hang on!'

Emily turned and looked back. The corporal was a long way behind them now, with his kitbag over one shoulder, looking wistful. She jerked Jo's arm, trying to slow the taller girl's determined stride.

'Jo, he was nice, really. Couldn't you . . . ?'

'Nope,' Jo said briefly, continuing to hurry across the station concourse towards the entrance to the underground. 'He wasn't nice, he was one of those superior, pat-you-on-the-head types. I can't stand men like that.'

'I don't think he meant . . .' Emily began, but Jo was having none of it.

'Don't you remember what we were saying in our hut a few nights ago? It's our war as much as the fellows', and we're going to do a good job so we deserve respect. Remember?'

'Oh yes, but what's that got to do with . . .'

'Everything, you goose,' Jo said triumphantly. They reached the top of the underground steps and she plunged downwards, towing Emily behind. 'That man, that corporal, thinks women are inferior to men, regardless of the truth. We want nothing to do with men like that.'

Emily, who knew very well that she was inferior to men, sighed. If her da could hear Jo, whatever would he say? He would push his stained old cap to the back of his head, so that you could see how his face was weathered to a deep reddish brown to an inch above his eyebrows, whilst the rest of it was white as snow.

‘Women better than men, is it?’ he would say in his heavily accented voice. ‘A women can give birth, but it takes a man to plant the seed. I think that says it all, don’t you agree, Siriol-fach?’

And Emily’s mother, who was forty-four and looked sixty, would smile timidly up at the man she loved devotedly but never expected to understand and say meekly, ‘If you say so, Eifion.’

‘Here we are; the ticket office,’ Jo said now, leaning down to speak through the little glass partition. ‘Two to Liverpool Street, please. Oh . . . do you sell returns?’

It had been a wonderful wedding, with the sort of reception which few couples married in wartime enjoy. Mummy and Daddy worked terribly hard to make it a memorable day for both of us, Kay thought gratefully now, leaning her head against the worn upholstery of the third-class carriage and feeling, with an anticipatory thrill, Philip’s thigh pressed warmly against her own. I just hope they liked Phil as much as I told them they would, that they understood why I’d been and gone and done it!

She had met Philip Markham a mere twelve weeks before, when they were both playing tennis at the Lime Tree Road Club. Philip was stationed at Horsham St Faiths and had been on leave, so perhaps that was why he had approached her at once. He had also known, too, that he was to be posted abroad, another reason for not wasting any time once he had decided she was the girl for him. But at first, of course, it had just been dating, fun.

‘Come dancing,’ he had urged her. ‘Come swimming . . . let’s take a picnic to that park with the river running through it that you were telling me about . . . there’s a play at the Maddermarket, a concert in St Andrews Hall, let’s get a boat and go on the broads . . .’

She had agreed with all his suggestions – dancing, swimming, listening to music, laughing at the theatre.

When, at the end of his leave, he asked her to write she had complied willingly. She had joined the WAAF in a way just for his sake; it was their war, they should both be involved.

He had not been pleased when she told him, though.

'I wanted us to marry soon, sweetheart,' he had said disconsolately over the telephone, with the static buzzing between them. 'You'll probably be posted to the Outer Hebrides and I'll be down in Land's End - we won't meet until the war is over!'

'We can marry whether I'm a WAAF or a civilian,' Kay had said, greatly daring. 'If you really want to, that is.'

He had wanted to, very much. He was going abroad for special training, probably to Africa, and wanted to marry before he went.

'I'm not being a dog in the manger,' he told her earnestly, the night he had come round to her house to meet her parents. 'But I want you all to myself for always, I don't want to leave the country wondering . . . believing . . .'

'I'm not that sort of girl,' Kay had said softly, loving him for his jealousy, his need of her. 'I'll be true to you, Phil, whether we marry or not. The first time I saw you, I knew that . . . well, that . . .'

It was not easy to say the words; she hadn't known him long enough to be completely at ease with him. But he had smiled and held her close.

'I, Philip Markham, love thee, Kay Duffield. Will you marry me, my darling girl?'

He knew the answer, of course, knew the ardent 'yes' which trembled on her lips, but when she said that she would, that life held no pleasure for her greater than marrying him, he hugged her convulsively, unable to speak for a moment, actually having to search for the right words.

'Sweetheart! God, I'm so happy! But you won't want to get married in uniform - could we get a special licence do you suppose, marry in a few days?'

But this her parents had totally refused to countenance. They had only one daughter and she was going to have a proper wedding, even if it did mean an awful lot of work, a lot of desperate beggings and borrowings. And when she explained, Philip had been good about it, though he had not wanted a big wedding.

‘Never mind, my darling, it’s your right, it’s every woman’s right,’ he had said tenderly, when she told him about her parents’ plans. ‘If only you didn’t have to join the wretched WAAF! But you’ve signed, you say?’

He knew she had signed; knew, too, that she wanted to be a WAAF. She wanted to do her bit for her country and thought she would enjoy being in uniform, doing important and valuable work. And he was going abroad, it was not as if they could have been together.

‘I’ll be doing my bit,’ she had reminded him when they said goodbye before she went off to do her basic training. ‘It’s not a huge sacrifice, Phil – and we’ll be married very soon. Then we can be together until you have to leave.’

She was wildly excited by the thought of marriage, because already Philip’s kisses and caresses had made her aware of her body and its needs. She wanted fulfilment very badly, though she had utterly refused to allow him any intimacies other than kissing and cuddling until after the wedding.

‘I’m not being silly, or prudish,’ she had explained carefully, two evenings before their wedding day when her parents had gone up to bed and left them alone downstairs. ‘It’s not all that pure young girl in white thing, either. It would seem like cheating on Mummy and Daddy, if you really want to know, and I won’t do that. After all, what’s two days?’

‘What indeed?’ Phil had echoed rather glumly. ‘Oh Kay, I adore you!’

So the following evening she had not objected when he and his friends went off for a stag night, though he came

home with a dreadful headache and woke the family up by falling down the attic stairs – he was sleeping in the attic because his parents were in the spare room. The Markhams were from Rutland, not local at all, but they seemed nice people, and were friendly towards their daughter-in-law-to-be. Even Kay's parents had said, without reserve, that Mr and Mrs Markham were pleasant.

And now their marriage was a fact, she was Mrs Kay Markham and Philip was her rightful husband. The train was entering Liverpool Street Station and very soon now they would cross the city in a taxi to Waterloo and get on another train which would take them to the very village where their honeymoon cottage was situated. What, Kay thought dreamily, could be better?

'There she is!' Jo's shriek was enough to turn heads other than Kay's. 'Kay, we're over here!' She shook Emily's shoulder gently. 'Have you got that rice, Bev . . . I mean Emily?'

Emily fished in her tunic pocket and handed over one of the packets of rice which a cookhouse WAAF had given them before they left the station, then tipped the contents of the second packet into her own small palm. Kay came down the platform towards them, hanging on the arm of a tall and very handsome young RAF officer who must be her new husband. Kay was radiant in a cream linen dress and jacket which was almost the same colour as her long, shining hair, and her face was wreathed in smiles. She even smiled through the showers of rice, which showed, Emily thought, that she had a nice nature because rice can sting and Jo threw hard.

'Jo, how marvellous to see you! Oh, you are good to come all this way! And you, too, Bevan, of course. Phil, this is my friend Jo Stewart and this is ACW Bevan . . . I'm afraid . . . I don't know . . .'

‘I’m Emily,’ Emily said shyly. ‘You look wonderful, Kay – well, you both look wonderful.’

‘Sorry, yes of course, Emily. And this is Philip, girls.’

Her pride shone in every glance, and no wonder, Emily thought enviously. Philip was so tall, so golden-haired, so undoubtedly gorgeous – he and Kay made a perfect couple.

‘Hello, girls, nice to meet you,’ Philip said. He held out his hand, first to Jo, then to Emily. ‘I’ve heard all about you, of course and Kay tells me you’ve been accepted to fly balloons, of all things. I just hope you don’t do yourselves an injury, I’m told it’s heavy work.’

‘Oh, we can tackle it,’ Jo said at once, giving Philip the benefit of her warm and friendly smile. ‘We like a challenge, Kay and me – and Emily here. Actually, Biddy Bachelor would have come as well, only she’s doing punishment drill. She’s a balloon op, too.’

‘You’re all very brave,’ Philip said. He turned politely to Emily, who was hovering on the edge of the little group. ‘Why did you volunteer for balloons, Emily? You aren’t very big, are you?’

‘The money’s good,’ Emily said thoughtlessly, then could have kicked herself. What a horrible, mercenary sort of thing to say, even if it were true. But Jo was nodding at her as though she thought Emily had said something rather clever.

‘Yes, the money is good, and WAAFs are always short of money. What’s more, they say the balloon operatives get more rations than other trades, and we’re more independent. I know we’ll miss out on the social life of a station, but there are bound to be compensations. And they really do need us, you know, now that they’re taking the men for other jobs.’

‘There, you see! I told you I shan’t be dancing or flirting with other men, because there won’t be anyone to flirt with on a balloon site,’ Kay said bracingly to her husband. ‘And that means I’ll be able to save my money for when you

come back to Blighty, darling. As for social life, mine will be spent writing letters to you and pestering the post office for replies.'

'Oh, I'll reply by return, though how long it will take before you get the letters is anyone's guess,' Philip said. 'Look, darling, I don't want to hurry you but we've a train to catch and this one was twenty minutes late so we really should . . .'

'Of course, we must dash,' Kay said. She kissed Jo's cheek, then bent and kissed Emily, too. 'Thank you both for coming, you are good, it was a marvellous surprise. See you in four days, then.'

'Yes, see you in four days,' Emily echoed, whilst Jo stood and waved wistfully after the two departing backs. 'Don't they make a perfect couple? Isn't he wonderfully good looking? And Duff . . . I mean Kay is awfully pretty.'

'Yes, they seem just right for each other,' Jo agreed. 'Look, our train back to the camp doesn't go for another hour, shall we try to get a meal somewhere like I said? I can afford it, honest, and I'm grateful that you agreed to come with me. It wouldn't have been much fun alone.'

'I've enjoyed it,' Emily said, and discovered rather to her surprise that she meant every word. 'If you're sure you can afford it, it would be fun. Do we need coupons, though?'

'Honestly, Emily, haven't you been out for a meal since the war started? All we need do is to find some small restaurant or café which won't cost the earth. We'll go out of the station, turn left and walk till we find somewhere. Right?'

'Or we could ask,' Emily said, greatly daring. She did not altogether fancy tramping the streets of London in the gathering dusk. 'Daft it seems, to walk miles when someone could advise us.'

Jo began to say she wasn't going to ask anyone, anyone at all, then stopped and gave Emily a sheepish grin.