

Beloved Enemy: A Romantic Thriller

Sheila Belbin

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Gripping and disturbing, this page-turner featuring a courageous spy heroine during WWII defies genre.

A bilingual woman in the British Women's Army sneaks into Germany during World War II to seduce Karl von Richter, a Nazi intelligence colonel, and ultimately falls in love with her enemy. Allison Grant's heritage gives her the cover she needs, and her sole motivation is to aid the German Resistance as Hildegard Hessler.

In a gripping story that spans twenty years, beginning in 1942, this courageous heroine sacrifices her safety and well-being to carry out her assignment. The book follows her psychological adjustment and relationships thereafter.

Dubbed a romance, Sheila Belbin's novel with a disturbing theme is far from romantic. An old-school love, without question, but this star-crossed passion is a devastating trip into the past with a murderous agenda.

Allison is an assassin. She completes her mission, disregarding her emotions—admirable from the standpoint of the military but abhorrent from a complex moral perspective that considers the duplicity in such an act. The situation may be offensive, painful, and difficult to comprehend, yet Belbin succeeds in writing high-impact, conflict-ridden historical fiction that will appeal to connoisseurs of war stories.

The prose is filled with period detail, enhancing the sense of place in war-torn Europe. A Harlequin-esque cover seems strangely incongruent, however, considering this brutal scenario is far from a storybook romance. Based on the artwork alone, an unsuspecting reader will anticipate mere involvement across enemy lines, not a black widow kill.

Belbin writes: "Hildegard couldn't stop trembling but wasn't sure whether to attribute this to fear or excitement. She had come prepared to die but not prepared to fall in love. *I must regain control*, she thought, resolving that she would never let the love she felt for this man interfere with the job she had been sent to do." This is a crisis that would propel any plot from the realm of mediocrity to outstanding, but the decision whether to execute, literally, determines much more than genre. The definition of love itself is at stake.

Belbin lives near Cambridge, England. *Beloved Enemy* is her debut novel, influenced by a Franco-German friend who lived in occupied France during World War II.

Despite the awkward marketing of this title as a romance, Belbin knows how to capture a reader's interest from the first page and not let go. This ability is not mastered easily, and she flaunts the skills of a seasoned professional in creating page-turning drama.

JULIA ANN CHARPENTIER (September 23, 2013)

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