

## Chapter 75

The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth.

[The story of the Lindberghs' last days in Paris, concluding with:]

So, yes, she found time to finish her letter to Harold. This, like the Lindbergh liner trunks, had been packed and unpacked many times over the last however-many weeks. And yet, in contrast to the trunks, it had not exactly been rationalised. No. It had grown into an epic production. It almost had chapters.

She sat outside a café on the pavement of an avenue lined by horse chestnuts and, looking up now and then, as if seeking a glimpse of blue sky through new leaves, pale green, fresh, improbably vibrant, she finished it.

*My Dearest Harold*, it began.

By the Wednesday night, the apartment had almost been stripped bare; and first thing the following morning removers arrived to take the last of their furniture into store. Anne told the concierge she had some mail to be posted, it was on the little console table in the apartment's hallway, she was leaving in half an hour, she hadn't time to go to the post office. One of the envelopes, addressed to an English destination, was particularly fat and would need special attention.

"Would that be all right?"

Anne gave her some banknotes, not merely for the postage, as a going away present too. Anne could trust the concierge, she'd never let her down.

The taxi arrived.

All went well. Anne had time at the railway station to change money and buy magazines, the children were as good as gold, the train was quiet, almost deserted, and no-one bothered them as they sped through the northern suburbs, contingent Paris, whimsical and illusory Paris, all afroth with lilac and apple and cherry blossom, perhaps the last she'd ever see of it; then at Le Havre there were only three reporters and Anne dodged them with ease, slipping aboard the *Champlain* with the minimum of fuss.

More reporters arrived. Anne could hear them all afternoon, with their big feet and loud voices, doggedly roaming first class, hoping against hope for a chance encounter; but Anne and Jon and Land laid low in their cabin until all-ashore sounded at six.

When the children were settled, Anne, who had been allocated a table of her own in the *Champlain's* vast *salle a manger*, dined and dined well. She knew she would sleep soundly that night. She felt a terrific sense of relief.

She had no way of knowing that, an hour after she'd left the apartment, a cleaner had come and had tipped all her un-posted mail into a waste paper bin.

*Listen! Ecstatically climbing, soaring – a sustained note of power and joy. We turn from the lights of the city; we pivot on a dark wing; we roar over the earth. The plane seems exultant now, even arrogant. We did it, we did it! We're up above you. We were dependent on you just now, River... we were, prisoners, fawning on you for favours, for wind and light. But now we are free. We are up; we are off. We can toss you aside, you there, way below us, a few lights in the great dark silent world that is ours – for we are above it. We are up, we are off. Now we are free.*

## BRIEF LIVES

**Anne Morrow Lindbergh** (1906-2001). *Listen!* was a critical success and sold tolerably well but Anne was not widely recognised as a writer of real quality until the 1950s. On her return to the US in 1939, she fell headlong in love with the aviator, poet and (after 1940) fighter for the Free French, Antoine de Saint Exupéry. He died in July 1944 when his P38 Lightning was shot down over the Mediterranean. Thereafter, Anne stayed loyal to Charles despite his many affairs. ⌘ **Harold Nicolson** (1886-1968). During the war, Harold served at the Ministry of Information, then joined the Board of Governors at the BBC. He was not re-elected by his West Leicester constituents in the 1945 General Election. ⌘ **Charles Lindbergh** (1902-1974) remains a controversial figure, still cited regularly as one of America's most notorious Nazi-sympathisers. He flew combat missions during the war; and thereafter he immersed himself in conservation projects and medical research. ⌘ **Vita Sackville-West** (1892-1962). In 1942, Vita published *Grand Canyon*, a novel about a Nazi invasion of the United States. She became gardening correspondent of the *Observer* and a founder member of the National Trust's garden committee. ⌘ **Sir Robert Vansittart** (1881-1957) resigned in 1941 and was elevated to the Peerage as Baron Vansittart of Denham in 1943. **Barbara Hutton** (1912-1979) donated Winfield House to the American people. It is currently the US Ambassador's residence in London. ⌘ Bermondsey residents **Ethel Harman** (dates unknown) and her mother were killed in the Blitz. ⌘ **Nancy Astor** (1879-1964). Astor to Churchill: "If you were my husband, I'd poison your tea." Churchill: "Madam, if you were my wife, I'd drink it." **Joseph Kennedy** (1888-1969). The ambassador's son became the 35<sup>th</sup> President of the United States. JFK's first book, *Why England Slept*, written while still at Harvard, was an international best seller.