

Brave Hearts

Carolyn Hart

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The mood and reality of WWII are captured with historical accuracy in this gritty melodrama.

Best known for her mystery novels, Carolyn Hart has published more than four dozen books over the course of her career. With twenty-one titles to date, her Death on Demand series has continued to attract fans for over twenty-five years, but mystery readers may be less familiar with her work in other fiction genres. Several of her older novels are now being reissued, including 1987's *Brave Hearts*, a romantic suspense novel set during WWII in London and the Philippines.

Hart captures the mood of wartime London from the first page. Diplomats, lords, military officers, members of the press, and their respective female companions drink champagne and dance the evening away in the glamorous River Room at the world-famous Savoy, exhibiting a "ferocious determination to have a good time," while "waiting for the bombing to start." Inevitably, it does.

Among the crowd at the Savoy that night are Spencer Cavanaugh, an American with the State Department, his wife, Catherine, and American newsman, Jack Maguire. Romance is as inevitable as the falling bombs. Within days, Catherine is nearly killed in a bombing raid, and Spencer is reassigned to Manila as a special envoy. Ever the dutiful diplomat's wife, Catherine must go along. Spencer arranges for his secret love, his secretary, Peggy, to join the group as they head for the Philippines, and Jack, already in love with Catherine, decides to follow. There is little new here. Furtive conversations, anticipated private assignations, and promises of long-term commitment abound, the stuff of romance novels everywhere.

What keeps *Brave Hearts* from slipping into cliché is its setting. Echoing actual events—during which aides to General MacArthur were assigned to secure the National Treasury of the Philippines and the contents of the Philippines Central Bank, and move their holdings to safety should Manila be attacked by the Japanese—Spencer has been charged with registering gold and silver in Manila and transferring it elsewhere if hostilities with the Japanese escalate, as they eventually do. Hart's interest in WWII and her research into historical events is evident in the care she takes in describing a very specific period of the war.

Those who appreciate romance novels will enjoy the ongoing challenges and hardships faced by Hart's flawed cast of characters as they flee the war, from London's Blitz to the anticipated horrors of capture by the Japanese in the Philippines. The plot resounds with melodrama. All cannot end well, so not everyone may survive the trials of this contemptible war, but they all give it their best shot. Those who seek a grittier reality will find it in the setting itself.

CHERYL HIBBARD (Fall 2013)

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