

# Once Upon a Winter

*By*  
*Catherine McDonald*

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## **DEDICATION**

*For Mum and Dad*

## **STORY OF THE PLAY**

World War Two rages. In London, the mysterious and charming Mae arrives home in the blackout to find herself accused of spying for Nazi Germany. Following the death of Mae's brother, his diary has revealed to the authorities a dreadful and secret past. In flashbacks, the young Mae, her brother and their friend find a wounded Nazi pilot who has parachuted to safety in a forest in rural Norfolk. They imprison and interrogate him, but find him fascinating and bewitching. Tonight, with her life on the line, Mae must reveal all her secrets before the bombs have finished falling.

## **CAST OF CHARACTERS**

*6 m, 2 w*

### **Present:**

**LORD HENRY MONCRIEFF:** In his mid-fifties, Henry is a veteran of the Great War who has recently married Maeve after a whirlwind romance.

**LADY MAEVE MONCRIEFF:** A spirited, unconventional young woman, very attractive and powerful, with a complicated and secretive past; she has recently married into the aristocracy.

**OFFICER CHARLES BURNS:** Fellow Great War veteran and old friend of Henry Moncrieff, Burns works for the British Security Service.

**GEOFFREY YORK:** A passionate young man horribly scarred both mentally and physically from his time at war.

### **Earlier:**

**YOUNG MAEVE:** Having suffered terrible bullying and a neglectful home life Maeve is angry, vulnerable and desperate to belong. She has grown up with her half-brother Tommy, and is very close to him and his best friend Geoffrey.

**YOUNG GEOFFREY:** A hopeful and excitable teenager, he is Tommy's best friend.

**TOMMY:** An intelligent and kind boy who has grown up with little moral guidance or rules. He is devoted to his half-sister Maeve and best friend Geoffrey.

**SEBASTIAN:** An ambitious officer in the Nazi Army, fluent in English; Sebastian has crash landed in the Norfolk countryside.

## **SETTING**

Present day is February 1945. Much of the action occurs in November 1940. The action is split into scenes for ease of reading and rehearsal purposes; other than the two separate acts, all action runs smoothly together. The characters in "present day" literally watch the action of the past play out before them.

## ACT I

### Scene 1

*(AT RISE: It is 1940. YOUNG MAEVE walks into the moonlight. She is dressed in a white nightgown with bare feet – both her feet and hands are filthy and covered in mud. She holds a muddy knife shakily between her hands. She moves forward, staring at it and raises it into the moonlight, where it glints.)*

### Scene 2

*(AT RISE: Westminster, London, 1945. The front room in the household of Lord and Lady Moncrieff; the decor is elegant, grand and traditional. All windows are blacked out. LORD HENRY MONCRIEFF enters from an adjoining room and helps himself to a brandy, switching on the wireless. SFX: BBC Newsreel from early 1945. MAEVE enters from the outside with a bag and coat. She is dressed in red and wears a full fox fur scarf.)*

**HENRY:** Here arrives the trouble at last. I was about to send the dogs after you.

**MAEVE:** I'm terribly sorry, darling. I was held up at Margaret's.

**HENRY:** Not to worry too much. I didn't think Gerry had made it as far as Islington. *(Kisses MAEVE.)* He hasn't, has he?

**MAEVE:** Not tonight.

**HENRY:** Jolly good. Have a brandy, if you like?

**MAEVE:** No, I won't, thank you, but there was something I wanted to—

**HENRY:** Bit indulgent, I know, but it was a bloody rancid day. Rancid. Seems Gerry's been up to some tricks in Eastern Europe that we hadn't any idea about. Been going on for – maybe years ...well, we don't yet. *(Beat.)* Whatever happened to make that seem like the best alternative? These...what are we going to call them? Prisons? Factories, more like. Death factories.

*(Beat. HENRY looks up and catches sight of MAEVE'S expression.)*

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**HENRY:** (*Cont'd.*) You look like you've seen a ghost.

**MAEVE:** I think I was followed.

(*Beat.*)

**HENRY:** You mean...followed here?

**MAEVE:** I think so.

**HENRY:** And it wasn't a warden, was it?

**MAEVE:** Well, I couldn't be sure, but...there shouldn't be anyone out and about, should there?

**HENRY:** Of course not. Besides, half of the wardens are as bad the chaps they're meant to be keeping an eye on. It's becoming quite a problem. But what more can we do? The streets are deserted and one can't even watch from a window. It's a thieves' paradise.

**MAEVE:** They stood having a cigarette on the corner of Berkeley Street when I left Margaret's. I thought I heard them start up behind me. And when I turned onto Curzon Street, they were still there. Two of them.

**HENRY:** What did they look like?

**MAEVE:** Well – gentlemen.

**HENRY:** Did they follow you here?

**MAEVE:** No, I don't think so: I cut in behind the church and came through the graveyard.

**HENRY:** (*Goes to the blacked-out windows and peeks around the black cloth.*) Can't see a blasted thing.

**MAEVE:** That's rather the point of the blackout, isn't it?

**HENRY:** I might just telephone the office—

**MAEVE:** No, darling, not on account of me. They've much more important things to be worrying about. It was probably nothing.

**HENRY:** (*Tries to see outside once again.*) It does give one the frights, being out in that absolute darkness. Although I doubt most Londoners have ever seen the stars quite so brightly and brilliantly as they do nowadays. Funny old world, isn't it?

**MAEVE:** Isn't it.

**HENRY:** It was probably a coincidence.

**MAEVE:** Yes, of course. The worst thing was, I thought I'd have led them right to you. And we've always been so careful.

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**HENRY:** Yes, quite. Well, as far as Tom, Dick and Harry are concerned I'm a burnt-out old war horse who bumbles about the war office sticking his nose into other people's business.

**MAEVE:** *(Goes to HENRY and holds him.)* I know you better. I always did.

**HENRY:** How did you know?

**MAEVE:** *(Deviously.)* Gypsy magic.

*(HENRY reaches across and turns the wireless up louder as it plays a romantic song. THEY dance together gently.)*

**HENRY:** Alright, alright, put me down, that's quite enough excitement for one evening.

*(SFX: The doorbell rings loudly. HENRY and MAEVE stare at one another.)*

**HENRY:** *(Cont'd.)* You aren't expecting anyone?

*(MAEVE shakes her head. HENRY starts toward the door. On second thought, Henry goes to a cabinet, takes out a pistol, loads it and pockets it. SFX: The bell is rings again more urgently. Henry exits. Maeve sits and waits. She turns off the wireless and listens. Henry enters with OFFICER BURNS.)*

**HENRY:** *(Cont'd.)* It's quite alright, darling, nothing to worry about at all, just an old friend from the war office. Officer Charles Burns, may I introduce to you my beautiful wife, Lady Maeve Moncrieff.

**MAEVE:** How'd you do?

**BURNS:** How'd you do? In fact, now I see you face to face, I believe we met once before, at a party in Whitehall. You were unmarried at the time.

**MAEVE:** Oh yes, of course.

**BURNS:** You don't have to pretend to remember. You were swarmed with admirers at the time.

**HENRY:** Yes, yes, we're all old friends, then. Well, I must say this is an unexpected pleasure, Charles. Tot of brandy for your troubles?

**BURNS:** I think I'd best not, thank you.

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