

## CHAPTER ONE



Katrine squared her shoulders and instinctively pressed a hand to her stomach as she stepped through the open doors of the café, past the yellow sign that read NO JEWS ALLOWED. She paused as the strong aroma of coffee and cigarette smoke hit her face. Men and women clustered around tables. Beautiful people in the height of their glory.

Looking around at the room's flocked wallpaper, ornate light fixtures, and marble flooring, she found it hard to believe that not too far away a war stormed. Not only battles for land and power, but a war against a people—her people . . . or what used to be her people.

Tucked between France, Holland, and Germany, Belgium had fallen to Nazi control in 1940, four years earlier. Yet many acted as if the war were not more than a minor disturbance—especially the Germans who filled and controlled the streets, embracing the country as their own.

Katrine had come here too, to escape, to blend in with the

numerous transplants on the Belgium streets. More than a year had passed since she was Rebecca Lodz. With the right connections and right papers, she'd hidden herself well. Perhaps too well.

She had visited this café and sipped coffee with her lover only the day before. Yet today she looked upon the scene differently. Now when she glanced at the other women with their fine clothes, red lips, and fancy hats, she realized what she'd become, and whom she'd betrayed. Heaviness burdened her chest the same way it had when she was hiding in that dark, smelly barn.

Only this time it wasn't rotten potatoes that pressed upon her, animal fodder that for a time had protected her from death. Her burden now was shame—for she was to birth the child of a man who wouldn't hesitate to kill her if he only knew the truth.

She sucked in a calming breath, wishing she'd called to cancel their meeting. But it was too late. Hendrick had spotted her and waved her toward the secluded table. Two glasses of red wine sat on the glass surface, one half empty. Katrine could tell from the foggy sheen of his gaze that this glass wasn't his first.

"Sweetheart, you look beautiful tonight. That new dress brings out the blue in your eyes." He took her face in his hands and pressed his lips against hers. There was possession in his kiss, and a hunger she had come to know well.

"Sit, we will eat, and then take a walk along the river. It's beautiful this time of year, don't you think?" His voice was deep and throaty, and Katrine knew what he wanted.

Although Hendrick Schwartz was an officer in Hitler's army and a wealthy man with a fine furnished apartment, he was also an outdoor enthusiast like none Katrine had known. No doubt he had in mind finding a secluded corner of the park and laying her down in the soft spring grass to take what they both had come to understand was rightfully his.

Katrine stared across the table at her lover. Though twenty years her senior, Hendrick, with his tall, thin frame and chiseled features, turned the heads of many beautiful women. He'd caught her attention, after all.

They'd met one of the first times she'd dared venture out

with her new identification papers. Though Katrine now lived a thousand miles away from the village of her birth, and though she looked as Aryan as the women highlighted on Hitler's posters promoting racial purity, she wasn't used to being out in the open.

After a year of hiding, she'd walked out of her home that afternoon still longing for the safety of darkness. "People can hide better in a crowd than in the safest dark hole," said the resistance worker who'd come up with the plan to "Germanize" any Jews who looked the part.

Katrine was riding the tram to the market in Brussels when the handsome officer sat down beside her. She answered his questions bluntly. Yes, she was new to the city, having recently taken a job as a nanny. No, she hadn't had time to see much of the Belgian capital. Yes, she did have Sunday afternoons off. Before she realized what was happening, she found herself agreeing to a picnic in Parc de Laeken the next Sunday afternoon.

When Katrine told her protector about the invitation from a German officer, the woman had been pleased. "If you can fool him, you'll fool them all. No one would dare question the girlfriend of a dedicated SS man."

Now, mere months later, she not only hated herself for falling in love with the handsome soldier, but for tying herself to him through this child—their child. She picked up her wine glass, swished it, then set it back down, her eyes focusing on the grouted lines of the tiled table.

Hendrick took her hand in his. "What is it, darling? Your favorite song is playing, and you didn't even comment. Are you ill? We don't have to go for a stroll tonight, after all. Perhaps we can return to my apartment, and I can rub your feet." Hendrick winked at her. "I told you, you shouldn't work so hard. Are the Pfizer children acting up again?"

"Hendrick, I'm pregnant." The words escaped her lips, and Katrine lowered her head, unwilling to meet his gaze. She'd been meaning to wait. To find the right time, the right words. Although she hated what she was, Hendrick's mistress, what scared her even more was the thought of being alone, forced to

raise a child on the little income she made.

“Pregnant?” Hendrick rose and swept her into his arms. “Yes! A child. My child.” His voice rose and his laughter echoed in the room. He spun her around once and set her down gently in her chair. Then he lowered his face toward hers and placed a dozen soft kisses across her forehead, acting as if they were the only two people there.

“A child. My child!” he repeated, louder.

With trembling fingers, Katrine pushed back the stray curls that had escaped from her pinned-up hair. “You’re happy?” Her eyes searched his.

“Happy? I’m overjoyed. No, jubilant!”

“But what of your . . . wife?” Katrine mouthed the last word rather than speaking it aloud.

Hendrick laughed again and sat back down. “Oh, sweet Katrine, you think she does not know? I am with you nearly every day of the week. Our picnics, the gifts.” He took a long drink of wine. “Oh, my naïve girl, this is a new Germany. A land of innovative ideals. Haven’t you heard Himmler himself: ‘All women might not have the opportunity to become wives, but all should have the chance to become mothers.’ My darling, I’ve given you that chance. And you, my dear, will give me the son I long for.”

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Mary Kelley sprinted down Sixth. The soles of her black-and-white saddle shoes barely touched the littered sidewalk as she wove through the crowd with the same urgency as when she was ten and Mr. Stein chased her, broom in hand, after she’d stolen a pack of gum from his corner grocery.

Only this time she was running *to* something, not away. For if she got the scoop today—the true story from the senator concerning the future of veterans’ benefits—then she’d really be going places. Away from her past as the illegitimate, big-dreaming daughter of a cleaning woman. Away from the gangly girl who’d lived her whole life dreaming of escape from the tight-knit German neighborhood in which the home country wasn’t simply

missed, but rather revived in the New York streets with an abundance of sausage, beer, and song.

The dense crowd slowed Mary's steps, and she noted that the entourage of black sedans had nearly made it to the corner. If she didn't hurry, the senator would slip inside the hotel before Mary could get a chance to speak to her.

"Excuse me, sir. Pardon, ma'am." Mary straightened her pleated black skirt and white blouse, then reached into her small satchel and pulled out two pink ribbons. She quickly parted her hair and formed two ponytails. Then she stuck a pencil behind her ear, clutched a composition notebook to her chest, and made her way through the mass of journalists already forming a semi-circle at the end of the parade route. "Excuse me. May I squeeze in? Thanks so much."

The crowd parted, body by body, until Mary had made her way to the front of the line.

Two black cars were just pulling up. Shiny Rolls-Royces with tinted windows, looking as if they'd just rolled off the assembly line. They parked in front of the Wall Street hotel where a press conference would be held tomorrow. Yet somehow news of the senator's early arrival had leaked out, drawing lines of veterans, educators, and others who wanted either to bend the senator's ear or get an early scoop.

Mary cocked her head to get a view of the occupants, but a wide man with a suit coat that smelled of cigar, sweat, and ink blocked her view. He stepped back and nearly bowled her over.

The tall, lean reporter standing next to Mary spoke up in her defense. "Hey, Mac, stop getting so pushy, will you? You most knocked o'er the girl here."

Mac, or rather Chester McWilliams, reporter from the *Times*, hardly gave her a second glance. "That's no girl. It's Mary Kelley from the *Sentinel*. Sorry, Mare, the schoolgirl gag isn't going to work this time."

"Wanna bet?" With a duck and a leap, Mary dodged under Chester's arm and slid her thin form between the two yellow-and-white-striped barricades.

A security guard approached with quickened steps. "Sorry, miss. Can't let you pass."

She slunk back as he gently wrapped a hand around her arm.

"But, mister, I promised I'd get this interview. What am I gonna tell my teacher if I don't? I mean, I only need five minutes." She twirled one of her ponytails between her fingers and smiled. "Please?"

"Let her through," called a voice.

Mary turned her head to see a woman climbing from the stretch limo.

"What are you doing manhandling a young woman like that? You're lucky I don't take down your name."

The woman walked over and motioned the security guard out of the way, then cradled Mary's elbow. "I already promised an interview to the daughter of a friend, but I appreciate your interest and spunk. If you behave yourself, I'll let you sit in."

The senator led Mary through the front doors of the lobby, then turned and paused. As if on cue, the door to the second limo opened, and a tall, attractive young woman climbed out. Dressed as impeccably as the senator herself, she slid from the passenger's seat, smoothing her sky blue suit with manicured fingers.

"Lee O'Donnelly. I should have known," Mary whispered, hugging her notebook tighter to her chest.

"So you know her?" The senator straightened her collar. "Of course you do. I hear from her father she's only been away from *Vogue* for a few months and has already made a splash in city reporting. I just love women with gumption."

Lee approached, offering a bright smile to the doorman, who opened the glass door wide for her entrance. Her heels clicked on the polished lobby floor, and gold bracelets jingled on her wrist. Lee smiled at the senator, but the look faded when she noticed Mary. One lone eyebrow juttled up as if to say *What are you doing here?*

Mary stepped forward before Lee could say a word. "Miss O'Donnelly, so nice to see you. I read your column every day and find myself in awe of the extent of your family connections.

And here you are again. I was invited to join in. I hope you don't mind."

"Mind? Of course not. Any friend of the senator is a friend of mine." She placed a hand on the senator's shoulder. "Or should I call you Lovey?" Lee's lips curled in a coy grin.

"Your mother told you, didn't she?" The senator laughed. "I made her swear not to breathe a word of my nickname . . . and you look so much like her, dear. Being in your presence takes me back twenty years." The senator hurried through the lobby and toward the lounge, her arm entwined with Lee's.

*Takes me back too. Mary felt twelve years old again. Find a corner and sit in it. Not a peep, remember?*

"You coming, dear?" the senator called back over her shoulder. "No time to dawdle. As Lee here can tell you, reporters must not only keep up, but blaze the trail if necessary."

"Coming!" Mary quickened her steps to reach the senator's side, but it didn't change anything. She was just a tagalong, allowed to come along for the ride. Just as she'd always been.

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*School had been out for two weeks, and the thought of spending another day in their stuffy apartment alone while her mother worked was enough to cause twelve-year-old Mary to resort to begging.*

*She could hear the stirring in the Heinzes' kitchen, just on the other side of theirs. The odor of Cousin Velma's spicy sausage, onion, and eggs nearly caused her stomach to heave. Hadn't the woman ever heard of pancakes? And if she had to spend one more day listening to the constant playing of German folk songs—*

*As if on cue, the phonograph started up. Mary pressed her hands to her ears as the familiar voice sang. Jetzt kommt die fröhliche. Sommerszeit, die. Stunden voller Lust und Wonne . . .*

*Her mother hummed from the next room, then joined in. Her mom's soft voice was much prettier than the German lady's husky one.*

*Yes, begging was definitely worth a try.*

*Mary walked to their bedroom and sat on the rumpled covers,*

*watching as her mother applied her makeup. “Mom, do you have to go to work today? Can’t we go to the park or the zoo? It’s such a nice day outside.”*

*“You know I have to work. The guys wouldn’t know what to do without me picking up their carbon and sweeping their ashes. And you want to have a new outfit when school starts again, don’t you?”*

*Though Mary’s father wasn’t around—never had been—her mother had faced every obstacle in their path with rolled-up sleeves, a cocked jaw, and a narrow gaze that Mary was sure even President Roosevelt himself would back down from.*

*She crossed her arms. “Then let me come with you. I’ll be good. I’ll just sit in a corner and watch the reporters work. They won’t even know I’m there, I promise.”*

*“You don’t understand. It’s more complicated than that. . . .” Her mother looked out the window, pressing her lower lip between her teeth.*

*“Ple-ease. If I’m not good, I’ll never ask again.” She held her breath.*

*Finally her mother nodded, as if coming to some resolution within herself. Then she stood and placed her hands on her hips. “All right then. Get your shoes and run a comb through your hair. But don’t be whining halfway through the day if you’re bored.”*

*They hurried out of the apartment. Her mother glanced at her watch, then took Mary’s hand, leading her through the busy streets toward the large office buildings downtown.*

*Mary didn’t say a word. She knew that if the wrong thing escaped her lips, her mother would send her back to the thin walls, smelly cooking, and German music.*

*Thirty minutes later, they approached the Sentinel building. Her mother stopped and turned to her. “Don’t speak unless you’re spoken to. Just find a corner and sit in it.”*

*Outside the newsroom she paused once more, straightened Mary’s collar, and stepped back, obviously satisfied. “Remember, not a peep.”*

*Mary nodded. Even from the other side of the closed door, she could hear the curious rhythm of fingers pounding on typewriter keys.*



*They stepped inside, and she was met by a bustling scene of white-collared men in motion, of words and confusion, black ink and white paper. Some men sat at long wooden desks, pounding their fingers against typewriter keys. Others leaned against the wall near the stand-up telephones, taking notes. And some hunched over semi-circular desks that read COPY in bold letters on the front. These men wore green shades over their eyes and seemed intent on the white papers spread before them. One man was so round, Mary didn't understand why the wooden chair didn't break under him. Another tall man sat sideways because he couldn't fold his long legs under the desk.*

*Mary didn't know any of them or their various roles. But her heart pounded as fast as the typewriter keys, with rising excitement and expectation.*

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The young woman's mouth opened wide, a cry bursting from her lips as Hendrick plunged the lethal injection into the white flesh of her breast, stabbing it into her heart. The needle slid deep, and Hendrick released its contents, then stood back to wait. In a matter of seconds the poison would take effect. He had performed the task a hundred times before. He'd witnessed the way death washed over a body—frantic movements soon stilling—as the feeble soul slipped away.

A group of men circled behind him, chosen officers of purification. They waited in anticipation, prepared to learn from the master, the expressions of their faces a mix of horror and thrill.

Yet still the mouth remained open. The screams continued.

A hand grasped Hendrick's shoulder. "It's happening again. You must stop her."

Hendrick reached for the woman's mouth, attempting to cover it with his hand, but she would not be silenced. *Die, you must die.*

It wasn't a joyous task, but one of necessity. Only valued life deserved the Fatherland's valuable resources, and this dim-witted female was not worthy. She continued to struggle. Then her face washed out in a stream of bright, white light.

“Hendrick, wake up! The child, she screams in her sleep. *You* brought her here. You silence her.”

His eyes adjusted to the brightness, and he realized he was in his family home, on the outskirts of Brussels. It was Onna, his wife, lying wide-eyed next to him. And the screams—they filtered in from the room attached to theirs. The ornate door did little to muffle the cries.

*They’re the screams of a child*, he realized. Yet their intensity was the same.

“Curse you, woman. I thought you found a nanny for her. I’m tired of these late-night episodes.”

“It’s Magie’s day off. What do you expect? You said—”

His look silenced her.

Hendrick jumped from the bed, slid on his satin robe, and strode across the room, still attempting to push the feeble-minded woman’s face from his mind’s eye. Was she one of the hundreds he’d disposed of in his duty of carrying out the required ethnic cleansing? Had her face somehow become imprinted on his conscience? Hendrick wasn’t sure, but he refused to allow guilt to accuse his honored work.

Taking a deep breath, he stopped just short of the door and allowed his heartbeat to settle. He closed his eyes and pictured the angelic face, the wide blue eyes, the blonde curls. This was the second child he’d chosen. *Aryan blood reclaimed from Polish soil.*

“Poor thing, what nightmares she must have from her past life,” Hendrick muttered as he pushed the door open. Soon, he knew, the girl would adjust to her new destiny—just as her sister had. Soon the nightmares would cease.

“Stella,” he whispered, his bare feet sinking into the plush carpet of the room. A shaft of light angled through the doorway onto his new daughter’s face and outstretched arms. With three steps, Hendrick was at her side. He sat upon her bed and pulled her close.

“Papa, Papa, Papa,” she cried in his ear. He pulled her tighter, allowing her four-year-old frame to fold into his.

“Shhh, Papa is here. All is well, my Stella. All is well.” Hendrick patted her back, but at his words the girl’s body stiffened. Her cries stopped, and with a small gasp she pulled back from his arms.

“Papa is here,” he repeated.

Stella pushed against his chest and shook her head. “No,” she whispered. Her blue eyes darted, glancing around the pink and lace room with the same horror as the woman in his dreams.

“Papa is here.” Hendrick’s voice rose, growing in strength. He laid Stella back on her white cotton sheets. “I will not let them take you back, child. Close your eyes and rest now.”

She shivered, and he tucked the blankets tight under her chin.

“Sleep now. Sweet dreams, Stella.”

Even in the dim light, he could see her squeeze her lids tighter.

“Good girl. Good, obedient child.” He patted the top of her blonde head, yet still her shoulders trembled. He leaned over to the lamp on the nightstand and flipped it on. Golden light cascaded over the bed and her small frame. “It is the darkness that scares you,” he whispered, wondering if she understood his German words. “It will be better in the morning.”

Hendrick returned to bed to find Onna curled to her side—her back to him—pretending to sleep. He slid into the sheets beside her and curved his body next to hers. Though arousal stirred within his flesh, he refused to let himself give in. It was Onna’s fault, after all, that the child in the next room was not of his blood. It was her body that refused to provide children—the pride of every officer of the Reich.

*Sweet Katrine*, he thought, wishing it were her within his sheets tonight. *Katrine is giving me the child I so desire. Even now my blood pumps through the heir of the Reich growing in her womb.*

“Sweet Katrine,” he whispered. Onna’s body stiffened in his arms, but Hendrick didn’t care. “It is she who will give us *our* child,” he said louder, tightening his grasp. “It’s a name you should love as much as I, my dear. For through *her* my strength will live on.”

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Though the quartet in the foyer was practicing one of her favorite melodies, Lee O'Donnelly wasn't in any hurry to go downstairs and greet guests. She had thoughts of deadlines and finding the next big story on her mind.

She sighed as her pink satin robe slid off her shoulders, folding into a puddle on the marble floor. With quick movements, she pinned her shoulder-length hair to the top of her head and stepped into the water, drawn and awaiting her arrival. It was the perfect temperature and scented with lavender. Jane always prepared it right.

*Thank goodness for good help.*

Lee sank deeper into the warmth, leaned against the cushioned headrest, and closed her eyes.

*Thank goodness for middle-of-the-day baths to melt away the tension.*

She had barely been at the newsroom two hours when her mother called the office, reminding her of the afternoon tea and charity event with two dozen of their family's closest friends. The Queen of the Known World, as Lee referred to her mother behind her back, had demanded her daughters attend. Demanded, not asked. As if they were still children who must obey her every whim.

The music's volume rose, and Lee visualized the upbeat notes climbing the polished, winding staircase and sliding under her door, seeking her out in the deep recesses of her private bath and urging her to put on a happy face.

Music meant parties. And parties meant people. Rich people. Arrogant people. People who lived as if this worldwide war didn't affect them in the least. People who instead expected one to smile and entertain with witty and complimentary conversation.

Yesterday, before heading to the tailor's for a fitting of a new Dior dress, Lee had scanned the guest list. More money would be assembled on their patio this afternoon than was held in the Bank of New York. Close friends indeed.

She allowed her arms to float to the top of the water, determined to relax and take her time. After thirty minutes, her fingertips began to shrivel, and she expected Jane—in black uniform and white cap—to arrive with a summons.

Sure enough, not five minutes later a soft knock sounded.

“Jane, tell Mother to go ahead and start without me. It’s been a hard day at the office.”

“I’m not the help,” a husky female voice said through the door, “but I *was* sent up to urge you to hurry.”

The door swung open, and a leggy brunette entered. A flattering fuchsia dress clung to her sister’s frame. Though two years older, Rondi looked enough like Lee that people often thought they were twins.

Lee continued to soak as her sister perched herself on the marble countertop and lit a cigarette. She flicked a red-painted toe at her sister, splashing a spray of water but carefully missing. “Dad will kill you if he discovers those *hideous* things in the house. He just paid a fortune to have the drapes cleaned, remember?”

Rondi let a thin trail of smoke curl from her lips and grinned. “I’m sorry, *Lenora*, but I’m not the one in the hot seat today. I’m afraid it’s your rear firmly planted on Daddy’s bad side. But at least you’re giving Roger a break.”

“Yes, well, next time I see him, I’ll encourage our dear brother to write a thank-you note.” Lee rose from the water, stepping over the satin robe and reaching for the white cotton one hanging on the wall hook. “I don’t understand why Daddy isn’t over it. I thought after seeing my byline on the front page a few times, he’d be willing to give me some slack.”

“Could it be, one, he hates reporters? Two, his shining hope for the future, our brother, turned his back on the family business to work as one. Or three, his darling daughter left a reputable establishment to do the same.”

Lee sighed. “It was either a new career or death from monotony. What was I supposed to do?”

“He’s not going to back down on this one, Lee. Where do

you think you got your strong will from? At least we know you're not the child of the milkman." Rondi laughed. "And I actually think he's even more upset today than he was three weeks ago. After all, the whole city now knows it's Marvin O'Donnelly's daughter bucking the system, attempting to do a man's job."

"Attempting? More like succeeding." Lee cinched the cotton belt around her waist, patted her neck with a plush hand towel, and then released the clip holding up her hair. Dark, thick strands fell on her shoulders. "My reputation precedes me, and my editors are coming to understand that I indeed have all the right connections."

Rondi took one more puff, then turned on the sink faucet and ran her cigarette underneath.

Lee smirked as her sibling walked to the bathroom window and opened it wide, waving her hand to dissipate the smoke.

Rondi sighed. "So you have your name on the front page. But is it really worth it? It's not like you didn't have a good job at *Vogue*. And just think of all the fringe benefits you gave up—lavish parties, fascinating interviews, generous gifts . . . a smile on Daddy's face."

Lee strode out of the bathroom and to her wardrobe, opening it wide to discover her chiffon rose-hued dress pressed and waiting. To most women such a garment would be a luxury beyond imagining; to her it was just another evidence of being trapped in an archaic system dictated by her parents.

"I've had it with his hardheadedness." Lee dressed hastily. "I want to do more with my life than give socialites tips on the best places to look for designer labels in patriotic shades of red, white, and blue. There's a war going on, for goodness' sake, with men fighting and dying. What about reporting that?"

Rondi glanced in the vanity mirror and then pinched her cheeks to give them more color. From the look on her sister's face, Lee was sure Rondi would rather be pinching her.

With a final sigh and shake of her pretty head, Rondi stalked toward the door. She paused at the threshold. "Well, there's no war in New York, but *your family* is here. Think about that.

Because sometimes harmony in the home is more important than one person's crazy dreams. Sometimes striking out solo just isn't worth it, sister."

## CHAPTER TWO



The city room was a man's world. Spittoons graced the corner of every desk. Cigar stubs, half-smoked cigarettes, and crumpled papers littered the floor. Massive Underwood typewriters topped rows of oak desks—a man sitting behind each one.

Mary had gotten her story in over an hour ago—beating Paul Bramley by a mere thirty seconds. It was a game they played every day, seeing whose text would hit the editor's desk first, and guessing how close to the front page each story would appear. To win both meant a slice of pie at Brenda's Café at the expense of the loser. Anything less than a complete win was a wash, not worth a free cup of coffee.

Paul glanced up from his whirring black typewriter keys. His brown fedora was pushed back from his forehead, his press pass tucked into the band. When he saw her, his fingers stilled, and a key froze in midair. "Gee whiz, girlie. You made me lose my train of thought." His green eyes sparkled. "Good work on the senator's story. Your ingenuity never ceases to amaze me. It seems



she's on to something with that Servicemen's Readjustment Act. Or what was it you called it—the GI Bill?"

"It was an easy story, really. All I did was sit back on that white leather chesterfield and take it all in." Mary smirked. "And I couldn't have timed it better—I mean, what were the odds of a surprise meet-up with that bomber crew just back from overseas? Their hopes of starting their own businesses and attending college added a special touch, don't you think?"

"What are the odds? C'mon, Mary, what source tipped you this time?"

Mary eyed her friend and shook her head. "A girl never tells her secrets. Now, speaking of secrets, let me see what you came up with."

She peered over Paul's shoulder and read silently.

*Mary Kelley looks like a New York City high-schooler with her blonde hair and pretty face—reminiscent of the girl all the boys had a crush on. And while this unassuming reporter often wears knee socks and oxfords to work, the others on her beat are on to her, and rightly so. For in that pretty little head of Mary's is a mind her co-workers claim to be one-half Florence Nightingale and the other half Sherlock Holmes. Her stories not only find the facts—sleuthing for the crux of the story—they make readers care. Which is exactly the type of person needed on the front lines of this war.*

*Dear sirs, the people of this country have heard enough of the facts. They're ready for heart. Although war production is at an all-time high, our men are still in need of more if we're going to rise victorious. How can we empower our dockworkers to put in more hours, or encourage our Rosie the Riveters to give a little extra? By reminding them of their brothers and sons who need their support. Mary Kelley can do the job of providing the heart behind the headlines, and because of her pretty face on the masthead she'll become America's Sweetheart as well.*

Mary cleared her throat as she rolled the sheet of paper from the machine. "It sounds a little over the top, Paul. America's Sweetheart? Increasing war production by writing stories with heart? I want a job overseas, not to become the next Shirley Temple."

Paul tipped the high-back wooden chair onto two legs and entwined his fingers behind his head. "Obviously, doll, you have no idea of the stuffiness of the review board. Yeah, it may be a little much . . . until you remember these guys probably read a dozen applications each day—every one of them with well-written, moving stories attached. There are plenty of reporters worthy of the assignment, but what's Rule Number 7 of Paul's Pointers?"

"Use your words to paint a picture in the reader's mind, so they're not just reading about an event, they're living it too." Mary lifted her fingers as if reciting a Girl Scout pledge.

"You get an A for the day," he chuckled. "My advice *and* recommendation are going to take you places. Heck, soon you'll be *invited* to those private interviews instead of crashing them. Speaking of which, did you read the piece by that high-society chick? Isn't she with *Vogue* or something?"

"Lee O'Donnelly? Used to be, but lately she's been trying her hand at hard news, which in my opinion still needs work. I mean 99 percent of the questions she asked the senator had to do with catching up on old times."

"Sounds like she's clued in on Rule Number 25."

"Rule 25?"

"It's not what you know, it's who you know."

Mary grinned and crossed her arms over her white blouse. "Yeah, yeah. You're right. But it's still my guess she won't last another month."

Mary scanned Paul's letter of recommendation one more time, then folded it and slid it into a plain white envelope. "Okay, I'll include this with my application. But if this sweetheart thing doesn't pan out, I swear you're gonna owe me more than a slice of pie. More like a whole meal."

Paul rose, unfolding his tall frame from the chair. He wrapped an arm around her shoulders, and she leaned into his embrace.

"Your faith in me means so much."

The news phone let out a shrill ring. Paul squeezed her

shoulder, then grabbed his pencil and pad. “Good luck. I just hope running your application down to the main office doesn’t take too much time away from tomorrow’s deadline.”

“You kidding? I have a scoop in the same neighborhood.” She winked, then slid on the blue blazer that Paul always complained reminded him of the ones worn by the students at St. Francis Boarding School for Girls.

He pulled out a cigar from his shirt pocket and tucked it between his lips. “Get outta here, kid. There’s an assignment over the big blue pond that has your name all over it. And whether you like it or not, you’re already a sweetheart in my book.”

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Eddie Anderson slung his musette bag over his shoulder and hurried toward the large brick barrack, noting stares from other officers lounging around the manicured lawns and checking out new arrivals.

As a member of the 91<sup>st</sup>, his new home was AAF Station 121, Bassingbourn, England—thirteen miles from Cambridge and a short distance from Royston. The truck ride to the base had driven them through a typical rural farming area, and Eddie had been surprised to find the accommodations more civilized than he’d expected.

Since the 91<sup>st</sup> had been one of the first bombing groups in England, they’d been lucky enough to be stationed at a permanent RAF base. Other B-17 crews whom Eddie met his first night in London had warned him about cold Quonset huts and other temporary buildings hastily plopped down on the English countryside.

Bassingbourn looked more like a country club than a temporary airfield. It had substantial brick construction, which included an Enlisted Men’s club, an Officers’ Club, steam heat in the buildings, and even indoor toilets.

“Looks like we’ll be fighting the war as gentlemen,” Eddie’s buddy, José Garcia, had stated with a smile and a low whistle

when they climbed out of the truck upon arrival.

With the rest of his crew still in line waiting for supplies, Eddie volunteered to go on ahead to find their assigned quarters.

Four men lounged in the sunshine—some of the first sun he'd seen since their ship docked. One guy whittled with his pocketknife, his eyes on Eddie instead of the stick. Another looked from the clear blue sky to Eddie and back to the sky again, as if expecting approaching aircraft any second.

Eddie made eye contact with each one, nodding at their glances, still trying to take in where he really was. He'd never imagined finding himself in Europe. Once, right after high school, he'd driven from Montana to Spokane, Washington, to give a friend a ride to college. He thought that was far.

He'd faced basic and navigational training in the States, and before that he'd been a normal high school kid floating on wooden rafts with his brother on Whitefish Lake. As they basked in the sun, they'd watched the bald eagles spread their wings, catching a ride on the updrafts, swooping and rising through the clouds. Now he was doing the same.

He entered the barracks and spotted the officers' assigned room. Eddie paused. Stuff was everywhere, piled on the long rows of iron cots. Clothes, shaving kits, letters opened and stacked. The smiling face of a girl—captured in a glamour shot reminiscent of Betty Grable—stared up at him from where it rested on a pillow. Every bunk appeared taken. Had he misunderstood the clerk's directions?

He took two tentative steps backward.

"Sorry about this, buster." The voice spoke from the doorway behind him. "The cleanup crew hasn't been by yet."

A lieutenant, whom Eddie recognized as the whittling man, strode up. He was nearly Eddie's height, but stockier, with reddish hair that looked as if it hadn't been combed in a week.

"Took off yesterday . . . was their tenth mission."

The man sank onto an unmade cot, and Eddie suddenly understood. He had a dozen questions about the guys who'd left their letters half written and their laundry unwashed, fully

expecting to return. But as he opened his mouth to speak, he realized maybe it was better he didn't know.

"They were just one of a dozen planes lost," the officer said. "It was a hard hit." He sighed. "The privates haven't had time to empty this place and clean the bunks." He pulled a cigarette from his shirt pocket, then reached over and stuck his hand under the pillow of the cot closest to the door, pulling out a silver lighter. "I'm Clifford, by the way."

Clifford lifted the silver rectangle toward a warm shaft of light. "Used to be mine till I lost it in a poker game. James Buch always did have luck with cards. Too bad he wasn't as fortunate flying."

He lit up his Chesterfield and inhaled nearly a quarter of it on the first drag.

"That his bunk?" Eddie cocked his chin toward the cot.

"Was." Clifford spoke without removing the cigarette from his lips. He glanced at the lighter one last time, then tossed it back onto the pillow. "Doesn't seem right taking it back. You can have it or any other stuff you find useful. Only personal items will be sent home."

Eddie dropped his bag to the floor, uncertain of what to do, what to say.

"The rest of your crew here?"

"They're still collecting supplies. I was lucky to be first in line."

"You a navigator?"

Eddie furrowed his brow. "How d'ja know?"

"The ink on your fingers gives you away—doing all those calculations, you know."

Eddie glanced again at the silver lighter but refused to pick it up. "Were they shot down by ground artillery?"

"Nah. Another plane got hit and started falling before *Lucy Lou* could get outta the way. She split open like a ripe watermelon. I didn't see one lousy chute. Dang Krauts."

"I'm sorry you lost your friends." Eddie's sentiments sounded lame, even to himself.

The man rose and kicked the toe of his boot against the floor. "I'm from Kentucky, horse country. Dung is a part of life." He took a musette bag from under the second cot and began to fill it.

Eddie did the same with the items on the cot closest to the door. He swallowed the large lump in his throat and tossed the lighter in with the rest.

"Just in from the States?"

"Yup." Eddie unfastened a photo of a young, dark-haired girl that had been pinned to the wall. He hardly gave it a moment's glance before tucking it between the pages of a book of English poetry. Then he stuck both into the bag, wondering whose hands would unpack it—a father, a mother, the girl?

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me," Eddie whispered to himself as he gathered the rest of the guy's things.

He wasn't sure if Clifford heard him and really didn't care. Eddie needed the comfort those words provided. And despite the prayer, he wondered just what he'd walked into. After all, the average crew only made it fifteen missions . . . yet it took thirty before they could go home.

This place cast a shadow of death that couldn't be denied, even on the days when the sun dared shine.

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Lee glanced at the address, matched it up with the weathered apartment building, and motioned to her driver. "Right there, Jimmy. Pull over next to that police vehicle. Meet me here in fifteen minutes."

From the front seat, her driver nodded his graying head and swerved through traffic as if on a mission from MacArthur himself.

When the car stopped, Lee quickly jumped out. A green glob of something spattered onto the right toe of her brown leather pumps.

"If that's not the end-all," she muttered. "Curses!" Without

further hesitation she hurried toward the front entrance.

"Hold that door, please," she called to a police officer who'd just exited.

"No way, lady. No admittance." He held out an arm.

"Lee O'Donnelly, *New York News*. I've already talked to Baker. He gave me the okay."

"Chief Baker?" The cop tilted his cap back on his head.

Lee thrust both hands on her slender hips. "No, *Chef* Baker . . . of course the chief."

"Okay, lady. But I swear, if you're pulling my leg . . ." He took a step back.

The glass-inset entry door swung shut, and Lee was alone with the panel of mailboxes, the odor of dust and age, and a worn set of carpeted steps leading to the crime scene. Narrow steps creaked with each hurried footfall over one, then two flights of switchbacked stairs. Curious neighbors peered past chain-restrained doors as she alighted on the third floor landing, and a distant radio supplied a crooner's song to the surreal scene.

A pudgy hand held the second door on the left open partway, and she approached. A stocky police officer was exiting, along with a man dressed in a suit—undercover for sure. Lee recognized him from another story she'd recently covered. He didn't even bother a second glance as she slid past them into the doorway.

Investigators swarmed one of the back rooms, and a tall man in a suit stood in the immaculate white kitchen, scribbling in a leather-bound notebook. With his shoulders slouched and his face narrowed in a deep frown, he looked twenty years older than he had just this morning.

"Well, hello, Roger. What a pleasant surprise."

Her brother's blue eyes flashed her direction, and he sighed. "Sorry, can't say the same, Sis. Aren't you supposed to be at a fancy party?"

Lee shrugged, realizing she still wore a strand of sapphires around her neck. Surely they clashed with the chocolate-colored suit. "Mother was trying to steer the conversation toward dessert when I got called away. She didn't say a word, but you should have

seen the look on Daddy's face. I swear, if looks could kill . . ."

"Uh, do you remember who you're talking to? I invented that look."

Lee chortled as she scanned the amazingly tidy apartment. She stepped into the dining room and spotted a notepad and fountain pen resting on the polished table. There was no mail. Not even the Sunday paper. Nothing out of place. She lifted the pen.

"I wouldn't—"

Her brother's words were cut short as she realized it wasn't a pen, but a knife fashioned to look like one. And the wet substance on the tip was definitely not ink.

"Ugh." She glanced down to spy more of the red substance pooled on the floor just inches from her green-globbed shoe. A thin red trail led to a back room.

Lee's stomach lurched, and she dropped the knife. "Thanks for warning me."

"As if you would have listened . . ."

She eyed her brother, who was still taking notes, and sucked in a deep breath.

Roger glanced up at her. "You okay, sis? I was only foolin'. But don't touch anything else. We can come in, but we're not supposed to mess up the crime scene."

Lee regained her poise, tilted her head, and smiled. If anyone besides Roger were standing there, she would have hurried to the sidewalk, waited for her driver, and then told her boss that she hadn't been admitted. At least those years of etiquette class had been useful for something.

"You're right. I don't know what I was thinking. And thank you for being concerned."

Leaving her brother behind, she hurried through the rooms, inspecting scenic photographs, neatly arranged socks in the top drawer of the bedroom dresser, and tidy stacks of *Life* magazines sorted by date of publication.

Lee interviewed a few of the officers, and within fifteen minutes she had enough to write the story. She bypassed the back room



with the body. It was the owner of the apartment. But from what she'd heard from the boss, he was being treated more like a suspect than a victim, a spy of some type.

*I've seen enough without having to bother with the dead guy.*

As her brother watched her every move, Lee jotted down one final note about the white cat with large green eyes on the sofa. The feline watched her movements with curiosity, then yawned and curled into a ball.

"You done already?" Roger asked.

"You know me, always eager to get on to the next thing."

He scratched his reddish brown hair under his gray hat. "Yeah, and you know me. I'll still be here for hours." He flipped through his notebook, showing her the pages he had already scribbled on. "I can't write if I don't have a feel for the whole thing. I mean, this was somebody's life. A person's dead, and I can't dismiss the thought that I'm responsible for giving him a fair shake."

"Take your time then. I'll tell Jane to save you a plate."

Lee gave Roger a small wave as she left the apartment, then hurried down the stairs.

As she climbed into her waiting car, she felt sorry for Roger. He usually spent more time on stories than they were worth. *It's only one dead guy who most likely will be forgotten by his neighbors in a week's time. And he was on the wrong side of the fence, after all.*

Lee smiled, realizing perhaps this gift for throwing a story together had to do with her training in the society pages. She'd learned to catch the slightest intricacy, such as which of the four kings—Gable, Heflin, Cooper, and Steward—was on the brink of yet another romance. Or why the leading man's hand was placed on Rita Hayworth's elbow rather than the small of her back as she was led down the red carpet. And what the slightest spark of interest glinting in the eyes of Rockefeller meant. These small particulars were hints of gossip-inspiring events that would soon splash through the papers—under her byline.

Her colleagues joked, "Here comes Lee; when's the story gonna start?"

She glanced out the car window, eyeing the tall skyscrapers

that filled her vision as they headed into the center of town. She noted the fading light reflecting off the numerous glass windows, casting a lighted hue over the city, and her mind returned to the apartment.

The man was said to be a spy, and the police believed he'd been working alone. Lee knew that wasn't the case. Some of the magazine clippings she'd noticed in the apartment were from *Vogue*—she recognized the photos. And then there were the pocked imprints in the carpet. High heels to be sure. Lee knew there was at least one more person involved, despite how well *she* hid herself. And Lee was certain it was something Chief Baker would be interested in hearing.

"On second thought, can you drive me by the police station first? I need a few minutes with the chief."

While Jimmy slowly maneuvered the car through the busy New York traffic, Lee rested her head against the back of the upholstered seat as the words of tomorrow's headline arranged themselves in her mind. "BOY NEXT DOOR" DISCOVERED TO BE GERMAN SPY

Not quite.

FRIENDLY NEIGHBOR LEADING DOUBLE LIFE

Hmm.

SINISTER SIDE DISCOVERED TO FRIENDLY BOY NEXT DOOR

Almost.

SECRET LIFE OF BOY NEXT DOOR . . . AND COULD HIS PARTNER BE SPYING ON YOU?

Yes, that had a nice ring to it.

No doubt every paper would state the facts of the dead man's undercover work: How he got into the country. Who he was working for. What could have leaked out.

Only her story would be different. It would bring a human side to the enemy. A man who enjoyed nature photography, cared for animals, and no doubt was part of a larger network. A man who fooled even those closest to him, proving loose lips do sink ships and it never pays to deceive.

Yes, this would be the story to prove, finally prove, what Lee had been telling her editor all along. She was ready for big news—the front lines.