

a novel

MELANIE DOBSON
CATCHING
the WIND



Praise for *Catching the Wind* and other novels by Melanie Dobson

Catching the Wind

“Another captivating weave of great characters, superb storytelling, and rich historical detail from talented wordsmith Melanie Dobson. A story to remind us all that resilience springs from hope, and hope from love.”

SUSAN MEISSNER, author of *Secrets of a Charmed Life*

“A childhood bond, never forgotten, leads to a journey of secrets revealed and lifelong devotion rewarded. Readers will delight in this story that illustrates how the past can change the present.”

LISA WINGATE, national bestselling author of *The Sea Keeper's Daughters*

“Intricate and lyrical, *Catching the Wind* tells intertwining stories of lost souls and faithful hearts. Once again, Melanie Dobson pens a novel full of fascinating historical detail and characters as real as your best friends—and worst enemies. Engrossing, beautiful, and thoughtful, this is a novel to be savored.”

SARAH SUNDIN, award-winning author of *When Tides Turn*

“*Catching the Wind* is a sweeping and beautifully written historical novel that showcases Melanie Dobson’s ability to tell a complex and enduring tale—one that will captivate readers with how love transcends the ravages of war.”

KELLIE COATES GILBERT, author of the Texas Gold novels

“My heart raced and at times broke as I read *Catching the Wind*. As I’ve interviewed refugees in the Middle East and Europe, I’ve heard countless stories of people being ripped away from family, home, and country. I’ve also heard stories of hope and redemption. And ultimately that is the story of this book, that grace can take us further than we can imagine . . . to a place our hearts feel at home.”

TAMARA PARK, producer, director, and author of *Sacred Encounters from Rome to Jerusalem*

Shadows of Ladenbrooke Manor

“Masterful. . . mysteries are solved, truths revealed, and loves rekindled in a book sure to draw new fans to Dobson’s already large base.”

PUBLISHERS WEEKLY

“Dobson’s latest is a splendid combination of the past and the present, skillfully woven together with an interesting mystery. The fascinating British setting, exploration of family secrets, and hopeful ending create an engaging reading experience.”

ROMANTIC TIMES

“[This] poignant mix of historical and contemporary family drama . . . delivers a beautifully redemptive love story that will appeal to a diverse audience of readers.”

SERENA CHASE, *USA Today’s* Happy Ever After blog

“Melanie Dobson’s magical story of the lives and loves of the Doyle women, and the healing that finally comes for them, is a beautiful tale of the redemption that can happen even when we’re not consciously looking for it.”

BOOKREPORTER.COM

“For the second year in a row, Melanie Dobson has penned my absolute favorite novel of the year. I was swept into the world of English gardens and intertwined families. Do not miss this novel!”

SARAH SUNDIN, award-winning author of *When Tides Turn*

Chateau of Secrets

“Amazing characters, deep family secrets, and an authentic French chateau make Dobson’s story a delight.”

ROMANTIC TIMES

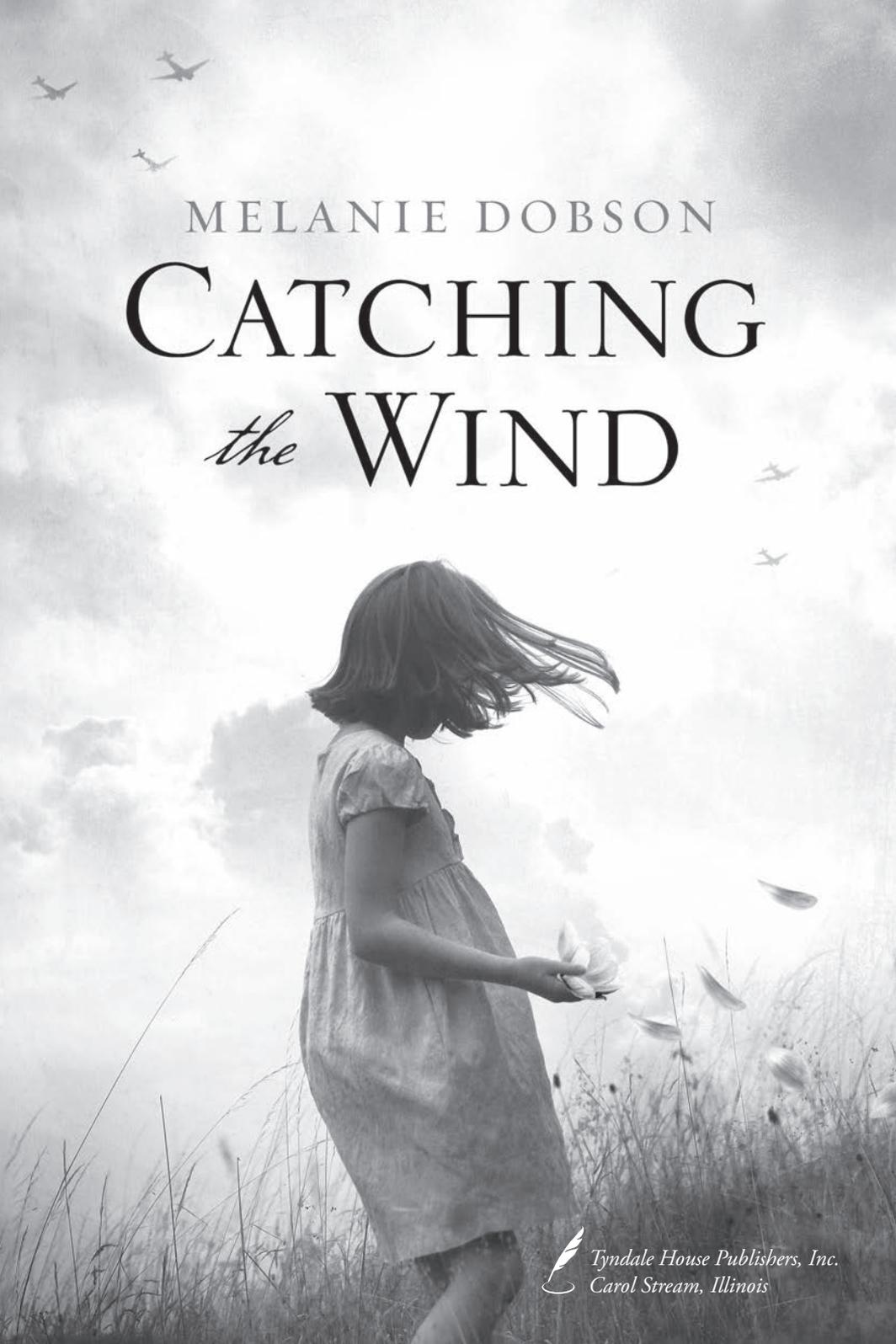
“A satisfying read with two remarkable heroines.”

HISTORICAL NOVEL SOCIETY

“Intriguing and suspenseful; rich in secrets, hidden tunnels, and heroic deeds—Melanie Dobson’s *Chateau of Secrets* weaves a compelling tale of a family’s sacrifice for those in need. A beautiful story.”

CATHY GOHLKE, Christy Award–winning author of *Secrets She Kept*

CATCHING THE WIND



MELANIE DOBSON
CATCHING
the WIND



Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.
Carol Stream, Illinois

Visit Tyndale online at www.tyndale.com.

Visit Melanie Dobson's website at www.melaniebobson.com.

TYNDALE and Tyndale's quill logo are registered trademarks of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

Catching the Wind

Copyright © 2017 by Melanie Dobson. All rights reserved.

Cover photograph of airplanes copyright © Everett Historical/Shutterstock. All rights reserved.

Cover photograph of girl copyright © Mark Owen/Trevillion Images. All rights reserved.

Cover photograph of petals copyright © injenerker/Depositphotos.com. All rights reserved.

Cover photograph of magnolia blossom copyright © Neirfys/Depositphotos.com. All rights reserved.

Author photograph by Jodi Stilp Photography LLC, copyright © 2016. All rights reserved.

Designed by Ron Kaufmann

Edited by Sarah Mason Rische

Published in association with the literary agency of Natasha Kern Literary Agency, Inc.,
P.O. Box 1069, White Salmon, WA 98672.

Scripture taken from the New King James Version,[®] copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.
Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Catching the Wind is a work of fiction. Where real people, events, establishments, organizations, or locales appear, they are used fictitiously. All other elements of the novel are drawn from the author's imagination.

For information about special discounts for bulk purchases, please contact Tyndale House Publishers at csresponse@tyndale.com or call 800-323-9400.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Dobson, Melanie, author.

Title: *Catching the wind* / Melanie Dobson.

Description: Carol Stream, Illinois : Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., [2017]

Identifiers: LCCN 2016055744 | ISBN 9781496424785 (hardcover) | ISBN 9781496417282 (softcover)

Subjects: LCSH: Women journalists—Fiction. | Missing persons—Investigation—Fiction. | GSAFD: Romantic suspense fiction. | Christian fiction.

Classification: LCC PS3604.O25 C38 2017 | DDC 813/.6—dc23 LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2016055744>

Printed in the United States of America

| | | | | | | |
|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| 23 | 22 | 21 | 20 | 19 | 18 | 17 |
| 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |



To Tosha Lamdin Williams

My forever friend and the heroine of a beautiful story.

Thank you for loving me at and through all times.

PROVERBS 17:17



*“Better that one heart be broken
a thousand times in the retelling . . .
if it means that a thousand other hearts
need not be broken at all.”*



ROBERT MCAFEE BROWN
Preface to *Night* by Elie Wiesel (1986)

Chapter 1



Moselkern, Germany, July 1940

Maple leaves draped over the tree house window, the silvery fronds linked together like rings of chain mail to protect the boy and girl playing inside.

Dietmar Roth charged his wooden horse across the planks, knocking down two of the Roman horses with his toy knight as he rushed toward the tower of river stones. In his thirteen years, he'd become an expert on both knights and their armor. Metal rings were useless for protection on their own, but hundreds of these rings, woven tightly together, could withstand an opponent's arrows. Or sword.

Standing beside the tower, a miniature princess clutched in her hand, Brigitte yowled like a wildcat. As if she might really be carried away by warriors.

At the age of ten, Brigitte was an expert on royalty. And drama.

Instead of an army, Brigitte played with one toy—the princess

Dietmar carved out of linden wood and painted for her last birthday. He liked renaming his knights, but Brigitte never changed the name of her toy.

Princess Adler.

Eagle.

Brigitte thought her princess could fly.

Dietmar drew a tin sword from his knight's scabbard and began to fight the black-cloaked opposition that advanced in his mind. Stretched across the tree house floor was an entire army of battle-scarred knights, all of them with a different symbol painted on their crossbows. All of them fighting as one for the Order of the *Ritterlichkeit*. Chivalry.

He'd carved each of his knights' bows from cedar and strung them with hair from Fonzell, their family's horse—at least, Fonzell had been the Roth family horse until Herr Darre stole him away. Herr Darre was a German officer. And the Roths' neighbor. He was punishing Herr Roth for not bringing Dietmar to *Deutsches Jungvolk*—the weekly meetings for Germany's boys. Brigitte and her father were the only neighbors his family trusted anymore.

Dietmar was too old to be playing knights and princesses, but Brigitte never wanted to play anything else. And Dietmar didn't want to play with anyone else. He and Brigitte had been the best of friends since her family moved into the house across the woods six years ago, playing for hours along the stream until his father built the tree house for them. Their mothers had been best friends too until Frau Berthold died from influenza.

Once, Herr Berthold asked Dietmar to care for Brigitte if anything ever happened to him. Dietmar had solemnly promised the man that he'd never let anything or anyone harm his daughter. Not even an army of toy knights.

He lifted one of his knights off the horse. "Brigitte . . ."

She shook her finger at him. "Princess Adler."

Cupping his other hand around his mouth, he pretended to shout, “Princess Adler, we’ve come to rescue you.”

Brigitte flipped one of her amber-colored braids over her sleeve, calling back to him, “I will never leave my tower.”

“But we must go,” he commanded, “before the Romans arrive.”

She feigned a sigh. “There’s no one I trust.”

Dietmar reached for Ulrich, the knight who’d sworn to protect the princess at any cost, and he solemnly bowed the soldier toward her. “You can trust me, Your Majesty.”

“Your Majesty’ is how you address a queen,” Brigitte whispered to him as if his words might offend the princess.

Dietmar knew how to address a queen, of course. He just liked to tease her.

With his thumb, he pounded the knight’s chest. “I will protect you with my life.”

Brigitte studied the knight for a moment and then smiled. “Very well. Perhaps I shall come out.”

Outside their playhouse window, six rusty spoons hung in a circle, strung together with wire on a tree limb. The warm breeze rustled the branches, chiming the spoons, and Brigitte leaned her head outside to listen to their melody. The whole forest was an orchestra to her. The strings of sound a symphony. Brigitte heard music in the cadence of the river, the crackling of twigs, the rhythm of the wind.

Dietmar checked his watch. Only twenty minutes left to play before he started solving the geometry problems Frau Lyncker assigned him tonight. The world might be at war, but his mother still expected him to do schoolwork between four and five each afternoon. Even though everything outside their forest seemed to be fondering, his mother still hoped for their future. And she dreamed of a future filled with *Frieden*—peace—for her only child.

Brigitte leaned back in the window, her freckles glowing like a canvas of stars. “I shall make a wish on this tree, like *Aschenputtel*.”

“Should I capture the evil stepsisters?” he asked.

At times it seemed the threads of imagination stitched around her mind like rings of armor, the world of pretend cushioning her sorrow and protecting her from a real enemy that threatened all the German children. She was on the cusp of becoming a woman, yet she clung to the fairy tales of childhood.

“I want you to capture the wind.”

He laughed. “Another day, Brigitte.”

Her fists balled up against her waist. “Princess Adler.”

“Of course.”

Her gaze traveled toward the ladder nailed to the opening in the tree house floor. “I’m hungry.”

“You’re always hungry,” he teased.

“I wish we could find some *Kuchen*.”

He nodded. Fruits and vegetables were hard enough to obtain in the village; sweets were impossible to find, reserved for the stomachs of Hitler’s devoted. But his mother’s garden was teeming with vegetables. He and his father had devised a wire cage of sorts over the plot to keep rabbits away, though there seemed to be fewer rabbits in the woods this summer. More people, he guessed, were eating them for supper.

He’d never tell Brigitte, but some nights he felt almost hungry enough to eat a rabbit too.

“I’ll find us something better than cake.”

He left Princess Adler and her wind chimes to climb down the ladder, rubbing his hand like he always did over the initials he’d carved into the base of the trunk. *D. R.* was on one side of the tree, *B. B.* on the other.

He trekked the grassy riverbank along the Elzbach, toward his family’s cottage in the woods. Beside his mother’s garden, he opened a door made of chicken wire and skimmed his hand across parsnips, onions, and celery until his fingers brushed over a willow carrot top.

Three carrots later, he closed the wire door and started to march toward the back door of the cottage, the carrots dangling beside him. He'd bathe their dirt-caked skin in the sink before returning to battle. Then he'd—

A woman's scream echoed across the garden, and Dietmar froze. At first, in his confusion, he thought Brigitte was playing her princess game again, but the scream didn't come from the forest. The sound came from inside the house, through the open window of the sitting room.

Mama.

The woman screamed again, and he dropped the carrots. Raced toward the door.

Through the window, he saw the sterile black-and-silver Gestapo uniforms, bloodred bands around the sleeves. Herr Darre and another officer towered over his parents. Mama was on the sofa, and Papa . . .

His father was unconscious on the floor.

"Where is the boy?" Herr Darre demanded.

"I don't know," Mama whispered.

Herr Darre raised his hand and slapped her.

Rage shot like an arrow through Dietmar's chest, his heart pounding as he reached for the door handle, but in that moment, in a splinter of clarity, his mother's eyes found him. And he'd never forget what he saw.

Fear. Pain. And then the briefest glimpse of hope.

"Lauf," she mouthed.

Run.

He didn't know if the officers heard her speak. Or if they saw him peering through the window. He simply obeyed his mother's command.

Trembling like a ship trapped in a gale, Dietmar turned around. Then the wind swept him away, carrying him back toward the tree house, away from his parents' pain.

CATCHING THE WIND

Coward, the demons in his mind shouted at him, taunting as he fled.

But his mother had told him to run. He just wouldn't run far.

First, he'd take Brigitte to the safety of her home. Then he would return like a knight and rescue his father and mother from the enemy.

Author's Note

More than a year ago, I sat down with a mug of green tea in my favorite coffee shop, scribbling down my ideas for this novel. Outside the window stood an old tree, a weeping cedar with its sturdy branches and dangling leaves that ballooned like a giant umbrella over the people drinking coffee and tea below.

In my mind's eye, I saw two German children—the best of friends—playing high among those branches. In a tree house. They were in danger, though at the time I didn't know what threatened them. I just knew the boy and girl had to run. And the girl would be lost along the way.

As I sipped my drink, the plight of Dietmar and Brigitte began unfolding. It was a gift to me, this story. Given by the Master Creator, who, I believe, works powerfully through stories to redeem His children.

My journey to research this novel took me north to the misty San Juan Islands, across the Atlantic to visit the historic streets and heaths in London and the beautiful gardens and villages of Kent, then down to Switzerland to tour the medieval fortress Château de Chillon.

Years ago, my husband and I hiked in a forest of bright green behind Moselkern to visit another medieval castle called Burg Eltz.

I drew on my memories of touring both Germany and Belgium and then living in Germany for a season to tell the story of Dietmar and Brigitte's escape. The Disney scenes were from my own childhood—and adult—fascination with the magic of story in Orlando.

While in London, I spent an entire day at the National Archives reading through a stack of recently released top secret files as well as older documents about German espionage in the United Kingdom. Many British citizens sympathized with Nazi Germany for a multitude of reasons, and I read account after account of men and women who either gathered information for Hitler or attempted to wreak havoc on England's facilities. There were handwritten letters from suspected spies; documents about microphotography, invisible ink, and secret codes; a worn file about a Nazi parachutist who became a double agent; and the transcriptions of interrogations conducted during and after the war.

Before World War II, hundreds of German agents gathered information in England about airfields, military bases, and factories, but hours after Great Britain declared war against Germany, British agents apprehended many of these men and women. They were either detained or deported back to Germany. Still the Nazis continued sending men over during the war via plane or boat to gather information and sabotage the country.

England has a grand tradition of documenting the normalcy of life through volunteers who submit their diaries to an organization called Mass Observation. These accounts from the 1940s were an invaluable reference for me as the diarists recorded their fears about espionage, the preparations for war, and the explanation of how the resentment toward Nazis spread to a hatred of all German people, many of whom already lived among the British.

While the threads of espionage stitched this novel together, my heart was not to expose those who betrayed their country—or those who came to a country bent on destruction—as much as to celebrate

the redemption and resiliency of children removed or evacuated from their homes and sent to live in another place around the world. So many children today need to begin writing new chapters of redemption and love in the stories of their lives. *Catching the Wind* was written with a grateful heart to all those who've helped abandoned, orphaned, and refugee children begin a new story.

If you're interested in more information about helping children who need a home, here are five extraordinary organizations that care for kids around the world: remembernhu.org, hearttheycry.org, worldorphans.org, runministries.org, and worldrelief.org. Also, prayforthem.com is an excellent resource if you'd like to pray specifically for refugees.

As with all my novels, writing this story was a personal journey, but a host of people partnered with me to help straighten up my facts and encourage me along the way. I've had to change minor points for the sake of story—like relocating chalky cliffs from the eastern bank to the west along the River Ouse—but I've tried to remain as accurate as possible with my facts. Any and all errors are my fault.

A special thank-you to:

My editors—Stephanie Broene, Sarah Rische, and Shaina Turner—and the entire staff at Tyndale House Publishers for welcoming me so graciously to your team. It's a privilege to partner with you. My agent, Natasha Kern, for your constant support and the wisdom you pour boundlessly into my life and writing career. Your heart to fight for those in need inspires me and so many others.

Kevin and Amanda Bates, Jacob Pflug, and all the baristas at Symposium Coffee for allowing me to sit for hours, nursing a green tea as I write in the old house you've turned into a beautiful shop, and for inspiring me with your faith and your love of story as well. Amanda—there are two lines in this novel taken straight from your lips. They still make me smile. . . .

The delightful Peter and Anne Cook for sharing your home in

Greenwich and your many wonderful stories with me. Caroline Watts, travel agent extraordinaire, for helping me get exactly where I needed to go and for sharing your own stories of England. Ed and Jitka Peacock for graciously rescuing me after I toured the remote Scotney Castle in Kent and delivering me to a train station near Tonbridge so I didn't have to spend the night in the forest alone.

Aunt Janet Wacker for embracing our family's heritage and for inspiring me with your many stories. Pinn Crawford and all the librarians at my local library who not only helped me find the resources I needed, but did it with such joy. My engineer brother-in-law Jim Dobson for brainstorming plot and my scientist brother-in-law Dr. Steve Dobson for teaching me how to use a modern-day microscope. Thanks to each of you for sharing your expertise.

My cousin and airline pilot extraordinaire, David Ransopher, and my friend and corporate flight attendant, Ann Menke, for educating me on corporate aviation. My critique partners—Dawn Shipman, Kelly Chang, Nicole Miller, and Mesu Andrews—for sharing your wisdom and allowing me to step into your stories even as you step into mine. Michele Heath, my friend and first reader, for your insight and encouragement. You always cut to the heart of what I want to say and help me communicate it better on the next version. Sheila Herbert for your gracious gift of time and wisdom as I continue learning about life in England both past and present. Tamara Park for inviting me into your journey and for your courage and passion as you interview refugee children and families around the world.

My Sistas—Mary Kay Taylor, Diane Comer, Julie Kohl, Ann Menke, and Jodi Stilp. You show me love in abundance, and I love each of you back. Thank you for linking arms and praying for me, empowering me with your kindness, and sharing your own stories. And to Jodi's sister-in-law, Quenby, for letting me borrow your very cool name.

My friend Tosha Williams, to whom I dedicated this book. I'm

grateful for every one of the thirty years that we've journeyed together arm in arm as sister friends. I savor your prayers and every encouraging word.

My entire family, who are an endless fount of encouragement as I write, including my parents, James and Lyn Beroth; my sister, Christy Nunn; my husband, Jon; and my daughters, Karlyn and Kinzel. Each of you keep me grounded (in the best sense of the word) and God-focused. I love you to pieces.

The power of story has transformed my own life, and I'm incredibly grateful to Jesus Christ, the author and finisher of faith, for enduring pain and humiliation and ultimately conquering the evil in this world, redeeming and healing because of His boundless love for His kids.