

THE GREAT WAR SERIES

*Springtime
of the Spirit*

MAUREEN LANG

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“Set in the French hamlet of Briecourt, [*Look to the East*] teems with conflict. . . . Lang’s novel is a cautionary tale as well as a romance within an exciting framework of war, secrets, and blissful reunions.”

Publishers Weekly

“Maureen Lang’s novel is a must read for all historical romance fans!”

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freshfiction.com

“A wonderful read! I’ve come to expect excellent prose from Maureen Lang, and *Look to the East* doesn’t disappoint. It gives a glimpse into the past that will make you reflect upon the characters and the message long after you’ve finished reading.”

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Romantic Times

“*Whisper on the Wind* shouts God’s goodness to His followers, even when His plan seems unknowable. . . . Lang has done an

excellent job drawing her reader into World War I and the stories of the brave souls who fought and perished on both sides.”

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Moments-of-beauty.blogspot.com

“[A] tale of bravery and intrigue that will keep your eyes glued to the story, page after page.”

Berlysue.blogspot.com

“The story is so well written, it keeps you glued to the pages and you find yourself going through a roller coaster of emotions—you laugh and you cry, and you just keep wanting more and more. A definite must read.”

Familycorner.blogspot.com



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Dedicated to my three brothers,
David, Mark, and Patrick, and my brother-in-law, *Jim*,
each of whom at one time or another inspired
political “discussions” in my family.

For this model of political passion,
I extend my heartfelt gratitude.

Acknowledgments

As with all my books, only my name shows up on the cover. In fact, my stories would barely be recognizable without the encouragement and insight of my two editors, Stephanie Broene and Sarah Mason. For this one especially, I am deeply grateful.

Germans who lived during those first ten postwar years talked of them afterwards as a time full of dangerous strains, yet too of hope and promise—a springtime of the spirit.

TERENCE PRITTIE, *Life World Library: Germany*, 1961, 1968

And what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly,
and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?

MICAH 6:8

A Summary of Terms:

By **bourgeoisie** is meant the class of modern **capitalists**, owners of the means of social production and employers of wage labour. By **proletariat**, the class of modern wage labourers who, having no means of production of their own, are reduced to selling their labour power in order to live.

F. ENGELS, NOTE TO THE ENGLISH EDITION OF 1888,

The Communist Manifesto BY KARL MARX AND FRIEDRICH ENGELS

Once there was a country that wanted a turn being a great and mighty empire. They thought their freedom was at stake when the countries around them matched their race for armaments. To protect that freedom and to make a try for their mighty empire, they ordered their army—an army with a glorious history of excellence—to fight.

Despite all assurances that they would surely win, this country was defeated after all. And its people, shocked at losing a war they'd been told would be won, ripened for revolt against the leadership that had brought them not only the loss of so many men, but the scorn of the world.

Some were willing to allow more sacrifice, but no longer from the workers and soldiers who had already given so much.

Some wanted a better nation through finding a better part of themselves.

This is the story of two such people.



Part One

NOVEMBER 1918



One step, then another. He'd started out with his eyes forward, chin up, but all he could see now were the tips of his boots.

Christophe Brecht was inside German territory, the train having taken them back over the border, away from the trenches that had marred France for the past four years. The ground his boots pounded now belonged to the fatherland.

Home.

The only sound was that of his men marching beside him—not that their tread could be called marching. Most looked as tired and worn as he, barely able to take the next step. They were still covered in the mud of no-man's-land, thick from boots to knee and in varying layers up to the helmet.

Did any of them remember how it had been when they marched—yes, really marched—in the *other* direction? Songs and praise echoed from every avenue, and flowers showered them from smiling women, with proud pats on the back from fathers and old men.

The city that had sent them so gloriously off to battle was still beyond sight. Those not wishing to go all the way to Munich had been made to get off the train already, close to but not at their requested destinations. The train lines were

in disarray after handing over half of Germany's locomotives to the Allies—too much disarray to answer individual needs.

But Christophe wasn't far from Braedon, his small hometown some distance west of Munich. He shoved away old thoughts of how this day was supposed to be. No victory parades to greet them, no flowers. No woman to kiss him now that he was home. Just silence.

He stared ahead under the autumn sunlight. His vision was clear, something the army had taken advantage of when they'd trained him to be a sniper in the last chaotic weeks of the war. Despite his earlier promotion from Hauptmann to Major, they'd stuck him where he was needed most, no consideration of his rank. Not that he hadn't been a successful sniper, but what he'd counted success only days ago now seemed something else altogether.

Very likely many of the men beside him couldn't see the details he could—signs on the series of poles before them: splashes of red, in flags, in backdrop. Signs he hadn't seen the likes of since before the war. Back when people still talked about politics, when the German voice wasn't the single one it had turned into during the war.

Then he saw it. An older poster, a bit tattered by the wind. The Kaiser's face, easily recognizable with his mustache and uniform. A call to arms.

Christophe tore his gaze away, to the sky, back to his boots. He'd answered that call; so had each of those who trod at his side. A call that had ended this way.

Rumor had it the Kaiser had fled Germany in disgrace. Good riddance. If what they said about the armistice was true—that Germany was to be given sole blame for the war—then the world hated them. Hated all of them for how the

Kaiser and his cronies, both aristocratic and military, had pushed them into this war.

Hated them almost as much as Christophe hated himself for all he'd done while in it.

His pace picked up before he knew it; blood pumped as wildly as it had during any fight with the British or French, in offense or defense. He reached for a rock and hurled it at the Kaiser's image. It landed with a thud directly between the eyes.

Another rock, then suddenly more than just his own, along with a grunt here and there, a muffled cry. Were they his? No. A few men broke ranks and hurled themselves at what was left of the poster.

All his life Christophe had needed something to cling to. His parents, a schoolmaster, the church, his commanding officer. In the trenches, other soldiers. And Christ.

Hate filled him now—something he didn't want but couldn't rid himself of. He clung to that.

Christophe kept hold of the rock in his hand. No need to throw it—the poster had disappeared.



“And so, fellow Germans! The calendar may say autumn, but in fact we are in the springtime of Germany. The winter of an unjust war is behind us. New life buds for all of us. Are there storms in spring? Yes, but the squalls bring us the energy we need for change. We can build our country anew and model for all—for ourselves and for our neighbors, with the world's eye on us—that we speak as one voice, a voice of men, of women, *all of us* together as one people without differences.”

Annaliese barely paused, although the crowd was already

beginning to cheer. She read the same fervor on every face; it was like a wave passing over those gathered, binding them together, uniting them.

“They’ll hear us speak of protecting and not exploiting our fellow citizens. They’ll hear of our compassion for those in need, feel it in the plans to protect even the least in Germany. They’ll hear our demands for the equal distribution of food!”

Cries of affirmation forced a pause.

“We’ll no longer be burdened by the yoke of a monarchy or kept under the thumb of warmongers, but we will be free—yes, really free—to live in the peace for which our men fought. Peace! Freedom! Fairness! And bread!”

Annaliese Düray reveled in the jubilation, in the immediate approval of her call. They outmatched her voice, which was a considerable thing because her voice—especially on this platform—was bigger than she was. Hands raised, she lifted her cry even louder, proud of the timbre she’d inherited from her one-time schoolmarm mother. Not the strident screech of some women but midtoned, boisterous, easy on the ear even at this volume. “Peace is ours! And so is the future! If we rally behind the party!”

“Anya . . . Anya, come along now.”

Leo Beckenbauer’s arm went around her waist and he ushered her from the crowd. Two others carved a path between the brick wall of the *Apotheke* behind them and the crowd before them, and off they went, the exuberance still echoing in her ears.

“Did you see them, Leo?” she called, breathless. “And more were coming! We should stay—”

But he pressed forward, and there was little she could do except follow, with Leo next to her, bodyguards in front and

behind them. Each one was a brother to her, united not by blood but by something deeper, a passion ardent enough to stir all Germany to embrace a better future. One that would bond them with others throughout the world.

They evaded the few people who followed by turning into a narrow gangway between the back of the *Apotheke* and the shop next door. Only four blocks to the back of the butcher shop Leo's father once ran, the temporary headquarters for those whose ideals about the future matched their own.

Not a block away, Annaliese heard the echoes and cries of another rally, led by a voice she recognized as belonging to another party. The Communists—a party not likely to support the recently appointed Bavarian Prime Minister Eisner the way she did. Eisner had been appointed by revolution, with a quick and systematic takeover—and not a single shot fired. Such a takeover would have been far different had the Red Communists been in charge, even if they did want some of the same things Annaliese's own party wanted. Eisner had agreed to a quick election just weeks from now, proving his confidence that he had the will of the people behind him, even though a half-dozen other parties demanded their voices be heard, too.

But in this neighborhood, one voice rang loudest, and that was Jurgen's. A Socialist one.

She saw the exchange of glances between the men around her, starting with Leo, who looked at Ivo, who looked at Huey. Huey was an ironworker and Ivo a woodworker—or Ivo had been, until the war had claimed most of his fingers. Despite any hint of a disability, he was as tall as he was stalwart, just like Huey. It would take little more than a word from either one of them to disperse a competing crowd in their territory.

“I could have stayed this time, Leo,” Annaliese said once they entered the back of the darkened shop. Though the kitchen hadn’t boasted a single slab of meat or even the stingiest of sausages in well over a year, the slight residue of blood and spices still tickled her nose when Leo closed the door behind them.

Leo went to the table, where a stack of papers awaited him. “You know how Eisner likes it; you and Jurgen are to keep their thoughts on Eisner’s council so the vote will be won. You’ll spend time more freely with the people once Jurgen is back beside you. He *is* Eisner’s council around here—or at least the best known of the council members.”

Of all the voices struggling to be heard these days, other than Eisner himself, it was Jurgen who attracted the biggest response from nearly all corners of their broken society. His promises to meet everyday needs did not fall on deaf ears, because his was the voice of the workers and the peasants themselves—of all those who’d never had a voice before.

Jurgen liked to tell Annaliese she brought the women’s voice to him, but Annaliese knew better. People came because they wanted to see Jurgen, to hear him, to witness the spark in his eye as he promised them what they wanted most of all. Each came with one need or another, but Jurgen promised that the council had the answer, no matter the question.

And Leo had access to bread. Bread few could afford in the quantities their office provided through donations and collections at street rallies. They could afford collectively what individually they must do without. Starve alone or unite and eat. Practical evidence of the effectiveness of the council’s goals.

“Oh! This must have been delivered while we were gone.”

Annaliese scooped up the package left on the wide butcher's table beside the stack of notes Leo tended. "And just in time for tomorrow's council meeting."

Ripping away the string and paper, she held up the jacket for Leo to see. It was exactly as she'd told the tailor to make it: broad across the shoulders, with a touch of padding to make those shoulders appear fully capable of holding the world's woes, just as he needed them to. And not black, but blue—dark, though, because anything too bright would be out of place in their tattered world. Yet blue would cast his elegant eyes in the best light.

But Leo was shaking his head. "He'll look like a capitalist."

"No jacket will hide Jurgen's working-class background. It's in the width of his shoulders, the strength and size of his hands. In this, he'll look the way every man wants to look. Strong. Fatherly yet handsome; a leader. And the color will reveal the poet in him."

Leo aimed a skeptical brow her way. "Fatherly? I wasn't aware that's how you viewed him."

She ignored the comment; it wasn't the first time Leo had tried coaxing free her infatuation with Jurgen. "It's important that he not look like a military man, even if we do want the military behind us. We've seen enough leaders in uniform. And he won't wear the top hat of a capitalist, either, or the shoes of a monarch. He'll wear trousers like anyone else, only this jacket will show he can take on another's burden without the excesses of an exploiter."

"Yes, well, he's doing that, isn't he?" Leo fingered the sleeve—durable fabric, plain but for the dark blue color. "Well chosen, Anya. You're young but smart; I've said so right along."

Annaliese smiled at the praise, especially coming from Leo. Jurgen might be the one to receive public praise in the name of Eisner's council—or the blame from those who disagreed—but anyone who worked beside them knew whatever Jurgen believed, Leo had believed first.

Author's Note

The setting for this novel is a volatile and complicated time in German history, one I attempted to share from a simple affection for history rather than scholarly authority. My hope is to present a glimpse at the conditions in Germany following the Great War, a time that served as the foundation for so many of the horrors that followed. There are, without doubt, many facets of that time in history left out of this story. For those omissions, whether intentional or otherwise, as well as for any misinterpretations of this time period, I offer my sincere apologies and a hope that the characters did their job to entertain.

There are, however, a few factual details mentioned in my story that I found interesting and wanted to elaborate on:

- Kurt Eisner and Eugen Leviné were actual historical figures, and both played prominent roles in Germany's history at this time.
- Kurt Eisner's assassination left the Socialist regime in disarray, providing enough chaos to inspire Eugen Leviné to attempt a Communist revolution in Bavaria. During the course of the revolution, Leviné accused a number of wealthy, prominent citizens of Munich of being counterrevolutionaries, succeeding in murdering eight of them by having them shot. After his arrest by the free corps, Leviné was sentenced to a firing squad and died crying, "Long live the revolution."
- The free corps ushered in their own reign of retributive terror, matching and in some cases surpassing the damage the Communists had done.

Writing this story reminded me how deep the passion for politics can run, particularly if the values and freedom of an individual are threatened. It also reminded me that a public voice can make a difference if we don't lose hope. At the very least, the challenges of this time and place in history prompted me to pray more often for our own country and its leaders and to be thankful that we have avoided such horrors because our government is of the people, by the people, and for the people.

About the Author

Maureen Lang has always had a passion for writing. She wrote her first novel longhand around the age of ten, put the pages into a notebook she had covered with soft deerskin (nothing but the best!), then passed it around the neighborhood to rave reviews. It was so much fun she's been writing ever since.

She is the author of several novels, including *Pieces of Silver*—a 2007 Christy Award finalist—*Remember Me*, *The Oak Leaves*, *On Sparrow Hill*, *My Sister Dilly*, and most recently, the Great War series. She has won the Romance Writers of America Golden Heart award, the Inspirational Readers Choice contest, and the American Christian Fiction Writers Noble Theme award and has been a finalist for the American Christian Fiction Writers Book of the Year award and the Gayle Wilson Award of Excellence. She is also the recipient of a Holt Medallion Award of Merit.

Maureen lives in the Midwest with her husband, her two sons, and their much-loved dog, Susie. Visit her Web site at www.maureenlang.com.

Discussion Questions

1. At the beginning of the story, Germany has been defeated and the soldiers are marching home. What do you imagine they were thinking and feeling at that time, and what do you imagine the waiting families might have been thinking? Have you ever faced disgrace or defeat? How did you respond?
2. Jurgen's initial message is a cry against tyranny and a desire to end inequality, but he compromises his ideals when they no longer seem feasible. How do you think someone as idealistic as Jurgen was able to cross a line from wanting to serve society to wanting to control it? In what areas are you tempted to compromise when it's difficult to achieve your goals?
3. Does the separation between Annaliese and her parents have more to do with their beliefs, or just a lack of communication? Is it possible for family members or friends who hold different beliefs to still be close to one another? What does it take to make that sort of relationship work?
4. Frau Düray asks Christophe to go to Munich in search of Annaliese. Do you think she did the right thing, or should she have accepted her daughter's independence? How have you seen parents respond when their children rebel? What are some constructive responses? destructive responses?
5. When you've been in a crowd or part of an audience, have you ever been aware of the audience uniting as one

large element, wanting to enjoy/agree/approve of the speaker or performer? How did you respond? Did your emotions and energy change after the crowd dispersed?

6. Is there an appropriate balance between an idealistic society that shares all things in common and the work-and-reward system of capitalism? What are the merits and failures of both ends of the spectrum? How much should people depend on the government? Should individuals, churches, and private charities assume more of the burden?
7. When Jurgen asks how a loving God could let war destroy the world He created, Christophe responds that God gave us the ability to choose, and He won't take back that gift just because we make a bad choice. Do you agree with Christophe's response? How would you have answered Jurgen?
8. Leo is the power behind Jurgen. Have you ever known, or known of, anyone who is happy to be working behind the scenes, avoiding the attention or accolades but pleased when the one they've chosen to support receives such things? A teacher? A relative?
9. Christophe has qualms about Jurgen's agenda. Was it ethical for him to remain and help train Jurgen's fighting forces anyway? How would you have handled the task that Leo and Jurgen assigned Christophe?
10. Some of the Socialist ideals appear to offer freedom—from the restrictions of government, of religion, of

nationalism, even of marriage. How do these ideas agree or disagree with your own view of freedom?

11. At one point, Leo states that the masses will allow almost anything to happen unless a gun is pointed directly at them. Do you agree that the populace is easily swayed? How involved should people be in politics? How involved do you think the government should be in the lives of its citizens?
12. How did you feel about Annaliese's decision to help Jurgen escape near the end of the story? Would you have done the same if you were in her position?
13. Even before the First World War, women of many countries had been fighting for the vote. How do you think this war influenced attitudes about the role women play in society, especially in view of the next world war that was yet to come?
14. How did you feel about Annaliese and Christophe's decision to stay in Germany at the end of the story? Did you wish they had gone to America with Annaliese's parents?

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