

1st January

The heat of the Cape January reminds me of Cyprus. I loved it there, and still pine for the view of the castle next to the sea in Kyrenia. Now I look at a different bay, from the stoep of a house on the slopes of Signal Hill, below the small round peak known as Lion's Head, junior partner to the massive flattopped Table Mountain.

It is hard to work in the heat, and I'm tempted to take the bus to Camps Bay and sit on the rocks with my feet in the water. They say there are sharks there, but I've never seen one, just a few seals, which they eat.

My name in these parts is Theresa, I'm English, evacuated from Cyprus, where I lived briefly with my husband. I've been here for three years, and I'm not supposed to keep this diary.

They chose me because I knew the codes and am good with maths and Morse code. They even found a husband for me. He's dead now. Lost at sea. In this war death is as common as breakfast.

I work for a publisher in Cape Town. John has a little office in a back street. Business life is difficult as before the war he was agent for a lot of English publishers, now he has to publish local writers good for them, but not so good for profits, certainly not enough to make ends meet, but he manages well. I know how. Payments from Cape importers reach his bank account on the same day every month, and they're not for services he claims to provide. He's Our Man in Cape Town, and the money comes from His Majesty. Cape Town is still an important sea route to the east although the Suez Canal is back in action. The sea off the coast is riddled with submarines, mostly heading up the coast for Durban and Mozambique waters. I intercept their signals and decode them. We can't rely on the locals. The government is on our side, but many of the personnel are covert members of the Ossewabrandwag, a bunch of Nazi sympathisers. If they knew about us, I wouldn't give tuppence for our lives.

Today is my 'day off', hence the musing. I'm going to meet a chap from HMS Grantham, a cruiser that's just docked at Simonstown. Ostensibly it's social, but in this war nothing is as it seems. I'm not the sort of girl who runs after sailors. He has brought the new codes. I use one of those machines that look like a typewriter, and lately I've been getting gobbledygook, as Mr John calls it.

I have to catch the bus into town, and then take the train.

2nd January

Gosh, that was some trip. The naval officer turned out to be sex mad. It must be those lonely nights at sea.

We met as arranged in the Sailor's Rest, the pseudo English pub in the main street. He was easy to recognise, as he was carrying the agreed bunch of lilies.

'Lieutenant Green?' I said.

'You must be Theresa; these are for you.'

'What lovely flowers. You shouldn't have.'

He smirked.

'Beautiful flowers for a beautiful young lady, I think you'll find they're what you need.'

So, the codes are in there, I thought. Good. I'll have to talk to this twit for a while, as this is supposed to be an assignment. This chap is not my cup of tea. Weak chin, mouth like a crack in a pie.

'How do you like the Cape?' I enquired.

'Very pretty, like you.' He smirked again.