

THE GOOSE

Rick Wilber

Rick Wilber has written about his fictional version of famous baseball player and World War II spy Moe Berg often in this magazine. In his new story, set in a slightly alternate 1941 Hollywood, Moe and his handler, the mysterious Eddie Bennett, are assigned to stop America's homegrown fascists from destroying Southern California's defense industry and murdering Jewish movie moguls. The Spruce Goose plays a critical role, as do a number of Hollywood celebrities, Pacific Coast League baseball players, a talented teenage girl short-stop named Billie Davis, and the villainous Georg Gysling, the German consul to Los Angeles whose job it was to keep the restive studios sympathetic to Hitler's Reich. Rick points out that most of the villains in this story are based on real fascist sympathizers who really were plotting a kind of insurrection in California in the months before Pearl Harbor.

CHAPTER ONE
APRIL 23, 2041
WATCHERS

Eddie Bennett wasn't Eddie Bennett in this timeline but, instead, a professor named Elizabeth Stern, who was getting in a brisk dawn walk for some much-needed exercise before teaching her graduate seminar, "Applications for Personal Finance," at Niagara University. The campus was north of Buffalo and Niagara Falls. A private university with a few thousand undergrads and half again as many grad students, NU was perfect cover for someone smart enough to hold a doctorate and publish some papers and get her tenure even as she lived the double life the real job required of her.

So it was Associate Professor Elizabeth Stern, Dr. Liz as her grad students at the university called her, who was taking her dawn constitutional as the sun rose to the east, slowly illuminating the west wall of the Niagara Gorge. A beautiful place, really, a steep ravine hundreds of feet down to the whirlpools below on the river and there, across on the other side, Free Canada.

She was admiring that stunning view when she heard a soft whine from myBoop. It sounded like a mosquito in her ear. She was slow to answer, thinking at first that it was a mosquito; they'd been ferocious this spring with no cool weather to slow them down. But no, the whine was digital, not arthropodic.

"What's up, Boop?" she asked her helpmate, who resided in her right ear and connected her to the truth of things, as well as to the necessary lies. Every time she had to travel to a different line, or into the past, she felt the loss of myBoop, who couldn't travel with her.

"Restricted call," said myBoop, and Liz came to a stop. This could be bad news—maybe the local Watch had filed a complaint against her or, god forbid, some student reported her for something unpatriotic and the Watch was on its way now to haul her in. Life in modern America.

If that was the case, she'd have to hustle back to the condo apartment, shove her period clothes into the portal, and then blink it out while cleaning her hard drive, too. Damn. It was stupid to leave those things out. Her own fault. She knew better. She hated this timeline, but this one was her basic.

She hesitated for a few seconds, thought it through. One didn't not answer these kinds of calls, to be doubly negative about it. Which was appropriate in New America, where life was full of such fluidities of meaning—down is up and black is white and everything is great, wonderful in fact, with the glorious leader in charge, the first woman president, the daughter in charge, in her second term and certain for a third.

She had to take the call. Still, "Is it bad news?" she asked myBoop, and then, hal-lelujah sister, it was good news, not bad. She was relieved to hear it when myBoop said, "No. It's a message from your brother in Chicago. I've set it on private if you'd like to hear it now."

"Of course," she said, and then she listened to a female voice, say "Lizzie, I'm sorry, but it's Becky. She's not doing well, and I think you ought to get over here and see her. She's only fifteen, Lizzie. Fifteen! I'm not sure how much time she has. Let me know when you get this, and we'll set it up for you to see her and talk to Dr. Donovan at Sinai. She's in Room 441, East Wing."

All of that by way of saying one thing and meaning another. Private wasn't private here in New America, though they all pretended it was. Her brother in Chicago wasn't her brother in Chicago. Becky wasn't her niece. There was, in fact, no Becky at all. There was a Donovan, but he was no doctor, and there *was* an East Wing at a Northside Sinai in Chicago, but in this case East Wing meant the Drake Hotel, where there was a Room 441, where she'd meet Donovan. That was how the last assignment had started, too, and there was some comfort in that, but some worry, too.

But the big news. The girl! That's what this meant. That was the point of the message. They'd found the inflection point. Somewhere back in that 1941 timeline was the girl around whom time and reality swirled. This was big news, indeed. There were a lot of people who'd been working on that project for the past several years, and now it had happened and Liz would get to do her part. This had the chance to be the game-changer at last.

She was careful not to voice those thoughts, and she was glad that New America couldn't read minds. Yet. But what this meant was that Liz would know where and when, if not who, so she said to myBoop, "Tell my brother I'm on my way, Boop, got that? I'll fly in this afternoon."

"Sure, Liz; will do," said the friendly but untrustworthy myBoop as Liz thought about how glad she was that in a few hours she'd be back in 1941 on a plane headed toward Chicago and from there to who knew where.

It would be good to get out of this time and place for a while. There'd be no papers to grade back in 1941, no student questions to answer, no research to fret over, no faculty watchers hovering around, listening in, intimidating most of the professors, pissing off the others, like Liz. Bunch of fascists. It never ended, the bullying, the

threats. She'd be back in a past where some of that had started, Adolf and Benito and Francisco and Tojo and the homegrown fascists like Henry Ford and Lucky Lindy and the ambitious aviatrix, Laura Ingalls, who was a cousin of the even more famous writer, Laura Ingalls Wilder, of *Little House* fame.

Maybe, if Liz found the girl and her skills were up to it, they could stop those fascists in their tracks and things would butterfly up to here. One could hope.

Another plus was that back in 1941 there would likely be some action, so all the training she kept up with would be put to use; the conditioning, the martial arts, the local gun range where she was third on the ladder behind a cop and a national guarder. She'd been itching for an assignment ever since that last one ended so badly, and now there was one, and a promising one, at that. She'd been forgiven, she supposed, for that last one. Or maybe this one would be some atonement? She'd know soon enough.

But first she had to put her watcher off the scent for a while, long enough to change, do a little packing, and then make the time shift. She started walking again, putting her hand to her ear as if she were trying to hear better from the ear amp. She smiled and laughed and gestured broadly, as if the call was from some close friend and they were sharing a joke. All these histrionics for the sake of that watcher who was walking along behind her, a white guy of course, clean-shaven, tan slacks and a black button-down shirt so he could be, you know, inconspicuous. Like she said. Fascists.

In ten minutes she reached the pedestrian crosswalk that led across the street to her five-story condominium. She waited for the red man to turn green so she could cross. She wasn't about to give the watcher an excuse to call her in for an infraction, because, one of these days, he might do more than just watch.

That was how it happened sometimes. Every college professor had a watcher since last year's coup attempt, and every professor could count on at least one student in each class being an informer, telling the watchers what was said in class. Say something unpatriotic and there'd be a knock on your office door, or worse, your door at home. The first was your job, the second was your life.

The border was tense these days, and the border was right over there, across the Niagara River. Just north of here the gorge ended, and the river widened to become more placid before emptying into Lake Ontario. You could row a boat across that placid stretch to Canada and freedom. Often enough, people did that very thing, or tried to, on moonless nights. Sometimes they made it, sometimes not. It was something her colleagues talked about quietly, with nervous laughs in the hallways or at the occasional faculty get-together. Who'd tried it. Who'd made it.

From behind she could hear her watcher hurrying toward her. Maybe someone had been listening in on that conversation she'd just had with her not-her-brother in Chicago, or maybe some pencil pusher in some office just had an urge to harass a professor, or maybe Liz's watcher just wanted to run up to her and say hi. Right.

The walking man turned green, and the crosswalk said "Cross now" in its stern female voice as Liz turned to face her watcher. He stopped, said, "Dr. Stern, I need you to come downtown with me. We'd like to ask you a few questions."

"Questions?"

He smiled, Mr. Gracious, and said, "It shouldn't take but a few minutes. You'll be back in time for your Applications for Personal Finance class. We wouldn't want to disappoint your students."

So that was him letting her know he already knew everything, or thought he did. But if that was the case he wouldn't be here talking to her. He'd never done that before, not in all the months he'd been her watcher.

Liz did not want to go downtown with this guy. She knew way too much about way too much. That coded call, she thought, they wanted to know about that call. Well. No.

And then he did a stupid thing, as the crosswalk voice started counting down the seconds left to cross, ten to nine, eight, seven . . . he reached out to grab her left arm, and Liz, without thinking about it really, because that's what all the drills were for, struck him with her right hand, hard, at the throat, her palm down, thumb open. She felt it push into his esophagus and saw his eyes widen in surprise before he fell back. Then she kicked him, all those hours of savate, in the crotch, and he let go of her left arm and bent over forward. So she used her left hand, palm up, to jolt him again in the neck.

He fell to his knees, and she turned to cross the street and get away from him, but the crosswalk countdown was done and here came a whole line of cars, four or five of them in the far lane.

He was up off his knees and stumbling toward her as she darted across the lane and heard the shriek of brakes behind her as the first of those cars tried to avoid her and angled left where the watcher was, right in front of the boxy self-drive commuter.

The self-drive's reaction time hitting the brakes saved his life, she thought as she looked back once to see he'd been hit and tossed forward and lay there, crumpled, but moving. And then she turned again and ran toward the entrance to her building, and her unit up on the fifth floor, and, if she hurried, safety.

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The Tesla Building was built in 1906, at the height of Nikola Tesla's career. He lived in the penthouse, his in perpetuity from when he was working to harness Niagara Falls to power his alternating-current system and send electrical power to Buffalo, all of thirty miles away. He was brilliant, was Nikola, no question. But he was not wise, or careful. He died in 1943, nearly penniless, having returned in poverty to that same penthouse apartment he'd lived in during better days. His ghost, it was said, haunted his building in Niagara Falls. Liz thought that what they'd seen wasn't a ghost at all. She was always looking for him anytime she went back before 1943, but in eight trips now, she hadn't met him yet. One of these days.

But not, alas, this one. She spent ten minutes, no more, changing clothes and packing her valise and her purse with the proper clothes and cash, then she walked over to the picture window, looked down to the street below where the watcher was surrounded by people now, four EMTs, an ambulance and a fire truck and two police cars, all with lights flashing, keeping him company as he lay there.

It was important to her to see the scene exactly as it was and remember it, and she did that. Then, wondering again, as she always did, why there was just this one small place in this one apartment in this one building in Niagara Falls, New York, where it was all possible, she walked into her closet and time-traveled.

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It wasn't a device, really, or a glowing portal, or some abracadabra gee whiz. It was something she could sense as the right place, a feeling, a certainty. There came a twinge of nausea, a bit of a dizzy lurch, and a stumble in the back darkness of that closet, and that was it. Seconds later, to her, she came out of the closet, as it were, in 1941, wearing her tan slacks for traveling, a fetching long-sleeved blouse, blue, with white patterned flowers down the button line, and a hat, a woman's fedora, tilted over one eye. She didn't bother looking out the window, irrelevant now, but simply walked out the apartment door, shut it behind her, and took the elevator down to the lobby. There, she walked over toward Reginald, the uniformed doorman, who came out from behind his desk and said "Hello, Miss Bennett, let me get that for you," as he reached down to take the valise from her hand, because here she was Edna, "Ed-die," Bennett. "Can I get you a taxi?"

"Yes, Reginald, if you please," she said, smiling, and walked over to the mirror beside the revolving door and took a look at herself. She loved this blouse. Very stylish. And the hat! The feather set it off. She liked feathers. She smiled at herself, put her

purse on her arm, and followed Reginald out the front door. He'd blown the whistle already and the taxi was pulling up. She handed Reginald a quarter, one of the new Eleanor Roosevelt coins that celebrated the first woman president and was a generous tip, as he put the valise in the trunk of the taxi. Reginald touched the brim of his cap and said, "Have a good evening, Miss Bennett," as he shut the taxi door behind her.

In thirty minutes they were at Buffalo's Metropolitan Airport, newly expanded to handle the recent increase in civilian and military passenger traffic in and out of Buffalo, a factory town now retooling to make tanks and halftracks and airplanes instead of cars and trucks. One of those arsenals of democracy they'd be talking about soon. Eddie paid the taxi the one dollar fare and added another Eleanor as a tip, and walked into the terminal building and over to the Midwest Airlines desk to buy her ticket, one way to Chicago. The walk to the boarding gate took five minutes, and there, after a fifteen-minute wait, they boarded, out the door of the gate and across the tarmac to the plane, a brand new RA2, silver in its aluminum and burnished steel elegance and handsome green MA logo on the nose of the plane. It seated thirty-two in some considerable comfort and was, everyone said, a big improvement over the DC2s that dominated the industry.

Eddie boarded, got comfortable in a window seat near the front, and sat back to watch as they took off and headed west over Lake Erie to Detroit and then across the state to Lake Michigan and, crossing that, down into Chicago Air Park. She had an afternoon meeting to make there, where she'd get her further instructions and then whatever would come next would come next.

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CHAPTER TWO THE PROFESSOR APRIL 23, 1941

In downtown Buffalo, New York, Archie Miller, "The Professor" to his fans and friends and the press because of his brains and his education, was standing on third base by virtue of a fly ball deep to right that bounced off the wall and then squirted away in the wet grass from Fred Schlabo, the right fielder for the visiting Mud Hens. By the time Schlabo could chase it down and peg it to the cutoff man, Archie—no speedster he, but it didn't matter in this case—had rumbled all the way to third.

Archie liked playing baseball. He liked it so much that he was happy doing it for the Buffalo Bisons in April as the snow started to fall, a few big fat flakes at first, and then, as he stood there at third rubbing his hands together, more of them.

Playing baseball in the snow wasn't the only thing Archie could do. He had a bachelor's degree in physics from Yale, a master's in modern languages from NYU, and a law degree from Columbia. He spoke nine languages fluently, count 'em: English, French, Italian, German, Spanish, Hebrew, Yiddish, Norwegian, and Dutch. And he got along pretty good in a dozen more, from Japanese to Arabic to Irish to Welsh and Portuguese and more. He read three or more newspapers a day; he was a subscriber to the *Journal of Applied Physics* and sent in his comments. He was one brainy guy.

So it was, yes, a little odd that Archie was using all that brainpower to play minor-league baseball. You'd think he'd be a little embarrassed about that. Despite the threats to America from the Axis powers, despite the disturbing things he read last year in *Applied Physics* about Hahn and Strassmann and Lise Meitner splitting atoms, despite the way the Nazis crushed the Poles and the French and then humbled the Brits, despite the worry in the States and in Canada about Hitler's appetite for more. Despite all that, he was playing baseball in a neutral United States, one

deeply divided, with half the country thinking that letting Hitler have his way in Europe was just fine, that Hitler had done a fine job there, that if you ignored what he said and focused on what he'd done you had to admire the guy. That is, as long as you weren't a Jew, or mentally deficient, or a homosexual, or Black, or Romany, or, well, the list was pretty long.

Archie could cite his flat feet and a heart murmur as the things that kept him from serving his country, and if you asked him about it—like a lot of the sportswriters had—he'd just shrug and say that when they let him join he'd be first in line.

Which sounded good but wasn't the truth. Archie Miller was, in fact, serving his country right at that moment, standing on third base in the falling snow. Six months ago he'd been recruited despite his flat feet and that murmuring heart. He was recruited because he's a smart guy and has all those languages, and he's an athlete, to boot. He said yes, and over the winter he'd gone to a very special kind of training camp, where he'd hit everything they threw at him, from climbing ropes to opening locks to code principles and ciphers, to jumping out of airplanes, to firing weapons from Berettas to Lugers to Sten guns. He'd joined the OSS. He'd become a spy.

He was ready, was Archie, but still waiting for his first assignment, waiting for some action. In the meantime, Wild Bill Donovan, the man who'd recruited him, pulled some strings to get Archie this Bisons' job, where Donovan knew Archie would do fine, catching and throwing and hitting baseballs around.

But this, this, wasn't what all that training had been for, and Archie badly wanted to do important things for his country. For now, he supposed, it was a great cover, playing baseball in Buffalo, even if it was a long-sleeved wool sweatshirt under the white home wools kind of day. And at the moment, at least, he was happy to be standing on third after hitting that triple. They'd only been playing for a week, but he was off to a good start, getting the bat on the ball for some singles and a double and now, rather miraculously, hitting a rare three-bagger. He wasn't known for his hitting, or his legs, so a triple! Life was okay.

Archie took a lead off third as he looked at the pitcher, who looked at him and then finally went into the windup to deliver the pitch to Lou Boudreau, who was leading the team in hits. Boudreau took a strike and then another and then ball one and then, the snow falling harder now, Lou connected on a change-up to drive a flyball to the wall in deep right. The ball was caught despite the snow, but Archie tagged up and trotted in with the winning run. He was the hero for the day, and the Bisons had finished their first homestand on a good note. The few hundred fans still rattling around in the cavernous ballpark applauded with their mittens on and then headed for the exits and a warm trip home on the streetcars that ran all over town. There might be a foot of snow by nightfall, this being Buffalo.

Later, Archie was celebrating the win and talking with his teammates when, toweling off after his shower, he was surprised to see someone he knew well but couldn't talk about, standing in the clubhouse having a chat with Steve O'Neill, the manager of the Bisons, and Paul Krasko, the general manager. The three guys were nodding and laughing, standing right next to the folding chair in front of Archie's tall, narrow wooden locker.

Archie knew the guy in the dark suit, William Donovan, nicknamed "Wild Bill," for how he'd fought in the Great War. Donovan was born and raised in Buffalo, fought like a demon in World War I, and was awarded the Croix de Guerre from the French and the Medal of Honor from the Americans, and then came home to become a U.S. district attorney and a crime fighter for Western New York.

And now there was going to be another war, most everyone with a brain was sure of that, and Donovan had taken on a different job, one where he recruited certain people to do certain things that were off the books, as it were. Dangerous things.

Donovan had recruited Archie last fall after the Chicago White Sox ended their season with a string of losses, including two games where a timely hit by pinch-hitter and backup catcher Archie Miller would have won the games. He didn't produce, and the Sox lost. Archie was pretty sure the team was going to let him go. That wouldn't be a first, and surely there'd be some other team that could use him. Everyone needs a backup catcher, even an old one.

Instead, Donovan had asked a question of Archie, a question about doing something to stop the Nazis, and Archie had said yes, that's what he wanted to do, and Donovan sent him off for training in Virginia, just like that. It all happened over one weekend. They told him they had important plans for him, and then, when he was through the training and ready to go, they got him this job playing minor-league baseball. Not exactly the top-level dangerous work that Archie had been promised.

Maybe that was going to change now? Good, thought Archie. He was ready for some action, something real to do, something important.

He played it cool, wrapping the towel around his waist and walking over to the clubhouse ice cooler, where he pushed his hand down into the slushy ice water and pulled out a brown bottle of Iroquois Lager, used the opener to flip off the cap, used the pencil hanging from a string to mark off on the chart that he took a beer—he'd pay a nickel for it later is how that worked—and then walking over to where the three guys were standing.

"That was a nice ending to a miserable start of the season, Archie," said Wild Bill, as Archie took a sip of the beer. Wild Bill reached out for a handshake, said, "I'm William Donovan."

Archie set the beer on the bench and reached out to shake that hand. "Glad to meet you," he said, to Donovan, pretending that he didn't know him. And then he looked at his manager and his GM. "To what do I owe this pleasure, gentlemen?"

"Nice hit, Professor, that triple," said O'Neill, his skipper.

"I hear a 'but' in there, Skip."

"Yeah, Professor, you do," said Krasko, the GM. "You'll do fine for us here, and we're glad to have you; but we all know you're getting a little old for this game."

Shit, Archie thought for a second, and then, seeing Donovan smile, he knew it would be all right. "I know," he said. "You letting me go?"

Krasko and O'Neill both had their sad faces on. They liked Archie. He was known for being a nice guy to have in the clubhouse, with lots of experience to share with the young guys. He was okay behind the plate, and someone who'd get you some hits here and there, too. But he was thirty-five years old, and Donovan had made them a hell of an offer. So . . .

"It's like this, Professor. We've made a deal with Mr. Donovan here. He's one of the owners of a team out West, and they need a guy like you."

"The PCL?" He hoped that was the case. If he was going to bide his time some more before getting an assignment, playing for the Pacific Coast League would be a nice place to do it.

They both nodded, and O'Neill said, "The Hollywood Stars, Professor. They just fired their manager and need a new one, and they need a catcher, too. You're the first guy they thought of."

Well, Archie thought, it's more likely that the Bisons could use the money that Donovan must be throwing their way. This was all something Donovan set up for show, so it would look legit. Still, "Player/Manager?" he asked, and when they started to nod he thought, well, hell, that didn't sound too bad, and at least the sun would be shining and it would be nice and warm in Hollywood, instead of this April snow in Buffalo.

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CHAPTER THREE
APRIL 23, 1941
THE DRAKE

After the Midwest RA2 landed in Chicago Air Park, Eddie Bennett left the airport and took a taxi to the Drake Hotel for her meeting in Room 441 with Donovan, as in Wild Bill Donovan. She'd worked with him before. He'd have the details on the new assignment; but if it went like it had in the past, he wouldn't know all of it.

She was early. As she got out of the taxi and headed for the big double doors, one of them held open by the doorman, she saw a guy sitting in a big leather chair look away from her, opening up his newspaper to hide his face. She walked on into the hotel lobby, a big one with plenty of comfortable leather chairs and reading lamps and the smell of cigars and cigarettes hanging in the air and that famously huge chandelier hanging from the center of the ceiling.

She had a half-hour to spare before the meeting, so she headed for the Cape Cod Room, at the far end of the lobby, got herself seated at a table for two, and ordered some clam chowder and black coffee.

The chowder and coffee hadn't come yet when she saw William Donovan and another man enter the restaurant. Donovan was looking around, spotted her, nodded his head slightly to her, and sent the other guy her way and left.

That was how she first met Jacob Wise. "Miss Bennett?" he asked, when he got to the table. "The same," she said, and added, "Grab a seat," and he did.

"Bill Donovan wanted us to get to know each other a bit while he handles a few phone calls up in his room," Wise said, sitting and signaling the waiter for another coffee cup, which came promptly, this being the Cape Cod Room.

"I'm Jacob Wise," he said, taking a sip of that coffee, "and you're coming to work for me in Hollywood, making movies."

Bennett smiled at him, said, "Of course I am," and sipped on her own cup as she looked him over. Medium height, thin, balding, good smile, expensive suit, and a guy who looked like he knew what he was doing. She didn't recognize the name. They chatted a bit about Chicago's weather and about the war in Europe. She could tell he was making sure she was no Isolationist.

The waiter had just set down her chowder when Wise looked at his watch, said "It's time to go, Miss Bennett," and stood up from his chair, then came over to pull her chair out from the table.

As she stood, Eddie saw the same guy she'd seen reading that newspaper. Now he was sitting at the bar on the other side of the room, trying not to be seen looking at her. Who was he working for, she wondered? Donovan, maybe, keeping an eye out for her? Not likely. No, this America, this April of 1941 America, was awash in fascists, most of them homegrown. The Silver Shirts, the American Bund, the Friends of New Germany, the Friends of Progress, all these fascists, all these admirers of Hitler and Mussolini. Yes, he had to be one of theirs.

She frowned, shook her head slightly, and as Wise threw a dollar bill on the table and tossed a couple of Eleanors on top of them for a nice tip, she turned and walked with him out the restaurant door and over to the elevators.

Room 441 was a suite with a meeting room. In that meeting room, standing behind his desk and then coming out to shake her hand, was William Donovan, head of the new Office of Strategic Services in this timeline. She and Donovan were old acquaintances, but Donovan hardly knew it. Their work together had started backward for him, beginning in 1945 and then moving earlier through the war, as she'd worked for her own purposes when they meshed with his.

“Hello, Miss Bennett,” he said, after one firm shake. “We need to talk.”

It was an interesting conversation. Wild Bill didn’t know what to make of her. He barely had the OSS up and running, and just yesterday he’d gotten a phone call from President Roosevelt, Eleanor herself, telling him this Edna Bennett woman and her feathered hats would meet him in Chicago tomorrow.

“And here we are, Miss Bennett, right down to the feathered hat. She said I need to work with you, but I didn’t get much in the way of why that is.”

“I’m not free to tell you why that is, Colonel Donovan,” Eddie said, “but I can tell you that this isn’t the first time I’ve worked on something that Madam President had an interest in.”

Donovan frowned. “I don’t like not knowing things, Miss Bennett. Especially in this new business we’re working on. But Eleanor Roosevelt is the president, and she and I have known each other for a long time. I trust her, and that means I have to trust you.”

“And I have to trust you, too, sir,” Eddie said and smiled.

Donovan chuckled. “True enough. All right, then. We’ve known for a while that there’s something smoldering out in Los Angeles. Bad characters, starting with that German Consul, Georg Gyssling, the one that Goebbels put in charge of censoring American films that want distribution in Europe. Gyssling is giving the studios fits, and we figure he’s at the heart of whatever trouble they’re planning to make out there. Sabotage? Spying on the aircraft industry? The shipyards? We need someone who can make pals with Gyssling, win him over, find out what we need to know.”

Eddie nodded.

“I’ve put my best man on that case, a guy named Archie Miller. He’s new to the game, but he aced our training, and he’s smart, speaks all the languages you might need, German and Japanese and Spanish out there.”

“Is he a baseball player?” she asked.

“You know him?”

“I know a ballplayer they call the Professor,” she said. She didn’t take it any farther than that.

“Yeah, that’s him. He’ll work for you, that sound good?”

“It does,” she said. Archie Miller? So that was his name now in this timeline. Well, fine.

“And we’ve set you up with a good cover.”

“Which brings me into the picture,” said Jacob Wise, who’d been sitting quietly and listening to all of this. He stood up now, a tall and lean six-footer in that expensive suit. “You’ll be my new associate producer, Miss Bennett. Congratulations.”

“Jacob and I go back a long way, Miss Bennett,” Donovan said. “We fought beside each other in the Argonne Forest in the Great War. I trusted him with my life back then, and I still do today.”

Wise smiled. “You’ll be traveling with me on the Super Chief this evening out of Dearborn Station, headed to Los Angeles. We’ll get you a first-class cabin. They call it the ‘Train of the Stars,’ and there’ll be a lot of Hollywood types aboard. I’ll introduce you around as my new producer.”

That sounded solid to Eddie and she said so, adding, “I don’t suppose this Georg Gyssling fellow will be on the train.”

Donovan smiled, and Wise smiled, and they both nodded. “Funny you should ask.”

“Got it,” she said. “I’ll be making some new friends.”

Donovan and Wise didn’t know anything about the inflection point, of course, and how that was going to fit into this whole thing. Whatever happened, they’d never realize it anyway. But Archie Miller, who had to be Moe Berg, her Moe, the one she’d worked with so often, the one she’d died with in that last assignment, would surely know, so she and Moe by whatever name he had would be doing the usual two things at once. Saving the problems in this line and saving the future while they were at it.

* * *

Later, Eddie Bennett walked briskly toward track eight in Dearborn Station, where the Super Chief was boarding passengers.

She was smiling, looking pleased to be here. But she was thinking about Aloysius, the guy she'd left tied up a few minutes ago in the station's marshaling yard. She probably should have killed him, but she didn't want someone finding a body there and raising the alarm. She settled for tying him up and taping his mouth shut with fabric tape. Her generosity might come back to bite her, she knew. She'd asked the questions she had to ask, gotten the answers she needed, and then she'd smiled and patted him on the cheek. "Comfortable?" she'd asked, and then left him there.

It had been much too easy to deal with Aloysius, so Eddie figured he was a German-American Bund amateur and not trained by the Germans. A real Nazi, Gestapo for instance, or Abwehr, would have required some effort on her part, might even have been dangerous. But this guy? Pudgy, short of breath, sweating and nervous as he'd followed her since she'd first seen him in the lobby of the Drake Hotel before the meeting with Wild Bill and Jake Wise. He'd been laughably bad at tailing her, looking into shop windows, crossing the street a couple of times, never catching her eye, all of that stuff useless once she'd noticed him, sticking out like a sore thumb as soon as she'd come out the revolving door of the hotel and in one quick glance seen him across the street, taking a picture of her with an old vest-pocket Kodak.

The Drake Hotel to Dearborn Station was almost a straight shot, down Michigan Avenue and over to State Street and there you were. Easy, even if you were carrying a valise with some clothes and some tools of the trade.

It was a chilly April day in Chicago. It's always a chilly April day in Chicago, with the wind blowing in off that cold Lake Michigan; but Eddie had a couple of hours before the train boarded, and she'd thought it might be fun to toy with the clumsy oaf and see what she could find out about who'd sent him. So she walked it, strolling past the Water Tower and the Wrigley Building and the Palmolive Building and the Allerton Hotel and then cutting over to State Street and then to Dearborn Station. It took half an hour, maybe a little more. With a thirty-six-hour train ride in her very near future, the walk felt great.

She'd looked back now and then to see the guy doing his best to keep up. She was thinking the exercise wasn't much fun for him. Nor would be what happened next.

She'd waltzed into the main entrance to Dearborn Station, walked past the Windy City coffee shop and the marble support column that was next to it, edged to the right and out of sight behind the column and waited for him to walk by. Which he did, stupid man, so that he'd been the one being tailed, and it was Eddie doing it.

He'd stopped to look around and she'd stopped, too, waiting for him to see her. He did, finally, when he had turned far enough around. She was only ten feet from him. She'd smiled. He hadn't. Her right hand was in her purse that hung down from her right shoulder. She'd lifted the purse up a bit to make her point and then said, "You and I should go somewhere and have a chat, don't you think?"

He'd nodded, no surprise, and come along quietly, her right hand still in that purse. He'd probably figured she was faking it, and there was no gun, no nothing, in that purse. She could almost see the wheels turning in that thick skull of his. He'd make a break when he could.

She'd led the way as they walked toward the checked luggage room and then to the left where there was a door. They walked through that and down a long, narrow hallway, doors to the left and right that led to offices or storage, neither one of them saying anything until they reached a door at the end of the hallway and she'd said, "Open it, and remember I'm right behind you."

He'd stepped through and onto a small stepped platform that was three or four feet

above the asphalt surface. It was hot as hell out here in the marshaling train yard—diesel and steam-engine switchers busy moving freight and passenger cars around to get the right engines on the right track pulling the right cars to go to the right place.

Quite a clamor, which was good since it wasn't likely that anyone heard what happened next. He'd figured, sure enough, that he could make a break for it once he got onto that platform, so he took the chance, jumping off and hitting the ground hard, but upright. He hadn't looked back. If he had he'd have seen Eddie pulling the little Beretta she liked so much from her purse, taking aim, and, almost, letting him have it.

Instead, she aimed to stop him, not kill him. The shot zipped by his left ear and clanged into the sheet metal that was propped up next to the switcher that sat twenty yards beyond. That was all it took. Stopped in his tracks, arms up. Stopped, in fact, almost *on* the tracks. Ten more steps and he'd have reached the rusty old tracks that were in front of him. On those tracks sat an old steam loco switcher that wasn't being used, from the looks of it. Perfect.

Ten minutes later he'd been tied and stuffed into the back corner of the motorman's cab in the old switcher. Nobody was likely to find him there until tomorrow morning at the soonest, and by that time Eddie would be halfway across Missouri, having a nice breakfast in the restaurant car with her new boss, Jake Wise, founder and top dog of Wise Studios.

She'd leaned over to get a good, close look at him. "Who are you?" she'd asked. And, "Who do you work for?"

He'd just glared at her. She held up the Beretta, the 418 model in this timeline, pulled back the hammer to cock it. "Now," she'd said, "who do you work for?"

He'd still glared. She waited for some noise from the marshaling yard, cars and locomotives banging up against each other. There, that loud whack and screech as two cars were coupled. She pulled the trigger, aiming right above the guy's head so the bullet would go out the loco's side window and, she hoped, not hit anyone else.

That got a reaction. His eyes wide, his pants wet where he'd just peed himself, he stammered, "Aloysius. I'm Aloysius Schmidt. Al."

"Good, Aloysius. And?" She'd put the barrel against his forehead again, pulled back the hammer with that audible click. Aloysius spoke, saying "Georg. Georg Gyssling." He pronounced it Gee york, with that hard "g," German style, and a "k" sound at the end.

Interesting. Gyssling was the German consul in Hollywood that Donovan had warned her about, the spider in the middle of the web. Why would he be worried about some woman he didn't know on a train he wasn't on?

So, "Why were you trailing me?" she asked the guy, keeping the barrel of the Beretta pressed into his forehead. It would be very messy if she pulled the trigger. Aloysius was sweating. Perfectly understandable.

"The Drake," he'd said. "You were at the Drake with Wise, the Jew who runs that studio. It was him I was tailing. And then you showed up. . . ."

That made sense to her. He'd seen her with Jake Wise having that cup of coffee in the lobby café and figured he'd follow her. Someone else probably followed Wise later. Bad decision on the part of Aloysius because now. Well.

She should've killed him. Hell, in other lines she probably had, a single shot right into that forehead, so he wouldn't turn up later, a bad penny. But they'd been seen together back in the main terminal, so, instead, she released the hammer, pulled the Beretta back from his brow, got busy with the adhesive tape covering his mouth and leaving his nostrils clear. Then she'd leaned forward, inches from him, said, "I never forget a face. Never. Next time, Aloysius, you're dead."

Then she'd yanked the Bund lapel button with its swastika and its American flag off the guy's coat and tossed it and the Beretta into her purse before smiling one last time at the chump, turning on her heels, and heading back to the terminal, and

platform eight. There the Super Chief, the "Train of the Stars," was filling with actors and directors and at least two studio owners and all their hangers-on. In a half hour the train would pull out of the station and head for Los Angeles. She'd be on it, making all the right friends in all the right places.

* * *

CHAPTER FOUR JUNE 15, 1941 TRYING OUT

Gilmore Field glistened in the morning sunshine of a warm mid-July day. The grounds crew had watered down the outfield earlier, and now, at eight A.M., the grass was drying fast in the sun, drops of water sparkling and then disappearing as they evaporated in the dry California breeze. The infield dirt, carefully raked, held only a hint of the moisture it had received the hour before, and the grounds crew was lining the field and putting in the bases as if today's game was imminent. It wasn't; it was a tryout day. Several times a year the Stars held open tryouts. You want to play pro ball? Here's your chance.

Eddie Bennett and a few of her new movie friends were there to watch the tryouts. Some of these were people she'd met on the Super Chief back in April, when Jacob Wise had introduced her around to everyone as his new associate producer. He'd conjured up a good background for her, about her being involved in movies made back East, good ones that Jack Wise liked, like *The Counterpuncher* and *Old King Coal* and *Earn Your Keep*. He'd seen those, he'd heard of her though she wasn't on the credits—that hint of scandal was nice, she thought—and he'd offered her a job and she'd taken it and now she was in sunny California. That was the story. It was thin, sure, but everyone in Hollywood had invented and reinvented themselves over and over, so the story didn't have to hold much water.

Now, a couple of months later, the story had stuck and she was one of the gang watching the tryout, along with Georg Gyssling and his pal, Laura Ingalls, the famously fascist American aviatrix. Gyssling made sure the Hollywood studios played nice with Herr Hitler and Joseph Goebbels, the Nazi head of propaganda. Yes, there were some ironies there, since most of the studio heads were Jewish. But that market was huge; it could make or break a film and Georg Gyssling knew it. Delete that scene, fire that director, get a new lead actor, rewrite that script. That was Gyssling at work. Always with a smile, that guy.

It was Eddie Bennett's job to get close to Gyssling, who was at the center of the Nazi influence in L.A. Georg fancied himself a real ladies' man, so it had been easy enough for Eddie to get him interested. She'd started that process back on the Super Chief by flirting with the guy, admiring all the good work he was doing, and how physically fit he was, and how she hoped the Reich appreciated his efforts. She didn't like doing it, or him, but it worked. They'd been having a quiet affair now for the past couple of months. She smiled and discreetly waved at him. He smiled and waved back.

Most of these luminaries were standing on the damp grass down the left field line, waiting to see if there was any new talent. They'd been invited to offer their input on the players, and they liked that a lot. Several had notepads out and pens, taking it all very seriously.

Bing Crosby was there, actually puffing on a pipe, and Gene Autry, the singing cowboy himself. He'd finished shooting *Cowboy Serenade* and *Heart of the Rio Grande* in New Mexico and was back in the saddle at Republic Studios, singing by the soundstage campfire and righting wrongs.

Hedy Lamarr was there, too, with her pal Brenda Haase and five or six others, all sitting in the first-row box seats behind the third-base dugout, making a point of distancing themselves from Gyssling and Ingalls.

Autry was right in front of them, standing there talking with Hedy and Brenda and bouncing up and down on the grass a bit because it felt right to do that, and as an owner—they were all part owners—of the Hollywood Stars, he'd helped pay for this new ballpark, and this grass and this Georgia clay in the infield and all the rest. He was grinning as he hopped a bit on that perfect turf. Gene Autry loved baseball.

A few minutes later, Autry was telling Hedy Lamarr about how much he loved the game when Archie Miller opened the left field gates and the would-be ballplayers, good ones and bad, trotted in, went out into left field and started playing catch and stretching to warm up and get ready for the day's activities. This was going to be a big day, maybe, for a few of them.

Eddie Bennett spotted her favorite right away, an awkward teenage girl, of all things, trying out for this team. They'd heard about her, the owners, that's why some of them were there. This slip of a girl had led Glendale High's baseball team to the state championship just a week ago, and there'd been plenty of press about her in the sports pages. A rifle arm, a good bat, a magician with the glove, the kid had it all. But that was high school. This was professional baseball. The mighty Pacific Coast League. They had their doubts, these owners.

Eddie Bennett liked the kid for a different reason. She'd been wondering when the promised inflection point, the hinge to change everything, would show up. She'd found and met several false alarms, teenage girls that might have been the one but weren't. The dimpled child movie star Liza Barton, who was the lead in *The Summer Boys* for Wise Studios. The dangerously beautiful Ingrid Torgersen, a Minnesota innocent who'd auditioned for playing the kidnapped girl in Republic's *Dust on the Trail*, destined to be saved (not on the railroad tracks, thank god) by Roy Rogers, another singing cowboy. Those girls and a couple of others seemed right to Eddie, but when she met them, nothing was there for her. She knew she'd sense the inflection point when it appeared.

And she did sense it. Here it was. She could feel it in the air, like ozone before a rain shower, the smell of potential change, an electric energy. This teenage baseball player, of all things. Eddie was dead certain that this girl was the one. There was nothing Hollywood about her. Thin and gawky, all arms and legs, brown hair in a short bob. A plain Jane, maybe; but that glove of hers! And that arm! Whew, even warming up you could see how she picked off short hops with ease, and how live the ball was when she threw it, popping into the glove of a twenty-year-old beach boy she was playing catch with.

He had blond hair, a tanned face and white teeth, a lot of them. He was here to be seen by the Hollywood types, mainly, looking for that big break. But he could play the game, she'd give him that. He threw the ball back to the girl, hard, trying not to get overlooked next to her; but he had to work at zipping it in, and Billie, that was her name, Billie Davis, just threw it nice and easy, the flick of that wrist, and the ball smacked into blondie's glove.

Archie Miller and his coach, Quentin Williams, had read about her, too, and now here she was. Eddie didn't have to say a thing as the next couple of hours went by, coaches hitting flyballs to the outfielders and groundballs to the infielders and keeping an eye on the pitchers and catchers, and then having the grounds crew wheel up the batting cage so each player had a chance to take some swings. After a little while, the coaches came up to the players individually, saying "Sorry, son, you're not ready," or "Thanks for coming out today," or "We sure appreciate your giving us a look at you, but . . ."

Until they were down to fifteen players. The kid was one of them. That rocket arm, that amazing glove at shortstop, her good range, and that terrific reaction time. She had speed on the basepaths, too; those long legs eating up the dirt, and her slides were works of art.

Could she hit? That was the only question left a little later when they were down to just a half-dozen ballplayers. Billie was still in the mix and due to take a few swings.

Eddie, who'd been close to Archie for a couple of months now, both of them on the same page about what they really had to do out here, was standing next to him by then as Billie stepped into the batting cage and settled in, planting that right foot solidly in the dirt, getting into her stance.

Archie trotted out to the mound himself to throw her some straight balls and then break off a few curves. He'd spent a lifetime throwing batting practice and could pretty much put it where he pleased, so he went inside and outside, high and low. She handled it all, slapping the ball around pretty good.

Archie wanted to see that swing up close, so he switched it up with Quentin, his top coach, who was another guy who could throw strikes. Quentin had been a starting pitcher for the Homestead Grays back in the day, so he had some stuff, too. He tried to rattle her, this fifteen-year-old girl, coming in tight on her with some heat, then going low and away with a breaking ball. She didn't rattle, she just kept slapping the ball around. She was no power hitter, but she made contact, and a lot of it.

Archie walked over to Eddie and stood next to her. "You believing this?"

"She's something special, Archie. I think you have to take her seriously."

"You know, the ball seems to come to her out there, the hops are just right, the pop-ups drift her way, the groundballs look like they're through and then bounce her way. It's like magic."

"Magic?" She laughed.

"Yes, wizardry. I've only seen two or three shortstops that made it look like that, like the ball, like the whole game, bent itself to suit them. Joe Sewell, he played shortstop like that; and Honus Wagner, the ball always came to him, too; and John Henry Lloyd, playing on some tough infields in the Negro Leagues, they called him the 'Black Wagner.' I saw him play, and he was even better than Honus, maybe. All of them, they controlled what came their way; they made it look easy. It's a gift, Eddie, and you can't teach it, you either have it or you don't."

"And she has it?" Eddie asked. She wasn't surprised, it was just further confirmation.

Archie scuffed at the dirt. "She sure does," he said. "And she's only sixteen, according to her paperwork," he said. "I'm trying to wrap my head around that."

"Actually, she turned fifteen a month ago, Archie. She lied about her age. But she's important. She's really important. I'm sure she's the one."

She'd been talking with Archie about the inflection point for weeks now, and he'd bought into the idea. It made sense to that polymath mind of his. "But you've said that before, Eddie. That kid actor, the Barton girl, and that one from Minnesota. You thought . . ."

"No, Archie, I hoped," she said. "But it was wishful thinking. This one? I'm sure it's her."

Archie looked at her. "You're positive? There's gonna be a little ruckus over this, you know."

"I'm sure," she said. "We need her, not just for now but for farther down the line, too. Oh, and there's this," she added, "Her father is an aeronautical engineer. He works at Hughes Aircraft."

"All right," he said, "all right."

Eddie smiled, squeezed his arm. In his mind he was, and had always been and always would be, Archie Miller; a brainy guy, sure, with that Columbia law degree and

that facility with languages. She missed Moe Berg, though. She'd given that her best shot, trying to jog his memory back when this started, and it had come to nothing.

Here, she watched him sigh. "At least she's a heckuva player," he said.

Eddie could see Archie's wheels turning about whether or not to sign this kid as shortstop. She'd have her way with him. She said, "Her dad used to be chief engineer at Roberts Aircraft in St. Louis, the ones that built that glider that went down."

Now he was focused. "The one with the mayor on board? The archbishop, too? Some others? I read about that in the newspapers. Terrible thing."

"Her father designed the wing strut that gave way."

"Oh," he said. "But I thought they said it was bad metal. Bubbles in the steel. Made by a casket company."

"All that's true, Archie, but he resigned in shame anyway. Came out here and caught on with Hughes, apparently he and Howard are old friends. Now he's working on the H-4 Hercules."

"The Spruce Goose."

"The very one."

Archie paused. Nodded. That mental lightbulb glowing. "We can use that," Archie said, and she smiled at him and said, "We sure can."

Archie looked back out to the field, where Billie was the only one left from the fifty who'd come for the tryout. She was back fielding grounders off the fungo bat of Quentin Williams. He whistled and Quent stopped in midswing. "Quentin," he shouted, "bring that shortstop over here so we can talk, okay?"

Quentin grinned, waved at Billie, and she started trotting in from short.

Archie looked over at Eddie Bennett. "I was going to give her a contract anyway. You know that, right, Eddie?"

"Of course," she said, smiling.

He turned back to greet his new shortstop. "Congratulations, kid," Archie said, when Billie got to them. He reached into his back pocket and brought out a folded piece of paper. He handed it to Billie, who opened it up and, eyes wide, said, "I made the team?"

"You sure did, Billie. And if you can get your parents to sign that contract tonight, you'll be in the dugout for tomorrow's game. That sound okay?"

"Yes, sir, Mr. Miller. That sounds okay," she said, shaking her head in disbelief. She'd made the team! "Wow," she added.

Archie Miller reached out to shake Billie's hand, said, "Be here at nine A.M. tomorrow, kid. We'll have a uniform for you, a locker, the whole thing. You bring your spikes and glove and your own bat if you want, right?"

"Yes, sir," she said.

Eddie was quiet through all this. This was the inflection point, no question. The girl wonder. The one she had to both protect and place in great danger. Gawky, all arms and legs, maybe five-foot-seven, couldn't weigh more than one hundred pounds, but a strong, confident stride as she'd approached, her bob mostly hidden by a Glendale High School ballcap, with that G on it.

The girl looked at Eddie and blushed, which was cute as it could be. She wasn't a beauty by any means, didn't want to be one, Eddie suspected. But she wore her shy smile well on that round face with those green eyes set wide and that god-awful haircut. Her wool baseball pants were covered in infield dirt from several diving stops on grounders from Quentin and some slides into second and third as they checked her footspeed. Her Glendale High Nitros jersey was pretty dirty. Eddie was certain that Billie liked it that way.

Eddie gave her a warm smile. "You're going to do great, Billie the Kid," she said, and then took a couple of steps over to her and gave her a quick hug. "We'll be seeing

a lot of each other, sweetie. Congratulations.”

“Th-thank you,” Billie managed to say through the hug. Aww, she had a little crush on her, Eddie thought. Well, that was fine.

They pulled back. Billie looked up at Eddie. “You’re the most, the most . . .” she said, unable to finish the sentence. She gave up on that and gave Eddie another nervous hug and then stepped back again and said, firmly, to Archie. “I’ll make you proud of me, Mr. Miller. I swear it.”

Archie smiled, and Eddie loved him for that. He could be grumpy with his players sometimes, but not here, not right now. “You’re gonna do great, kid,” he said. “Now go home, get that contract signed by your folks, and bring it with you tomorrow. Be here by nine A.M., right?”

“Right,” she said. “Nine A.M.” And then she ran off toward the dugout, where she would change her shoes and maybe, if the guys would look the other way, put on that clean shirt she’d brought, and then get across the street to the streetcar stop and head home with the big news.

* * *

CHAPTER FIVE JUNE 15, 1941 BLOWHARD BULLIES

Billie the Kid Davis had a long time to process all the wonders of the day as she rode the streetcar home from Griffith Field to Glendale. She’d just turned fifteen, but she’d been playing baseball her whole life and felt she knew what the game was about and nothing much could surprise her. But this! This! Some new door had opened wide. She had a chance to play the game as a professional, a top professional, at that. A lot of people thought the Pacific Coast League was every bit as good as the Major Leagues and the Negro Leagues out East. Mother would be so proud of her!

Even her dad, she knew, would at least pretend to be happy, though baseball didn’t mean much to him, and the tragic deaths in St. Louis had so darkened his life that there wasn’t much happiness for him to find anywhere. Before that terrible day he’d been the top designer and test pilot for Roberts Aircraft back in St. Louis, and when he wasn’t busy working on the design for the new RA2 passenger plane he was in the air, often with his daughter, who sat on a couple of phone books in the copilot’s seat so she could see out the cockpit windshield. He’d taught her everything about flying, and she’d taken it in like a sponge. She earned her pilot’s license at twelve, the youngest girl in the state of Missouri to get one.

When she wasn’t flying she was playing baseball, always with Mom when she was little. Mom hadn’t had a chance to play much sports in her childhood, but she had a great arm and a good glove. Over the years they must have played catch and games of pepper a thousand times, Billie and her mom, stealing a half hour here and there before Mom had gone into work at St. Louis General, where she was head of nursing.

By the time Billie was eight years old she was the star of the local sandlot, playing in pickup games on the ballfield at Tillman School, the whole neighborhood showing up on a summer morning to pick sides and play ball. It was glorious, using ballcaps to mark the bases and one of their three available bats to step up to the plate. Billie learned to choke up and slap out singles, and loved playing shortstop on the pebbly infield.

From sandlot baseball to high-school softball at St. Joseph’s Academy in St. Louis, an all-girls school run by the nuns, turned out to be a pretty easy jump for her. She earned the starting shortstop job as freshman and was All-City by the end of the season.

All those thoughts, those great memories, of life in St. Louis, a young life in baseball and how it had all led to this, to being a Star, a Hollywood Star, playing short-stop. All of this was tumbling around in her head when the streetcar took that big left at Echo Park and headed up the middle of Glendale Boulevard to Glendale itself and home. And there it stopped.

There was a demonstration going on. Men, a hundred of them or more, dressed in silver shirts with blue ties, blue corduroy pants, leather leggings and campaign hats with those flat round rims and four-corner indents on the top. You might have guessed it was a riot of forest rangers, the way they were dressed. You'd be wrong. Billie had seen them often enough in small groups handing out angry leaflets throughout the city: members of the Silver Legion of America. Fascists, through and through.

A bunch of blowhard bullies, Billie thought, watching them out the window as they held up signs, marched in formation down the boulevard, their faces angry with hate as they walked right by the streetcar. Some of them held baseball bats, hoping to crack some skulls. Bad customers, every one of them.

That stretch of Glendale Boulevard was brick-paved, with the streetcar tracks running in the middle with a single lane of car traffic on either side, and sidewalks wide enough for the restaurants and shops that lined both sides of the road to have tables out front. A pawn shop, a small grocery, a fruit stand selling oranges, a barbershop, an Italian restaurant she'd never been in, Ruggiero's, and a kosher deli, Mink's.

The Silver Shirts, the blowhard bullies, demonstrated their hate by going after the kosher deli, chanting "Jews out! Jews out!" and prying out bricks from the road as they marched so that when the front line of the Silver Shirts reached the deli, the leaders of the march were well armed. Two of them, brothers she was thinking, the way they looked alike; same medium height, not wearing campaign hats like all the others, but with black armbands, black hair, angry faces and carrying the baseball bats they obviously planned to use.

They raised their hands to stop the march as a middle-aged couple came out to meet them, courageous if maybe a little crazy, both of them wearing butchers' aprons, the man carrying a carving knife, the woman with her arms akimbo, frowning at the threat in front of her. The woman shut the door behind her as the man held the knife in front and shouted at the two with the armbands. Billie couldn't hear what he said, but she got the message anyway.

The leaders didn't like that knife, so they stood where they were but shouted "Jews out! Jews out!" and then one of them, it was hard to tell one from the other, turned to the crowd behind him and took a brick from another marcher. Then, holding the brick up high, the leader turned back around and threw the brick at the deli window. He missed, the brick falling ten feet short, but the angry marchers behind him were persuaded by that singular act to do their part, too, and they surged forward and started throwing their own bricks, some of those making it to the window. When it shattered they all surged forward into the deli, some of them hurling bricks that hit their own people and staggered them, and then as they fell were trampled by the angry mob behind them.

Billie saw the aproned butcher swinging the knife back and forth, trying to hold back the onslaught before the two men leading the mob raised their bats high and together, swung at the butcher, one just missing his head, the other connecting with the butcher's ribcage.

The butcher fell to his knees. His wife, unarmed, had been right behind him and now came to him, went down on one knee herself to try and help him, when one of the men with those leadership black armbands came over and took a swing at her, hitting her on the right shoulder, watching her fall, and then raising his bat to go

after her even as his arm-banded brother came over to do the same, him holding with two hands, like he was ready to step up to the plate and swing for the fences.

The couple would be dead soon. Billie could see it, clear as glass, that the couple would be dead. The two men raised those bats for a killing blow.

Billie didn't want that to happen. She very, very much didn't want that to happen. "On, no," she managed to whisper, watching and wanting it to stop, to not take place. Very, very much wanting and then needing this to not be happening, not right in front of her, not to those innocent two people as she watched. She was still, frozen, lost in the intensity of the moment. No!

A wave of nausea hit her, her stomach flip-flopping, her head suddenly feverish. She couldn't breathe. She closed her eyes, held them tight as the nausea passed and the fever disappeared and her breath came back.

She opened her eyes, and the scene was not quite the same. The two leaders were standing there, looking at the deli couple. The bats were gone, not even lying on the street next to them. Gone.

The men turned away, waving at the mob that had been at their backs all this time, shouting something, but motioning them back, back away from the butcher and his wife.

The mob mumbled and murmured. Billie couldn't hear what was being said, but she could see them looking at each other, see their mouths muttering, heads nodding or shaking, decisions being made. And then, after one more pair of shouts from the leaders, the mob backed off, turning to look down the road for someone else to bully and threaten. This moment, this particular moment, was over.

The mob swirled and shouted and held up signs, but the danger was past when, at last, the police showed up, sirens blaring and cops running into the crowd, using their billy clubs to whack one Silver Shirt or America Firster after another over the head as they wrested control from the mob.

A long five minutes later an ambulance showed up and the couple from the deli were put into the back and, sirens blaring, it headed to the Emergency Room at Queen of Angels, just down the road in Echo Park.

Then a fire truck showed up, hooked up its high-pressure hoses, and sprayed down the crowd, and that finally ended it. Twenty minutes later things had been cleared enough that the streetcar could start up again and, another twenty minutes after that, Billie reached her stop in Glendale and got off. All the while she was thinking about what she'd seen and what she'd done. She'd felt sick, and then dizzy with a hot flash, and then, when she'd recovered—a minute later? Less?—everything had changed. What the hell? She had a lot to talk about with her folks.

* * *

Before the carnage she'd just witnessed, Billie had pictured in her mind how it would go when she got home with the good news about the baseball contract. Mom wouldn't be home yet from her nursing shift, but her dad would be there, probably at his design table out in garage, working on the empennage for the Hughes Hercules. She would come into the house, drop her Louisville Slugger and her Rawlings mitt and her spikes off in her room, then walk out the side door to the garage and tell him she had a good summer job.

I'm happy to hear that, he would say. He would set down the protractor and the pencil and give her that tired smile and then open his arms for a hug and tell her he was proud of her, and that the job would keep her busy and a dollar a day at the malt shop or whatever would give her money to spend all summer and some savings, too. Then she'd laugh and pull the contract out of her pocket and show it to him. That would knock his socks off, she bet.

It would have, too, she was sure. But now, after what she'd seen with those fascists

attacking that Jewish deli, she wasn't in the mood for any jokes or celebrations. That was horrible to see. How could people hate other people like that?

* * *

She did set her glove and bat and spikes in her room, and she did walk into the garage, and Dad did set down his protractor and said Hi, Sweetie, did you have a good day? And then he opened his arms for a hug and she came over to get that hug and hug him back and then, and only then, she allowed herself to cry.

Robert Davis was working in the garage, tinkering with the specifications for the Link Simulator they were building for him in Binghamton, New York. They'd have it delivered by July if he could get the specs to them, and then he'd start training in it. Billie would be his copilot in the simulator, and together, father and daughter, they'd pretend to be flying the largest plane on Earth, the Hughes H4 Hercules. By sometime in the fall the Hercules, the plane the newspapers were calling the Spruce Goose because it was made out of a wood laminate, would be ready for some flight-testing. Robert would be in the cockpit for every one of those test flights. He'd learned a bitter lesson about that. If the plane went down, he'd go down with it.

He was contemplating a late change to the empennage of the Hercules and what that meant for the simulator when he heard Billie come walking in. He set down his pencil and looked up at her with a smile. She'd been a trooper through all the horror of that day in St. Louis and since, with all the sadness and the changes. She and her mom, that wonderful Gladys of his, that remarkable woman who'd brought him a daughter and then gone back to saving lives, in the Midwest and now here in California. An emergency room nurse in these difficult times, she faced a tough day every day, and then came home to fix dinner for the three of them.

The look on Billie's face wiped the smile from his face.

"Hi, Sweetie, what's the matter?" he asked her and then she ran to him, he opened his arms, and they hugged as she cried. His little girl, his Billie, in tears.

"What's happened, honey?" he asked again. She must not have gotten that job or something, he guessed. It wasn't like her to cry. Poor thing, she wanted a job, wanted something to do all summer, wanted to contribute to the family finances, though they were doing all right with him and Gladys both working.

But that wasn't it.

"I just saw a man and a woman get beat up something awful in a riot, Dad. The Silver Shirts were marching and shouting all sorts of hateful things. There was a deli, Mink's, a kosher place, and the Silver Shirts attacked it. They beat up the man and the woman who ran it."

"Oh, Billie, I'm so sorry. How did you . . . ?"

"The D Line streetcar, right after it makes the turn at Echo Park. The marchers were all around us, walking by us as they marched. We couldn't move. We were stuck there, watching what they did."

"And they attacked someone? Are you sure?"

"It happened right out my window, Dad. They hit those people with baseball bats. It was horrible, and those Silver Shirts looked happy about it!"

"Sweetheart," her father said, "these are terrible times, and I'm afraid it's only going to get worse. These Isolationists, these America Firsters." He shook his head. "I don't know what to tell you. I'm sorry you had to see that."

"Me, too," she said, and then stepped back, took a deep breath. "I was all happy until I saw that. They were hurt bad, those two. I saw the ambulance take them away."

Neither one, father or daughter, mentioned the last time they'd seen that kind of injury firsthand, back in St. Louis. Instead, Billie said, "Here. I got a summer job. A good one. But I don't know. Maybe it's too crazy to think I could do it."

She had a piece of paper in her hand. She gave it to her father, and as he looked it over she said, "How can I play baseball, have fun and get paid for it, when everything's going down the drain. Those horrible men like that walking the streets. The war that's sure to come. The Nazis, the Japanese."

He wasn't paying attention to what she was saying, he was reading the contract. He whistled. "Wow, Billie, this is a contract. The Hollywood Stars want to pay you sixty dollars a month to play baseball for them. How in the hell. . . ? Is this real?"

"Yes! I told you! There was a tryout today at Gilmore Field. There were scads of people there trying out for the team, and I was the only one they signed."

"You told me? And you tried out? And they gave you a contract? You're sure this is real?"

"Yes, it's real. You can call Mr. Miller on the phone and ask him. It's real. I'm playing baseball for the Hollywood Stars." She hesitated, "Maybe."

Her father ran his fingers through his hair, looked at his daughter and thought about what she'd done today, and what she'd seen after she'd done it. What a world they lived in here, in this time and this place. Crazy, wonderful and awful both. He'd look in tomorrow's newspapers to see who those deli workers were and if they'd really been killed. He'd had some sympathy, he had to admit, for some of the things the Silver Shirts and the Bund were saying. But beating up two shopkeepers? That had no place in the America where he lived and worked and raised a family. No place at all.

He looked over at Billie, said, "I think you should play, Billie. I'm thinking that couple at the deli were Jews. Well, there are some Jews who own that ballclub, and a couple of others are your teammates. Join that team, play for them, make friends with those teammates and those fancy Hollywood types that own the club. Be as good as you can be, Billie, and that'll be your answer to those thugs you saw today."

Billie was listening to him. Maybe he was right.

Her father went on. "I always knew you had some real talent with the ball and bat, but this, Billie, this is amazing!" He held the contract up to the light like it might be counterfeit money, brought it back down, looked at it again and said, "That's some kind of great summer job, Billie. Really, I'm proud of you." And then he signed it.

A couple of hours later, after her mom got home from her nursing shift, Billie talked with her about her doubts. "Playing a kid's game when the war is coming to the whole world? If it happens, *when* it happens, I have to do something real about it, don't I, Mom? I have to fight against the fascists somehow, don't I? Don't I?"

Her mother smiled at her. "That's so like you, sweetheart. You're only fifteen, and barely that. There'll be plenty of time for you to fight for your country in one way or another in a couple of years."

"I didn't like what I saw today, Mom. Those people were vicious. The looks on their faces, all filled with hate. It was terrible."

Mom reached out to hold her daughter's hand. "I know, dear, I know. There's a lot of hate around. But not here, all right? Here, we try and get along with everyone. We try to do the right thing."

Billie took a breath, said, "Okay, Mom. Dad said playing baseball on a team with Jewish players and Negro players and a lot of Jewish owners might be my way of making a statement."

Mom's eyes widened, "He said that? Bless his Catholic heart. And you know what, I agree. That team of yours has Negroes on it, and Jews, and Mexicans, and now a girl. I think that's all a wonderful thing."

She picked up the contract again and hesitated one last time. All of this was well and good, but what about school? What about college? What about being a normal kid in high school?

And what about how much Billie loved baseball and always had, and how often she'd played catch with her mother, back and forth and back and forth? All those Cardinals games they'd gone to, and now these Hollywood Stars. Billie had a real gift for the game.

"I know you're pretty shook up, Billie," she said, "and you have every right to be. But baseball is something you love, and it's more than just a game, you know. It's a symbol, especially for you, for what you bring to it. That's why you love it so much. It's all about playing within the lines, playing fair, playing hard. And what it *should* be about is letting anybody who's good enough out there on the field. You're good enough, Billie. It's yours. It's your game. We want you to play, your father and me. We want you to find the joy in it you always have." And she signed it.

Billie never did get around to talking about that dizzy spell, and the weird way things had changed.

* * *

CHAPTER SIX
JULY 20, 1941
THE SIMULATOR

He hadn't been worth a damn for a long time now, nearly two years that felt like two centuries. He'd gone up as the copilot on the first flight, his best friend Milton Jurgensen in the pilot's seat of the glider as a Roberts RA2 towed them to twenty-one hundred feet and then let them go. They'd descended smoothly, three slow spirals to the right and then in for the landing on the grass strip. Perfect.

Three hours later the mayor of St. Louis was there, the archbishop of that very Catholic city was there, two top military brass were there, and the press who'd backed the gliders being built in St. Louis were there. Standing with these big shots was Milton Jurgensen, Robert Davis' best friend, now with a new copilot to take them up in the flight-tested glider for a quick spin around the field, a smooth landing, and then champagne for all as St. Louis took its rightful place at the center, or somewhere near it, of military aircraft construction.

They all stood for photographs next to the glider, and then they boarded and posed inside for more photographs, and then they all boarded the glider, eight of them in all, and as the crowd watched the Roberts RA2 plane, the pride of the fleet, had taken off with the glider in tow behind, got them up to two thousand feet, and let them go.

They should have circled downward in three long spirals. They should have landed on the grass field. They should have emerged to applause and champagne. Instead, Robert Davis had watched in horror as the glider banked into its first turn and the right wing seemed to vibrate, trembling and then tearing and then separating from the fuselage to start fluttering its way to the earth below as the fuselage spun and twisted and spun again and, fourteen long seconds later, crumpled into the grass just a few feet from the newly paved runway. All ten, counting pilot and copilot, died instantly as they hit the ground. Those fourteen long seconds of falling to their deaths must have been terrifying.

It was Robert Davis's wing strut that gave way, snapping in two like a dry branch off an old oak tree. For an anguished month he was certain the fault was his. He soldiered on to make sure the problem was found and fixed and then, he planned, he

would end it all after the inquest was done.

The inquest determined it was the fault of the manufacturer of the strut, a local St. Louis company that made caskets. Bubbles in the metal didn't matter to caskets, but very much mattered to airplane wings. Robert Davis was exonerated.

It wasn't so simple as to stay with the company and press on, though. Every day when he drove from their home in the little town of Kirkwood to the small office building where he worked and the two big hangars where they were building RA2 passenger planes in one and the new gliders with their excellent struts in the other, he was reminded of that horrible day, of those tragic deaths. He couldn't move past it.

Until Howard Hughes called and offered him a job. Hughes was designing and building a new plane, the largest plane on Earth, a seaplane the size of a small ship. Would Robert come take over the design of the empennage, the tail assembly?

Robert and Howard had met at Rice Institute in Houston, where they shared an interest in aeronautics. When Howard's father died and left his nineteen-year-old son with the controlling interest in Hughes Tool Company and a considerable amount of money, Howard dropped out of Rice and moved to California to make movies and airplanes. The two friends stayed in touch, each admiring the work of the other, and it was Howard who offered Robert and his family a lifeline, a fresh start out in Los Angeles, making airplanes and, who knew, maybe movies, too.

Howard knew all about the glider tragedy—everybody in the business did. But Howard knew that Robert would never again let something like a shoddy strut get past his close inspection. Howard was right about that, too.

And now the Link Simulator was here. Robert had seen it arrive this morning at the hangar in Culver City. He'd help install it, a complex job that wouldn't be done until sometime late tomorrow. And then he'd take the simulator out for a spin.

They wanted the plane flying by November, and that first flight would be Robert's redemption. The Spruce Goose. Damn silly name. Yes, war was close now and there were restrictions on steel, so the Hercules was made of wood laminates, but the wood was birch, covered in plastic and then cloth. Tough material, really. No spruce involved. Still, the press was calling it the Spruce Goose, and even nicknamed it the Goose.

On this cool July night Robert was out in the garage, working on the specs for the Link Simulator, looking for anything they might have missed during today's installation. Everything looked good. That wasn't good enough. There were a lot of hydraulics involved in the Goose; it was the first big plane to use them to assist the pilot, who couldn't possibly muscle this beast around in the sky. And that meant there were a lot of hydraulics in the simulator, which had to mimic the plane in flight in every way, from the wing flaps to the empennage and more. It was tricky business; it demanded exactitude. He started checking the numbers again. For the fourth time? The fifth? Yes, the fifth. Good.

The Hollywood Stars had a day game tomorrow, so Billie would probably be done by four-thirty or five o'clock. If the simulator was really ready tomorrow night, he'd bring her along for the first simulated flight. She'd love being copilot as they put his tail design to the test.

She was a hell of a pilot when she wasn't playing baseball and, oh yeah, going to high school. High school! She was just a kid, barely fifteen, and yet here she was playing shortstop for the Twinks. Getting some hits, dazzling them all with her glove and arm at shortstop. Rookie of the Year, he was hoping. What a girl. He and Gladys were so proud of her.

She was on her way home now from today's game, he was sure. As soon as she walked in he'd invite her along for tomorrow's dry run. She'd love that.

* * *

CHAPTER SEVEN
SEPTEMBER 4, 1941
THE COMFORTS

Sylvia Comfort and her mother Grace stood in the middle of the living room of their new home, a two-bedroom bungalow on Sawyer Street in Culver City. They weren't far from Gilmore Field and the La Brea Tar Pits to the north and Santa Monica and the beaches to the west, and it was an easy streetcar ride to the ballpark and to the studios. That mattered to them both; Sylvia was a stenographer and a good one, and was sure to get a job at one of those studios, and Grace was a baseball fan.

After the death of her husband Roy, a Navy commander in San Diego felled by a heart attack, Grace moved herself and her daughter to Culver City to start a new life. She hoped that Sylvia would prosper as a stenographer, and that she herself could find some pleasure in going to the ballpark. Watching the Hollywood Stars play baseball would remind her, in these difficult times, of the joy that she and her husband found in baseball, a sport he'd played well at the Naval Academy. He threw a no-hitter against army one nice May afternoon in Annapolis, and then met Grace three nights later at a mixer with the girls from Goucher. He always called that the best week of his life.

They'd come to Los Angeles for work, Grace and Sylvia, but also to try and put the sad past behind them with this fresh start. They had friends here. Brenda Haase, who went to school with Grace all those years ago at Goucher, was a screenwriter and married to a studio lawyer. She'd been Brenda Aiken back in the day, but for ten years now she'd been married to David Haase, who ran the Legal Department for Wise Studios. They had a circle of friends, the Haases did, and Brenda wanted to introduce Grace and Sylvia to them all, so there was a dinner party in a couple of nights to welcome them to town. It had been nearly a year since Roy's death, and money was tight. It was time to begin to move on.

The Santa Ana winds were blowing, dust and a dry heat that didn't seem like a very good omen on their first day in the new house. The mother and daughter stood in that living room, arm in arm, lost in thought after all the changes since Roy had died; leaving the little house they'd loved so much at the naval base, figuring out the hard, cold financial figures of Roy's pension and how far it would or wouldn't take them, all of that and more, when the doorbell rang. It was their first visitors, and after only a couple of hours in the new house.

Grace walked over to the front door and opened it. Hot wind rushed in as "Hi, neighbor!" boomed a heavysset and balding man, about five-ten, a round face, a tight smile. Next to him was a woman, his wife, Grace was certain. She was meek and looked down and away a lot, though she did manage to look up once to smile briefly at Grace. She carried a plate full of cookies in her hands.

"We live next door," the man said. "I'm Joe Allen, and this is the little woman, Patience, you can call her Pat."

He reached out to shake Grace's hand and walked in, uninvited, tugging the little woman along behind him. "And you're?"

"Grace Comfort, and my daughter Sylvia," Grace said.

"Where's the man of the house?" Allen asked. "Off at work? What does he do?"

"My father died last year, Mr. Allen," Sylvia said. "He was in the navy."

That was the spot for some condolences from Allen, but he only barely managed it. "Sorry to hear," he said, and followed with, "I always wanted to see the inside of this house. The Murphys, they moved out a month ago. They weren't much for company

outside their own circle. Couple of boozing Micks, you know," and he held up his hand to his mouth to mimic drinking, "so lots of whisky, lots of fights." He laughed, "But better them than having Eyeties next door, I guess, though that bunch have cleaned up their act with good ol' Benito in charge, eh?"

Grace couldn't believe what she was hearing. She looked at Sylvia, whose face was polite and impassive, but Grace could read the disapproval in her eyes. And he wasn't done.

"Not a Jew in this whole neighborhood, at least," he added. "That much we got cleaned up. They're everywhere else in this town, though, know what I mean? They run Hollywood, those Jews, like Mayer, Selznick, Goldwyn, the Warner brothers, Wise, all of them. Hell, it goes all the way back to Carl Laemmle, the Jew who started the whole movie business out here in the sunshine. They run the movies and the movies run this city. Money-grubbing Jews everywhere here."

Joe was oblivious to the looks on their faces. He'd obviously convinced himself long ago that his thinking on things was, as Sylvia would learn he liked to say, just perfect.

He forged on: "Where you all from?" he asked. Grace wondered if he was talking about what part of the country or the world they were from, or was he assessing whether they were white enough for him.

He walked from the living room into the dining room as he spoke. Pat just stood there, smiling slightly as her husband roamed the rooms.

"San Diego," Grace said to his back as he walked through the dining room and into the kitchen. "Sorry for the mess, we only just walked into this place a couple of hours ago."

Joe did not get the hint, but Pat, embarrassed for him perhaps, finally spoke. "We should let you settle in," she said, and she walked over to the side table and set the cookies there. Then she looked toward the kitchen, "Joe? C'mon dear, we need to let Grace and Sylvia finish moving in."

"In a minute!" Joe yelled from the kitchen. Then, when he walked back through the dining room and toward the three women, he added, "Nag, nag, nag, that's you, Pat." And he laughed, and looked at Grace and Sylvia. "Just kidding," he said, "Pat's a great little woman," and he gave her a smile and then looked at Grace and Sylvia. "You looking for work, ladies?"

This would be a terribly rude thing for someone to ask, normally; but somehow coming from this man it seemed ordinary. Of course he would be rude.

"I'm a stenographer," said Sylvia. "I'm told the studios need stenographers. I'll start applying tomorrow."

"She finished first in stenography in secretarial school in San Diego," Grace added, happy to add to a conversation that wasn't part of this awful man's world. "I'm sure she'll do fine here. I'll probably work in a shop somewhere, too, just to stay busy."

"Hey," said Joe as a lightbulb—a dim one, no doubt, thought Grace—went on over his head. "My brother Henry is looking for a girl who knows her stenography."

"He is?" asked Sylvia. "What does he do?"

"It's an organization that he started, and now it's gotten too big to handle all by himself, even with my help. He needs someone to handle the secretary parts, notes at meetings, letters and all of that. I'll put in a word for ya."

"That would be very nice," said Sylvia, polite as she could be, though Grace could see Sylvia wanted nothing to do with this awful man or his brother, who was probably just as awful.

"I'll take care of it," says Joe. "You can count on me. I'm reliable as hell, right, Pat?"

Pat walked over, pecked him on the cheek, said, "We do have to go, Joe, and let these nice women settle in."

"Yeah, yeah," he said, and put his hand on the small of Pat's back to push her

toward the door. "Great talking to you both," he said over his shoulder as they left and Sylvia went to the door, waved once and smiled, and then shut the door, firmly, behind them.

A few seconds went by, and then Grace looked at Sylvia, who was looking right back at her. "Goodness," she said. And "Unbelievable," Sylvia agreed.

* * *

Two nights later, the mother and daughter were moved in and, truth be told, exhausted by the effort of it all; but their friend Brenda Haase was hosting that party, and Brenda had been so wonderful in helping them find this little house and get moved in, and it was a chance to make new friends, and they were the guests of honor as the new girls in town. So off they went in their ten-year-old, but still quite serviceable, Hupmobile Aerodynamic, bought in better times after Roy's promotion to captain and his first command, a destroyer escort, in 1931. Roy loved that car and, most importantly, it was paid for, so Sylvia and her mother gave it all the attention it deserved. It always looked good, and it always ran smooth.

Everyone who was anyone in this particular circle of friends was there. Brenda Haase was a budding screenwriter, it turned out. None of her scripts had made it into production yet, but one of these days she'd read her name up on that screen, for sure. For now, it was her husband's role as head of legal for Wise Studios that made the Haases important figures in this town.

At the party, there was a group of executive wives who circled around Brenda. She was witty, she made friends not enemies, and her husband couldn't hire or fire your husband since he was just the lawyer, not the studio chief or an assistant or a producer or a director or, god forbid, one of the actors. This made Brenda safe for all concerned, and she knew it. She could keep a secret, flash a smile, give a hug, offer support or solace, and all with a disarming sense of the genuine. She was, you could argue, the most popular wife in the executives' circle that lived in the hills of Encino.

And right now she was talking to her old college roommate, Grace Comfort, and her pretty young daughter, Sylvia. There were a lot of eyes on this friendly conversation. Who were these new girls in town? The mother was stylish if a little plain for this crowd, the daughter attractive and had a great smile that she didn't show off very often. Dimples, even.

Their conversation had started with a hug and two French air kisses, left cheek and right. Brenda and Grace had learned to do those together in the summer of '28, touring Europe. It was funny then, faking it, and now they did those air kisses and broke into laughs. Old times.

They'd gotten together a few times since, at Goucher College reunions and whatnot, but it'd been a good eight years or more since the last time, a nice lunch in Washington, where both their husbands happened to be at the same time.

"Gracie, darling," Brenda said, after the laughter of the air kisses. "I've missed seeing you! Your letters were lovely, but nothing like your charm in person."

Grace smiled, "It's been much too long, Brennie, thank you for inviting us over."

"And who is this beautiful young woman? Not little silly Syl? Darling!" and she gave Sylvia the same hug and air kisses, "You were, what, about thirteen back in Washington?"

Sylvia smiled that smile and said hi, and wonderful to see you again, too, and then Brenda turned her attention back to her old best friend. "Grace, we're so sorry about your Roy. He was a wonderful man. He served his country with honor and distinction and obviously helped you raise a wonderful daughter, dear."

Grace and Sylvia squeezed each others' hands. That was always nice to hear, and they knew they'd hear it from Brenda; but Roy's death remained a little raw for them.

Still, "Thank you, Brennie," said Grace, and "Thank you, Mrs. Haase," said Sylvia.

Brenda smiled at Sylvia and said, "It's Brennie to my friends, Sylvia. Please think of me as your friend, all right?"

"Thank you, Brennie," said Sylvia, and then added, "You have a wonderful home."

It was a wonderful home. Mickey Rooney's house was just two blocks away, so that told you the neighborhood. Brenda and David's place was a big two-story brick colonial with a wide front porch where they could sit and enjoy all the good weather, with a long circular drive with plenty of places to park. There had been a dozen cars already there when Grace and Sylvia pulled up, so Sylvia, doing the driving, had parked next to a nice Series 62 Cadillac convertible, turned off the engine, and looked at her mother. "My goodness, are we dressed well enough for this crowd, Mother?" she'd asked.

Grace had laughed, fiddled with her hat, brushed her bangs back into place, and said cheerily, "We'll have to see, I suppose, dear." And they'd gone on in.

Now, just ten minutes later, Brennie was talking about her home, and how it was once owned by William Fox—yes, *that* William Fox, he of Fox Studios—and he'd rented it out to Herman Mankiewicz, had they heard of him? They said no and she explained, "Herman's a screenwriter, a very good one, and he has this great script, *The Mad Dog of Europe*, that everyone raves about, but nobody has the nerve to make. You can imagine why."

"Hitler," Grace said and looked at Sylvia, who looked right back at her and nodded her head a bit, permission given. Grace and Brennie both had been rejected by Radcliffe because they were Jews, and both had found a home at Goucher College, where they prospered. Brennie had been outspoken about anti-Semitism back then, and it sounded like she still was in the age of Adolf Hitler and his nasty friends as they attacked Europe's Jews. Now, perhaps, Brenda was in a position to do more about it than just talk, like they did, endlessly, in their room at Goucher.

"Hitler, the mad dog," Grace said, completing the thought, and looked her old friend in the eye. "You know, even some of the people here in Los Angeles are absolutely rabid about loving that monster, Brennie dear. We met one just the other day, a Mr. Allen, a neighbor, and he was the most, most . . ." she stumbled, searching for the word, something strong enough.

Sylvia, standing next to her, offered, "Horrible? Despicable? I'm not sure I can find the right word for him, either," said Sylvia. "He was just an awful man, and so off-hand about it, hating the Jews and the Blacks and the Italians and the Mexicans and, my gosh, everyone but him and his wife, it seemed."

"And he almost seemed to hate her," Grace added. "The way he treated her!"

Brennie gave her head a slight shake. "It's terrible, isn't it? And it's getting worse and worse. Even here in the film community, even some of our 'friends' in the business, even our local police and politicians. It's like a terrible infection. The Isolationists, the Bund, the Silver Shirts and their nasty marches for 'peace' where they attack any Jews they can find. They're out and out Nazis, all of them. They hate us."

Grace sighs. "It's a hateful time, Brennie. Europe is falling apart under that madman and his Italian friend, and the Japanese seem to want all of Asia for their own. My Roy talked about it all the time, about Hitler on one side of us and Tojo on the other; about how the Japanese were building a huge navy full of aircraft carriers and submarines and battleships. They want to control the Pacific, and if we didn't do something about that soon we'd regret it."

Brenda reached over to hold Grace's hands in her own. "Dearest Grace. He was so strong and capable, I still can't believe he's gone."

"We'll always struggle with it, I suppose, Brennie," said Grace, as her daughter just looked sad for a moment, reminded once again about her father and how much they

missed him. Damn heart attack, thought Grace. He never ate well, he smoked like a chimney, he hardly ever exercised, he stayed up late with paperwork and meetings. And all that stress. On his last deployment the *Alan Bedry* had visited Pearl Harbor and then off to Midway and the Philippines and Guam and eventually to Singapore. With war looming they hadn't stopped in Japan itself, but it seemed obvious to Roy, knowing what he knew and saw of the Japanese Imperial Navy, that doing battle with the Japanese navy was inevitable. It ate at him, that knowledge, that certainty, that it was coming and soon, and that it would be bloody, two evenly matched foes settling their differences.

It was a terrible morning when she woke to an empty bed and came out to find him on the couch, papers fluttering on his chest from the open window and the morning breeze. Cold. So cold.

"That's one reason we're so glad you invited us here, Brennie. It's been almost a year since we lost him. It's time to get our lives going again, you know?"

"I suppose I do, Grace," said Brenda, getting the hint and reaching out to take them both by one hand and begin to tug them along. "Come, come, come, so I can introduce you around."

And so that's what she did, introducing Grace and Sylvia to a couple of dozen people at this "little" gathering. Some studio lawyers were here, of course, given David's job at Wise. But there were other studio people, too, and Grace made sure the stenographic Sylvia met them, starting with David's boss, Jacob Wise, and his associate producer, Eddie Bennett, who'd only been in town for a few months. They both shook hands with Sylvia and Grace, and Bennett made polite conversation before she and Wise moved off. Grace watched them go. Wise was handsome, but married; but here he was with Bennett, who was a knockout and single, so there simply must be some chatter about them, Grace thought. There was, she'd find out later, a lot of chatter, but not quite the kind she'd guessed at.

Meanwhile, look, over there was Harry Warner, standing by the fireplace, talking with David and a couple of other men, both well-dressed, stern faces, maybe lawyers, she thought. No directors that she recognized, though, and thank god, none of the actors. Grace and Sylvia both were nervous enough with the studio people, but some big movie star or famous director? Gary Cooper or Hedy Lamarr or Frank Capra or someone like that? It was hard to imagine what you could possibly say to a person like that.

And now here was Brenda reaching out to take Grace and Sylvia by the hand, then chatting away about who they were about to meet as she started walking them over to her husband and his friends. The first they were introduced to was Harry Warner himself, he of the Warner Brothers, oh my goodness. One of the other men was a lawyer, Leon Lewis, and the man next to him was a director, so at least one of those were here, too. This one, Fred Zinnemann, was new to town. His first major film, *We Knew, We Knew*, would be released in another month. And behind him, drinking a beer, was a face she recognized, Archie Miller, the ballplayer who was now the manager of the baseball team here, the Hollywood Stars, the one owned by all the celebrities. She was delighted to meet him and said so as she shook his hand.

Leon Lewis was the founder of the Jewish Federation Council of Greater Los Angeles, which must be rather important, thought Grace, since he was hobnobbing with the likes of Harry Warner and Fred Zinnemann and David Haase, not to mention the ballplayer Miller. Grace was Jewish on her mother's side, but non-observant and not particularly religious at all. Her daughter Sylvia had grown up Catholic, her father's religion. That was a deal the Catholics had insisted on before the marriage. For Sylvia, the Catholicism didn't take hold, really, but she knew the rituals.

They chatted amiably, the group of them, standing by that fireplace. Sylvia and Grace were polite and gracious, as the conversation wandered from the lighthearted

to the dark, from Harry Warner talking about how much he liked baseball and Archie Miller offering Grace and Sylvia box seats to whatever game they'd like to attend, to a worried Fred Zinnemann talking miserably about his parents, who'd been rounded up by the Austrian SS in Vienna and sent to who knew where.

Brenda told the men about Grace's husband who'd died a year ago and now here they were, Grace and Sylvia, starting over in Los Angeles, looking for work. And that led the conversation right into that awful Joe Allen, their new neighbor. "My gosh," said Sylvia, "he hated everyone, but especially the Jews. And he wanted me to work for him and his brother! Imagine! If that brother is half as awful as that Mr. Allen, well, working for them and their little club? That would be unbearable. Such hate! How can we stop these people from spreading that hate?"

Leon Lewis' ears pricked up at what she said. "Joe Allen and his brother Henry? Is that who you're talking about?"

"I think so, yes," said Sylvia.

"And you could be their stenographer, you'd be taking notes at their meetings?"

"Whose meetings?" Sylvia asked.

"The Silver Shirts," said Leon Lewis. "They're bad customers, Sylvia. They're the ones that nearly killed that Jewish couple during one of their 'peaceful' marches last month. Nazis through and through."

Sylvia reached over and took her mother's hand. "And he's our neighbor, Mother! We'll have to move!"

"Now, Sylvia," said Grace.

"But we have to do something!" said Sylvia right back to her. "They're Nazis, Mother!"

Sylvia turned to look at Leon Lewis, who looked right back at her. She was ready to say something when Lewis spoke first: "Sylvia. Grace. There *is* something you can do, if you're willing."

Sylvia Comfort was a product of her upbringing. She was young, but she was brave, and she knew from her father's worries over the years that America was surrounded by enemies without, sure, but had plenty of enemies within, too. Like the Bund and the Silver Shirts and the others who admired the Nazis.

Her father had been ready to go to war against people like that, but now he couldn't, his heart had betrayed him. But she could, thought Sylvia. This was her chance to do something important, do it for her dad.

"Would it be dangerous?" she asked Lewis.

He nodded, said, "Probably. These people can be vicious, look what they're doing to the Jews like Zinneman's parents in Europe. That's what they want to do here."

Sylvia took that in. Then she looked at her mother, who looked back and smiled.

"Count us in," Sylvia said.

And then they walked, the three of them, outside into the balmy evening air, out to the backyard where there was a pool and chairs and beyond that a stone path leading down to a dry creek bed with two or three benches along it. Lots of privacy there. They talked, and talked some more, and made their plans.

* * *

CHAPTER EIGHT OCTOBER 3, 1941 THE TWINKS

It was all a bit of a mystery how Archie Miller got the manager job back in April. Some of the owners had wondered at the time whatever the hell happened to Paul Birch, the

previous manager; but it all turned out fine. Miller was good at the job and so nobody was asking too many questions about him now. This was Hollywood, after all, where everyone's past was an invention, where everyone's future was bright and shiny, and where no one wanted to know too much about anyone else as long as they could do the job and the public loved them. Half the people in this town had stage names, so they all assumed Archie Miller had a past back East that he didn't walk to talk about, and the reason must be some scandal. They were right about that first part, but wrong about the second because Archie had always been careful.

The Hollywood Stars, the Twinks as the locals called them, were in second place, just two games behind the San Francisco Seals, with six weeks left in the regular season. The top four teams would play in the post-season, so things looked good for the Stars, with Miller the main reason why. He was hitting .322, he'd thrown out a dozen runners trying to steal second, he was good with his pitchers from behind the plate, and in the dugout and the clubhouse he was a ballplayers' manager. They liked him and he had them believing in themselves. All of that made him a popular guy around town, showing up here and there with all the right people. You couldn't ask for much more. The owners were happy. Archie himself was happy.

And he was busy, too. Archie, like most people, had different lives in different situations, and we're not just talking multiverse theory. Even limiting it to this particular timeline, Archie was a ballplayer, one of those rare athletes who could play the game at this top level. And he was a manager, one of just eight in the truncated version of the Pacific Coast League that he was working in now as war loomed. And he was a sexual being, was Archie, one with a variety of interests that all seemed accessible in this Hollywood, where private lives were protected by everyone from the press to the local politicians.

And then, of course, he was a spy, maybe even a double agent, though that was as hard to pin down as his sexual interests.

In the game that took place a few hours ago Archie took the day off from catching and tended solely to his managing duties, which were easy enough for most of the game as the Rainiers and Stars traded single runs here and there. The phenom, Billie the Kid, was the one who'd kept it close, making at least three game-savers at shortstop, the best of them a highway robbery on a ground ball up the middle from Dom DiMaggio with two outs and men on first and second in the top of the seventh. The ball leapt off the bat and screamed past pitcher Boots Babich as it headed over second base, a sure two-out single that would drive in a run for the Rainiers.

Billie had started moving when she saw Boots release the pitch and knew it would be up a bit and outside, and DiMaggio would reach out and slap it up the middle. As ball met bat Billie was already headed to the right spot behind second. The ball loved her glove, they all said in the dugout, grinning and shaking their heads, figuring that somehow she'd make the play, like she always did. Downright magnetic, the way she handled grounders.

Sure enough, there it was, kicking up dirt in the infield as it landed right behind the bag. There, it took a funny hop, squirrelling away to the left like it had a mind of its own, getting six inches or so closer to Billie as she came over toward the bag and diving, flat out, got her glove on the ball and reached in with her right hand to grab it and flip it up backhand to Lincoln Wright at second, who stepped on the bag for the third out. Top half of the seventh over, just like that. The Girl Wonder did it again.

Now it was the top of the ninth, and the Stars had a one-run lead, but there were two men on again and one out for the Rainiers with Dom DiMaggio right back at the plate.

It was a big moment as Miller faced his first serious managerial decision of the day. He stood there, one foot on the field and the other on the top step of the dugout,

and considered his options. He could leave his tiring starter, Boots Babich, in there, or he could bring in reliever Al Tost, who was the only lefty available against the right-hand bat of DiMaggio, the star center fielder of the Rainiers and the youngest, but most talented, of the DiMaggio brothers. A year later DiMaggio would be in the navy for the duration, where he would, mostly, play baseball in Australia for his wartime duty. But here, in this moment, he wasn't a sailor; he was a hitter, and a good one.

Miller was getting plenty of advice on the pitching decision from some of the more vocal owners who were sitting in the first row behind the dugout. The place was packed, and the owners were part of the reason why. Sure, the team was playing great and headed to the playoffs, and sure, it was a beautiful Hollywood afternoon for baseball. But the fans were there as much to gawk at the owners of the club, who sat in those high-priced seats behind the dugout, as they were to cheer for their team.

Jake Wise was there with his assistant, the beautiful Eddie Bennett. Rumor had it that Eddie Bennet was having an affair with the married Wise. Rumor had it, too, that Eddie Bennett was, at the very same time, the girlfriend of our Archie Miller, who was often her escort at all the usual restaurants and parties and charity events. The two of them said they were just friends, but wink, wink, Hedda Hopper said it was a lot more serious than that, and if you couldn't trust Hedda . . .

All we can say for sure is that Eddie and Archie were regulars for after-ballgame dinners at Rosario's over on Sunset, and at the Brown Derby, where a lot of the owners hung out, people like Gary Cooper and Barbara Stanwyck and, sure, Jake Wise, who always had a smile on his face when Eddie Bennett was around.

Most of these luminaries were real baseball fans, others were there just to see and be seen as they watched their Twinks try to win this one against the Rainiers. It was Gail Patrick who sat at one end of the first row in the red box seats, and Georg Gyssling at the other end of that same row, who were the most vocal during the game. They both were yelling at the ump and loudly offering advice to Archie, who usually just looked at them and smiled.

Gyssling didn't really know the game, and worse, didn't know he didn't know it. Archie smiled at him, but didn't give a thought to what he was saying. Gail Patrick, on the other hand, knew her baseball and followed the team closely. She was saying, "Babich has had enough, Archie. Pull him and bring in Tost. We need a groundball to end this thing."

Archie didn't look back but gave her a small nod. She was right. A groundball would, indeed, give the Twinks a chance for a double play that would send them all home happy, especially if it was up the middle for Billie the Kid. She'd been a marvel the whole season and was a shoo-in for Rookie of the Year. Archie was sure Billie would make another dazzling play, given the chance.

Gail Patrick was a major figure in Tinsel Town, plus her husband owned the Brown Derby, plus he'd been thinking Boots Babich was running out of gas anyway. So okay, let's do it, Archie thought, and looked down the line to the bullpen where Al Tost, the lefty, had been warming up and looked ready. DiMaggio, at the plate, was a .300 hitter, sure, but only .250 or so against lefties. Tost's little rinky-dink sinker just might get a grounder out of DiMaggio, and wouldn't that be nice?

Everyone around her, all the other owners, had heard Patrick and knew what was going on; so they were all smiles as Archie stepped out of the dugout and walked to the mound while umpire Lou Demestre called timeout.

Miller told Babich he'd done his job for the day and sent him on his way, and then he handed the ball to Tost, patted him on the butt, said, "Go get 'em," and walked away as his backup catcher, Tommy Seals, who'd walked out for the little meeting at

the mound, reminded Tost that he needed to keep the ball down against DiMaggio and Tostie said sure he would. As Miller ducked down into the dugout, he gave Patrick a smile by way of saying thanks. She nodded her head and smiled right back. These are the things that endear you to the owners, when you're managing the Hollywood Stars.

Warm-ups took a couple of minutes and then Tostie was ready. DiMaggio stepped into the box and, bingo, two pitches later DiMag slapped at a sinker that was low and away and Billie the Kid did it again, stealing another sure base hit from Dommy D, diving to get her glove on the ball as it took a happy hop right toward the glove, then spinning on her right knee as she was rising and pegging the ball to Lincoln Wright at second, who turned it over to make the play and send it on to Orestes Mino at first for a very tidy double-play and then they all went home—or to the Brown Derby, and later, more secretly, to the Culver Hotel—happy as they could be, just like it was planned.

So there they were at the Derby, even Billie the Kid was there, all of them sitting around three tables in the middle of the room, holding court. Yeah, there was another game tomorrow at 1 P.M., and they'd be facing the Rainiers' own young phenom, Bobby Feller, who was tearing up the league at age seventeen. He had a blazing fastball and a great earned-run-average, and it would be a tough one to win. But that was tomorrow and this was tonight, where Archie Miller and Eddie Bennett and Gene Autry and Billie the Kid and all the others were laughing and smoking and drinking whiskey sours or, in the Kid's case, a Grapette, as they dissected the ball game and very pointedly didn't talk about the wars in Europe or China, oceans away from Hollywood Stars' baseball and the movie business and the joy of winning baseball games.

Archie was at the head of one table, with Billie the Kid to his left and Quentin Williams, his pal and coach, to his right.

Miller raised his drink and said to the assembled multitude, "Here's to Billie, who dazzled us again. Nice job, kiddo."

"To Billie!" they shouted, and raised their glasses. The Kid was embarrassed and pleased to have Gary Cooper, for god's sake, and Eddie Bennett, who she'd been having vivid dreams about, and all the others, raise their glasses and shout her name. This had been going on for months now, this kind of praise and celebration of her talents, and she still wasn't used to it, still flushed every time these kinds of people, these famous celebrities, sang her praises.

She smiled though, a big grin in fact. Baseball was a great equalizer, and no matter all the amazing things that might happen to Billie for the rest of her life, she would always have the memory of these moments of praise for a teenager with a good glove and a strong arm.

Archie Miller was still grinning as he leaned over and said, quietly, "Fifty cent bonus for that play today, Billie. But we need some hitting from you, too, you know; so extra batting practice tomorrow morning at nine, right?"

"Right, sir," said Billie, as Miller added, "We got to get your average north of .200, Billie. So I've asked Coach Q here to take you under his wing for some extra work. We need you to slap out some base hits in the playoffs, okay?"

"Thanks, sir," said Billie, and thought to herself once again about the wonders of California baseball. Back in St. Louis, Coach Quentin would be somebody's chauffeur or, if he was lucky, playing Negro League baseball in front of Black fans on a run-down field. Here in Hollywood he and Lincoln Wright at second and Orestes Mino at first were all on the field coaching and playing in a spanking new ballpark in front of adoring fans, Black and white. Plus, Billie thought, Quent was a hell of a hitter, so maybe some of that would rub off onto Billie's bat. She needed to make some

contact.

Meanwhile, she knew she'd have to get out of there soon to catch the streetcar home, back to reality in Glendale. She'd tell her mom and pop about this and then get some sleep and look in the morning paper to see her name and grin, before getting right back on the streetcar to Gilmore Field in the morning. She was lucky tomorrow was a Saturday so her morning was open. Since school started, during the week she went to class at Glendale High School and then rushed out of class to take the waiting taxi all the way to Gilmore Field, courtesy of the ball club, since she was worth every penny. She'd had to miss a few away games, but otherwise it had all worked out okay.

She'd be facing that Feller kid tomorrow, and that would be something. Just to get the bat on the ball would be great, Billie was thinking. To have one drop in somewhere or find a hole in the infield would be even better. One can dream. Billie the Kid had come a long way since the tragedy in St. Louis.

By eight-thirty Billie had to go, and everyone said, "Goodbye! Goodbye Billie!" with grins on their faces because they'd been doing some drinking, sure, but also because she was a great kid and they all liked her and she was a dazzler at shortstop. She waved back to everyone, happy as she could be as she walked out the front door of the Brown Derby. Where Hedy Lamarr and her pal, the famous movie score composer Georg Antheil, were walking in. Years later Billie would still be talking about how she couldn't believe it when Hedy Lamarr stopped to say, "Wonderful play today at the baseball, young lady," and then introduced her to Georg Antheil, who was American by birth and European by choice, which made him a great admirer of baseball from a distance, the way expats were, sitting outside at a café in Paris, sipping on a cup of coffee and reading "The Crack of the Bat" poem in the *Herald Tribune* and getting all misty-eyed over the distant national pastime.

Those memories would be hers for the future. Right then, she blushed and stammered as Lamarr hugged her and Antheil gushed over that double-play ball and how Billie handled it, and then he and Hedy headed into the Derby as the kid walked to the corner of Hollywood and Vine, where the streetcar was ringing its bell as it approached the stop. Perfect timing. She'd be home in Glendale in a half hour or so.

* * *

The ride home was long enough to bring her back down to Earth a bit. Sure, she was a baseball star, but she was also a fifteen-year-old kid and lived at home with Mom and poor, sad Dad, who'd never gotten over the failure of that wing strut and the deaths that ensued.

Maybe his work on the Spruce Goose—he hated that name!—would finally give him some peace once they got the plane into the air. He'd be on that first test flight, she was sure. It was pretty much all he talked about, especially when they were in the Link Simulator together, father and daughter, pilot and copilot, so lost in the simulation that you'd think they were in the real Goose making it all happen. Together, the two of them would keep an eye on the oil pressure, the RPMs, the touchy verniers, the engine temperature, all of that, on all eight engines, bringing up the speed to seventy, eighty, ninety miles per hour and then easing it up off the chop of the harbor water and feeling it all, everything on Earth it seemed, smoothing out beneath them.

In those moments Billie forgot about baseball, forgot about the Twinks, forgot about the last game and the next one. Instead, she sank deeply into flying that wonderful, huge contraption that her father had helped build, just a big, blue box, really. It fooled the mind, with that ambient engine noise filling the cockpit, the bumps from the harbor chop, all the instrumentation exactly the same, even a painted harbor and sky out the cockpit window. She loved it.

The Link Simulators were famously painted blue on the outside, even this purpose-built one that was nearly twice the size of the regular simulators. That color was perfect, Billie thought. Sky blue, feeling real as she dealt with the yaw issue that still remained each time they took off, dealing with bringing the big boat off the water and making it an airplane. Sometimes, not often, her father would crack a smile after they'd taken the simulator for yet another spin around the harbor, taking off, heading out to sea, circling back and landing, time after time.

Her dad often let her have the controls when they flew in that simulator together, taking the Goose into the air and then bringing it down for a smooth landing. They'd even started doing some touch-and-gos, no easy task inside the new Long Beach breakwater, but after one or two moments of doubt the first few times she'd tried it, it had gone pretty well. She admitted to herself that she was getting pretty good at that.

No, he insisted the one time she'd voiced that confidence aloud, she was damn good at it, better than him. She had the right touch on the controls, the right feel, the right sense of things. And this, he said to his amazement, was in the simulator. God knows what she'd be like in the real thing. Even better, he said. He was sure of it. And he'd make sure she got a chance to prove it, too.

He loved that plane with all its superlatives: the largest airplane on Earth, greatest wingspan ever built, the largest hull, the most powerful engines. It was three times the size of the next largest seaplane. The Goose was built to hold seven hundred soldiers and their equipment and land anywhere there was a large enough body of water, from a bay to a lake to an ocean to a river.

He'd told Billie that no other nation had anything like it, but you could bet they'd like to—the Japanese, the Nazis, the Italians. They'd all love to get their hands on the designs that Robert Davis worked with all day long. But they wouldn't, of course. The most important plans, the critical plans before that first flight, were his and Howard Hughes's, and closely held by the two of them. They'd been huddled over drawing boards for this plane every day for the past six months, watching it grow from sketches to a prototype, which Billie guessed they'd be flying in soon. She hoped like hell that she'd at least be in a cockpit jump seat for that first flight.

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CHAPTER NINE NOVEMBER 1, 1941 ELASTICITY

Time and space were elastic for Eddie Bennett, and they had been that way since the first time she'd felt that strange dizziness and nausea one evening in her own timeline in 2037 while hiking at the bottom of the Niagara Gorge. She'd been admiring the views of the rock walls on both sides of the river as she'd approached the great whirlpool, camera in hand, hoping for a picture of the ospreys who'd returned to rebuild their nest, lay their eggs, and bring their chicks into this troubled world.

Standing there, doing nothing much in particular, she'd been staggered by the wave of nausea and the hot flash that came with it. She'd gone down to one knee and, seconds later, when it passed and she stood up, it was 1906 and there was an envelope pinned to an oak tree right in front of her, and when she opened it and found the key to an apartment in the Tesla Building, her new life and its travels and dangers and changes and importance had started.

That was five years ago in her timeline, and seven years of her life if you counted

the way time passed when she was on an assignment. Months went by and then, when the thing was done, she'd go back to home base and no time would have passed at all, her wounds disappeared, her hair color back to its basic brunette with some worrying gray here and there, and her life back to exactly where it had been when she left.

Her life back. That was rich. She'd been vaporized over the Wolf's Lair, that bomb ripping her into molecules in one small part of one second. And yet there she was, alive and well, in that closet in the Tesla Building, when she came to. She hadn't had to travel there, or ask to go back, or even thought to go home. But there she was.

There was much guessing to be done about who was really in charge of all this and how it had happened; but she knew the ropes, at least, if that's what you could call them. This particular rope started with the call that came through myBoop and led her once again to Wild Bill Donovan and to this Archie-who-was-Moe and didn't know it, and to the girl, the phenom, the Kid who was going to change things, but hadn't, not yet.

She hoped that would happen soon. There were always changes, some small and some large, between every assignment. But here, in this time and in this place, the changes seemed dizzying and uncontrollable. Why, for instance, had Archie Miller never realized his real background? And Billie the Kid was wonderful, but how, and when, was she going to fit into things? And, most importantly, why was the future of this particular timeline so opaque? It was the fall of 1941, for god's sake, and that was a momentous year. She should be able to see what was coming here and make the needed changes.

Was this a timeline where the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor or one where they went first to Midway and built from there? If it was Pearl, were the American aircraft carriers there in this line? If they were, this must be the line where the Japanese occupied California by the spring of 1942. What about the Wehrmacht and Russia? Was this the one where the Germans took Stalingrad and Leningrad and Moscow? Was this the one where Fortress Singapore fell to the Japanese or the one where the Brits held on with the help of Australia's Royal Navy? Did Douglas MacArthur die heroically defending the Bataan Peninsula in this one, or did he flee and leave his troops behind? Did Rommel take Cairo and control the Suez Canal in this one or not?

All these things were to come soon in this timeline, one way or the other, and this line was either in for that thousand-year Reich or for the better future of a defeated Axis and a cold war, not a hot one. That future existed, she'd been in it. Others, too, with Korea or not, or the loss at Dien Bien Phu of the peaceful exit, or victory or failure of the Long March. And the bombs, and the missiles. The Long Night or not. All of those and many more existed. So many questions, and she couldn't see the answers clearly, couldn't see them at all, really.

How would the hinges swing? She should know what to do to make things go the way they wanted, but she didn't, and it was an awful feeling, the not-knowing, the lack of control, the feeling that she might make a mistake and the repercussions could be shattering all up the line, here and elsewhere.

She'd been wrong on the last assignment, that was the truth of it, and all the dominoes must have fallen from there. They should never have trusted the Russians, and that had been her decision. It had cost them dearly, her and Moe Berg and pilot Jackie Cochran and her crew; all of them gone in an instant, when Little Man went off before it could be dropped over Rastenburg and the Wolf's Lair.

She realized now that the singular moment when the bomb went off and they all died, that moment changed everything. Could she get it back on track? She didn't see how. Could Archie who was Moe? She didn't see how that one would work either.

It was up to Billie the Kid to get it back on track, and it was up to Eddie Bennett and Archie Miller to help, however they could.

She didn't seem to fit the role, gawky Billie. She was sweet and fun to be with, and Eddie spent a lot of time with her and with Laura Ingalls, the chummy threesome that Hedda and Louella both had declared the Thing, the very charming Thing. How adorable they were, like mothers or older sisters with their sixteen-year-old ballplayer, showing her the town.

Adorable, but for what reason? Whatever it was that needed doing, it had to come soon, before December 7th, when the Japanese attack that she supposed was coming in this timeline would sink those carriers at Pearl and win the Pacific War in one telling blow.

* * *

She was lying atop Georg Gyssling's silk sheets as she thought it through. Perhaps all would become clear sometime soon? She hoped so, if for no other reason than she'd tired of this tawdry little affair with gorgeous Georg, who was every bit the self-centered oaf you'd think he'd be in bed. She'd put up with this for months now, ever since that first night on the Super Chief, when she'd allowed him into the inner sanctum, as it were, in her bedroom compartment, while his escort, Laura Ingalls, was off in her own cabin getting something from someone, maybe Archie Miller? Could be.

She'd wanted Archie for herself that first night, thinking it might wake him up as to who he really was; but duty called in the form of Georg and, yes, it had gone well enough. He was a man of appetite, and she had satisfied it. It wasn't anything to write home about that first time or any time since, but Eddie faked it and Georg, no surprise, didn't notice. He wasn't the worst lover she'd ever had, but he was in the running.

Her relationship with Georg was mutually beneficial. Georg thought she was his mole in the inner workings of the Jewish cabal that ran Hollywood. She gave him just enough to keep him hooked in that regard, while she, in turn, was learning the names and the dates she needed to stop the coming sabotage, even a coup d'état if they could pull it off, that Georg's friends had planned for the aircraft industry and major studios in Southern California.

And ambitious plans they were, for a wave of destruction that would try to take out the Long Beach Shipyard, where two destroyers were nearing completion and ready for sea trials, to Douglas Aircraft in Long Beach, North American Aviation in Inglewood, Hughes in Culver City, Northrop in El Segundo, McDonnell, Bartlett, Consolidated, and more. It was a long list. Hell, two-thirds of the country's wartime aircraft and a good number of destroyers and destroyer escorts were being built here in Southern California. The German-American Bund and the Silver Shirts and their other Nazi sympathizers planned to blow it all up if they could, forcing everyone to start over, saving precious time for the Reich and the Japanese to expand their holdings.

It was Eddie's job, her and Archie Miller and the others like Sylvia Comfort, to make sure that the night of destruction didn't happen, that history went the way it was supposed to in this timeline, with ships and planes, the Flying Fortresses, the P-38 Lightnings, those two destroyers and four escorts, the Douglas C-47s and Dauntless dive bombers and Invaders, and many more all rolling out of drydock or off the assembly lines and headed into battle.

Archie was doing his part, squiring Laura Ingalls around town. He'd told Eddie about all of it, about how he got Ingalls some ink in Louella Parsons and Hedda Hopper, and that helped him keep her happy in several ways. She was connected, the famous fascist aviatrix, all the way up to the sympathizers in the House and Senate

and their pals in the military. A coup was in the works, Ingalls had bragged to Archie after a particularly tumultuous session in his bed. She was passionate, that was for sure. And talkative. Members of the House and certain Senators were in on it and would support the new regime, which could be born peacefully or through necessary violence, whatever it might take.

The ship of state needed a firm man's hand on the tiller in these perilous times was their argument, not the weak touch of a woman, and especially not Eleanor Roosevelt, coarchitect of the New Deal and an interventionist, spoiling for a war the U.S. didn't need to fight. No, America needed someone who could make an honorable peace with Adolf and Benito and Hirohito. That someone, Ingalls said to Archie in the lull between too many drinks and a second round of lovemaking, would be Charles Lindbergh. He was the one to lead America to peace with the Axis. Archie had smiled and said sure thing, right as rain and all that, and then reported it to Eddie, who'd encoded it and sent it on to Wild Bill Donovan.

And Archie wasn't the only one keeping an eye on Ingalls. Billie the Kid told Eddie that Ingalls was taking turns with her dad and her on the Hercules simulator, and they talked all the time about how to fly that plane. Billie said she thought the plane was ready, it was just a matter of when.

Eddie had been laying the groundwork for this all summer, befriending Billie, chatting with her at the ball club's postgame get-togethers, flirting with her just the littlest bit to encourage her crush, bringing her to the studio to show her around on weekends, making sure that Jake Wise spent time with her and buttered her up.

It wasn't hard work; she was a very likeable kid, not too full of herself despite her talent. Down to Earth, a kid raised in the Midwest who always said please and thank you and couldn't bear to call her coaches or Hollywood friends by their first names. Miss Bennett kind of liked that. It was useful.

She had a job to do, did Eddie, lying on Georg's expansive bed in his three-story home that was also the German consulate. The third floor, Eddie had learned early on, was very private.

All she needed to know now was the date when it was all supposed to happen, the bombing and burning, the riots in the streets to keep the fire departments and police busy, the self-styled fascist patriots, well-armed, bringing down the aircraft industry by destroying the planes now built and sheltered in the hangars waiting for shipment, blowing up the factories that were making more. Burn it down. Blow it up. A coup in Washington D.C.? A private army here in California? How big was this going to be, this thing they were planning? And, most importantly, when was it going to take place?

The Mad Dog of Europe was going to premiere December 11th, and Jake Wise would make sure the studio pulled out all the stops for that, red carpet and floodlights and gowns and tuxedos and glamor all the way. It would infuriate the Nazis. Georg would be apoplectic. Eddie couldn't wait. This double-agent business was wearing on her, especially since it involved letting Georg have his way with her, or at least try.

She'd been giving him the benefit of the doubt the first few times; perhaps he was having trouble lately because he felt some guilt over his children, who were with his wife in Paris, to get away from the Russian bombs that were falling on Berlin. Or maybe he was worried about the content of the coded radiograms he received daily from Goebbels or, god knows, from Hitler himself. Or maybe he was worried about his job, worried that the recalcitrant studio heads like her own boss, Jacob Wise, and Harry Warner over at Warner Brothers and some others were all green lighting the projects that made the Fuhrer look bad.

Maybe that was it, but truth was that even when the news was good on the studio

side of things, even when his children's letters got to him and sounded cheerful; even then, Georg was a lousy lover.

She was lucky, she supposed, that she had Archie Miller the rest of the time, a ballplayer, sure, but not your typical jockstrap, full of himself. No, Archie was gentle and kind and wanted to make sure she was enjoying it as much as he was. If there was anyone who didn't find their peak when they made love on the weekends, it was Archie, and she loved him for that. She'd loved him, in fact, in all his different names and in all his different assignments, from the very first time they'd met in the first Heisenberg assignment to the last time they'd worked together before this, in New Mexico, with Fermi and Heisenberg and the rest. Sometimes she wondered what it might be like if they were in a time and a place where they could really find out about each other. And then she thought no, that wasn't who she was and, she knew, wasn't who he was either.

Right now, here in the silk sheets of Georg Gysling's bed, she sat up, pushed the sheets down so her breasts were available for Georg to see as he walked back from the phone call he'd taken in the sitting room, and said, "That was wonderful, Georg," in English. Georg didn't know she was fluent in German, and she wanted to keep it that way.

"Ah, my Liebling," he said, in English, "it is you that is wonderful."

She smiled at him, put her legs over the side of the bed, and said, "I have to get to work, darling. There's a meeting in an hour on *Mad Dog*, and I should be there."

That was a teaser that should have set him off about his plans to stop that damn movie. But it didn't. Instead, he sighed. "I haven't told you this, Liebling, but *Mad Dog of Europe* and all the others? I won't be trying very hard to stop any of them anymore."

She was putting on her bra and stopped mid-hook. "What's happened, Georg?"

He sat down in the plush leather armchair that was next to the bed. He was in his underwear, white cotton shorts and a simple cotton undershirt. He was a handsome man in his way, still physically fit though he carried too much weight. But he'd been an athlete in his day and you could tell. He'd even been a Winter Olympian for Germany at the Lake Placid Olympics, where he'd been the brakeman on the German bobsled team. They'd finished last, he always admitted with a laugh, but one is always proud of representing one's country, yes?

"You never heard this from me, Liebling."

She walked over to him and sat on his knee, her right arm around his shoulder. She leaned down and gave him a kiss, then ended that kiss with a smile and an, "of course."

"In strictest confidence, then, Liebling. I'm trying to help you. Barbarossa is not going well. The Wehrmacht is stalled short of Moscow, short of Leningrad, short of Stalingrad, and mud season has started, and then it will be Russian winter. Herr Hitler is working to persuade the Japanese to be more ambitious, more aggressive, opening up a front in the Pacific to keep the English and the Americans occupied elsewhere so he can move more of his armies to the East."

Eddie patted his knee. "We're not at war with Japan, dear Georg, at least not yet. And I thought the Japanese Empire was very aggressive indeed. The Chinese certainly think so, and the Manchurians, and the Koreans."

Georg took her hand from his knee, kissed it and sighed. "With many more to come, my dear Eddie," he said, "from Burma to Fortress Singapore."

She nodded. Why was he parting with this now?

"I have been ordered," he said, "to advise the German-American Bund and the Silver Shirts and the other patriots to be prepared to take action very soon in support of a very bold strike by the Japanese Empire."

"Bold strike?" she asked. What was he talking about? Japan attacking the West Coast of the United States? "Why are you telling me this, Georg?" she asked. Was he telling the truth? Was he using her as a conduit for misinformation?

"Telling you what, Liebling?" And he smiled at her, shrugged his shoulders. She knew he knew who and what she was and, no doubt, had known all along. Now, perhaps, he was trying to flip a coin and have it land on both sides at once, heads and tails.

"I will be recalled soon, Liebling, I'm quite sure. People you know will tell you why."

There it was then, out in the open. She half turned and leaned up a bit to kiss him. Then she stood, reached for her bra and put it on, slowly while Georg watched. When she finished with the bra, she reached down to the floor to find her nylons and slowly slipped each foot into them and pulled them up, all while Georg watched, transfixed. She did her heels next, still sitting on his left knee, getting one foot in and then the other. Her skirt and blouse were on the floor at the foot of the bed. She stepped into the skirt, very slowly, then put on the blouse and stood in front of Georg to button it up, one button at a time, slowly again, until it was done.

Georg took a deep breath. "I will miss you so much, Liebling."

"And I'll miss you terribly, Georg," she said and leaned over to give him a kiss.

He took another breath, put an odd smile on that round face of his. "There are plans in place," he said. "But the timing will change, depending on what we hear from our friends in Yokosuka. And when the time is right, it will upend everything, or at least that's their hope." He shrugged. "Me? I rather like things they way they are. I will dearly miss this place, and its people. And you, dear Eddie."

Dear Eddie finished buttoning her blouse, walked over to the full-length mirror to pat herself down, brush her hair, do a little primping on her makeup. "Your friends? They're not afraid of the police? Or the FBI? Or even the army?"

He started walking toward her. He reached into his pocket. That little Luger, she wondered? But no, he pulled out a small envelope. "Why would you say such a thing, Liebling? It's nothing like that at all. It is a parade they are organizing, that's all."

He handed her the envelope. She put it into her purse, came over to give him a kiss, a warm one. "All the best to you, Georg," she said.

"You'll have fond memories of this, Liebling?" he asked. "You'll remember what you've overheard from me when the time comes? I may need your help, you and your employers."

Ah, she thought. He'd be looking for protection in return. Did he want to stay in America once this all came down? Was that his plan?

"I so very much don't want to lose my friends here," he said. "Jake Wise, Harry Warner, even that rather evil Herman Mankiewicz."

"There are plans for them?" she asked as she finished at the mirror, pursed her lips, turned to smile at Georg. Assassinations? Is that what they planned for the Jewish owners and writers and directors? That would be a lot of killing, but that wouldn't surprise her.

He smiled back and nodded. She turned to leave. She had some messages to encode, and these should go to Eleanor, and copies to Donovan.

"*Auf wiedersehen, Liebling,*" he said. "*Tch hoffe dich wieder zu sehen.*"

"*Du wirst mich sehen, Georg, da bin ich mir sicher,*" she said as she walked out the door. Later, back in her own expansive apartment, she opened the envelope. In impeccable English, Georg was asking for political asylum. It was handwritten, with the same flourish she saw in the card that came with the roses he sent her way regularly.

She supposed he was thinking this was his get-out-of-jail-free card. She also supposed he might be right.

CHAPTER TEN
NOVEMBER 16, 1941
TAKING NOTES

Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto's Kido Butai fleet was assembling in the deep, sheltered waters of Hittokapu Bay in the Kurile Islands, north and east of the Japanese home islands. There were two heavy cruisers, two dozen submarines, two light cruisers, nine oilers, two battleships, eleven destroyers, and six aircraft carriers: the Akagi, the Kaga, the Soryu, the Hiryu, the Shokaku, and the Zuikaku. In the early dawn hours of December 7th, the Kido Butai will be two hundred miles from Oahu, and the carriers will turn into the wind and, in three separate waves, will launch 408 aircraft to attack Pearl Harbor. The Americans' aircraft carriers, four of them, are in port, easy targets. The battleships are there, too, all in a row, six of them. Destroy those ships, and the Americans will have to come to terms with the Empire over its control of the Pacific.

* * *

The Silver Legion of America, aka the Silver Shirts, had been meeting once a month in the large first-floor banquet hall of the Iron Building on Sunset Boulevard. When Sylvia Comfort first started working as their stenographer, back in June, the meetings had been in the Iron Building Annex, which held about sixty people. But as things had heated up, both in Europe's war and in the minds of the Shirts themselves, the crowds had grown, and they'd moved to the banquet hall, which had a stage at one end, and plenty of room elsewhere for several hundred to sit comfortably, or double that to stand and raise their fists in support of what Joe Allen had to say to them.

Joe's brother Henry was officially the president of the organization, but he wasn't a great speaker. Joe, on the other hand, could really get them going, like he was doing here tonight, preaching to the choir about staying out of Europe's war, letting Hitler unite Europe as a white, Christian nation, just like America. Dressed in his silver shirt, blue tie, blue corduroy pants and brown leather leggings, he was the very picture of the Aryan future for America if only the government would listen to what true Americans wanted for their country.

"We are Hitler's friends and his allies!" he said to the crowd, most of them dressed the same way, a brotherhood of real men willing to take up arms and do what must be done if it came to that, to claim their version of America.

"We will fight to preserve our culture, the most successful culture on Earth, against the communists, the Blacks, the Mexicans, and the Jews! We will fight for a white, proud Christian nation! We will win!" he said and then raised his fist high to the acclaim of the hundreds in the great hall, who raised their fists in support. True Americans, all.

Offstage left, Sylvia Comfort sat in a wooden chair at a small table, an open notepad in front of her as she took down the speech in shorthand. She had the written speech in front of her, but she always took shorthand because Joe often wandered away from his prepared speech at these gatherings. Spurred on by the frenzy of the crowd, their righteous indignation, their hate for Jews and the Communists who were ruining their America, they would chant and scream and raise their fists time and time again, and Joe Allen liked that, he fed off it, and it led him into talk that might get him in trouble. Sylvia took down every word.

This was a public meeting. The press was here, scribbling down notes and ready to file their stories about the rise of the Silver Shirts. The police were here, too, to keep

the peace, but some also nodded their heads in agreement as they listened to Joe Allen.

"We are ready to fight for our America!" Joe yelled out to his followers. He pounded the podium, a little trick he'd learned over the summer, picking it up from some movie reels of Adolf and Benito. It worked here, too. "We will fight! We will take arms!"

The crowd went crazy. Sylvia kept taking shorthand.

The following Saturday, November 22nd, Joe Allen took Sylvia with him as he drove to a meeting at the Murphy Ranch, an isolated spot in the hills, a good twelve miles or more away from Culver City, the last two miles of the drive on a dirt road that wound through a couple of shallow valleys before it got to the ranch and the monthly meeting of the General Council for Southern California.

Sylvia was well liked there, and why shouldn't she be? She was white, with plenty of Aryan blood, she was attractive, she was quiet as a mouse but sympathetic to the cause, she was a loyal American patriot, and she was one hell of a stenographer. Joe had Henry hire her after one short interview.

These were the real meetings, these get-togethers at the ranch. There would usually be a dozen or more people there, the movers and shakers from the Silver Shirts and the German-American Bund, the Friends of New Germany, the Friends of Progress and the like.

Georg Gyssling ran the meetings and always had his personal physician, the fervent Nazi, Dr. Konrad Burchardi, along. Hans Diebel from the Bund was there, too. The word was that he was a Gestapo agent, so everyone was very polite with him. Fran Ferez was there as a pal of Georg. Ferez was the distributor of pro-Nazi films all over the country. And then there was Laura Ingalls, the famous aviatrix often seen with Archie Miller, the manager of the Hollywood Stars. She was the only woman in the group. There were big plans for her. She might be Miller's girl, but she always came with Georg Gyssling to the meetings, and the natural assumption was they had their own thing going, despite what she did with Miller.

It had been a long summer of planning for this chummy gathering, from planting sympathizers in the factories and hangars where the planes were stored or were being built, to amassing their own armaments, the mortars and machine guns, the small arms for all concerned. Enough explosives to bring down an entire industry. Another month, perhaps two, and they'd be ready.

So it was with confidence that on this fine mid-September Saturday they were all talking of an independent, strong and secure and fascist California. Maybe, if the other elements around the country were ready to take action, it would be a national uprising, the longed-for coup d'état.

Robert Pape, the former Wehrmacht captain and the head of the Friends of Germany, had a lot of the details and started listing them, which unit would handle which factory, which warehouse, which airplane hangar. It would all be ready by December 1st, he said. Sooner if the last few shipments of arms showed up in the Port of Long Beach earlier than expected.

And the *pièce de résistance*? Georg Gyssling asked that question, and then reached over to pat the hand of Laura Ingalls, who said, "We are trained and ready to liberate the Hughes Hercules and strike a blow for global fascism and support for the Fuhrer. That's so, isn't it, Robert?"

A quiet voice spoke from the far end of the table. Robert Davis, who worked at Hughes Aircraft, the father of the famous phenom shortstop Billie the Kid Davis, one of Howard Hughes' top designers, nodded his head and said, "The Hercules should be ready to fly by mid-November. They're moving the hull and the wings separately from Culver City to a drydock at Terminal Island in Long Beach, where they'll assemble it

all. Once that's done, a week or two of checking things, and she'll be ready for her first trials, taxiing around the harbor. If that goes well, she'll fly by November."

"Perfect," said Georg Gyssling. And then he looked at Pape. "They will be ready in Mexico?"

Pape nodded. The plan was to steal the Goose with Laura Ingalls in the pilot seat, fly it down to La Paz, Mexico, on the Gulf of California, and land it in that calm bay. A freighter would be waiting there, the *L'Orient*, out of Free France so technically neutral, and they'd take off the wings and empennage, and get them and the fuselage of the plane packed away in the freighter and get it to Occupied France, where Hermann Göring and his Luftwaffe friends would reassemble it, put a swastika on it, and build a hundred more of them, sharing their new toy with Benito, for the Med, and the Japanese Empire, for that wide Pacific.

Sylvia got all this down. The names, the plans, the dates. She'd transcribe it all into the usual typewritten notes for Joe and Henry and for Georg Gyssling, too. The Germans loved to keep records of everything.

Oh, and in a day or two her mother, Grace, would have her usual lunch with Brenda Haase at Musso & Frank. They met there every Monday to reminisce, the two old college roommates. Grace would have an envelope in her purse. That envelope would be in Brenda's purse when lunch came to an end. From there it would go to Brennie's friend Leon Lewis, and from there to Wild Bill Donovan and then to Eleanor herself. Then, in a nifty loop, it would come back to Eddie Bennett and Archie Miller, with instructions on what to do about these plans.

* * *

Aloysius Schmidt sat in his Ford Coupe, smoked another cigarette, and watched Grace Comfort and Brenda Haase eat their salads in the outdoor seating at Frank & Musso. This was his fourth Tuesday in a row to keep an eye on these two. He was pretty sure there'd be a handoff at some point, and he meant to see it and then do something about it.

It all started with that woman, Eddie Bennett, who left him for dead in that old switcher in Buffalo. That pissed him off, so on his own coin he followed her out to Los Angeles, aiming to get even, one way or another. And then it got complicated when Georg Gyssling wondered what the hell Aloysius was doing out here and what did he find out about Jacob Wise and that meeting with Bill Donovan?

Nothing, he had to tell Gyssling. I found out nothing. I followed this woman instead, and she damn near killed me. I was lucky to escape.

Sure, said Gyssling, and then added, "Stay away from her, Aloysius, you'll just screw that up, too. I have plans for her. Here, I have an assignment for you, keep an eye on Brenda Haase, a Jew married to a Jew who's the lawyer for Jacob Wise, another Jew who's running his own studio."

It felt like make-work, tailing this Haase woman. Gyssling had shunted him onto a side track, for sure. But the Haase woman led him to Grace Comfort, who led him to her daughter, Sylvia Comfort, both of them great friends with the Jewish cabal that ran Hollywood and then, voila!, Sylvia was hired to be the stenographer for the Silver Shirts and even the General Council for Southern California, and now, here he was, Aloysius Schmidt, doing some important work, hoping still for that chance to get even with the Eddie Bennett woman. He owed her a good beating, if nothing else.

It was toward the end of the lunch, the two women laughing and smiling and drinking iced tea, for Christ's sake, that Grace set an envelope on the table and then turned away to talk to friends at the table behind them while Brenda set her iced tea down and picked up the envelope and slipped it into an inside pocket on that very fashionable torero jacket that she'd kept on in this cool weather.

This was it, then, for sure. He watched and waited as they left cash on the table and got up, hugged, and air kissed, and then Grace went one way and Brenda another. Her car was parallel parked at the curb. When she came around and opened her door, a black Ford Coupe, its license plate covered in dirt and road grime, came out of nowhere to slam into the open door and hit Brenda Haase and sent her tumbling, head first, into the side of her car and then rebounding to land on the pavement, the back of her head hitting it hard.

The driver went on for ten yards and stopped, got out, ran back to see how badly she'd been hurt, checking her torso like he knew what he was doing. She lay still, blood already pooling on the pavement beneath her head. He yelled for someone to call for an ambulance as a crowd gathered, gawking at the sight. There was a doctor right there having lunch and he took over, feeling for a pulse and listening to her breathe. In the hubbub, no one noticed the driver who'd hit her leave, an envelope in his hand that made its way to his coat pocket as he walked away, got to his Ford to get it out of the way of traffic and make room for the ambulance, and simply drove off. He'd walked right by Grace Comfort, who'd come back to hold her unconscious friend's hand as they all heard, not far away, the wail of an ambulance siren.

It was weeks of emotional worry and sorrow before it occurred to Grace to wonder what happened to that envelope as she visited Brenda in St. Vincent's Hospital and held her friend's hand for the last time. She finally asked Sylvia to jot it all down again, and then Grace herself planned to deliver it to Leon Lewis at the funeral service on December 10th.

* * *

CHAPTER ELEVEN
NOVEMBER 30th, 1941
TOAST OF THE TOWN

It was cocktail hour and Archie Miller's Hollywood Stars had won the day's playoff game to bring things even at two wins each for the Pacific Coast League Championship. So he was the toast of the town, or at least the toast of the owners, as they all sat around a few big tables at the Brown Derby, eating Cobb salads and Steak Diane and drinking whiskey sours and celebrating the victory. The Pacific Coast League had that good autumn weather so the season ran late anyway, and with the past two weeks of winter rains coming a little early this year, it'd been tough to get the games in, especially up in Seattle, where the Rainiers split the first two under bad, let's face it, conditions. They and the Twinks both gladly got on the Coast Starlight train and headed south to the supposed Southern California sunshine to play the next three. If the Stars could win them all, the championship would be theirs and they wouldn't have to go back to Seattle till next spring. That's if they would have a season at all in 1942. War was on the horizon, most people thought. You'd have to wonder how long American could stay out of it.

Bing Crosby left the restaurant after being his gracious self for a good hour or so; but Barbara Stanwyck still held court, along with Gail Patrick and her hubby Bob Cobb, who owned the restaurant and liked to celebrate with the celebrities and the ballplayers. Hedy Lamarr and Eddie Bennett were still there, too. Bennett was said to be wooing Hedy for the lead in *Escape from Vienna*, an Anschluss movie that was anti-Hitler as it could be. They were all there as either part owners of the baseball team or great pals of the manager, good old Archie Miller, who was happy enough with the afternoon's 6-3 win over the Rainiers.

Two tables were full of ballplayers, Orestes Minoso, Lincoln Wright, Tommy

Thompson, Lou Tost, Eddie Silber, Boots Babich, Babe Herman, Vince Monzo, Joe Hoover, and in the middle of that gang, Billie the Kid Davis herself, and had earned the camaraderie, the protection even, of these teammates. Nobody messed with Billie the Kid.

Archie, their skipper, was at the front table, looking out over the happy owners at the several nearby tables. Next to him was Laura Ingalls, who'd been Archie's pretty much constant companion since July. When she wasn't off flying cross-country or doing acrobatics or dropping Nazi flyers over Washington, D.C. or the Chicago Loop or, just yesterday, downtown Los Angeles, she was hanging onto Archie's arm, giving him kisses on the cheek, putting her arm over his shoulders, as possessive as she could be.

At the next table over from Archie, looking fat and happy, was Georg Gysling, Archie's pal, who'd be angry that Archie stole Ingalls from him if he hadn't stolen Eddie Bennett from Archie in return. She was next to Georg and associate producer at Wise Studios and in charge of *The Mad Dog of Europe*, which would premiere in a couple of days, so yes, there were some ironies there. Georg didn't seem worried about that. Frankly, there was some mixing and matching at first with these four, but it was all settled now. They all met for the first time on the Super Chief on the way out to Tinsel Town back in April. Georg held up his drink—a Scotch, neat, would be Archie's guess—and said “*Prost!*” and all of the luminaries heard that and held up their drinks and echoed the sentiment.

Prost, indeed. They weren't talking about it right then, but it would be worth noting that on this same day that Archie's baseball team won its game against the Seattle Rainiers in languid California, the Germans required all the Jews in Germany and the Occupied countries to wear yellow stars and the Wehrmacht advanced on Sevastopol and Moscow while a U-boat sank the Royal Navy's *Ark Royal* aircraft carrier. At Auschwitz they'd been using poison gas for a month now, and at Kiev a couple of weeks earlier the Nazis slaughtered thirty-four thousand Jews. Within a couple of months, the Germans would formalize the Final Solution. But here in Hollywood they were saying “*Prost!*” because a baseball team won a playoff game.

Archie knew all this, even as he stood up to receive the accolades. He'd known for a few months about alternate timelines and different realities, some of which he'd been to, most of which he hadn't. He didn't remember anything at all from any of that. But Eddie Bennett kept telling him about these things, hoping to wake him up to remember his own past; and even if he couldn't recall who he'd been elsewhere, he was a believer in who he was there, and who she was, too. He trusted her. Hell, he loved her, even as he was dating Laura Ingalls for the sake of the assignment and as a way to keep Hedda Hopper and Louella Parsons and their two million readers happy.

One timeline over, Eddie told him, the Germans started bombing neutral Dublin for whatever the hell reason they conjured up. In another timeline in the other direction he was with Eddie in Zurich to assassinate Werner Heisenberg, the head of the German superbomb program. In yet another, two over from that one, he and Heisenberg were here in California with Eddie to fight against the Japanese who'd taken over Northern California and wanted to take over Southern California, too.

He had no recollection of any of these. Eddie said they'd both died in that attempt to drop a superbomb on Hitler's head. Things had gone south on them, the bomb had gone off before it ever left the bomb bay doors. A moment's white light and then vaporized, Eddie said, the both of them.

He didn't remember that one, either. Perhaps that was a mercy.

Eddie was looking at him. He smiled at her. She was fabulous in bed, and there was something more, a lot more, than just sex involved. They were seeing each other on

the sly, not wanting to piss off Gyssling or Ingalls. That was breaking the rules, and they both knew it, but the risk was worth it, at least to Archie. Eddie said she'd loved him, that other him, and that the other him had said that he'd loved her. He could believe it. And even as he had that thought, Laura Ingalls put her hand on his knee under the table and squeezed, then moved it up toward his crotch. Ownership, that was her flight plan. Archie was all right with that because he had to be, and a lot of lives depended on it, so he turned to look at her and smile as she squeezed again.

Georg Gyssling hadn't sat back down since the last toast, so they were all waiting for what was next. He was at the center of things. One had to pay attention, always, to what Georg Gyssling had to say. Did he work for the Gestapo or the Wehrmacht's own security force, the Abwehr? You'd have to think yes, he did, for one or the other or, god knows, for both. Were they at work here, in Hollywood? Did the Abwehr support the Bund and the Silver Shirts and all those hoodlums? Was the Gestapo after all the Jews who had found success in Hollywood? What could those Gestapo thugs do here, after all?

Well, there was always murder. Did all these Hollywood types realize that? Most of them did, you'd think. For all his bonhomie Gyssling was a thorn in their side, especially for the Jewish studio heads. Only a few, Warner Brothers and Wise Studios, for example, had been willing to risk the wrath of Gyssling. Would there be a price to pay for that? A deadly price?

And what was Gyssling's interest in Archie Miller? Friendship, maybe? Entry to all those politicians and celebrities who loved baseball and their winning team, perhaps? Yes, maybe, to both of those. But Archie and Eddie, who would be in each other's arms later that night after she exited from Gyssling and Archie disentangled himself from Laura Ingalls, had another idea. Georg Gyssling was making friends, because he didn't want to go back when Berlin would recall him after Congress finally declared war; he wanted to stay in L.A. He liked it there. Probably wanted to get the wife and kids there, too. He thought Archie and Eddie could help him do that.

You know what? There just might've been something to that. Let's say there were some scheduling issues that Georg might've wanted to talk about, or some particular names in the FBI, or the LAPD, or the mayor's office, or even better, in Washington, D.C.

Now that would earn some help getting the family out of Paris, where he'd already sent them to dodge the bombings in Berlin. The kids would love the beaches and the sunshine, and Georg, a grateful government might find you gainful employment, too. Could be. Maybe.

* * *

CHAPTER TWELVE
DECEMBER 7, 1941
THE SPRUCE GOOSE

It was five in the morning on December 7th, 1941, and the Silver Shirts and the German-American Bund and the Legion of Decency and America Firsters had all settled their differences and had their assignments. Some were attacking the Jewish studios, with arson in mind, some were breaking into the homes of Jewish owners and directors and writers and actors, with murder in mind. They planned to bring Hollywood to a halt.

Meanwhile, two hundred and thirty miles north of the Hawaiian Islands, the pilots of the Imperial Japanese Navy were in their ready rooms getting the final details of their attack on the American fleet. In the first wave of the attack, the three hundred and fifty planes would concentrate on the battleships and the aircraft carriers. These

ships were the heart of the Americans' Pacific fleet. Only four of the aircraft carriers were in port, but they must be sunk. Seven of the battleships were in port, and they, too, must be sent to the bottom.

The pilots in that first wave on all six of the Japanese aircraft carriers were looking at the huge map in the front of the room, where they could see the Americans' *Lexington*, the *Ranger*, the *Yorktown*, the *Hornet*. They all were in Pearl Harbor, all in the darkness that came with two o'clock in the morning in Oahu. On the other side of Ford Island lay Battleship Row, where *California*, *Maryland*, *Oklahoma*, *Tennessee*, *West Virginia*, *Arizona*, and *Nevada* were all in port, cuddled up two by two in the harbor. Inviting targets, all of them.

It would take the planes in that first wave nearly two hours to reach Pearl Harbor. The planes started taking off from the carriers at six A.M., gathered strength and formed up, and then flew south and east to Oahu, the faster Zeros and other fighters flying patiently for the slower dive-bombers and torpedo bombers until they reached Oahu and Pearl Harbor. In the calm Sunday morning sunshine, their targets clear in the harbor, they would attack, sinking the American fleet, all of the battleships sunk or badly damaged, all four of the carriers settling into the sandy bottom, multiple torpedoes having done their job below the waterline while the dive-bombers battered the flight decks above. The surprise attack would be a complete success.

A second wave would follow, and a third, and then the islands would be occupied; Maui, Lanai, Molokai, Kauai, Kahoolawe, Niihau, and the big island. The plan was to isolate the American Navy on Oahu and starve the island of food, ships, planes. No assistance would come to relieve the siege, and in three weeks the Navy would surrender Oahu to the Empire of Japan. At about the same time, the British Empire's Fortress Singapore would surrender, and the Pacific would belong to Japan for as long as America had to focus on the fascists in Europe.

* * *

Others, farther afield, were setting explosive charges against the sidewalls of the oil storage tanks that dotted the coast and into the interior of California, from Long Beach to San Diego. And the final group, a half-dozen at each factory, were planning to destroy some six hundred warplanes either built and on the tarmac or nearly built and in the factories in Culver City and Anaheim and Santa Barbara and Pasadena.

America First was in charge of placing the incendiary charges on the oil storage tanks in Long Beach and Santa Monica. When those charges went off, and the oil tanks with them, it would light up the night sky all over Southern California and lead to the revolution that America First was looking for. All white and all right, America First!

And it was the Silver Shirts there in Long Beach Harbor, moving as stealthily as they could down the side road that led to Pier E in Long Beach and the dry docks where the Hughes H-4 Hercules flying boat's main fuselage, the largest such fuselage on Earth, floated on the water of the central dry dock, flooded to sea level, with the pontoons hung down from each wing floating in the water of their own smaller dry docks, one on each side of the big Goose.

There was a cavernous hangar over the Goose, but no front on that hangar so the Goose could slip right out of those dry docks as soon as the front gates were opened to the harbor. Men were working on that as the pilot and copilot, Laura Ingalls, the famous aviatrix and admirer of Adolf Hitler, and Robert Davis, engineer, designer and test pilot for Hughes Aircraft, climbed up the ladder from the hangar floor, first stepping over the two feet of water between the side wall of the dry dock and the body of the Goose to reach the ladder.

Ingalls went first, nimbly reaching across to put her right foot on the rung and her

hands on the thin wooden rails. And there she went, up the side of the boat, because that's what the Goose was at that moment, a winged boat.

Davis went next, less nimble but solid enough, and then he was following Ingalls up and up, to the open hatch, the door swung wide against the side of the boat. Davis, by the way, was the father of Billie the Kid Davis, teen-age wunderkind short-stop of the Hollywood Stars baseball club, currently one win away from winning the Pacific Coast League Championship. Where was Billie herself? Home in bed, perhaps? The biggest game of her life would be tomorrow.

Once inside the plane, Ingalls and Davis had more climbing to do, up a smaller ladder that led from the belly of this huge best up to the cockpit, which sat six but for this little escapade would hold just two.

All this took place on schedule. There wasn't any trouble. A couple of dozen silver-shirted and well-armed patriots, loyal to the cause, were outside the hangar defending it from any threats from Hughes Security, or the Long Beach police force, or the FBI; but they weren't really needed. There were plenty of people on the inside, people who thought the Silver Shirts and the German-American Bund and America First were just what the country needed. Some of those people worked for Hughes Aircraft, some of them for the Long Beach cops, some of them, a few, for the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

The plane was fueled up and ready to go. There were people from Hughes Aircraft who designed and built this gigantic plane who were loyal to the higher cause of a strong America, one they wanted to see allied with a strong and united Europe led by the Third Reich, for the good of all white European mankind. They'd spent the last few hours getting the plane ready for the flight south to the Sea of California where Ernst Heinkel's engineers were set to disassemble the Hercules, put it aboard the neutral Spanish freighter, *El Corazon*, and go with it on the long, careful voyage to Barcelona, and from there the train north through Free France and Occupied France and, ultimately, to the Heinkel factory in Rostock, with its excellent Baltic harbor where, with good engineering, a whole fleet of these planes could be built.

* * *

Laura Ingalls and Robert Davis didn't need to say much to each other. They ran an abbreviated checklist, and then Ingalls started firing up the four R-4360 Wasp Majors engines to port and the four to starboard. She and Davis and Billie the Kid, Robert's daughter, had taken the Goose out for a takeoff and landing a dozen times or more: all of those in the Link Simulator back in Culver City. Laura crashed it on takeoff the first two times, and she was a fabulous pilot, one who had literally flown around the world. That she crashed the Goose in those simulations said something about the special skills needed to handle eight engines in the heaviest, largest airplane ever built. On the third try she found the sweet spot and she'd been solid since.

Robert Davis was a test pilot and a damn good one. He'd been in the simulator with her, or with his daughter Billie, or by himself, every single day since it arrived two months ago. He never crashed it, or came close, and he knew every inch of the actual plane, too. Knew them long before the simulator ever showed up. He and Howard Hughes, this was their baby. He was now on this first flight because that was the price he exacted for getting Ingalls into the Link Simulator and getting her familiar with the Goose.

Now the moment was about here. He looked out the cockpit window to see the gray light of dawn casting gray shadows on the big ships and smaller boats, on the distant breakwater, on the buildings to port and the open fields to starboard. He could see the men there, most of them holding rifles, all them in those silver shirts and blue corduroy pants with those leather leggings. Jesus. He'd been trying hard to not know what this was all about; but the whole early morning excitement made it clear

that he was on the wrong side of the fence. Still, he promised himself he would do anything, anything at all, to be on the first flight of the Hercules. St. Louis, and that glider, were very much on his mind as he reported to Ingalls, engine by engine, that things looked good as the Goose slowly moved out of the dry dock and into the harbor.

He was sick to his stomach, was Robert Davis, as Ingalls ran the engines up a bit, and then brought them back to idle. Engines two, five, and seven wouldn't settle down and Robert got up out of the copilot's seat and hopped into the flight engineer's seat with all those dials in front of him and reset the vernier throttles. You weren't supposed to have to do this manually, but now it was done anyway and the engines settled down, though even at idle they all made quite a roar.

And now he was truly complicit in this madness. They'd hang him or give him the electric chair or he'd spend the rest of his life in Sing Sing or Alcatraz. But the Goose? The Goose wanted to fly.

They were in the harbor proper then and there was a long stretch of open water in front of them, a mile or more of calm runway there on the inside of the breakwater, and it was into the wind, too. Perfect. Ingalls pushed the throttles up and the engines roared and off they moved, sluggish and bumpy at first, and then smoother as they got up to fifty, then sixty, then seventy miles per hour. The simulator had tried to replicate the bumpiness, but didn't come close. It felt like the tail and the wings might tear right off. Then the hull rose off the water and then slapped quietly down as the top edge of a swell only nicked the bottom of the hull. Eighty and only a few bumps then. Ninety and Ingalls pulled back on the stick and up rose the Hercules H-4, the Spruce Goose, no longer a boat, but an airplane, a huge, magnificent airplane.

They rose, and rose higher, fifty feet, a hundred, two hundred, and then steadily upward to five hundred feet and then one thousand feet before Ingalls began a slow bank left and headed out to sea where she'd bank left again and aim down the coast, heading toward Mexico. There were scattered clouds around them, one of them dark with rain.

Robert Davis looked out the cockpit windows ahead and to his right and saw smoke rising from half a dozen sites inland. Fires burning and there, at the foot of the Hollywood Hills, he saw a huge burst of flame and smoke. No airfield there, no factory, just studios. What the hell?

Laura Ingalls saw the distant explosions. "That's Wise Studios going up in smoke to the right, Robert," she said, "and Warner Brothers off to the left. More will go up shortly."

"Really?" was all he could muster by way of response.

"Really," said Ingalls. "The Jews will be dead soon, if they're not already."

"Dead? I don't understand," said Robert. "Why? How?"

Ingalls laughed. "We're breaking their hold on America, Robert. We're cutting off the head of the snake, right here in California."

Robert Davis looked at her, stunned. He'd been blind, so blind, as he realized he was on the wrong side of history. He thought he and Ingalls were stealing the Hercules to save it from destruction by bureaucrats in the new Pentagon, by politicians with no vision, by the penny-pinchers who were still building old biplanes for a new air war that might break out at any minute, a war that would render Hitler's U-boats and Japan's submarines useless against giant planes with a three-thousand-mile range that soared overhead with shiploads of soldiers and equipment and supplies.

And then this. This awful truth that he had sold his soul to the devil and gotten almost nothing for it in return. Even his honor was gone.

The Goose was looking west now, out to the open ocean. There was a submarine right there, on the surface, the rising sun on the conning tower. A half dozen men

were up there, the sun glinting off their binoculars as a torpedo leapt from the number one tube and headed inland, no doubt toward those destroyers. Another torpedo whooshed out of the tube, and then men were scrambling onto the deck of the submarine and loading up the deck gun. The gun fired and missed, who knows where in hell the shell went, back into the harbor somewhere. An aft machine gun was manned then, too, and Robert Davis saw the bright flashes from the muzzle as it fired, ratatatatat, a few tracers visible heading right for them.

Ingalls cursed as she tugged at the controls. "They signed that fucking tripartite pact," she said. "They're our fucking allies. Why are they firing at us?"

Robert Davis felt a wave of nausea and a hot flash that stunned him for a second. He closed his eyes in pain as they flew into that dark rain cloud for cover and suddenly blasts of rain hit the Perspex of the cockpit windshield. Ingalls was trying to hide in here, but they both heard bullets from that machine gun peppering the fuselage on the right side, starting back behind the cockpit and marching forward. There was a ripping sound as the fabric tore with each bullet.

Robert very much didn't want to be in the Hercules as the last few shots hit the right side cockpit window, one of them shattering the glass and then traveling right behind Robert's head, tumbling as it found the neck of Laura Ingalls and she said, quietly, "Oh," and then slumped over the controls. Dead? Maybe.

The rain came pouring in through his shattered side window as Robert grabbed the yoke and took them into a left turn and dive, getting out of the way of that machine gunner. It would work, he was sure of it, and then his vision went gray for a second or two, no more, and when it cleared he was in the Link Simulator, still pushing the yoke down and to the left. They were surrounded by the light gray of the cardboard that covered all the windows in the cockpit, and when he saw that he eased back, straightened things out, and looked around. The simulator. What the hell? Next to him, Laura Ingalls, alive and well, gave a little "Whoeee, Robert, that was some maneuver! Let me try that, all right?"

She didn't remember anything. It was just another fun day at the controls in the simulator. Not a bullet hole in sight. No shattered Perspex from that side window. "Sure," he said, "have fun, and then bring it in for a landing?"

"Will do!" she said, and jerked the yoke left and pushed it forward and the simulator on all his hydraulics reacted by angling left and letting the front dip a good foot or so. Some fun.

* * *

CHAPTER THIRTEEN DECEMBER 7, 1941 THE BLUE BOX

On the morning of December 7th, Billie the Kid Davis and Eddie Bennett, associate producer at Wise Studios, used Billie's key to open the side door on Hanger D of Hughes Field in Culver City. They planned to go for a ride, the two of them, in the Link Simulator, aka the Blue Box, that sat in the middle of the hangar floor, taking up a tiny part of the space that the H-4 Hercules itself took up until a few weeks ago when it was moved to Long Beach for the long-awaited maiden voyage, and first flight, of the seaplane.

The beautiful and brilliant Eddie had been Billie's major crush all season long, from tryouts in June to here, now, another Saturday in December. In the car on the way there, Eddie did the driving and Billie sat shotgun. Being alone with Eddie in that confined space was almost more than Billie could bear. The smell of Eddie, the

way she smiled, those soft dark curls of her hair, those perfect hands on the steering wheel, nails polished. Billie had it bad for Eddie Bennett.

This had been going on for months now, this flirtation between Eddie, whose age we're not sure of but she's no damn teenager, and the gawky, insecure, absolutely brilliant shortstop, Billie the Kid Davis. Eddie had been kind about all the nervous laughs, the wide eyes, the cautious touch now and then as they walked down the street together, the celebratory hugs at the Brown Derby after a win at Gilmore Field. She was a sweet, sweet kid, was Billie, and while Eddie wasn't interested in anything inappropriate with Billie, she did want to play nice and not break the heart of the PCL's Rookie of the Year.

It wasn't just that Eddie cared for Billie and didn't want to hurt her. Sure, that was part of it. But the main reason, the big reason, for all the attention Eddie had paid to Billie, had nothing to do with schoolgirl crushes. Eddie was getting to know Billie, her moods and her talents and her weaknesses and her courage, and all of that was about to come into play, because Billie the Kid Davis was the inflection point, the hinge, the pivot, call it what you will. Billie could open doors she didn't know existed, could change things and move them around, could alter her own reality and everyone else's while she was at it. She was powerful; she was very, very powerful, and she didn't know it. Not yet. What Eddie heard, what she saw, last week with Billie convinced her at last.

That was a day off for the Stars, and Eddie and Billie had been sitting at a sidewalk table in Café Noir, watching the fascists march right down Hollywood Boulevard. "America First!" they were chanting, hundreds of them, carrying placards and wearing their uniforms, the Firsters and the Silver Shirts and the Bund bullies and the rest. "No foreign wars!" they chanted, and "Jews out!" they chanted, and "America First! America First!"

Billie was telling Eddie about the last march she'd seen, about how they'd tried to kill that deli owner and his wife, and they'd almost done it. How awful it had been to see that happen. How if that Allen guy and his brother, the ones swinging those baseball bats, hadn't dropped their bats for no reason at all, they would have killed the couple that owned that deli and had come out to protect it. Such anger! Billie was sickened and dizzy by what she was seeing, she told Eddie. She'd closed her eyes to stop the nausea and the dizziness, and when she opened them back up the Allen brothers had dropped their bats and walked away, and the mob had lost its energy.

"Just like that!" said Billie, snapping her fingers, "it was all different. Thank god."

Eddie had smiled, reached over to pat Billie's hand and say, "They were lucky you were there, Billie."

"But I didn't have anything to do with it, Miss Bennett. I was just watching."

"I know," said Eddie, still patting that hand. "I know." And she did know, for sure now.

* * *

Billie thought she'd be showing off her flying skills in the simulator. She'd do about anything to impress Eddie Bennett, so when Eddie asked her last night after the game if they could fly a simulation this morning, she sure said yes.

Eddie hoped that this would be the moment when the inflection point took hold and Billie worked some kind of miracle. She feared they needed it. From what she'd heard from Georg and Archie this morning, the Big Day had arrived and no one was ready for it. All that good spycraft gone to waste, the whole thing a mess. Unless Billie . . .

First things first, they were walking toward to the blue box when a voice from behind said, "That's far enough, ladies. Stop right there. And turn around."

They stopped. They turned, and damned if it wasn't Aloysius Schmidt, holding a Luger, for Christ's sake, in his right hand, pointed their way. Eddie forced a nice smile. "Aloysius, nice to see you again. I see your craft has improved."

"I've been tailing you for weeks, Eddie Bennett," he said with a grim smile, "and you never figured it out."

"You got me," she said. "Now what are you going to do with me? Take me to your boss?" That, thought Eddie, would be perfect, since his boss was Georg Gyssling, and she and Georg had that understanding going on.

"No," he said. "I know about you and Georg, and you and Archie Miller, too. And, hell, you and that Laura Ingalls, too. You've been a very bad girl, Eddie."

She shrugged. She hoped to buy a little time so, with any luck, Billie would work that longed-for miracle right there, and make Aloysius disappear or something.

No such luck. Aloysius walked toward them, saying, "I'll kill the kid first and make you watch, Eddie, that should be fun. And then I'll take care of you. The head or the heart? Up to you."

He got within ten feet, aimed the gun, smiled, and a loud bang erupted behind him, back at the door to the hangar. Aloysius had a strange look on his face, a combination of surprise and death, as he crumpled to the floor.

A bright light came from that open door, so it took a few seconds for the person who took that shot to become clear as he walked toward them. He was tall, thin, comfortable with that pistol, a Colt.

It was Jake Wise. He hadn't been around the studio much this past week and only now Eddie learned why.

"Nice to see you, Billie," he said and smiled at her. Then he looked at Eddie, said, "I've been worried about you. I saw this guy follow you out of the parking lot at the studio last Friday. I didn't like the look of him. A Nazi, for sure. I called Wild Bill about it and he asked me to do him a favor."

He walked over, rolled the body over with his foot. "This is the favor. Aloysius Schmidt. I know him. He was following me around Chicago back in April. I thought I'd left him behind there. I'll let Wild Bill know."

Eddie smiled and shook her head. Funny kind of miracle. Billie hadn't said a thing during this whole encounter. Then she looked at Eddie and at Jake Wise and at the body of Aloysius Schmidt. "I guess our flight in the simulator is off for now," she said.

"Not at all, Billie," Eddie said. "Mr. Wise will take care of this, I'm sure, and you and I can have some fun in that simulator. I mean, as long as we're here, right?"

"Right, got it," said Jake Wise, who figured something was up. He didn't know it, but being here doing this had saved him from a Silver Shirts hit team that tried to kill him in his own home.

Billie was wide-eyed. "What's going on?" she asked. "I mean . . ."

"I'm not just working for Wise Studios, Billie," said Eddie. "I work for the government, too. I came here to stop the fascists. I think you can help me."

"Well, I knew something . . . But how? In this simulator? It's not real, you know."

"I know," said Eddie, and then turned to Jake Wise who looked at back at her. "C-mon girl," she said to Billie, "let's give it a try." And together, the two of them climbed into the simulator.

A minute later, no more, and they felt like they were in the cockpit of the H-4 Hercules flying boat, about to go for a joy ride. Billie promised Eddie a chance at the controls once they got airborne, or seemingly so. Billie'd flown the simulator a couple of dozen times. This was Eddie's first time.

This "flight" in the simulator was Eddie's idea. Something about that sidewalk café conversation with Billie cleared her vision. Eddie knew things again. Because of Billie she started to see various paths and possibilities again. She started to heal.

So there they were, in Hangar D at Hughes Aircraft in Culver City, California at eight in the morning on Sunday, December 7th, 1941.

"Lower fifteen degree flaps," Eddie read on the checklist and said to Billie, who

levered the flaps to that takeoff position, put her hands on the paired throttles, and then looked over at Eddie to say, "Ready for takeoff?"

Eddie looked at her pilot, the fifteen-year-old shortstop, pilot, and inflection point. She said, "Ready, Captain."

Billie smiled at her, that same nervous smile Eddie had seen a hundred times, a mixture of desire and fear. And then off they went, Billie pushing all four of those paired throttles forward to send the engines roaring, twenty-four-thousand horsepower seeming to move the flying boat down the harbor, picking up speed. It was a bumpy ride, and Eddie wondered if it was always like that. Did the simulator give you those bumps and jolts like you're taking off on choppy water? How did it do that?

Twenty knots, thirty knots, forty, and then at fifty knots the bumping from below eased and they could feel the Goose lightening on the water, less chop slapping the bottom. Then, at sixty knots and seventy and then at seventy-five knots they felt it as the Goose lifted off the water and rose and became an airplane.

Billie, lost utterly in the task of bringing the machine from boat to airplane, didn't notice how the plane twisted and bounced over those waves, that wood frame bending plenty but not breaking. That was something the simulator couldn't reproduce, hadn't reproduced in all her dozens of times in it. But then, as it lifted and was flying, she realized between what was and what is as she pulled up on the stick and brought the flaps back and felt the wonder of the huge machine as it rose.

She looked out the cockpit window and there, instead of the light gray cardboard offered by the simulator, she saw the harbor at Long Beach, the breakwater to the left, the docks and piers to the right, the coastline straight ahead, marching north.

Billie gasped. What the hell?

She turned to look at Eddie Bennett, who was looking at her and offering her a huge smile with a mouth open in awe. She'd had her doubts about Billie, had Eddie, but not lately and most definitely not then. Billie moved them from the reality where the Link Simulator was in Hangar D to this one here, the harbor, the Spruce Goose, the future of flight made real.

"Look," said Billie, and turned the flying boat to starboard, and there they could see the whole city laid out before them, parts of it afire. What the hell?

In the hills rising to the north and the east, just below the new Hollywood sign, the one with "land" removed, there were plumes of smoke rising from fires so active that even from there, miles to the west and a thousand feet in the air, they could see the yellow flames. There were more, too, as they continued that lazy circle to the right, fires all over the place, in fact, to the north and the east and the south.

"It's all those fascists, Billie," said Eddie. "Today's the day. They've been planning it for months. They're going to burn down the studios, burn down the aircraft industry, sabotage the shipyards, blow up those two new destroyers the navy built in Long Beach. God knows what else might be planned. Murdering the Jewish studio heads? Taking over all of Southern California? Something to do with the Japanese? An invasion right here? Some fleet on its way to Long Beach?"

"Oh my god," said Billie as they completed a one-eighty and there, right in front of them, the new *Edmund James* listed heavily on its side, some underwater charges having blown to open the hull to the harbor water. One berth ahead of it there was a sudden explosion in the *Ramsey*, and right before their eyes was the white streak of a torpedo aimed amidships. They watched in horror as it hit, and a bright flame and smoke blossomed, and then they kept turning to complete the circle and they saw, a half-mile out, a submarine on the surface as another torpedo, and then another, emerged from the front tubes heading toward the destroyers to finish the job. It was eight thirty-six A.M. in Long Beach. There was a rising sun on the conning tower of that sub. The Japanese had arrived.

Two thousand miles to the west and south, it was five thirty-six in the morning as the Akagi launched its first plane, with thirty-two more to follow. The other five aircraft carriers of the Japanese Imperial Navy's Kido Butai did the same. Inside of two hours nearly three hundred torpedo bombers and dive-bombers and fighter planes would attack the American aircraft carriers and battleships, and their success would mark the end of the Pacific Fleet of the American Navy as a powerful fighting force. By spring the Japanese would control the Hawaiian Islands. By summer they would make the first landings, at Solana Beach, and Halfmoon Bay, and Arcada. By fall California would be theirs.

Billie the Kid completed the circle and off to the right she and Eddie saw that havoc reigned in Los Angeles. There was smoke from a dozen fires billowing into the morning air, then two new explosions took place even as they watched.

She brought the big Hercules around circling north and west over that submarine and just before they slipped into a dark cloud that promised rain and lightning and thunder, they saw gun crews working on the deck guns and bullets started flying. She and Eddie heard the slaps and tears of the bullets from the machine gun ripping through the fabric of the Goose's fuselage, the bullets coming their way, ratatatat. As soon as she heard the first one Billie reacted, her fine motor skills and the way she could slow things down for herself when she needed to bringing the Goose down and out of danger.

The plane came alive in her hands, the behemoth moving in a controlled yaw that slipped away from danger. She felt like she had all the time in the world to make this happen. She had time to think about her dad, and her mom, and Eddie and Archie Miller and Mr. Wise and Eddie and Eddie and Eddie.

When they came out of that dark cloud into bright sunshine the rain had disappeared and the submarine was gone. Perhaps it dived? Maybe, but then why were the destroyers in the harbor untouched, and where did the smoke of all the fires from the insurrection go?

Because of Billie there were some changes. Remember that lunch with Grace and Brenda? Remember those notes that Sylvia transcribed? Remember the Ford Coupe that hit her, and the driver of that car that stole those notes? It didn't happen that way, not here. Sylvia wrote them up, Grace gave them to Brenda, and Brenda got in her car and drove off safely to give the notes to Leon Lewis while behind her a frustrated Aloysius Schmidt kept turning the key and pushing the starter of his Ford and heard only the tired clicks of a depleted battery.

Lewis told Eleanor, who told Wild Bill, who called his old friend Michael O'Connor, provost marshal general of the Military Police Corps, and told him who and where, and just before midnight December 6th, several hundred MPs fanned out to get the job done. The fascists, when push came to shove, surrendered rather meekly.

In Hawaii no surrender was needed. The Kido Butai, that immense Japanese Fleet that had designs on a sneak attack and invasion, turned south toward Singapore when the Imperial Japanese Navy learned from Takeo Yoshikawa, their vice-consul spy in Oahu, that the American aircraft carriers and battleships had left Pearl Harbor and the island had gone to full alert. The targets and the element of surprise gone, the Kido Butai moved away.

"You did it, Billie," said Eddie, as they brought the Goose around for a smooth landing in Long Beach harbor. There was a wrenching moment just after the hull touched the water, and Eddie and Billie both felt that wave of nausea and dizziness. Eddie found comfort in it. Things were back to normal—she could see clearly now, the rain was gone. Billie was startled by it, but Eddie reached over to take her hand and tell her it was all right. They were all right. They were down and they were a boat again, idling their way into the dock, where the tractors would guide it back into

the three dry docks, one for the hull and two, one on each side, for the huge pontoons that lay under the wings.

* * *

CHAPTER FOURTEEN
DECEMBER 7, 1941
NEED A LIFT

After the landing and taxiing, after the tractors took over to move the Goose into the dry docks, the pilot and copilot left their cockpit, walked back to the ladder that led down to the cavernous main interior of the seaplane, then opened the side hatch there, lowered the ladder down to the jetty, and clambered on down to solid ground.

There was no one around. It was seven A.M. on a Sunday morning and all was very quiet there in Long Beach.

There was the clatter of a car engine, grinding gears as it rounded the corner from the entrance road and came on out to the jetty. It was a Duesenberg Coupe Deluxe, and sure enough it was Archie Miller at the wheel, and Jake Wise right next to him. They pulled up to a stop not five feet from Eddie and Billie, and Archie rolled down his window, looked over at them, smiled, and said, “Jake told me you two might need a lift?”

Billie, speechless, stared at Archie and Jake. What happened to everything? Her memory of it was all fading. Didn't Jake Wise kill that man in Hangar D? Weren't she and Eddie flying in that simulator? Was there a submarine or was that a dream? She turned to look at Eddie, who took her hand and gave it a squeeze. Billie wouldn't remember any of this soon, and neither would Jake Wise. Billie would have had a nice time taking Eddie for a flight in that simulator, and Jake, already looking a little confused over in the passenger seat, would be so busy with the big premiere for *Mad Dog of Europe* that today's heroics would drift away.

But Eddie wouldn't forget, and she was betting Archie knew, too, and knew he wasn't Archie anymore. She looked at him. He winked, said, “It's all back, every bit of it. I like that Moe Berg guy. Happy I met him. We'll talk soon.”

That's not all they'd do, she thought.

For all the rest, Wild Bill's MPs to the rescue must have rounded them all up, including Laura Ingalls, and Joe and Henry Allen, and all the rest of their pals.

Archie nodded his head. He really did understand now. He knew his role. He reached back behind him to open the rear door of the Deusy. “Hop in, Kid,” he said, “Jake will drop us off at the ballpark. We got a ballgame this afternoon, you know. A pretty important one.”

Eddie reached out to Billie to take both hands in hers. She squeezed them, then brought her in for a hug, kissed her on the cheek, and put her finger to Billie's lips and said, “Don't forget me, Billie. We have a lot more to do together, you and me.”

“You're leaving?” Billie asked.

Eddie reached out to touch Billie's cheek. “Yes, Billie, I have to go. But you did great, girl. You're really something.”

Billie looked ready to cry. Eddie smiled, caressed that cheek, said, “I'll be keeping an eye on you, Billie, and we'll see each other again soon, all right? I promise.”

Only half of that was a lie. She would be keeping an eye on Billie. As for seeing her soon? Well, it might be a few years.

Billie climbed into the Deusy, brought her legs in as Eddie shut the door, then put her hand on the window as Archie jammed the car into first gear, stepped on the gas, and wheeled the Deusy around to head for Gilmore Field and the seventh game of the series. They'd be champions if they could win it.