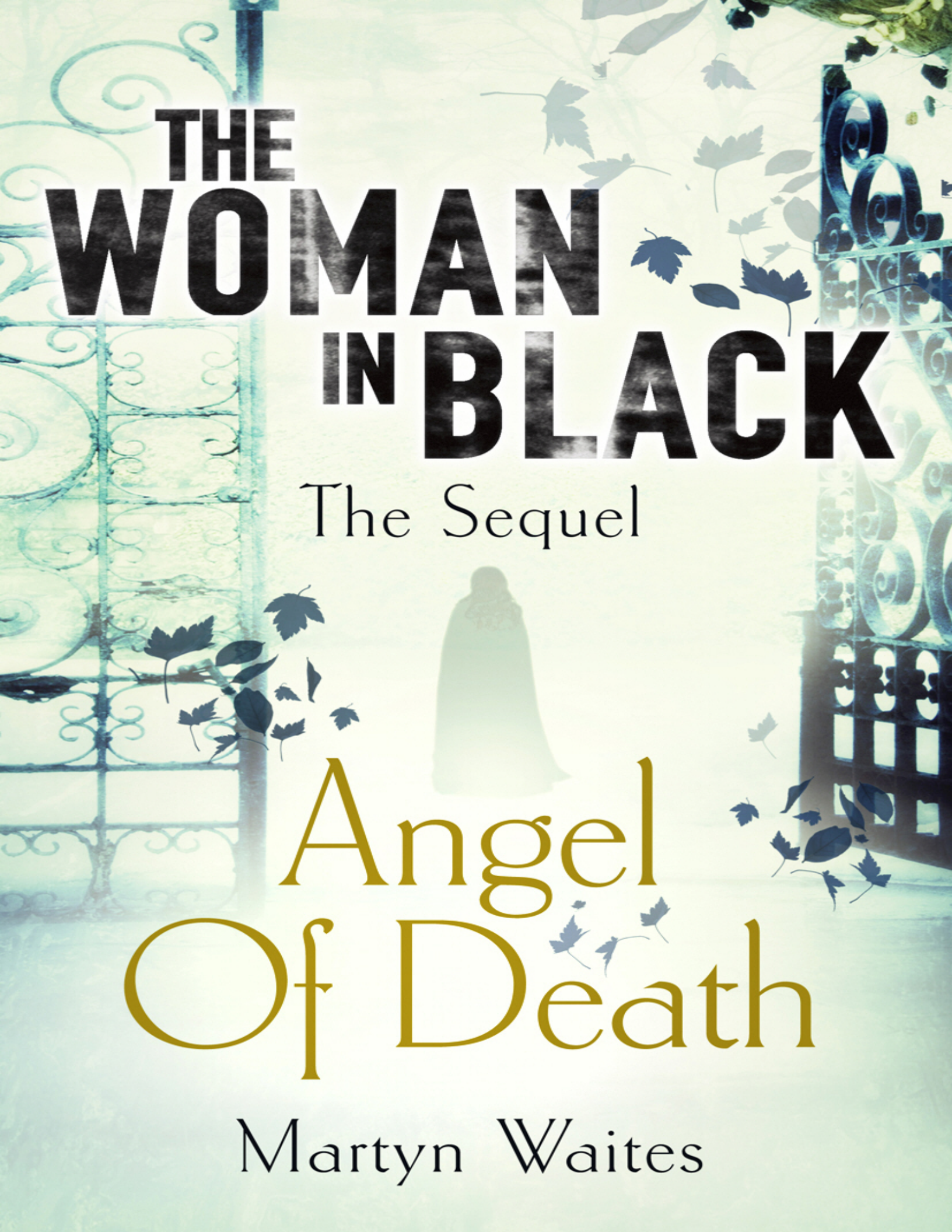




THE WOMAN IN BLACK

The Sequel

Angel Of Death

Martyn Waites

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About the Book

Based on an original idea by Susan Hill

1940: World War Two

A group of school children and their teacher escape the London Blitz and arrive at a lonely, desolate house – where someone is waiting for them.

She is someone the children cannot see, but she is far more dangerous and deadly than the German bombs.

She is ...

The Woman in Black

About the Author

Martyn Waites was born and raised in Newcastle Upon Tyne. He has written nine novels under his own name and five under the name Tania Carver alongside his wife, Linda. He has been nominated for every major British crime fiction award, has been chosen as a *Guardian* Book of the Year and is an international bestseller.

Also by Martyn Waites

Mary's Prayer
Little Triggers
Candleland
Born Under Punches
The White Room
The Mercy Seat
Bone Machine
White Riot
Speak No Evil

As Tania Carver (with Linda Waites)

The Surrogate
The Creeper
Cage of Bones
Choked (US title: *The Black Road*)
The Doll's House

For more information visit www.martynwaites.com and
www.taniacarver.com



THE WOMAN IN BLACK

The Sequel



Angel Of Death

Martyn Waites



The House

Eel Marsh House. Dank, dilapidated, unloved and unloved in.

It has stood alone on Eel Marsh Island for the best part of a century. Surrounded by swirling, damp mist that paints it darker and greyer, and by clammy, cold drizzle that renders it indistinct, it looms out of the fog. Empty. But not silent.

The water swirls and susurrates around the island the house has been built on. It laps the edges of the marsh that surrounds it. It permeates through the softer ground, turning it to quicksand, ready to claim the lives of travellers who have strayed, pull them under and close above them once more, swallow them whole, leave the surface undisturbed, as if no one has ever been there. Beneath the surface, the water churns with the eels' constant slithering and writhing; snakes with angry faces, they feed on whatever living matter makes its way down to them.

The house has been undisturbed for decades. An ancient pile of heavy stone, it has weathered but endured, crumbling but still upright. But there is movement on the island, in the house. Recent. Unwelcome.

The front door is pushed open. It throws light on darkness, causes dust to rise, small animals to scurry for the shadows. Paintings have been taken from walls, old photographs, documents, papers, ornaments have all been thrown in boxes, stored away.

In their place different things come into the house. Unfamiliar things. Alien things. Heavy, black curtains have been put up at the windows, creating a new world within. Wrought-iron beds have been carried up the stairs, arranged

in the bedrooms and mattresses placed on top. The house is to have new occupants.

Now, thick black cable snakes through the house, taking on twisted, serpentine shapes, a dark mirror of the eels writhing in the water below and around it. The one cable connects to a generator that casts a hum down the halls and through the rooms. Gas masks hang from hooks, their blank, round-eyed stares the first welcome newcomers will receive.

The overgrown grounds outside the house have also been cleared. Slowly, a garden, long since subsumed by wilderness, is beginning to emerge. And with it the rest of the island. Even the stones in the graveyard have had ivy and moss cleared from them, making their names legible once more.

The house is ready.

The house is waiting.

The Boy

The British Spitfire banked high then turned, and, engines screeching, swooped down low over the platoon of soldiers, its two front-mounted machine guns belching rapid-fire death.

The soldiers screamed, '*Achtung! Schnell! Heil Hitler!*' They were dressed in the khaki uniforms of English infantrymen, but they spoke with German comic-strip voices. They fell on to their backs and sides, lying heavy and unmoving, legs in the air, arms still holding rifles, still raised.

The Spitfire banked upwards once more and came round again, screaming as it did so. The pilot spoke into his communicator in smooth, calm RAF tones, his valedictory speech overlaid by static. The plane was poised, ready to swoop down again, to kill the few German soldiers who remained standing. The throttle was open, the screaming of the engines increased—

The plane stopped. Completely still. It hovered in mid-air.

The boy holding it put his head up, cocked on one side, listening.

He had heard something. A voice. Calling for him. And only him.

He turned and walked towards the window, drawn to the voice. His game forgotten, he was oblivious to the tin soldiers on the floor. His feet came down, crushing them, snapping them, bending them out of shape.

He was playing in an upstairs room of what was left of a bomb-damaged house. His own house was on the other side

of the street, the only street in the area still left standing. All the rest had been demolished by German bombs.

The voice was insistent, drawing him on. He reached the window, stopped before the broken glass. He leaned forward, pushing his head slowly through the empty square, his neck close to the razored edges.

A dark silhouette of a woman stood in a doorway on the opposite side of the street.

‘Edward! Edward!’

It was His mother.

‘Get here, now. Quick ...’

The boy blinked behind his thick glasses. He could hear the noise of a plane, not the plane from his previous game, but a real one. He listened again. A whole squadron of planes approaching, and, above that, the depressingly familiar whine of the air-raid siren.

He looked down at the doorway once more. His mother was gesturing to him, telling him to hurry, get out of the building, get down to the shelter. She was dressed in her black wool coat, her weddings and funerals and church coat, the one she always wore in an air raid.

‘My only good coat,’ he had heard her say often. ‘They’ll have to bury me in this.’

The boy looked at the toy plane, still in his hand, then up at the sky. Real planes were approaching, none of them Spitfires. He let the plane fall to the floor, and a small cloud of dust rose from the bare floorboards as it landed. He turned away from the window, anxious now, ready to run downstairs.

Time stopped, held its breath, then sped up, and the boy heard the end of the world in his head as he was thrown backwards across the shaking floor, the remaining glass in the windows shattering, flying after him.

When Edward opened his eyes he thought he must be in Heaven.

He blinked. Sat up. No. He was still in the upstairs room, still where he had fallen. He checked himself over, found that he could still move. His body hurt, but he didn't seem to have broken anything. He let out a small, rough laugh. He was alive. He had survived.

His face was itchy and wet, stinging. He rubbed it. It felt like sandpaper, rough and sore. He took his hand away, studied it. Blood. He had been cut by flying glass.

He ran over to what was left of the window, ready to call out, to give his mother the good news, tell her not to worry. But his mother wasn't there.

There was just a pile of rubble where the house had been, out of which was poking the hem of a black coat.

Edward stared, unable to move, as he began to understand what had happened. Tears formed in his eyes, started to roll down his cheeks, mixing with the blood.

His mother was gone. Dead.

Grief welled up inside him then, bubbling, dark and toxic. He screamed and sobbed and screamed some more, screaming his pain at the world as if he would never stop.

Hope in Their Eyes

Eve Parkins knew there were worse things to fear than the dark. But that didn't mean she enjoyed it. Or that she ever would.

The Tube station was becoming more familiar to her than her own bedroom. It had been the same routine for over a month now. Lying shivering on the platform, night after night, wrapped up in blankets and huddled next to complete strangers on the flagged floor and against the cold porcelain wall tiles, like shrouded, slabbed corpses in a mortuary. Each one of them praying that tonight would be the night that the Luftwaffe would miss, that the anti-aircraft guns would get lucky, that the RAF had managed some daytime bombing of their own over the Channel to deplete the German numbers.

That no one would die, at least not any of them. That there would still be a city left for them in the morning.

She looked along the row of people. All of life was here, she thought, on the platform with her. Young, old, fat, thin, and everything in between. All different, yet all the same, their faces displaying the same tiredness, the same desolation.

Some were attempting to sing. A few choruses of 'The White Cliffs of Dover' to keep morale up. After the first chorus most of the voices petered out.

'I'll never forget the people I met ...'

A lone voice sang on, wavering, echoing round the cold walls and away down the tunnel.

'Braving those angry skies ...'

Others joined in once more, their voices stirring, trying to rise. But it still sounded hollow, haunted.

‘I remember well as the shadows fell, the light of hope in their eyes ...’

The voices died away. No one moved.

The drone of engines could be heard from outside, from above. Everyone knew what that meant. The staccato bursts of anti-aircraft fire that answered the drone just confirmed it.

The bombers were back.

There was another whine, different to the engine drone. Then another. And another.

Everyone held their breath. The oil lamps strung along the walls illuminated trembling bodies, fearful eyes.

Then the bombs hit. The walls shuddered and shivered. Plaster and dust fell. People flinched, jumped. A few let out moans and screams, then tried to regain control of themselves. It didn’t do to break down in front of others.

Eve closed her eyes, tried to take herself somewhere else, somewhere warm and sunny and safe.

Another explosion. Another drizzle of dust and plaster.

Eve opened her eyes once more. It was no good. She was here. Now. The bombs wouldn’t go away by wishing them to, so she just had to deal with the situation.

She looked across the row of faces, her gaze settling on a little boy. He was dressed in his pyjamas, his hair sticking out at all angles. In his hands he clutched a threadbare teddy, clinging to it like his life depended on it. With every distant explosion his eyes darted about in terror, another tear threatening to fall from them.

Eve felt something inside her break and moved to sit beside him. She smiled. It was a warm smile and it illuminated her face, giving it a certain radiance, even in the oil-lit darkness.

‘What’s his name?’ she asked, looking down at the teddy.

The boy stared at her, barely able to speak. ‘Bear,’ he said eventually, his voice as small and threadbare as his toy.

‘And are you looking after him?’

The boy nodded.

‘So will you make sure he doesn’t get scared?’

The boy thought for a moment, looked at his bear, then back at Eve. He nodded again.

‘That’s good,’ said Eve. ‘We need brave boys like you.’

Her smile deepened, fixed on him, and the boy gradually smiled back. Safe now, reassured.

‘How do you do it?’

A woman was huddled against the wall in a blanket alongside her. She was older than Eve, only by a few years, but the worry and exhaustion in her features made her seem even older still. Eve turned towards her, frowning slightly.

‘Night after night of this,’ said the woman, ‘and you’re still smiling ...’

Before answering, Eve glanced down the tunnel once more. It was dark, empty, seemingly endless.

‘You’ve got to, haven’t you?’ she said, her voice as cheerful as she could make it.

The woman didn’t seem so sure. It looked like the fatigue and strain would get her before the bombs did. She frowned at Eve, clearly not believing her words.

Under the woman’s gaze, Eve’s smile faltered and she looked away, down into the tunnel once more.

The next morning was dull and grey, depressing and wintry, as Eve emerged from the Tube station brushing the dust from her clothes. She had survived another night.

She looked round. The city was even more shattered and scarred than the night before. The bombed-out remains of shops, pubs and houses were everywhere. A broken mannequin dangled from a shattered shop window, swaying like a hanged looter. All that remained of the floor above was a wall with an intact fireplace, but no floor, no hearth. Next to it was a cupboard, the door creaking in the breeze, a stack of Cornishware bowls teeter-tottering on the shelf.

They fell, smashing, adding to the rubble. Someone's family photographs blew down the street; smiling, happy children borne away, memories, markers of a life, lost for ever.

Eve was alive. But the city seemed dead.

She checked her watch as she hurried home. She had to pack. She was leaving.

Safer in the Country

Eve was only slightly out of breath as, smartly dressed and suitcase in hand, she walked into King's Cross station. She needed to make a fresh start, she thought. And today would be the day to do it. She was leaving the city. Going somewhere safe.

Soot covered the ceiling glass inside the station, as steam from the trains drifted above their heads. The place was alive with comings and goings, the clang and clatter of the trains and the passengers. Joyful reunions and tearful goodbyes were all around her. The air was filled with a frantic, nervous energy as hope and despair turned routine departures and arrivals into matters of life and death.

Posters covered all the walls of the station. Several variations of 'Careless Talk Costs Lives' were dotted about, as were invocations to 'Dig for Victory'. A stern, red-faced and angry-looking man dressed in full John Bull regalia standing in front of a line of infantrymen pointed an accusing finger at all who walked past, and asked, 'WHO'S ABSENT? Is it YOU?'

The poster made Eve notice the soldiers all the more. The young, fresh-faced, optimistic ones, eager to engage the Hun in battle, contrasted with the wounded, broken men who were returning. Heads were turned, eyes downcast as they made their way through the concourse. The young soldiers making a point of not looking at the returnees, ignoring them in case their bad luck turned into an airborne infection.

She heard sobbing just behind her and, turning, saw a mother with her daughter. It was difficult to make out who

was crying the most. The mother clung on to her daughter, and the daughter did the same until well-meaning relatives separated them both, taking the girl away. 'It's for her own good,' Eve heard. 'She'll be safer with us.' Eve thought of the boy in the Underground station the previous night. She hoped somebody was looking after him, making sure he was safe. The thought made her tearful.

'Mothers - send them out of London' said a poster on the wall above the sobbing mother. It showed a boy and girl in dressing gowns and pyjamas, against a brick wall. Huddled together, frightened and apprehensive, their eyes haunted and shell-shocked. Next to it another brother and sister, but these were bucolic, blonde, chubby cherubs. The boy, hair neatly parted and slicked down, held a protective arm round his kiss-curved little sister. They both looked contented and cheerful. Underneath was stated the reason for their happiness: 'CHILDREN are safer in the country ... leave them there'.

Eve hoped so. Yes. She could only hope so.

It didn't take her long to find the woman she was meant to meet. A decade older than Eve, steel-eyed and ramrod-backed, standing as if to attention, Jean Hogg was Eve's headmistress.

Surrounding Jean was a group of children, all resembling the frightened children in the first poster. Jean had found something wrong with one of the boy's coats and was bending down to straighten it, admonishing him for not buttoning it properly, as Eve walked over to her.

'Good morning, Headmistress,' said Eve, smile in place. Then she looked at everyone else, giving them a bigger smile. 'Good morning, children.'

'Good morning, Miss Parkins.' They all spoke as one, the words said by rote in their usual sing-song voice. Some of them managed to return her smile. Eve felt a warmth inside her when they did that.

Jean straightened up, scrutinised her. For a second, Eve wondered whether the headmistress was going to find fault with her own coat.

‘You’re late,’ said Jean.

‘My ... road was hit last night.’

Jean’s expression suggested that a bomb was no excuse for unpunctuality, as Eve looked down at the children. There were seven of them, three girls and four boys, the youngest seven, the oldest eleven. They all had their own suitcase and each carried a small cardboard box with ‘Gas Mask’ written on the side. They were poor children, from the centre of the city, and none of them had their parents with them.

‘Shall we find the train?’ Eve asked.

‘We’re waiting for Edward.’ From Jean’s tone, Eve could tell Edward had placed himself in an even worse category of tardiness than herself.

Eve frowned. ‘I thought his mother was bringing him here.’

Jean’s steely gaze – just for a second – gave way. ‘Their house was hit two nights ago. He’s an orphan now.’ She looked away from Eve, eyes roving down the concourse. ‘Here he is.’

Eve stared after her, still trying to take in what she had just heard. Edward – an orphan.

All the children had turned to watch Edward arrive, clamouring in their own way to be the first to see him. Eve knew what children were like. Anything out of the ordinary, different, was a source of spectacle, especially when it involved calamity and loss. Edward, whether he wanted to or not, would now be a celebrity.

Edward walked slowly towards the group, an older man holding his hand and leading him. But unlike the others he had no suitcase and was carrying all his belongings in a patched-up bag. The cuts on his face from the explosion had begun to heal and his glasses had been repaired, but Eve

could tell from his expression how much he was hating being the centre of attention.

‘Come on, Edward, there’s a good chap,’ said Jean, expecting her authority to carry automatically. ‘We have a train to catch.’

She held out her hand to him, but Edward made no attempt to take it, or even move towards her. He clung on to the man at his side.

Eve moved quickly towards him, bending down so she was on his level. ‘Edward,’ she said, trying to get him to look at her, ‘I’m so sorry ...’

Edward didn’t reply.

Eve tried a smile. ‘You’re ... you’re going to come away with us now,’ she said. ‘Away from all this.’

Edward still made no reply, and Eve eventually stood up.

‘He hasn’t said a word since the accident,’ said the man. ‘I take it you’re his teacher?’

‘Yes.’

‘I’m just a neighbour. Been looking after him since ... you know.’ He gave the boy’s hand a squeeze. ‘Come on, Edward. Go with the nice lady. There’s a good boy ...’

The man let go of Edward. ‘Don’t forget your sweets,’ he said, pushing a paper bag into Edward’s pocket. Still Edward said nothing.

Eve took Edward’s hand and looked into his eyes once more. They were dulled, silent. There was nothing there. Nothing she could read.

Nothing she could reach.

She walked him over to the other children. It was time they were on the train and leaving London. Time for them to be safe once again.