

Adelante Books

*I'll Wait For You  
My Darling*



**Karl Kern**

**A true story of love in war**

I'LL WAIT FOR YOU MY DARLING

Karl Kern

**I'll Wait For You  
My Darling**



Against all the rules, a World War II prisoner  
and a beautiful English girl meet and fall in love.  
Despite obstacles and enforced separations they are eventually  
united.



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I dedicate this book to  
my dear wife who was my life's partner for 47 years,  
also to my son Peter and my granddaughter Christina.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Cousin Lorna is still living in England. Cousin Kathy emigrated with her husband to Australia where she died of cancer. Her husband Gordon also passed away there. I have not seen or heard of little George, nor my friend Walter since I last saw them in England at the P.O.W. camps. It is my hope that my friend and companion Struppie lived a long and happy life with his new owner on the farm.

Thank you to my dear friend Jennifer Van Westrum who, when reading some of my letters while I was writing this book, came up with the title “I’ll wait for you my Darling.”

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Thank you also to my friends who helped me to get started by putting all my handwritten pages on the computer at the very early stages of this book. They are: Jeany Deake, My nephew David Maeding, and my good friends Benny Hinnen and Peter Antoniak.



The location of the POW camps in England

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Excerpt starts on page 38 --->

## 7

One evening we heard a lot of gunshots and fireworks in the nearby village of Clayton. One of the guards who was walking outside the fence called out to us, “The war is over! The war is over!”

Next morning, May 7<sup>th</sup>, we all had to assemble. The commander himself told us that Germany had capitulated and the war with England was over. We were all relieved and now the question on everyone’s mind was, how soon will we be sent home?

I wondered if my family was OK and if our village had been badly damaged. Not knowing was almost unbearable. One thing was certain; there would be no celebrating or fireworks in Germany.

Next morning on our way to work we had a lot of stones thrown at us, mostly by kids. The British population seemed different. Naturally, they had won the war. After we had arrived at the building site it was decided that it had been a mistake to bring us out and we were taken back to the camp.

On our way back, as we were going up a steep country lane, a young boy about 12 years old threw a stone at us. The driver stopped the lorry. Two of our men jumped off, threw the boy onto the back, gave him a good spanking, and then dropped him off again. The driver smiled, made the victory sign, and drove on. Except for an occasional incident while waiting at stop signs, the ride back to the camp went smoothly.

During the day we spent a lot of time sitting in our tents, thinking and talking about what it would be like to be sent back home. Little did we know that most of us would spend another three years behind

barbed wire. All day and into the early hours of the next morning we could hear fireworks and celebrating in the village of Otley.

The face of that young girl kept coming into my mind. I wondered what her name was, where she lived, and how old she might be. Since she crossed the building site so often I assumed she must be living close by. If only I could find a way to communicate with her. My heart told me I had to do something. Why, I don't know. I knew nothing about the girl. And why would she want to have anything to do with a German prisoner of war?

My growling stomach told me that I had to find ways to get more food for myself. One Sunday we were all given a piece of raisin cake. It tasted delicious and I saw an opportunity for some extra food. I made a bet with one of the men in our tent called Bruno that I would jump off the water tower, which was situated in the corner of the camp, if he gave me his piece of cake. During my school years I had always been a little daredevil.

Accompanied by a few more who had listened in on our conversation we walked over to the tower. After I climbed up to the top and looked down I realized it was probably a very foolish thing to do. But I had had good parachute training and was fairly confident that I wouldn't get hurt. During my fall I was concentrating on what I had to do when I hit the ground. When I landed I thought my legs had ended up in my chest. For a few moments I couldn't move. But I was all right, and very reluctantly I was handed my piece of cake.

Since I was getting weaker physically and always felt hungry I devised another way to get a good source of food besides the watery porridge, which we got every morning for the so-called breakfast.

Just for something to do, I walked a lot around the camp. One morning, on one of my walks, I noticed that the empty canisters, in which our porridge had been made, were put outside behind the kitchen. The tubs into which the porridge was poured contained 80% water. However the original containers still had a residue of good porridge left in them. So I made sure that no one was looking and then I jumped the fence enclosing the kitchen. What a feast I had, wiping my hand around the inside of the container and licking the good porridge from my hand.

For a long time I managed to do this almost every day, early in

the morning, without being detected. It helped me to keep up my strength.

One day, we were informed that changes were to be made which would benefit us. We now had a shop where we could purchase items such as pencils, toothpaste, toothbrushes, and paper. There was also a Cassell's German-English/English-German dictionary. We received seven pieces of plastic money a week to spend. This would buy a pencil in a week, a toothbrush in two weeks, and so on. I figured it would take me six weeks to buy the dictionary and I made up my mind to save up for it. The dictionary was more important than the toothpaste or toothbrush, and I already had scrap paper and a pencil from Bill. Then I had another idea. If I sold my piece of cake on Sunday, it would speed up the process.

One Friday morning at the building site, Bill called me into his office. He told me that the night before, after we had gone home, they had dug a trench across the public walkway. He wanted me to build a wooden bridge over it because the walkway had to be kept open for public use for the time being. Bill had drawn a sketch on a piece of paper and he gave me instructions on what to do. He had already delivered the wood that I needed with a dump truck and he left me to it. The bridge had to be just wide enough for one person to cross safely.

In the afternoon it started to drizzle. At around 4:00 p.m. the bridge was ready to be used, except for the railing. As I looked down the walkway, I noticed someone with a raised umbrella coming towards me. It was the young girl I had named 'Pretty' because I didn't know her name.

Quickly I made up my mind that this time I was going to get a good look at her. As she got close, I turned my back to her, pretending that I didn't know she was there. She had to say something because there was no other way for her to get round. For a few seconds she stood behind me. I did nothing. Then she said in a quiet voice, "Excuse me, may I come by?"

I thought what a sweet voice she had. I stood up and my eyes met hers for a brief moment. She had a beautiful face. I could not miss her deep blue eyes. Standing next to me I noticed that she was about half a head smaller than myself, she had a good figure and I could

even smell her perfume. Her hair was dark and she had high cheekbones. I felt a great urge to touch her cheeks. Now that I was so close she looked more beautiful than I had imagined.

I motioned to her to go across. I even managed to say, "Please." I was tempted to offer my hand and help her across, but I didn't dare. As she walked on, I saw her glance back at me and smile. My heart beat faster and I felt as if I was walking on air for the rest of the afternoon.

That evening, after I lay down to sleep, I couldn't get that lovely face and those beautiful eyes out of my mind.

The more I thought about the young lady I called 'Pretty', the more I realized how much I liked her. I wished that I could talk to her. But then I wouldn't know what to say, not being able to speak the language.

I kept myself busy writing words on anything I could find to write on, including toilet paper. We were issued about two feet of it every day. I also acquired a candle and some matches from Bill. He brought them to me when I told him that I needed them for writing after dark. Nearly all of the men I shared the tent with, except Walter, worked in brickyards. They were a lot more tired than I was, and the candlelight didn't stop them from going to sleep. I was glad because I used to sit up till very late at night, teaching myself English and writing it all down.

One weekend I sold my piece of cake, which gave me enough plastic money to buy a red pen and a scrap book. Now I could write my German words in black and the English equivalent in red ink. After a while I had quite a collection of words.

The manhole frames were coming along very well, but there were many still to be built. Bill seemed very pleased with the progress. As the so-called 'chief timber-man' on the building site I was more or less free to be anywhere on the site I wanted, without being questioned. The guards, as well as the civilian staff, got to know me well. But still I had to be very careful what I did. I was afraid that if anyone suspected that I intended to fraternize I might be transferred to another work commando and never see my 'pretty lady' again. My mind was continually working on ways to communicate with her. So far, besides saying, "Excuse me" and "Please" we had only had eye contact.

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One night, as I lay wondering what I could do, I got the idea of exchanging notes with the young lady. I would carefully drop a note in front of her in the hope that 'Pretty' would pick it up as she was walking by.

As I was going towards the office that evening I noticed a cigarette box lying on the ground. I bent down to pick it up. To my surprise, it was half full of cigarettes. What a find. To get them inside the camp, I decided to put them loose under my shirt and throw the box away. On second thoughts, I tore off the back of the box and took it with me, to write on.

That evening I sat up in my tent with the candle burning. I wrote *Have a very good night, Charlie*. I assumed that Karl must translate as Charlie.

For the next few days I carried the note around with me, waiting for the right opportunity. Finally, one Friday afternoon I saw 'Pretty' coming up the walkway. There was not much activity near the little bridge I had built, so I decided to drop the note near there. I wanted to look as if I was doing something so I carried a piece of wood in one hand and the note in the other. When I thought the moment was right I dropped the note about five feet in front of her as I crossed over the road. I kept on walking but I knew that she had seen the note. At first she walked past it, then stopped, took one step back, looked around and then bent down to pick it up. My heart leaped with joy as I watched her walk away with the note.

The next Monday afternoon I saw 'Pretty' coming across the

building site with the same little girl who was with her once before. I started to walk in their direction and saw the little girl drop a small package on the ground. I continued walking until they were some distance away from me, then, after making sure that everything was clear, I turned and walked back to the spot. Pretending I had something in my shoe I knelt down, took off one of my shoes and at the same time retrieved the packet.

I couldn't wait to find a suitable place behind a wall where I could be alone and open it. Besides a sandwich, I found a note which read, *Thank you for your note, enjoy the sandwich. Sue.* I was very hungry, so I sat down and enjoyed the food. Now I knew that the girl's name was Sue. Only much later did I learn that it was short for Ursula.

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The following night I didn't sleep much. I was going over and over in my mind what had happened during the day. I still couldn't believe that it was not a dream. If only I could write a note to say thank you for that delicious sandwich.

For the next few days I carried a note for Sue around with me, hidden in my shoe because that was the safest place. One afternoon, as I was busy building a frame for another manhole, I saw someone crawling towards me on hands and knees along one of the dry stone walls that covered the building site. [Eventually they would all have to come down to make way for the houses.]

Sue was standing some distance away. The little girl kept looking in all directions, wondering if anyone would see her. She came up to me and handed me a paper sack, saying, "From my cousin." I remembered the letter in my shoe and quickly took it off and handed her my note. As I was doing so, I asked what her name was. She replied, "My name is Kathy." Then she turned around and crawled back along the wall. When she got to the road she got up and ran towards Sue who was waiting for her. I could hardly believe what had happened.

Kathy was a cute little girl, about seven years old and very bright. At least some of my concerns about communicating with Sue had been settled. I started to wonder if Sue really liked me or if she was only taking pity on a German prisoner of war.

I couldn't wait to see what was in the sack. To my surprise, it was a whole small loaf of bread and a packet of cigarettes. As I was

always hungry, I ate most of the bread. The rest I managed to hide under my jacket. The army jackets were short and very loose with a tight band at the bottom, very handy for hiding anything small without it falling out. The cigarettes fit neatly in my jacket pocket.

I went back to the trench where Walter was working to share the bread with him. Of course he was curious to know where I had obtained it. I answered, "Never mind, a little bird gave it to me." He looked at me a bit strangely but he did not press me any further and enjoyed the bread.

Similar exchanges took place every few days. We handed notes back and forth between little Kathy and myself. As my English improved our notes became short letters. I was very much afraid that she might be seen or get caught. I had to be constantly alert.

Finally I had enough plastic money to buy a dictionary. Every evening after that, when I returned home from the building site, I would sit in my tent and study new words and phrases by candle light, mostly the words which I needed to write my notes. Everything I wrote was of a general nature, such as 'Thank you for the cigarettes and goodies,' or, 'I hope your cousin Kathy is very careful.'

One day Sue wrote that her mother knew she was seeing me and writing to me, but her father didn't. It seemed that her mother approved of what her daughter was doing. That made me happy.

Sometimes we would see each other in Bradford while I was on my way back to camp and she happened to be in town, riding her bicycle as we drove by. Then she would mention it in her next note. She was naturally inquisitive about the conditions at the camp. So she would ask 'Are you warm at night? Do you have a nice bed to sleep in?' Sometimes it took me two or three evenings to compose a small letter because I had to look up most of the words in my dictionary. Also I wrote the way we think in German and no doubt it was not always easy for her to figure out what I was trying to tell her.

One Monday we were just getting ready to call it a day at the building site. The truck was waiting at the usual place and most of the men were already seated on the planks. I saw Sue hurrying towards me and I sensed that she had something for me. However I was still quite a distance away and all the men were waiting for me to get on the truck. My mind was feverishly trying to come up with a feasible

29<sup>TH</sup> OCT. 45

MY DEAREST SUE  
\*\*\*\*\*

J HAVE JUST MET KATHIE  
AND GOT YOUR VERY SWEET AND LOVELY  
LETTER. TAKE MY BEST THANKS FOR IT.  
J AM VERY PLEASED TO HEAR ANY NEWS  
ABOUT YOU AFTER A LONG WHILE OF  
WAITING. WE CAN'T ANY WORK TO-DAY.  
THEREFORE J CAN ANSWER YOU AT ONCE.  
ON THURSDAY J GAVE A LETTER FOR YOU  
TO KATHIE. DIDN'T SHE HAND IT OVER TO YOU.  
OR DID YOU FORGET TO MENTION ITS RECEIPT  
IN YOUR LAST LETTER? "CHAMPION." J SAY  
TO YOUR TOFFES AND MANY THANKS FOR THE  
CIGARETTES.

DEAR SUE YOU WERE ILL?  
ALL THE TIME MY THOUGHTS WERE WITH YOU.  
J WOULD ASK KATHIE ABOUT YOU. BUT THERE  
WERE SOME OBSTAKLES TO DO SO. NOW THEN.  
J AM GLAD TO HEAR THAT YOU ARE FIT  
AGAIN. J AM VERY SORRY MY SWEETHEART  
NOT TO HAVE SEEN YOU ON THE BUS.

MY DARLING J AM VERY  
DELIGHTED THAT YOU ARE SO MUCH ENDEAVOUR=  
RED TO FULFILL MY DESIRES. BUT NOW,  
WHAT MAY J DO ANY GOOD FOR YOU?  
IT'S A PITY THAT YOU CAN'T ANSWER ONCE  
AT NOON OR IN THE AFTERNOON TO PAY  
HEAVISIT.

MY DEAR NOW IT IS 8 O'CLOCK.  
JUST J AM COMING BACK FROM BRADFORD  
AND WILL WRITE TO FINISH THIS LETTER.  
J WAS VERY SORRY THAT YOU HAD TO GO HOME  
SO FAST LAST NIGHT. MY LORRY ARRIVED AT  
3 PAST 7 A.M. WOULD YOU HAVE GONE BACK  
IF YOU HAD KNOW THIS??

PLEASE TURN OVER

My first letter to Sue



FOR TO-DAY I WILL HAVE TO CLOSED NOW.

LOTS AND LOTS OF LOVE  
AND THOUSAND OF KISSES

YOUR FRIEND

*Bob*

I LOVE YOU.

*Darling*



excuse to delay the truck. Sue was still 20 yards away from me.

Then I remembered the shoe trick. I quickly took off one of my boots and my sock while the truck driver blew his horn impatiently. I called out that I had a splinter in my foot and wouldn't be long. Finally Sue caught up with me, sitting there on the ground, and a letter fell right in front of me. Without looking up I slipped it inside my sock and put my sock and boot back on again. I did not look back at Sue, but hurried to jump onto the back of the truck.

One of the men nearest to the cab gave the usual signal that we were all aboard, and off we went. I later found out that Walter had kept the driver talking, to distract him from what was going on. Walter was aware of the relationship between Sue and me, and he was ready to help out whenever the need arose.

By now we were on friendly terms with the driver and he was very good to us. Many a time, when we were driving through town, he would slow down to show us something of interest. Once, when one of our men had problems with very sore eyes, probably from the wind and draught from riding on the open truck, he stopped at a drug store and bought him some eye lotion.

After we arrived back at the camp that evening we were all told to wait inside the gate. We were searched occasionally after returning from work but I was not sure if this was routine or if they had got word that someone was trying to smuggle something in. The guards checked all our pockets but I was not asked to take off my shoes and the letter went undetected.

Some time later I looked for a place where I could read my letter. Sue had a lot more to say than usual. I read that her cousin Kathy had got into trouble at her school for going near prisoners of war at the building site. She was told that her parents would be notified. All the children were warned not to go anywhere near us.

Naturally neither Sue nor I wanted Kathy to get into any more trouble. Sue suggested that we should not exchange any more letters for a while, to let things cool off. I thought that was a good idea, and in the meantime I would try to think up a better and safer way to write to each other.

I suppose the way we had been exchanging letters was a little too obvious. Sooner or later someone was bound to find out. I was very

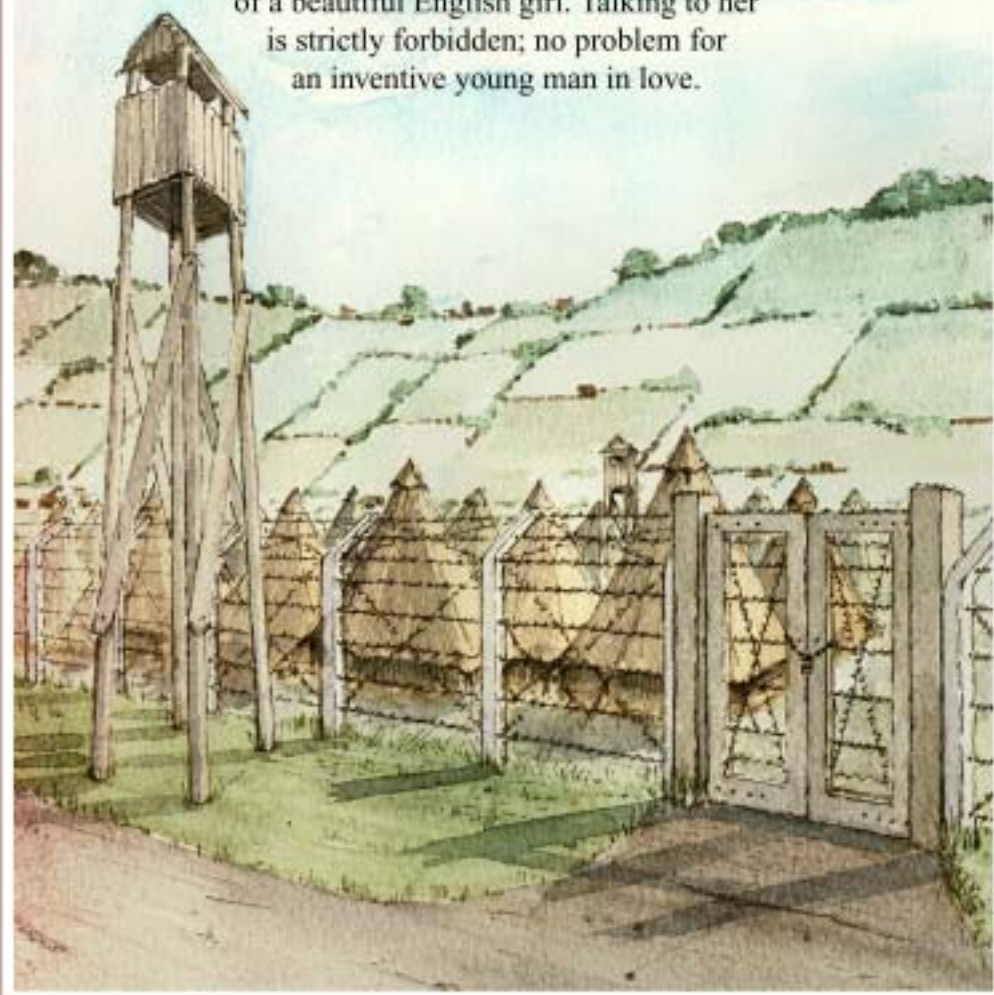
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[adelindadm@adelante-industries.com](mailto:adelindadm@adelante-industries.com)

A striking, first-hand account of life in the trenches in World War II. Karl Kern is captured and taken to England. He experiences the harshness of prison camp life but also the kindness of a beautiful English girl. Talking to her is strictly forbidden; no problem for an inventive young man in love.



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