

MAGGIE HOLT

# A Nurse At War

She longed to serve her country  
in its hour of need...



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## About the Book

Previously published as *For Love of Lily* by Maggie Bennett.

Attractive, clever and wilful, Lily Knowles is desperate to leave home. So at twenty-one she escapes to London to train as a nurse, where she gathers many admirers - none more dashing than RAF officer Sandy Redfern, with whom she falls in love.

But the coming of war, with the chaos of the Blitz, brings upheavals and unforeseen entanglements. On hearing of Sandy's reckless affair with a married woman, a heartbroken Lily throws herself into her work. As the war rages on, a further change in circumstances brings Lily to a busy RAF hospital in Hampshire. Here a faithful childhood sweetheart persuades her to become engaged to him.

And then fate brings Sandy back into her life, physically scarred by burns and inwardly embittered. What of their once passionate love and her present commitment? Can the past ever be recaptured?

## About the Author

Maggie Holt was born in Farnborough, Hampshire, in 1931. She worked as a nurse and midwife for many years before marrying and moving to Manchester where her two daughters were born. Having been an avid reader and scribbler all her life she took a correspondence course in creative writing after her husband's death in 1983, and won the Romantic Novelists' Association New Writers' Award in 1992. Writing as Maggie Bennett, she is also the author of *A Child's Voice Calling*, *A Child at the Door*, *A Carriage for the Midwife* and *A Child of Her Time*, all available from Arrow. *A Nurse at War* was previously published as *For Love of Lily* under the Maggie Bennett name.

Also by Maggie Bennett

*A Child's Voice Calling*

*A Child at the Door*

*A Carriage for the Midwife*

*A Child of Her Time*

# A NURSE AT WAR

Maggie Holt



arrow books

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## Part I

### *The Fiery Trial*

Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you ...

1 Peter, chapter 4, verse 12

## Prologue

### 1924

Lily Knowles the Doctor's daughter stood firm on her sturdy legs, facing the jeering circle of Pinehurst children who attended the Church school at Belhampton. She was wearing a smart new frock in a tartan material, box-pleated like a miniature gymslip, with white sleeves, and frills at the neck and wrists.

'Cor, yer don't 'alf look posh, Lily!' breathed little Beryl Penney, in contrast to the jibes of the others in their washed-out, much-mended schoolwear.

'Ain't she sweet! See 'er walkin' dahn the street!' they taunted, and Polly Dawes stuck out her tongue, which encouraged Jimmy Watson, not the brightest of boys, to cross his eyes and whistle through his teeth.

Lily went as scarlet as the bow in her fair hair. Auntie Daisy had gently suggested that it might be best to save the new frock for church on Sunday, but Lily had wanted to wear it straight away. What was the good of having nice new clothes if they were only worn on Sundays? The pretty frock, like the new green winter coat with its fur collar, had arrived in a flat cardboard box for her seventh birthday, and there was a card with it saying, 'To our darling Lilian, from her loving Grandfather and Grandmama.'

'I want to wear it *today!*' she'd insisted, and Auntie Daisy had given way, as she usually did - but nobody had said how nice Lily looked in it - only Beryl Penney, who didn't count because she was a *waif* who'd say anything to

be liked. That was the trouble with the Pinehurst children – they were all *Waifs and Strays* who didn't know any better.

'You're all ignorant and stupid!' Lily cried, tears pricking the greenish-gold eyes that could look so appealing when somebody praised her. 'I'm going to tell my daddy of you!'

'Telltale tit! Yer tongue shall be slit!' chanted the mob, and Polly tossed her head.

'Tell 'im all yer like, 'e don't never take no notice o' yer. 'E's got better fings to do!'

Now that really hurt, because it was true that the busy Doctor seldom took Lily's part in her fallings-out with the other children; he either passed on her complaints to Mabel, or told her to be a big girl and take no notice of petty squabbles. It was her place to set a good example, he said – but how could she do that when they did nothing but make fun of her?

'Hey, what's goin' on over there?' came a familiar voice through the railings, and Lily's tormentors at once looked around for something else to occupy their attention. Tim Baxter was in the Big School overlooking the Infants, a strong thirteen-year-old lad who'd been one of Mabel's first admissions to Pinehurst, before her marriage to the Doctor. He'd been a *stray* who'd run away from a foster home, and Mabel had taken him in and become his adored mum. He remembered the day that the Doctor had arrived at Pinehurst, holding a bewildered three-year-old Lily by the hand, and he'd always looked upon her as his special little sister.

Now he came out of the gate of the Big School, and into the Infants' playground. 'What's up then, Lily? Are they upsettin' yer?' He looked around at the scattered group. 'Cause they better not, that's all!' he announced loudly enough for them all to hear. He turned back to smile at her and Beryl. 'See yer later, then, girls. We got cherry-cake for tea today – that'll be nice, won't it?'

'Oh, ain't 'e good an' kind, Lily!' said Beryl. 'I never knew such a nice boy as 'im, did you?'

And Lily could only agree that Tim Baxter was different from the other horrible rough boys. Not that Mabel thought them horrible, of course. She was the Matron of Pinehurst, who had been Miss Court until Lily's father had married her and turned her into Mrs Knowles. The Society kept her supplied with a dozen Waifs and Strays, and amazingly she loved them all, no matter where they came from. They were often distrustful when they arrived, spoke rude words and had dirty habits, but Mrs Knowles was never shocked, and never threatened to send them back, however badly they behaved. They discovered that at Pinehurst they were safe, and in the course of time, which varied from one to another, they succumbed to Mabel's special secret treatment: love. It was something they had usually never known before, and when they got used to it, they called her 'Mum' or 'Mummy', and settled in. They did not turn into angels, and many of them never lost the scars of their earlier lives, but carried them into adulthood; but Pinehurst gave them a new chance, and the security of a family life.

Except for Lily. She was neither a waif nor a stray, but could just remember having a real mother of her own, who had died, and soon after that, the Doctor had taken her away from her grandparents' Northampton home, and brought her to Pinehurst where, for reasons best known to himself, he had married Mabel, who continued to run her children's home while he practised as a local GP, visiting patients, delivering babies, running his surgery from the home of old Dr Forsyth, and giving the anaesthetics on operating days at Belhampton War Memorial Hospital. Lily did not see as much of him as she did of Mabel and Auntie Daisy, who was the deputy matron, Mabel's youngest sister, a dark-eyed, lively girl of twenty. They had another sister, Mrs Westhouse, Aunt Alice, who lived in a fine big house in Belhampton Park, and did a lot of fund-raising for the

hospital and other good causes like - of course! - the Society for the Provision of Homes for Waifs and Strays. Lily shared the life at Pinehurst with these twelve others, so could be nobody's favourite, though she liked to sit on her daddy's knee when the opportunity arose, and claim his undivided attention. She refused to call Mabel 'Mummy', though the Doctor said it was disrespectful for a young child just to say Mabel.

'Can't you call her "Auntie Mabel"?' he asked. 'She's not my auntie, either. She's just Mabel,' replied Lily, pouting.

'Oh, for goodness' sake, Stephen, what does it matter?' asked Mrs Knowles with a laugh. 'I've been called worse'n that in my time!' And she gave Lily a broad wink, which for some reason made the cross little girl feel that her stepmother had scored a point over her.

Auntie Daisy was different altogether, easy to tell things to, and best of all, she sometimes sought out Lily's company.

'Come to evensong with me on Sunday, Lily, just you and me together, showing off our nice new dresses, shall we?'

Lily brightened at once, for it was just this sort of special attention that she craved. On Sunday mornings the whole of Pinehurst trooped off to attend matins at the parish church and listen to the vicar's sermon. In the evenings it was a smaller congregation, and Mr Wingate, the curate, usually took the service and preached a much livelier sermon that made Daisy laugh, especially when he looked straight at her. He had a young wife who had stopped attending church after the birth of their baby and, because she was finding it difficult to cope, she had gone to stay with her mother at Basingstoke until she felt better able to look after it. Mr Wingate stood outside the church after evensong, chatting to a circle of sympathetic ladies, and he remarked on Lily's pretty dress, which made her blush with pleasure. So did Auntie Daisy, for these were the

post-war years when able-bodied young men were in short supply after the terrible carnage of the Great War.

The dream of going to visit her mother's parents was one that the little girl frequently indulged in, but it met with little enthusiasm from her father.

'It isn't convenient for you to travel all that way, Lily. You'll have to wait until you are older,' he said with a frown, though that might have been because of the pain in his war wound.

'But they looked after me when I was little, didn't they, Daddy?'

'Yes, but I didn't see much of you, and after your mother died I didn't want you to be brought up by grandparents. That's why I brought you here with me.'

'To be brought up by Mabel?'

'Yes, by Mabel and myself - and your Aunt Daisy, of course.'

'Aren't Grandfather and Grandmama lonely without me, Daddy?'

'I expect they may be, sometimes - but they're old people, and lead a quiet life; they don't really want children around.' Knowles spoke awkwardly, for this was not a favourite topic.

'They send me lovely presents and dresses and things, don't they, Daddy?'

'Yes, they've been very generous.'

'Grandmama sends me cards and letters, "to our darling Lilian", so they must want to see me, mustn't they?'

'Oh, Lily, we've been through all this before. You can go to see them when you're older.'

For Dr Knowles was sometimes troubled by his conscience, as well as his war wound.

Daisy had helped Lily to write a thank you letter to Mr and Mrs Rawlings, correcting her spelling with a dictionary.

Dear Grandfather and Grandmama,

Thank you very much for the new dress which is Scottish tartan, and I look very nice in church. You are kind to me and I wish I could see you, but it is a very long way to Northampton on the train. When I am older I shall come to your house when there is somebody to come with me. Daddy cannot come because he is very busy, and so is Auntie Daisy who is Daddy's wife's sister and looks after me. She is very kind.

With love from your granddaughter,  
Lily Knowles (You call me Lilian, but they call me Lily here.)

And thus were sown the seeds of so much future pain.

# Chapter 1

**1938**

THE LONGCASE CLOCK in the hall had just struck eight, the usual twelve seconds before the one on the parish church tower boomed out its strokes. Tim Baxter, standing on the kitchen doorstep, could hear the voices of Mum and the Doctor drifting on the evening air, and caught their note of seriousness; they were either discussing Lily again, or the latest rantings from the Fascist leaders in Europe. He grimaced, and brushed the war rumours from his thoughts, for this was his favourite time of day, when the children were in bed, and the house was quiet at last. If only Lily were here to share this sunset hour, instead of wasting her lovely smiles on that twerp Geoffrey Westhouse ...

A sudden howl of indignation from the open window of the boys' dormitory sent him indoors and upstairs to investigate. He found the two youngest sleeping, or pretending to, and the other four perched on one bed, playing cards. They looked up at him, half sheepish, half pleading.

'Now then, what's goin' on? Time you lot were settlin' down to sleep,' he said with as much sternness as he thought necessary, deftly sweeping up the cards to a chorus of protest.

'It wasn't us, Mr Tim, it's 'im, Charlie Samms, 'e's bin cheatin'!

'Too blinkin' early to go to sleep, anyway,' growled the accused.

'Aw, go on, Mr Tim, give us 'em back agen. We won't make anuvver sahd, honest!'

Tim wanted to smile, but kept his face straight before these London urchins, transported from grime and neglect to clean and healthful rural Hampshire; it was his job to watch their behaviour.

'Come on, ye've been playin' outside all day -'

'We ain't bin playin', we bin *workin'*! Mum told us to 'elp ol' Mr Cheale in the garden, an' 'e didn't 'alf keep us at it, cuttin' the 'edge an' sweepin' up till we got blisters on our 'ands - look!'

'An' anyway, the girls ain't sleepin', neiver,' put in Charlie. 'Miss Beryl's readin' to 'em abaht that ol' Christopher Robin. It's ever so rude!'

There was a yelp of laughter. 'Yeah! The boy 'oo shits hisself!'

'*What* did you say?'

'S right, we 'eard 'er readin' it to 'em - "wherever 'e goes, there's always Pooh!" Yeah, that's wot she said - *pooh!*' There was another explosion of mirth and holding of noses.

'Right, that's enough from you, Charlie - and you too, Jack. Get back to yer own beds this minute, or there'll be trouble, d'ye hear me? Not another word from any of yer!'

There was a scuffle as each returned to his bed, followed by silence.

'That's more like it.' Tim paused, looking round the room. 'All right, then. Good night, boys.'

'G'night, Mr Tim.'

'Ere, can we go to the pitchers in Bel'ampton one aft'noon?' asked the boy called Jack. 'See ol' Charlie Chaplin - an' them Seven Dwarfs?'

'Not if yer don't pipe down, yer won't. Not another word, didn't yer hear me?'

Silence again, and then a muffled, 'Sorry, Mr Tim.'

'That's better.' After three or four minutes spent adjusting the curtains and watching them out of the corner of his eye, Tim nodded and quietly murmured, 'G' night, boys. Be good.'

Outside the door, he stood in the wide corridor that separated the two dormitories, and listened. Yes, there were murmurings from the girls' room, though they were happy sounds: one rather stumbling reader accompanied by breathy oohs and aahs. Tim hesitated for a moment, then tapped softly on the door. He heard a collective gasp, and there was a shuffling sound. The door opened, and Beryl Penney's timid face appeared around it.

'What's goin' on, Miss Beryl? Why aren't they asleep?'

'Er - the trouble is, Mr Tim, they can't settle 'cause it's too light,' she faltered, coming out and closing the door behind her. 'I came up an' told 'em to stop talkin', but they asked me to read to 'em - in fact they begged me - so I thought just for a few minutes maybe, Mother don't really mind when it's holiday time, an' they asked for *Winnie-the-Pooh*, y'see -'

'Ye're too quick to give in to 'em, Beryl,' said Tim, dropping the 'Miss' as they were out of the children's hearing. 'Yer got to be firm about bedtimes, same as mealtimes.'

'Beggin' yer pardon, Mr Tim, but readin' 'em a story 'elps 'em to settle, though I can't read as good as Miss Lily can - and it's a nice way to end the day.'

Her earnest little face was as persuasive as her words, and Tim softened, as he invariably did. 'Well, all right - but yer must say goodnight now, and tell 'em to go to sleep.'

'Please, Mr Tim, can I just finish the chapter? It's only another page an' a half - *please!*'

'Just another five minutes, then, but after that ye're to come down.'

'Oh, *thank* yer, Mr Tim!' Beryl beamed as she scurried back into the girls' room and closed the door. Tim was not

allowed in there, just as she was not allowed into the boys' room; only Mother and her deputy, Miss Styles, had entry to every part of the house - and, of course, the Doctor.

Tim descended the stairs, satisfied that he had done his duty. A place like Pinehurst needed a good disciplinarian, he thought, seeing that the Doctor had his practice to attend to, and Mum wasn't as energetic as she'd been when the Home was opened in 1919. At twenty-seven Tim was now her secretary, book-keeper and general factotum, happy to stoke up the boiler, bring in the coal, chop wood and keep order among the boys - no light responsibility during these August days of the school summer holidays. Tim took great pride in being Mum's right-hand man; this was home to him in every sense of the word, and he had a secret dream that one day, when Mum and the Doctor retired, he and Lily would run Pinehurst together, as man and wife - even though he knew in his heart that it was never likely to happen. Lily had changed from the pretty child he had always thought of as his special little sister, into a discontented young woman who seemed to prefer hobnobbing with the Westhouses up at Cherry Trees.

Seated behind the sprawling, thorny tangle of the blackberry bushes, Dr and Mrs Knowles were having a private conversation. They were not finding it easy.

'I suppose she's at the Westhouses again?' he said, and when his wife nodded he frowned. 'Do you think she's getting overfriendly with young Geoffrey?'

She smiled and shrugged. 'She's a pretty girl, and he's a well-set-up young man, so o' course there's bound to be some interest. Stands to reason.'

Mrs Knowles had never made any effort to lose her London accent, though twenty years of country living had softened it a little; she still spoke the language of most of the children in her care. She had no affectations, and it was one of the qualities that Stephen Knowles had always loved

about her, ever since those days at the East London children's hospital where, during the war, he had found himself able to talk to her about certain nightmarish experiences he could confide in no other. How different she was from her sister Alice, who as Mrs Westhouse of Cherry Trees in Belhampton Park had become a member of Belhampton society, on the Board of Governors for the War Memorial Hospital and tireless fund-raiser for Mabel's Waifs and Strays. The doctor's mouth tightened: he did not care to see his wife patronised, nor for his daughter, Lily, to mix with social climbers like the Westhouses - and their son.

As if reading his thoughts, Mabel remarked that Alice had been a good wife to her husband, Gerald, badly scarred and half-blinded in the war. 'She helped him cut down on the drinkin', an' got him back into his father's office - and never said a word against him.'

'Hm. Nor, as far as we know, did he against her,' grunted Knowles. 'I just wish that Lily spent less time at Cherry Trees and more at giving you a hand here at Pinehurst.'

'I've got willing help enough, Stephen, an' don't need anybody to be forced into it.' She hesitated, choosing her words carefully, so as not to appear critical. 'I can see it isn't easy for Lily, brought up without a mother -'

'My dear Mabel, you've been -'

'No, Stephen, I'm *not* her mother, though I've tried to be fair and treat her the same as the others, but the fact is she's not the same as them - she's your daughter. Most o' mine never knew their parents, or have bad memories o' them, but Lily had a mother who loved her, and I can't ever take her place.' She smiled and touched her husband's arm. 'We haven't done so badly, have we? Lily may not have had a normal home life, but then neither have you!'

He gave her an affectionate look, for it was true. He had accepted their unconventional marriage, simply because he loved her and had needed her. He had got used to coming

home to a houseful of children who were often disturbed and difficult, knowing that Mabel loved them all and had a healing touch, even with the most recalcitrant. He'd known from the start that he'd have to share her, just as he accepted his war wounds, the almost constant pain in his right buttock and thigh. It didn't improve with time, and now that arthritis was setting in, he had to use a stick for walking. But he'd survived, and three-quarters of a million of his countrymen had not.

'So what are we going to do about Lily?' he asked point-blank. 'You've been wonderful with her, Mabel, but she'll be twenty-one next month, and it's time she took herself in hand. I ask you, what has she done since she left school? A year at Houghton Ladies' College, a few months at poor Miss Drew's teashop, then the Commercial College at Winchester, and now the Westhouses' office, where she spends her time powdering her nose and making eyes at young Geoffrey.' He sighed deeply.

'Well, at least she got over her idea o' goin' out to Spain an' joinin' the International Brigade or whatever it was,' Mabel pointed out.

'Yes, thank God - she had me worried for a while with her silly ideas, but the horrors of Guernica last year made a lot of crack-brained idealists think again. Huh!'

'I reckon she just wants to show that she's got a mind of her own.' Mabel suppressed a sigh, for Stephen's grown-up daughter had always been more of a trial to her than any of the children sent by the Society, though she would not have dreamed of saying so; nor did she voice her opinion - her wish? - that her stepdaughter should leave Pinehurst and stand on her own feet.

'Couldn't you possibly have a word with her, Mabel - you know, talk some sense into her, woman to woman?'

Oh, Stephen, Stephen, she thought silently - can't you see that I'm the one person who *can't* talk to her? She resents me enough as it is.

Shaking her head slowly, she ventured, 'What about her grandparents in Northampton? She seems to set a lot o' store by what Grandmama tells her.'

He frowned. 'Hm. I don't like her going there. Too much harping on about the past - it isn't healthy.' And they poison her mind against me, he added to himself.

'But if she needs to talk about her mother, there's surely nobody better to confide in than her grandparents,' said Mrs Knowles gently, fully aware that there was no love lost between her husband and his former in-laws, and that there were faults on both sides. 'Just think, it must've broken their hearts when yer took Lily away from them,' she went on, remembering the motherless three-year-old clutching her father's hand. 'Why not send her to them for a visit, say a couple o' weeks, let her have a change o' scene, open her heart to them? Yer never know, they might persuade her to follow in her mother's footsteps an' take up nursin'!'

'Hm, I'm not sure that she'd be up to the hard work and long hours - but perhaps you're right, you usually are. I'll write to them, and suggest she goes to stay - ask if they can help her make up her mind what she wants to do with her life - use a little soft soap.' He gave a mirthless laugh. 'Whatever I say will enrage them. They'll never forgive me.'

Nor me, thought Mabel Knowles as he drew himself up stiffly to a standing position, and grasped his stick.

'Come on, my love,' Stephen said. 'Let's see what the excellent Tim's been up to.'

She put her arm in his and they made their way back to the house. Tim had just reached the foot of the stairs.

'Everythin' all right, Tim?' Mabel asked with a smile.

'Sure thing, Mum. Just a bit o' fidgetin' up there 'cause it's so light. They've quietened down now.' Tim said nothing about the cards or *Winnie-the-Pooh*.

'Is Miss Beryl around?'

'Just comin' down.'

'D'you want to listen to the wireless? We're havin' it on tonight for a nice concert from the D'Oyly Carte Opera. They're doin' *The Yeomen o' the Guard*, so that'll be jolly good. I see Miss Styles's already taken a seat with her knittin'!

'Thanks, Mum, but I'd better swot up on astronomy for Church Lads' Brigade tomorrow evenin'. Mr Perryman's givin' us a talk an' lettin' us look through his telescope, so I want to have a rough idea o' what he's talkin' about! But I'll tell Beryl, shall I?'

'Thanks, Tim. Don't know what I'd do without yer, and that's a fact! I'll make a pot o' tea for us all before it starts, an' take it in on a tray - let's be posh!'

'Right oh, Mum. I'll take mine up to me room,' grinned Tim, thinking that he might be able to waylay Lily as she came in, and maybe have a little chat - try to find out what was bothering her these days, and let her know that she was still special to him, no matter how much she teased him. Or snubbed him, which was rather hurtful, though he tried not to show it.

Miss Lilian Mary Knowles had eagerly accepted the invitation to tea at Cherry Trees with the West-houses. Aunt Alice had always treated her as a niece, a cousin to Geoffrey, Geraldine and Amelia, though she was related only by marriage, not by blood. It was such a relief to exchange the constant clamour and lack of privacy at Pinehurst for the leisurely comforts of Cherry Trees that her cousins took for granted. Geraldine was a pretty girl of eighteen and Amelia three years younger, but the real attraction was, of course, Geoffrey, born a few months before Lily in 1917, which made them both war babies. He had grown into a presentable young man with his mother's good looks, though he was fair and she was dark, and it was difficult to trace any family resemblance to Gerald Westhouse, whose face had been badly disfigured by burns

and who wore a black eye-patch, a legacy from his service as a flyer in the war. Lily was a little in awe of Uncle Gerald whose temper could blaze suddenly, and Geoffrey admitted to a similar wariness of Pa's abrupt changes of mood. They had all passed a pleasant evening on this occasion, but Lily knew that the best part was yet to come, when Geoffrey would escort her back to Pinehurst; both of them waited in pleasurable anticipation for that evening stroll together in the summer dusk.

Cherry Trees stood halfway up a steeply curving crescent of spacious detached houses in Belhampton's best residential area, known as the Park. Tall hedges and wrought-iron gates screened their gardens from the public gaze, and tradesmen used separate entrances that led round to side doors. Professional men drove out each day from the Park to their offices and consulting rooms, while their wives decided what to wear, went shopping and met each other in The Spinning Wheel, Miss Drew's genteel tearooms, where their talk was often about the difficulty of getting reliable domestic staff these days.

Lily listened to Aunt Alice's stories of cheeky housemaids and sullen cooks who muttered about giving notice and getting better places; Alice managed to make it sound amusing, and she always looked so charming in her well-cut suits and day dresses, the blouses with frilly sleeves and frothy lace collars; she was the perfect hostess.

So different from her sister, thought Lily, for Mrs Knowles never seemed to bother about her appearance, and spoke just like the rough children who rampaged around Pinehurst. 'Such a pity to see a gracious family home turned into a bear garden,' Aunt Alice had once remarked, though Lily had learned not to criticise her stepmother in front of Uncle Gerald; when he'd heard Geraldine comparing her Aunt Mabel to the Old Woman who lived in a Shoe - the one with all the children - and

Lily had giggled, he had suddenly rounded on them both in fury.

'If you two foolish girls grow up to be half as good as Mabel, you'll do very well - but it's not likely, because I've never met a woman to match her. Knowles is damned lucky!'

They had sat in abashed silence with eyes downcast, though Lily was mystified that any man could think her father *lucky* to live in a children's home with scratched paintwork and worn carpets, not to mention the pervading odour of washing soap and carbolic that never quite overpowered the smell of a dozen children's bodies. It was hardly a place to bring friends home to, however much Mabel might insist that at Pinehurst the door was always open and visitors welcomed. Just imagine taking Geraldine up to her room, which she shared with poor Beryl Penney; Lily could just hear her apologising: 'Oh, sorry, Miss Lily, beg yer pardon, I didn't know yer was in!' Geraldine would be sure to giggle, and Lily would have to tell Beryl that it didn't matter. It simply wasn't worth it.

More and more Lily wanted to get away from Pinehurst. But how? She quite enjoyed her job at Westhouse and Westhouse, especially with Geoffrey there.

'Y'know, I'm frightfully pleased to have you in our office, Lily,' he was saying. 'You really brighten the place up. Trouble is, Pa wants me to go up to London and get experience as an articled clerk with a larger firm, and there are frightful examinations to be sat. I can't say that I'm all that keen.' He could have added that Pa was counting on him to become an equal partner in the Belhampton solicitors' office within a year or two. His grandfather was now in his seventies, and Pa's unpredictable temper had lost them more than one client; Geoffrey was only too well aware of the expectations they had of him.

Lily's eyes brightened at hearing this. If Geoffrey went to work in London, so could she!

'Oh, you should take the opportunity, and go, Geoffrey. I'd be off like a shot if I were you!' she said with feeling.

'I say, would you really, Lily? I wouldn't mind if you could find your way up to town sometime - it would be too marvellous!' He spoke eagerly, and Lily remembered her grandparents' suggestion that she should train to be a nurse, as her mother had done. Her father had studied for his medical degree at the London Hospital in Whitechapel Road, but up until now Lily had had mixed feelings about nursing, and certainly no wish to work in a poor area. Mabel sometimes came out with stories about her own training at an awful-sounding Poor Law infirmary, before she moved to the East London children's hospital where she and Dad had met during the war while she, Lily, had been a baby living with her mother at her grandparents' home in Northampton - until her poor mother had died in the postwar influenza epidemic, and he'd lost no time in marrying Mabel. Lily's mouth hardened. Everybody in Belhampton thought Mabel was so marvellous - but not at Northampton. It was Grandmama and Grandfather Rawlings whose significant hints in recent years had made her look at her stepmother with an increasingly critical eye.

Perhaps she should think again about nursing. If the training could be endured, there might be opportunities for private nursing with well-to-do patients in pleasant surroundings. And if Geoffrey was going to be in London ...

He had taken her hand as they walked down the hill, and by now they had reached the old turnpike road that led southwards across the common to the village of Beversley and then on to Petersfield and Portsmouth. He stopped walking and rather awkwardly drew her towards him, looking into her face.

'I say, Lily, you really have got the loveliest eyes, y'know - such an unusual colour, almost green in this light, with golden flecks. Quite beautiful, actually.'

She wondered if he was about to kiss her. It would not be her first kiss, but it might be better than the tentative attempts that other fellows had made. Her heart gave a little thud, for she was not quite sure how to react. Should she respond - or would it give a better impression to refuse?

Geoffrey Westhouse hesitated, for his previous experience with young women was not as extensive as he liked the world to think. Lily had accepted his compliment, but did she expect him to follow it up with a kiss? Standing here with her in the fading light, it seemed the natural thing to do.

It was Lily who made the decision to break away and continue walking. She needed a little more time. 'It's a lovely evening,' she said lightly as they rounded the church and the cluster of cottages before the corner on which Pinehurst stood. In the glow of the sunset the solid Victorian mansion appeared better proportioned than Cherry Trees; it had been built by Mabel's grandfather and left to his three daughters, the youngest of which had been Mabel's mother. During the war it had been used as a convalescent home for wounded servicemen, and now it was Mabel's property, which she allowed the Waifs and Strays Society to use as one of their 'cottage homes', with herself as matron.

And Dad and I have to share it with her and all that mob, thought Lily with a now familiar stab of resentment - and vexation, because young Westhouse knew of her position.

'Thank you for seeing me this far, Geoffrey,' she said politely. 'I can walk the rest of the way myself now.' She didn't want him to be seen by Mabel or one of the others, and perhaps asked in: it would be too embarrassing.

But young Westhouse was not to be so easily dismissed.

'I - I was rather hoping that we could say good night,' he pleaded, taking her hand again. 'I do think you're a - a lovely girl, Lily!'

So he *was* going to kiss her, and all right, it was up to him. She would neither encourage nor discourage, but just stand still on the path, the last rays of sunlight outlining her fair head like a nimbus. Keeping hold of her hand, he drew her towards him; she felt his lips touch her cheek and then settle firmly upon her lips. It was a very pleasant sensation, and she instinctively closed her eyes ...

And then suddenly she drew away, remembering that they might be seen from Pinehurst by anybody looking out of a window facing north-east. He had to release her just as he was getting into his stride, and wondered whether he should apologise - or persuade her to stay and finish the kiss - if it was possible to resume an unfinished kiss.

'I think I heard somebody calling,' she muttered. 'Maybe not - but in any case I must go now, Geoffrey. Thank you for ... er ... good night!'

'I didn't hear anything. But good night, er, Lily. When can we see each other ag—'

But she was already hurrying along the path that led round to the back door, and entered the house through the kitchen. In the hall she stopped to listen: behind the closed door of what Mabel called the Quiet Room she heard a sound of music, so they must all be in there, listening to the wireless - Dad, Mabel, Miss Styles with her knitting, Tim Baxter sitting with a rapt expression on his face, and Beryl worshipping him with her sheep's eyes. None of them would have seen her and Geoffrey, Lily thought, impatient with herself at behaving so childishly.

She tiptoed up the stairs to the first floor, past the children's dormitories, and was about to climb the second flight to her own room when she was startled by Tim Baxter's voice calling to her softly from his doorway, next to the boys' dormitory. He and Miss Styles had rooms on the first floor so as to be on hand during the night for both boys and girls.

'Had a good evenin', Lily?'

'Oh, hello. It was all right,' she said coolly, wondering if he'd been looking out of his window.

'They're all listenin' to a concert on the wireless,' he said, smiling. 'Why don't yer go an' join 'em, Lily?'

'Why don't *you*?' she countered

'I would've done, only I've got to prepare for CLB tomorrow.'

'Oh, yes, of course, Captain Indispensable! I'm afraid it's not *my* idea of an evening's entertainment to sit and watch Miss Styles dropping her knitting needles and counting her stitches. Good night, Tim.'

'Lily, wait -' But she hurried up the stairs before he could say anything more. The days when he had played with her and defended her against the others were long gone, yet he still seemed to think he was some kind of elder brother, and she didn't care to be ordered around by Tim Baxter in his rolled-up shirtsleeves and Fair Isle pullover that Miss Styles had knitted; you could see the mistakes in it where she'd used the wrong colour all along a row, poor old thing. She was kind enough, and well-meaning, but no substitute for lovely Auntie Daisy, who had been sent away from Belhampton in disgrace after that silly business with Mr Wingate ...

Yet at the same time Lily was cross with herself for speaking to Tim as she had, and for behaving in a way that could only be called horrid. Oh, life was trying! The sooner she got away from here, the better.

Tim Baxter wished that he had not spoken. It was difficult to know how to approach Lily these days. She was so impatient, and snapped at his well-meant suggestions; when would he learn to keep his big mouth shut? He blamed himself for his clumsiness, and felt no anger towards her; he knew that she was not happy, and it bothered him. Worse still, he could see that it bothered Mum too.

'I've had a letter from your grandparents, Lily,' said Dr Knowles at breakfast a few days later. 'They've asked if you'd like to visit them for a week or maybe two, if you can get the time off from Westhouses.'

'Yes, I know, Dad. I had a letter from Grandmama yesterday.'

'Oh, did you? So how do you feel about it?'

'I'd quite like to see them again. I need to talk to them about my future. As a matter of fact, I've told Uncle Gerald, and he says it will be all right for me to take the last week in August.'

'Hm. You didn't see fit to mention your plans to us. Still, I think it would be a good idea for you to see - er - your Rawlings relations, and have a bit of a change before the summer's over. You'll need to travel up to London and go on to Northampton from King's Cross.'

'From Euston, actually. I've been there before, you may remember.'

He finished his coffee, and set down the cup. 'Of course, Lily. I'll let you have some extra cash today.'

'There's really no need, Dad. Grandfather has sent me a cheque for my train fare.'

'Has he? Very good of him, I'm sure.'

There seemed to be nothing further to say, and as usual Knowles felt at a loss when talking to his only child, especially when her only grandparents were the subject. He wondered what she would say to the old couple about life at Pinehurst, about himself and Mabel. He really shouldn't mind, because they had at least taken up his suggestion, and said they appreciated this opportunity to help and advise their granddaughter. Would they persuade her to follow in her mother's footsteps and train to be a nurse? This was what he had hoped for her, but now he felt less sure, especially about the London Hospital - or any hospital in London. It was impossible to ignore the storm clouds gathering over Europe as the threats of Fascist