

## Prologue

Theirs was a chance encounter – an alignment of the stars that would alter the course of their lives in unimaginable ways. If he had refused the invitation of his comrades to join them for a drink, as he had done so often in the past, he would never have met her. If her circumstances had been more fortunate, their paths would never have crossed and their histories would have been very different. But such is chance, or fate, perhaps. It was meant to be.

He should have nipped their relationship in the bud. She was lost, innocent, vulnerable. He, many years her senior, should have been the responsible adult – lent his help, walked away, and left her to make her own future. Once she was settled, he should have bowed out. She was beautiful and intelligent and could have had her pick of more suitable suitors. But she had unknowingly cast a spell over him, making it impossible for him to resist the temptation of seeing her again. And she had fallen in love with him. He had put them both at risk by continuing their forbidden romance in the climate of the times, but he couldn't help himself. And because of his stupidity and weakness, she lost her life.

Her lovely face was a snapshot imprinted in his memory, which aroused him in his dreams and haunted him in his nightmares. The image was still sharp. His time had come and soon he would be reunited with her, in death if not in life.

As he neared his end, Heinrich vividly recalled the moment he had first laid eyes on her, and a wistful smile accompanied him into oblivion.