

The Double Helix E.F. Tablak

The **double helix** describes the appearance of **double-stranded DNA**, which is composed of two linear strands that run opposite to each other, or anti-parallel, and twist together. Each **DNA** strand within the **double helix** is a long, linear molecule made of smaller units **called** nucleotides that form a chain.

September 1931

She was seated at the first desk of the row in the sixth-grade classroom. This was the opening day of school.

Angie was only slightly aware of the chirps of the birds sitting on the sill of the open window.

The afternoon September sun was beating on her left shoulder. A large fly kept landing on her bare arm even as she unconsciously kept swatting it away.

The nun, who was seated at her desk a few feet away, was beginning the introduction to the English grammar class.

Angie's mind was not focused on the nun's words. She was centered on the image on her mental screen. In the center of that screen was Tommy, the cute blond boy who occupied the seat behind her.

Tommy had bumped into her in the midst of the crowd as they exited the church building yesterday after mass. He apologized as he gave her a wide smile.

The words were the right words but the tone did not seem apologetic. He had taken her hand in his as he spoke the words. It seemed to her that he meant, "I'm glad it happened."

The brief scene kept recurring during the day and was the last picture in her mind just before she fell asleep last evening.

She was remembering the incident this morning during geography class when she felt a slight pressure on the back of her curly hair. *“Was that real or did I just imagine it?”*

A moment later, her body jerked as she felt the slight tug on one of her curls.

A moment later she heard the nun asking, “Angie, would you and Tommy pass out the text books, please?”

“Yes, Sister.”

The nun asked, “Why is your face red? Are you too hot?”

“Just a bit, but I’m all right.”

The blush began to fade but was back in full bloom when Tommy bumped into her at the book table and gave her a warm smile. She was so surprised that she toppled one of the piles of books.

They bumped heads as they both reached to straighten the pile. Both were flushed red as they began the distribution.

Angie’s best friend, Rosie, grabbed her hand as they walked to the playground during recess. “How come you were blushing when Sister called your name?”

Agnes looked to be sure no one could hear. “Just the moment before that, Tommy gently tugged at my curls. It was so exciting. Then he intentionally bumped into me at the book table.”

“Wow. Tell me how you felt.”

“It’s hard to explain. I was embarrassed about toppling the books but I just felt goeey and want him to touch me again.”

The conversation was interrupted with a young male voice saying, “Hi, Angie. I’m sorry I caused you to knock over those books.”

Without thinking, Rosie said to Tommy, “You didn’t look sorry.”

Angie gave Rosie a look that said, “Enough.”

To Tommy, “That’s okay, Tommy. You don’t have to apologize.”

She gave Rosie a look which Rosie understood to say, “See you later.” She was gone within a few seconds.

Angie sat on a bench, thus inviting Tommy to do the same. The conversation started with school subjects but soon drifted to more personal subjects like, “What do you do after school? Do you always sit with your family in church? I notice you are the catcher on the boy’s baseball team.”

Tommy nodded his head affirmatively. He asked her, “Do you like to watch baseball? I never saw you in the grandstand.”

“I saw almost every game you played last summer.”

The bell interrupted their chat, but they did not separate until she promised Tommy that he could walk her home after school.

By the time they reached her home, Tommy had her books in one hand and her hand in his other.

As she waved from the front door, anyone would have noticed that that first seeds of puppy love had sprouted.

The twosome was inseparable for the next two years. Tommy walked her home after school each day. They went to the Saturday matinee movies where they held hands and learned the art of kissing. They roller skated on the sidewalk, evenings after doing homework

Angie helped Tommy develop his writing skills, while he tutored her in the science and math subjects.

By end of the sixth-grade year, it was obvious to the nun that Tommy was exceptionally bright.

During the next school year, Sister Eusebia assigned him extra reading and found a series of tests that measured his intelligence

The parish priest and Sister Superior held a conference with Tommy's family in the spring of his seventh school year.

Sister Marie led the conversation. "As you know from previous conferences, Tommy is a near genius and a very creative thinker."

"At the end of the seventh grade, there is nothing more we can offer for his education in our curriculum. Thomas needs to be challenged."

"He already is at ninth grade level in math and Latin. We believe, despite his young age, Tommy should go to the public high school."

Tommy tried to resist, but a twelve-year-old has little to say on the subject. He had a gut feeling that a major change was about to occur in his life.

By late summer, Angie had the feeling that she was losing Tommy. He was playing ball with older boys who were on the high school varsity. He lost interest in the kind of movies that were shown at the matinees. His eyes and mind were leaping forward.

She was right. Before Thanksgiving, they were no longer a couple. Angie was being left behind. She had seen their bonds loosening and even understood the why more clearly than Tommy did.

"He may not love me but I still want to be friends with him."

They saw each other at Sunday High Mass until Tommy started to attend the earlier low mass. Angie switched to attend low mass so that she could attend the sandlot baseball games in which Tommy pitched. She became his staunchest fan.

When the season ended, Angie would make it a point to invite Tommy for Sunday brunch. He was fond of her younger brothers and was doted on by Angie's mama.

When she learned that Tommy liked to practice pitching during the off season, she borrowed a mitt from her brother and played catcher to Tommy's practice.

Several times, she asked Tommy for help with math problems. On those occasions, they met at her home and Tommy stayed to dinner.

Her brothers and parents kept inviting Tommy to dinner.

It was around that dinner table that Tommy thrilled Angie and her brothers with history stories of great men in American history

He not only talked about Washington but of John Adams and Teddy Roosevelt. He admired them because they took on difficult tasks despite what they knew to be difficult challenges and they succeeded.

Angie was awed with the breadth of his knowledge.

Their relationship continued to mature. The puppy love affair was history but it was the root of their deep friendship.

Her contribution was leading him to understand and appreciate classical music and opera. She invited him to join the family on Saturday mornings to listen to the Metropolitan Opera radio broadcasts.

Angie arranged dates for Tommy on occasion. In fact, she introduced him to a good looking, recent transfer student, MaryAnn Luna, whom he took to the senior ball.

Tommy invited Angie to have dinner at Jonson's restaurant on the evening before graduation.

"I need to thank you and I want to say a few things in a private setting."

In the last booth of the dining room, he took her hand in his. "Angie, I want to thank you for never giving up on our friendship. I need you to know how much I appreciate the way you widen my horizons with a love for music and the visual arts.

“You were there for me when my mom was down with pneumonia.

“You helped me develop some social graces.”

Angie interrupted. “Not so fast, Tommy. This has been a two-way relationship.”

He put his index finger over her lips.

He laughed. “Save your comment for a letter. This is my night.”

He continued. “I would not have believed it possible to feel so close to anyone. If there were a word for “more than a friend,” I would like to use it. I hope that we find a way to keep those bonds tight as we move into the future, no matter where we find ourselves.”

Angie took his hands into hers. “All right. I will save my thanks for another time but I want to pledge my friendship for the rest of our lives and I pray that in some way we find our lives intertwined at some future date.”

Chapter 1.

June 1939

“Tommy Dudak, what a sight for sore eyes!”

He turned at the sound of a very familiar, although more mature, voice. “Come; sit with me in last pew. I don’t remember you ever attending High Mass during our teen years.”

“Angie, you look absolutely stunning. Of course, I’d be delighted to sit with you.”

After mass, they were standing about twenty feet from the front doors, starting to ask questions of each other. Angie waved to Tommy’s mother.

“Mrs. Dudak, will you allow me to steal Tommy for lunch with my family? My two older brothers are home on leave and would love to see Tommy.”

His mom smiled. “Only if you promise to join us for dinner next week.”

Angie nodded and turned to Tommy. “That was rude of me. Are you free and willing, Tommy?”

He grinned. “That would be like old times. Sunday lunch was always a big deal with chicken soup, lettuce salad with Momma’s special dressing and pasta until we all burst.”

Angie slipped her arm onto his and began a slow stroll, reminiscent of earlier times.

Later, they talked of life on campus, Tommy of his at University of Pennsylvania and Angie of hers at Barnard in New York.

Bill, in Navy blues, and Frank, in Marine greens, rushed down the path toward the twosome and bear hugged Tommy until he could hardly breathe.

The first part of the conversation was about Bill's training at Great Lakes Training Station and Frank's at Paris Island.

Bill said, "We both drew low numbers in the Selective Service draft and decided to enlist."

Both took time to ask some questions of Tommy but swiftly drew back to talk excitedly of their military futures.

At one thirty, both were kissing Angie and Mrs. Demilo and rushing off to dates with their sweethearts. In the living room, Angie pointed to the sofa but took a chair across the room, facing Tommy.

"Tell me about yourself, Tommy. I'm sure you ace every class you take. That's a given. I'm guessing you haven't joined a fraternity and, if so, what about your social life?"

Tommy laughed. "You're right, of course. I spend a lot of time in the library. I usually double date on Saturday evening, occasionally take a date to one of the sporting events."

How about extracurricular activities?"

"I'm writing for the Daily Pennsylvanian and now I'm on the Debate travel squad."

"Now it's your turn."

Angie smiled. "I've had a great year. My GPA is 3.70 for the first year. Thank you for all the tutoring."

"My social life during the first half of the year was like yours. Then, I met Jimmy Ryan just before Easter vacation. I put a note on the bulletin board, hoping for a ride share to Pittsburgh or thereabouts. It was

a smooth ride in his 1939 Buick convertible. He is charming and a great conversationalist.

“We spent some time dating during Easter week and visited each other’s homes. He has a beautiful sister, a year younger than I. I’m sure I can set you up for a date. We could go dancing. What do you say?”

He avoided the question with a question of his own. “Are you in love with him? You glow when you mention his name.”

“I do? I’m not sure about love but I enjoy every moment I am with him.”

Tommy was thinking, *“I need to meet this someone who makes my Angie glow.”*

“Okay. How about Tuesday for a double date?”

It was a fun evening. Katie Ryan was a great dancer, but a little immature. Tommy watched Angie and Jim and saw the glow as they floated around the floor.

He fussed mentally about Jim’s drinking twice as much as Tommy or Angie, although it didn’t seem to affect him too seriously.

He wondered why Jim scowled all through the two dances he had with Angie. It was as though Jim was very jealous although Angie had clearly explained her friend ship with Tommy.

Jim was very rude when another acquaintance of Angie’s tried to cut in during one of the dance numbers.

Angie invited Tommy to lunch after Mass on Sunday. “You have to come. I may not see you for some time. Next summer, I will be in Italy for a year abroad. I earned a scholarship.”

The conversation during lunch was sobering. Both realized that their lives would take them in different directions and challenge their close relationship.

Angie said, at one point, “I’ve tried to prep Mother, for the fact that I will be living my life at some distance. For a while, I may be traveling as a photographer.

She doesn’t want to believe it, since she hopes to live out her life with her only daughter somewhere nearby.”

Tommy told Angie. “I hope to be free to travel for a while and then marry some exotic Asian and live in some distant land like Singapore or Tokyo. I’ll find a profession that allows me to make a contribution to the society in which I live. What do you think of that dream?”

Angie put her hand on his arm. “I am sure you will be a success wherever you are or whatever vocation you choose.”

The conversation after lunch became very intimate, as it can between two friends.

Angie laughed at some thought in her mind. Tommy asked, “What’s so funny?”

“I was just thinking about our deep friendship. I thought I would never be able to forgive you for leaving me behind at the end of our seventh year in school.

Yet, what was puppy love became a deep relationship that few boys and girls enjoy. I feel closer to you than I do to my very protective brothers.”

“That certainly goes for me, too, Angie. I felt so bad when I realized how abruptly I moved away from you. I am so happy you never held a grudge.”

Angie changed the subject, saying, “You seemed a bit remote during most of Tuesday evening, Tommy. I thought Katie was a good partner.”

“She was, but a little too young for me. You beamed most of the evening but you got angry with Jim when Mike Benton tried to cut in.”

“I was. I scolded Jimmy for being rude to my old school pal. Sometimes, Jimmy can be too protective.”

Tommy chose his words carefully. “Jealousy can be a serious flaw. If I remember my catechism, it is a cardinal sin.”

Tommy thought her laugh was just a bit tight.

He went on. “He sure can hold his liquor.”

Angie agreed. “I mentioned that a couple of times but I’ve never seen a hint of drunkenness afterwards.”

Tommy switched subjects. “Would you consider me rude if I asked if you two have slept together?”

Angie’s face flushed. “If anyone else asked me that question, I would slap his face. The answer is a definite no. I’ve been firm with Jimmy each time he has tried to seduce me

To be honest, I think I want to, but I’m scared. That sounds silly for a twenty-year old coed but the teaching by the nuns and my own fear of getting pregnant keeps me a virgin. How about you?”

“The same for the same reasons. In fact, I just decided that I need to do some research. I don’t know a damn thing about female anatomy or sex, except what I learned on the street corner.”

Angie said, “I did some study recently and even learned about something called the rhythm method to prevent unwanted pregnancy. It sounds like the answer but any desire is quickly overcome by fear.”

She burst into laughter. “Wouldn’t Sister Magda die if she heard us talking about sex?”

Tommy said, “I think we need to change the subject.”

Angie nodded, unable to say a word. The conversation was stirring her private place and a weird thought had entered her brain. “*I can trust Tommy. Maybe I should invite him to practice how to make*

love. According to the book, this is a good time of the month and I know where bother Bill keeps his condoms.”

She felt a blush being to rise from her throat. She kept her head bowed so that Tommy would not see her flaming cheeks.

She looked at her watch. “Jimmy will be here soon. We are having dinner with his family.”

They stood and walked toward each other. Tommy opened his arms and Angie moved in for the embrace. She whispered. “No matter where you are, I will remember you. I shall always be your friend.”

“I will be your friend, Angie. Try to find me wherever I am, if you need me. I promise to keep you posted with a long letter more than once a year.”

“I promise to do the same. Your friendship is a precious gift. It is important to have a friend with whom I can be totally open.”

They were to discover how difficult it would be to keep that promise.

Chapter 2.

The letters they exchanged during the following year were fairly newsy. The big news was that Angie had deferred her trip abroad for a year and was working full time during the summer at the New York Times.

Tommy wrote that he had opted to change his major to Romantic languages, with a minor in Germanic languages.

June 1941

As promised by Angie, Tommy received a long letter; post marked “NY, NY” 364 days from the she had written her last letter to Tommy.

Dear Tommy,

What a year! First, I have decided not to take the trip to Italy. I don't like anything Mussolini stands for. As I see them, Hitler and Fatso are cut of the same cloth. I convinced my folks to defer their visit.

The news points to an inhospitable climate for Americans.

I'm taking classes all summer and plan to continue, hoping to graduate early. I have a part time job as the 'stringer' on the Columbia campus for the New York Times.

The war on the western front in Europe is looking bad for the Allies. The pact between German and Russia has allowed Russia to start gobbling up land in the east and the Baltic seas.

I was heartbroken to read about the losses at Dunkirk during the British attempt to retrieve their troops from France.

Our country should be doing more to help Great Britain but the America First group still has the upper hand.

I'm thinking of going to England to volunteer as an s Military Driver.

That's enough about the world conditions.

My brothers are both deployed somewhere out of the country. Mom says their letters contain very general info, giving no hint of either location. They are both doing well enough. Mom says she prays for them each night just as she does for you and me.

You are also in my prayers, although I am not as consistent as my mom. I often remember our last conversation and our pledge of friendship.

I have a bit of bad news to share. It happened some time ago and I think I am on the road to recovery.

You are my Father Confessor, only you.

A few months after we were back in school, Jimmy and I got tipsy one evening and ending up alone in his room.

For me, it was a lousy experience. I wanted to go slowly but Jimmy was in a hurry. I was in pain from the moment we joined. It seemed like seconds before Jimmy exploded. God, it was awful.

Afterwards, he was apparently feeling guilty and apologizing again and again but not asking me how I felt.

I dressed and walked to my room and a hot shower. I felt unclean and kept blaming myself, not Jimmy. I must have sobbed the whole night through.

Six weeks later I discovered that I was pregnant. When I told Jimmy, he wanted to drive to Connecticut for a quick marriage, but I was having none of that.

I refused to see Jimmy for a week after my first visit with a doctor. God, how I needed you! But, getting in touch with you was an impossible idea.

I decided to have an abortion, no matter what the Church has to say. I had plans for a professional life. I had already decided that marrying Jimmy was not part of my future.

As you hinted, he was a heavier drinker than I thought.

I believe Jimmy was the most relieved man in the world when I gave him my decision. He helped me to find a physician and paid the fee.

My doctor suggested I get some counseling and Jimmy will pay for some of that.

The nights of those first weeks after the abortion and before counseling were absolutely hellish. I needed your shoulder to cry on, but that was not going to happen.

As you might imagine, the guilt feelings were overwhelming. I remembered somewhere hearing that having an abortion was a mortal sin that no amount of penance could wash of your soul.

For a while, I was worried that I might not ever have a child but a specialist physician assured me that is not the case. He warned me that I might have severe depression, but so far, I seem to have escaped that punishment.

I recently had my first date. It was a school dance and supper afterwards, followed by a light hug at my front door. I'm hoping to ease into the social life at school as my counselor has suggested.

I haven't been to Mass since the abortion. I went to confession after that evening in Jimmy's room but I'm not ready to talk with a priest about the abortion.

I am looking forward to a letter from you. I do receive letters from my mother and from two girl friends that are at Penn State.

I had better stop writing. I may not be able to stuff all the pages in one envelope.

With warmest regards,

Angie

A week later, Angie was tucked into the corner of the sofa, tearing open the envelope showing Tommy's address.

Dear Angie,

I'm sorry it took so long to send you a letter. So much has happened and school is demanding.

I have to admit, that I would not have made the promised deadline if I hadn't received your letter.

The news of your suffering tore at my heart. It is so painful to know you are suffering. I have this feeling of frustration because I can do little to help.

I have no real way of understanding the spiritual and emotional pain you have or are enduring. I wish I had been close by to support you during the heaviest of the times.

If it helps any, please take the time to write and share your feelings. I am giving you my phone number, in case you believe a conversation would be helpful.

Unfortunately, I will not be here thirty days from now. I am going on active duty in military intelligence. It's all hush, hush, so I can't say more.

My draft number has been drawn. I talked with an army recruiter who referred me to a specialist in Intelligence. I feel sure that he wasn't authorized to do this. I have a feeling that someone has read my records and is reaching for me. And I am willing.

As you may remember, I have been majoring in languages, specifically in the romance branch with French and Italian.

Naturally, my Italian is my best language, having had my first lessons at your family dinner table when I was only ten years old.

My counselor thought that, given the world situation, I might do well to add Russian studies to my curriculum. He introduced me to the head of the Slavonic language department who agreed, especially with my Slav roots.

I found the study easy. My professor says that with another six months of concentrating, I will be an excellent interpreter.

My social life is still limited but I take time to go the tea dances and the junior and senior proms.

I've been dating, of all things, a good looking Italian woman. She, like you, is blond. Her family, like yours, has roots in Northern Italy.

We're not going steady, but neither of us is dating another.

We have slept together on a few occasions, recently, but we agree that marriage, if it happens, must wait.

She knows that I am leaving school for the service. She has earned her pilot's license and believes she can be of help if we do go to war.

Both of us are convinced that our country ought to join the fight in Europe sooner than later.

Anyhow, we are taking what the Lord give us at the moment, love for one another, but leaving our futures open.

By the way, I just returned from a visit home. My dad had a heart incident that turned out to be more pain than threat.

I dropped in for a visit with your folks who looked great. I enjoyed a glass of your dad's homemade wine, of course.

Since it was about noon, your mom insisted I have lunch and stay for part of the Metropolitan Opera broadcast. You dad misses having you and your brothers to share the pleasure he gets from those broadcasts.

My warmest regards,

Tommy.

What he could not tell Angie was the nature of his assignment. He was to be commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the Army but assigned to a new organization called the Office of Information Collection.

He was pleased to discover that the White House was either preparing for war or, at least, doing more than shipping materials to challenge Hitler.

Tommy had only general information that this new organization would be conducting multiple activities and missions, including collecting intelligence by spying, performing acts of sabotage, waging a propaganda war, organizing and coordinating anti-Nazi resistance groups in Europe, providing military training for anti-Japanese guerrilla movement in Asia, among other things.

He assumed that, if war broke out, he probably would be serving in France or Italy.

The mystery for Tommy was, *“How will I serve if we do not enter the war? The isolationist America Firsts are still strong politically.”*

Thirty-five days later, he checked into Fort Benning for basic military training.

Chapter 3.

Six months later, came the devastating attack on Pearl Harbor and the United States was now involved in World War II.

Angie's first thoughts were about her brothers, Bill and Frank. *"I pray that that neither of them was stationed at Pearl Harbor. I've never heard of Pearl Harbor."*

She was to learn names of a lot of Pacific Islands over the next three plus years of war.

It took Angie hours to reach her folks by phone and, as expected, a calm father was doing his best to soothe the emotions of a mother, worried about her two young cubs.

"I wonder where Tommy is stationed. Life is hell. Men you care about are at risk and you have no way of knowing their location or situation."

Classes were cancelled the day after. The entire student body and Barnard staff were glued to a radio to hear the President's address. The news station broadcast could be heard at every location on campus.

Groups of students were huddled in conversations in dorm rooms, coffee shops, libraries and hallways.

Others were lined up at telephone kiosks.

"Oh, Angie, there you are. I've been searching for you, all morning."

"Hi, Peggy. Have you talked with your parents? Any idea if your brother is still in the country?"

Peggy shook her head. "My mother is out of control, according to Dad. He thinks I should come home for a few days."

“Why don’t you? I can take notes for you in two classes. Your Jeff can do the same in the other class. Speaking of Jeff, I wonder what this means for the ROTC guys. Will there be time for them to graduate before being called to duty?”

Peggy acted as though she didn’t hear Angie. “I better pack a few things and head for the bus station. Thanks for taking notes. If I miss Jimmy, please tell him about my situation.”

Angie felt sure that Jeff would be with her Anthony, at Lydia’s coffee shop just off campus. It was Angie’s and Anthony’s favorite haunt for studying together, making out or holding hands while telling each other of their love for the other.

She had to elbow her way through the crowd to the large round table, where Anthony was holding space for his sweetie.

She had to crawl over two guys to reach Anthony, who immediately kissed away the tears that were flowing on to her lashes.

The din was so loud that they had trouble hearing each other.

Anthony said, “This is too noisy. Now that we are together, let’s take a walk or find someplace quieter.”

“Okay but I have a message for Jeff.” She reached across Anthony’s body and shouted her message in Jeff’s ear.

Just outside the café, they paused to hug each other, with Anthony’s face buried in Angie’s hair.

She said, “Let’s go to my room. Janet won’t be back until this evening. She went out to her home on Long Island right after the story broke.”

“Anthony, what do you think this means for the ROTC group?”

“I’m hoping that it takes long enough planning to let the seniors get their degrees. That way, we can be commissioned directly and train for combat immediately. It’s a big job to deploy hundreds of thousands

of men to the right places and positions. Even if my hope is wrong, it will take months to sort out everything.”

“I hope you’re right, honey. Meanwhile, what shall we do? Should we plan an early wedding?”

Anthony did not respond immediately.

“What’s running through your mind, Anthony?”

It was another long minute of silence.

“Anthony Galiardi, you’re not backing out of your pledge. Please tell me that is not what you’re thinking.”

“No, honey. What I’m thinking is about your situation if I don’t return. You would have a better chance of finding a husband. If I return in good shape, we could get married the day I get home.”

Angie fought back the tears that were welling up. “That is ridiculous. The odds are that you will come back. It is you I need. I want to have at least one child with you and live the plans we’ve been making during these last months.

“I want to take care of you and our children. Please do not take that away from me.”

“What if I survive but am seriously wounded and handicapped? How will I be able to support you and our child?”

“Anthony, together, we can do anything. We’ll find a way. I am going to make it as a journalist/photographer. If the worst happened, my family will stand with me and support me. Please, Anthony.”

“Angie, honey, I always find it hard to say no to you but I need you to think about a future in which I am not present.”

“I don’t want to do that. *Que sera sera*. What will be, will be.”

“Anthony, I want your baby, whether you marry me or not.”

Twelve weeks later, Angie gave the good news to Anthony. They took the train to Connecticut that weekend to elope, and then called her folks.

Mamma was upset that there would be no church wedding but she was pleased that Anthony was her daughter's choice.

Anthony's family accepted the news with mixed feelings. His parents worried about him and his child if the war was not kind to him.

Anthony discovered that he would be able to get his degree before reporting for duty in July. They prayed that he would still be stateside and possibly see his first born the date of the baby's arrival, September 24th, 1942.

Angie was eager to share the news of her pregnancy with her friend, Peggy, who appeared to be less than enthusiastic. As it turned out, she and Jeff had made the opposite choice, to wait until the end of the war.

The next few months were very difficult for Angie. She moved in with Anthony while Jeff, his roommate moved in with Peggy, despite university rules about co habitation.

Angie suffered with severe morning sickness but refused to give up attending her morning classes. She swore that she ate a ton of soda crackers, which seemed to help a bit.

Anthony cooked dinner while she boned up on her studies.

She did her best to disguise her pregnancy but her swollen belly was a dead give-away by the end of April.

She was called to the dean's office for a conference. The university had a policy that pregnant students were to be dismissed from attending classes.

The dean's voice was firm as she read the words of the policy to Angie. "You do understand, of course, that the school cannot tolerate promiscuity among the students."

Angie fought back the tears but said, “Miss Harper, this pregnancy is not the result of promiscuity. Anthony and I are married. He is about to go on active duty to serve his country as soon as he graduates.”

The dean’s voice softened. “I think I understand. You probably are the first among others who sense this need to be true to your pledges of marriage.”

She continued, “I have an idea. Please tell me more of your reasoning and hopes.”

Angie burst into tears. There was a glimmer of hope. She explained Anthony’s reluctance and her own feelings during the next half hour.

The dean stood. "Let’s make an appointment for a week from now. This is a little above my level of authority.”

She smiled. “In the meantime, a larger sweater might help a little.”

Angie wasn’t sure the Lord was concerned with such trivial matters, but she prayed each evening for a positive outcome.

Negative thoughts kept inserting themselves into her mind in the middle of classes and in her conversations with Anthony.

She was tense as she took a seat in the dean’s office but she was aware that the dean was smiling.

“The Chancellor has a temporary interpretation of the policy. During the next four weeks, you are not to attend classes but this should not keep you from completing your semester studies.

You may work out any arrangements with your professors that allow you to take final exams. I feel sure you can come up with a creative solution.”

She broke into a wide grin. “The Chancellor hopes you will choose a large robe for the graduation exercises.”

Angie jumped up and hugged the dean who became flustered and shed a tear of her own to mingle with Angie’s.

By the end of the workday, Angie had various agreements with her professors, two of whom promised to turn over their lecture notes to study and two who pointed to certain chapters in the text books.

She and Anthony celebrated with dinner out. She knew she would be tapped into Phi Beta Kappa and graduate Summa Cum Laude.

The next major hurdle was arranging for a position in journalism after a reasonable period with the new babe.

A few days after receiving the good news, she wrote a letter to Tommy to bring him up-to-date.

Chapter 4.

Meanwhile, Tommy was about to receive an entirely new kind of education. He reported to the Congressional Country Club, OIC, headquarters in Bethesda, Maryland for basic training, including physical training, hand to hand combat and commando tactics.

At 1600 hours, after arising at 0500, he staggered to his room, where he fell onto his cot totally exhausted, hoping that he would never have to get up again.

He managed to rise for dinner before spending the evening at wireless communications, including equipment operations and maintenance.

He still had to find time to true up his language skills.

He had no time off except for longish mealtimes and six hours of sleep each twenty-four hours.

Eighty-seven days later, he was summoned to Colonel Donovan's office.

"Lieutenant Dudak, you may pin on the insignia. You are a Lieutenant in the U.S. Army, seconded to the Office of the Coordinator of Information."

"Dudak, you are the youngest officer in the Operational Intelligence Center (OIC), chosen for your exceptional mind, as well as your ability to speak a variety of languages."

"As part of your continued training, we are sending you to England to work with the British. They have been a great help in organization and training and continue to offer their services.

"We want you to learn a variety of ways in which you can serve our country.

"In this case, the assignment is unusual, since we are not at war with Germany, but we want you to learn how they facilitate the work of the French underground. That is your primary task. As part of your training, you will spend time in France behind enemy lines.

“A secondary task involves learning the types of equipment used by their commando units as well as some of the techniques used in their raids.

“That will prepare you for your next assignment. I assume Major Wilson will write your orders and arrange transportation.

"Good luck."

"Yes, Sir, Colonel Donovan. Thank you."

Four days later.

“Welcome, Lt. Dudak. I’m Lieutenant Bill Smythe. Join me for a spot of lunch before we take you to your quarters

Minutes later, Tom was being introduced to a half- dozen members of Commando Unit 7.

The conversation almost immediately returned to the football competition match that was set for the afternoon.

Tom was perplexed. He thought he was meeting with a unit that specialized in facilitating the work of the French Resistance.

Smith saw the question on Tom's face. “Sorry, I should have explained. There is a delay for a few days in Captain Johnston’s operation, so we thought we would use the first few days for you to work with our commandos.

"This afternoon is free time for the unit, so the focus is on an inter-squad competition between the red and blue units.

“You and I will have time to view our equipment inventory and observe some demonstrations. Tomorrow, you will have an opportunity to test any or all of the pieces that meet your fancy.”

Tom grinned. “That sounds great.”

Smythe smiled. “That includes an invitation to watch the match and join us as we hoist a pint this evening.”

Tom met three new recruits at breakfast. He could see that they were a combination of nerves about their first challenges as well as excitement about their chances to be part of a commando team.

On the training field, he listened carefully to the instructor as he prepped the recruits for the demonstrations.

He was surprised to hear his name.

“Lt. Dudak, would you like to participate in the demonstration phase?”

“Why, yes I would.”

Two minus later he was flat on his back, letting out a whoosh of air and embarrassed. The instructor gave him a hand and said, “Sorry, I took advantage of you. I could see by your eyes that you were about to set yourself. I chose to attack before you could set up.”

Tom laughed. “I should have been ready. I hope my embarrassment is a lesson for your new men.”

By the fourth day, Tom had trained his muscles and learned some new techniques during the hand-to-hand combat demonstrations

At the end of his days with the commandos, just before they hit the showers, the training master handed Tom a Fairbairn-Sykes Fighting Knife with a “well done” and a round of congrats from others in the group.

Tom met with Captain Johnston of MI6, the British foreign intelligence service for dinner.

He was warmly welcomed and was encouraged to talk about himself and his future hopes.

Tom said, “All I know, at the moment, is that the boss mentioned being ready for France or Italy when we are back on the continent.”

Tom had three days of intense training, including a few hours with a French teacher from Normandy, who worked on Tom’s enunciation so that he could pass muster as a local

Captain Johnston thought he was ready for a trip across the channel.

Two evenings later, the moonless sky covered the dark earth. Tom could not even hear the dipping of the oars into the cold water of the channel as they neared the shores of Normandy.

Four blackened faces were peering through binoculars into the darkness on the land.

“Did I see the blink of a light or was it my imagination?” he whispered. Tom wasn’t certain until he felt the pressure of his partner’s hand on his knee. He covered the hand to assure the man that he also had seen the signal.

He sensed the rubber raft make a slight change in direction, now heading for the blink. In another five minutes or so that he heard the lapping of waves on the sand. He held his breath and let out air softly. Another two minutes passed before he felt the bottom of the craft sliding onto the sandy beach.

The four of them jumped out of the boat and were joined by two others from the shore, pulling the small craft into a clump of bushes. Once it was hidden, one of the arrivals covered it with a tarpaulin that seemed to be painted a multitude of camouflage colors.

One of the hosts held up his hand to signal, “Follow me.”

Tom guessed that the walk had taken almost a half hour.

Someone opened a door just as they arrived at a small cabin.

The coffee was black and bitter but warmed them all.

The host introduced himself as Paul and his comrades as Rene and Michele, a woman about Tom's age.

Paul said, "I suggest we get some sleep. We have all day to discuss details. You will not be leaving until eleven in the evening. We have dozens of blankets. We can spread out across the room.

"If snoring keeps you awake, there is a double bunk bed in the next room."

Thirty minutes later, the snorts and snores of two individuals drove Tom to the next room. Five minutes later, he sensed someone enter the room, touch his body and then climb into the upper bunk.

Just as dawn cast a dim light into the room, he heard the squeak of the springs of the top bunk, sensed someone stirring and then felt the person jump to the floor. He spied Michele opening the door and disappearing.

Ten minutes later, he found her in the kitchen, preparing a breakfast of toast and eggs. Tom offered to help, to which she nodded a yes and pointed to the toast and the wood stove.

She was delighted to find that he spoke French fluently and soon engaged him in conversation, eager to know why an American was involved in the mission.

"Have Americans joined the war against the Nazis?"

Tom tried to explain but nothing he said seemed to be acceptable.

"Can't the world see the evil that is Hitler?"

The discussion was interrupted when Paul came in to check the status. "May I send in the men to get their food?"

"Oui, Papa."

Afterwards, Paul gave his guests a rundown of their group of Maquis.

“We are twenty-seven men and women. During the last month, we have derailed two freight trains, blown up three small ammo dumps, set fire to one of their special restaurants run by collaborators and identified a number of collaborators who will be dealt with eventually.”

Tom could only guess what that meant. He was sure Paul was not the gentleman who was hosting the visitors. The fact that his daughter was an active participant spoke loudly to Tom.

Tom’s partner, Fred, asked Paul, “Tell us the primary need for the funds that you requested.”

Paul looked at his team members. “We have identified a collaborator and two men, members of the Waffen-SS, whom we believe we can bribe into becoming double agents.”

Tom looked at Michele, who stared directly into his eyes, as though defiant.

Tom heard Paul saying, “And the ability to purchase the materials for the underground newspaper to keep the people informed and upbeat. We need the help of the public and we all need to feel confident about our successes.”

Tom helped Michele clean up and then prepares lunch. She refused to talk with Tom about her role with the potential double agents. She wanted to know about life for women in the States, about women’s fashions and President Roosevelt.

When he continued to press her, she asked, “Why do you care? It is my life to give for my country. What I do may be sinful but it’s for the benefit of others. God will not punish me.”

“But if something goes wrong, you may be killed.”

“That may be so but there are many other ways to die in a war. Anyway, I am committed. I just ask that you give us the funds and pray for me. I will pray for your safe return to England.”

Tom was to see that face in his memory for years to come.

Captain Johnston was at the pier to welcome Fred and Tom at 0300 when the corvette, the small warship that had brought them back across the Channel, deposited them and sped off to another mission. He was pleased with Fred’s oral report and left quickly, saying, “Write it up as usual. Hope you had a good trip, Lt. Dudak. I shall forward a report to your superiors.

“If you do get a return assignment, I hope we can work together. All my staff says that you are one hell of a warrior. God speed, Lieutenant.”

Tom spent the next week exercising his body and legs preparing for jump school.

He was required to have two practice parachute jumps before his next insertion into France.

He was driven by jeep each day to the jump school, which was five miles down the road from his base. After a brief rest at the school, he chose to jog the five miles back to base. Two weeks of training and two days for jumping qualified him for a mission jump into France.

Tom made two jumps into France, both assisting with the delivery of ammo and weapons to the Maquis. He and his companions were not well received because the Maquis were expecting more and newer weapons.

The last group kept threatening to desert them to wait alone for the next night pick up. In fact, one of the two receiving groups did leave for a while, but they returned and apologized.

“We know that you are only the messengers. We shall stay with you until the time for you to leave. Please send us the latest weaponry.”

Just before dawn, someone whispered into Tom’s ear, “Stay quiet. German patrol is nearby.”

Everyone in camp lay still. Tom, listening intently, picked up the sound of rustling leaves and then a German cuss word. Tom had his new knife in hand, ready for anything.

The footsteps seemed to be approaching but then veered and faded away.

The first light of dawn appeared on the horizon. The camp came to life with a minimum of sound.

At midday, part of the Maquis group left camp for about four hours.

The group was in high spirits when they returned, announcing, “We broke into a storage area and destroyed a hoard of canned food products. We brought back enough for a good evening meal.”

The troop ship return to New York was long and boring. Although he had a small stash of books, he had hours of time to ponder his future.

Angie kept creeping into this mind. He thought about the dozen years of friendship and the intimacies they shared.

“I wonder how things are going for her. By now, she is a sophisticated senior, a far cry from the little curly head I knew in the sixth grade.”

After promising himself to write her a letter, he tried to give thought to his future. *“At this point in time, there seems to be little use of effort in planning a future. We are bound for war regardless of current*

public feeling. Hitler and Mussolini are an evil pair, who will not be satisfied with Europe if they are not contained.”

He speculated on the changes coming, even if the West with United States helping were to defeat the Axis.

“I will have to go back to school. There will be little use for a trained espionage agent.”

In that respect, his thinking was flawed

Tom arrived in New York in the late evening on December 6th and was able to board a midnight local for Philadelphia and connect with an express train to Washington.

After a quick breakfast, dead on his feet with the lack of sleep, he headed for the sack. It seemed like minutes before he was awakened with blaring on someone’s radio. “Japanese bomb Pearl Harbor.”

Within minutes, a sleepy-eyed Tom was on his way to headquarters.

Chapter 5.

It appeared to Tom that everyone was already at the office, although a few staffers did come in after Tom arrived.

Maggie, the receptionist, nodded a signal that she would let the boss know of his arrival. However, it was almost two hours before Colonel Donovan called for him. During his time overseas, Tom had learned that Colonel Donovan was nicknamed "Wild Bill" during his stint during the First World War. His respect for the boss had increased as he had heard stories.

"Tom, I understand you performed well with the Brits. Nice going. At this point, I am not sure how to use you. I suggest you continue training, perhaps at the spy school. The picture should be clearer within a month. By then, the President should have a strategy set."

"Check in with Maggie every Friday and be sure she has your phone number."

The ringing of his phone was a sign of dismissal.

It was more than a month later that Tom was called to report to Colonel Donovan.

"Tom, I am sending you to North Africa to coordinate information from a number of sources. Some of it is coded, some in French, some in Italian, some in Arabic.

"You will have a sergeant and two other servicemen to serve as your support. Each day, you will receive communications from a variety of sources. Your job is to relay that information to two receivers in four quick radio bursts, one for each of the languages and one for the coded messages.

"Here are your specific instructions.

"You will move your station every three days to a new site set up by your sergeant, who knows the North African coast well.

"You should study all the information that you understand. It may be of some use to you in the future.

"This assignment is for a period of four or five months. You have a week's leave starting now but, as you know, you are to tell no one of your connection to our organization.

"I suggest you create some story of a loose connection to army intelligence. Understood?"

Tom nodded his agreement to the Colonel.

"Your tutors hold you in high regard, despite your age. I am hoping for some great work during your future with us.

"God speed."

The foursome was flown to Oran on the northeast coast of Algeria. A huge bus driven by an employee of the COI, met them, and helped load the communication equipment and baggage.

The bus had been gutted and was reformed into a radio studio in the rear, fold down bunks from the sides. The windows were opaque to maintain privacy.

The amenities included a propane stove and tin dinner ware and aluminum service ware.

Tom reflected, "*This is not going to be a picnic.*"

He was right. There was no relief during the day from the beating sun and hot wind, although the cooler nights provided some change for the better.

When not on duty, they did exercises to keep in good physical condition, listened to public radio musical broadcasts from Oran or read.

Abdulla, their driver, seemed to be in meditation a good part of the time.

The assignment took discipline and patience, for which all four seemed to be well suited.

Thirty days into his work, Tom and Sergeant Jensen were guessing that the information was related, in some way, to a planned military operation that was in the offing.

Upon his return from the Mideast, Tom received a brief memo of “good job” from the chief. The envelope contained a memo that read, “You are scheduled for Chinese language school on Illinois Avenue, starting next Monday. In addition to Mandarin, I suggest you study a couple of dialects, including Wu and Jin.

“Report back in ninety days.”

On the day he reported in, as he stepped into the outer office, Maggie said, “Classes begin in three days, Tom. Meanwhile, the boss wants you to spend time in the records room. He wants you to know about our history, particularly about some of the difficulties we face with other agencies.”

As he pored through the records, Tom was pleased to learn that, by now, some of the difficulties were behind them, but he realized that the Navy wanted no help in the Pacific.

He learned that the Office was to be renamed the Office of Strategic Studies, OSS, and was expanding into full-fledged operations abroad. The Director is sending units to every theater of war that would have them.

His approach had already impressed the State Department, which in 1941 had desperately needed men to serve as intelligence officers in French North Africa.

Tom smiled when he read, “*The COI sent a dozen officers to work as "vice consuls" in several North African ports, where they established networks and acquired information to guide the Allied landings, Operation Torch, in November.*”

Tom, of course, had played an important role there and also improved his command of the French language. Now he had added Chinese to his list of skills.

He read with sorrow that no progress had been made with the hostility from the FBI, the G-2, and various war agencies.

Tom perked up when he read, "The new Joint Chiefs of Staff initially shared this distrust, regarding Donovan, a civilian, as an interloper, but one they might be able to control and utilize if COI could be placed under JCS control."

Surprisingly, Donovan himself, by now, was inclined to agree. Working with the Secretary of the JCS, Brig. Gen. Walter B. Smith, he and Donovan devised a plan to bring COI under the JCS in a way that would preserve the office's autonomy while winning it access to military support and resources.

The deeper Tom studied, the more he realized that his employer was shunned by the War Department, the FBI and Naval Intelligence and had no access to their decoding secrets. It was up to the OSS to discover its own techniques.

"Why must agencies protect their own interests instead of cooperating, especially in a time of war?"

Chapter 6

Anthony Galiardi, Jr. arrived screaming at 0615 on the morning of September 23, 1942. Angie was exhausted but doing well and now grinning as she held the newborn in her arms. Mama and Dad were eager to hear the news, but they had to wait until she was in her room away from delivery.

She would have her dad write Anthony the good news as soon as possible. "I sure hope the army gives him leave to visit. I want him to

have a true picture of his son as he faces the unknown. I want him to see what it is that he is fighting for.”

Her wish was not to be granted. Maternal leave could not be granted in the middle of a war time exercise.

She would have her dad take lots of pictures to send to Anthony.

She settled into her old room in her parent’s home. As she sat in the rocker that her dad had made, she was nursing the baby while her thoughts were on Anthony.

“Will he get leave to come home to see us, to see his son, before he goes some place overseas? He must come home. It isn’t fair to keep him from meeting his son.”

Angie felt her body tensing and turned her mind away from such a negative thought but was soon wondering about her brothers, Bill and Frank. They sent letters regularly but any hint as to their location was stamped out by the censors.

Her thoughts turned to her closest friend, Tommy. *“If he is in some kind of Intelligence work, he must be somewhere in Europe and probably at risk. I have to pray for you tonight, Tommy.”*

“I’m sure I’m not alone in this situation. Every woman in this country must be having thoughts like mine, thinking of a husband, a father, a son, a brother or a friend or even a fiancée.”

She knew that her mother spent a long time on her knees each evening before bed time.

Mama walked into the room and, seeing that Angie had finished nursing, took the baby, Junior, to burp. Five minutes later she put Junior into his bassinet.

“Mama, I think I’ll take a walk. The temperature seems mild.”

“Put on a heavy sweater, Angie. You mustn’t catch a cold.”

“I will, Mama.”

Halfway down the block, she met a group of three elderly neighbor women. “Good afternoon, Angie. How’s the baby?”

“Very well, thank you, Mrs. Scott. She nodded in the direction of the other two women.

Mrs. Vancoulich asked, “Have you heard the news about Johnny Hatchick?”

Angie shook her head.

“You know that he was in the merchant marine? Well, his ship was hit by a German torpedo in the Atlantic. Johnny is dead.”

The news hit Angie like a punch in the stomach. She hadn’t thought about that kind of possibility. She turned ashen. Her knees started to buckle. Mrs. Scott noticed and gripped Angie’s arm.

All three women began to apologize. “Sorry, Angie. We weren’t thinking. Your husband and two brothers are in the service. The war is very personal for you.”

Angie thought, *“That’s true. These neighbors have no one close in the military. For them, it is only news.”*

“I’m sorry, ladies. That is the first time I have heard of anyone I know being injured or killed. I’ll be all right now, Mrs. Scott.”

A few hours later, Junior was fussing and Angie was considering nursing him. She heard the phone ring and knew Mama would answer.

“Angie, its Anthony. Hurry, come to the phone.”

Just as she picked up the phone, Junior squealed. She heard Anthony saying, “That was some welcome to the daddy he has yet to meet. Hello, Darling.”

“Oh, Anthony, it is great to hear your voice. I love your letters, but this is super.”

The next few minutes were filled with proclamations of love and sadness of being separated before Anthony said, “My time is rationed. I

love you and baby Anthony. Give my love to your parents. I'll be out of touch for a few months.

Keep writing, please. There is nothing in my day that brightens it like a letter from you.”

“Oh, Anthony. I love you.”

“I know, dear. Bye.”

He was gone like that. Mama took the baby from her arms while Angie soaked her hankie with tears.

“Oh, God. Give us the chance to be a family of three.”

Her day brightened a bit when the mail arrived. There were three v-mail letters, one from each of the men in her life, Anthony, Bill and Frank.

Reading between the lines, she determined that her brothers were no longer in the states and that both were exposed to very hot weather.

She thought, “It’s time to start doing my part. The question is what and how, especially considering Junior.”

Chapter 7.

Maggie handed Tom a set of orders on the first Monday of January 1943.

“You’re due at Captain Smith’s office on the next floor, room 401. I’m going to miss your smiley face, Tom. Stop in whenever you have a chance.”

“Lieutenant Dudak, reporting as ordered, Sir.”

“At ease, Lieutenant. I tend to be less formal in this job than I might be in a navy ward room.”

“From reading your personnel jacket, it seems the boss has you’re ready for a number of assignments. By the way, open the envelope and I’ll pin the silver bar on your collar. You are now a first lieutenant.”

“Thank you, Captain.”

“Thank Bill Donovan when you see him. At the rate he is travelling around the world that may be a long time. That, of course, is the reason you now report to our office.”

“Pour yourself some coffee and pull up a seat. We need to chat a bit. Relax.”

A few minutes later they were chatting in Chinese. Tom was saying, “I also picked up a little Burmese while at the language school.”

“That’s excellent and may come in handy. You seem like the ideal pick for a spot we need to fill in China. A new detachment has been formed and Bill believes we need to have a liaison with the new group.

"Detachment 1205 is charged with collecting intelligence and supporting Chinese forces in order to tie down as many Japanese soldiers as possible in China instead of in one of the Pacific Islands.

"We began operating recently, in conjunction with the U.S. Navy Group, China, and Chinese intelligence, under our Special Cooperative Agreement.

"The detachment is set up to avoid bureaucratic obstacles and Nationalist Chinese demands to control all operations that have prevented it from reaching our potential.

"We have several agents on site working as part of the operation. Your primary job is to keep me informed of progress. Your cover job is to help the staff in training recruits in the art of commando combat and parachute jumping. I understand you are qualified."

"Yes, I am, and I hope to be of assistance."

"On the diplomatic side, soliciting support from the Nationalist Chinese would be helpful since they seem to be dragging their heels. In fact, any information that seems pertinent should be reported to your C.O."

"I understand and will do my best."

"I'm sure you will. Growing a mustache or a small beard is permissible. It may add a year or two to your youthful appearance."

He grinned and shook Tom's hand.

"You have a few days leaved and travel time to the west coast. You must be at Hamilton Field, north of San Francisco on the fifteenth. Good luck."

Mama Demilo opened her arms and gave Tommy a bear hug. She called out "Angie. Someone to see you."

She stepped back, knowing that Angie would be flying in, once she knew who was at the door. She was right. A minute later three sets of eyes were shedding tears of happiness at this special reunion.

Mama asked, "When did you get in?"

"Last night. I had a great visit at home with the family and we celebrated with a huge breakfast and tears."

Mama laughed. "We can do the same at lunch. I must say that you have put on some muscle since you left."

He laughed. "Military training can do that."

Angie took his hand and pulled him to the bedroom for a look at Junior.

"He looks just like Anthony."

"Except that the eyes are just like yours, Angie. He is handsome and he is healthy, I presume."

"Yes. You can hold him. He will awaken for his lunch about the same time Mama is ready."

They heard Mama calling. "Come sit with me in the kitchen. I don't want to miss a word from Tommy about his life in the service."

Twenty minutes later, Angie was saying, "That's a nice story with a lot of holes, which I presume will not be forthcoming because of military secrecy. Am I right?"

Tommy laughed, "You can say that, but I did tell you I had been to Africa and on the continent."

Momma said, "Yes, but you didn't say why"

“Well, I can tell you that my next assignment is in the opposite direction, but not where or why. I’m sorry. Now tell me about Anthony and your boys.”

Angie said, “We don’t know a damn thing except that they seem to be well. We get lots of those small V-nail letters that are short and sweet with no real information. It’s so frustrating.”

“We’ve been able to deduce that all three have seen some action. Do you think they were involved in that North Africa battle that the papers call Operation Torch?”

“If all three were in battle that is a good deduction.”

Mama said, “Enough about the war. Tell us about your family. We miss them because we attend mass at different times.”

They were interrupted by the sound of an infant crying.

Tom sat with Angie as she nursed Junior. She confided to him that, while she loved taking care of Junior, she was getting antsy about taking up her profession as photographer/journalist.

“I take a walk each day with camera in hand. I’ve written to a few newspapers, inquiring about a possible assignment. Mama is willing to take care of Junior as soon as I finish nursing.”

“Wow. That comes as a surprise.”

“I know but I’ve been fighting with the idea for weeks. If something happens to Anthony, our family will need a bread winner. Besides, I need to test myself.

She burped the baby and placed him down for a nap. “Now, let’s reminisce and sing a few operatic arias.”

The next few hours were filled with laughter and stories of past days while Tommy played with Junior.

Tommy promised not to wait a whole year before writing. The parting was as difficult as it would be when he left his real family. This would always be his second home.

Tom was bushed. The cargo flight on which he hitch hiked a ride over the Hump from India to China had rough winds. They flew through two thunder storms.

His seat on the deck amongst all the boxes was less than comfortable. His fanny and back ached and he needed sleep.

He was shivering as he stepped out of the plane. It was colder than predicted. He would need to draw heavier clothing.

None of that could get any attention until he reported to his new Commanding Officer.

The sergeant at the desk waved him into the interior office. Major King didn't bother to return his salute "I'll take the papers. Who the hell sent you and why?"

"The paper will explain, sir, and I don't know why me, sir."

The major took a good look to see if Tom was being a wise ass and decided that he was serious. He scanned the papers while Tom was braced at attention.

The Major looked up. "Relax, Dudak we are very informal here."

After finishing his reading, “That uniform doesn’t look like it has seen much action. What makes the Boss or Smith believe you can be of help? What’s your experience?”

“Gathering Intel in North Africa before Torch, Commando trading with the Brits, a few missions into France, including jumps, before we were official.”

I also have some experience in radio broadcasting.”

All of a sudden, the major grinned. "All right. It sounds like you can help, not like the last two bozos the army sent."

He suddenly switched into speaking Mandarin. Tom was not caught off guard but responded in the same language.

“Welcome aboard, Tom. Now get yourself some sleeping quarters and draw some heavier clothing. They say that spring will be colder than usual. Report in tomorrow morning after chow.”

There were ten students in his first hand-to-hand combat class. All were muscular and eager. Watching closely the faces of his students as he explained the basics, he could see that not all the students followed his words.

He addressed the three in Wu. Two of them immediately brightened and nodded. He switched to Jin and saw a smile on the face of the third.

He asked the three of them to step aside and watch while he started his short lecture in Mandarin for the seven others and taught some basic moves.

When he paired off six to practice, one of the three stepped up to pair up with the odd man out of the seven. He said in Jin, “I learn by watching.”

He did very well but needed some verbal hints. Tom pulled him to stand with the other two and explained the precise way he wanted them to make their moves.

After class, he met with their group leader and arranged for classes to be assembled according to dialects understood by the trainees.

He did the same with his afternoon classes for judo and supplementary hand-to-hand combat techniques.

It was a difficult chore to organize the students since each of the basic dialects also had variants related to geographical areas.

Fortunately, Tom had a good ear and mind for languages, thus making it easier to adapt to the variety of students in his classes.

At the end of the first week, Major King was thanking him for the number of students who were transitioning from basic hand-to-hand combat.

He had watched the final trials and said, “Tom, that’s the greatest number of graduates from a single batch that we have ever promoted.

Great job, Tom. Any idea how we can help the other instructors? We’re getting backed up.”

“I’ve met the others. All of them do well with Mandarin and Jin. A few are passable with Wu. Unfortunately, the bulk of our students speak a variation of Hue and other dialects. It takes twice as long to teach by example alone without a verbal grasping of the fundamentals.”

“What do you suggest?”

“Do we have access to a well-educated Chinese staff person who can do some sorting? I would be happy to take the students who have limited Mandarin or Wu. I seem to have a knack for finding the right words to deal with those from distant provinces.”

“Good. Let’s see what I can do.”

The major was successful and the reorganization had its effect. Within weeks the backlog was diminishing.

The weather began to warm up.

The major asked Tom to stop by for a chat. Over some hot coffee and some local sweets, the major said, “The backlog is just about evaporated. Thanks to you. I want to thank you, especially for helping the other instructors to improve their language skills. I know many have thanked you personally.

“I’ve sent off a commendation to be put in your personnel file.”

“Thank you.”

“Now. With the warmer weather, we are ready for jump training and we have a spot for you on the staff. Our first class is a large one, made up of officers of the Nationalist army. We haven’t had much cooperation from the officers but they seem eager to form groups of airborne.”

Tom asked, “From the tone of your voice, do I understand that there is some deep reason that we do not grasp at present?”

“That’s what I like about you, Tom. You are quick on the uptake. Yes, and we hope you can find a way to get some clues.”

Tom discovered that the entire sixteen weeks of training would consist only of Nationalist Airborne students. They had registered an overabundance of students to replenish the classes when some students would “wash out” for one or more reasons.

This fact peaked Tom’s interest. He decided to develop a relationship with some of the students.

On the second day of ground school, Tom decided to share lunch with them instead of going to the officers’ mess.

Two from the class welcomed him warmly and invited him to sit with them. They were eager to practice their limited English with Tom.

By the time the rest period was over, the group around Tom had grown to eight. When the bell sounded for return to class, they were inviting Tom to share dinner with them. He responded enthusiastically.

Since he had no duty for the next hour he waved to the waitress to bring more coffee when the others left.

She approached slowly, attempting to avert the right side of her face. He asked gently, “Why are you hiding your face? You are a beautiful young woman.”

The comment brought tears to her eyes. A sob escaped her lips.

“What is your name?”

“Soo Ling.”

“Please tell me what’s wrong.”

She hesitated but Tom pressed her.

She turned her face which displayed a huge red mark that was beginning to turn color.

“I am ashamed.”

“Who did that?”

There was no response.

“Soo Ling, someone hit you with a fist. That is not allowed on this base. I must know.”

“It was one of the captains from Shanghai. I do not know his name.”

“One of his friends accidentally bumped me when I was pouring water which made me spill a drop on his sleeve.” She gulped.

Tom waited for the rest of the story.

“He stood up, yelled ‘You pig!’ and hit me so that I fell down and spilled all the water, some on his shoes. Then he kicked me.”

“No one helped you?”

“No. Some laughed and others turned their faces.”

Tom said nothing. He took Soo Ling by her hand and walked to her supervisor.

“This lady needs medical attention. I am taking her to the first aid station.”

The mess supervisor started to protest, but Tom led Soo Ling out of the door.

Forty minutes later, she was released with a bandage covering the area on her cheek where the skin had been broken.

She said to Tom, "Please let me return to work. My boss will be angry. We are short-handed and must not anger the captain. My boss says he is important member of Chang Kai Sheki family."

Tom walked with her to the dining hall. Her boss came running out the door. "Soo Ling, you no longer can work here. The captain said you are poor waitress and may not serve his men. I am so sorry. He pays for their food and our wages."

Tom's first reaction was outrage, but he realized he was in no position to argue with the captain. He put his arms around a sobbing Soo Ling. "Come, let us see what we can do about this."

She shook her head. "Please do not make trouble. He is powerful. I will pack my things and walk to another camp."

"Wait, Soo Ling. Let's see if there is work you can do elsewhere in this camp. Get your things and meet me over there."

He pointed to the U.S. mess hall, which included the officers' club.

She nodded and with head down walked to get her belongings.

An hour later, she was being interviewed by the Club manager while Tom was off to the jump ground school.

He didn't have time to check on Soo Ling until much later. He had a dinner date with the major so catching Soo Ling would have to wait.

A long slim arm was placing his soup bowl on the table and the faint scent of Soo Ling wafted past his nose. He turned to see her smiling face.

The next day at lunch with the ground school students, he casually asked why there were so many extra candidates for the school.

One of his students said, "Oh, that is so there is no room for any of the peasants from the villages to learn how to jump. You need to understand that we want to be strong after we defeat the Japanese. We will have to be strong enough to defeat the communist peasants who will try to overthrow our leader.

"We do not want to have them learn modern warfare techniques to use against us."

Tom shared the information with the major at dinner that evening. The major said, "I see. That's why I was being pressed to cut down the size of the combat classes. To hell with them. We need all the fighting men we can get."

"I want you to train a few more of those so-called peasants so that they can train more of their own."

It must have been well after midnight when Tom was startled. He was awakened by the feeling that someone was in his room. A moment later, he felt the bare hip of a woman slipping close and the scent of Soo Ling overcoming him.

She started to speak in English but Tom said, "It is more comfortable for you to speak Jin."

She switched. "It is not good for a man to be without a woman. If it pleases you, Mr. Tom, I would to be that woman for you."

“Soo Ling, that is a nice offer but not necessary.”

“I know but it is what I want to do for you. I owe you so much. “

“You owe me nothing. I did what any thoughtful man would do.”

“That is not so. You are kind and gentle. It would please me much to be your woman while you stay with us. I am sorry I am not a virgin but I will be a good lover. I think you like me.”

“Oh, yes, but do you not have a man? You must have. You are so beautiful.”

“Thank you. My man is dead a long time ago. The Japanese killed him.”

Tom was debating within himself. She was stirring his blood, but it didn't feel right.”

She said, “It has been a long time for me. A woman needs the touch of a man to be fulfilled as a woman.”

She took his hand and covered her breast and moved just a bit closer. Once she knew that he was approving, she made love to him as no other woman in his limited experience had ever done.

She was gone before Tom awakened in the morning, but she greeted him at breakfast with a shy smile and a cup of hot coffee. As he took his seat, Tom was sure that everyone was aware of something special happening between the two of them, but a look around proved otherwise.

Standing at the bar with a group of his fellow officers that evening, he picked up some chatter. He learned that several others were

involved with local women, including one who spoke as if his woman lived with him every night.

That evening, he was awake with a dim light still lit, when she arrived. She gave him a warm smile and looked from him to the lamp. “You wish to watch me undress?”

He nodded. She made no special movements, but to Tom it was as if she were in a ritual dance. She did not pose, even for a moment, and it seemed to him that she floated across the space to envelope him into her being.

Much later, as she lay in his arms, she responded to his questions with full honesty. Soo was the third daughter of a small farmer in the middle of the country. Their village was rather large so that she was able to get decent schooling

She managed to earn a scholarship to a teachers’ college in the east where she got a two-year degree to teach and learned Basic English.

She was a serious student and received top grades.

During her senior year, she fell in love with one of the professors. There was no way to have a real marriage but they lived together until the Japanese came to the town.

Her lover was killed in the first skirmish and Soo was ravished by one of the Japanese. “Fortunately, I was able to escape to the edge of town and hide in the bushes. I was lucky. Many of the women were raped three or four times. When the enemies were gone, the town was destroyed and the younger men killed. The town was dead.”

“I left the town with a little food, a few clothes and a Chinese-English dictionary.”

“I needed to find a way to make a living. I could not go home. I was what you call damaged goods, a shamed woman.

I walked a long distance, begged for small amounts of food at farm houses along the way.”

I finally reached a military base where I found part- time work as a dish washer and then as a waitress for the officers.

Recently I was sent here because this place was expanding under American control.”

“Now, I am so lucky you are good to me and you are a gentle lover. Perhaps the next time we make love, I will be able to – what is the word you use?”

“Do you mean climax?”

“I think that is the word. It is when a woman experiences as much joy as the man. It happened to me on the last night that my man and I lay together.”

Much later, she whispered, "That was beautiful and I know it will still be better for me as we continue."

Her honesty was so innocent and welcome. Tom was determined to give her the utmost pleasure in the nights to come. And he did.

Chapter 8

A few weeks later, Tom received several letters that arrived with the cargo from India. One was from his mother and the other from Angie. The moment he began to open Angie's letter, he had the strangest feeling overcome his body. It was an omen.

He saw the mark of a tear drop on the top of the page.

Dear Tommy, I just received word that Anthony is dead. I have no real details except that in a skirmish about six weeks ago, Anthony took a bullet in his torso that eventually turned to pneumonia which the doctors were unable to cure.

He will be given the Distinguished Service Medal and Purple Heart; posthumously. I am taking the train to be there for the ceremony in two weeks.

I plan to get over my depression to be strong enough for the trip.

We still have no real news from my brothers except to deduce that they are all right.

I have had some correspondence from several women's magazines that are interested in using my services as photo/journalist overseas. I will keep you posted.

Junior is growing like a weed and is nice and chubby.

Pray for us, Tommy.

Momma sends her love, as do I.

Angie.

That evening, Tom retired to his room early in order to write a letter to Angie. He found it difficult to find the right words to express his deep sorrow.

Soo Ling noticed his grieving and hurried to his quarters as soon as her tasks were completed and daylight had turned to dark.

She found him asleep, humped over the desk and his writing pad. She moved to his back and began a gentle massaging of his neck. He relaxed under her fingers.

“My Thomas is sad. What may I do to help him in this moment of sadness?”

Tom stood, lifted Soo Ling in his arms and took her to the large deep chair. He sat her on his lap and told her the story of his long relationship and friendship with Angie.

When he finished, he said, “Now, I find it hard to express my sorrow. Words seem so futile at a time like this.”

She said, “I have never had a friend so close until I became your friend. I would not know what to say if word came to me of your sudden death. I would probably cry until there were no more tears to shed.”

Her words opened the flood gates and he let the tears roll. Soo Ling took the helm of her dress and wiped away wave after wave of those tears.

When there were no more tears, she led him to the bed, undressed him and placed the cover over him so that he could sleep.

Soo Ling, in her compassion for Tom, sat up in the deep chair as a sentinel might. Her heart wept for her lover.

Several evenings later, Tom asked Soo Ling, “Have you ever written your family to explain your situation?”

“Yes, I wrote one letter explaining what happened in that town. I had to be truthful with my family. I wrote again when I came to this camp but have not heard from my father.”

“Is it possible that he never received the letter?”

“I guess it is possible, but tradition says that I am no longer acceptable at my father’s table.”

“How far is your home from here?”

“I would guess about forty miles by your measurement. That is only a guess. Why do you ask?”

“I have just received notice that I will be returning home in a few weeks. I think it would be better and safer for you to be teaching in your village than working in a military camp.”

She interjected, “But my father – “

“May forgive you. Much had changed with the war.”

“I do not think so. Besides, that is a long walk with bandits or soldiers eager to force a woman if necessary.”

Tom brushed off her hesitation. “I could borrow a jeep and a driver. We would be there in no time.”

“This might make my father even angrier.”

“Maybe not. Why not take a chance and try? It can be no worse than what you are suffering now.”

He could see that she was weakening. Finally, she said, “I have to stay with you until you must leave.”

“I understand and will be honored as I am each day. Once I have my orders, we can plan the trip. I will stay with you until your father decides. If he does not accept your return, I will bring you back to this base.”

“Oh, my Tom. You are the kindest and most loving man in the world.”

Two weeks later, Tom received his orders. He was to depart for India on the cargo plane scheduled nine days from this date.

Three days prior to departure, he and a sergeant, both heavily armed, sped off toward the village. The road was rough with many pot holes and ceased to exist for a few miles as they approached Soo Ling’s village.

The land approaching the village was full with rows of vegetables. Scattered across the landscape were dark lumps of stooped individuals, mostly women as far as Tom could determine.

The entire group stood to look in the direction of the approaching vehicle. Tom had the driver pull to a stop. He saw a lone figure begin to walk slowly toward the jeep.

Within a minute, Tom could see that it was an elderly male. His gut said, "This man is the village elder and is Soo Ling's father."

Tom decided to wait but he stood to honor the gentleman. As he approached, the man glanced at Soo Ling but his eyes immediately returned to look at Tom.

Speaking in the dialect that the man would understand, as he had learned it from Soo Ling, he introduced himself.

The man nodded and welcomed Tom to the village.

Tom explained his mission and asked if the elder would be willing to speak with Soo Ling.

Her father turned to look carefully at his daughter, and then said to Tom, "It is almost time for the noon meal. We would be honored if you would join us."

Tom noticed that the entire group was gathering at a certain spot. The elder led the parade, followed by Tom, the serge and Soo Ling at the rear.

"I am Soo Li Hu, village elder. All the other men are at war or are dead. Our children are playing games in the village. You will, please, eat with the women while I speak with my daughter who has been gone for a long time."

He signaled to Soo Ling who followed him to the shade of small tree about fifty yards distant.

Tom delighted the women when they discovered that he spoke their language. They asked many questions about America and news about the war.

One wanted to know if he would sing an American song, which he did to their enjoyment.

Father and daughter were gone the best part of an hour. Tom kept his eyes on Soo Ling, hoping for a hint. The good news was that they returned slowly but with her hand in his and a beaming smile on her face.

"We are pleased to welcome our daughter's return and I thank you for making this gift to our family. She will explain while she and I enjoy our food."

"My dear Tom, I thank you for insisting and finding the way to have me reunited with my family. I have told him every important detail

including our relationship. The smile on his face is his approval of you and all that you have done for me and meant to me.”

“My sadness at your leaving is balanced by my returning to my family. My mother and two sisters have given me a smile, which is good news.”

My father, as the elder of the village, has hired me as the teacher and hopes to recruit some children from the next village”

“You should leave now. I am having a hard time holding back the tears of sorrow.”

They stood, facing each other, their moist eyes saying all that needed to be said.

Chapter 9.

Maggie rose and opened her arms to welcome her favorite agent. “I missed your smiling face, Tom. Welcome back “Oops, I’ll get you a tissue to take care of the lipstick.”

She reached for a letter on her desk and handed it to Tom. It was a letter from Angie, written on a V-mail letterhead.

“It looks like a note from one of your other admirers.”

“Dear Tommy,

I have just a moment to get this note off before my flight to London. I have three women’s magazines sponsoring my engagement as a journalist/photographer in England for a minimum of a year. The contract may be extended, if need be, for more.

I received approval from the War Department two days ago and lucked out with this cargo flight. I hope the dispatcher remembers to post this letter. Angie”

He wondered how Mama was making out with Junior, who was about a year old. He decided that a long letter to his family and one to Angie’s family was his top priority. He might get an assignment this afternoon or a month from today.

Two hours later, he was in Captain Smith’s office about to discover the when and where of his next mission.

“I hope you haven’t unpacked. Your terminus is Naples. Take along your Italian dictionary. It’s a bit different from Mandarin.

Here are your orders, to be opened during the flight across the pond. Your connecting flight leaves Andrews Field in three hours. A complete briefing will be given you in London, the day after tomorrow. That is if the weather is kind to you. Good luck, Tom.”

After digesting the content of his orders, he knew very little more than Smith had told him

Apparently, he would have little or no time in London. “That’s too bad. I was hoping to find Angie.”

In the meantime, he was tightly buckled in and felt like he was riding a bronco for hours upon hours.

Commander Ted Stevens met him in the hangar at the airport. He was escorted to a waiting vehicle, what appeared to be an old Rolls Royce.

Stevens announced. “Sorry I can’t give you time to rest after that hellish flight. We’re driving straight through to the coast. You may get some rest after the briefing since this is a long drive.”

“You will be inserted into Naples via a British submarine, which is now waiting under water just off our coastline. Your mission is to make friends with members of the resistance.

“We expect, given the current pace of allied movement up the coast, that Naples may be under siege by late September or early October. That is a bit more than about six weeks from now.

“Your mission is to help organize a provocation of the Germans so that their reaction will provoke much of the city’s population into rioting, if possible that should keep the Germans busy enough to be diverted from the surprise attacks planned by the allied forces. The bigger diversion the better.

“The second, and even more important, task is to get detailed German defense locations and radio them to me. September 12th is our target date for receiving the info.”

“I understand that you are fluent in Neapolitan Italian, which should make your job a bit easier.”

Tom said, “About the language, the answer is yes but I’m not so sure about the task. I’ve had no experience in that field.”

“I’m sure you will do fine. Now, try to get some sleep.”

Tom was fast asleep in minutes. He had to be awakened at the dock.

Once aboard the submarine, he found a bunk and had to be awakened for the briefing regarding his date with a fishing boat in the gulf of Naples.

The change of clothing took place on the sub His new fisherman’s outfit looked like any other member of the crew, once he was aboard the crawler.

“I am Primo.”

“I am Pietro, said Tom.”

“Are you tired or hungry?”

“No. I slept and the navy fed me well.”

“Good, then we can go to the meeting. Giovanni is our leader and he is anxious to meet you.”

“First, we must continue fishing so we won’t arouse suspicion. We will enter the harbor just at sun up. After unloading our catch, we will go to his home to wash up and dress you to look like one of us. We should darken your hair and eyebrows a bit.”

“Then we join the fishermen for the usual early lunch at Francisco’s café on the waterfront. There are always Nazi soldiers on guard there but they are so used to us that they are careless.

Some of the men will be drinking, some playing dice and others playing cards. It will be a typical morning for the fishermen.”

Casually, over a two-hour period, a few of us drift off. We go the end of a large culvert that leads us to a tunnel to the basement of that large house on the hill.”

The house belongs to the Contessa, whose husband is Giovanni, our leader.”

It was close to eleven thirty when Primo and Tom entered the basement. Tom had to choke off the gasp when he was greeted by the most beautiful woman he had ever seen.

“Welcome, Mr. Dudak. I’m Irene Mania Costa. May I present my husband, Giovanni Costa?”

Tom turned to see a handsome gray-haired and muscular man. In heavily accented English, “We are delighted to welcome you, Lieutenant. Please come in and meet the others.”

Seven men and another woman were seated around a large table, making this a meeting of twelve. The Contessa began pouring wine for the group as Giovanni called the meeting to order

Anyone could see the surprise and pleasure in the faces around the table when Tom greeted them in excellent Italian with the touch of local accent.

“I hope you will excuse my Italian. I have just returned from China.”

Giovanni laughed. You haven’t lost your touch. How did you come to speak our language so well?”

“My best friend from the second grade on was from a family of immigrants from Naples. I practically lived with the family.”

“Let me begin. I bring a bit of gold to help with your expenses. Here is a bag of twenty ounces. In my pack at Prime’s house another four such bags. My employer will spare no expense to make my trip worthwhile.”

Tom could see the grin of approval on their faces.

“If I may, I would like to have a run down on the types of activity in which your group has been engaged and your own evaluation of that action.”

Giovanni nodded toward another man at the table. “Pietro, why don’t you start off.?”

“We have been involved with a lot of small guerilla activity. On an intermittent basis, we cut telephone lines and then will certain power lines that affect the Nazi operations.

That usually frustrates the commandant, who must use soldiers to help with the repairs, which in turn provides less security for their headquarters.

That gives us opportunities to set fires to their storage sheds. On one occasion, we were able to bomb a shed that contained many weapons and much ammunition. That really upset the commandant who issued orders to shoot anyone on the street who was not employed.

That reaction really provoked the people who were unable to buy any food, especial milk for the babies.”

Giovanni thanked him and then said, “Since the allies seized Anzio, we were able to set up a network with other resistance unit to return three fliers who had been shot down and were under our protection for months.”

Pietro cut in. “and we were able to recruit some of more skilled members who helped us implement acts of sabotage on the electrical power grid.

He continued. “One of our effective acts has been derauling freight cars. We’re good at the job but the Germans have heavy patrols that limit our opportunities. We switched to planting road bombs whenever we can discover dates of incoming shipments”

Several men added details of other activity.

The Contessa interrupted the discussion. "Time is up." She turned to Tom. "If the men are absent from their usual haunts for too long, it may rouse some suspicion."

"We meet again this evening just before the fishermen take off. You are invited to stay here with us until the evening meeting. That limits your exposure."

"Thank you. I am honored to be your guest."

A maid knocked on his door. "Lunch is being served. Please follow me, signor."

The Contessa was seated at a table in a small room off the main dining room. She waved Tom to seat opposite of her.

"Giovanni will be gone for a few hours. By the way, I would be pleased if you called me Irene."

Tom nodded.

She continued, "I am sorry that I have only bread and cheese to serve you. The Boche takes all the best and allows us limited amounts of what they do not take for themselves."

Tom smiled. "Fresh baked bread and goat cheese makes for a great lunch,"

She laughed. "You are a gentleman but a very poor liar, but Maria will delight you with a cottage cheese pie to go with our coffee."

During lunch, the Contessa gave Tom a rundown of civilian life under the German heel. She went on to explain that with each subversive act by the underground, the Commandant found a way to take revenge.

"Never the less, the eight group leaders, the ones you just met, say that their men and women want to continue with more activity. Each group has been taking polls of the neighborhoods in which they are formed. More than half the people are urging them to do more damage to the Germans."

"I could see by their faces at the meeting that your gift of gold has come at the right time."

Maria interrupted their conversation to clear away the plates so that she might serve the dessert and coffee."

Irene laughed. “The Boche would die if they knew I still had real coffee in my basement. Of course, we use it sparingly.”

Tom joined her in the laughter and looked forward to the next half hour.

Irene said, “Thomas, you may ask me any question. I have as much information as Giovanni. In fact, the group has voted that if anything happens to my husband that I shall replace him as the coordinator for Napoli.”

Tom nodded his understanding. “Then let me brief you on my mission and hopes.”

“I have in my possession a grid with small lines of latitude and longitude of the bay and the metropolitan area of the city. My superiors are requesting your assistance with as much accuracy as possible in detailing the locations of the German defenses. I need to get that to the crew of a submarine by September 10th.”

“Our troops could be ready for an invasion by the 20th. Do you think the group will be willing to do that for me?”

There was no hesitancy with Irene. “Absolutely.”

She went on. “There is more, isn’t there?”

“Yes. If it were possible to create a real diversion a day or two ahead of the first arrivals, it would divide the German effort, leaving fewer men to defend the city.”

“Do you mean something like a major rail accident that would take a lot of soldiers to fix as well as unload and transport to storage?”

“That sounds great. Concurrent with that, some sort of mass meeting in another part of town would require the Germans to use more men.”

She laughed. “Maybe a big peaceful march, with someone flies our flag.”

Tom asked, “Isn’t that something that could lead to bloodshed?”

“Yes, but our people have done that previously. We have amazingly brave citizens who put their lives on the line daily.”

She went on. “I’ll tell you what. Let me make the suggestions to the group when we meet this evening.”

Irene stood. "It is time for Maria and me to go shopping. The food shops open at three thirty and we must get in line with our baskets. Please enjoy the library. I am sure you read as well as you speak Italian."

The Contessa made the presentation of Tom's request which was agreed to unanimously after a long discussion of the methods.

The group decided that it would be wise to ease up on some of the planned actions. Someone said, "The Commandant might be fooled, thinking that his harsh treatment is having its effect on our behavior."

Pietro then introduced a concern. "We might run into some resistance. Some young hot heads in my district are talking about revenge for the recent killings of innocent people as punishment for our activity."

Giovanni said, "That would be unwise. We could be freed within a month or so. Why risk more slaughters? We need to put a lid on that kind of thinking."

There was general agreement around the table, a commitment to minimize risk.

While it was still dark on the morning of September 8th, Tom heard someone arrive. Apparently, Giovanni talked with some sort of messenger.

At breakfast, he told Tom, "An armistice has been signed between our government and the Allies. It will become public at noon today."

Tom said, "That sounds like trouble for the Naples areas. The Germans will bear down and turn on the Italian soldiers that are now under their command."

"Yes, and some of our young people will use this to create more havoc. I must call a special meeting, since we had not planned on a meeting today. By the way, you may make plans to send your chart to the submarine. That task is complete."

As it turned out, the situation was taken out of the hands of the committee.

The Italian soldiers who had been serving under the Germans went into hiding. German soldiers started looting Italian shops and the owners defended themselves by shooting the soldiers.

On the following day, the committee heard “A bloody clash just occurred. Some resistance fighters succeeded in blocking the path of some German motor vehicles. In the fights, six German soldiers died.”

“The Commandant will just turn the screws more tightly.”

As a result, new repressive measures were issued by the Commandant. He also ordered the evacuation of the entire coastal area up to 300 meters from the sea.

That order affected a quarter million people who would be thus forced to abandon their homes to allow the creation of a military security zone.

To the citizens, that seemed like a prelude to the destruction of their port.

The committee members were still meeting when a messenger arrived. “A manifesto has been issued, calling for compulsory work from all males between the ages of 18 and 30. They will be sent in to labor camps in Germany.”

Days later Giovanni had information that very few men across the area responded to the manifesto. The Commandant sent soldiers into the city to round up and immediately execute defaulting citizens.

The population waited for no organized resistance. They took charge of their own fate.

An unarmed crowd poured into the roads, protesting against the Nazi roundups, freeing young people already rounded up from deportation.

The rioters were now joined by some former Italian soldiers, who had kept themselves hidden so far.

It was obvious that the recent actions by the German command had gone too far. The people saw a future with hundreds being shot indiscriminately and all their young people being deported to Germany.

It took days of street fighting. Then the German command, confronted by tens of thousands, decided to evacuate the area. The fight for Naples was over.

Tom was invited to join the committee in order to welcome the first allied unit to enter the city.

Not a drop of Allied blood was shed in the taking of Naples. All the blood had been shed by thousands of Neapolitans in the months prior.

The Contessa created a special celebration dinner that evening. Over drinks before dinner, she asked, “Tomas, what are your plans, if I may ask?”

“I have no idea. I will stay put until I receive orders.”

“Good, Giovanni and I want you to continue to stay with us. There is so much more than war to talk about. We have whole collection of phonograph records of Italian operas that we haven’t played for years. Do you enjoy opera?”

Tom chuckled and told them about his friend, Angela and the Saturday afternoon broadcasts from the Metropolitan opera.

At that moment, Giovanni started to rise. He strode to the doorway and gave a bear hug to a young woman. As she finally broke the embrace, Tom saw a graceful and beautiful younger version of the Contessa.

She moved toward Tom, giving him a warm smile and putting out her hand, said, “I’m Rosa Lippo, Irene’s niece and I already know a bit about you, Tomas.”

Tom took her hand and put it to his lips. “I’m pleased to meet you, Rosa.”

She widened her smile and sat on the sofa close to the spot that Tom had occupied. As he sat, he was aware of a subtle scent of jasmine and the wedding ring on her left hand.

The Contessa brought Rosa into the conversation with a recap of Tom’ story of hearing the broadcasts from the Met in New York.

Rosa turned to Tom. “Wonderful. Perhaps, we can listen to some recordings this evening.”

Giovanni said. “This should be a great evening, ending, I hope, with your rendition of the aria, from La Bohème, that I love so much.”

In a soft and endearing voice, Rosa said, “Of course, Papa.”

Tom was confused. Rosa was Giovanni’s daughter but Irene’s niece.

It was a beautiful evening, one that Tom would never have dreamed of. Both Giovanni and Rosa joined the voices of Rodolfo and Mimi on the phonograph.

Tom could not hold back his tears as they sang the duet from the first act during which they discover they are in love. He was so into the aria that he felt that Mimi was singing to him.

Giovanni was so emotional that he left the room.

The Contessa arose. "I need to be with Giovanni. You young one should stay and get acquainted."

Rosa asked, "Tomas, would you like a gentle red wine that Papa has for times like this?"

Tom nodded.

"Come; walk with me to the wine cellar. I may need help on the old staircase."

Fifteen minutes later, they were ensconced on the sofa, sipping some of Gods nectar.

She said, "You must have a thousand questions. The question mark on your face never left even for a moment."

Tom laughed. "That's putting it mildly."

"The story is not long but very complex, more like a fairy tale.

My father met and fell in love with a set of boatful twins. This was when they were performing the opera, La Boehme. Both women loved him. In the end, he had to choose and he chose the younger of the two.

As you would guess, her name was Mimi.

She died at my birth.

In all his grief for his lost Mimi, was a forgotten infant, as far as he was concerned. The older sister, Irene, came to my rescue. She cared for me as though I were her child.

I was never told about a time lapse, but a very patient Contessa, always in love with my father, waited until a grief-stricken man was ready to ask for her hand in marriage.

I never knew any part of the story until I was sixteen.

There is another twist in the tale. I have a twin brother, a minute younger than me. We are and were very close, separated when the Fascists made him a foot soldier.

We have not heard a word from him since the day he was inducted.

We were such a happy family.

Both parents groomed us for the opera and we kids did well, both playing minor roles at La Scala and lead roles in some provincial companies.

Papas always insisted that we sing the duet and always ended up leaving the room. I'm sure that it has to do with the last operatic performance he saw which was La Bohème in which my brother played Rodolfo and I was Mimi."

At that point, her voice broke completely and the dam burst to let flow a gush of tears.

She leaned to her right and laid her head on his shoulder. Tom waited.

She stirred, saying, "I haven't told that whole story to any one in my life, Tomas"

"You are not to worry. That was a very dear confidence which I shall hold as that."

"Thank you and thanks for the shoulder. This feels so nice."

They stayed in that position for a long five mints

Tom decided to ask, "Is there another sad chapter that deals with ring on your finger?"

Rosa sat up and smiled. "Oh, that's my wall of protection from lecherous German and Italian officers."

I've been serving as a military driver. You'd be surprised at the things I hear and pass on to the resistance, but I'm glad that is part of my history. I think I did well but the tension was terrible, fearing that I might give myself away."

Tom had a sense that her lips were not saying what her eyes were revealing. He squeezed her and into those pools of emotion where a hint of moisture was developing.

"Oh, Tom, you're looking into my soul."

Rosa took a deep breath and squeezed her eyes but the tears still escaped.

Tom reached for his handkerchief, saying, "I'm sorry, Rosa. I didn't mean to pry open a wound.

She shook her head and continued dabbing at the tear.

"Please don't apologize. I've been trying, without success, to be total open. It's a secret known only to my family."

I was in love with Giacomo. He was suddenly called to active duty. We wanted to get married but the time was short.

He had his dead mother's wedding ring and put it on my finger the night we yielded our virginity to each other.

He was gone the next morning and was killed in action a few months later. This ring and three letters are all I have left.

She began to sob. Tom took her into his arms while she dealt with her grief.

When she was composed, she finished her story. "Weeks later, I was delighted to find that I was pregnant. My folks and I rejoiced but within two weeks I had a miscarriage."

"Tom, it is our family secret and now you are the only one outside the family and my doctor who shares the secret."

Tom, through his own tears, said, "A secret that will stay in my heart."

"Hey. We haven't put a dent in that bottle of nectar."

She poured a liberal amount into both glasses.

"Now, it's your turn." She set the glass on the end table and lay back, her head on Tom's lap.

Tom was sure she would fall asleep, believing his story to be so mundane. Instead, he was surprised to find her interested in what she had done and some of what was in his heart.

When his story was ended, she really surprised him. She reached up and pulled his face to hers, until their lips met. She let her lips linger gently before she sat up. She took his hands into hers.

"We are like two peas in a pod, unaware that we are looking for love in a world at war."

She sat up, picked up her glass and pointed to his. When he had his in hand, she linked hers against his. “To two lonely souls.

She put down the glass and lay her head on Tom’s shoulder. Within seconds, she was sound asleep. Thinking she would be uncomfortable, he let her head slip to his lap and lifted her legs so that she could lie comfortably.

It was a half hour later that she awoke. Her eyes popped open. “What? Where am I? No.”

“Hush, Rosa. It’s only Tom. You’re safe with me.” He planted a soft kiss on her forehead.

“Oh, Tomas. I must have fallen asleep I was in the middle of a bad dream. Thank goodness you are here.”

Tom waited, as she seemed to be making a decision. I am so tired, Tom, let me lie like this for a bit.”

“I think you ought to be in your bed for a good night’s rest.”

“I’m too tired to club the stairs.”

Without a word, he stood, lifted her in to his arms and headed for the stairs. “Which is your room?”

“My stuff is in the second room on the right. This is so nice.”

He pulled down the coverlet, then sat her on the edge of the bed and removed her shoes. He started to look for a night dress.

“Tom, help me take off my dress. I will sleep in my slip.”

A few minutes later, he was pulling the coverlet to cover her body. She reached for his hand.

“Tom, stay with me through the night. This is a large bed but I would like the idea of your being nearby.”

Her head move slightly and then she was still. She had fallen asleep.

Tom wasn’t sure how to act. He usually slept in the nude. He decided to strip down to his shorts and lay down on the far side of the king-sized bed.

He awakened several times to find her breathing evenly. When he awakened at seven in the morning, she was gone.

Twenty minutes later, he found her in the kitchen where she and the Contessa were preparing breakfast.

After breakfast, Rosa invited Tom to take a long walk around the neighborhood and do the food shopping for the Contessa. They spent two hours strolling and sharing their histories.

Tom never felt so free to talk about his life, his boyhood dreams and his religious beliefs. He shared so much with Angie, but he had never let anyone get close.

For every bit of his sharing, Rosa gave back one of her own.

They surprised themselves to discover their mutual love for children and a need to protect the weaker ones.

Tom told her of taking on two bullies and giving both a bloody nose for threatening a small boy who was very effeminate. After the fight, he ended up helping the boys stop the bleeding

“The funny thing, Rosa, is that Teddy, one of the bullies, became a good friend later.”

When he told her of his first love of Angie, Rosa, said, “Even at age twelve, I would never have let you go.”

After lunch, they took a long walk around the estate. They ended up in the gazebo where they found a pitcher of lemonade which some mysterious person had set it along with two glasses.

Rosa poured two glasses and sat beside Tom on the large sofa. “Tom, do you believe that you will have to leave real soon?”

“I have no way of knowing. That depends on where I am being sent and what transportation is available. I was looking forward to a quick departure until you walked into my life. I need to know more about you and to know the real you. I have never met any woman like you.”

She gently put her hand on his arm and looked him directly in the eyes.

“I have that same feeling about you. It is difficult to reconcile a warrior with a sensitive soul that shows through when needed.”

Rosa took the glass from his hand and put both on the coffee table, took both his hands into hers.

“Tom, I want you to kiss me.”

His answer was, “I want that to happen but that may be only the beginning of something bigger and I will soon be out of your life.”

“I hope it is. I want to get to know the deeper you that come through in the intimacy of making love.”

The kiss went on and on with a brief interruption to inhale and begin once more. They finally broke apart. Tom sunk his face into her hair.

“Aren’t you worried that you may get pregnant if we continue, Rosa? I have no protection.”

“Not to worry, Tom.”

To her, “I don’t think there is a chance of making a baby but, if so, I would have a real memory if a new Tomas were to come forth.”

All thoughts faded into the background as two lovers found explosive fulfillment and then, in the intimacy that followed, found the deeper essence of each other.

Much later, he carried her to the shower where they washed and dried each other while admiring the beautiful bodies that had become one.

The Contest’s eyes twinkled when she saw the beaming couple come to dinner.

Giovanni suggested a few hands of bridge after dinner. He and Rosa were partners. After Rosa missed two cue bids by her Papa, he laughed and said, “Lovers belong in bed not at the bridge table.”

It was a hilarious and loud night of laughter, love and tears that finally dissolved into sleep just before dawn.

It was as if they knew that at ten o’clock word would come that the submarine would be expecting Tom at 1600 that afternoon.

All three misty-eyed members of his host family were at the dock when he boarded the fishing boat. Rosa gripped his hand with such strength that her nails drew bloods from his palm

It was possible that neither would see each other again.

Chapter 10.

Angie was dead tired after the long and bumpy ride. It took most of ten hours to work her way through the maze of red tape to be admitted legally as a visiting journalist to England. The fact was that some of the government workers did not want another Yank taking up space and food, both of which were in short supply.

When the last stamp had been applied to her papers, she was told that she might find shelter and a bed in the barracks set aside for women military drivers

It was almost dark by the time she boarded the bus from the military airfield to Victoria Station which is where she would take the underground to her destination.

Angie must have dozed off. Boom. The bus rocked left, teetered and rock back to the right and final settled down. The driver braked hard to stop.

Angie and others were thrown to the floor of the aisle, she on top of a general who had been seated next to her.

“What the hell was that? Have I come to London to die? What will happen to Junior without any parents?”

“Are you all right, Miss?” She finally realized that the general was talking to her.

“Oh. I think so. She rose slowly, after lifting her weight from the general’s body.

How about you, General?”

“I think I have a few busies. Oh, I feel some blood wetting my left sleeve.”

“Let me help.””

They stood. Angie helped him roll back his sleeve. He had a thin slice on the outside of his left arm.

“I have a handkerchief in my hip pocket.”

Angie moved quickly, took the hankie and wrapped it slightly round he wound.”

“Press firmly. The blood should coagulate quickly. I suggest you find some first aid as soon as we arrive at the station.

“Thank you, Miss. May I have your name?”

“Yes, sir. My name is Angela Galiardi, aspiring photographer.”

“I’m pleased to meet you. I am in your debt. My name is Bradley. I see you are married. Is your husband also in England?”

Her voice choked but she finally said, “No sir. He died in North Africa, last year.”

It took him a long moment before he said, “I’m sorry to hear that.”

The sat in silence for a bit until he asked, “Where are you staying?”

She explained. “How will in know where to catch the underground?”

“The signs are very clear. Once you see the sign for your train, take the down escalator.”

He laughed. “From that point, the crowd will push you into one of the cars.”

She walked into Vitoria station, her body tense with worry about taking the wrong train. She relaxed only when she saw the sign and felt the crowd pushing her toward the train.

It was dark as she set out on the quarter mile walk from the station. The sliver of the moon offered no light it was eerie and scary. "I'm a stranger in a strange land."

Ten minutes later she was startled when a deep voice asked, "May I help you, Miss?"

She felt her body tense as she looked around to discover the source. It wasn't a thug. He turned out to be an elderly gentleman.

"I'm the warden for this area and know the area well."

"Thank you. I'm looking for the building where some women military drivers reside."

"I will be happy to escort you to the place, miss. Have you been in London long?" He picked up her two heavy suitcases.

"This is my first day."

"Oh, my. You will need some help. By the way, there across the road is the entrance to the bomb shelter. If you are in your room when the siren starts, head for the entrance. Your building is only three doors along the way on this side the street."

A few minutes later, she was gently knocking on a door. When the door opened, he said, "It's Josh, Clare. I bring you a new companion."

Angie spoke up. "I'm Angie Galiardi, just arrived from the States."

"Welcome and thank you, Josh."

Clare saw something in his eyes. "I'll see to it, Josh. I pray we have a peaceful night."

She said to Angie, "Drop you bag alongside the one that Josh left for you. We'll have some tea, first."

Clare had a special way of getting people to talk over hot tea and toast. Without asking, she knew that it had been a long time since Angie had eaten. She scrambled an egg to go with the toast.

In just a bit, she also had the essence of Angie's story and her hopes for this mission.

She noticed Angie trying to keep her eyes open.

“Let me show you to your cubicle and bed. We can talk more and perhaps I can be of some assistance. All the others, except for Bette, are asleep. We’re expecting some heavy bombing later tonight.”

The arrival of the German bombs was delayed until morning commute time, a few minutes after five in the morning.

The wail of the siren jolted Angie out of her dream. She was disoriented, still in her parents’ home chatting with Tommy.

She stumbled out of bed and hit her shin bone against one of the suitcases. “Damn.”

All the others were ahead of Angie, but Clare was waiting at the door. “We need to hurry in order to find a seat. Standing for an hour or more in a crowded shelter is no fun.”

Angie shuddered at the whistling of the first descending bomb that sounded as though it was falling directly overhead, then sighed with relief that the explosion only shook the ground on which she sat.

With each eerie whistle of a falling bomb, Angie’s body kept tightening up. It was only when she realized that the explosions were growing fainter that she allowed her body to unwind a bit.

When the all clear sounded, the crowd seemed to be in a hurry to disperse as it had to rush to the shelter.

Clare explained later that the rush hour had been delayed and many were already late for their jobs.

She was introduced to most of the others but without a chance to visit since all were rushing off with or without breakfast.

Anne Townsend took a seat for breakfast next to Angie. “Clare tells me you are a photo/journalist from the States. Welcome.”

Angie nodded and Anne introduced herself.

“Do you have the address of the office to which you report for orientation, Angie?”

When she looked at the note that Angie produced, she smiled “That’s my boss. We can take the underground together.”

Anne noticed the sigh of relief that Angie produced.

Anne laughed. "It does help to have someone guide you through the maze of underground trains, especially now that some are out of commission"

Anne was easy to talk with. It wasn't long before Angie was telling of her reasons for being on this mission and her hope to visit Anthony's grave in Morocco.

Anne was empathetic. Her husband lay in Northern France after his battle of Dunker in which the British were driven off the continent by the German onslaught in the summer of 1940.

Anne said, "We need to leave within thirty minutes so that I am in time for the first trip of the day. We need a little extra time so I can introduce you to the boss."

Angie took some photos of the entrance to the bomb shelter as they walked by and a dozen shots of damage from the bombing of the night

Angie decided that an aerial view of the landscape would show a checkerboard, large areas of untouched buildings abutting acres of flattened structures.

She saw a flat roof standing vertically alongside a pile of rubble, the cross of a church still vertical in a pile of smoldering ashes and a lean hungry dog scratching for food in the debris.

Just as Anne said, "The second stop is ours."

The train screeched to a halt. A minute later, a conductor was saying, "Everyone must exit. This is the temporary end of the line. The next station was partially destroyed last night and will be out of commission until further notice."

Anne laughed. "What a welcome, Angie. This is London on a hot summer's day in 1943."

"I hope you have good walking shoes. We have about another mile to walk."

Angie was bushed by the time they arrived. A long tiring day followed by a shortened night and now a long hike was not what she was expecting for the first day of her new undertaking.

Anne introduced Angie to Colonel Brown and said, "What a coincidence that she was assigned to our living quarters."

In the course of the conversation with the Colonel, Anne was reminded that she was free to write any story she chose but that the content had to be cleared by his department before being dispatched to her sponsors. He made no comment when she mentioned North Africa.

As the conversation came to a close, he said, "You might consider writing a story of your first night in London. I believe your women readers would be interested in night life in London."

"You also may find the assortment of folks in a bomb shelter a good source of stories. Try our reading room for some inspiration."

He stood, indicating that the interview was over.

Angie met Anne just as she exited the room.

She said, "Like we talked, take your camera and wire recorder and look for some stories. Almost anyone you meet has a story for you.

"I should be ready by six to leave for our place."

Angie walked to the station that had been bombed and began taking photos. She was walking with her eyes focused on the damage when she bumped into an older bearded bootblack carrying his few tools to another location.

"Sir, may I ask why you are walking with your tools when you should be shining shoes for some business men?"

He shook his head. "I've been doing that for years. I had a location in the underground station but that vanished last night. I'm looking for my friends who had their businesses in the station. One is a newspaper vendor. The other sold cigarettes and cigars. The third sold fresh scones."

"I feel sure they have found a good place to serve our customers. I must find them, if you will excuse me."

He turned to walk away but Angie asked his permission to shot a photo. He reluctantly waited and gave her a toothless grin for the shot.

She followed along until she found the busy corner where his friends were already in business.

She watched as he unpacked his mobile foot stand and a customer asking him to hurry

She had a first story, including brief bios of the four and a dozen photos of transactions on a busy corner with a background of piles of rubble from previous bombings.

She returned to the office to take advantage of the reading room offer. She found dozens of stories that inspired her and gave her ideas for her own work.

One story she discovered would become the model for her writing style.

She photographed the typewritten pages of a manuscript by her favorite journalist, Ernie Pyle, the real spokesman for the foot soldiers of World War II,

“They came just after dark, and somehow you could sense from the quick, bitter firing of the guns that there was to be no monkey business this night.

Shortly after the sirens wailed you could hear the Germans grinding overhead. In my room, with its black curtains drawn across the windows, you could feel the shake from the guns. You could hear the boom, crump, crump, crump, of heavy bombs at their work of tearing buildings apart. They were not too far away.

Half an hour after the firing started I gathered a couple of friends and went to a high, darkened balcony that gave us a view of a third of the entire circle of London. As we stepped out onto the balcony a vast inner excitement came over all of us - an excitement that had neither fear nor horror in it, because it was too full of awe.

You have all seen big fires, but I doubt if you have ever seen the whole horizon of a city lined with great fires - scores of them, perhaps hundreds.

There was something inspiring just in the awful savagery of it.

The closest fires were near enough for us to hear the crackling flames and the yells of firemen. Little fires grew into big ones, even as

we watched. Big ones died down under the firemen's valor, only to break out again later.

About every two minutes a new wave of planes would be over. The motors seemed to grind rather than roar, and to have an angry pulsation, like a bee buzzing in blind fury.

The guns did not make a constant overwhelming din as in those terrible days of September. They were intermittent - sometimes a few seconds apart, sometimes a minute or more. Their sound was sharp, nearby, and soft and muffled, far away. They were everywhere over London.

Into the dark shadowed spaces below us, while we watched whole batches of incendiary bombs fell. We saw two dozen go off in two seconds. They flashed terrifically, then quickly simmered down to pin points of dazzling white, burning ferociously. These white pin points would go out one by one, as the unseen heroes of the moment smothered them with sand. But also, while we watched, other pin points would burn on, and soon a yellow flame would leap up from the white center. They had done their work - another building was on fire.

The greatest of all the fires was directly in front of us. Flames seemed to whip hundreds of feet into the air. Pinkish-white smoke ballooned upward in a great cloud, and out of this cloud there gradually took shape - so faintly at first that we weren't sure we saw correctly - the gigantic dome of St. Paul's Cathedral.

St. Paul's was surrounded by fire, but it came through. It stood there in its enormous proportions - growing slowly clearer and clearer, the way objects take shape at dawn. It was like a picture of some miraculous figure that appears before peace-hungry soldiers on a battlefield.

The streets below us were semi-illuminated from the glow. Immediately above the fires the sky was red and angry, and overhead, making a ceiling in the vast heavens, there was a cloud of smoke all in pink. Up in that pink shrouding there were tiny, brilliant specks of flashing light-antiaircraft shells bursting. After the flash, you could hear the sound.

Up there, too, the barrage of balloons was standing out as clearly as if it were daytime, but now



the sky was pink instead of silver. And now and then through a hole in that pink shroud there twinkled incongruously a permanent, genuine star - the old - fashioned kind that has always been there.

Below us the Thames grew lighter and all around below was the shadows - the dark shadows of buildings and bridges that formed the base of this dreadful masterpiece.

Later on, I borrowed a tin hat and went out among the fires. That was exciting too; but the thing I shall always remember above all the other things in my life is the monstrous loveliness of that one single view of London on a holiday night - London stabbed with great fires, shaken by explosions, its dark regions along the Thames sparkling with the pin points of white-hot bombs, all of it roofed over with a ceiling of pink that held bursting shells, balloons, flares and the grind of vicious engines. And in yourself the excitement and anticipation and wonder in your soul that this could be happening at all.

These things all went together to make the most hateful, most beautiful single scene I have ever known."

After taking the photograph, she sat in a corner, reading slowly every word of this awesome experience. Several times during the reading, she had to pause to wipe away the tears that blurred the page.

She put down the manuscript, closed her eyes and tried to visualize the scene that Ernie Pyle had experienced. She searched her mental screen for the vivid detail written on those pages.

“Oh, Lord, I wish I had his talent of stringing words together. Perhaps, my camera can portray the aftermath of that night and the thousand nights that have followed.”

She looked at her watch. “It’s time to find Anne.”

During the long ride to our quarters, Angie asked Anne if she would agree to an interview about her first war experience.

“It might be something that I could use at some date in the future for a possible article about English women at war.”

Anne laughed and said, “Why not? You will find that it is like ever woman’s story.”

Because of two major delays, it took two hours to reach their underground station. By that time, Angie’s copious notes took up all note paper that she had with her plus three sheets that she borrowed from Anne

She spent hours late that night and stayed at home the next day.

The following is a copy of the personal story that she sent to her employers.

“Anne’s story”

“I grew up in Dover and managed my freshman year at Cambridge September, 1939 to May 15th, 1940.

If you recall, ten days later we began evacuating our troops from France where they were being pushed into the sea at Dunkirk.

I had rushed home at my father’s request. “I may need your help Anne. The damned Nazis have our boys cornered and will slaughter them unless they can evacuate successfully. To make that happen, the Admiralty is asking every boat owner to make one or more trips to ferry

our men back to English soil while the RAF keeps the Luftwaffe from bombing them on the beach.”

I knew why he wanted me, because I was a sort of tomboy, in the sense that I love boats and engines. My mother expressed her disgust at the unladylike conditions of my greased and calloused hands from working on our boat or helping my neighbors.

After the first fifteen minutes hugging and telling Mum that I was doing great, I changed into my mechanic clothing and joined Dad in the boat house

I think a spot of grease from his hand blackened my left cheek.

He said, “The carburetor needs a good cleaning. You can start there. When we finish and have our supper, we need to help our next-door neighbor, Mr. Whyte.”

“Fred has very limited mechanical skills and Teddy, you remember Teddy, well he was called up a few weeks ago.

We are going to need every boat available to rescue our soldiers.

Over the next few days, I worked on boat engines for four other neighbors, all of whom had responded to the call from the Admiralty

Mum and I were on our dock as the fleet of small boats headed down the inlet to the Channel. I tried to talk my dad into letting me be his backup but he said, “It’s a bit too dangerous. Besides, one or more of the soldiers can rest me on the return trip.”

What I didn’t know was that the rough waters of the Channel took its toll on Dad and the tired beaten soldiers were of little help.

It was a bit after three in the morning when I was awakened by the sound of small boat engines beating their way up the inlet.

I bounced out of bed, pulled on some clothing and ran to the dock. I have never seen anyone as fatigued and worn out as my dad when I jumped into the boat after tying it down. He could hardly move, but he summoned enough strength to stand and lean on my shoulder. Mum ran to his other side and the three of us stumbled to get him a seat in the kitchen.

The kettle had begun to steam for the hot tea and whiskey that was Mums antidote for fatigue.

It wasn't enough this morning.

Dad's eyes drooped and tea mug slipped to the floor. We dragged him to the sofa, where I slipped off his boots and socks while Mum undressed him and covered him with the blanket that I had fetched.

I don't believe he felt a thing.

Later that morning, he gave us a brief description of the night.

"The water was very choppy and the wind hard from the southwest. By the time we got to the French coast I wish I had a backup

Every bone and muscle in my body ached for relief.

Of the seven men I took aboard, only one was without injury but he had not eaten much for three days and was dehydrated. He tried to take the wheel but had to give up within ten minutes. I need a backup for tonight's run."

He stopped to sip some tea. I waited for more but suddenly realized that he was falling asleep. Mum and I guided him to the sofa where he slept for another two hours.

At his request later, I covered the neighborhood to find a backup for the night mission, but to no avail.

Five minutes before departure, he finally agreed to have me as his relief. There was no way that we would fail to save at least another seven men.

Dad and I agreed that I take the wheel for the trip to France, letting him rest for the return trip when we would have a full load and the winds would pick up as predicted.

The night was dark. The moon was a sliver on this first day of a new moon.

The first leg went smoothly. We were in the vanguard of the small boat fleet. I didn't know what I expected to see, perhaps desperate men running to our spot on the beach. That was not the case

As we neared our target, we could see flashes of tracers in the sky above the shore.

Soon we could hear the sound of rapid fire of the guns, then the dim view of airplane shapes streaking across the sky. Within a minute I saw two long tails of fire headed straight down to the water, my heart jumping with the knowledge that the two might have been our own boys.

I turned my mind back to my task. A few minutes later, I was waved to a specific spot where soldiers were neatly lined up and patiently waiting to board. I had expected chaos and men shoving others for a seat in a life boat.

Here men were helping the less fortunate to board our boat. The first three were two able bodied men carrying a soldier who seemed to have two broken legs dangling from a very thin starved body. He was delirious and trying to break the hold his companions had on him.

As they moved to the rear, the next to aboard was a grinning teenager, hopping on one leg being supported by an older veteran.

Three additional soldiers boarded.

Dad took the wheel while I poured hot tea from the large thermos. I noticed that he pulled to the rear of a Corvette, which then escorted our fleet of ten small boats for the first twenty minutes.

We were on our own. I turned to chat with the men, asking if any wounds needed attending. No one said so.

“Pardon me to say so, Miss. The skipper looks a bit weary.”

“Yes, I noticed. He had a hard, long night last night with the high waves and wind. I am about to relieve him.”

His voice had a smile that I could not see in the dark while he said, “My family is from Dover. I’ve spent my life around boats and water. I’d love the chance to handle this beauty. Would you mind asking the skipper if he could use some help?”

“I grinned. “I might be able to talk my dad into letting you play with the controls.”

Three minutes later. Geoffrey Lindsey had a smile plastered across his face as Dad handed over the controls.

Suddenly, we heard the drone of German bombers overhead on their way for the nightly bombing of southern England.

I heard Dad tell Geoff. “We have plenty of fuel, son. Full speed ahead. We need to unload before daylight to avoid being seen by the bombers.”

I was holding my breath. It took me a few seconds to realize that they could not see us.

I poured more tea from a second thermos and chatted with a few of the men. Only two men of the group had known each other before coming aboard.

I introduced myself and got all to tell a bit about their name, home and pre-war life.

I hoped the conversation might divert their minds from the horror of Deniker. It certainly helped me.

It seemed like no time before Dad took over the wheel for the approach to Dover.

My heart was heavy as my mind reverted to thoughts of what these men had experienced and, of course, would not be able to talk about.

Before he left the boat in Dover, Geoffrey offered to be Dad's backup for any additional rescue missions. Dad agreed to have him. They took four more trips, including one to rescue part of the French troops

A few days after the trip, I hitched an outboard motor to my skiff and rode down to the docks. Before the day was half gone, I was hired on by a small parts rebuilder who had a contract with the Admiralty. We worked twelve hours a day, six days a week, never catching up with our backlog.

Geoff found work with a boat builder located a short distance from our shop. He and I had lunch together twice during the first week of my employment.

I invited him to Sunday brunch with Dad and Mum. It was Mum who asked, "What do you know about your future, Geoffrey?"

"I have no idea. I will be back on call after a sixty-day rest period. If I am ordered into combat, my guess would be North Africa. Getting troops back on the continent will be difficult but the southern belly may be the easier route to take. Of course, that is only my view point."

We talked of life before the war and dreams we had for our futures. Geoff had been studying Marine Engineering at the outbreak. He told us that his entire class volunteered during the first three days and

almost all were sent to army training camps and then to support the French.

After supper, Geoff stayed long enough to listen to the BBC newscast we all ended with flowing tears after hearing extracts of Mr. Churchill's address to the House of Commons. It was his famous "We shall fight on the beaches" speech.

Geoff and I spent Sundays going to our village church, walking in some lovely gardens, and dinner with my family.

Before you ask, Angie, no, there was no romantic relationship. Both of us were too aware of the fragile futures we faced.

Other than a short note from him at his training camp that fall, I never heard from Geoff again."

Angie's editors were extremely pleased the story of Anne and asked for another persona story.

Angie decided to take the underground for her visit to Buckingham Palace. To Angie, the palace was even more impressive than any of the pictures she had ever seen

A small group of soldiers were gathered near the main gate, apparently waiting for the changing of the guard. Angie checked her watch and saw that the activity was still twenty minutes away. She began shooting some pictures but was quickly interrupted by a Bobbie. "Sorry, miss, no photos unless authorized."

He smiled and nodded approval when she produced her journalist card, knowing that her pictures were reviewed by the censors.

Later she turned to view the gathering audience. She noticed a young girl seated alone on a bench. The look on the girl's face was not exactly sad, but sober.

Angie decided to take the seat next to the youngster with the idea of offering her friendship.

The teenager hardly noticed the woman who took the seat. Her mind seemed miles away.

Angie sat quietly, waiting some acknowledgement from the girl, perhaps when the crowd noise announced the changing of the guard.

The girl seemed not to hear. Angie asked, "Are you going to walk to the fence to see the changing of the guard?"

"No, I've seen it twice already."

“May I ask if you are waiting for someone or is there anything I can do to help?”

“I’m fine, just lonesome. My Mum brought me down from Cambridge yesterday. We did some sightseeing and a little shopping.

Today, she has a busy day of errands and I’m on my own.”

Angie introduced herself and explained that she was photographer on assignment

“Perhaps we could do some exploring together. I haven’t had time for touring since I arrived recently.”

A big grin preceded her self-introduction. “I’m Tessa Whitney. I like that idea. May I see some identification just to be safe?”

A moment later, Tessa said, “We didn’t get to see the House of Parliament. Shall we start there?”

“You lead the way.”

Tessa said, “I hope you like walking.”

She picked up a small basket that resembled a picnic basket. Tessa saw Angie’s quizzical look.

“Yes. This is our lunch. I would like to have our lunch in St James Park. I understand it is beautiful.”

Three hours later, they were lunching in the shade of a large tree just on the edge of a large meadow in the park.

Angie asked Tessa, “Would you be willing to tell me a bit about your life since the war started? My editor wants a human-interest story for some magazines in the States.”

Tessa gave that some thought. “I think so but we need to get Mum’s approval about using my real name. She does some secret work for the government.”

Angie said, “I understand. I would love to chat about your young life even if we don’t publish.”

The following story appeared in three magazines.

“My Precocious Friend”

“I was ten years old when the blitz began. The fact that we were at war meant nothing to me. It was words that I overheard from my parent’s conversations. That changed in one night’s experience.

The ear-splitting wail of the siren in the middle of the night and crashing thunder of bomb blasts had me jumping out of bed and to my parents’ bed. I was a scared little girl, needing hugs and the feel of my dad’s arms around me to calm my down. It did, eventually.

Even now, I can recall a sense of panic slowly evaporating as I lie in the cocoon of two warm bodies transmitting their love for me.

Being bombed was a continuing, frightening experience for me. That siren was less than a hundred yards from my windows, and the sound of it was so loud that my body shuddered every night.

We lived in a two-story house, and each night, when the Nazis flew over, we would go down to the cellar below to shelter. Eventually, we realized this would happen every night so we made other arrangements. To avoid the nightly trek down and up again, we made up beds and slept down in the large basement room. This was far easier than going into the street shelter outside our home.

Incidentally, if we had had a direct hit by a bomb, we would have little chance of survival

Oddly enough, my parents did not dwell on those morbid thoughts. We had a lot to live for, too many other good things happening in our lives.

Dad and Mum had important government jobs related to the war effort.

We were always very tired and slept soundly when we had the chance. I learned to drop off to sleep in an instant.

One night, before we could get to the cellar, a bomb fell on a house eight door down the street. In doing so, the impact broke my bedroom window and knocked me to the floor.

I was too surprised to be afraid and quickly ran to check if my parents were all right. They were.

Dad replaced the pane and added clear tape to protect shattering. The black-out blinds kept the shards of glass from cutting me that night.

My parents wanted to make sure that my life was more than bombs and Nazis.

Either Dad or Mum took me to the 'moving pictures' twice a week. My folks loved the theater and took me along for the education, even though the dialogue was over my head very often

My mum said that going to the 'pictures' and theater were important diversions for both of them. It also stretched my vocabulary and thus was part of my educational process.

The next summer, our family moved to Cambridge. Mum said that she had been transferred and that Daddy would work part time in Cambridge and part time in London.

Shortly after the move Mum hired a daytime nanny. Someone had to be there for me when I returned from school. The problem was more serious during the summer when school was not in session.

I already knew my new nanny because she had been my Sunday school teacher the last two Sundays and she was the wife of our vicar.

In these years, I have become closer to Mrs. Brown than to my mum. She was there to greet my first date and opened her arms to me the night he broke my heart.”

The story was interrupted as Tessa broke into tears, dealing with a very emotional moment

“To tell the truth, I was closer to my dad than to mum. Among other wonderful things that we did together, I remember the original stories he created each bed time.

“Dad was killed during a bombing about six months after we moved to Cambridge.”

Tessa’s voice broke and she paused, and then continued in a tight voice.

He was on a bus that was knocked over when a bomb exploded near the road.”

Tessa took only a moment to recoup. She wasn’t about to breakdown in front of a stranger.

Mum’s workload seemed to increase shortly thereafter, for reasons never explained to me.

During the summer months, I spent more days and nights at the vicarage than I did at our home.

Mrs. Brown taught me to knit socks for our boys in the army. I helped her take food, donated by parishioners, to four widows.

She put me in charge of toddlers on Sunday mornings instead of going to my class, then discussed the lesson I missed during lunch with Mum and the vicar.

Near the end of the last school term a bomb fell near our school. Two class rooms were totally destroyed. Carpenters from the University were there at six that very morning to initiate repairs.

Meanwhile, those classes were transferred for a few days to the class rooms at the University.

Mrs. Brown says that the war has brought the University and the town’s people closer together.

The day after the school term ended, I was taking an afternoon walk in the public gardens. Silence reigned in the shade of the ancient trees that bordered the walking path.

I was trying to imagine the first day of the fall term when I would be enrolled in a new school.

The shouts of a couple of small children broke through the silence. I looked toward the source to my left and saw two boys and a girl, each about six or seven years old. They were taking turns sliding down the curve metal object. I could see that it was not a regular slide.

My intuition said “danger” and my suspicion was confirmed moments later as I approached the group. They were playing on the tail end of a huge German unexploded bomb.

I called to them, asking to come for a chat. The older of the two boys came running. “Hurry lady, I don’t want to miss my turn.”

“Please ask your friends to play fair and join us. I need to talk with all three of you.”

He started to turn away and I almost shouted, “Please.” I guess the tone of my voice convinced him.

He called and his pals came.

I asked, “When did you find the slide?”

“Two days ago.”

I couldn’t remember any bomb blasts this close within the last three days.

“Do your mums know about the slide?”

Silence.

“I think you mums would like to know about the fun you’re having. Don’t you?”

One voice said, “I guess so.”

I asked, “If one of you takes me to your home, I would be glad to tell you mum about the fun you were having.”

The boys, who were fraternal twins, lived next door to the girl.

Their mum greeted us with an inquiring eye

I said immediately, “The children are fine and asked me to explain the new play thing they discovered.”

The look on my face alerted her.

“Jake, please serve Blake and Sue some lemonade?”

When they were gone, I explained about the large half buried bomb.

“Thank you, dear. I shall call the authorities immediately. I am so glad you were on that walk. May I suggest you post yourself some

distance from the bomb and warn anyone approaching, until someone official arrives.

I spent the rest of the day watching two patient and slow-moving soldiers clear the ground of the buried portion of the bomb.

They posted red flags to warn of the danger. The hole they dug around the nose of the bomb must have been over six feet deep. I could not see their bodies as they worked on defusing the bomb but my imagination was working overtime. My body grew tenser with the passing of every fifteen minutes

Just as I prepared to leave for our evening meal, one of the soldiers jumped out of the pit and raised his hands in a form of the Vie, our symbol for victory.

The small audience that has gathered, followed suit and then gave the men a round of applause.

It made a lively contribution to the meal time conversation that evening.

Recently, Mum's work load had eased and we spent much more time together. “

Tessa said, “I don't see why your editor would want to publish that story. It is not much different from stories that other girls can tell you.”

When Angie put away her notebook, Tessa said, “I need to head back to the Palace. Mum will soon be looking for me. Come, I want you to meet Mum, who likes to call herself Libby.”

Elizabeth Whitney arrived a few minutes prior to Tessa's arrival. She was pacing, nervously, and looking at the watch when Tessa ran up and put her arms around her mum.

“Mum. I had a spectacular day with my new Yank friend. Meet Angela Galiardi, photo-journalist from America.”

Mrs. Whitney looks surprised but quickly relaxed when a smiling Angie said, “Your very lovely daughter is a great guide and hostess to this visiting foreigner.”

Within a minute, Tessa was watching two women engaged in a lively welcome and discussion.

“Angela, have you had a chance to visit Cambridge?”

“No, I haven't. I have just arrived and am looking forward to that experience.”

“Tessa has been giving me hand signals behind your back telling me to invite you to come for this evening. Are you available?”

“Why, yes, but you hardly know me.”

“I trust Tessa’s judgment. We all know that she is wise beyond her age. She must have some special reason and it would be an honor to have you. Also, I would be pleased to introduce you to Cambridge, the town and the university.”

“I’m honored and the answer is yes. “

The train ride through the fifty miles of countryside was a welcome alternative to the bomb-damaged areas of London. The last twenty miles were like the pictures that Angie remembered of rural England.

The town seemed to be hardly touched by German bombings. “There must be a reason and one that my readers would appreciate.

Tessa made the salad. Angie peeled the potatoes while Libby prepared the lamb.

At dinner, Angie raised the question of bomb damage. “I was aware of how little damage I saw during our last miles and specifically from the train as we slipped through the town.”

Libby responded with, “I’m not sure anyone in England knows the why of that.”

“Everyone, including the Germans, knows the town became a military center, with an R.A.F. training station just outside of town. It’s true that we have very little manufacturing of importance to the war effort.

The town itself escaped relatively lightly from German bombing raids, which were mainly targeted at the railway.

Occasionally, one or two planes come in, dropping a few light bombs, as though to remind us that we are vulnerable.

We did have a large unexploded bomb, and according to the authorities it was larger than the usual which have targeted the residential areas.”

Since Libby worked for the government, Angie avoided the question that she was hoping to get answered.

As though she read Angie’s mind, Libby said, “Tomorrow, you will meet Tessa’s nanny. My work keeps me very occupied. I can’t say much about it except that I coordinate important meetings.

Once it came to our attention that Cambridge received less attention from the bombers, it seemed logical to have important meetings here.

You may see a recognizable face or two as we tour the town tomorrow, but I need your assurance that this is not for publication.”

Mrs. Brown was cooking breakfast when Angie entered the kitchen in the morning.

“Good morning, Miss. Please pour yourself some coffee while I continue. Tessa tells me that you will be her guest today. She is very excited to show you around the town and the University.”

They were interrupted when Libby entered and a moment later when Tessa bounced in.

During the meal Libby explained, “Tessa has planned the day and would like to tell you about her plans.”

Tessa, who had bolted her food, was ready. “We could start with a visit to a few of the colleges that make up the University. That will take most of the morning.”

“Mrs. Brown is packing a picnic lunch which I thought we could have while we take a ride on the river. I hired a boat for two hours. The day is beautiful and we can’t let you miss this wonderful experience. That will rest us and get us ready for a walking tour of the town. How does that sound?”

Angie grinned and Libby smiled. Angie said, “I’m ready.”

Tessa was at the top of her game as a host for a special guest. She had prepared the comments for each stop of the morning.

At the first stop, she read her prepared speech.

“Formally, this is The King's College of Our Lady and Saint Nicholas in Cambridge. It lies here beside the river and faces out onto King’s Palace. This is the center of the city.

King's was founded in 1441 by Henry VI, soon after he had founded its sister college in Eton. However, the King's plans for the college were disrupted by the War of the Roses and resultant scarcity of funds, and his eventual deposition.

Progress was made on the project in 1508. Henry the VII began to take an interest in the college

The student population, now, is down because of the war, so I can’t give you a figure.

The college can boast of a lot of Nobel Prizes, the highest number of any college.

At the next stop at Trinity College, Tessa read her notes. Trinity alumni include British Tory prime ministers. The college is also proud of alumni like physicists Isaac Newton and Bertrand Russell, whom it expelled

At the next stop, she had a special lilt as she read, "Queens' is one of the oldest and largest colleges of the university, founded in 1448 by the Queen of Henry VI, who founded King's College.

The college spans both sides of the River, often referred to as the "light side" and the "dark side", with the world-famous Mathematical Bridge connecting the two.

The college's alumni include heads of government and politicians from various countries. Graduates include royalty, religious leaders, astronauts and Oscar nominees.

Its distinguished alumni include my daddy."

Three very tired females were ready to sit in the boat, enjoy a libation and let the boat master do the work.

The boat ride took longer than intended, putting time pressure on Angie's plan to catch the four o'clock train to London.

At the station, Tessa whispered, "Thanks for coming, Angie. Mom needs adult company and you were perfect. I hope you can come again. You saw nothing of our beautiful city. Drop me a note when you think you have time."

Angie wrote a brief addendum story of this trip to Cambridge with a photo of an undamaged city in the midst of a war-time England.

During the ride to London and then the long trip in the underground to her quarters, Angie spent most of the time trying to figure a way to get to North Africa or even to the battle zones in Italy. "I need to provide a variety of views of the war to our readers."

"Meanwhile, it's time to write my weekly letter to Junior and to Mom. I should drop a note to Tom with a few details of my work.

Chapter 11.

Lt. Colonel Johnston rose as Tom reported in as his orders had directed him

“Take a load off and relax. You’ve been on the move for days. The tea is hot and the scones are fresh.”

“Thank you, sir. I hope I have one night of rest before you send me off again.”

The colonel laughed. “Nightly rest, yes. Day light hours, not so much.”

“You may take a few days to rest. A class that you will be taking begins on Monday. I hope you can rest, see some historical landmarks and catch up with a host of mail we are holding for you.”

“Now, let’s hear some stories of your short vacation in Naples.”

The colonel had booked Tom into a hotel. After reading the mail, he had an early evening meal and was in the sack by 1800 hours. He slept fourteen hours and after breakfast he set out for a walking tour of this section of London

“I wonder if Angie is in London and whether I can find her if she is. If she were lucky enough to get to North Africa, I presume she would be in Oran trying to find Anthony’s grave. Clever. Angie might have been lucky enough to get to a battle zone in Italy.”

Tom took a couple of bus rides and a walking tour and ended up with tea at the Savoy Hotel. His subsequent attempt to find a list of journalists from the States proved fruitless.

The next day he took a trip to visit the changing of the guards at Buckingham Palace.

After the ritual, he decided to find a bench and scan his tour map.

He took his seat and was poring over the map. A soft voice asked, “May I help? I know the area very well.”

He looked up into a pair of lovely brown eyes of a young teenager who was seated next to a beautiful woman, probably the mother.

“I would appreciate that. I want to see as much as possible after I find place to eat lunch. By the way my name is Tom Dudak.”

“I’m Tessa Whitney and this is my mum, Elizabeth Whitney. Mum, would it be all right if I offered Mr. Dudak some of our picnic lunch?”

Without waiting for a response, she reaches for the basket underneath the bench.

Her mum laughed “How can I say no? The last time we were here, we ended up taking a young lady home for a visit.”

Tessa giggled. “Mum, you enjoyed that. Besides, Angie was fun and she wrote a wonderful story about us.”

Tom gasped. “You couldn’t possibly mean Angie Galiardi, photo/journalist?”

Elizabeth said, “Why, yes are you acquainted with Mrs. Galiardi?”

The grin on Tom’s face was a mile wide. “She is my dearest friend and has been since the sixth grade. Have you any idea how I might find her?”

Elizabeth frowned. “Unbelievable. Are you aware that she is headed to North Africa?”

“Oh, yes. She is detained to visit Anthony’s gravesite and write some stories of the aftermath of Operation Torch.”

Tessa almost screamed. This is a miracle, here on the same bench next to the Palace.”

Tessa went on in a muted voice. “I’m sorry. I didn’t answer your question. I had a note from her yesterday saying that she had an arrangement to fly today to Oran.”

Elizabeth reached out to him as she saw his crestfallen face. “We’re so sorry you missed her.”

“Thank you. At least I know she is well and on target to meet her goal. I’ll get a letter in the near future telling me of her success.”

Tessa reached into the basket and handed a sandwich to Mum and Tom. In deference to their concern for his military position, they asked no questions but talked about Angie’s visit and told him about Cambridge and some other distant tourist spots that he would be unable to visit.

Tessa asked, “Are you doing more visiting this afternoon?”

“Yes, if I can read this map.”

“I think I can help. Let me explain.”

Fifteen minutes later, after an explanation and an exchange posing for snapshots, Tom was waving goodbye.

Tom arose at six on Monday morning. After a four-mile run and a workout, he found the officers' mess.

At 0800 hours, he reported to Lt. Colonel Johnston, who said, "I presume you had a morning workout."

"Yes, sir."

"For the next two weeks only, I want you to spend the first hour with your friend, Jack, at the gym, refreshing your hand to hand combat technique.

Jack will concentrate on martial arts like krav maga and jiu jitsu, and help you learn to fight with improvised weapons.

At 0900, you are to report to building where you will start your class."

"As you know, we are fond of your big boss, Mr. Donovan. This class is the first of several, designed for OSS agents. As usual, most of the others, this week, are older and senior in status.

I am sure that you will have a good grasp by the end of the first lecture."

"Now, be on your way. Jack is waiting."

"My name is Lester White of M16

You may introduce yourselves to each other as time permits.

This is a special class for eighteen of you who have been selected for future assignments, either espionage agents or as counterintelligence agents. A few of you may find that you will be called to perform as both

Other than this first day, all instruction will be conducted within the context of examples or actual practice.

First, let me say a few words about mental stress.

The work of a spy doesn't follow a routine schedule, and you can expect to endure long stretches without sleep and other comforts.

You must be able to maintain intense concentration despite fatigue, discomfort and the threat of physical danger.

We will test each trainee's strengths in these areas during training. Your cognitive abilities and resilience in stressful situations are often more important than raw physical strength.

MI6 places its clandestine candidates in training programs that are just as rigorous as those experienced by U.S. Army soldiers, including airborne training. Extensive hand-to-hand combat skills are learned, including martial arts like krav maga and jiu jitsu.

We shall teach you to fight with improvised weapons as well as testing your skills with conventional firearms.

These specialized skills are taught with agents using government-issued guns along with weaponry you might find in your area of deployment. We have a large inventory of foreign made firearms for your learning process.

In the normal course of events this espionage course would take a dozen weeks

But we have four intense weeks. You will either qualify or be returned to your units

Now, count off by threes. Good. Each triad will have a tutor for the entire period.

Tom introduced himself to Lionel and Michael as they waited to meet their tutor.

“Good morning, gentlemen. I’m Jack. We have a target. A group of three German suspected spies are meeting at location two miles away. Our job is to get close enough to discover their intent. Time is of the essence. I’ll meet you out front in two minutes.

When they gathered two minutes later, Jack handed each a map. “Meet at this spot in eighteen minutes. Choose your routes. We can’t run as a foursome”

Within a flash, he was off and running. He was followed by two others who were checking their maps while jogging.

Tom studied the map carefully before starting. He turned ninety degrees to the left and began to speed up to his five-mile pace.

He was the first to arrive and carefully scanned the area for three men in a huddle. He saw some women chatting, but no obvious enemy.

Lionel was second, Jack third and Michael immediately behind.

Everyone began looking for the target but no success. Lionel asked, “Where’s the target, Jack?”

“Look carefully.”

He noticed Tom smiling.

“Tom has spotted them.”

Lionel and Michael looked confused

Jack asked Tom to explain.

“Those three women are probably of German extraction and are planning dinner or a party.”

Jack laughed. “I meant to put you on the wrong track Michael, following me was clever, but you noticed that I led you to be late. I was hoping for good map reading and creativity.”

“I wondered if you would see through my attempt to test your assumptions that the three men were plotting military action.

“If you were wise enough to bring water, have a swallow but no sharing on this trip. We leave in three minutes for a fast walk back, ten paces apart, Tom leading the way.”

They were awakened at 0330 hours for a planning meeting about evading being caught in enemy territory.

Everybody was awake at six, following Tom’s pattern of a morning run and workout

Each day began with some competition in one of the martial arts.

At 1000 hours, they were playing hide and seek with one team of two trying to evade the other team finding them in a forest.

That afternoon, the group spent hours trying on different clothing that would help each hide in the crowded section of the business area.

So, it went for three weeks, three tired and worn out trainees trying to concentrate on a given task. In between the actives, each was given a course in cross examination and extracting bits of information from civilians.

Some activity required teamwork while most were individual competitive events.

The fourth week was spent in the field with veteran operatives. Tom’s new partner was an experienced agent who took him to Paris for three days, dressed as seriously wounded French soldiers, medical retirees.

Tom was astounded to learn so much through careless talk by German soldiers and even one Gestapo couple.

Even the last day of the program provided no letup. Nine pairs of combatants were engaged in hand to hand combat, using whatever method, fair or foul to put his enemy in a life-threatening position. It was grueling but it put a fine fighting edge on each of the candidates.

Tom had a long weekend of freedom before beginning the next class. He decided to go to Cambridge to visit the university where he hoped to study someday.

He picked up his one piece of mail that had been withheld for the four weeks. He opened Angie's letter

“Dear Tommy,

This is a brief note to let you know that I managed to hitch hike to Oran. I was able to visit Anthony's grave site. Until now, the whole thing seemed more like a dream, something unreal. I wept and shed a million tears seated at his side until there were no more tears to shed.

I sent some photos to Mama for posterity and I wrote a letter to Junior that I can read to him at some future time.

I am writing stories about local families who have been affected by the battles that took place. I have to steel myself as I hear stories of families caught in between opposing armies, everyone hoping to avoid a stray bullet or a mortar aimed at the wrong target. Ugh.

I am now trying to bribe my way onto a flight to Anzio Beach or anywhere on the Italian mainland.

I would like to hear from you.’

Angie.”

It was great to hear from Angie but he had a sense of disappointment. He was sure there would be a letter from Rosa.

He packed a few items and headed for the train station.

The train was packed. Tom had to settle for standing room in the corridor but the inconvenience was offset by views of the beautiful country side.

He was one of the earliest to debark. As he walked toward the main gate, he heard a feminine voice calling, “Lieutenant Tom.”

Just on the other side of the gate was Tessa. She was waving with a wide smile plastered on her lovely face. When he handed his ticket to the agent, she ran up to him.

“I’m waiting for Mum. She should be on this train, her usual on Fridays. There she is.”

A minute later he was being greeted by a surprised Elizabeth Whitney.

Tom quickly explained about the surprise weekend freedom and his desires to visit the campus where he hoped to study one day.

“Have you booked a room? If not, please plan to stay with us. We have plenty of room.”

Tessa interjected, “Please do. It would be good to talk with an American.”

There was no way to decline the invitation.

Shortly after dinner, Elizabeth noticed Tom’s eyes drooping. She waved to Tessa to cease with the questions.

She said, “Tom, after your decryption of the four-week program, you must be dead tired.”

Tom laughed, “I’m sorry. I was planning on a long night’s sleep before a walking tour of Cambridge.”

“Please don’t apologize. I should have noticed earlier. Tessa will show you to our room. I won’t even start breakfast until you make your appearance. Now, scoot and sleep well.”

“Tomorrow, Tessa will walk your legs off; tell you more about Cambridge and the University than you may care to know. I promise you rest and quiet upon your return.”

Late the next afternoon, Tom said, “Tessa, you have worn me out. It must be time for a soda or tea or something.”

She laughed. “You’re just fooling with my head and tired of hearing my babbling.”

Tom grinned. “Not tired, only filled with more information than I can absorb. You are a fantastic docent. You should apply for the job with the city.”

Tessa blushed. “Thank you. You are a great student and keen with the right questions. Okay, I know where we can find a nice tea shop.”

It was a restful weekend. He attended the Sunday morning worship service and treated the two women to brunch at a sidewalk café.

Elizabeth introduced him to her well stocked library where he spent most of Sunday. The three of them cooked dinner and he spent after dinner answering Tessa’s questions about life in the States.

Monday morning, Tom and Elizabeth caught an early train to London. She helped choose a few more sights in London to visit along with instructions for locating them.

“Thank you for the hospitality, Elizabeth. I am so relaxed and even more excited about going back to study at the university.

Tuesday morning. 0900

“Gentlemen, my name are Richard Preston. I see all fourteen of you are present. I assume you have had your required morning run and work out and a good meal.

This is a basic four-week course in counterintelligence. I know that some of you have had a crash course in espionage training. Here we will deal only counterintelligence.

For a selected few, there will be a special course for those of you who may be assigned to work in both fields.

After a series of lectures the training will be in the form of lab work.

Each of you has undergone one or more experiences that quilted you for this school. Your record has been carefully screened and labeled “Top of Form.”

Each of you has the equivalent of a bachelor’s degree. Three of you have doctorates. Each of you graduated cum laude or better.

Despite his statement, he was aware that Tom was the exception.

“You need to have a thorough understanding of what is happening on each battle front at the moment and a fair knowledge of the culture of the locals in the areas to which you will be assigned.”

“Both these things will be provided as part of the school program.”

“Since this information has to be assimilated along with practical techniques of counterintelligence activity, you can see that there will be no leisure time and little time for sleep.”

During next four weeks, Tom learned the art of coding and decoding and intelligence analysis. He developed the ability to determine when someone was lying while he learned to lie without betraying himself.

He listened to lectures on the cultural life of Italians who lived on the east coast of the country and practiced speaking the dialect of the people in that area.

Each day, he went to pick up his mail and was disappointed that he had no letter in response to his three letters to Rosa. He was pleased to read a nice letter from Angie’s mom about her busyness and the antics of Junior, Angie’s son.

The letter from his Uncle Jack was the shocker. Two weeks prior to the date of the letter, his parents were hit by a drunken driver while walking home from church

The letter explained, “There was no way to reach you and the army told us that at present you would not be able to have compassionate leave.”

The sadness was slightly ameliorated by a note from his new friend, Tessa.

His grieving was cut short by the demands of his classes.

On Sunday of his fourth week, Tom was introduced to an elderly gentleman from Ortona in the region of Abruzzo in eastern Italy. For three evenings, Tom learned the fine points of the dialect of the region, good hiding places in the city and the names of three resistance fighters.

He learned nothing about this individual mystery man but he was well prepared for his task.

His orders were handed to him the morning after his last orientation.

Tom was flown to Bari on the southeastern coast of Italy. As the plane descended, he had a glimpse of the enormous amount of equipment and other material and goods that were stored over acres and acres of ground. This seemed to be the main source of material for the Allied fighting forces.

Tom had been told to report to Colonel Parker, a British intelligence officer. The understanding was that this was a British and Canadian offensive and “They are more open to dealing with the OSS than are the American military.”

He found the Colonel on his way to chow. Come along to the Officers’ Mess, where I can begin your briefing.”

“You may not know that Ortona is of high strategic importance. It is one of Italy's few usable deep-water ports on the east coast. We need to be able to dock ships and so shorten our lines of supply as we move northward.”

“As you know, Ortona is part of the German Winter Line defense system and the Germans have constructed a series of cleverly designed interlocking defensive positions in the town.”

“The town is held by the German First Parachute division. The soldiers are battle-hardened after many years of war, and have been ordered to defend Ortona at any cost.

If we are successful, we can turn the corner of the Winter Line. The coming battle is crucial and so is your role.”

“We need you to play two roles. We need a clear picture of the German defense scheme. The general is the foxiest of all the Germans and the battle harden troops are clever, as well as experienced. Whatever is planned will be different from any previous set up that we Brits or Canadians will have faced.”

“The second role is finding a way to get the German current thinking and change in tactics. We have uniforms and identification papers that will pass muster if you decide that joining their ranks becomes feasible. Of course, that will be your decision since being discovered brings the ultimate penalty.”

Tom knew that failure meant death. At 0600 hours the next day, he was in the back seat of a sedan seated next to Major Ted Frost, intelligence officer for the Canadian forces that would spearhead the assault on Ortona.

Frost introduced himself. "I drove down last night so that I could bring you up to date and work out details for inserting you and arranging a communicant network."

By the time they arrived at Brigade headquarters, Tom thought his head would burst with detailed information.

Frost introduced him, at dinner, to Tomaso Patera number two man in the Ortona resistance group.

Plans were made for a 0300 meeting with two others to carry Tom's equipment and the German uniforms.

Each man was given a pair of hi boots for wading through the huge underground pipe that led to a pump house which served as the resistance meeting place and, for now, Tom's home.

The core group of fifteen fighters was gathered to meet Tom. They wasted no time since time was of the essence.

Tom handed a detailed map of the town and its adherent communities. The map had been enlarged and cut into sixteen squares.

"We should plan for an assault on the town within three or four weeks. Since your town population and surrounding areas are estimated at sixteen thousand that means about 4500 buildings."

Someone interjected. "Four thousand, six hundred and one."

The group bursts into laughter. A voice said, "Sisto knows every square inch of the town."

Tom didn't get the joke but figured Sisto could be of help.

He continued. "A week from now I would like to send these maps to the General with details of every gun emplacement, every tank, any stacks of anti-tank guns or mortar. Is this possible?"

"Why do you think there will be so many locations, instead of heavy perimeter defenses which already exist?"

"Because of the importance of Ortona and the foxy mind of this German general. I'd rather be cautious than caught off guard."

Almost everyone shook their heads up and down.

Tom said, "I have quite a few extra copies for those of you who have partners. Now let me show you the symbols you should use. He handed out sheets of paper with symbols of twelve different items.

This afternoon, I would like to visit some homes and commercial buildings to see the structure and materials that are contained in the structures."

Sisto said, "I can help you do that. By the way, how come you speak exactly as we do? You look more like someone from up north."

Tom laughed "I grew up with a very close friend whose family came from another village in Abruzzo.

Sisto asked, "What size shoe do you wear?"

"Why do you ask?"

"You have shoes that we wear but those are a bit too formal for our tip. I will find something more suitable."

"Good. I need something with a soft heel. I use an insert to make me limp. After all, I'm supposed to be a wounded soldier, retired with a shattered thigh bone and hip."

That brought smiles all around the room.

Sisto's home was only a hundred meters from the pump house. There were three women in the house but no introductions were made.

Sisto took him to the basement that was as large as the first floor of the house. Tom noticed that there were vents on three sides only.

"Sisto, why is there no vent on this side?"

"The house next door butts against our house."

"Do you mean that you share a common wall?"

"No. No. The whole block is made up of individual houses that abut each other."

Tom thought that would be worth noting in his report.

As the two of them rounded the corner of the street, they heard someone in a guttural voice call, "Sisto, who's your friend?"

Tom's body stiffened.

The voice was that of a German soldier. Sisto laughed. "Hi, Hans. Meet my young cousin, Tomasco Minarda."

Tom felt his guts tighten. He felt an urgent need to go to the toilet in a hurry. He told himself to relax and put on a happy face.

In a grim voice, Hans said "I need to see his papers." He put his right hand on the butt of his pistol, his eyes daring Tom to make a wrong move.

Tom, gingerly, reached into his pocket. Sisto said, "He's a seriously wounded vet. He has a shattered leg."

Hans scanned the papers and the picture carefully before returning them to Tom.

He turned to Sisto. "Do you have any more of those little cakes?"

"Nope, I need more sugar and eggs. We're all out."

"Okay. I'll get you some on Thursday." He turned to Tom. "I'm glad it's over for you. It might be better for you to be someplace else. All hell is going to break out. I hear that the English are not too far away."

Tom could feel his insides relax. He said, "Sisto, the German speaks pretty good Italian."

"Yeah. Hans is well educated and has been here since early forty-two. I think he is more than a corporal."

During their casual stroll, they passed two other soldiers. Tom could feel his insides tighten in fear but all he heard was "Hello Sisto."

Tom was thankful for his training that taught him to mask his fear. He recalled the statement, "We all experience fear. The important thing is not show the fear to your opponent or enemy."

The two of them stood on the corner. "By the way, "The Germans occupy one of the four houses on each corner in the town. They forced out the families and occupy the house with eight or ten men, one of whom is a Corporal or Sergeant."

Tom noticed the tail end of a tank sticking out of the garage.

Tom jotted another note for his report.

He turned to Sisto. "Do you have an organized listening network organized?"

"I don't know of anything organized. We do get tips from barmaids occasionally that help us plan some mischief."

Tom nodded. "We may be missing a good bet. I suggest you bring up the idea at the next meeting. Tidbits of conversations, particularly between officers can lead to important information. Barmaids, waitresses, busboys, shoeshine boys, barbers and housekeepers are often invisible to those using such services and may talk freely. The officers forget that servants have been around long enough to understand some German. Any tidbit can help."

When Tom asked if any of the men were interested in learning some hand to hand combat technique, the six unmarried men all said they would. Over the next few days, he spent ten hours working with these men.

At the group meeting on the sixth day of his stay, he had all the copies of the maps and the duplicates.

He spent hours searching all the details, looking for discrepancies between the originals and the second copies.

It was 0300 when he felt satisfied. Using the high-speed radio, he sent a short burst in code. "Ready."

An hour later, he received coded burst giving him a precise location, two miles south of town. The time had been preset

The Canadian intelligence officer whispered, "Maple leaf." Tom whispered, "Eagle."

Both emerged from their hiding places.

Tom reported as concisely as possible.

"Here are maps of the entire area, marked with symbols indicating locations of soldiers, ammunition, anti-tank equipment, tanks etc. As you can see, well placed defenses in tight areas probably means limited use of armour and a great deal of close quarter, face to face fighting."

"I also have a drawing of how most houses abut thus making every wall doubly deems. Your engineers might devise some method of

penetrating these walls to surprise the enemy as you fight house to house.”

“Another important factor in their defenses system is their daily occupancy of certain dwellings. In the residential area, almost on every corner, one of the corner dwellings is occupied now only by German soldiers, most with mortars and machine guns and a few tanks in some shelter on the property.”

“Tom, this is excellent and will give us a good edge in the coming battle. By the way, we are planning to go on the twentieth. You should plan to be out by the eighteenth. “

“I plan to stay until the last minute. Some details may come out that will be of help. Ask your artillery to avoid hitting the pump house marked “P” on the map, if possible”

“I need to dash. My escorts will be getting nervous.”

The group of four was about two hundred meters from the entrance to the tunnel when Giacomo ran head long into a scouting party of Germans. He bounced off the body of the lead soldier shouted a warning and dashed back toward his three companions.

Tom heard the pounding of the pursuers. He whispered loudly. “Knives and clubs, no guns.”

He pulled Giacomo into the bushes and thrust him behind the others. “I’ll take the first. There seem to be three.”

All of a sudden, three burly bodies appeared. Tom stepped forward, surprised the soldier. Tom thrust his knife under the ribs on the left side of the enemy. The man slumped to the ground.

Tom looked around. He saw two of his buddies lowering the body of another dead German. Angelo, however, was in trouble. His opponent had him in a choke hold.

Tom, with deadly accuracy, threw his knife hitting the German in the throat. His grip released Giacomo who fell to the ground.

Pietro immediately turned Giacomo on his back and began pushing on his chest. Within seconds, Giacomo was breathing.

Pietro, who was a giant of a fellow, picked up Giacomo and led the party to the tunnel.

Two others awaited their arrival, having hot coffee and grappa ready for the returning warriors.

The sat silently, each with his own thoughts.

Tom was ambivalent. He knew he had done what was expected but felt a queasiness in his gut about killing two men whom he could see.

He found himself thanking Jack and the other commandos who had been his mentors.

“While learning and then teaching others, I never thought I would actually have to kill another person. I wonder what going through the minds of the others.”

His important thing was to reset his focus. At that moment, Pietro suggested a game of cards.”

At the next group meeting, Tom gave them the information that the operation to take Ortona would begin on the twentieth. “I believe your group should advise the citizens of the heavy bombardment and house to house fighting will be the order of the day. Evacuation should begin immediately.

“Those of you with families might want to lead the way in order to show your neighbors that this is serious. The rest of you should be gone as quickly as possible.”

Pietro asked, “What are your plans?”

“I want to gather as much intelligence as possible, especially about last-minute changes in the defense set up. I plan to go out through the tunnel, early morning of the nineteenth.”

Pietro said, “If you don’t mind, I will stay with you. You have done so much for us. I want to be there in case you need help.”

“Thank you, but this is my job.”

“If it’s okay, I want to make it my job, too.”

Midmorning on the eighteenth a young boy brought a note from Sisto.

“Hans is looking for you and me. He knows that we are not related. I will be gone by the time you get this note. I suggest you go into hiding. He can be determined and vicious. S.”

Pietro came to the pump house after lunch.

“Tom, one of our waiters heard some conversation at the café where I wash dishes for the Germans. Two of the officers were moaning the fact that they have practically no back up for this battle. Two reserve units have been deployed to some critical location west of here. Can we get that information to the Canadians?”

The waiter asked me how to get the message to our allies. I promised him I would take care of the matter.”

“We need to get to the Canadians tonight but just in case, I will prepare a coded message for a quick burst, if our path is blocked.”

He didn't have to spell that out for Pietro. Both knew the risks. The Germans also had good intelligence and they expected an onslaught soon. They would have a slew of patrols, making it more difficult for Tom and Pietro to get to the other side.

In light of Sisto's message about the Germans hunting for Tom, they got rid of any evidence of ever having been in the pump house, placed their hip boots next to the tunnel hatch.

Just then, they heard the sound of approaching boots. Both dashed for the tunnel, picked up the boots and were moving down about forty feet around a bend and out of sight.

Toms heard the hatch open and recognized Hans' voice “I want him alive.”

Tom held his breath. Flashlight beams scoured the walls of the tunnel. Finally, they heard the hatch close and the sounds fade away.

After a couple of minutes, Pietro scooted up the tunnel and lifted the hatch for a glance and quickly closed it. “They left a guard. It looks like we're stuck.”

Tom said, “Let's go to the tunnel outlet where the air is fresher. This will be a long wait for darkness before we start for the other side.”

At midnight, Tom decided to send the radio message, just in case. The light from the moon did not make this an ideal night for evading patrols.

Within the first thirty minutes, they had to lie very still in the brush, in order to evade German patrols.

Just a few meters from the line where Tom expected to find Canadian patrols, he saw a glint. He held out his arm to touch Pietro but he found no arm. He felt a sense of panic. "Where is Pietro?"

He heard a scuffle from the directing of the glint he had noticed. He moved silently in that direction.

He thought, "Pietro must be in trouble if there is more than one German scout."

He nearly jumped out of his skin when he felt the touch of a hand on his shoulder.

"It's done. Two down. Lead the way."

Tom felt his gut unclench and relax.

Thirty minutes later, he heard a soft whisper, "Mounted Police."

He whispered, "FBI."

"Follow me, Eagle."

A half hour later, two tense bodies were relaxing with two shots of Canadian blended whiskey in hot coffee.

Thirty minutes later, they heard the opening salvo of the battle for Ortona. Allied forces, outnumbering the Germans, were ordered to maintain the offensive, knowing that the Germans had no backup to bring into the battle.

Going through the built-up areas in and around Ortona was the only feasible option. Since Ortona was part of the Winter Line defense system; the Germans had constructed a series of designed interlocking defensive positions in the town.

This made the town a formidable obstacle to any attacking force.

For eight bloody days, Tom heard and read the reports of slow movement forward and casualties mounting, despite the good intelligence by Tom and the Italian underground.

Finally, eight days of fighting resulted in the withdrawal of the Germans and a total of more than two thousand dead

On New Year's Day, Tom received orders to report to Washington on or before January 15, 1944.

Chapter 12.

Angie, after dispatching a number of stories of life of the Arab families and young women during the aftermath of the North African battles, decided to take a rest.

It was time to care for her son, her mom and herself. She had lost a dozen pounds and felt like her face was created of sand.

It took two weeks on two different cargo ships and an overnight train ride to reach home.

The first three days at home were difficult. All the way home, she dreamt of having her son in her arms and showering him with kisses and love.

Her eagerness had the opposite effect. Her actions frightened Junior who struggled to get out of her arms and into the bosom of Manna.

At meal time, he never looked at Angie but held up the palm of his hand to hide his face from this stranger.

It took three heart wrenching days for Junior to accept her as a friend and initiate the warm and loving relationship that fulfilled Angie's dream.

Three weeks later, she received letters from two of her magazines inviting her to submit stories dealing with disabled veterans and their families.

The idea was not very appealing but she needed the funds. "It seems more gruesome than interviewing widows or gold star mothers."

She would give the idea some thought. Meanwhile, she got into the motherly mode, playing with Junior, taking him for walks in the neighborhood and greeting her neighbors.

She took in the movies with some high school girl friends, most of whom had married and looked for mail each day from their husbands somewhere overseas.

On Mondays, she often stopped for coffee with Lena Balli, whose husband was serving in the Marines. Lena was living with her two-year-old daughter at her in-law's home.

The air was brisk. Junior was trying to clap his hands without success because of the mittens. Angie decided to stop in for a visit with Lena. She turned into the walkway and stopped to take Junior into her arms.

“Hello Angie.”

She knew that familiar voice. It was Mike, their postman for as long as Angie could remember.

“Good morning, Mike. I'll save you a few steps if you want to hand me the mail.”

“Good. Lena has a letter but the return name is not Mark. I hope it's not bad news. See you later, Angie.”

She didn't have time to think about the letter. The door burst open and Lena was dashing to see the mail.

Her face clouded over. “It's not from Mark. I don't recognize the name. Come in, Angie. I have a bad feeling and I need to have a friend with me.”

Mrs. Balli was waiting at the door. “Len, is it from Mark?”

“No mama. “Her voice choked.”

Angie said, “It looks like a letter from a friend.”

Angie put Junior on the floor and sat next to Lena while Mrs. Balli stood with a face of stone.

Lena could not read the letter. Her hands were shaking and her voice croaked on the first word. She handed the letter to her mother-in-law, Mary, who handed it to Angie as though the letter would burn her hand.

Angie read through the letter before reading it aloud. She wished she did not have to continue.

“Dear Lena,

Mark is my best friend. He asked me to write to you. He isn’t able to write now but the doctor says he will be able to do so when the operation bandages are removed and he completes his therapy.

He suffered severe burns in the last battle we fought.

Mark and I have been buddies since basic training. He saved my life early in this battle.

We are bunkmates in the hospital. I push his wheel chair since he can’t walk until he gets a new leg.

He says to tell you that he loves you and is all done with the war but it will be months before he sees you.

Tell his mom that he will give me a message for her tomorrow.

Sincerely, Jeff Michaels

PS. I will take good care of him until he comes home.”

Angie watched Lena fall apart. Her face went ashen. Her father-in-law, John, who had just walked into the room, caught her as she fainted and slumped. He took her in his arms and laid her on the sofa.

Mary was frozen in place, her steely faced expression unchanged

John was massaging Lena’s wrists. “Mary, for God’s sake, gets me a damp washcloth. Hurry.”

Mary came out of her daze. “What did you say, John?”

“I need a damp wash cloth.”

Mary dashed to the bathroom. Before she returned, Lena began to stir. Angie joined John.

“Lena, you’ll be all right. You just fainted.”

“Oh. Yes, I remember. Mark was burned and lost a leg. Oh, Papa, what are we going to do?” I will have to go to work. Who will take care of little Mark? Will Mark ever walk again” Yes, of course, we can get him a crutch.”

John said, “Hush, dear. All will work out. Mary and I will see to that and Mark’s brothers, when they get home, will be there for him and little Mark.”

Mary handed him the cold cloth and sat down in the overstuffed chair. Angie noticed that she was staring into space while droplets of tears fell on her cheeks.

She was to find out later that Mark was the youngest of four boys and was her favorite, her baby. She remembered stories of how his brothers always protected him.

Angie thought, no wonder she is dazed. The love of her life is hurting and there is nothing neither she nor his brothers can do.

John had put the cloth on Lena’s forehead and was gently wiping away her tears with his handkerchief.’

Angie thought to herself. “John sees Lena as the daughter he never had. She will be in good hands. She will understand that subconsciously for the interim but will come to experience his love for her in some future time.”

Angie came to realize that her first story was happening here and now in this room. “Part two will unfold when Mark walks through that door.”

She felt Junior trying to climb on her lap, a signal that it was time to leave the grieving family to struggle privately. She planned to come by with some soup for their lunch.

Angie spent the next two afternoons researching the archives of the Daily Eagle. She was certain she would find stories of local military heroes wounded and returned home as a disabled veteran.

She decided to interview one Otto Faber whose home was in the neighboring community of Two Bridges. She could take the street car and not have to use precious rationed gasoline.

She found his telephone number and asked for an appointment after telling him the reason for her call.

He responded with, “I’d be happy to meet if you are willing to include some others in your story.”

“Of course.”

“Okay. Then, meet me at Frank’s barbershop on Main Street, Friday at six o’clock.”

She was met at the door by the proprietor whom she recognized as the leader of a fine local dance band, which played at her senior ball.

“Welcome. Come meet the gang. She gaped as she saw four men ranging from a teenage to two gentlemen in their last forties.

Frank performed the introductions. “Meet Otto Faber, a double amputee dating back to the invasion of Sicily, sergeant in the 101st Air bore.

Next is Fred Mulak, seriously affected by a gas attack, dating back to the Second battle of the Marne River in France.

This is George Stenson, minus one right arm, dating back to Guadalcanal.

Last is Mike Andes, double amputee, dating back to a canon shot into his trench the morning of November 10, 1918.”

Otto interjected. “Please join us with a cold bottle of Rolling Rock beer. Frank has made this our chapter headquarters for the local group of Disabled Vets.”

“My request to you is that you consider four stories for your magazine. Within our four tales there is more than enough pathos, happiness, joy, failure, success, despair and hope.”

“We have agreed that if you choose our four stories, each of us is willing to answer any question you ask, something none of us has ever done other than among ourselves. There are things that even our closest family or friends have never heard.”

Angie thought about her response. “I will listen to anything you wish to discuss but I intend to print what is relevant to the magazine’s request. That is how your injury and return affected your loved ones. Also, since Frank knows you personally, I will ask him for a brief sketch of each of you before I talk with you. How does that sound?”

Each nodded agreement.

Frank began, “Otto was never too interested in school. He started hanging round the shop as a young teenager wanting to earn money to take flying lessons. He shined shoes, ran errands for my customers and

me and the dance band guys, moved instruments, music stands and the sheet music on evenings we had a gig.

Otto cut in. "I never made enough to take those flying lessons. Along came the war. I tried for the Army Air Corps as a pilot but ended up as a paratrooper in the 101st."

Because of wind and fog, the initial flights got off to a late start. Things were pretty messy by the time we were in the air

The upshot was that I landed in the mist, slam bang into a tree at a speed that nearly tore off my legs.

I hung in that tree for over an hour, screaming with pain, trying to the attention of anyone. I lost a lot of blood while accumulating a lot of dirt and crud in my wounds.

I cried like a baby for days when I was told that both legs would be amputated. I couldn't give a damn about "men don't cry." I was going to be a damn worthless cripple because a sorry-assed officer had miscalculated"

Angie said gently, "Take your time, Otto."

"I didn't know what to expect when I came home. We lost mom to cancer a couple of years ago. My two older brothers are in the navy, probably in the Pacific.

Sis, the oldest of the kids, whose husband is also in the navy, lives with us, takes care of the house and cares for me even as she did when I was growing up.

Dad is a police sergeant and takes me to the YMCA for a workout five days a week. He works with me on the parallel bars He has me learning to pull myself up the long rope hand over hand"

Otto laughed. "Now that I can almost reach the top, I draw a large audience"

"I think my family was prepared for what happened to me. I remember dad saying to us on the day I left, "I pray that all of you come home to sis and me but, if you do, we must be prepared for something less than you are today. No matter what, you will be changed."

"That is not to say that there were no tears. We cried and shed water by the bucket full. Every once in a while, I get so angry about what might have been that I burst into tears."

“If you don’t mind, talk with one of the others. I need to recoup.”

Frank took advantage of the pause to pass out another small bottle of Rolling Rock Beer.

The two older men insisted that young George Stenson tell his story, so Frank did a brief intro. “Gorgeous George, before Uncle Sam shaved his head, had the most beautiful head in town, including the best coiffed woman.

I gave him a trim at age three and watched his mom cry tears when I removed the first curl.

He was the smartest kid in his class. He was the handsomest. That is one tough burden to overcome in the tough neighborhood where he grew up. So, George became the toughest.”

He got a full scholarship to Yale, graduated magna cum laude and a commission in the Marines. He can take over from there.”

“I went to basic training three weeks after getting my degree in 1941. I was assigned as a platoon officer just before Thanksgiving and given a ten day leave before shipping out to the Pacific, where maneuvers would get us into fighting shape.

Three days later the Japs hit Pearl. We moved to Camp Pendleton in California for specialized training which helped significantly for our taking of Lunga Point and Henderson Field from the Japs in August of the following year.

The enemy sent wave after wave to take back Henderson and lost 20 times the number of soldiers than we did, so desperate was their need for that airfield.

By the end of eighty-five days on the line without relief and little food, I was dead tired at the culmination of the intense three-day battle at the end of October.

The decimated Japs retreated. I was dazed. I got careless and walked into path of a straggling Jap who cut off my arm with a sword before he was shot by a buddy.

The blow shattered my shoulder, making it impossible to replace the arm.”

I was one of the lucky few that met Dr. Mackie at the Naval Hospital in San Diego. He was my psychological counselor.

Within weeks, he showed me that I was not helpless and dependent. Once he learned that I wanted to be a writer, he encouraged me that it was something I could do with my brains.

He found me a caring occupational therapist who taught me to write left handed and hunt and peck on the typewriter with amazing speed.

All that and a sensitive newspaper publisher have paved the way to my being the city editor of the regional newspaper.

Mr. Paige, the publisher, came to see me at the hospital in Bethesda just before I was retired. It was there that he made me the offer.

Since the day I was injured, my brother was killed in a naval battle.

My two older sisters were with my folks when I arrived and mingled their tears with my parents, my two nephews and me.

Within a half hour I was telling some fun stories from my training days. Sis, Ruth, caught on and turned the event into a story telling time.

I told the story of my injury to my father, who gave me a “hrumph” and changed the subject.”

I never think of myself as handicapped. “I am planning a wider career in journalism and our publisher says he knows a lot of people in the industry.”

Frank said, “It’s food time.”

Angie said, “I’m buying.”

Frank said, “We all bring brown bags” He was interrupted by Otto.

“I’d love a burger and a milk shake.” The others were nodding their heads. Angie grinned. Frank said, “See you in the shape of a lamb’s tail.”

During the brief lunch, Frank shared a fun tale.

“I was late in signing up for the first war and was signed up for a spot in an army band; we set sail from New York on November 7, 1918. Of course, the war ended four days later.

We were in the middle of the Atlantic. Within the hour, we had orders to return to New York. We arrived to a shower of welcome home, including the offer of drinks and congratulations for a job well done.

We had been mistaken for the first wave of returning veterans.”

That story received a round of real laughter.

Frank initiated the after-lunch conversation. Fred Mulak was eighteen, just three years after his immigration from what is now Czechoslovakia. There was talk of creating a homeland for the Slavs if the allies were successful.

He enrolled as a volunteer for the French army and immediately returned to France before we got into War One.”

“The rest of his story is up to him.”

In understandable but accented English, he said, “It’s still hard to talk about, so I will be short.”

“I was an excellent shot due to my hunting skills in the old country. When my superior officer discovered this, he made me the company sniper. I can tell you that seeing one’s shot hit and kill an individual is a terrible thing but I had to do that twenty-three times.

I finally told the segment that got the officer to relieve me and sent me to the trenches Three days later I was in the path of the wave of mustard gas that the Germans released over our trenches.

The stinging was horrible but fortunately I passed out and stayed out for hours. I came to in the first aid tent, wanting to scratch the burning skin on my face and neck, but my arms were strapped to the cot.

A nurse noticed that I was stirring and hastened to my side. “Here, have a sip of water.”

“Is your throat burning hot?”

I heard my scratchy voice saying, “Not as bad as my skin.””

“Good. Someone did you a favor by placing a large hankie over your mouth and nose. Any idea?””

I shook my head and asked “Water?”

At that point, Mike hesitated for a moment, and then he turned toward Angie. “What did you ask me?”

Angie looked bewildered. “I didn’t.”

She studied him as he tried to find his train of thought.

“Oh, excuse me, Miss. That’s one of the lasting effects. In the middle of a sentence or a thought, my mind goes blank for a few seconds, and then recovers. Otherwise I’m fine. The young ones use to tease me when we first got together.”

Angie decided to accept the statement. She asked, “May I change the subject?”

“Sure.”

How did your family respond when you got home?”

“There was no family at that time. My older brother who paid for my first trip had moved to another state while I was gone but never informed me until he sent a Christmas card at the old boardinghouse to which I returned.”

“How about now?”

“I got laid off wok, two years ago but I get enough part time jobs to go with a small pension and social security. I have rented from the same woman for years so she keeps my rent and board to very little. I get along.”

“These buddies are great. Every time I forget to bring lunch, they share with me. I owe them so much.”

Frank said, “During lunch, Mike told me he is opting out, Angie. He usually has little to say but seldom misses our get together. We’ve heard his story and it is too painful for him to rehearse details.”

Angie nodded her understanding in the direction of Mike who gave her something that could pass for a smile.

“I thank all of you for a special learning day. I plan to send Otto a copy of my stories so you can make any corrections before I send them off to be published.”

Otto sad, “Now that you know where and when, drop in for a visit.”

Chapter 13

Tom, with time on his hands, was trying to decide if he had time to get to Naples.

“How would I be received? I haven’t received any response from Rosa. Has she found someone else? I can’t believe that could happen with a few weeks.

Is there a chance she did not receive my three letters and thinks I abandoned her? This is driving me crazy. I will never have a better chance for a while to find out, but I need to get to Naples.”

He decided that his Canadian friends or someone from the Eighth Army headquarters, who might be in Ortona, could give him a helping hand.

He started with the transportation office, since he had to initiate his travel plans to Washington.

“Hello, I’m Ted Evers. I’m happy to help you find your way to Washington. It will mean a lot of zigging and zagging.”

Tom said, “First, I need to ask for a favor. Is there any way I can get to Naples as part of this trip?”

Ted was about to ask why, but changed his mind.

“I think I can do that but you will have to arrange your own transport from Naples to England. Since you have a high priority that should be no problem.”

He picked up a phone. After some mumbo jumbo that Tom could not understand, he hung up.

“You’re set. An hour from now, one of our drivers will pick you up at your quarters. He will take you to our temporary air strip where a Piper Cub will fly you to Base Six.”

“Sometime tomorrow morning, a scout plane, which is a converted photography-recon plane, will make a practice run to Naples.”

“Wow. That was fast and smooth. Thank you.”

“You’re more than welcome. You may not know it, but you are quite a hero for the intelligence you provided from the other side.”

Tom blushed. “There were no heroics although it was a bit risky.”

“Well, we think so. Meantime, I will try to work with someone in Naples about getting you to England and beyond. Ask for Terry Maguire at the Naples air base. Good luck.”

During the flight to Naples, he had a strange thought. “If Rosa has moved, will I be welcome at the Countess’s home? If Rosa is angry with me, will she have tried to poison my relationship with her family? Damn. Damn.”

It was three in the afternoon when Tom stepped out of the cab, his body tense with anxiety.

“What the hell am I doing? I should have the driver take me back to the air field. Oh, hell. Here goes.”

The moment he knocked on the door it flew open. The Contest’s arms were wide open inviting Tom to her bosom.

“Thomas, what a wonderful surprise. I was looking out the window and watched ever step. I could hardly wait to open the door to your knock. Come in. Come in.”

She called out. “Maria, make some fresh coffee. Tomas is here.”

She led Tom to the sitting room that he remembered so well from his first visit.

“Rosa is napping. I will have Maria awaken her but first, I want a moment with you.”

Tom nodded, hoping she would tell him that Rosa was still available.”

When they were seated, she moved directly to the subject. “You must be mystified about the lack of communication. Rosa will tell you when the two of you are alone.”

“I want to tell you that she loves you and will be surprised but relieved that you’re here. She will tell you all that you want to know.”

“Giovanni and I have missed you. Maria has awakened Rosa. I hear her stirring.”

Maria came in with a tray loaded with sweets and a coffee server.

She seemed to be delaying the coffee serving. Tom thought. “She’s waiting for a signal. As I remember, she rushed to serve me during my entire visit.”

The door opened to let Rosa enter clad in a long dressing gown. She gasped and burst into tears, frozen in place. She reached out her arms but seemed to be anchored to the floor.

For just a moment, Tom froze as he beheld his beautiful Rosa. He dashed to sweep her into his arms. Her arms wrapped around his neck, her lips rose to meet his. It was a long time before Tom could catch his breath.

“Cara mia, I spent hours and hours thinking of you and remembering those few days we had before I had to leave.”

Rosa led Tom to the sofa, nestled her head on his breast, as he put his arms around her. She tried to speak, but no words issued forth. Her tears flowed but neither paid attention. She continued to press her head onto Tom’s chest.

Eventually she took Tom’s hand and placed it on her belly. It was the first moment that Tom realized that Rosa was with child. He felt the baby kick and his heart jumped.

It was so unique and thrilling and he had no idea of the millions of men who had also thrilled at a moment like this.

He leaned forward to kiss Rosa on the forehead. It was a sign to Rosa that all her fears were for nothing. Tom was going to love his son. The tears that had ceased for a moment started anew with joy.

They sat in silent acceptance of this new relationship, unaware that Maria came in with a new tray. “Signora, you must eat for the bambino.”

Tom said, “Gracia, Maria. I will see that she eats.”

He reached for the pitcher and poured some orange juice. “Let’s have something to eat while you tell me about these last moths.”

She began. “I’m sorry I didn’t respond to your letters. I had begun to doubt myself. Our time together had been heavenly but so short.

I missed you so. I had just experienced the most glorious days of my life.

Was it even possible for two of us to fall in love in such a short time? There was so much more to know about each other.

I spent days and nights thinking about the answers. I finally came to the tentative conclusion that if it was true for me it must have been for you.

When your first letter arrived, I saw more news than declarations of love. That wasn’t really true but it was how my tortured mind interpreted it.

While I struggled with the meaning of that, I discovered that I was pregnant. I was overwhelmed with joy but all my doubts returned.

I remembered a moment when you asked me if it would be safe to have sex because you had no protection with you. I assured you that it was not a concern.

That reminder made me ask myself, “How will he react when I tell him he is a new father?”

“I decided to delay responding. When Irene, the Contessa, and I discussed the matter, she tried to assure me that your love for me, and the caring person she believed you to be, would win the day.”

“I kept delaying. Your other letters seemed to fill me with guilt and even caused a rift with Irene.”

Rosa’s voice choked. The tears slowly eased out from behind her lashes. Tom wiped them with his handkerchief. He pulled her to his breast and smoothed her hair until she had composed herself.

“Oh, Cara, Mia. I am sorry that I was not here to share the joy of your discovery. I love you and nothing should create any doubt. I was in seventh heaven for all those early days until I thought you had found someone else and a new and wonderful life.”

“I wanted to curse this damn war until I remembered that it was the war that brought us together.”

Rosa turned and put her fingers to his lips. “Hush, sweetheart. We are here together for now. How long can you stay?”

“Only a few days.” He explained the situation.

He asked, “Is that enough time to get married?”

“I don’t think so. The church requires that the bans be proclaimed during mass, for three weeks.”

“Why don’t we go to the rectory and see the priest? Maybe, he can make an exception.”

“I will talk with Irene. She will make the appointment if she thinks it is feasible.”

She went to see Irene.

When she returned to Tom, she reported, “She will make the arrangements. Now, what I would like is to take you to our room and make love with you. Just thinking about seeing you naked is making me moist.”

“Won’t that be dangerous for the baby?”

“Not according to the books on pregnancy. I have another three weeks. Now, hurry before I rape you here and now.”

An hour later, he was amazed to be looking at a glowing Rosa while his fingers touched lightly on her belly, awaiting the next kick from Junior.

Rosa had decided to name the baby Thomas. Even if Tom were not to return for any reason, she would have little Thomas as the memory of her love.

There was a light tap on the door. “Yes, Maria?”

“The Contessa says there is time for a bath before dinner.

The lovers decided on a shower to relive those few days when they teased and washed each other and laughed through the toweling down.

Irene met them, with a wide smile, in the sitting room. “I have a nice vintage white cocktail wine for you, Tom but only juice for our glowing pregnant Rosa.”

“By the way, Father Cardoni says he will have the bans published at three masses tomorrow morning. He said that he will be available any time after three tomorrow afternoon.”

Tom looked at the Contessa in astonishment. She laughed.

“Father C. is past retirement. He has been my confessor for ages. He once told me I was the most creative sinner at age eight so that he could assign me more candles to light for all my sins. He is a wise old bird, never asked a question other than were you a Catholic.”

Giovanni came home just in time to sit for dinner. He took in all the news after he bear-hugged and welcomed his American friend.

The ceremony took place the next evening at six in the chapel with a couple, friends of the Contessa, as the witnesses.

The wedding dinner was catered in the formal dining room at home. Giovanni, as the best man, made the speech and sent the couple off to the bedroom.

Everyone was sensitive to the fact that the newlyweds had only a brief time for their wedding and the making of plans for their post war lives.

After a long discussion of where, Tom agreed with Rosa’s request. She was willing to go to the States but wanted Tom to give Naples a try.

“For one thing, I know that my father has been having heart problems. If nothing else, he could use a man’s brains to help him. He has all the physical help he needs, but I worry, because the management side puts him under a lot of pressure.”

“Even if that kind of work does not suit you, he will value you as a friend. You are aware of that.”

Tom answered her request with, “I’ll give it a try. There is no special reason for me to be in the States except that it has been my home”

“I haven’t a close relationship with my relatives.”

As they lie together before rising in the morning. Tom said, “Honey, I have to start looking for a ride to England and on to the States. It may take me days or hours. I have no way of knowing.”

“I understand. I will have everything laundered today and steel myself for a sudden departure. I am strong enough to handle our separation and I will accent the positive, as you told me.”

“My parents and God will be my bulwark. You will be in my nightly prayers.”

Tom said, “I will develop the habit of evening prayers as I did when I was a boy.”

Tom was able to reach the chief staff sergeant to the Deputy Transportation officer for the Eighth Army at the Naples airport.

“I’ll see what I can do, Mr. Dudak. With that high priority, your chances are pretty good.”

He laughed. “I can even bump a Brigadier General and some of them need a little surprise.”

“There is one problem. I need you to be on standby. I may need you in as little as a two-hour frame. Will that work for you?”

“Definitely. I can do that.”

He shared the news with Irene and Rosa and decided that a jog around the estate was in order. He hadn’t a decent workout for four days.

He was sweating profusely, a half hour later.

Rosa, watching from their bedroom window, had the shower ready when he arrived in their room.

Rosa begged off lunch but Tom was joined by Giovanni and the Contessa. In the middle of the lunch, Irene said, “Rosa said that you were open to the idea of working with us and living in the area. This is the first time that Giovanni will have heard this.”

The response to hearing the news was enthusiastic. “Tomas, I would be delighted to work side by side with you, if you learn to like the work and choose to do so.”

Tom nodded. “I’d be honored, my friend, to be invited and to work with you.”

Giovanni retired to his office. Irene poured some coffee and encouraged Tom to relax.

“Thomas, had you any specific plans for your future, something you may regret not pursuing?”

“Nope. I was pursuing a wide general education that, I hoped, might make me a good candidate for some corporation. The war cut short any thinking that was in process.”

He asked Irene, “Did the war interrupt frustrate your dream?”

“Not really. Our family business has been interrupted and its work delayed.”

“In a strange way, it has helped further my dream. You’re coming into our life will bring these that I have not been able to give to Giovanni. I look forward to being the grandmother to your children.”

The conversation was interrupted by the ringing of the phone. Maria entered, “The phone is for Signor Tomas.”

When Tom hung up, he said, “My flight leaves in four hours. The army is sending a driver to pick me up in about two hours.”

Three very sad faces were set in a tableau of silence until Irene said, “Father and I will take a walk in the garden while you and Rosa say good bye. We’ll meet you in the driveway when the driver comes.”

Twenty minutes into the flight, Tom opened the packet that Rosa had prepared for him. Inside was a book of classical Roman and Italian poetry, material describing the Estate pre-war framing and vineyard business. She also included notes from Giovanni about his ideas for rebuilding and expanding after the war.

He also found some food items that would tide him over until he arrived in England.

He closed the packet and let his eyes wander over the few seats that surrounded his.

He knew that the plane was a C-47, the military version of the Douglas DC-3, with 21 seats.

He was in the aisle seat of two on the left side of the plane. On the other side of the aisle was a single row of seats.

His seat mate, who was aboard and asleep when Tom boarded, stirred. “Where are we?”

“We’re just leaving Naples, the last leg to London. Where did you board?”

“Sicily, the origin of the flight. I’m on my way to London in order to be discharged. This damn war is over for me. Where are you headed?”

“Washington, after a brief leave. I’m awaiting new orders.”

“Where you expect to go?”

“I have no idea but I hope its back on the continent. I want to be part of whatever when the Allies are back on the continent.”

“I’m sorry I won’t be joining you. The British frown on blind commandos.”

“Wow. You had me fooled.”

“I’ve had a lot of practice. I’m Ian Smythe.”

“Tom Dudak. I’ve had a bit of commando training in Colonel Johnston’s outfit.”

“I’ll be damned. Was Jack one of your instructors?”

“Yep. He was good. I have bit of history to back that up.”

“I, too, can vouch for that. I just got careless. My opponent managed to throw some gasoline in my eyes. Disposing of him took some time and no source of water was nearby. End of story and my career.”

“Sorry to hear that.”

“Oh well. Do you think that sweet smelling young nurse can get me a drink?”

From that point on, the conversation turned to “What did you do before the war?”

During the flight over the Atlantic to New Jersey, Tom decided he could squeeze in a visit home to see his relatives and see Angie’s family and her son.

To his surprise, it was Angie that answered the door. Hugs and kisses were the order of the day. After Angie, he was smothered by her mama. Junior just looked on, wondering who this man was.

Angie picked him up. “Junior, this is another of your many uncles.”

Junior turned his head in Mommy’s shoulder. The adults laughed, understanding the youngster’s shyness.

Angie insisted that Tom be the first to tell his story. They listened in rap attention as he gave as many details as he could.

Mama frowned throughout his telling her of being deeply drawn to Rosa at the end of his Naples assignment. Angie grinned and pressed him for details.

“Tommy, you are actually beaming. I am so happy for you. I wondered if you ever would find love.”

Mama changed the subject, insisting on details of his espionage in Ortona, but when he talked of his reunion with Rosa, she rushed to the kitchen

She mumbled “It’s time to start water boiling for the pasta, finishing off the tomato sauce and prepping the salad.”

Tom had the feeling that this visit would not be the festive gathering that had been in the offing.

Angie gave Tom a detailed account of her trip to Oran and the long silent vigil she kept at Anthony’s grave.

They shared their earlier stories, omitting no details, as close friends will do.

Mama brought in some homemade red wine and cheese. “Dinner in thirty minutes. I am setting a place for David. Is that right?”

“Yes, Mama.” She poured three glasses of wine and raised her glass. “To dear friends. May our bindings never loosen?”

A minute later, she was telling Tom about her interviews with disabled returnees and their families.

“The David that Mama mentioned is one of those. He lost part of his left arm and it seems they can give him a replacement for his forearm. Within a few months, he expects to be teaching high school math.”

David Rizzuto was handsome and charming and a spinner of good tales. He kept the dinner table in great spirits with stories of his basic training days.

When he began telling war stories, Mama excused herself. David must have felt comfortable telling those stories since most of them had been told to Angie.

She seemed to be captivated by David throughout dinner and Tom thought that David's relationship with Angie was rather possessive.

Tom had planned to stay the night at Mama's house but the scene at dinner and afterward changed his mind. Mama begged him to stay but he insisted that he had promised Uncle Bill to stay with them.

When bidding them good night, he got the impression from Angie that he was doing the right thing.

Mama walked him to the door. Even with teary eyes, she managed "I'm sorry that I walked out before you finished your story. I should be and will be happy for you. It's just that I always hoped that you and Angie would come to love each other."

Uncle Bill and Aunt Mary were delighted to see him. Bill pressed him for details of his assignment, intrigued with his role as a spy.

The three of them had more to drink than was wise, Tom, rising with a headache.

They got him to the railroad station, in the nick of time, to catch the departing train ride to Washington.

Meanwhile, Angie sighed with relief when Tom said that he could not stay the night. She didn't want to be obvious. She realized that her insightful friend would get the message. Over the years, she often felt that he was reading her mind.

When Tom first arrived, she had been excited. She had, momentarily, forgotten about her date for the evening.

David was important to her. She was sure that he would make a serious pass tonight and from her past behavior; he would expect a full response.

He was clear about his desire to marry her and discuss engagement. He told her that his prospects for work were good.

They even discussed the possibility of living with her mother.

The last few nights in bed, she had spent hours in reverie, imagining herself responding to David's love making.

It came to pass as she expected. After Mama said good night, David led Angie to the sofa and knelt before her with a small plain cut blue diamond in his open palm.

“Angela, my love, will you marry me?”

Her response was an enthusiastic yes. He slipped the ring on her finger. She pulled him off his knees, wrapped her arms around his neck and fell back on the sofa with David astride her.

Physical desire for each other ruled the moment as two lovers sealed their engagement.

It was obvious that David was fulfilled but the same could not be said for Angie

“Oh, well.” She remembered that the first time with Anthony had not been as fantastic as her dreams had been.

Chapter 14

Maggie, Mr. Donovan's personal secretary was not in the new outer office. Priscilla said, “Welcome, Lieutenant.”

She rose and escorted him to a door to the inner office. “Maggie is expecting you.” She gave him a warm welcoming smile.

Maggie was on her way for a hug. “Welcome home, handsome. You are a sight for sore eyes, handsomer than ever. From the look in your eye, I’m betting some lucky Signorina has got your eye.”

“Sweet Maggie, I see nothing escapes you.”

She grinned. “The boss awaits, but you and I have a luncheon date afterwards.”

She opened the door. “Lieutenant Dudak, boss.”

“Welcome back, Tom. All reports are that you did a great job in Ortona and in Naples, before that. I hope you can do as well with the French as you did with the Italians. You are being coopted to Colonel Johnston’s group in London. He is coordinating all assistance to the French underground. Maggie will give you details.”

“Thank you, boss. I have a belated request if you have a moment.”

“Shoot.”

“I didn’t realize until after the event that I needed permission to marry. I was married in Naples two weeks ago.”

Donovan laughed. “Hell, I would have said yes. Tell Maggie to fix the record. Now, go do the job the way I expect of you.”

Maggie took him to the Mayfair Hotel dining room for a long lunch. “This is my treat. I want the details direct from your mouth with nothing held back. I expect no false modesty about your work in Orton. Then I want the full inside story of your romance with this Neapolitan beauty. I’m a deep down romantic, no matter what Bill thinks.”

Maggie’s face was a beam of smiles as she listened to the love story of Rosa and Tom.

She asked, “Have you any pictures?”

“She had only two snap shots, taken at the time of her high school graduation. Her mother took some of us. I’ll forward one when and if any mail finds me.”

Maggie whooped. “I knew it. She is beautiful and even that young, she seems mature for her age. Congrats, Tom, but remember that she, too, is the lucky one.”

“Promise to get me a copy of the first pictures of the baby.”

Maggie called a waiter. “Champagne for two.”

Colonel Johnston was on the phone when Tom entered the office but gave Tom a welcoming smile as he waved him to a seat.

Two minutes later, the sergeant arrived with tea and scones. He was followed by a captain who was three or four years older than Tom.

The sergeant introduced Captain William Newstead, who gave Tom a warm smile. “I’m delighted to meet my new partner.”

“You have the drop on me, Captain. I didn’t know I was getting a partner. In fact, I haven’t the slightest idea of my next assignment.”

The Colonel’s voice interrupted. “I see that you’ve been introduced. Tom, William is your partner and mentor, as may be needed. He has been working with the French Resistance movement for three years and is coming after a long rest period.”

“William, Tom did an exceptional job in Ortona during bloody December. Since you read his file, you know he has had some commando and other underground experience.”

Tom, while you have not read William’s file, he is one of our most valued associates. He has spent most of his time just outside Paris and has a huge variety of contacts.”

The Colonel rang the sergeant for more coffee and scones and started his briefing.

“As you may suspect, the time is drawing near for the Allies to cross the channel. The timing and the location is a closely held secret but everyone can make an educated guess.

It will be either western Normandy or the beaches near Calais. My associates and I intend to stay ahead of the game.

We are sending several teams into Nord Pas de Calais province and two teams into Normandy. The assignment may take two to four months.

While we change the other teams, we are asking you to work right up to the time the balloon goes up and through the first weeks of the invasion.

My gut tells me that western Normandy is the focus although, as I say, I am only guessing.

What I am asking is that, after some intense tutoring in Norman conversation that the two of you take up residence in Normandy.

In addition to knowing the location of every gun emplacement and bunker, we need a good estimate of total manpower that the Germans have available.

Both of you have demonstrated the ability to make close friends with and get strong support from our allies in resistance movements. We need you to learn the amount of help we can expect after we hit the beaches.”

“What I am trying to make clear is that in addition to helping the resistance workers, we need a lot of espionage to help ease the way of the invaders.”

Now, once you are sure that a system is in place to gather the information, I want both of you to move into the field.

Working with the local leaders, you are to identify either German intelligence agents or Frenchmen known to be collaborating with the Germans.

Your job will be to turn them into double agents. William, with your past experience you can help Tom who had had the training but no experience.”

There was one question. Two veterans knew their jobs. William asked, ‘Have you a specific area for us to settle into?’

“Nope. You should be centrally located to reach as many towns and villages where German soldiers may congregate on days off duty. The base location is your decision.”

“I’ll see you in a week. Get to know each other along with the tutoring lessons. William, Tom has had little chance to use his German. May I suggest that you two spend as much time as possible speaking German?”

Second Tuesday of February, 1944 Three A.M.

“Arrest.”

“Ami. George Washington.”

“Cheri. Proceed. Let us help pack the parachutes. Go with Emile.”

A few minutes later, Emile held up his hand. William whispered to Tom. “Left hand up means German Patrol. Stop. Right hand up would mean German Patrol. Follow me.”

The group froze in place. Tom, who had been holding his breath, exhaled slowly through his nose.

He finally realized that he was overly cautious. The noise from the stomping patrol was loud, almost as if scaring away any underground fighters in order to avoid confrontation.

Fifteen minutes later, they were warming their hands in front of the fireplace. William introduced Michele, Emile and Jean.

“Tom, these are three friends although we haven’t worked together for about a year. Michele is Jean’s daughter and this is their home.”

Jean is a partially disabled vet of the first war. Emile is a deserter from the labor gang working for the Germans.”

William put his hand on Tom’s shoulder. “This young man had worked with resistance groups in France and several times in Italy. He is wiser than his years.”

He turned back to Jean. “Is Jacques still the top man for the region”

“Oui. He should arrive tomorrow. It was he who sent word to meet you.”

Michele said, “Time for sleep. We must be in the field at seven-thirty. Breakfast at six forty-five.””

“There are two cots and sleeping bags in Emile’s room.”

She left abruptly.

When Michele awakened them, she left some overalls and hats. “Camouflage. You need to meet the neighbors.

At breakfast, Jean explained. We can vouch for every neighbor. Since you plan to be here for some time, it will be important that you are accepted as one of us. No one will ask any questions. They are accustomed to visitors to our home.”

Jacques greeted William as he would an old friend and gave Tom a warm greeting.

Michele called, “Dejeuner.”

Jacques pulled out a bottle of wine from his gunny sack. “We celebrate the return of our good friend, William, and our new friend, Tom”

Michele listened closely as she cleared the table

Jacques asked, “Any news about the date for your invasion?”

William nodded. It is still a big secret. Everybody is guessing late spring. The location is also a secret. Our job is to keep the Germans guessing and off balance.”

“How can we help?”

“We need to get information that would be helpful in case the design is to land on the western shores. Meanwhile, we need to send a message that it is unlikely to be on this part of Normandy.”

Everybody nodded. “What kind of information?”

Tom said, “There are two major pieces of information that would help. The first is as much detailed data about locations of bunkers and tanks as well as anti- tank groups and mortar groups.

We also need the location of gasoline reserves and ammo storage, both above and below ground.”

Jacques said, “We can get most of that information but in what form of writing do we provide the info?”

All four of the resisters beamed when Tom provided the grids for twenty sectors, labeled A through T.

He explained the suggested process and the symbols for each type of equipment

Tom said, “That is my suggestion for reporting the data.”

Michele said, "It's a great suggestion. Jacques, we can organize that easily."

Jacques nodded. "Is there a time limit?"

"Not at the moment but we should move directly, just in case."

Jacques said, "We will deliver. You said that there was something else."

William said, "Our superiors would like a good estimate on the number of soldiers defending this sector of the coast."

"Let me work on that with Michele and some others. We should have something by dinner time."

Michele interjected. "We should get into the fields. The daily patrol arrives within the next hour."

Tom sensed his body tightening as the patrol of four soldiers approached. He was totally wound up when they came to a halt right next to him.

"What the hell is happening to me? This isn't the first time I've had this situation."

A smiling sergeant greeted the farmers with a guttural "Bon Jour" and a big smile."

The group all replied with a "Bon Jour". In thirty second, the sergeant gave the command to move on.

About an hour later, Tom noticed a handsome young man, about thirty years of age; join the group in the field. Within minutes, Jacques and the young man were huddling. Thirty minutes later, the stranger had vanished.

As soon as the evening meal was over, Michele started clearing but had her ear to the discussion.

Jacques started the discussion. "We have a plan. We have twin brothers, professional waiters, who have been wooed by a German agent, urging them to come to work as waiters at the two officers' ward rooms at division headquarters. The agent is not aware that both speak German fluently."

“Andre says that Julien probably will agree to become collaborators if we can promise to clear their names when the war is over.”

William asked, “Do you think they are strong enough to take the pressure of being spies for three or four months or even more?”

“I know that Andre can and he assures me that Julien is strong enough.”

William said, “It’s a good plan. Senior officers will forget that he is French and discuss more than tidbits in the presence of a waiter who is invisible in their eyes.”

The men relaxed. Jacques asked, “Did you bring some American cigarettes? I can use a smoke.”

Tom went to the sack of goodies and brought cigarettes and chocolate Hershey bars. The response was enthusiastic including a kiss from Michele when she received the chocolate bar.

When his companions lit up and relaxed, Tom asked, “Do you think I can meet this agent. I would like to know of any others in the area.”

Michele said, “That can be arranged. We also know of one other. By now, they don’t even try to pretend. They are always recruiting.”

She turned to Jacques. “We should have you three go to the cellar. The evening patrol is due. Some of the time, they politely ask permission to search the house, as if we have a choice. They have no idea that we have a cellar.”

Emile pulled the small rug and opened the trap door.

The cellar was cold but nicely furnished with chairs and cots and candlelight.

A lot of detailed planning was compiled before Emile reopened the hatch.

Like most things military, there was a lot of waiting. It was ten days before Michelle arranged for a casual meeting between Tom and Herr Max Fuller. Michele did come up with an important fact.

“Herr Fuller is gay.”

William and Tom decided to split their duties for the present.

“Tom, since Jacques has taken all the work off our shoulders in this coastal area, I think I should start to work our way inland. It may be one hell of a job for our troops to come ashore, but once they do, the generals will be hell bent for leather to move deep.”

“That sounds good, William. I’m just about to make my first contact with a prospect for double agent. I may need your help when you return.”

“Good luck. I doubt that you will need help.”

Tom had been growing a beard. He trimmed it in a fashion that would give a careful, well-groomed look. He put on the special shoes that would force him to limp.

His papers were real, his photo replacing that of a young man from Viewville, who died prior to the Nazi invasion.

Tom inspected his new cane, the one a villager had carved from a tree branch, smooth on the surface and painted with several coats of shellac.

With the help of Michele, he was dressed to give a hint of his feminine side.

It was she who confirmed that Max Fuller, the Nazi, was gay.

“He is very discreet. My source tells me that his comrades have no idea. Since we made the discovery, his sexual partners have been French collaborators,”

“The word is that his latest partner has moved and that Fuller is looking.”

Tom was seated alone in the rear of the café. He was sipping his bitter dark coffee and looking over the patrons at this late afternoon hour. The patrons seemed friendly but had obviously avoided eye contact with Tom when he entered.

As Michele had predicted, in walked Fuller about an hour later. For a moment, the room settled into a hush but then, slowly, returned to a soft buzz.

Fuller took a seat at the table next to Tom’s but his chair was the one that faced Tom. He offered a hint of a smile to Tom who nodded but did not smile.

Fuller ordered a carafe of wine along with some cheese.

When the items arrived, Fuller said, “You’re new in the village. I’ve never seen you before.”

In a tone that hinted fear of German and authority, Tom said, “Yes, I have some cousins who have a farm nearby. I need work and I hoped they would need help as spring approaches.”

“Will they need you?”

“Maybe. They will have a family conversation and let me know. It doesn’t seem hopeful. My injury also limits how fast I can work.”

Fuller did not respond to the comment but took a sip of wine. “Let me buy you a glass.”

Tom hesitated. “That might be misinterpreted by some of the other patrons.”

Fuller ignored him and waved to the waiter.

“Wine for the gentleman. Put it in a cup. Bring me double schnapps.”

He turned to Tom. “I might be able to find a job for you, a desk job.”

Tom was thanking. “He’s getting a bit more aggressive. He uses the liquor to bolster his courage.”

Fuller ordered another double.

He said, “Let’s go to my quarters. We can review some of the jobs that may suit you. It’s only six doors to the right.

You can follow me about ten minutes after I leave. No one will suspect that we are meeting again.”

In the apartment, they sat next to each other at a table, looking at a folder that was titled “Occupations.”

Fuller’s knee began a light brushing against Tom’s thigh. When Tom said nothing, Fuller increased the pressure Tom did nothing to discourage the move.

Fuller put his hand high on Tom’s thigh.

Tom, with a tinge of indignation asked Fuller, “What are you doing, Herr Fuller?”

“I’m also gay and I wanted to let you know that I am available. I sized you up the moment I walked into the café”

“What if you’re wrong?”

“I’m not wrong. I know. This can be perfect. You can have a soft job and with discretion and we can meet our sexual needs. You are beautiful.”

“Do any of your colleagues or any of the officers know your sexual preferences?”

“No. No, and they mustn’t find out. I hate to think what might happen to me.”

“Well, they need never know from me.”

“That’s wonderful. Now, let’s look at some of these positions and go to my private quarters.”

When Tom stood, Fuller’s face broke into a grin. “Please call me Max. What shall I call you?”

Tom said “Philippe. I presume your primary job is that of gathering tidbits of intelligence for the Abwehr. Is that right?”

Without thinking, Fuller nodded assent.

“I don’t see any radio. You must have another place.”

“Oh, no. I have it hidden.”

He was breathing a bit more rapidly. Tom could see that Fuller was eager to get him into bed. He shucked his jacket and began to loosen his tie.

“Philippe, you may hang your clothes in the closet.”

“I’m sorry, Max. There’ll be no sex today. I’m not gay but I am an agent for the Allies. I’m here to have you do some work for us.”

Fuller’s face turned red. He sputtered some words in German and he rushed toward Tom, hands in front of his as though he wanted to scratch out Tom’s eyes.

Tom, with his powerful grasp, took Fuller’s right hand in his grip and twisted it behind Fuller’s back.

“Max, you’re no match for me. You’ve grown soft. I don’t intend to hurt to you.”

“I don’t believe you. You must be working with the resistance people. They’ll kill ne.”

“Max, they already know all there is to know about you, the collaborators you’ve recruited and your ex-lovers. No, you’re too valuable to kill.”

Max’s face turned ashen. “You mean that I am going to betray the Abwehr? No. I can’t do that. If they find out, I’m a dead man.”

“If you don’t, I will let your special secret be known to the local soldiers, who may not be as kind as I am.”

“You can’t do that. It’s blackmail.”

“I know and I will. Don’t forget that. You belong to me, now, Max.”

Tom let go of Max’s hand expecting Max to try something, but he was as meek as a mouse. It looked like Max was about to accept his fate.

“Where’s your gun, Max?”

“I don’t wear a gun.”

“I can see that but you do have a gun, don’t you? Do I have to do a search and mess up your tidy drawers?”

Max reached into his pants pocket and handed Tom the key to his desk “Second drawer on the left.”

“The radio?”

Max looked defiant for a moment, then capitulated. It only took one look at the determination on Tom’s face.

“The radio is in the attic.”

“Thanks. Working with me will make it easy for you.”

Max asked with a tremor in his voice. “What is going to happen to me?”

“Believe it or not, nothing is going to happen. For the most part, you will go on as usual. I won’t even stop you from finding another partner. You can still recruit collaborators. The resistance people simply want to keep track of their names for the future.”

“You may continue to send radio messages as long as I see the content and have a chance to edit or add a note or two.”

“The Abwehr is to have no idea that you have been compromised. If I have a hint that you are not complying fully, your secret is no longer secret.”

Fuller started to protest. “I can’t fool my masters at German Intelligence, at least, not for long.”

“Don’t be too sure of that. Now, let’s find your radio set.”

Fuller’s hands were shaking as he reached for his jacket. He slipped it on and turned toward the stair case.

Suddenly, he whipped around, holding a small caliber pistol pointed directly at Tom’s heart.

Fuller said, “All right, Mr. Know-it-all. Freeze.”

A surprised Tom froze. To himself, he thought, “That was careless.”

Slowly he let his face turn into a smile.

“Max, there is no way you’re going to shoot me. My associates, who are just outside, will take your life within a minute. Secondly, few men have the courage to kill a man in cold blood, face to face. You’re not one of those few.”

Fuller’s shoulders sagged. “Of course, you’re right, but I’m worried. I don’t see how you can protect me once I’m involved.”

“Max, with all the information you can give me, including the names of other agents in the area, you will be so precious to us that I will defend you with all the power at my discretion.”

Max’s pallor turned even more ashen. “I can’t betray my fellow workers. Besides, why do you need them if you have me?”

It’s plain, Max. You can see that. We need to make sure the reports from this area do not vary significantly.”

“Oh. I guess you’re right.”

Max had no other objections. He capitulated. Within two weeks, with the help of William and Michele, Tom successfully turned three other German agents in the area.

For the next several weeks, William and Tom carefully edited the nightly radio messages with a few changes.

Each message was edited to indicate a reduction in the number of disruptions caused by the French underground.

Two of the double agents reported to Berlin that two known leaders of the resistance were no longer on the scene in western Normandy.

Both facts were engineered by Tom in such a manner as to be real for the Germans. The local underground was very cooperative, recognizing the need for believable information being accepted by the enemy.

Tom discovered that his new double agent, Johann Mueller was the son of a leader the S.S. and a nephew of a major leader in the Gestapo.

Tom suspected that Johann also sent his information to his father. Thus, his messages might carry a bit more weight, going to the S.S. as well as the Abwehr.

Tom proved to be right when he discovered a second radio in the basement, a radio set to a different frequency.

When confronted with his duplicity, Johan burst into tears. "I had no choice. If I ceased sending information, I would have an unpleasant visit from the local Gestapo. I never wanted this assignment anyway but father insisted."

Tom sensed the truth in that statement and pressed the issue. "What does that mean, Johann?"

He kept dabbing at his tears. "I'm a lousy Nazi. I refused to volunteer for the S.S. as my father wanted me to do."

"While my parents and brother are rabid Nazis, I did what I could to avoid participation. Two of my best friends and their families went to some internment camp because they refused to join the Nazi party. I don't have that kind of courage."

"If I weren't so weak and scared, I would have told you this at the beginning, but am more afraid of Gestapo than of you."

"Do you know the local Gestapo man? Have you ever talked with him?"

“Yes. He introduced himself but he has never approached me since.”

Tom gave some thought to a plan. “Johann, you are extremely important to me. Since you see yourself opposed to the Nazis, I presume you are willing to be of real help to the Allies. Am I right?”

“Absolutely, but only if the Gestapo never finds out.”

“I can promise that. If he ever approaches your home or you in someplace away from home, our network will report to me immediately so that I can handle him.”

“What do you mean?”

“I will do whatever is necessary but you will be safe.”

Tom shared that conversation with William, asking him to meet with Johann. He wanted to be certain that Johann was being totally honest.

William affirmed Tom’s conclusion. Together they visited each new double agent.

William explained that he was senior to Tom and would be taking over Tom’s responsibilities. “I promise you that all that he has promised will be unchanged. You will be protected and treated well as long as you do as you promised.”

What he did not share was that Tom was headed back to England for a new assignment from Colonel Johnston.

Chapter 15

“Angie, you haven’t been the Angie I have known since I nursed you at my breast. What’s wrong?”

Angie turned her face away. She did want Mama to see the tear that was about to escape. She thought, “There is no reason to delay.” She reached for a handkerchief.

“Mama, you were right. David is not the right man for me. He is not the same man that I have been dating.”

Mama listened carefully. She knew that Angie was facing a crisis and she wanted to be supportive in such a sensitive time.

Angie wasn’t sure how much she wanted to share. “Oh, to hell with it. I could always tell Mama everything.”

“Once we were engaged, David acted as if I was his personal property. He told me I had to quit going to the movies with my girlfriends. He tore up two dresses that Anthony loved, saying they were too revealing.”

“Last night, he told me I was not to continue as a professional photographer. He would provide the income.

When I said that was not the way it would be, that, in fact, I was going back to Europe soon, he got angry. He slapped me.”

Angie paused and reached for a hankie. When she stayed silent, Mama said, “There’s more isn’t there?”

It took a while but Angie finally said, “He raped me when I refused to have sex. He said, “A wife has no right to refuse sex when her husband wants it.””

Mama wrapped her arms around Angie, saying, “I am so sorry, my daughter. How can I help?”

“First, let’s call the locksmith and change the locks. I will place all his belongings on the front porch and refuse to answer the door.”

Two hours later, the locksmith was bidding them goodbye.

By four thirty, the house was secure and David's possessions were sitting on the porch.

At five forty-five, David was pounding on the door, yelling and refusing to go away.

It was a neighbor who called the police who sized up the situation. When policeman discovered that David was not a member of the family, he warned him off with a threat to jail him for trespassing and creating a disturbance.

David kept calling on the phone ever hour for three days and night, but the women withstood the barrage until David gave up.

“Angie, when are you planning to leave for Europe?”

“I just received an approval for going to southern Italy or Sicily. It's open ended, so it's up to me to catch flights or a ship ride. Are you still willing to take care of Junior for a few months?”

“You know the answers. I'd rather you didn't go but I'm ready when you are.”

It took Angie three weeks to reach her destination, Naples. A cargo plane got her to London. The toughest trip was the flight to Salerno, but once more she was able to hitch a ride on a cargo flight after three days of hanging around the airport.

It took her another two days to reach Anzio. From there, she managed short jeep hops up the coast until she arrived in Naples.

Twice there was only room on the laps of some GI's.

Once in Naples, she spent all her time in the camps with GI's, certain that some high-ranking officer would order her out of the area.

She developed a nice relationship with a supply sergeant who made frequent trips from the camp into Naples.

Creating a portfolio of portraits and scenes of this famous city seemed like a good idea until she could get to some villages where battles were raging.

While Sergeant Ted Peters was conducting his business in the city, Angie found a cabbie who agreed to take her to famous sites where she took a bundle of photos.

She was effusive as she told Ted about the shots she had of a view of Mergellina Port, a panoramic view of Mount Vesuvius, Via Toledo Street from Naples Railroad Station which was classic in itself.

Ted said, "I need to get some photos. Let's plan something for the next tip."

"I'll tell you what, Ted. I'll find someone to give us a tour and lead us to areas of fine architecture and classic beauty of old Naples."

Ted grinned. "It's a deal."

Three days later, Ted was driving the jeep while Pietro sat beside him, leading the way. Angie, from the back seat was shooting pictures.

Pietro was explaining.

"The main city square is what we call the Piazza. Its construction was begun by the Bonaparte's king Joachim Murat and finished by the Bourbon king Ferdinand, the fourth.

The piazza is bounded on the east by the Royal Palace and on the other side by the church of San Francesco di Paolo.

As you can see, the church has the colonnades extending on both sides.

That building is the San Carlo Theater, which is the oldest opera house in Italy.

Naples is well known for its historic castles. He pointed. The ancient Castel Nuovo is one of the city's foremost landmarks. It was built during the time of Charles I, the first king of Naples. Castel Nuovo has seen many notable historical events: for example, in 1294, we had Popes, before they moved to Rome."

Pietro took them beyond the core of the city to see more castles and some of the gardens that were not destroyed by the Germans.

Angie stopped Ted. "Pietro, what is that beautiful home?"

"Oh, that is the home of the Contessa and Giovanni Costa, our leading citizen and head of the resistance while we were occupied by the Germans."

"Do they have a daughter named Rosa?"

“Why, yes they do. How would you know that?”

“Never mind for the moment. Ted, please drive up to the house.”

Pietro asked Ted to stop. “Giovanni will be angry for bringing tourists to his home.”

Angie shook her head. “I take full responsibility.”

Just as Ted pulled to a stop, a beautiful young pregnant woman stepped out of the front door. She looked curiously at Angie who was stepping out of the jeep.

Rosa asked Angie. “Do I know you?”

“I’m sorry to intrude but are you Mrs. Dudak?”

Rosa was startled. She was about to respond when the door opened and the Contessa stepped out.

“American? Journalist? We have nothing to say.”

Angie had to rethink her approach.

She blurted out. My name is Angie, friend of Tom since we were in parochial school.”

Now the Contessa was startled. Rosa step forward. “Have you seen Tom recently?”

“Yes, I saw him in the middle of January, shortly before he reported to Washington and a few weeks after you were married.”

“We are very close friends and he shared his news with me. You have a marvelous husband, Mrs. Dudak.”

The Contessa broke into a smile. “Please, come in. I will have Maria serve tea. Pietro, I am so glad you brought a friend. I miss seeing you since our work in the resistance is done.”

Rosa was delighted when Angie was willing to talk about the young Tom. She laughed aloud when Angie recounted the days of their

puppy love romance. She thrilled to hear the story of his brilliance in school and cried tears for Angie, who got left behind.

They talked of Angie's marriage, the loss of her husband and the baby who was the memory of those happy days.

Hours later, they were parting. Angie had a story for her magazines, photos to develop for Rosa and Tom and pictures for her portfolio.

On the way back to camp, Ted said, "I have a friend who is a technician in the Company photo lab. I should be able to have prints with few days. I'd like you to meet him and, perhaps, work out some future arrangement."

Angie decided she could earn her keep by helping the corpsmen in the field hospital. The men were delighted to have a woman to talk with.

In a very short time, she was writing letters home for the men who needed her help.

That led to personal stories that her magazines would love. Soon she was sending portrait snap shots along with the letters.

In no time, friends of the patients were asking Angie if she could shoot a picture that they could send home with their letters.

When the men held a sing-a-long on an occasional evening or a coke party when a special shipment arrives, Angie was the invited guest in Charley Company.

Miraculously, up to this point, except for medical staff, no high-ranking officers was aware of her presence

"Miss Angie, front and center." Captain Foxx tried to look stern but failed.

"So, Miss Stowaway, are you the female source of the high morale of my men as of late?"

Angie looked around with a wide grin. “I must be the guilty party, sir.”

He started to ask “How did you get here? No. Don’t answer that. What am I to do with you? I am required to send you back but if I don’t know where you came from, where do I send you?”

“For the moment, we never met. Just don’t disappoint me by getting injured or be the cause of some rivalry for your affections.”

“Thank you, Captain. I will not abuse your trust. Sir, when do you think I might be permitted to mail off some stories via your censors?”

He thought about the question for a bit. “When your copy is ready, bring it to my tent.” He turned and left.

Angie took a deep breath. “Whew. That went better than I expected.”

Angie tried to sit with different groups of GIs at each meal. When she entered the large mess tent, several hands would be raised in salute, an offer to join their table.

Today, she joined a group of five privates whose muddy uniforms said. “We’re just in from that bloody hillside.”

All five grinned when she approached the table. Two of them opened up a small gap so that she could sit and place her tray on the table.

“I’m Mike. Our buddy, Ben Bright, was in the party that relieved us. He said that you helped him write a letter to his sweetie and gave him a snapshot to send. We’d all like a chance to get in on the game, if you have the time.”

Angie laughed. “Everybody is welcome but there is a price to pay. I’m a magazine writer and photographer and I write stories of and by GI’s. That means talk about things you feel like discussing.”

“I know that some conversation is hard and I do not want you to be uncomfortable. Some guys talk to me as a group, while others need privacy and even then, can’t talk about a specific experience.”

Mitch, who looked like the oldest, but probably still a teenager, said “Ben who is a corporal, told us about that. We decided on the ride down, that if we had a chance, we would do it as a unit.”

Later on, Angie watched the teenage veterans walk out of the barracks in clean uniforms. Without trying, they fell into step naturally, the headed for the first aid station for an exam that cleared them for return to duty.

She walked with them to the PX where they picked up cokes and Hershey bars before gathering in the corner of the mess tent.

Mike opened the conversation with a question. “You did say no last names?”

“Yes. This is a story in which the participants remain anonymous. My purpose is that readers get a feel for the life that is lived in battle zones.”

“Jay, Steve, Nick, Frank and I were assigned to the same squad on our first day in basic training.

Ben, who was private first class, became our squad leader about two weeks later. He had protected us like a mother and her chicks and taught us to have each other’s backs as if we were Siamese twins.”

Steve picked up the story. “Jake, our platoon sergeant, drilled us and taught us the art of survival while our lieutenant taught us the art of war.”

Mike, said, “We thought we knew it all until we hit the beach at Anzio. There, we learned how to be scared while being another asset for our buddies in midst of combat.”

Steve took over. “When we are relieved and come off the line, we hang together, the six of us. Two other members of our squad are always

by themselves or reading their paperbacks. Those two are truly joined at the hip.”

“Did Ben tell you about his injury?”

Angie said, “No. We talked about a lot of subjects but not combat. I never pressed him because he seemed so determined to avoid the subject.”

Steve pointed to Nick, who told the brief story. “The night was lit by a half moon. The hillside was almost devoid of trees or shrubbery. What you see are small mounds of dirt where soldiers have piled the dirt while digging their foxholes behind those piles.”

“The stark scene is interspersed with flashes of gunpowder as the Nazis fire off canons and mortars or rapid-fire rifles from above us.”

“We are now one minute prior to an uphill charge. Our goal is to advance twenty yards and dig in.

Our bodies tense up. The odds are greater that one or more of us will become a casualty in that short period.

The enemy is looking down from his hiding place, knowing we have no choice but to expose ourselves since we are committed to get to the top of the hill.

Suddenly, our fierce leader, the platoon lieutenant, Don Ferrari, is out of his foxhole. Within seconds, the chatter of enemy machine guns is deafening, accented by the higher pitch of the rapid fire of rifles.

Within two minutes, digging spades in hand, we moving rocks and dirt to create a new haven for our bodies. Bullets whiz by or go spat into the ground at our feet.”

Angie can see heads nodding in support of his story

He continues. “At first glance, I see that everyone is safe but me. I see Ben, on his hands and knees pulling the lieutenant, still five yards short of his goal. I yell at Mike who, in a flash, quits digging his hole. He and I

are digging a hole for Ben and the skipper Steve is helping Ben break his hold on the lieutenant because the lieutenant is dead.

Steve hands his spade to Ben. I hear his voice commanding Ben, “Dig.”

He notices that Ben is bleeding at the shoulder, so Steve grabs the spade and starts digging. Seconds later he is joined by two others. I am yelling for a medic.”

Minutes later, everyone else is safe. No others are injured which seems like a miracle. Later, we find out that the squad next to ours drew the fire away from us, exposing themselves to the Germans.

There is nothing to be done about the lieutenant. I am saddened, not only for the loss of another soldier, but for the loss of a gentle, caring leader, who always led from the front and always knew what was best for us.”

His voice choked. He paused.

Angie said, “I presume you haven’t had a chance to talk with each other about the death of Lieutenant Ferrari.

Mike shook his head and said, “And we probably won’t. Each of us has special memories of a gentle soul with the heart of a lion in battle. He was a helluva leader.”

Nick cut in. “It’s too hard to talk about the dead on the battlefield.”

A week later, Angie took four stories to the Captain, who was on the verge of returning the rest of his company up to the battle line.

After reading the stories, he said, “I will send three of these to the magazines. I suggest you hold on to the story of Lieutenant Ferrari’s death for some post war issue.”

That was the end of that subject.

“By the way, you will receive official notice that the General is revoking your stay with us. He is ordering you out of Italy and will provide transportation to England.

Three days later she was the guest of honor at a huge farewell party organized by her “squad of six.”

Chapter 16.

At Colonel Johnston’s office, Tom learned that he needn’t unpack.

The Colonel was beaming at the sight of his highly successful Yankee protégé. He was aware that while Tom was young in age, he was a field hardened veteran in Intelligence.

“That was extremely fine job of counterintelligence in France, Tom. Now, I need you to spend a short time in Italy, specifically in Naples, which should give you some joy.

You will be working long hours but you will have some time with your new family.”

“You will head a team of three. Your goal is the same. In this case, the German agents are the typical agents left in place after the military has quit the area.”

“The focus, until the invasion of the continent has occurred, is to make the Germans believe that we are increasing our troop presence in Italy. Our hope is that the belief will keep some German divisions in Southern France while the landings occur in Normandy.”

“Later on, we will be adding troops in Italy. That plan is for those troops to invade Southern France on the first of August.

When that occurs, your team must find a way to get behind German lines and resort to pure espionage. As you know, anything we learn may be helpful.”

“The French underground will be very cooperative.”

Three mornings later, three very tired operatives were stretching their muscles after the long flight in the cargo plane from London.

A young British corporal drove his jeep to the plane and called Tom’s name. A half hour later they were in the office of the Eighth Army counterintelligence director.

Colonel Jackson’s batman served them hot tea, powdered eggs and bread while the Colonel briefed the new arrivals.

“We’ve identified three Nazi agents whom we believe to be receptive or at least vulnerable. If we are to achieve anything, it will have to be in a hurry. While I have no specific information, I’m betting that the balloon will go up within six weeks.”

It took Tom’s team four days to have their respective newly turned double agents willing to send the first of a number of believable lies to the Abwehr.

A delighted Colonel said to Tom, “I understand you have family in the area. I’ve arranged a jeep for your use. Take forty-eight hours. When you return, I’ll let you know if we’ve had any success.”

Rosa, Giovanni and the Contessa came rushing out the door to greet Tom.

Rosa wrapped hers arms around his neck and crushed his lips with a long kiss. The others wrapped their arms around both and let tears of happiness flow.

The Contessa broke off and saw Maria waiting her turn for a hug. Not until Tom hugged and kissed the housekeeper, did she go to the kitchen to begin cooking dinner.

Rosa took Tom's arm and led him to the newly decorated nursery. He was surprised. "Really? He asked.

Rosa grinned. Si. Twins. They are due within two weeks."

Tom couldn't mask his disappointment. "I probably will be in England."

Rosa put her arm around his waist. "I understand but we never did expect you to be present for the birth. Meanwhile you have lots of opportunity to feel their life while massaging gently my belly.

At dinner, since Tom had little to contribute about his life, he got a full run down of the family activity.

He learned how the neighbors pitched in for the plowing and planting in the spring and, proceeded by the pruning of the vines and the fruit trees.

The Contessa said, "God has been good. We have had the right amount of rain and sunshine. We shall have a bumper crop."

Tom said, "Perhaps I can take all three of you in the jeep and see the fields and orchard."

Giovanni said, "I was hoping that you might want to do that."

To say that Tom was impressed would be an understatement.

The fields were filled with neighbors bringing in the early crop, waving to the boss and family.

At dinner that evening, the Contessa told Tom about their holdings.

"Giovanni's family had the estate next to ours. Giovanni is the only surviving child of his family. My twin sister, Giovanni and I played together and went to school together.

Both families were ambitious and sought more land to provide food for the families in and around Naples.

Based on the parent's belief and hope that Giovanni would marry one of us, the families merged the holdings into a corporation while we were still young.

As it turned out, their hopes were fulfilled.”

As per the doctor's orders, Rosa did a lot of walking. During those two days, she and Tom walked through the gardens and rested in the pergola. She told Tom of the surprising visit from Angie.

“I learned a great deal about you from another woman who has admired you for most of your life. My folks were affirmed in their regard for you. Oh, Tom, it is so hard sitting and waiting for this damn war to be over.”

Long embraces and tears testified to their love and was the prelude to their separation that afternoon.

The Colonel greeted Tom with good news. “It is reported that no German divisions have moved.”

The big news is that Operation Overlord is under way. The first bombardments have started. The target seems to be the Normandy coast just east of the Cherbourg peninsula.”

Without thinking, Tom said, “My last assignment was at that sight just weeks ago. I hope my partner, William, is okay.”

The Colonel said, “The OSS has made a contribution to the Allies' cause. I, personally, want to thank you for your great service.

Now, we need to talk about your next assignment, considerably more dangerous than this last one.”

“By the way, did you have a good visit?”

“Yes, sir. Thank you.”

Two days later, Tom and his team were flying to a new air strip just outside Casino, which was now in the hands of the Allies.

The six-passenger aircraft was just five miles shy of Casino when its engine died. The pilot shouted, “Bail out.”

The pilot was unable, for some unknown reason, to keep the craft out of a spin. The passengers, who had unbuckled their seat belts, were flung in all directions. None were able to get to the hatch.

The craft suddenly righted itself, but too late. A copse of trees stood directly in the path of the plane. Both wings were sheared off the fuselage which then turned on its side and slid to stop.

Tom groaned and passed out, awakening later in a stretcher while being loaded into a truck.

He tried analyzing his injuries but his whole body seemed to be affected and every muscle and bone in pain.

He was to find out later that he and the pilot were the only survivors of the crash.

His body was shocked. It took almost an hour before he was admitted to a field first aid tent at the army station.

It seemed like only minutes before he heard a voice saying. “Both need to be put on a plane and flown immediately to the hospital in Naples.”

“Dope them enough to handle their pain and put them to sleep for a few hours until the docs at Naples can give them full attention. Stat.”

Tom’s consciousness left him. He did not hear the last statement.

It’s really a matter of life and death.”

Chapter 17.

After being dropped off near Trafalgar Square, Angie found a small hotel. She needed a long bath to clear off the grime that saturated her pores.

She had dinner at the hotel before deciding on a walk to the Square. She wanted to rub shoulders with the few soldiers left behind and the civilians who needed a break from the dreaded wait for the continental invasion.

After a long walk, she decided to take a seat on a bench and watch the passers-by.

Within two minutes she was joined by two young women who also wore the symbol “C” for correspondent on their blouses.

Hello Yank. May we join you?”

“Please. I’m Angie Galiardi.”

“Sue Williams and Mae Sweet”, said Sue. “Are you feeling left out, as we are?”

“I am. I sure would like an invite to see the action when our boys hit the beaches.”

Sue said, “That was our hope but Eisenhower says no. We’ve been trying to think of ways to stow away but security is tight. Mae, who is qualified to jump, tried to bribe her way onto a glider but was threatened with jail if she tried again.

There is no way to get near the docks. One would think that women journalists were the enemy.”

Mae said, “The reasons they give are ridiculous. Imagine, “It’s too dangerous for women to fly” or “Women can’t dig latrines.”

Sue laughed. "Imagine. Ike says woman would be a distraction. Who the hell would find me desirable in this get up? Ridiculous."

Angie asked, "So, what have you decided?"

"Of course, we plan to go to the daily briefings and then try to be creative with the material they hand out. How about you, Angie?"

"I'll do the briefings but I need to do more for my readers. I'll think of something."

A week after the landings, the briefing officer announced that the first of the injured were on their way to hospitals in England.

Angie joined Sue and Mae for a cup of tea. "Ladies, in Italy I volunteered to help some of our GI's to write letters or just be present to those who needed to talk. As a result, I found some worthwhile stories that made their way into print. I'm going to give that a whirl."

A few days later, they were welcomed as long as they were willing to run errands for the nurses.

At the end of the third day, the two English women took Angie as their guest to a fine dining restaurant.

Sue treated them to a glass of wine.

Her toast was, "To Angie who has turned us into angles of mercy and led us to a source of stories for our readers."

Mae continued. "Angie, I have been moved from laughter to tears during these last three days. One of the patients, Sergeant Jack Lord of the 82nd Airborne, with two broken legs and a broken arm keeps his buddies in stitches. He knows more jokes than are contained in two joke books.

His optimism and humor has a positive effect on every patient in the unit.

I find myself smiling as I walk out of that ward, something I never did in a hospital prior to this."

Sue chimed in. “It seems paradoxical that some of the soldiers are trying to boost the hopes of their wives or girlfriends even as they have me write of their personal injuries and potential limitations. It breaks my heart. I have a hard time holding back my own tears.”

Angie said, “I know. I’ve been there dozens of times and still felt the same today.”

All were in agreement that as tough emotionally as it was the reward of a smile or a thank you made it all worthwhile.

Within the next few weeks, they had recruited a dozen other disappointed journalists to volunteer.

One warmish and sunny day about three weeks later, Angie was seated on a bench, relaxing and hoping to get a sun tan. The two-hour stint in the ward had been emotionally draining.

She became aware of the sound of an approaching wheelchair. She looked up and saw a nurse pushing a dark haired, olive skinned patient. The nurse stopped and asked, “Are you Angie?”

“Why, yes I am.”

“Joseph says that he wants to meet you because a friend in Unit Six suggested it. May I leave him with you for a while?”

Angie smiled. “Of course.” She turned to the soldier. She widened her smile. “I’m Angie Galiardi.”

“Hello. I’m Joseph Manno. I was in therapy during your visit to the ward. Mike said you were a good listener and also would write a letter for me. Are you willing and do you have time to do that?”

“Absolutely.” She started to reach in a tote bag.

Joseph said, “I have my writing kit in the chair pocket.”

He dictated a long letter to his parents, the contents indicating a very close relationship. While dictating the part about his injury, he had to stop twice when his voice broke.

“Mama, it’s all right about Sophia. She was never sure about loving me. I hope she will be happy. Some place, there is the right woman for me.”

“You know that my financial future is sound. Signor Costa told me that no matter which parts were missing, I had a future as long as my brain remained intact.”

The name, Costa, rang a bell for Angie but she could not recall the context.

When he finished, she asked, “May I address the envelope?”

“I have to borrow an envelope. My buddy will address it for me. Thank you.”

“Angie said, “That was a hard letter for you. I’m a good listener if you want to talk.”

“That would be nice, if you have time. It’s hard to talk with other guys who have their own problems.”

Angie waited. He said, “As you know, I have a broken ankle and three crushed fingers on my right hand as well as two on my left. I also have some internal injuries which I did not put in the letter.”

“Will you have use of the uninjured fingers?”

Joseph grinned. “To some extent, since I have two good thumbs and two good index fingers.”

“Would you care to talk about the incident?”

“Sure. I was scheduled to parachute from a thousand feet into a clearing behind German lines. Because of bad weather, high winds and low visibility, I was dropped at seven hundred feet into an orchard. Although my chute opened, I slammed into a tree, the thick branches crushing my ankles, others tearing at my body and hands. This was at 0400. I hung in that tree for three hours until the farmer heard me calling when he stepped out of the house. It was another four hours before the medics got to me.

Those were the toughest hours of my life to date. I never thought I would appreciate a shot of morphine as much as I did that morning. Men don't cry but I sure did."

They heard the nurse's footsteps. Joseph asked. "Will you be here tomorrow? I feel good talking with you."

"Sure. Shall we meet here at the same time?"

"That would be great."

He was writing that next afternoon and gave Angie a broad smile as she approached.

He said, "It occurred to me that you might have been too polite to ask me. I am Italian, from Naples I was working toward a PHD at London Unity when the war began. I was called back to Italy to serve in the military, but I sought and received asylum here. Two years later, I decided to volunteer for military service in gratitude as well as my strong feelings against Fascism."

Angie said, "I wondered. You speak English beautiful with just enough accents to make me curious."

"If you don't mind, why is a married Yank writing war stories and helping wounded warriors write letters?"

Angie smiled. "I'm a frustrated photo journalist, who would rather be in France covering the war. I lost my husband in the North African campaign and decided to follow my chosen profession."

"Now tell me about you. What were your plans?"

"I was and still plan to study plant genetics. I plan to go back to work for the Costa estate, a large family owned corporation in Naples. The principal officer has promised me a position and hopes I can make a difference in field crop production as a result of my studies and research. I worked for them part time until I came to London, my studies here funded by the Costas."

The two hours sped by but not before each had a good grasp of the others history and hopes for the future.

They planned for another conversation on the next afternoon.

Angie listened in awe as Joseph waxed on the subject of genetics, explaining the possibilities of increased production.

“Food will be in great demand because of the loss of fertile agricultural land, over run by the military and made toxic by the fuels of tanks, the shells and unexploded bombs and so forth.”

“Looking down the road we may find ways to engineer food, thus meeting the needs of a hungry world.”

“My research was in the early stage of modifying foods. I hope some of my colleagues continue that research.”

“Much of the world will be looking for food producers to prevent wide spread starvation and I want to be part of the solution.”

Angie could sense the caring that Joseph had for the underdog.

Joseph turned the conversation. “Tell me something of your work, Angie. You must meet some interesting people as you look for stories.”

“I do but as I told you, I have a son. I plan to help him become all that he can become. I want him to get a good education that will be the base of a good life, good relationships and excitement as he finds a woman to share his dreams.

The education part will take money which means I need to practice my profession. Where and how are the big questions?”

“How about a second marriage? You are beautiful, sensitive and care about people.”

“If the right man, who wouldn’t mind raising another man’s son, found me, it would be wonderful and miraculous. We will be facing a shortage of men after this war takes its toll and thousands of widows who

will need and want a man in their lives. The odds are stacked in the wrong direction.”

“The odds may be wrong but you are special, Angie. If I had two good hands that allowed me to caress you and didn’t require you to feed me, I would ask you to let me court you. I can think of at least three guys who would think you to be desirable with or without a son to rise.”

Angie moved a bit closer to Joseph.

“Did I just hear a hint that you might like to date me, Joseph?”

His face turned a flaming red. For a full minute he was tongue tied.

He stammered. “I do think a lot about you, Angie but cut off the dream when I look at my hand. I know the doctors will take care of the rest of me but not my hands.”

“Joseph, if I haven’t judged you wrongly, I ‘m sure you will find a way to compensate.”

She reached for his left hand. “Your thumb and index finger seem fine. Do they hurt?”

“The pain from the sprains is quite reduced but I have lost the others. All that remains is a stump, and that is my good hand.”

Angie noticed as he held back the tears of frustration. “What shall we do on our first date?”

He was surprised and looked carefully to make sure she wasn’t teasing.

“If you mean it, we can have dinner in the cafeteria and then see the evening movie in the auditorium.”

“That sounds great; a dinner and movie date.”

At the movie, she found an aisle seat so that his wheel chair was at her right.

During the tender scenes in the movie, “White Cliffs of Dover”, she felt his thumb and index finger gently take hold of her right hand, his finger softly massaging her knuckle.

When she left him at the door to the ward, he grinned when she kissed the top of his head.”

Three dates later, she aimed her kiss for his cheek but he moved quickly so that he maneuvered so that his lips became the target. Angie responded with enthusiasm.”

“That was clever, Joseph, but don’t read too much into that.”

He said nothing but held onto that feeling long after she was gone.

A week later, Joseph was moved to a rehab facility for occupational therapy on his hands, to be followed by therapy for his ankle injury.

Angie continued working with incoming wounded at the hospital and with some rehab patients.

Joseph was hopelessly in love and Angie tried but was unsuccessful in maintaining some distance from Joseph. Suddenly love was becoming a problem for Angie. Every hour together brought her closer to Joseph.

What they both desired was some privacy, something unavailable in a hospital setting.

Once she accepted the fact that her life was being inextricably bound to Joseph, the issue of where they would live confronted her.

She knew that for Joseph, his future was in Naples but her family was in the States. Would her mother come to live with her and little Anthony? How would her brothers feel about that? She felt sure that Frank would accuse her of deserting the family.”

“Joseph, your campaign to make me love you is winning but there are severe road blocks ahead.” She opened her heart to him with her concerns for her family, especially mother.

“I know. That has been on my mind. I keep hoping that one of your brothers would lift that burden from your shoulders.”

“I also thought about our living in the States but I would have to be located at some distance from your home in order to follow my profession.”

“Honey, you can’t do that. You have an obligation to the Costas.”

There was no easy answer. Evening after evening found them falling deeper in love. One evening, Joseph said, “Honey, I will be retired with a partial pension in four weeks. We need to make a decision as hard as that is.”

“I know. Let’s go with your plan. Let’s find a flat near the University so you can finish your studies. If the Allies are successful, the war may be over before you get your doctorate.”

“We will delay our wedding until you get your degree and are ready to return to Naples. I can’t worry about what the Church thinks. I am sure God will forgive us. Every night I dream of making love with you.”

Her good night kiss was laced with passion. “I can’t wait until the moment I undress you. You will need to defend yourself from a love starved tigress.”

Joseph laughed and slapped her gently on the fanny. “That should be quite a battle.”

Chapter 18

Tom had no memory of a ride in an ambulance, flying to Naples or being taken to the operating room.

He would never find out how close to death he was. He did not hear the worry in the voices that were involved in his operations over a space of six days.

Tom awakened one bright morning. “Where am I?” As he looked around, he realized this was a hospital room. He became aware that there was a person in bed on the other side of the room.

“Hello, there.” No response. “He must be asleep.”

Tom closed his eyes and tried to recall the reason for his stay in a hospital. Nothing came to mind. He recalled that he was sitting in a small plane at the edge of a runway, ready for takeoff.

He heard someone stirring nearby. He opened his eyes. A nurse was about to put her hand on his forehead.

An Italian accent greeted him. “Oh, good morning. I’ll tell the doctor that you’re awake.”

She turned and was gone before he could ask her a question.

Within a minute, a deep baritone voice was saying, “We’ve been waiting for you to awaken, Tom.”

“You know my name? Good. I couldn’t recall. Why am I here and hurting like hell?”

The doctor hesitated. He was trying to determine how to tell Tom. He opted for a direct but gentle answer.

“What’s the last thing you recall?”

“I was waiting to take off in a small plane.”

“Well, that plane crashed in a forest, short of its destination. The plane was totaled and we will never know how or why you survived. You were examined and flown immediately to this hospital in Naples.”

Tom said, “Now, I remember waking up in a plane hurting in every bone and muscle and wishing I would die. It was just for a moment. Can I have something to kill this pain?”

“Absolutely. I’ll put you back to sleep, but when you awake; I have a lot of questions. I’m not your surgeon. I’m concerned about your memory.”

Four hours later, Doctor Bergen had finished an hour of probing Tom’s mind and psyche.

He said, “Tom that three-hour nap helped a lot. You talked a lot; sometimes logical and other times not making any sense.

I believe it helped you sort out your memory because your responses during this last hour were as clear as a bell.”

“Now, tell me more about Rosa.”

“I need to reach her. She’s my wife and probably has given birth to our child while I’m lying here. How can I reach her? When I do, what can I tell her about my condition?”

Hearing the anxiety in Tom’s voice, the doctor said, “In case she is in a hospital, is there anyone who can get a message to her?”

“Yes, her mother, Contessa Irene Maria Rono Costa.”

“Good. I’ll get right on it.”

Tom let out a long sigh and his body relaxed.

It was 1600 hours when the Contessa arrived. Light hugs, tears and kisses marked the union of two dear friends.

More tears of joy were shed when Irene said, “Tom, you have to help Rosa choose two names, one male and one female.”

Even the attending nurse was grinning and dabbing at her tears.

Irene switched to Italian. “How bad are the injuries, Tom?”

“The doctor said two broken legs, one dislocated shoulder, one severely damaged kidney, a nicked ear lobe and four broken fingers are all fixable, given time to heal.”

“Much of my body is black and blue and the cuts, bruises and contusions will heal themselves.”

“The head doctor said that I have no brain injuries. The few memory problems will heal themselves.”

“As the doctor told you, I was lucky to survive that plane crash. Now tell me about Rosa.”

“The delivery went smoothly while Giovanni was a nervous wreck. The little girl came first. The boy’s skin is like yours and the girl’s like Rosa’s. Both are healthy with no blemishes.”

“The pictures are being developed.”

It was a week later when Rosa walked in. After a joyous reunion, she was about to answer some questions when the door opened. In walked Colonel Donovan, the OSS leader and Tom’s big boss.

He walked directly to Rosa. “You are beautiful, as I would expect of Tom. Congratulations. I understand you are the mother of twins.”

He took her right hand and kissed the back. He walked to Tom’s bed.

“I am deeply sorry, Tom. This was not the way I thought of your retirement, at least not this soon. I was hoping for thirty more years.””

“I will see that you are well taken care of and then retire with a good retirement income.”

Unexpectedly, he leaned over and gently kissed Toms cheek.

“God bless you.” Then he was gone.

Rosa said, “Wow. Who was that?”

“That, honey, was Bill Donovan, the head of my organization. He recruited me. You might say he is the biggest spy in the world.”

The loving couple spent the next two hours in intimate conversation. Rosa looked at her watch.

“Honey, I need to leave. The twins will be calling for their dinner. Are we agreed on names?”

“Yes. I like your suggestions, Irene for the Contessa and John for your father and mine.”

Tom was chafing at the bit to see the twins but the doctors would not allow them to be exposed to the germs that float around a hospital. It was six weeks before Tom was permitted to sit in wheel chair.

Within a few hours of that, Rosa, the twins, Irene and John, met him in the flower garden of the hospital for the grand get together.

Tom’s first look was blurred by the tears in his eyes but that was soon supplanted with the joy of holding them in his arms.

The Contessa was shooting snapshots of the scene and then rearranged the scene with both parents holding a child and ending with pictures of the two lovers.

Tom insisted that holding the children was not tiring. After waiting so long for this opportunity, he wasn’t about to lose a moment of joy.

He did tell the women that his convalesce were going to take about six to nine months. There were multiple fractures in each ankle and some bone chips were lost during the crash. That will require multiple operations. The good news is that I can be out of the hospital during each healing, since my feet will be in casts. All I need is someone to push the wheel chair.”

The Contessa said, “I am sure Giovanni will be ready to help you into and out of the car or taxi.”

The next day, Tom had a surprise visitor. Maria, the Costa’s housekeeper, came during visiting hours. She adored Tom and prayed each night for his safe return.

During the visit, she, in a shy manner, told Tom, “The Contessa had hired a new housekeeper. I am now the bambinaia for your children. I will still do the cooking for the evening meal but Rosa insists on preparing breakfast and food at noon time.”

“Maria, I am so pleased. You will be a great bambinaia.”

During the months of convalescence, Tom devoured books and papers on the subject of agriculture production and management.

Giovanni had rigged up a double seat on the tractor so that together they could tour the large fields.

Tom asked Giovanni, “Papa, what is that area north of the barn that is tilled but unplanted?”

“That is our research and experimental garden. When this damn war is over, young Joseph, who is studying genetics in London will come back to head our experimental department. Irene and I financed his studies. He started working as a cleanup boy when he was twelve. Joseph grew interested so that he worked in dozen different jobs with us. He went to college in Oxford and now at London University.”

“Papa, I’m impressed. You and the Contessa are so advanced in your thinking and planning.”

“Thank you. We are looking forward to you’re being ready for work. We are both impressed with the speed of your learning. You already have a masterful grasp of the industry.”

He went on. “By the way, I am thrilled that you have adopted me as your Papa but I would feel better if you used my nick name, Vanni.”

Tom laughed. “I’ll try but we may have to fight Rosa, who pressed me to call you Papa.”

Chapter 19

June 1945

It was a poignant moment after a blubbery ten-minute wait for the gate to open for Angie’s flight. The week had been tense but finally all three brothers agreed with Mama that Angie had a right to live her life wherever her husband chose to practice his profession.

She said, “I’ve known for years that someday I would be separated from my daughter. It’s your turn, my sons, to find a replacement, if possible.”

“Angie, if you can afford it, bring little Anthony home to see us as often as possible.”

Two days earlier, the entire Manno clan in Naples was waiting at the docks to greet Joseph after an eight-year absence. An assortment of uncles, aunts, cousins, nieces and nephews had joined the parents to welcome home the long absent young man.

It took a long time for twenty-seven hugs and kisses. One cousin offered to bring along the luggage as the crowd moved slowly to cover the mile walk to the Manno residence.

Two neighbors were roasting the lamb on the spit while their wives lay out the vino and cheese.

It was a joyous and noisy party. Uncle Tomaso played some folk music on his fiddle and accompanied his daughters as they sang a medley of arias.

After all had departed, a few being supported because of too much vino, Joseph, his parents and two younger brothers were getting ready for bed. Joseph asked his parents “Are you ready to welcome home a new daughter?”

Mama gasped. Papa said, “Hot damn.” The younger brother, Tony, said, “I’ll bet she’s hot.”

Joseph grinned. “I think so.”

Mama was smiling but with a lot of questions. “You are serious? Yes, I see that you are. Tell us more. I’m not ready for bed.”

The hour was late when Joseph finished with all the details, including their pledge of marriage while living together in London.

He was surprised to see a neutral acceptance of their living arrangement, not even a wince from his mama.

“I’m not sure when she will arrive. You should know that her family cannot afford to come to the church wedding. Since her family can’t host the wedding reception, we should assume that role.”

Mama pulled Joseph to her breast. “You are not to worry. Papa and I will take care of that. I am so pleased. She sounds like a great addition to the family. I am so happy for you.”

His dad had told him about Rosa’s husband, a wounded Yank. Joseph became just a bit leery. “How will that affect my future with the Costas?”

He needn’t have worried. Hugs and kisses greeted him two mornings later. The smile and handshake from Tom was reassuring. This was as welcoming as the family event at the docks.

His report was a repeat of the one with his family the other evening. The excitement and desire to meet his love was infectious.

The Contessa was making plans for a bridal shower while Giovanni was thinking about a bachelor party for Joseph.

The Contessa said, “Rosa and I will talk with your mother about plans.”

The conversation was interrupted when Maria entered with the twins, handing Irene to Tom and little John to Rosa.

After the festive morning party, Joseph, Tom and Giovanni spent the rest of the day in the fields. Rosa brought lunch and joined them, listening to plans the three were making.

On the drive back to the house, she was musing. “I am so glad to see the way those two bonded, almost at first sight.”

It was a month later when the Manno clan gathered at the docks to welcome Angie and shy little Anthony who was not about to be separated from Mom.

A half hour later, he was running on the lawn with two older uncles.

The clan partied once more just as they had when Joseph arrived. The feeling of warmth spread over Angie as though she had arrived from a long absence.

When Angie learned that they were having lunch with the Costas, she did not tell Joseph that she had met briefly with the Rosa and the Contessa.

Tom couldn't believe his ears. Rosa, who answered the knock on the door, gasped and shouted, "Angie". This is a dream."

"Not really, Rosa. I asked Joseph not to tell you my name because I like to surprise friends."

Tom ran to the door. "Angie, this is unbelievable." He wrapped his arms around his friend. Both were laughing while their cheeks glowed with shiny tears.

Smiles galore greeted the loving scene. Angie broke out of the embrace, greeted the Contessa and waited for the introduction to Giovanni.

At lunch, Angie was saying, "I could hardly believe my ears when Joseph said he was inviting his newest best friend and my life-long friend to be his best man and witness to our marriage."

Tom stood, lifted his wine glass in a salute. "To my two best friends."

In those years that followed the big war, in one corner of the world, six loving persons saw their dreams fulfilled.

Giovanni, with his two young men, produced food for the hungry.

The Contessa helped raise three grandsons and her brilliant granddaughter.

Rosa raised her daughter to become the chief executive of the family corporation and three sons who brought her seven grandsons to cuddle and spoil.

Joseph made his scientific contributions to the agricultural industry but, more importantly, despite his handicap, he found no physical limitations because of Angie's love and Tom's support.

Tom and Angie, along with love and support from their spouses and children, had their dream fulfilled.

Angie has said it so clearly years ago.

I pray that in some way we find our lives intertwined at some future date."

Their lives had been entangled into a double helix.

The end.

