

The night before they leave for Canada, the lovers eat at a small, quiet restaurant in Antwerp, which disappoints Ethel as she's in need of company and stimulation. Hawley chose the wretched place and insisted on sitting in a cramped and secluded corner, placing his back to the other diners and forcing Ethel to squeeze past him to the other side. She watches him shift nervously in his seat, his posture betraying both restlessness and anxiety. He orders nothing more than soup and bread rolls. For both of them.

'It's a beautiful city, isn't it?' asks Ethel, who has spent the afternoon visiting churches and museums, making small sketches in her notebook to serve as future memories. 'Not what I expected at all.'

'It smells of fish,' replies Hawley with a shudder. 'I don't care for Europe as a rule.'

'I met a man this afternoon who told me that he had served in Bismarck's private office for seventeen years before retiring home to Belgium. Funny to think of that, isn't it? That all seems like such a long time ago.'

Hawley says nothing, simply glances at his watch from time to time and wishes the kitchen would hurry along with the food.

'Then I discovered these narrow laneways,' Ethel tells him, leaning forward. 'Three or four of them. With very tall walls dressed in yellow jasmine. I asked about them and apparently they're called love alleys. Can you guess why?' Hawley shakes his head. 'Because they're so narrow that only two people can pass along them at any one time,' she says. 'The idea is that if a couple holds hands and walks along the love alley unimpeded, then they shall have eternal love. If they fail, so will their romance.'

'That's amusing,' says Hawley, nodding his head.

'Yes, I thought so. There's one a few streets from here. I thought perhaps that after dinner we might -'

'Waiter,' says Hawley, clicking his fingers at a passing attendant, a man old enough to remember when the citadel was held by the Dutch. 'Could you hurry the food along please? We're in rather a hurry.'

The waiter nods and shuffles away. A few more minutes pass and Hawley realises that neither of them has said a word.

'Ethel?' he asks. 'Are you alright?'

'I'm fine,' she says quietly. 'After dinner...?'

'We'll return to the hotel,' he says. 'Pack. Sleep. Prepare for tomorrow. We have a long journey ahead of us.'

'Fine,' she says with a shrug. She looks out the window, tilts her head and can just make out the love alley nearby. She feels an overwhelming urge to run across, to pass along it alone and see what will happen, whether she will make it to the other side without meeting anyone.

To have twice as much space as normal. That, she realises, would be a good thing.

It's several minutes before Hawley even thinks of her again and when he does, she's already gone.