

# CHILDREN OF TIME



By  
Michel Poulin

# **CHILDREN OF TIME**

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A SCIENCE-FICTION NOVEL

BY

**MICHEL POULIN**



## **WARNING TO POTENTIAL READERS**

**THIS NOVEL CONTAINS GRAPHIC DESCRIPTIONS OF WAR, VIOLENCE AND SEX AS WELL AS COARSE LANGUAGE AND CONTROVERSIAL SUBJECTS UNSUITABLE FOR CHILDREN. WHILE THIS NOVEL DEPICTS MANY HISTORICAL PERSONS AND EVENTS FROM THE PAST, THIS IS A WORK OF FICTION AND WORDS OR DEEDS ATTRIBUTED IN IT TO PERSONS WHO EXISTED DO NOT REFLECT HISTORICAL EVENTS AND ONLY DESCRIBE ALTERNATE HISTORICAL SCENARIOS. RELIGIOUS-RELATED EVENTS DEPICTED IN THIS NOVEL IN NO WAY REFLECT THE RELIGIOUS BELIEFS OF THE AUTHOR.**

### **ABOUT THIS NOVEL**

This science-fiction novel is the third installment in a collection of five novels depicting the adventures through time of Nancy Laplante, a female Canadian war correspondent from the year 2014 and the chief of operations of the Time Patrol, an organization originating from the 34<sup>th</sup> Century. Those novels were written prior to the fictionalized events of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century depicted in them, and thus should be treated as novels about alternate realities. The year in the dates shown in the headings are followed by the letters 'A', 'B' or 'C', denoting in which timeline the action is happening. Timeline 'A' is the original historical line, while Timeline 'B' is a parallel alternate history created accidentally by Nancy Laplante when she was transported against her will from 2012 to the year 1940 and changed history by her actions. Timeline 'C' is a second parallel alternate history created from 1941 'B' when enemies of Nancy tried to kill her and thus change history in their favor. The fourth novel in the collection, TIMELINES, will be published in 2013.

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## **CHAPTER 1 – BE FAMOUS OR INFAMOUS...**

**10:28 (Standard Eastern Time)**

**Saturday, November 8, 2014 'A'**

**Hélico Pro flying school, St-Mathieu de Beloeil**

**South shore of Montreal, Province of Quebec**

**Canada**

Nancy landed the Hughes MD-500 light helicopter as smoothly as she could, then throttled down the engine to idle before looking at her flight instructor and speaking to him in French.

“Should I take off again and do another landing, Régis?”

The instructor, scribbling a few last notes on his pad, shook his head and smiled to her.

“No need to, Nancy: your landing was near perfect. In fact, you proved to be a talented student from the start. You have first class eye-hand coordination and sense of equilibrium, which helped you a lot in your flying lessons. You said before that you practice skydiving and pistol shooting, right?”

“Correct! I also practice gymnastics.”

Régis Tremblay nodded once his head while discreetly admiring Nancy Laplante. She was tall for a woman, measuring a full 183 centimeters, and had a strong, athletic body and wide shoulders. She however also had very feminine curves, with a generous, firm chest, wide hips and long legs. Her face was more than pretty, with sparkling green eyes and long, silky black hair, but it also reflected assurance, intelligence and strength of character. She in fact reflected perfectly her reputation as a woman of action and incredible courage. Apart from having seen many of her reports as a war correspondent from various war zones around the World, Régis had also seen last July the movie ‘CROSSROADS’, in which she had performed a mind-blowing stunt as part of her first cinematic role in her new career as a part-time actress. There were in fact many rumors floating about her second movie, which was due in theatres next Spring.

“Well, Nancy, I can tell you right now that you passed your final flying test brilliantly and just earned your helicopter private pilot license. Congratulations!”

“Thanks, Régis!” She replied with a big smile while shaking hands with her instructor. “I have wanted that license for quite a while now. It will complement nicely my light aircraft license.”

“Are you planning to eventually buy a helicopter of your own, Nancy? Your new career in Hollywood should give you the means to do so now.”

Nancy grinned and pointed an accusing finger at Régis.

“You are trying to milk information about my new film, right, Régis?”

“Me? Never!” Lied the instructor. “Just out of curiosity, how much did they pay you to play the role of the Shadow Dancer in CROSSROADS, if I may ask?”

“Not that much, really. Don’t forget that it was my debut as an actress and that I was a total unknown in Hollywood, with no training in acting at all. The reason I was approached for the role was because of my physical combat abilities and athletic looks. I could also thank that BBC news video that showed me shooting down those Taliban bastards in Afghanistan, when I was still an officer in the Canadian Army.”

“I saw it on YouTube.” Said Régis, grinning. “That was some pretty incredible pistol shooting, in fact. May I say that I loved watching you in CROSSROADS: for a beginning actress, you played very professionally, in my opinion.”

“Thank you!” Replied Nancy, her pride swelling. “I must say that reporting from the field and interviewing various warlords, politicians and generals accustomed me to work in front of a camera.”

There were also other factors at play to explain her ease in front of a camera but she was not about to talk to Régis about them. In truth, her life as a war correspondent and part-time actress in this century took less than half of her time, the rest being spent either in the future, in the 34<sup>th</sup> Century, or in various periods of the past, as the senior field agent and co-founder of the Time Patrol. Thankfully, the genetic longevity treatment she had received in 3384, a treatment standard for all the citizens of the Global Council, the civilization that spanned the whole Solar System in the 34<sup>th</sup> Century, allowed her not to burn herself quickly despite living two widely separated lives. This was not however her only secret. Thanks to a profound, life-changing experience in the year 1941 of Timeline ‘B’, one of the two parallel timelines that now existed besides the original timeline of Humanity, Nancy held a number of fantastic mental and physical powers. As a Chosen of The One, the immensely powerful, nearly omnipotent spiritual entity that had been shepherding Humanity for millions of years, Nancy possessed incredible strength and speed, could fly, move objects with her mind, communicate

telepathically and heal herself and others by the touch of her hands, among other things. Her mind had also been opened by The One to the souvenirs of her past incarnations, which covered 92 past lives spread over 9,000 years. Her linguistic talents, which had already been formidable as a normal girl thanks to her I.Q. of 153 and phenomenal memory, now included knowledge of over eighty languages and dialects, most of them forgotten in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. A number of her past lives had been as a musician or a dancer, thus giving her an experience as a public performer that was now proving invaluable in her new, part-time career as an actress specializing in action roles.

Shutting down the engine of the helicopter, Nancy closed all the circuits before unbuckling her harness and stepping out on the concrete pavement of the tarmac. She then accompanied Régis Tremblay towards the club house of the flying school. Régis was however not giving up on his attempts at learning more about her second film.

“So, now that you proved your worth in CROSSROADS, I hope that Disney is paying you a decent salary for your second role, Nancy.”

“I effectively was able to get a good sum for playing in AVENGERS 2, Régis. While my salary is still small compared to that of my main costars, it is in the high six figures. Mind you, I am not in it strictly for the money: acting is for me a way to earn a living while cutting down a bit on the amount of insane risks I took in various war zones as a war correspondent or, until I left the Canadian Army early this year, as a military officer. I am still in top shape at the age of 32, but I have to start slowing down a bit if I want to survive in one piece more than a few more years.”

“So, you intend to leave for good the business of war reporting, Nancy?”

“I didn’t say that, Régis. War reporting will always be in my blood. While few people realized it, my military career as a reserve military intelligence officer took a lot of my time, much of which was spent on overseas deployments and operations. I was however coming to the point as an officer where I would have been mostly stuck behind a desk, something I positively hate. Since I also hate being idle, I took the chance of a career as an actress as a way to fill my life after leaving the army.”

“And AVENGER 2, is it still scheduled for a May release?”

“It is! The production and filming are nearly completed and the film will soon be in the editing stage. I think that you will like it, Régis.”

“I’m sure I will, Nancy: I loved the first AVENGER, as well as your playing in CROSSROADS, so I certainly am waiting impatiently to see you in AVENGER 2.”

Nancy smiled and patted his shoulder as he opened the door of the club house for her.

“I will make sure to send you two tickets for the advanced premiere in Montreal, Régis.”

That apparently pleased the flying instructor to no small degree. Going to the reception counter of the flying school, Régis spoke briefly to the secretary, getting from her a pilot certificate that he dated and signed before making a couple of copies of it, then giving the original to Nancy while shaking her hand.

“You are now officially a qualified helicopter pilot, Nancy. Congratulations!”

“Thank you very much, Régis. You were a very nice instructor, truly. I certainly intend to come often to rent a helicopter and practice my flying skills.”

“Just call in advance and we will have a machine ready for you, Nancy.”

After putting her precious new license in the briefcase she had left with the secretary before going for her flying examination, Nancy left the club house and went to her red Mitsubishi OUTLANDER 2010, parked nearby in the parking lot of the flying school. Feeling happy about herself, she decided to go celebrate her new pilot license in Montreal and, starting her V6 engine, backed out of her parking spot and left the small local aerodrome, taking the nearby highway leading towards the island of Montreal. She soon was crossing the St-Lawrence River, using the Louis-Hyppolite-Lafontaine tunnel-bridge, to finally park in the large lot of the Place Versailles commercial center, in the East end of Montreal. Locking up her car, Nancy then walked to the nearby subway station, going down the steps to the underground quays. Thirty minutes later, she was going off the subway at the McGill Station, in downtown Montreal. Emerging in the open air on a sidewalk of Ste-Catherine Street, the main commercial artery of the city, she walked briskly along the shops and clubs lining the street, her long silky hair flying in the cold wind. Despite the cold of November, a dense crowd of pedestrians was walking along the sidewalks, gazing at the shops' windows or going into the various shopping plazas, restaurants and cinemas lining the street. Nancy finally pulled open a door and went down a long, steep staircase, entering the underground dining room of the REUBENS delicatessen restaurant, one of her favorite eating places and justly famous for its smoked meat sandwiches. A few persons were already waiting in line to be seated in the small, popular and often crowded restaurant. Nancy waited patiently a few minutes and was finally led to one of the rather tight alcoves, sitting down at a two-seat table. She immediately gave her order, knowing in advance what she wanted: a juicy,



mouth-filling smoked meat sandwich with a poutine, a plate of French fries topped with cheese and gravy that was a Quebec specialty. That was not exactly a healthy menu but today was an occasion worthy of indulging. She also ordered a beer to go with her order.

Her order was delivered quickly and she eagerly grabbed the thick smoked meat sandwich, with the piled slices of smoked meat literally overflowing from the two slices of rye bread. Opening her mouth wide in order to be able to bite in the more than eight centimeter-thick sandwich, she closed her eyes to savor fully the juicy, spicy meat. She was taking her third bite in her sandwich when a Haredim Jew, easily recognizable by his black hat, long black coat and twin side braids, stopped near her table to glow at her, hatred in his eyes. His tone was definitely unfriendly when he addressed her in a loud voice, making the other customers and the waitresses around turn their heads.

“Are you Nancy Laplante?”

Already seeing where this could lead, Nancy calmly put down her sandwich and wiped her hands with her napkin while answering the man, returning his stare.

“Yes, I am. What can I do for you, mister?”

“You could choke on your sandwich and die, you Jew hater and stooge of Iran!”

Anger filled Nancy as the manager of the restaurant started hurrying towards her table, intent on restraining the ultra-orthodox man before he could start a serious incident. There had been bad blood between Nancy and the Israeli government since November of last year, when the Israeli secret service, the Mossad, had learned by sheer luck that she was a time traveler and then had kidnapped her during a visit by her to Israel as a war correspondent for CNN. The Mossad had been fully prepared to torture her to get the secrets of time travel out of her, then to kill her and make her disappear. Nancy had however turned the tables on her captors, killing two of them before escaping and continuing her reporting trip despite the best efforts of the Mossad to capture her again. Out of frustration, the Israelis had then publicly accused her of being a supporter of terrorist groups and a murderer of two Israeli officials, something that had briefly put her on the Interpol international wanted list. Her reports from Lebanon and then Iran, where she had been able to secure interviews with many high-level officials and even make officially-sanctioned visits to secret Iranian uranium enrichment facilities, had subsequently earned her a high-level prize in journalism. However, those same reports had seriously embarrassed the Israeli government, which was at the time at war with

Iran after bombing repeatedly Iranian nuclear facilities. It had also invaded Southern Lebanon for the fourth time in history, after the Lebanese Shiite Hezbollah organization had retaliated for the airstrikes on Iran with a barrage of rockets and missiles against Israel. The American CIA, which had learned about Nancy's special talents through a mole inside the Mossad, had managed to have Nancy taken off the Interpol list and other no-fly lists, mostly by pretending she was a CIA agent, but the Israeli government was still after her, doing its best to smear her name, especially via the various Jewish lobbying groups in Canada and the United States. While Israel had been forced to sign an armistice with Iran and Lebanon, thanks partly to Nancy's reports that had discredited its arguments to attack Iran, it was still very much an enemy of Nancy. As a consequence, this was not the first time, by far, that she had to confront persons accusing her of being against Israel, or worse, of being a friend of Iran or of terrorist groups.

"Listen, mister. You are free to believe the lies told by the Israeli government about me, but here in Canada we have something called the freedom of the press, contrary to Israel, where the medias are subject to military censorship. What I reported were the simple facts, no more, no less."

"YOU REPEATED THE LIES OF THE IRANIANS, YOU BITCH!" Shouted angrily the Haredim before grabbing her glass of beer and splashing its content in her face, soaking her T-shirt. Now truly angry, Nancy jumped up on her feet and grabbed the man by his collar, then forced him down on his knees with a strength that left the man stunned with surprise and fear.

"I am getting seriously tired of ignorant and intolerant morons like you, mister. Get out before I am tempted to give you the lesson you richly deserve."

She then violently pushed him back, making him fall on his back in the narrow alley between the rows of alcoves. Before the man could get up again and attack her, the manager, a tall, big man, grabbed him from behind and forcibly turned him towards the exit.

"Get the hell out before I call the police, you idiot!"

"How could a Jew like you allow this woman in your restaurant?" Replied the Haredim while being pushed towards the exit. "She's a murderer of Jews!"

"Shut up and leave!" Said the manager before forcing the man up the stairs. He was back two minutes later, obviously frustrated, then going to Nancy's table to present her his excuses.

"I am deeply sorry for this, miss. I will get you a fresh beer right away. The bill for your meal is on the house, of course."

"That won't be necessary, mister: you were not at fault here. I will pay my bill but will accept another beer. Now, if you will excuse me for a minute or two, I'm going to clean up a bit."

Going to the women's public washrooms situated just outside the underground level exit of the restaurant, Nancy took off her soaked T-shirt and bra and splashed water on her head and torso, trying to remove as much as possible of the beer covering her. She however still had a slight smell of beer coming from her hair when she was done and her T-shirt, which she had washed and dried as best she could, was now wet all over. Sighing with frustration at that Haredim idiot for spoiling what should have been a happy day for her, she made her mind to go to a nearby shop after her meal to buy a new T-shirt: going around Montreal in November with a wet T-shirt, even with a coat over it, was a good way to freeze. Putting back on her bra and moist T-shirt, Nancy returned to the restaurant, to find that her food had been replaced by a fresh sandwich and poutine, along with a new beer. Smiling and nodding to the manager, she sat down at her table and finished her meal, this time without being further disturbed. As she lined up at the cashier to pay her bill afterwards, the sight of big briskets of smoked meat put on sale by the restaurant, which cured its own smoked meat, convinced her that now would be a good occasion to replenish the cold storeroom of the Time Patrol's main base cafeteria. That base, situated in the future location of the city of Auckland, in New Zealand, was also located five millenniums in the past of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, far enough back in time to be able to escape the effects of most potential attempts at manipulating and modifying history. This way, if someone would, say, go to the past to kill Napoleon and thus change history for whatever purpose, the Time Patrol would still be able to react to that, instead of being erased and rewritten like all the historical events in the future of the manipulative action. True to the diversity of its members, the Time Patrol cafeteria and bar regularly stocked up on various specialties from around history, of which smoked meat was a popular item. Nancy thus forked up over three hundred dollars to buy four big smoke meat briskets wrapped under vacuum in plastic, apart from paying for her meal. On second thought, she also bought three complete cheesecakes, another favorite of Time Patrol members, two strawberry ones and one blueberry. Such acquisitions for the Time Patrol was common for her and she was not worried about

getting reimbursed for that expense. Now feeling better and having mostly forgotten the Haredim idiot, she left the restaurant, returning to the sidewalk along Ste-Catherine Street.

Her next stop was at a nearby shop selling a variety of T-shirts and which also made T-shirts with custom messages or pictures on them. Browsing through the racks and tablets, Nancy grinned when she saw a particular T-shirt with a five-word message. Grabbing two similar T-shirts in her size, she paid for them and, to the surprise and delight of the male customers in the shop, promptly took off her wet T-shirt and put on one of her new T-shirts before dumping her old one in a garbage can. On a sudden impulse, she then went back to the racks to buy another similar T-shirt, but of smaller size, for her adopted daughter, Ingrid Weiss 'B', who was living and working at the secret Time Patrol base. Now wearing proudly her new T-shirt proclaiming 'BITCH AND PROUD TO BE', she put back on her coat and walked out of the shop with her bags to continue on her shopping excursion.

Her arms were full of shopping bags when she came back to her condominium suite in Boucherville in late afternoon. She had however left in the back of her car the cases of beer she had bought, beer made by a Quebec micro-brewery whose brands were very popular with the members of the Time Patrol. Putting the lot on her small dining table near the kitchen corner of her lounge, she stored the perishable items in her refrigerator, then went to check her telephone answering machine. Next, she went to her computer to check her emails. The only messages of importance waiting for her were hotel and plane tickets reservation confirmations for her incoming trip to Japan, where she was due to pass her official examination to qualify for the sixth Dan to her black belt in Kyokushin karate and to compete in a karate kumite, or full contact fight competition. Printing copies of those confirmations, she next prepared herself a light supper, which she ate while watching the latest news on television. She was nearly done eating when a piece of news from Israel on the BBC News channel made her put down her fork and stare at her television set. It was a small news clip, nearly drowned in the middle of other pieces of news, but it was one that reverberated deep inside her: the body of a man bearing horrific torture marks had been found near Tel Aviv two days ago and had now been identified as that of an Ukrainian ex-arms merchant living in retirement in Israel. While the nature of the man's past had prompted the news report

about his death, which would not otherwise have attracted much attention, the death by torture of the said Victor Medveyev meant a lot for Nancy. For one thing, the Israeli Mossad had learned that she was a time traveler through Medveyev, from which Nancy had clandestinely bought sixty AS Val silenced assault rifles in 1992, going back in time to effect that buy in order to equip her newborn organization. Unfortunately for Nancy, Medveyev had seen in 2012 the news clip from Afghanistan showing her shooting down three Taliban extremists and had realized that she had not apparently aged one bit in twenty years. Now worried, Nancy thought about who could have tortured and killed Medveyev. She doubted very much that the Mossad had done this: Medveyev was one of their informants and had already sold most of his secrets to the Israelis. The possibility that the CIA would have done this brushed her mind but she dismissed that nearly immediately: the Americans would have been more discreet about it and would have used methods that left little physical marks. If anything, this looked like an execution meant both as a revenge and as a warning to others. In Nancy's mind, one group popped up as a most probable culprit: the Russian secret services, or SVR. Medveyev had dealt mostly in the past in stolen or rerouted Soviet and Russian weapons and had been on the Russians' wanted list for years. In fact, he had retired to Israel precisely to escape Russian justice, making a deal with the Mossad in order to buy his safety there. With the way that Medveyev had been tortured, Nancy had no doubt that he had told everything he knew to his captors before dying. That meant in turn to Nancy that the Russians now possibly knew her to be a time traveler. Now feeling depressed, Nancy thought about what she could do about this. The short answer was however that she could do little indeed, except avoid as much as possible future travel to Russia. She then realized something that made her swear quietly. By demonstrating her mental powers in a brutal way to the Israelis in Tel Aviv, she had been able to convince them that her ability to travel through time was strictly mental. This had deterred the Israelis from further trying to steal her secrets, even though they still wished her dead. However, Victor Medveyev didn't know about her show of mental powers and probably told his tormentors that she had to use a time machine of some sort. She was thus now back at being somebody's potential prize for kidnapping and interrogation. At the least, the SVR could legitimately charge her with illegal acquisition of Russian military weapons, but Nancy doubted that would be the main thing on their minds.

Her day mostly ruined now, Nancy finished her meal, then washed her plate and utensils while still thinking about how to react to this bad news. At the least, she would have to warn Farah Tolkonen 'A', the gentle giant from the 34<sup>th</sup> Century that had co-founded the Time Patrol with her, in order to discuss possible counter-moves and security measures against this new threat against her. Nancy was not worried about the Russians finding something in her condominium suite, it not containing any future technology. She could not jump by herself all the way five millenniums in the past to the secret base of the Time Patrol, her implanted time distorter inside her body being limited to jumps of about 2,000 years at a time, but she had access to a hidden time scooter. That machine, what the Israelis had been really after without knowing about it, was in a deep subterranean module buried under her cottage by the shore of Lake Manitou, in the Laurentian hills northwest of Montreal. A robotic construction crew had dug up a big hole all the way into the rock layer, then had installed the self-contained module, a cylinder with a diameter and height of fifteen meters, before burying it back, with no cable or pipe leading outside it to give away its position. While that work had been done only two years ago by Nancy's relative clock, in reality it had been all done in the year 3,000 B.C.E., thus leaving ample time for the vegetation to grow back and cover the work site. The final installation of internal systems had however been done in 2012 'A', with robots jumping space-time directly into the millenniums-old buried module to put in the air and water recycling systems, the power generators and the various electronic equipment. If Nancy wanted to effect a really long jump to the past or future or, like today, wanted to carry through time a heavy load, she only needed to mentally activate her implanted time distorter, jump to the buried module and then use the time scooter parked there. With the bulk of her lakeside cottage sitting above the module, even seismic sensors could not detect the module without first destroying utterly her cottage. Her mind made up, Nancy gathered in a large ice box the smoked meat and cheesecake bought in Montreal, then grabbed the ice box in her two hands to jump to her Laurentian module. The cases of beer in her car would have to wait for her follow-up trips. Giving a mental order to the implanted computer incorporated to her time distorter grafted against the inside face of her spine, she disappeared from her condominium in a brief flash of white light.



**19:11 (New Zealand Time)**

**Monday, July 18, 3000 BCE (Before Common Era)**

**Scooter Hall, Time Patrol main base**

**Future site of Auckland, New Zealand**

Nancy appeared in her time scooter in the middle of a big dome-shaped hall, then moved immediately her scooter to a parking area on the periphery, to let the space empty for other scooters to appear. She knew that the base main computer, via its numerous internal sensors and surveillance cameras, had already recorded her arrival, but she still went to the duty desk of the hall, where a man from the Global Council was sitting. Like all the adults from the 34<sup>th</sup> Century, he was over two meter-tall, was totally bald and had six fingers per hands, the results of a racial genetic mutation effected in order for the Human race to survive the long term radiations from the catastrophic 2052 Nuclear Genocide that had nearly wiped out Humanity. The man smiled with genuine happiness at seeing her as she approached.

“Hello, Nancy! How are things in Montreal?”

“Well, Jens, until I caught some bad news on television. Where could I find Farah ‘A’ at this hour?”

“I believe that she is at the Timeless Club, with Mike and Ingrid ‘B’.”

“Perfect! Could I borrow a cargo plate, so that I could unload the beer, smoked meat and cheesecake I bought in Montreal?”

Jens’ eyes widened at the mention of ‘smoked meat’.

“Yes! We were out of smoked meat at the cafeteria. I will call in a robotic cargo plate.”

“Thanks, Jens.”

A robotic cargo plate showed up in less than a minute, allowing Nancy to transfer her beer and foodstuff from her scooter and onto the plate. Using one of the elevator cabins of the Scooter Hall, she first went up to the level of the main cafeteria, dropping her smoked meat and cheesecakes in the hands of the chief-cook there, then went on up to the level of the Timeless Club, the social club used by the members of the Time Patrol. Her entrance with her cargo plate in tow inside the large room attracted welcoming waves of the hand by Ingrid Weiss ‘B’, sitting at a table with Nancy’s husband, Mike Crawford ‘B’, and with Farah Tolkonen ‘A’.

"NANCY, WE'RE HERE!"

Nancy smiled to her adopted daughter, a very beautiful teenager with reddish-brown hair and big blue eyes.

"Let me just drop these cases of Unibroue brand beers at the bar first, then I will be with you."

"DID YOU GET SOME CASES OF 'MAUDITE', NANCY?" Shouted from another table Otto Skorzeni 'B', who was having a beer with two other members of his assault team. Nancy grinned, knowing that the big, ex-Waffen SS officer particularly appreciated that brand of Quebec beer.

"I GOT FOUR OF THEM JUST FOR YOU, OTTO."

The big, powerful Austrian grinned and made a thumbs up signal at those words. Taking three minutes to unload her cases of beer behind the bar, Nancy then sent away the robotic cargo plate and walked to the table occupied by her family and Farah, hugging and kissing all three occupants. Mike Crawford 'B', a tall American from Montana with the build of a professional football player, squeezed her in his powerful arms while kissing her.

"Are you done for your period in 2014 Montreal, Nancy?"

"Not yet, Mike. I came by to drop some beer and smoked meat I bought in Montreal and to give Farah some news."

"Good or bad news, Nancy?" Asked cautiously Farah Tolkonen 'A', knowing too well how trouble followed Nancy, through no fault of her own. Nancy made a grimace.

"Potentially bad, Farah: the Russians may now know about me being a time traveler."

Nancy then spent two minutes telling Farah about the demise of Victor Medveyev, with Mike and Ingrid listening on with growing alarm. At the end of it, Farah shook her head in discouragement.

"If this keeps going on, I am going to have to design special robotic bodyguard probes just for you, Nancy. Look, if the Russians try to play rough with you, I won't mind if you deal decisively with them, as long as it is made discreetly and without leaving a suspicious trace. While we don't want to interfere with the history of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century of Timeline 'A', I can live with secret spy wars. Just don't go and kill the head of the Russian secret services, please."

"Don't worry about that, Farah. I am not that crazy."

"That should reassure me." Replied Farah, making a face that made Ingrid giggle.

"Nancy, crazy? Never! She's just an adrenaline junkie mixed with a sex maniac."

"Look who's talking!" Replied Nancy, smiling. "Haven't you burned out yet your nice young husband?"

"Tom is doing just fine and keeps asking for more, thank you very much. In fact, I arranged a special night for his last birthday: I invited my timeline twin, Ingrid 'A', to gang up with me on him, so he got double pleasure that night."

Mike Crawford 'B' made a face at that.

"I don't know if I could survive a night with two Nancy. I'm tough, but not that tough."

"You will have to wait another seventeen year before trying that, my dear husband: Nancy 'B' is still only one year old."

The mention of little Nancy Laplante 'B', saved on her first day in life from CIA assassins intent on preventing the rise of the British Empire in the now rewritten Timeline 'B', made Ingrid 'B' remember something that saddened her.

"And Nancy 'C' lived for only a fraction of a second, time to be killed by an Imperium guard in 1941 'B' and thus cause the creation of Timeline 'C'. My timeline twin there must have been devastated when she learned of Nancy 'C's death."

## **CHAPTER 2 – HEROINE’S FAREWELL**

**14:03 (GMT)**

**Friday, June 27, 1941 ‘C’**

**R.A.F. Air Station Northolt**

**England**

Commander Peter Stilwell patted Mike Crawford’s shoulder as they and other officers watched the Spanish Air Force transport aircraft roll towards the hangar where they were waiting by the opened doors.

“Be strong, Mike. We’re with you.”

The big American clenched his jaws, his face pale, but didn’t answer. Peter could see from the corner of his eye that Douglas Wilson was crying, while the normally unflappable George Townsend was barely holding his own tears in. He himself was close to breaking down as the transport aircraft, wide Red Cross signs painted on its fuselage, stopped in front of them. Air Commodore Nicholls was first to talk with the Spanish aviator who opened the side door of the plane, exchanging salutes with him before signaling to Peter and Mike to come forward. The British and the American were then invited inside, where a civilian standing besides a casket shook their hands.

“I’m Jean Rudolpho, of the International Red Cross. I escorted the body from Berlin, on the demand of the American embassy there. I assume that you can formally identify Brigadier Laplante?”

Peter Stilwell had to swallow the lump in his throat before he could answer.

“You are correct, sir. I am Commander Peter Stilwell, one of her assistants, while this is Major Mike Crawford, her husband.”

“My sincere condolences, Major.” Replied the Swiss, looking at Mike Crawford. “I must however ask you to identify her formally now, so that I can have you sign for her body.”

On a nod from Crawford, the Red Cross man opened the casket, then unzipped open the plastic body bag lying on a bed of dry ice inside.

“My God!” Whispered Peter, tears coming out of his eyes: it was too obvious that Nancy had been tortured severely before being shot in the head. Mike passed a shaking hand on Nancy’s bruised, lifeless face, then collapsed to his knees, crying shamelessly.

“The bastards! Nancy...”

Without a word, the Red Cross man presented a clipboard with a form on it and a pen to Peter, who signed the form before returning it to Rudolpho. Peter then went to the door of the plane and waved at six airmen waiting outside, who quickly but respectfully took the casket out of the plane. A small honor guard presented arms as they brought it to a waiting ambulance. Peter turned towards Rudolpho as he left the plane, dragging the distraught Mike with him.

“Thank you for escorting her body to England, Mister Rudolpho. We won’t forget your kindness.”

“It was the least we could do for her, Commander. Goodbye!” Replied the Swiss, obviously moved, before closing the door of the plane.

Both Stilwell and Townsend had to help Mike to their car. With Doug Wilson driving, they then headed back towards London. Peter waited for Mike to get back some control on himself before speaking.

“Mike, I’m sorry if I have to ask this now, but a lot of highly classified things depended on Nancy: did she give you a will?”

“Yes!” Answered back the American. “In fact, she gave me an extra copy, to be given to the British government along with an attachment in the event of her death. She told me that there was a part concerning her job as the Prime Minister’s special military advisor. Here is that copy.”

Peter took the envelope handed by Mike, then opened it after a short hesitation. Reading twice through the will and the letter attached to it, Peter felt discouragement overtake him: what was in there would make his job much harder tomorrow at the special war cabinet meeting called by Winston Churchill. Nancy’s uncommon kindness and open mindedness could well hurt her own reputation in this case. Peter knew that there was only one thing for him to do, and quickly.

“Mike, do you mind if I go see Ingrid Weiss at the Tower of London today?”

Mike looked sadly at him and tried to smile.

“I expected that, Peter: I already read my own copy of Nancy’s will. I want to be present when you see Ingrid, though.”

“Understood, Mike. We will go see her at seven, tonight. I will pick you up at your apartment at a quarter to seven.”

“I will be ready.” Replied Mike weakly.

The rest of the trip was spent in silence. Dropping off first Mike at his apartment at 24 St-James' Place, Doug Wilson then drove his two colleagues to the ministry building in Whitehall housing the Athena Section. Wing Commander Winterbotham, Doctor Reginald Jones and Jennifer Collins stared at them the moment they walked in the closely guarded office of the most sensitive and secret government section in England. Peter spoke immediately, preempting their questions.

“Nancy is dead. I identified her body. She was also obviously tortured severely before being shot in the head. Her body should now be at the forensic department of St-Thomas Hospital. We will know more tomorrow morning.”

Peter's subdued announcement brought tears to Jones' and Collins' faces. In contrast, after bowing his head briefly, Winterbotham went to a desk and grabbed a decrypted German Enigma message, waving it at Peter.

“When are you going to tell General Ismay about this?”

“Tomorrow, at the war cabinet meeting. I am going to the Tower of London tonight to speak to the main person concerned by that Enigma message in order to find out why Nancy acted the way she did. In the meantime, I would appreciate if you would keep this under wrap.”

The tone Peter used for his last sentence obviously didn't please Winterbotham.

“You are trying to cover up for her, aren't you? Well, there is too much at stake here to play this kind of game: I'm going to see General Ismay now.”

An enraged Stilwell grabbed Winterbotham by his shirt before he could make two steps, then slammed him hard against a wall.

“Are you crazy, Commander? Let me go!” Could barely say the choking wing commander. Instead of letting him loose, Peter tightened his grip even more as he spoke in a low, dangerous voice.

“I'll be damned if I let you smear the name of a lady who won twice the Victoria Cross in combat without giving me a chance to find out about both sides of this affair. Furthermore, I don't want to hear any more doubts about Nancy's loyalty, especially when coming from a desk-bound paper-pusher like you. You shut your mouth until the cabinet meeting tomorrow. Is that clear, mister?”



Winterbotham, cold sweat on his face, looked around the office, silently pleading for help. Jones, Townsend and Wilson were all looking at him with something akin to murder in their eyes, while Jennifer Collins was turning her back to him, typing at her desk as if nothing was happening. Even the two military policemen on duty at the entrance of the office had retreated in the hallway and were ignoring him. The devotion that Nancy Laplante enjoyed around the Athena Section was now clearly turning against Winterbotham, who swallowed hard.

“Alright, I’ll keep quiet for the moment.”

Stilwell then released his grip and took one step back, his eyes still locked on him.

“Don’t worry about the truth, Wing Commander: whatever I find tonight will be reported in full to the war cabinet tomorrow. Now, let’s go back to work!”

Returning to their various occupations, the five officers and the secretary kept themselves busy until closing time, but their hearts were clearly not into it. Winterbotham and Stilwell exchanged poisoned looks when the R.A.F. officer walked out of the office. In contrast, Jennifer Collins waited until Winterbotham was gone before grabbing her purse and stopping in front of Peter’s desk.

“Peter, I saw that decrypted Enigma message too. While it shocked me at first, I revised my opinion after seeing the amount of information we already have in Nancy’s databank about that German. I now think that she acted purely out of kindness, to avoid unnecessary suffering to that German. For what it’s worth, I’m on your side in this.”

Peter smiled tenderly at the secretary and took her hand gently.

“Jennifer, you do count for a lot in this office. Thanks for your confidence in Nancy.”

The mention of Laplante’s name brought back tears in the secretary’s eyes, who wiped them quickly while speaking in a shivering voice.

“When I think that, after all she did for us, some people still would try to stab her in the back...”

“Jealousy and chauvinism.” Replied Peter bitterly. “It was to be expected, I guess. Be assured that I will do my best to defend her name at that meeting tomorrow.”

“Thank you, Peter. I appreciate that.”

Jennifer then kissed Peter on the cheek before leaving the office. His heart heavy, Peter then packed his briefcase and had a last look at Nancy’s desktop computer, sitting on a

work desk in one corner of the office, before closing the door and locking it up. His briefcase in his left hand, he then walked away, his mind in turmoil.

**19:04 (GMT)**

**Tower of London**

Mike Crawford and Peter Stilwell found Ingrid Weiss in her small room on the second floor of Gaoler's House, studying a book on mathematics. She was barefoot and wore only a T-shirt and a pair of shorts. Peter couldn't help notice how athletic the young German had become since the first time he saw her five months ago, when she had been captured in France by Nancy, along with the rest of the staff of the Luftwaffe headquarters where she had been working as an air situation plotter. The rows of books on her small desk reminded him that Ingrid, apart from being a very beautiful teenage girl, was also a very sharp cookie. Ingrid's welcoming smile disappeared as soon as she saw the sad faces of her two visitors. Tears appearing in her eyes, she looked up at Mike, who still stood just inside the door of her room.

"No! Don't tell me that Nancy is dead, please!"

Mike nodded his head, then stepped quickly forward to hug the now crying girl. Watching closely Ingrid, Peter was certain that her distress was not faked: Nancy's affection for her was no one-way street. He himself felt a pang of guilt at the secret attraction he had towards what was supposed to be an enemy of England. That young German made him think more and more about a teenage version of Nancy, and an even more beautiful one at that.

Mike and Ingrid finally parted after long minutes, their eyes still moist.

"How did she die, Mike? Please tell me the truth."

The American sat on the edge of Ingrid's bed before answering her in a weak voice, his head bowed.

"She was tortured and killed by the Gestapo, Ingrid. The Abwehr, on Hitler's orders, tried to deliver her but arrived too late. Her body arrived this afternoon in Northolt via Spain, escorted by a representative of the International Red Cross."

"Could I see her, one last time?" Pleaded the girl, prompting Mike to look at Peter, who nodded his head.

"I can arrange a visit later tonight to the forensic lab where her body is kept."

“Thank you, commander. You are a kind man.”

“Ingrid,” said Mike softly as he took an envelope out of the bag he had brought with him, “Nancy included you in her will. Here is your copy, which she translated into German.”

The teenager read the document carefully, occasional tears still coming out. At one point she opened her eyes wide with surprise.

“She is leaving me her savings?”

“That’s right, Ingrid. That bank account is now yours, with 2,342 Sterling Pounds in it. Here is the bank transfer form. Just sign here and I will complete the paperwork tomorrow.”

“But, you are her husband, Mike. You are entitled to that money.”

“Bunk! I don’t need that money. You will, when this war is over. Besides, I intend to be with you then: I will come here at the end of the war to pick you up and bring you to the United States to offer you a new home. That is what Nancy wanted and that is what I still want.”

Peter looked at both of them with unmitigated surprise.

“You and Nancy were planning to adopt Ingrid at the end of the war? That is a sweet thought indeed.”

Mike simply nodded his head, unwilling to look straight at Peter: the truth was that Ingrid was already his adopted daughter, at least in the eyes of the American government. Mike had secretly obtained and given to Ingrid a certificate of adoption, listing him and Nancy as her adoptive parents, and an American passport made in her new legal name: Ingrid Maria Louise Crawford. Another item in that passport that would have shocked Peter was the religion she was listed under. Officially designated until now as a Lutheran, the religion of her original Father, Ingrid had started two months ago to return to the secret religion of her dead mother, Judaism. Knowing what kind of controversy and even hatred that could spark amongst the other Germans interned with her if that became known, Ingrid had been very discreet about that, praying in Hebrew and Yiddish solely in the privacy of her room at night and often flouting the food restrictions of the Mosaic Laws in order to appear as a good, typical German. Ingrid was however resolved to change that in time. Signing the bank form, she gave it back to Mike, who pocketed it before taking out of the bag he had brought Nancy’s Discman and portable radio/CD/cassette player unit, along with a small carrying case. He then gave the three items to Ingrid.

“Nancy wanted you as well to keep her Discman and portable sound system, along with her collection of musical CDs. These are now yours.”

Peter was about to protest this but Mike stared firmly at him.

“Peter, don’t get in the way of that part of Nancy’s will! It is not as if Ingrid will send the electronic parts of those items to Germany by mail. I was planning after this to go see Brigadier Browning anyway, when I will tell him about these appliances.”

“Alright, I will go with that, but only because it is for Ingrid. Now, before we go to the forensic lab to see Nancy’s body, could I speak to one of Ingrid’s friend, Hanna Reitsch?”

Peter’s apparently innocent question made Ingrid stiffen, alarm appearing on her face. Mike, on the other hand, appeared surprised by Ingrid’s reaction.

“What’s wrong, Ingrid? What is it with this Hanna?”

“Only me and Nancy knew the true identity of that woman, Mike.” Explained the teenager without breaking eye contact with Peter. “Why do you want to see her, Commander?”

It was Peter’s turn to touch Ingrid’s hand gently.

“Ingrid, others have learned about Hanna Reitsch and are ready to smear Nancy’s name for her protecting that woman’s identity. I must know why Nancy acted the way she did, in order to defend her name at a cabinet meeting tomorrow.”

Ingrid nodded her head, her face grave.

“Wait here, Commander. I will get her.”

While Ingrid walked out of her room, Peter sat besides Mike on the bed, emotionally drained.

“This must be the worst day of my life, Mike.”

“Welcome to the club.” Replied the American, equally downcast. Both then waited in silence, lost in their thoughts, until Ingrid returned with a petite blond woman in her early thirties. The newcomer looked with dread at Peter, who stood up and offered his hand.

“Flugkapitan Hanna Reitsch, I am Commander Peter Stilwell, one of the assistants to Nancy Laplante.”

Hesitantly at first, the tiny woman finally shook hands with him and spoke in a fair English.

“Pleased to meet you, Commander. Ingrid told me that Brigadier Laplante is dead. How did she die?”

“She was captured following an airplane crash at sea, then tortured and killed by your Gestapo, Flugkapitan. I am here to avoid her losing her good name on top of losing her life. Could you explain to me the reasons why she protected your true identity?”

Hanna Reitsch, pale and shaken, had to sit on the bed before speaking, her voice subdued.

“I don’t know if you will understand, Commander. I myself couldn’t believe it when she recognized me and didn’t blow the whistle on me. Basically, she told me that, since she already knew everything of importance about me and my work as a test pilot through her historical files, it would be pointless to finger me and thus expose me to endless interrogations and harsh treatment. She was a very humane and kind person, Commander. If it can help protect her name, I am ready to testify in front of your superiors.”

Peter lowered his head in discouragement. Nancy’s open-mindedness and generosity was nothing new to him, but to make his superiors understand how she could be kind to a German was going to be one tough sell.

“Flugkapitan, I will attend a meeting of the war cabinet tomorrow, where I intend to defend her actions as best I can. If it would be only for me, you would remain here under your cover name, with only a few high-ranking officers and politicians in the know about you. I cannot guarantee that I will succeed in protecting both her name and yourself, though. I do appreciate your offer of testifying and may take you up on that. Was there any other reason why Nancy protected you?”

Hanna, her hands pressed together, hesitated before answering him.

“Yes! I was one of her childhood’s heroines, believe it or not. I was after all the first-ever female test pilot and the first woman to fly a helicopter.”

Peter and Mike exchanged bemused looks at that confidence.

“Uh, don’t mention that little detail if you have to testify tomorrow, Flugkapitan.” Said Peter. “I am now going to bring Ingrid to the forensic lab of St-Thomas Hospital, where Nancy’s body is kept. I will fetch for you tomorrow if your deposition is needed, Flugkapitan Reitsch.”

Peter suddenly found a pair of blue eyes pleading at him.

“Commander, could I come too? I owed her so much.”

Peter contemplated for a moment the sad face looking up at him from her 150 centimeters of height, then nodded his head.

“This is most irregular, Flugkapitan, but I guess that today is not an ordinary day.”

## **20:12 (GMT)**

### **Forensic lab, St-Thomas Hospital**

#### **London**

Doctor Stephen Brown looked with sympathy at the two men and two women standing near him besides the examination table, where a form lay under a blanket. He then addressed the one wearing a Royal Navy uniform.

“Commander, I have to warn you that, while we have not opened up Brigadier Laplante’s body yet for detailed forensic examination, the tortures inflicted on her were horrific. Are you sure that the two ladies here want to see this?”

Brown then looked at the two women, one a mere teenager informally dressed in shorts and T-shirt, the other a petite blonde wearing a baggy two-piece fleece sports suit. Neither of the two had said a word yet, being presented by Stilwell as close friends of Laplante. The commander nodded his head soberly.

“Go ahead, Doctor. They can take it.”

“As you wish, Commander.” Replied Brown as he uncovered the head and shoulders of the body. Tears immediately came to all four visitors. To Brown’s surprise, it was the teenage girl who spoke up first after the initial shock.

“Uncover her completely, Doctor.” She said in a voice she tried to keep firm. Brown obliged and pulled away the blanket. The petite blonde choked down a horrified sob, while the young girl closed her eyes for a moment. She however reopened them quickly and examined with immense sadness the body from head to toe for long seconds. She then nodded to Brown, who then covered back the body. A tearful Stilwell shook Brown’s hand.

“Thank you for accommodating our visit tonight, Doctor. Will the forensic report be ready in time for tomorrow’s cabinet meeting at ten O’clock?”

“It will be, Commander. I will deliver the report myself during that meeting.”

Brown then lowered his voice and glanced quickly at the two women being escorted out by the American officer.

“May I ask you who were those two women, Commander?”



“You can, Doctor.” Replied Peter in a tired voice. “Nancy was planning to adopt the younger one, who is a war orphan, while the other is a good friend of her.”

“Commander, you have my most sincere condolences. Brigadier Laplante will be sorely missed by all.”

The Royal Navy officer shook his head angrily.

“Wrong, Doctor! Some are already trying to stab her in the back. Don’t be surprised tomorrow if you hear nasty accusations and comments about her at that cabinet meeting.”

“Who could do such a thing to her?” Asked Brown indignantly. “It is obvious from the extent of her wounds that Brigadier Laplante resisted her interrogators for hours, if not for days. She deserves to be treated like a heroine.”

“Well, believe it or not but some are ready to call her a traitor.” Replied Peter bitterly.

“What? Are they mad or just mean? What would make them believe such a stupid notion?”

“Doctor, if Nancy was guilty of something, it was of being too kind and tolerant for this damn time period. Keep this for yourself, but those two women you just saw are actually German prisoners of war.”

Peter then left the lab. A stunned Stephen Brown now stared alone at Nancy’s battered face. Pulling up a stool besides the examination table, he then started his grim autopsy work.

**08:06 (GMT)**

**Saturday, June 28, 1941 ‘C’**

**Prime Minister’s Military Secretary’s office**

**Home Office building, London**

Peter Stilwell found Lieutenant General Hasting Ismay at his desk, working on some report. The old officer didn’t seem to have his heart in his work, though. Smiling meekly at Peter, he threw away the file he had in his hands the moment his visitor walked in.

“What can I do for you this morning, Commander?”

Putting first a pile of documents and papers on the general’s desk, Peter then locked eyes with his superior.

“For me, nothing, sir. For Nancy, a lot. I need to ask a very big favor from you, sir!”

**10:02 (GMT)**

**Cabinet conference room**

**Prime Minister’s residence**

**10 Downing Street, London**

Winston Churchill’s gavel banged three times, bringing silence to the room full of ministers, generals, admirals and various aides. Peter Stilwell was actually the lowest ranking person present, if one discounted Jennifer Collins, tasked with steno typing the meeting’s proceedings.

“I now declare this special war cabinet meeting open.” Said the Prime Minister in his usual gruff voice. “The main subject to be discussed is the death of Brigadier Laplante and its possible fallout. I will first ask the honorable Sir Anthony Eden to summarize the events of the last few days.”

The Foreign Minister nodded, took a sheet of paper from a folder and started reading it in as steady a voice as he could muster.

“On June 23, Brigadier Laplante boarded a Lockheed Hudson aircraft of the Coastal Command at R.A.F. Northolt, with the Royal Navy base of Scapa Flow as her destination. Somewhere off the coast of Scotland, her plane encountered a very severe storm and apparently crashed in the North Sea. On the next day, we intercepted and decrypted a message from the German submarine U-47, advising its headquarters in Wilhelmshaven that it had found Brigadier Laplante on a rubber raft, nearly frozen to death. That submarine then apparently delivered her in the hands of the Abwehr in that port. From what we now know from Admiral Canaris, who contacted us via our embassy in Spain, it seems that it was actually a Gestapo team, which had ambushed the Abwehr team on its way to Wilhelmshaven, which actually took delivery of Brigadier Laplante. She was subsequently brought to a Gestapo center in Berlin, where she was tortured for a minimum of a day before being killed by a gunshot to the head. Since torturing her was in direct contravention of a directive from Adolph Hitler, the Abwehr took by assault that Gestapo center with the support of Luftwaffe troops as soon as they learned where Laplante was held, but arrived too late. Admiral Canaris, still through our embassy in Spain, then arranged for her body to be flown back to England. The body arrived in

Northolt yesterday afternoon and was subsequently brought to the forensic department of St-Thomas Hospital. That's it for my report, gentlemen."

An oppressive silence followed Eden's presentation, broken by Winston Churchill.

"As distasteful as the next subject is, in view of the amount of highly classified information held by Brigadier Laplante, we have to ask ourselves the following question: did she talk under the Gestapo's tortures?"

"What does the forensic report says about the state of her body, Mister Prime Minister?" Asked Brigadier Stewart Menzies, in charge of the British Secret Services.

"I thought that the doctor who performed the autopsy would actually be the best person to enlighten us on this." Replied Churchill, who then turned towards a bodyguard standing besides the door of the conference room. "Let Doctor Brown in!"

Most of the meeting's participants looked ill at ease as they waited for Doctor Brown to come in, with the notable exceptions of Stewart Menzies and Claude Dansey, the head of the Counter-intelligence Service, the M.I.5. Both men appeared cold and unconcerned, something that did not escape Peter Stilwell's attention. The tension went up in the room as soon as a tall and lean man in a civilian suit came in, escorted by the bodyguard. Taking the seat offered by Churchill, Stephen Brown listened to the whispered instructions from General Ismay before opening a briefcase and putting a file folder on the conference table, then looking around at the faces surrounding him.

"Mister Prime Minister, gentlemen, I am Doctor Stephen Brown, head of the forensic department at St-Thomas Hospital. I performed a full autopsy yesterday on the body of Brigadier Nancy Laplante. While some chemical test results are not in yet, I am confident that my report contains all the details of interest to you. I am pained to tell you that nothing was spared to Brigadier Laplante. Before being shot in the head with a high velocity, small caliber bullet that instantly killed her, she was atrociously tortured for at least a day, maybe two if there were breaks between interrogation sessions. With the amount of pain she had to endure, she undoubtedly passed out more than once and was probably close to a cardiac failure by the time she was shot."

"Excuse me, Doctor." Interrupted Claude Dansey. "Could you be more specific about the treatment inflicted on her? We have to assess if she could have resisted those tortures."

Brown shot a dark look at Dansey before picking up a sheet of paper from his file folder.

“If it’s the cold facts you are after, mister, then here they are. She was flogged to the point of bleeding on over seventy percent of her body, with the heaviest concentrations of strokes on her back, chest and buttocks. All of her nails, both on her fingers and toes, were pulled out. Her fingers and toes were then smashed, probably with a heavy hammer. Her face showed the marks of severe and repeated beatings, both with fists and with a short leather flogger, and six of her teeth were broken or missing, while both eyes were closed shut and her lips were split open. There were extensive electrical burns on her breasts and genitals, along with 37 large, third degree burns distributed over her torso and chest, probably the result of the application of red hot irons. Both of her feet were also extensively burned with a probable welding lamp. Finally, I can say that she was raped, repeatedly. Like I said before, she was spared nothing.”

Winston Churchill, looking sick, was about to say something to Claude Dansey when Jennifer Collins ran out of the room in tears. Churchill immediately rose from his chair and followed her, turning briefly towards the others.

“Please take a short break, gentlemen. I won’t be long.”

Churchill found Jennifer in the anteroom next to the conference room, crying hysterically while sitting in a sofa. Sitting besides her, the politician took out his handkerchief and gave it to Jennifer, who thankfully accepted it.

“That poor Nancy... She was a good friend of mine and now these cold-hearted bastards are discussing her fate as if she was nothing more than a slab of beef in a butcher’s shop.”

“Look, Jennifer, nobody is enjoying this, least of all me. We must however find out if Nancy could have given away some secrets before dying. This is critical.”

“She would never have betrayed us!” Shouted the secretary, furious. “Do they assume that, because she was a woman, she was thus weaker and incapable of resisting the Gestapo?”

“I never believed that, Jennifer, and you know it. Can you resume your duties or do you want me to get Mary Miles to replace you?”

Jennifer shook her head, wiping her tears as she answered.

“I will go back inside. It’s the least I can do for Nancy.”

“Good girl! Nancy would have liked that.”

Holding the still sobbing woman by one arm, Churchill helped her back into the conference room. There, he found half the participants, led by Sir Anthony Eden, facing off the other half, led by General Menzies, in an acrimonious debate on whether Nancy Laplante had talked under the tortures. The confrontation calmed down as Churchill sat down while looking severely at the participants around the table.

“Gentlemen, Brigadier Laplante worked for me for nearly a year. If there is anything that she proved during that period, it was that she possessed enough courage for the lot of us. I see two glaring facts out of Doctor Brown’s report: first, Brigadier Laplante obviously resisted the Gestapo, as her wounds clearly show; second, the Germans would not have killed her if she was in the process of giving away our secrets. With the amount of secrets she held in her mind, it would take days of interrogation to note down everything she knew, and that is if she was cooperative and didn’t have to be constantly coerced. I thus believe that Brigadier Laplante didn’t give away anything despite the worst tortures that could be inflicted on her for hours and that an interrogator probably killed her out of frustration. Does anybody here disagree with this assessment?”

“Mister Prime Minister,” said Claude Dansey, “just learning about how we can decipher the German Enigma encoding machine would have been a coup for the Gestapo. There are countless cases known of persons being tortured for weeks by the Gestapo. Surely, their interrogators would have shown lots of patience with a prisoner as valuable as Brigadier Laplante. Killing her after only a day or two would have made no sense, unless she gave away enough information to satisfy them. As Doctor Brown said himself, Laplante was probably close to death when she was shot.”

“Then the Gestapo would have stopped to let her rest and would have continued another day.” Objected General Ismay. “Brigadier Laplante must have said something that infuriated the Gestapo so much that she was then shot. Maybe the shooter was a visiting, high-ranking SS officer on whom Brigadier Laplante was about to reveal something very embarrassing or incriminating. As an example, take Reinhardt Heidrich, the head of the SS security forces. Laplante and we knew that his maternal grandmother was Jewish, something I doubt Heidrich wanted widely known. It would have been consistent with this sadist’s ways to go watch her being tortured and to laugh at her. Brigadier Laplante may just have had the last laugh on him.”

Churchill, Eden and many others nodded their heads, convinced by Ismay’s reasoning. Churchill then addressed the participants in a voice full of sorrow.

“Gentlemen, in view of the facts presented up to now, it appears that Brigadier Laplante died as bravely as she lived. God knows I will miss her. She was a godsend to our cause and saved us from a lot of grief in this war. I intend to personally recommend her for a second bar to her Victoria Cross, for her incredible courage under extreme duress.”

“If I may, Mister Prime Minister...” Said Stewart Menzies, attracting everybody’s eyes on him.

“Go ahead, General Menzies.”

“What I’m going to say may shock many of you here, but I have some hard evidence with me to suggest that, instead of being decorated, Brigadier Laplante should actually be stripped of her medals and rank, for aiding and abetting the enemy.”

Churchill immediately shot up from his chair, rage on his face.

“WHAT? WHAT’S THIS NONSENSE?”

Churchill’s furious reply made Menzies cringe, while nearly all the other participants glared angrily at him.

“Please, Mister Prime Minister, hear me out. I am taking no joy in this, believe me. What I have is facts, not suppositions or suspicions.”

“Then you better be very convincing, General!” Warned Churchill. The head of the Secret Services nodded and took a sheet of paper out of a locked briefcase, then passed it to the Prime Minister.

“This, sir, is a translated copy of a decoded German Enigma message from the higher Luftwaffe headquarters to their liaison office at the Focke-Wulf factories near Bremen. It informs Bremen that one of their test pilots, one Flugkapitan Hanna Reitsch, was being held as a prisoner of war in London but that she was assuming the identity of a simple auxiliary. That message also said to the Focke-Wulf management not to worry about us discovering her real identity, as quote Brigadier Laplante was protecting her cover identity unquote. Here, sir, I must emphasize that this Hanna Reitsch is no ordinary test pilot. She has flown many of the most secret German prototypes and even received the Iron Cross from Hitler himself. This message thus proves that Brigadier Laplante knew the true identity of the so-called Oberhelferin Fisher for months, but protected her for some unknown reasons. By that willful act, Laplante let a prime potential source of information slip from our hands for many critical months. If that is not treason, I don’t know how to call it.”

“But...why?” Asked Sir Cyril Newall, Chief of the Air Staff, as stunned as everybody else around the table, except for Dansey, Wing Commander Winterbotham and Peter Stilwell.

“I am afraid that the answer to your question accompanied Miss Laplante to her grave, sir.” Replied solemnly Menzies. The noise of knuckles rapping the table then made everybody look at Stilwell.

“I believe that you are wrong, General Menzies: I have both statements and witnesses to explain Nancy Laplante’s actions. May I, Mister Prime Minister?”

“By all means, Commander.”

Stilwell took out a number of files from his briefcase, putting them on the table as he spoke.

“First of, this business about hiding Hanna Reitsch’s identity. These files in front of me contain the information on her available in the historical data files given to us by Nancy Laplante. Tell me, General Menzies, how would your M.I.6 interrogators proceed with this prime potential source of information, as you called Flugkapitan Reitsch?”

“Well, we evidently don’t use torture, unlike the Germans. She would be subjected to tight, non-stop questioning using strictly psychological tricks, stress positions, sleep and sensory deprivation and so on.”

“How long would you subject her to that treatment, sir?”

“As long as it takes. What’s your point, Commander?”

“My point, General, is that this treatment you described, apart of amounting to mental and psychological torture, would also have been totally unnecessary in the case of Flugkapitan Reitsch.”

Peter then started throwing forward on the table his files one by one as he spoke.

“This is the biographical entry on Hanna Reitsch, including her accomplishments in aviation. This is the list of characteristics of all the so-called secret prototypes she flew, along with the dates and places she flew them. This one contains the service history of the prototypes that made it to the production line. The last file describes the relations between Hanna Reitsch and the Nazi Party. We had all this information since September of 1940, when Nancy Laplante arrived from the future with her computers and her data files. We even used some of that information to raid some critical German installations. In short, General, your goons would have destroyed mentally that woman for no good reason at all. That is why Nancy Laplante protected Reitsch’s identity: to prevent unnecessary suffering to a fellow human being. Is that such a crime, Brigadier?”

“Why did she care so much for Germans?” Replied Menzies, furious at letting himself be trapped by Stilwell. “Besides, who could swear to her true motives? You have only suppositions, Commander.”

“Wrong, sir! I have a written statement from Nancy Laplante, as well as two witnesses. As for why she cared for Reitsch and other Germans, it is simple indeed: she was from the future. In that future, Germany was a trusted ally of both Great Britain and Canada. Nancy actually served with German Army units during joint exercises in Europe and during overseas operations. She did not despise or hate Germans the way many of us do. In fact, the only prejudices Nancy had that I know of was against racists and male chauvinists.”

Many participants smiled at that last remark from Stilwell: Nancy had been widely known as a convinced feminist. With the tension in the room now lowered somewhat, Churchill spoke up.

“Commander, what is that statement you referred to and who are your two witnesses?”

“Mister Prime Minister, I was given yesterday by Nancy’s husband a copy of her last will, along with a letter intended for this government. I would like to read out loud the latter with your permission, sir, along with parts of her will that are relevant to this conversation.”

“Please do, Commander.” Said Churchill softly, then looking sternly around the table. “I will not tolerate any interruptions during the reading of Brigadier Laplante’s last will and of her letter.”

Peter, a lump in his throat, unfolded a few sheets of paper and started reading aloud.

“Dear Prime Minister, this letter is to ask forgiveness for an act that may be construed as an act of treason, but one which I consider merely an act of mercy. One of the female German prisoners held in the Tower of London since Operation BACKSTABBER, Oberhelferin Katharina Fisher, is in reality Flugkapitan Hanna Reitsch, a civilian test pilot at the Focke-Wulf factories in Bremen. I protected her identity in order to avoid her long and brutal interrogations that would be in my mind unnecessary and cruel in view of the amount of information on her contained in my computer files. I further beg the British government to be lenient and humane with Flugkapitan Reitsch and to treat her like the other German women held in the Tower of London. My last wish to the British government is to be buried in London in as simple a ceremony as possible, instead of in Canada. I have yet to set foot in the Canada of the 1940s and consider



London as my true home in this decade. I hope that the Honorable Winston Churchill may find a hole in his busy schedule to do my eulogy at my burial. I would also be eternally grateful to the British government if one of the German Luftwaffe auxiliaries held in the Tower of London, Helferin Ingrid Weiss, was allowed to be one of my pallbearers, alongside my four assistants from the Athena Section and Corporal Megan Thomas, a WAAF serving in R.A.F. Northolt. As I will no longer have the need for them, I wish to inform you as well that, in my last will, I give full possession of all my electronic equipment and data files presently situated in the Athena Section to the British government.”

At that point, Peter looked back at Churchill.

“That was the content of her letter to this government. I will now read excerpts from her last will that will explain further her frame of mind concerning those female German prisoners in the Tower. What that will makes clear is that Nancy Laplante and her husband, Major Mike Crawford of the American embassy, were planning to adopt a young German girl at the end of the war. That girl is fifteen years old, is a war orphan and also happens to be one of the prisoners interned in the Tower of London. Her name is Ingrid Weiss.”

Many officers and ministers tensed up as he then resumed his reading.

“To Ingrid Weiss, born on September 7 of 1925 in Berlin, whom I consider as my adopted daughter for all intents and purposes, I give full possession and use of my two portable music systems and of my library of musical tapes and disks. I also give to Ingrid Weiss the content of my bank savings account, held at the Bank of Midlands on St-James Street.”

Peter looked up at Churchill again.

“That account now holds the sum of 2,342 Sterling Pounds. I understand that Nancy Laplante was not much of a spender, what with all the time she spent either planning or conducting combat operations. Those savings represent strictly her untouched pay.”

“Damn, you could buy a nice car with that sum.” Wondered Sir Newall.

“That money should be confiscated, along with those two portable radios given to that German girl.” Replied wryly Claude Dansey, attracting the ire of Churchill.

“Out of the question! First off, Brigadier Laplante has the legal right to give her money to whoever she wants. Secondly, it is not as if this Ingrid Weiss can go to the bank when she feels like it. As for the two radios, I believe that the security in the Tower

of London is tight enough to prevent Miss Weiss from taking them out of there. What is it between the M.I.5 and Brigadier Laplante, Mister Dansey? First, when she arrived from the future, you wanted to confiscate all her belongings and lock her up for life in an insane asylum, so she could not claim her things back. Now, you seem to want to destroy her reputation at all cost as she lays dead. May I remind you that she proved her loyalty on the battlefield many times and that we are now in the process of winning this war mostly thanks to her? I am not aware of any outstanding credentials on your part, sir.”

As Dansey smarted under the sharp rebuke from the Prime Minister, Churchill looked severely at General Menzies.

“From now on, I will not hear any more accusations of treason or disloyalty against Brigadier Laplante. Am I clear on this?”

“Very clear, sir!” Said Menzies, swallowing hard. Churchill then looked at Peter Stilwell.

“You mentioned two witnesses earlier on, Commander. Who are they?”

“Helferin Ingrid Weiss and Flugkapitan Hanna Reitsch, Mister Prime Minister.”

Churchill smiled at the calm answer from Stilwell, while Menzies and Dansey turned red with indignation.

“I should have guessed so. Their testimony will not be necessary at this time, however.”

Churchill was silent for a moment, looking at the table while collecting his thoughts, then spoke softly.

“I will have to disagree with one of the ultimate requests from Brigadier Laplante: I will be damned if we bury her in London without giving her the honors that she earned so hard. General Ismay, I want from you a list of suggestions about this within three days. Do not hesitate to search for the King’s advice: I know that His Majesty had a lot of admiration for her.”

“It will be done, sir.” Replied soberly the old general.

“Then, gentlemen, let’s discuss now how we are going to keep using Nancy Laplante’s legacy to the best effect to win this war as quickly as possible. I’m open to your suggestions.”

**13:19 (GMT)**

**Office of Governor of the Tower**

**King's House, Tower of London**

Brigadier Charles Browning, having just received a long telephone call from Lieutenant General Ismay, put down his receiver as someone knocked on the door of his office.

"Come in!"

Corporal Ann Myers, one of the military policewomen in charge of the 23 female German prisoners of war held in the Tower of London, then opened the door and came to attention, saluting Browning.

"Sir, Helferin Ingrid Weiss is here, as you requested."

"Good! Let her in, then wait outside, Corporal."

Myers saluted again, then shouted at the young German waiting in the hallway.

"Prisoner, forward...march! Left, right, left, right... Prisoner...halt!"

As soon as Myers closed the door behind her, Browning smiled at the apprehensive-looking girl and spoke to her in German.

"At ease, Helferin Weiss. I know that you asked to see me this morning but I also wanted to see you. Please have a seat."

"Thank you, sir." Said Ingrid softly before taking the chair offered by the old, thin officer. Browning waited for her to be comfortable before speaking again.

"Ingrid, I first want to express my condolences about the death of Nancy Laplante. I knew that you were very close to each other, plus I was just told that she had been planning to adopt you after the end of the war. I am truly sorry for your loss."

"Thank you, sir. You were always a kind man."

"My job is to ensure that you and the other prisoners are safely held and well treated until the end of this war, Ingrid. I have no wish to be harsh with you. What I wanted to tell you is that Nancy Laplante asked in her will that you be one of her pallbearers and that, after a discussion at the highest level, you have been authorized to do so. The only condition will be that you will have to attend the ceremony in civilian clothes. Since I realize that you have no proper civilian clothes for such a formal occasion, I am ready to let you out under escort on Monday to let you buy clothes with the money you just inherited. The burial ceremony is scheduled for next Friday, which will give you ample time to prepare."

Some tears came out from Ingrid's eyes at those words.

"You are most kind, sir. Do you know where Nancy will be buried?"

"Yes, besides Admiral Nelson and the Duke of Wellington, in the crypt of St-Paul's Cathedral. The funeral procession will be led by the King and the Prime Minister. She will get a heroine's farewell, Ingrid, as she deserves."

Ingrid then broke down in tears, prompting Browning into leaving his chair and going to kneel besides her to console her. She was able to speak between sobs after a minute or so.

"Your government's gesture towards her is nice, but I would have preferred to see Nancy return alive instead, sir."

"So do we, Ingrid."

"Sir, about my request to see you this morning, I have a favor to ask from you."

"I will do what I can. What is it, Ingrid?"

The teenager swallowed her last sobs, then spoke in a soft, nearly whispering voice.

"Sir, what I am going to tell you must not be known by my German comrades, as I am not sure how some of them will react to it. While I am officially of Lutheran faith, the religion of my father, my mother was Jewish. She taught me Judaism, along with how to speak and read Hebrew. I also speak Yiddish, but did so only within our house or with other family members in discreet surroundings. Nancy's death has deeply shaken me and I now feel the need to return to my true roots. What I am asking for is the permission to be able to go discreetly pray at a synagogue once a week, preferably on a Saturday, Sabbath day. I realize that I will have to be escorted around but if you could find one of your soldiers that is Jewish, I would eternally be grateful to you, sir."

Truly surprised by this, Browning stared into Ingrid's eyes, trying to gauge how sincere she was. He finally decided that she was only saying the truth and patted gently one of her hands.

"I will see if I can find someone in the Tower, Ingrid. Will you need a special piece of clothing or religious item for your prayers?"

"Only a dark shawl, sir. I was planning to buy one in the next days."

"Then consider your request granted. I will keep you informed on when you will be able to go pray."

A weak smile then appeared for the first time on Ingrid's face.

"Thank you so much, sir. You are truly a kind man."

"It is nothing, Ingrid. You may go back to Gaoler's House now."

The teenager nodded her head and got up, saluting him before leaving the office. Browning waited until the door was closed again before picking up his telephone and calling the guardroom.

“Hello, this is Brigadier Browning. Tell Sergeant Chaney to bring Oberhelferin Fisher to my office right away... Thank you!”

The petite German blonde was marched into Browning’s office twelve minutes later, appearing quite nervous, something understandable in view of her precarious status. Browning returned her salute and stared severely at her.

“Oberhelferin Fisher, or rather Flugkapitan Hanna Reitsch, do you know that assuming a false identity is enough to strip you from the protection you would normally be entitled to under the Geneva Conventions?”

Hanna Reitsch swallowed hard, some sweat appearing on her forehead.

“Yes, sir! I am ready to take whatever punishment you deem appropriate, sir.”

“Well, we can start with one day of extra duties for being improperly dressed, Flugkapitan. From now on you will only wear civilian clothes, as you are not a bona fide serviceperson. As for assuming a false identity, the Prime Minister, after reading a plea in your favor in a letter made by Brigadier Laplante before her death, has decided that no action will be taken against you. You will thus continue to be held here, with the other female German prisoners, but as a civilian internee. As such and in view of your rank of Flugkapitan, you are entitled to a room of your own. Being now as well the officially most senior prisoner in the Tower, I have decided that only one of the V.I.P. rooms of King’s House is fit for you. The one I chose for you was previously occupied in the 16<sup>th</sup> century by Queen Ann Boleyn prior to her execution in 1536. Your day of extra duties will consist in sweeping, dusting and cleaning that room before you can occupy it. Do you have any questions or objections, Flugkapitan Reitsch?”

“Uh, no sir!” Replied Hanna, not believing her luck.

“Then you are dismissed! Sergeant Chaney, you will take the prisoner to Ann Boleyn’s room and make sure that she cleans it thoroughly before moving in.”

“Yes sir!” Shouted Chaney, who then marched Reitsch out of Browning’s office. The Governor of the Tower chuckled to himself while picking his telephone again and calling the orderly room of the Royal Fusiliers Regiment, the unit stationed inside the Tower of London.

**15:02 (GMT)**

**Gaoler's House, Tower of London**

A young British soldier approached Ingrid as she was taking care with other prisoners of a bed of flowers on Tower Green, the grassy square in front of Gaoler's House. The soldier, too timid to address her immediately, simply stood besides her until she noticed him and looked up from her kneeling position. After five months of internment in the Tower of London, Ingrid's English was now quite good.

"Yes, soldier?"

"Uh, you are Private Ingrid Weiss, correct?"

"Yes. Am I requested somewhere?"

The English soldier, a thin young man with a prominent nose and curly black hair, hesitated and looked at the other prisoners nearby, who were now starting to show curiosity at his presence.

"Yes. Could you come with me, please?"

Intrigued, Ingrid nonetheless got up and followed the soldier to the entrance of Gaoler's House, where the British stopped and whispered to her.

"I was sent by Brigadier General Browning to escort you to the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue near here, where I normally pray. My name is Benjamin Lewinski and I'm Jewish."

Ingrid nearly clapped hands with joy but restrained herself in order not to attract the curiosity of her comrades. She did however whisper back to the soldier, in Yiddish this time.

"May God bless you! At what time is the religious service?"

"At five O'clock. We have plenty of time. The Brigadier told me to remind you that you have to be in civilian clothes."

"That's alright: I will go change into a clean fleece sports ensemble. The one thing I don't have however is something to cover my head, like a shawl."

Benjamin smiled and produced a sealed envelope with Ingrid's name on it.

"The Brigadier gave me this for you. It contains twenty Sterling Pounds, an advance from the Brigadier. He said that you can reimburse him later this week, when you will be allowed to go to your bank to get out some money to buy clothes for Brigadier Laplante's funerals. I know a small store on the way to the synagogue where you will be able to buy a shawl and maybe some Jewish religious items. My father owns it."

The malicious way the soldier said those last words made Ingrid smile widely: Benjamin seemed to be a nice young man, even if he was most timid.

“I will go wash and change quickly. Wait here!”

Benjamin had to wait only ten minutes before Ingrid came back, wearing a gray fleece top and trousers, plus a pair of black shoes. He admired her young, beautiful face for a second, her reddish-brown hair held in the back in a ponytail and her blue eyes sparkling with happiness.

“You’re perfect, Ingrid! Let’s go!”

Hauptheferin Sara Wolf, still working with the other German prisoners on the flowerbed, had been watching the conversation between Benjamin and Ingrid and elbowed discreetly Oberheferin Rebekka Lindeiner to attract her attention. Both women had been long recognized by their British guards as being part of a group of six hardcore Nazi sympathizers amongst the 23 female German prisoners in the Tower.

“Rebekka, there is something fishy going on with Ingrid. That British soldier seems to be leading her out of the walls.”

“A British, you said? Say a Jew instead! I can smell his type even at a distance.”

“This is weird. We better talk to Fuhrerin Manheim about this later tonight.”

They both watched as the soldier and Ingrid effectively walked out through the gate of Bloody Tower, then returned to their work, their minds still on that mystery.

Once out of the old fortress, Benjamin, who was armed with a revolver in a belt holster, escorted Ingrid up Tower Hill Street, turning north on Minories Street and following it for 400 meters before arriving at the corner with Aldgate Street. By now, it was obvious to Ingrid that many Jews lived in the area, judging by the inscriptions on the shop fronts. Turning left on Aldgate Street, Benjamin led her to a small pawnshop, gallantly opening the entrance door of the shop for her. The bearded, bespectacled man in his forties standing behind the service counter shouted with both joy and surprise at the sight of Benjamin.

“Ben! What are you doing here at this hour? Aren’t you still on duty?”

“I am on duty, father. This is Helferin Ingrid Weiss, one of the German female auxiliaries held in the Tower. I am escorting her out.”

Abraham Lewinski gave Ingrid a guarded glance, and then looked back at his son, switching from English to Yiddish.

“Are you meshugeh<sup>1</sup>, Benjamin? Why bring a German here, even if she is young and beautiful?”

“Because she is a Jew, father. She hid her true religion up to now in order not to attract the hostility of her German comrades. She asked my commander permission to go pray at the synagogue, so I was chosen to escort her, since I regularly go pray each Friday.”

“If she’s a German Jew, why did she volunteer to serve the Nazis? As a woman, she could not be conscripted against her will.”

“I enrolled in the Luftwaffe after my whole family was wiped out in a British bombing raid on Berlin, Mister Lewinski.” Said Ingrid in Yiddish, surprising Abraham. “I was then an angry, insecure fifteen year-old girl who mostly wanted to help protect her country from the enemy bombers who had killed her parents and siblings. Since I always had an interest in flying and in aircraft, I enrolled in the Luftwaffe as an air situation plotter. I joined to serve my country, not the Nazis.”

“Why didn’t you declare yourself as a Jew when you were brought here, instead of waiting until now?”

“Because I didn’t want to abandon my comrades, most of whom are no more Nazis than I am. What decided me to switch back to the religion of my father was the recent death of my adoptive mother, Brigadier Nancy Laplante. I desperately need to renew contact with God.”

Abraham opened his eyes wide at those words. Laplante’s death had been announced on the BBC radio at noon and had caused him no little grief. The Canadian time traveler had been after all their best chance at ending this war quickly and thus put an end to the suffering of the Jews in Europe. Abraham looked back at Benjamin, who answered his silent question.

“It is true, father. The Governor of the Tower confirmed to me that Brigadier Laplante was planning to officially adopt Ingrid at the end of the war. I can tell you personally that Brigadier Laplante always showed great affection towards her and was very protective of her.”

Abraham looked back at Ingrid with new respect and bowed his head in salute.

“You must be someone quite special to have conquered the heart of such a woman, Miss Weiss. Were you looking for something to buy here?”

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<sup>1</sup> Meshugeh: Crazy in Yiddish



"I was, Mister Lewinski. I was looking for a dark shawl, to cover my head for the prayers. I was also hoping to find a prayer book in Hebrew."

"Those two items I have, miss." Declared Abraham before leading her to the back of the room, where used clothes were suspended on coat racks. He searched for a moment through the racks and took out three shawl, all of dark color but of varying pattern and tone.

"This is all the choice I have in shawls, miss. Which one do you like best?" Ingrid looked briefly at the three shawls before pointing at one of them.

"I will take the dark gray one. It will fit better with my present clothes." Abraham looked with some reprobation at her fleece suit.

"They may be modest enough for praying but I wouldn't call them exactly stylish, miss. A young beauty like you deserves better clothes than this." Ingrid sighed and nodded her head.

"I couldn't agree more with you, Mister Lewinski, but I have very little leeway presently on what I can wear. It was this or my Luftwaffe uniform. I suspect that the latter would not have been welcome at the synagogue."

"I can't imagine why." Said Abraham sarcastically. "Let's see the prayer books now."

Going to a shelf unit full of used books and various objects, he showed two books to Ingrid. One was smaller than the other and was barely bigger than Ingrid's hand, but was beautifully decorated with gold lettering. The bigger one was easier to read but was also quite plain. Ingrid chose the smaller book, prompting a warning look from Abraham.

"This is effectively a nice book, miss, but it is also an expensive one. It is tagged at fifteen pounds."

"And how much is the shawl?"

"I am ready to leave it to you for ten shillings, miss."

"Then I will take both." Said Ingrid while taking out the envelope given to her by Benjamin and counting sixteen pounds. Abraham gave her a surprised look as he took the money.

"The British let you keep this much money, miss?"

"Actually, my adoptive mother left me an inheritance. No need to pack these things: I will be using them soon."

"As you wish, miss."

Going to the cash register, Abraham got her change and gave it to Ingrid while smiling widely.

“Thank you for coming, miss, and welcome back to our faith.”

“Thank you, Mister Lewinski. You were most kind.”

Ingrid then left the shop with Benjamin, her prayer book in one pocket and her shawl tied over her hair. Abraham followed the couple with his eyes as they crossed the street and headed towards the nearby synagogue, then shook his head in wonderment.

## **19:26 (GMT)**

### **Gaoler’s House, Tower of London**

Ingrid was feeling nearly at peace with herself as she entered Gaoler’s House: the service at the synagogue had gone well for her, with the congregation accepting her after a touching speech from the rabbi, who had interceded in her favor. The pain from losing Nancy was still there but now she had somewhere to go to get comfort and relief. Half a dozen of the female prisoners were sitting around a massive oak table and playing cards when she entered. Silence fell as all eyes became fixed on her. Ingrid hesitated for a moment, then smiled to the others and started heading towards the staircase. The harsh voice of Fuhrerin Greta Manheim stopped her.

“Hold it there, Helferin Weiss! Where have you been all this time outside the walls?”

Ingrid turned around to face her, answering firmly but politely.

“I was getting ready for the incoming funerals of Nancy Laplante, Fuhrerin. Nancy asked in her will that I be one of her pallbearers and the British accepted to let me go. I simply got briefed on the incoming ceremony. The burial will be next Friday.”

“You are planning to attend a ceremony for an enemy of the Reich? That is...”

“That is none of your business, Manheim!” Declared Hanna Reitsch, who was stepping out of the restroom adjacent to the hall and who had heard the exchange. She walked to one end of the table and stared hard at the Luftwaffe matron.

“Manheim, you try to cause more trouble to Ingrid because of this and you will have to answer to me. Brigadier Laplante may have been an enemy of the Reich but she was no enemy of the German people. Even I can see and accept that. Furthermore, she was always a fair and compassionate enemy. That is rare enough in war to warrant respect. I would be in a British interrogation cell if not for her and that

nearly caused her to be branded a traitor by the British. So, cut the patriotic crap and try using your heart for once, if you have one.”

Subdued by the fierce tone of the small but energetic pilot, Manheim could do nothing but sit back and swallow her anger as Ingrid climbed the steps towards her room. She swore mentally to herself that the young bitch was going to pay for this one fine day.

**15:14 (GMT)**

**Friday, July 4, 1941 'C'**

**St-Paul's Cathedral**

**London**

Peter O'Neal was listening only occasionally to the eulogy given by the Prime Minister. He was still trying to figure out who was the teenage girl sitting across from him and the other reporters in the Chapel of the Order of St-Michael and St-George, one of the six chapels contained inside St-Paul's Cathedral. While the crowd admitted to Nancy Laplante's funeral was small, due to the limited size of the chapel, it more than made it up with its composition. Apart from the royal family, most members of the cabinet were there, along with many generals and admirals. The lowest ranking persons present, not counting the reporters, were the six pallbearers. O'Neal knew four of them as being Laplante's assistants, while the young WAAF corporal was rumored to have been the first person to have met Laplante after she had arrived from the future. That left the tall teenage girl in black mourning dress sitting besides Nancy Laplante's husband, Major Mike Crawford.

O'Neal was brought back to reality when the spectators around him rose to their feet, signaling that the ceremony was ending. Getting to his feet, he watched intently the teenage girl in black take her position at one side of the coffin and help pick it up from its pedestal. Preceded by the priest who had officiated the ceremony and by two choir boys, Nancy Laplante's coffin was brought to the South transept of the cathedral, then down the stairs leading to the crypt, the crowd of mourners in tow. Six royal guardsmen in red parade uniform and a bagpipe player were waiting for them by the side of an open sarcophagus made of white marble. Peter O'Neal then realized with a shock that Laplante's sarcophagus was close to that of the Duke of Wellington, while the one containing the remains of Admiral Nelson was not far away. After the coffin was laid on

supporting straps on top of the open sarcophagus, the priest said a last prayer before the bagpipe player started a moving rendition of 'Amazing grace'. That was the signal for the six guardsmen to free the straps and start slowly lowering the coffin in the sarcophagus while everybody stood at attention, with the military men present saluting. Mike Crawford, himself crying, had to support the teenage girl, who was overcome with grief. O'Neal himself had a big lump in his throat as the coffin disappeared inside the sarcophagus. While his interest for Nancy Laplante had been mostly professional, he had always admired her and had started to feel more than a little attraction towards her. The final resting place chosen for her was a most fitting one for such a person of exception, at least in his mind. He knew that some reporters still resented her strong feminist views and had tried to find fault with her in their articles. Fortunately, very few readers believed those articles by now.

The last act of the ceremony was the handing over of Laplante's medals, laid on a red cushion, by the King to Major Crawford, who accepted them with tears in his eyes. The mourners then dispersed, the heavy bronze lid of the sarcophagus to be put on and sealed only later in the evening. Peter O'Neal stayed discreetly behind a stone pillar then, waiting to follow Major Crawford and the teenager, who were consoling each other by the side of the sarcophagus. They eventually left the crypt, O'Neal following them discreetly, and exited the cathedral, going to Laplante's car, a red Mitsubishi OUTLANDER 2010 that was by now known throughout London. O'Neal ran to his car and started the engine as the OUTLANDER was pulling out of its parking spot. To his surprise, instead of heading West towards Crawford's apartment, the car sped eastward. With its distinctive shape and color, the OUTLANDER was however easy to follow and O'Neal had no trouble keeping behind it, observing a cautious distance in order not to be spotted. He was not a little surprised when the OUTLANDER finally stopped in front of the drawbridge marking the entrance to the Tower of London. The teenage girl got out and gave a quick kiss to Crawford, then walked towards the fortified gate of the Middle Tower, the cushion with Laplante's medals in her hands. The two soldiers standing guard there briefly stopped the girl, with one of them grabbing a telephone and talking briefly in it. The soldiers then let the girl proceed to the Byward Tower gate, where she disappeared inside the fortress. Now frankly intrigued, O'Neal got out of his car and walked to the gate of the Middle Tower, flashing a smile at the two soldiers there. He

decided that playing the donkey could possibly get him some information the soldiers might otherwise not volunteer.

“Good afternoon, gentlemen! I saw by chance that young woman walk inside while bearing a row of medals on a cushion. It can’t be her medals, right?”

His apparently naïve question made the two soldiers broke out in laughter.

“A German, having the Victoria Cross? Having any woman win it was already pushing it far but that would be the end of everything.”

“A German? What is she doing here, in civilian clothes?” Asked a flabbergasted O’Neal. The senior soldier, a corporal, gave him a derisive look.

“Don’t you know that we’re holding 23 female German prisoners of war here, in the Tower? That young Ingrid Weiss is one of them. She was quite cozy with Brigadier Laplante, to whom the medals belonged. In fact, if Laplante would not have been so well known for bedding men left and right, I would have thought that the two of them were lovers.”

“That young Ingrid would be one nice thing to have in bed.” Added the other soldier. “She’s a real looker and one hell of a firebrand, German or not.”

“Hey!” Said the corporal in fake protest. “Don’t you know that the laws of war prohibit the rape of enemy women?”

“I know that! It makes me long for the good old medieval days of rape, loot and pillage.”

The two soldiers then laughed hard again. O’Neal laughed with them in order to play his role, then thanked the soldiers and returned to his car. Driving away, he stopped and parked one block away, in order to think over what he had just learned. O’Neal was fully aware how damaging to the reputation of Nancy Laplante the public knowledge of her affection towards a German would be. He personally didn’t object to such an unlikely affection: he was open-minded enough to accept that it could be based simply on mutual friendship and also knew how tolerant and compassionate Laplante had been. Despite the fact that this story was definitely a hot one, O’Neal decided that he was not going to publish it: Nancy Laplante’s name deserved to be respected, not reviled.

**17:18 (GMT)**

**Gaoler’s House, Tower of London**

Hanna Reitsch was sitting at the large table in the ground level hall of Gaoler's House, along with Gruppenfuhrerin Lisa hartmann, Unterfuhrerin Anna Hauser and Oberhelferin Bertha Reinholdt, when Ingrid Weiss slowly entered the hall. Everybody fell silent as Ingrid approached them and put a red cushion on the table, numerous medals carefully pinned to it.

"This...this is all that is left of Nancy now." She said tearfully before sitting besides Hanna and burying her head in her arms, crying shamelessly. Hanna Reitsch caressed one of the medals, which bore the inscription 'Peacekeeping – Au service de la paix<sup>2</sup>', then hugged tenderly the teenager.

**14:50 (GMT)**

**Friday, July 11, 1941 'C'**

**Athena Section, Home Office building**

**London**

"You wanted to see me, Peter?" Asked Reginald Jones, sticking his head inside Stilwell's private office.

"Yes, Reginald. I need your help as a physicist to understand fully this report on the project 'Tubes Alloys'. I am afraid that physics was not my strong suit in college. Did you read this report?"

"I did, as a matter of fact. Do you want me to explain to you its main points?"

"That would be greatly appreciated. I still don't know how Nancy managed to understand all this technological stuff."

Reginald gave him a sober look then.

"Peter, she may not have been an engineer or a scientist, but she was a self-taught woman who read widely on all aspects of technology. From the speed she grasped some of my technical briefings, I also suspect that her I.Q. must have been in the high 140s or even past 150. She was just not anybody."

"I know!" Replied sadly Peter, visualizing for a moment Nancy's smiling, beautiful face. "Please go on."

Jones scanned the first pages of the report quickly before resuming them.

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<sup>2</sup> Au service de la paix: 'In the service of peace' in French

“The Canadians report that the work on the atomic reactor at Chalk River is going well, with completion expected in about a month. From there, they will immediately start producing plutonium from irradiated natural uranium, since Nancy’s data on nuclear weapons made most preliminary research work unnecessary. We saved at least two years of intensive work just there. That data also saved another year or more of bungling around on the design of the bomb itself. It seems that the first American atomic bombs made in the original history were very wasteful of fissile material. Ours will be an implosion type device with a yield of about twenty kilotons and a weight of no more than two tons, thus compatible with our actual heavy bombers. Also, contrary to the Americans, we will not pursue the uranium 235 road, which would have entailed immense efforts at separating the various uranium isotopes. To top the cake, once successfully tested, that atomic bomb design will become the core for a thermonuclear weapon with a yield of about two megatons. Again, Nancy’s data saved us a lot of work there, possibly up to eight years. Once we have those bombs in service, we will be able to dictate an end to this war on our own terms and will also gain world supremacy, whether the Americans like it or not.”

Peter couldn’t help shoot a worried look at the physicist.

“Reginald, I can’t help feel bad about keeping the Americans totally out of this project. Remember Nancy’s warnings about playing nuclear king of the hill.”

As if on cue, Stilwell’s telephone rang, making Peter pick it up quickly.

“Commander Stilwell here!... Ah, good day to you, General Walker. What can I do for you?... Where did it crash?... My God! I...I will advise Ingrid Weiss right away about this... You already did?... Thank you for telling us, sir. Please keep us informed if they find anything, sir... Thank you again, sir.”

“What was that all about?” Asked Jones, alarmed by the distress on Peter’s face as he put down the telephone. “What did the American Defense Attaché want?”

“Brigadier General Walker just advised me that the plane transporting Major Mike Crawford and other officers recalled to the United States crashed in the North Atlantic yesterday. Two ships searched the area for nearly a day, without results. General Walker has already visited Ingrid Weiss in the Tower of London to give her the sad news.”

“My God, the poor girl!” Whispered Jones sadly. “First Nancy, now Mike Crawford. We should go visit her and try to comfort her.”

“That is a kind thought, Reginald. However, we should let her some time to quiet down after receiving such awful news. I will visit her tomorrow evening.”

Jones was silent for a moment, then looked eyes with Peter.

“You know as well as me that Nancy was planning to adopt Ingrid at the end of the war. With Mike gone, she should be entitled to inherit the rest of Nancy’s things, including her car, that is after the end of the war, of course.”

“General Walker already has that covered, Reginald. He is in possession of a will from Mike that gives everything he had here, including Nancy’s car and electronic appliances, to Ingrid. I will however discuss that subject with Brigadier Browning tomorrow, when I will visit Ingrid.”

**19:18 (GMT)**

**Saturday, July 12, 1941 ‘C’**

**Gaoler’s House, Tower of London**

“What do you mean, attacked?” Asked Peter Stilwell in surprise and shock to Hanna Reitsch as they both stood in the main hall of Gaoler’s House. The female aviator appeared embarrassed, even shameful as she answered him.

“Someone attacked Ingrid and beat her up badly last night, while she was sleeping in her room. She is now in the hospital block, across the inner yard.”

Peter could sense that she was not telling everything and stared down at her.

“Flugkapitan, you are one of Ingrid’s best friends here. I am also one of her friends, whether you believe it or not. What really happened?”

“I...I must let Ingrid tell you herself, Commander. I will lead you to the hospital.”

Walking out of Gaoler’s House and past the huge mass of the White Tower occupying the center of the inner yard of the fortress, Stilwell and Reitsch soon entered the Tower’s hospital, where a British military doctor led them to a private room. Stilwell winced when he saw Ingrid Weiss in her bed: her face was puffy, with one eye black and shut, both lips split open and with bruises all over her face. Her ribs had been bandaged, telling him that some of them had been broken or cracked. Approaching to just besides her bed, Peter whispered softly to Ingrid, who appeared drowsy.

“Ingrid... Ingrid. It’s Commander Stilwell. I’m with Flugkapitan Reitsch. What happened last night?”



“She is on pain killers, Commander.” Explained Hanna when Ingrid would not react at first. After repeating his question, Peter finally got a clipped answer in a slurred speech.

“Was sleeping... Didn’t see who... Many, saying ‘Jewish bitch’ or ‘dirty Jew’... I passed out.”

“Jewish bitch?” Said Peter, confused. Hanna explained for him.

“Commander, I didn’t know it before last night, but it seems that Ingrid is actually Jewish through her parents. Since the death of Nancy Laplante, she has been praying a lot, going out of the Tower with a military escort to go pray. She kept her newfound faith secret, something that now appears to have been a wise move. Somebody however must have found out and then attacked her out of ingrained racism.”

“And you, Flugkapitan? We know from Nancy’s data that you were a fervent Nazi sympathizer and a fan of Adolph Hitler. Didn’t it shock you to learn that Ingrid was a Jew?”

Hanna bowed her head in shame.

“At first, yes. Then I thought about how Nancy Laplante, who was no lover of Nazis, accepted and protected me, showing a degree of open-mindedness I would not have been capable of before. Ingrid is my friend, whatever her faith is, and I intend to support and protect her in this, like many of the other prisoners.”

Peter nodded, satisfied, then looked back at Ingrid.

“Ingrid, the voices of the persons beating you, were they speaking German or English?”

“German...at least three persons.”

“Alright, Ingrid, let us handle this now. Rest and get well soon: I will visit you again during the next days.”

Peter then led Hanna out of Ingrid’s room and spoke to her in a low voice, so that the medical staff around couldn’t hear him.

“Flugkapitan, if someone could attack Ingrid once, it means that this could happen again in the future, maybe with more serious consequences. Ingrid could even be killed one night by the jackals that did this. I believe that she should be moved out of the Tower of London, for her own safety.”

“But her best friends are here, Commander. She will never agree to abandon Frida Winterer, Johanna Fink, Bertha Reinholdt or Susanna Berghof, to name just a few.”

“Alright, if she has so many friends, she should not have too many enemies here then, no?”

“I know a few.” Said Hanna hesitantly. “You will understand if I am hesitant to denounce a fellow German to you British.”

“I was expecting that, Flugkapitan, and can understand your reluctance. We need however to do something to ensure the safety of Ingrid in the Tower. If we can’t, then she will have to be moved. Were you planning to try to resolve this problem between yourselves?”

“That would still be the best solution for all, I believe, Commander. Brigadier Browning has already given me a two-day ultimatum to iron out this problem. There is already a military investigation going on anyway. Please let me handle this my way for the next days. If we still have a problem, then I will accept whatever measures you British deem necessary.”

“That sounds fair enough to me, Flugkapitan. I will now escort you back to Gaoler’s House.”

They walked back together in silence, both preoccupied by Ingrid’s dangerous situation. They shook hands in front of Gaoler’s House before Peter left the fortress. Hanna watched him walk away, silently thanking fate for having brought such a decent man to the help of Ingrid. She then entered the old Tudor building and went to each of its four levels, shouting in each room.

“EVERYBODY DOWN IN THE MAIN HALL, NOW! GENERAL MEETING!”

Then returning to the ground level main hall, Hanna soon had the other 21 female prisoners facing her, wearing either their uniforms or informal sports gear. She scanned each of the faces slowly, gauging their attitudes. Hanna already had quite a good idea about who had been involved in beating Ingrid, but still hoped that the culprits would be honest enough to publicly stand by their bad deed. She didn’t think that Gruppenfuhrerin Lisa Hartmann had been involved, though: while being a thoroughly indoctrinated Nazi, she was not mean enough in Hanna’s mind to beat up the teenager. On the other hand, Fuhrerin Greta Manheim and Fuhrerin Grete Meissner were exactly the kind to commit such an act. She looked at them hard while speaking in a harsh, clipped voice.

“You probably all know why I called you here, so let’s not waste time. As the senior prisoner here, one of my duties is to ensure the safety of all of you. We are all Germans and we were all serving our country when we were captured. We thus have a

duty to support each other while in the hands of our enemies. Helferin Weiss had understood that and had proved her solidarity with us even as she formed a bond of friendship with Brigadier Laplante, a woman I myself respected greatly. Helferin Weiss was hit hard by Laplante's death and returned to the Jewish faith of her parents, but still stayed with us. We all know how much of a stigma being a Jew is nowadays in Germany and I won't fault her from hiding her faith, especially since that fact did not change her loyalty towards our group. She is thus worthy of our protection and support. What happened last night was nothing but a total disgrace and an act of rank cowardice. Ganging up on a sleeping teenager at night to beat her is an act unworthy of any true German. Those who committed that act now have a choice: you can either show some honesty and courage now by stepping forward and acknowledging your participation in that beating; or you can hide in this group and earn our collective contempt. First of, which ones of you knew that Ingrid was a Jew?"

Frida Winterer, Bertha Reinholdt and Susanna Berghof stepped forward without hesitation, followed a few seconds later by Mathilda Reichenberg. Hanna Reitsch looked at Reichenberg, a young Luftwaffe haupt Helferin<sup>3</sup> she knew to be a member of the National-Socialist Party, like her.

"Haupt Helferin Reichenberg, did you attack Helferin Weiss last night?"

"No, Flugkapitan!"

"Ober Helferin Reinholdt, Helferinen Berghof and Winterer, did you attack Helferin Weiss last night?"

"No, Flugkapitan!" Answered in unison the three auxiliaries. Hanna nodded her head, her face still stone hard.

"I believe all four of you. You had the courage to acknowledge a fact that would make you suspects in the beating of Helferin Weiss. Others in our group did not have such courage, though."

Hanna then stared hard at Manheim and Meissner.

"As senior auxiliaries, I expected much better from you, Fuhrerinen Manheim and Meissner. I know for a fact that you knew about Weiss' newfound religious faith: you swore loud enough about it for me to hear. So did you, Ober Helferin Lindeiner. If anything, you were the most venomous of the lot. Yet, none of you three had the

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<sup>3</sup> Haupt Helferin: German female auxiliary rank equivalent to a master-corporal

honesty to acknowledge this in front of the group. I now give you a second chance to confess.”

Meissner looked down at Hanna with contempt.

“A chance to confess what, exactly? Jews are the enemies of the German people. I have done nothing to be ashamed of.”

Ingrid’s three best friends stared angrily at the matron, with young Frida Winterer shouting at Meissner.

“You beat up Ingrid while she was sleeping and you find nothing shameful in this? You’re nothing but a jackal, Fuhrerin or not.”

“Helferin Winterer, keep silent!” Shouted Hanna. “I am the one doing the disciplining here.”

Hanna then stared back at Meissner.

“Fuhrerin Meissner, you just proved yourself to be unworthy of both our trust and of your rank. I do not intend to point you to the British, since I wish to preserve the solidarity of this group. However, I do expect you to move to one of the free rooms in the attic, away from the rooms of the others. I expect the others involved in yesterday’s beating to move up to the attic as well and to refrain from trying to intimidate the other members of our group. If anything else happens to Helferin Weiss in the future, then I will have no qualms to ask the British to move you out of this building.”

“Who the hell do you think you are, Reitsch?” Shouted Greta Manheim. “You’re just a fucking civilian!”

Lisa Hartmann finally reacted, coming out of her lethargy and jumping to her feet.

“Fuhrerin Manheim, Flugkapitan Reitsch is a pilot, thus of officer status. She was also decorated by the Fuhrer himself. If I can defer to her authority, so can you. You, Meissner and Lindeiner will move upstairs to the attic tonight and will keep your peace with Helferin Weiss. Is that understood?”

The three hardcore Nazis came to attention, having no choice but to obey the senior auxiliary.

“Yes, Gruppenfuhrerin!”

Once the three women had marched upstairs to move their things, Hartmann looked more gently at Reinholdt, Berghof and Winterer.

“I will ask you three to move Ingrid’s things out of her present room, which is too close from the attic to my taste. Which one of you would be willing to share your room with her?”

All three raised their hands. Frida Winterer then stepped forward.

“Ingrid is my best friend, Gruppenfuhrerin. I will be most happy to share my room with her.”

“Excellent! Let’s do it, then.”

Hanna Reitsch approached Hartmann as the other women were dispersing, presenting her right hand to the tall blonde.

“Thank you for your support, Gruppenfuhrerin. This could have turned quite ugly.”

“It still could.” Said Lisa, bitter. “I never loved Jews myself but Helferin Weiss has won my respect for her courage and sense of comradeship. If she is attacked again, then I won’t have any hesitation in asking the British to move Meissner and her clique out of the Tower. In the meantime, I will ask you and the others to keep a protective eye on Ingrid.”

“You can count on me, Gruppenfuhrerin.” Replied firmly the petite aviator.

## **CHAPTER 3 – PROTECTOR OF PALESTINE**

**09:53 (Jerusalem Time)**

**Thursday, November 5, 1942 'B'**

**Main entrance, King David Hotel**

**Jerusalem, Palestine**

The British Army captain waiting in front of the entrance of the King David Hotel, which housed the British Grand Headquarters and the offices of the mandated government in Palestine, nervously looked at his watch for the third time in the last minute. His job was to give enough warning to the honor guard inside the main lobby of the hotel about the arrival of the V.I.P. they were expecting. The problem was that the Time Patrol had specified the time and place of arrival but not the mode of transportation of the person who would take over the hot potato that was Palestine from the hands of the British government. Captain Larkin was thus looking literally in all directions, attempting to detect the approach of either some kind of motorcade or, more probably, of some flying craft. Larkin was not exactly prepared for what he finally saw coming from the sky. His eyes bulging out, he stared upwards for a few seconds, then turned around and shouted at the major standing in the doorway of the hotel.

“SHE’S COMING DOWN, SIR! ALONE!”

As the major nodded in acknowledgement and disappeared inside the lobby, the passersby walking along the King David Avenue also started looking skyward, stopping cold where they were and shouting their surprise. A few seconds later, a tall young woman wearing a silvery Time Patrol parade uniform seemingly covered with medals and decorations landed smoothly in front of Larkin, who came to attention and saluted.

“Welcome to Jerusalem, maam! I am Captain Peter Larkin, your escort for this ceremony. Uh, is anyone else due to arrive with you, maam?”

Nancy Laplante returned his salute before answering with a smile.

“My staff will arrive later by air in our flying command post, Captain. Could you make sure that the site of the military camp just vacated east of the hotel is kept empty of any vehicle or other obstructions?”

“Of course, maam!” Replied Larkin politely before taking out a small radio and speaking in it for a minute, relaying Nancy’s instructions to the lieutenant in charge of the campground. He then pointed at the hotel entrance.

“If you would please follow me, General Maitland-Wilson is expecting you inside the hotel lobby, maam.”

“With pleasure, Captain.”

As he was walking besides Laplante, Larkin was mentally wondering how she could have flown the way she had done. There was no obvious flying device on her and her uniform molded her body in a most delightful way that also would have revealed any mechanism close to her skin. Larkin had heard that Laplante had some incredible powers but then there were all kinds of rumors flying around concerning her, each more fantastic than the other. Giving up on this mystery, Larkin concentrated instead on following the rules of decorum for the welcoming ceremony. Lieutenant General Sir Henry Maitland-Wilson, in full parade uniform and wearing a long row of medals, greeted Nancy with a salute and a handshake once she entered the luxurious lobby of the King David Hotel.

“Miss Laplante, it is a true pleasure to meet you in person. I’m Sir Henry Maitland-Wilson, Commander of the British forces in Palestine.”

“Pleased to meet you, General. By the way, I should by all rights be the one to salute you first.”

“Nonsense!” Replied Maitland-Wilson while pointing at Nancy’s Victoria Cross with two bars. “I would salute first anyone wearing the VC. Besides, you are here to take over Palestine from Sir Harold MacMichael, which certainly puts your position above mine. Would you like to review the honor guard, miss?”

“With pleasure, General.”

The two of them, accompanied by the major in charge of the honor guard, then reviewed the company of British infantrymen while Larkin waited besides the bank of elevators near the reception counter. Once the inspection was done, Nancy followed Maitland-Wilson and Larkin inside one elevator and went up with them to the fifth floor of the hotel, then walked down the main hallway leading to the South wing, where the British staff had its offices. Larkin had to wait in the hallway as Nancy was introduced into the royal suite occupied by Sir Harold Alfred MacMichael, the British High Commissioner for Palestine. The sixty year-old career public administrator was flanked by his top aides and assistants as he shook hands with Nancy in the middle of a luxurious lounge.

“Miss Laplante, I would be lying if I said that I was sad to leave my place to you. Palestine is one difficult place to administer and an even more dangerous one to live in, as you may quickly discover.”

“I have no illusions about how difficult this job will be, Sir Harold. I however do have a few aces up my sleeve that should help me. For one thing, I spent four of my previous lives in this land and knows from historical hindsight what the dangers facing me are.”

Sir Harold glanced at the door of the suite, then back at Nancy.

“I thought that you would have brought your own staff for this official takeover ceremony, miss.”

“They are about to arrive by air, Sir Harold. Once they have landed, I will have them start the actual turnover of official documents and information with your staff.”

“Uh, would it be too indiscreet to ask in passing what the various digging sites that were started around Palestine by your machines three days ago are about, miss?”

“They are foundations for a large number of prefabricated buildings due to be flown in place soon. These buildings will in turn shelter various types of facilities, including housing units for Jewish immigrants from Europe.”

Sir Harold gave her a cautious look at those last words.

“Those immigrants may spark a violent Arab reaction, miss. We lived through this already.”

“I know, Sir Harold.” Said soberly Nancy. “I believe however that I have a way to convince the Palestinian Arabs to accept peacefully those new immigrants.”

“I hope so for you, miss. Shall we sit to continue this conversation?”

“By all means, Sir Harold.”

Once they were all sitting in the sofas of the lounge, Nancy resumed the conversation, looking around at the British administrators surrounding her.

“Gentlemen, what you have seen of our preparations up to now is actually quite deceiving. In reality our machines have been working for over two weeks, but their work was underground. Our robots have by now built a complete underground network of pipelines crisscrossing most of Palestine. These pipelines will soon be connected to nine big water desalination plants that will be flown in place tonight. Once that is done, we will have enough fresh water to triple the agricultural output of the country. We will also introduce an agricultural technique that is well developed in the 34<sup>th</sup> century, that of hydroponics. Hydroponics resembles in a way cultures in greenhouses, except that you



don't use dirt to grow plants. Instead, you can use fine pebbles, glass or plastic beads or even coarse sand as the supporting medium for the plants, in combination with a fertilizer solution. The results are bigger and tastier produces and multiple crops per year, whatever the climate turns out to be in Palestine. Since the new settlements will be on lands that are unoccupied and are normally unsuited to agriculture, the Arab Palestinians will have no motives to complain. Besides, they will also benefit from the new infrastructure, with new water sources, free schools and medical care and other social benefits."

The British looked at each other in surprise, with Sir Harold giving a cautious nod to Nancy.

"This could actually work with most of the people in Palestine, miss, but we have learned to our sorrow that there are plenty of extremists who will settle for nothing short of their own personal dreams, which rarely take account of those with possible dissenting opinions. How will you control these extremists?"

"I will try reason on them first, Sir Harold. If that doesn't work, then I will use overwhelming force and simply eliminate them, the way the Japanese Army was exterminated. I will have at my disposal over 2400 combat robots to keep law and order in Palestine. I am ready to show mercy and compassion to those who deserve it, but I will be ruthless with those ready to use violence for political purposes. I will rule the Holy Land for the good of all, not for the good of a few, as was too often the case in the past. Some may call me a dictator for the way I will rule but that is what I will be in essence: a benevolent dictator with the goal of bringing peace and prosperity to the Holy Land."

One of Sir Harold's assistants, who wore a British police uniform, then spoke up politely.

"Miss, I'm Alan Saunders, Inspector General of Police and Prisons for Palestine. The directives we got from London said that we will have to turn over all aspects of the local administration to you in one week's time, by which time we will leave Palestine. There was also a request to canvas our British police officers and constables to see who would be interested in staying behind and continue working here as local citizens. Some of my men stated their desire to stay but many more are still undecided, since they don't know exactly what to expect to happen in Palestine in the coming future. The security of their families also weigh heavily on their minds."

A soft expression appeared on Nancy's face at the mention of families.

"Tell them that their families will be well taken care of and that I will support them to the utmost. Tell them also that, for those willing to stay, pay, conditions of service and

social amenities will be substantially improved. That, by the way, will also apply to all British civil servants and officials willing to stay in the Holy Land. The whole local administration will be reformed, with the emphasis put on merit and competence and with the goal of making services to the public more accessible and just. You will all get more details about this during your turnover briefings.”

Nancy then looked at her watch and got up from her sofa, pointing at the nearest window, which was facing east towards the old city.

“If you may approach the windows, gentlemen, my flying command post is about to land.”

The seventeen British men got up eagerly and went to the windows, scanning the sky for an incoming ship. General Maitland-Wilson pointed at the vacated campgrounds situated between the King David Hotel and the walls of the old city.

“Either your ship is a small one or your pilot is a good one, miss: the campgrounds are at most 150 yards to the side.”

Nancy grinned at that remark.

“My pilot is indeed good, General, but my command post is anything but small. There it is, in fact.”

A concert of exclamations came out of the assembled British when what looked like a huge tower building appeared from above, descending slowly above the campgrounds. As tall as a 40-storey building, it was made of brass-plated structural framing and sky blue-tinted false mirror windows. The massive polygonal base, under which dozens of large landing legs were visible, was of polished copper color and had only a few large windows, contrary to the tower, with its curved Plexiglas reflective walls, that sat on the base. The top of the tower was distinctly wider than its bottom part and what looked like a big landing pad sat atop the structure. The flying building landed smoothly in the middle of the campgrounds, nearly covering the whole of its surface. After maybe a minute, a wide ramp lowered to the ground under the base, while a series of metallic, copper-tinted plates deployed to cover the gaps between the sides of the base and the ground. Four long metallic arms supporting a number of antennas and electronic arrays last deployed near the top of the structure.

“Well, I’ll be...” Muttered Sir Harold, who then looked with sparkling eyes at Nancy.

“If this doesn’t impress the local population, miss, then nothing will.”

“Actually, Sir Harold, I am planning to impress them mostly with the benefits they will gain from living in peace in the Holy Land.” Replied Nancy, looking down thoughtfully at the crowd quickly gathering around the newly arrived building.

### **13:30 (Jerusalem Time)**

#### **Executive conference room, 35<sup>th</sup> floor**

#### **Time Patrol Regional Command Module**

#### **Jerusalem, Palestine**

Nancy banged her gavel twice to quiet down the men sitting around the big conference table and then looked in turn at each of them. If not for the presence of a few combat robots standing against the walls of the large conference room, some of her guests would probably have jumped at the throats of each other. To say that the atmosphere was tense would have been a huge understatement.

“Gentlemen,” she said firmly in Arabic, “we are here to bring peace to the Holy Land, so I will appreciate if you could forget your animosities and concentrate on what I will tell you.”

Nancy then repeated herself in Hebrew before switching on the simultaneous translation system and continuing in English.

“You all got a brief explanation a few minutes ago on how to use the translation system. I will however ask you to ask permission to speak first and to not interrupt each other. That will make life much easier on our translators. First, let me present myself. I am Nancy Laplante, Overseer of the Holy Land. My goal is to bring peace, justice and prosperity to this land and I was given full powers by the Time Patrol and the British government to attain that goal. I am committed to improving the lives of all who live in the Holy Land, irrespective of their ethnicity, religion or sex. I am also committed to offering asylum in the Holy Land to many unfortunate European Jews who barely survived the Nazi holocaust that took place during the recent war. However, that will not be done at the expense of the present inhabitants of this land.”

“And how do you propose to do that, miss?” Asked in a skeptical tone the Mufti<sup>4</sup> of Jerusalem, Hajj Amin al-Husseini. “How could you bring more Jews to Palestine without creating prejudice to us Arabs?”

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<sup>4</sup> Mufti: Top Muslim religious cleric

“Before I answer that, I want to make a point that may be of crucial importance: from now on, this land will be known as the Holy Land, and not as Palestine. It will be an independent, secular state with its own money, constitution, laws and institutions. While the Time Patrol took on itself to govern this land for the time being, it will eventually be governed by its own people, once we get rid of the violence and intolerance that is poisoning this country. I will however stay at the helm for the next decades to come, to ensure that the new spirit of peace and justice is respected. That is not because I crave political power, gentlemen: it is because I, as The Hand of The One, want to see the words of The One enforced and obeyed. You all supposedly respect the word of God, so I hope that you will cooperate with me in this.”

While the Jewish delegates around the table, who had all heard tales from European Jews about Nancy’s powers and interventions in their favor, mostly accepted her words, the Mufti angrily looked at her.

“I pray and obey God, miss, but I have not seen any proof that God chose you to enforce his will in this land, or anywhere else. He would not have chosen a woman for such a task anyway.”

Nancy didn’t say a word, instead fixing the Mufti in the eyes. The Muslim cleric suddenly started shouting in alarm and fear as he floated up from his chair. With his arms and legs thrashing around, his body then rotated and he ended up in mid-air on his belly before floating towards Nancy and coming to a stop with his face only a few centimeters from her face.

“Mister Hussein, you may be officially the Mufti but your conduct so far in your official position has been a disgrace to God’s word. He wishes to promote tolerance, kindness and compassion, not intolerance and violence. You will either start respecting the true word of God or you will be deported from the Holy Land. Furthermore, if you keep preaching hatred and murder I will personally punish you. I invited you here as a matter of courtesy but I see that you are truly a lost cause. Restrict yourself to purely religious matters from now on and stay away from politics. Now, go back to your place!” The Mufti, still seemingly held by an invisible hand, then floated back to his seat, where he flopped down in his armchair under the incredulous eyes of the others. Ignoring the shaken cleric, Nancy looked severely around the table. Her next words were delivered telepathically.

“I was given my personal powers by The One in order to help make this world a better place for all. I have however his authority to use as well my powers to impose his will if need be. Don't force me into using them in a violent way.”

David Ben Gurion, the chairman of the Jewish Agency for Palestine, hesitantly raised his hand next.

“Miss Laplante, I was told about the miracles you performed while helping our Jewish brothers in Poland and in the rest of Europe and you have my heartfelt gratitude for this. Our long-held dream has however been for a Jewish national homeland in Palestine, a country given to us by God. Many of my fellow Jews may not be satisfied by living in a secular state, however just and prosperous it could be.”

The outburst he feared from her did not come out. Nancy instead looked calmly at him.

“I understand that is what the scriptures may have led you to believe, Mister Ben Gurion. They are however based on oral traditions dating back many millenniums and were written down by imperfect men who may or may not have interpreted certain points according to their own personal points of views. For one thing, God reportedly gave to Abraham and all his descendants the land of Israel, then known as Canaan. First of, that didn't mean that it gave the right to Abraham to kill or chase away the then inhabitants of Canaan, something he didn't do anyway. Second, the promise included ALL of his descendants, which includes his son from Agar, Ishmael, and the latter's descendants. The Holy Land is thus not the exclusive preserve of the Jewish people, contrary to what you may believe.”

“But, Ishmael and his mother were chased away by Abraham.” Protested Ben Gurion. “They lost all rights to the Holy Land then.”

The old Jewish politician was surprised to see a look of deep pain and sadness appear on the face of Nancy Laplante.

“Abraham chased them away because of the influence of his old, jealous wife, Sarai, not because God told him so. God later showed compassion and helped Agar and her son survive in the desert. As for Abraham, he deeply regretted that rash gesture of his for a long time and would have taken back Agar and her son if he could have found them again. Sarai, on her part, eventually understood the meanness of her actions and died with that weight on her conscience.”

The Jewish delegates looked at each other in utter confusion, with Ben Gurion finally speaking back to Nancy.

“We are not aware of any parts of the scriptures that would have described such regrets on the parts of Abraham and of his wife Sarah. Besides, why do you keep calling her Sarai and not Sarah?”

She appeared near tears when she answered him in a soft voice.

“My spirit was there when this all happened. I was Sarai of Ur, wife of Abraham, and I changed my name to Sarah only after we stopped in the Holy Land to live there for good. The scriptures don’t mention these regrets because they are incomplete and contain errors, as could be expected from something made by mere humans. I was recently able to find again the spirit of Agar, whom I adopted as my daughter before knowing who her spirit was. She has by now forgiven me for my past meanness towards her. The Jewish people is welcomed to the Holy Land if it comes in peace, Mister Ben Gurion, but not at the expense of the descendants of Ishmael. My duty is to all the people of the Holy Land and I will not be swayed from it.”

There was a heavy silence, broken by General Glubb Pasha, a British officer converted to Islam who was the commander of the Arab Legion, the army of the Emir of Transjordan.

“Miss, the Great Patriarch lived close to four millenniums ago. You are not saying that you are this old, are you?”

“Not in body. I was referring to my spirit, which was living through one of its incarnations. My spirit is actually 9,000 years old and I can draw on the memories of 93 successive lives. This body that you see is 36 years old but it can live to past 200 years old. If I could serve the cause of the Holy Land during those years, then I will not have wasted my time on this Earth.”

“So, the Hindu concept of incarnation would actually be a reality?” Asked Glubb Pasha, swallowing hard while staring at her with wide eyes.

“It is mostly correct, yes. The one part they got wrong was about spirits reincarnating in forms other than humans. A human spirit is too precious to The One to be wasted by putting it in an insect, a bird or another type of animal. All human spirits come from and are part of The One. They also go back to it after the death of their host body, spending some time in communion with The One to cleanse themselves before going back to a new human life. The One feels everything we feel and knows everything we do. As for me, I have already been in communion five times with The One while in this present body. Don’t ask me what The One looks like: it has no physical form and cannot be described, even though it could take any form it wishes.”

The Muslims sitting at the table nodded in satisfaction at that: what Nancy had just said fitted with the Islamic belief that God could not be represented by a mere picture. The Arab representative for Jericho spoke next to her with great deference.

“Please do not take my question as a sign of doubt in you, miss, but what specific benefits would my fellow citizens in Jericho gain in exchange for letting Jewish settlers come to Pal... uh, to the Holy Land?”

“Your question is a legitimate one, my good man.” Replied Nancy, smiling to the old man. “They will get what all the citizens of the Holy Land will get: free medical care; free schooling; pensions for old and disabled people and, above all, peace and justice. There will also be numerous other social programs to help the needy and the poor of this land, plus new infrastructures to bring electricity and running water to all parts of the Holy Land. All this will take a few months to put in place but the wait will be worth it.”

“This sounds all very nice, miss,” cut in one of the Jewish delegates, “but who will pay for all this? These social programs will cost a fortune. Are you planning to raise the taxes?”

“Nothing so painful, actually. The Global Council, the society of the 34<sup>th</sup> century from which the Time Patrol comes from, is building all the new infrastructure we will need for free and will support financially the Holy Land during the first years, until we are self-sufficient. A shipment of gold worth fifteen billion British Pounds will also be delivered this afternoon to the Central Bank of Palestine, along with supplies of the new currency. There is more gold available to us if need be.”

“Fifteen billion pounds?” Exclaimed the Jewish delegate, unable to believe his ears.

“That’s correct. Money is actually no problem. You, gentlemen, will tackle the hardest problem: convincing your citizens of giving up all the illegal weapons in their possession within a week. After that, if I am not satisfied of the results, my robots will do a sweep of the whole country and collect the weapons themselves. If anyone hesitates to give up his weapons because he fears for his security, you can tell him that I have 2400 robots like the ones present in this room that will disperse around the Holy Land today to enforce peace. In case you don’t know how effective they can be, just remember that 2000 such robots were enough to exterminate a Japanese army numbering over a million soldiers in China, at the cost of one robot damaged.”

A number of delegates swallowed hard while eyeing carefully the robots present in the room.

“Concentrate on that particular problem for the moment, gentlemen, while I coordinate the installation of the new infrastructure and the arrival of the new immigrants. We will meet again here next Thursday at the same time to review our next moves. Oh, by the way, each village and town in the country will soon receive a number of persons from the Global Council, mostly teachers, who will help run the new schools and social services. They are all very competent and caring people, even though they may appear to you to be somewhat, uh, wimpish. That’s because they are total pacifists, not because they are cowards. Listen to their advice and let them run the schools the way I told them to run them, unless you want to have trouble with me. Hurt or attack any one of them and you will be in big trouble. Now, if you have no questions, I declare this meeting over.”

Getting up from her chair, Nancy accompanied the delegates out of the conference room and to the elevators. It didn’t surprise her to see that the Arabs and Jewish delegates chose to take different elevators. Not wanting to appear to prefer one group over the other, she stayed behind on the 35<sup>th</sup> floor, letting one combat robot accompany each group down to the main lobby. Taking another elevator, Nancy decided to go up instead and got out on the level of the roof landing pad and then stepped out of the roof access hut and onto the pad. The wind at that height was quite strong, making her hair float around her head. The view she had now of Jerusalem was however magnificent. Her next destination, the Hadassah Jewish Medical Center, was clearly visible about three kilometers away to the Northeast, perched besides the Hebrew University on top of Mount Scopus. Using her implanted time distorter, Nancy made a short spacetime jump, reappearing above the hospital and then flying down to the ground, using her power of levitation. The two armed Jewish guards stationed at the main entrance could only stare in disbelief at her as she calmly walked past them, too stunned to react. Her Time Patrol silvery dress uniform and her height and physical build ensured that she did not go unnoticed inside the main reception lobby either. Something however attracted her own attention as she was walking towards the reception desk: a man in a civilian suit standing a few paces behind the desk was talking in a low but less than friendly tone to another man wearing the white overcoat and stethoscope of a doctor. The man in the suit seemed agitated and kept pointing at a wicker basket lying on top of a work desk. Intrigued by this, Nancy walked towards them and jumped clean over the reception desk, landing besides the two men.



“What seems to be the problem, gentlemen?” She asked in Hebrew. The two men looked at her with some confusion, with the one in the suit answering her in a polite but defensive tone.

“This is only a minor matter involving hospital administration, Miss Laplante. What brings you to this hospital, miss?”

“I am here to inspect this hospital, mister. As the new Overseer of the Holy Land, I am interested in any problem that may come out around. What’s in the basket?”

The doctor to Nancy’s right answered her, getting a dirty look from the hospital administrator.

“A baby, miss. It was found only twenty minutes ago, abandoned near the entrance to the hospital. I was going to examine the baby and admit it until we could decide what to do with it but Mister Rosenblum thought otherwise.”

“Dammit, Shapiro, we can’t afford to simply pick up every kid left around and admit it. Who is going to pay for its care? You?” Replied the administrator, making Nancy look dubiously at him.

“Mister Rosenblum, if you really are only concerned about making every patient pay its way, then know that as of now medical care will be free for all the citizens of the Holy Land. My administration will take care of covering the costs of medical services. Send all the bills from now on to the health services department of the Holy Land Overseer’s offices.”

“Uh, where are those offices actually, miss?”

“If you look outside, Mister Rosenblum, you will see a big blue tower sitting besides the Old City. My administration works out of that tower. From now on, I don’t want to hear anymore about any citizen being refused care for financial reasons. Is that clear, Mister Rosenblum?”

“But, miss, I must first get clearance about that from our foundation’s board in the United States. We are a private institution after all.”

“Not anymore, mister. All public and social services institutions are nationalized as of today, according to a charter signed this morning between the British High Commission for Palestine and me. I, as the Overseer, have full dictatorial powers over the Holy Land, and I intend to use them for the good of all. Your parent foundation will be fairly compensated for the true value of your hospital. Now, let me look at this baby.” Rosenblum stomped away as Nancy, Doctor Shapiro besides her, went to the basket and looked tenderly at the small baby lying inside it on a folded blanket. It was only a

few days old and seemed healthy. It was also wrapped up to its chest in a white cloth and was sleeping. A wave of pity then overcame Nancy: such a young and innocent being should never face the pain of being abandoned. She very gently caressed the head of the child, then looked at Shapiro.

“Could you examine it now, Doctor?”

“With great pleasure, miss.” Said the Jewish doctor, a big grin on his face. Taking the basket, he walked out of the reception area and into the emergency treatment section, going with Nancy to a small examination room that was not occupied at the moment. The baby woke up when Shapiro took it out of the basket and put it on a weight scale, the contact with the cold hard surface making it start crying.

“Six pounds and five ounces.” Pronounced Shapiro. “A good, healthy weight. Could you hold him while I measure him, miss?”

“Of course!” Said Nancy, too happy to be able to touch the baby. She took a second to look inside the baby’s diaper while Shapiro fetched a measuring tape.

“It’s a boy, Doctor. He was not circumcised.”

“Hmm, it could only mean that he was still too young, miss. On the other hand, his skin is too pale to be that of an Arab baby. He actually looks Caucasian if you ask me. Uh, could you stretch him for a moment?”

Nancy spoke softly a few soothing words to the crying baby as she held him while Shapiro measured the boy. The doctor noted down the measurement on an examination form, then took his stethoscope and checked the baby out carefully, writing down more notes on his report as he went. He finally looked back at Nancy with a smile.

“This boy looks quite healthy to me, miss. Whatever were the reasons for his parents to abandon him, they didn’t neglect him. What shall we do with him now, miss? Normally, we would have to send him to an orphanage but we don’t even know if he is from Jewish, Muslim or even Christian parents. That could be a problem when placing him in an institution.”

Nancy, who had taken the baby in her arms and was cuddling him, thought about that for a moment. Shapiro was unfortunately right about this: a Jewish orphanage would probably not take a baby that was not known to be from Jewish parents, while other orphanages would have the same problems with the boy’s unknown origins. This was a cruel world for an unwanted, helpless little life. With a big lump now in her throat and tears about to come out, Nancy took the only decent decision she could take. It was also a decision that, she was realizing now, she wanted desperately to take.

"I will take him in my care, Doctor. Can you prepare the forms for that? I will sign them after my inspection of the hospital."

Shapiro nodded soberly as he looked at her and the baby.

"Count on me, miss. Let me first get a bottle of milk and a pacifier for him. Uh, what name should we use for him on the forms?"

"I will call him Eli." She replied after a short hesitation. She sat on the examination table and looked at the child as Shapiro left the room. The few hairs on his head were pale in color and his eyes were blue. Nancy's best guess was that the boy was the unplanned child of a young unwed couple of lovers who could not marry, probably because their love was between two different ethnic backgrounds that would not allow them to marry. He could well be the child of a Jewish girl and of a British soldier, something the blue eyes and blond hair of the baby made more probable. That kind of union generally would be frowned upon in this intolerant age and especially in this country, where the Jews living in it considered the British a hostile occupying force and where, in turn, the British often looked down with contempt at both the Jews and the Arabs. Still holding the baby close to her, Nancy gently put her forehead against his forehead and concentrated to establish mental contact with the spirit in the child. Shapiro found her still in that position a few minutes later, when he returned with a small carrying bag stuffed with baby supplies. He watched on in silence for a few seconds, noticing how eerily quiet the baby was now, with its small hands caressing Nancy's face while she seemingly meditated. What particularly spooked him was the way the baby's hands moved deliberately as they stroke Nancy's face, instead of the random, uncoordinated movements one would expect from such a young infant. Shapiro nearly dropped his bag when the baby gave a very adult-like kiss on Nancy's lips as the latter opened her eyes and smiled to the baby, tears in her eyes. She then saw that Shapiro was watching them and smiled to him as well.

"Don't be afraid, Doctor: I was communicating mentally with the spirit inhabiting Eli's body. Eli may be only a few days old but his spirit is already a few thousand years old."

"But...it was acting so much like an adult." Stammered Shapiro. "Will it always act like this?"

"No! Eli's spirit surfaced only because I opened a link with it. If not stimulated telepathically, he should act like any normal baby."

"Should?"

Nancy smiled with embarrassment then.

“Yes, should. Such contacts with a baby are new to me. This may turn out to be a fascinating experience. What I can say is that Eli’s spirit is a beautiful one, peaceful and kind. He will make a very nice man indeed. Do you have a bottle of milk ready with you? I think that he is getting hungry.”

“Uh, sure. Here you are. I took the liberty of putting together this bag of supplies. You have everything in it to change his diaper, clean him up and feed him for a couple of days. The head nurse at the reception desk is also preparing the release form for him, with you named as his tutor.”

“Thanks, Doctor, you are really sweet. Could you show me to the pediatric section or do you have duties to attend to here?”

“I can guide you around for a while, Miss Laplante. By the way, thank you for caring for that baby.”

“It is my pleasure, Doctor.”

Holding the milk bottle in place to let Eli suck on it, Nancy followed Shapiro to a bank of elevators, taking with him a cabin up to the third floor. While the baby attracted a few gentle smiles from passing medical personnel and visitors, Nancy was the universal target of intense curiosity, with a few bowing respectfully to her. Nancy simply smiled to all of them; feeling happier than she had been for months, with Eli’s warm little body in her arms. They soon arrived at the pediatric section, where Shapiro led her first to the nursery. He smiled at seeing the joy that sight brought to Nancy.

“It looks like you were more than ready to have a baby, miss.”

“I always adored children and babies, Doctor. I was already planning to have a baby of my own.”

“Then I wish you the best luck in that, miss.”

“Thank you, Doctor. Do you have incubators in this hospital?”

“We do, miss. We are still one of the best equipped medical facilities in the whole region. Intensive neonatal care is that way.”

Moving about twenty meters down the main hallway, they ended up facing a series of large bay windows that gave a view of a mid-sized room containing six incubators. Two of the incubators were in use, with three nurses and a doctor busy around them. Nancy, with Eli now asleep and resting on her chest and left shoulder, felt sorrow at the sight of the two tiny, premature babies inside the incubators. A distraught young man sat on a

chair in the hallway, near one of the windows. His despair then decided Nancy's next move.

"Doctor Shapiro, do you mind if I go inside the incubator room? I can help those babies."

Shapiro looked at her with both hope and reverence: he had heard plenty about her miraculous healings in Europe during the war.

"You certainly can go in, miss. Follow me."

The doctor working inside the incubator room looked displeased at first at seeing a visitor enter his sterile room but changed quickly his attitude when he saw who she was.

"Miss Laplante? You should not have entered this room with a baby."

"He is not at risk, Doctor. I am here to help, not to simply visit."

Watched by the doctors and nurses as well as by the distraught father now standing against the window, Nancy approached the first incubator and looked at the tiny baby inside, with tubes and wires connecting it to a series of bulky medical machines and monitors. Then, with Eli still pressed against her, she closed her eyes, raised her free arm high up and spoke softly in ancient Proto-Semitic.

"Great One, please let me be one with you again and help me alleviate the suffering of these souls."

The medical staff recoiled with awe as a column of white light came down through the ceiling and enveloped Nancy. She then started radiating light herself, turning into a brilliant shape, along with little Eli. The light soon became too bright to let the others look directly at her. A silent explosion of light then burst out of her, traveling outwards through walls and objects at incredible speed. The burst of light persisted for over a minute, when Nancy's halo started fading rapidly until she had returned to normal. Apparently exhausted, Nancy went to a nearby chair and sat down, still holding Eli, while Shapiro and the other doctor quickly inspected the two babies inside the incubators: both had visibly grown in size and now looked like fully developed babies. The nurses present knelt down to pray as the two doctors performed examinations on the babies, eventually finding them healthy. Calling the nurses to his aid, the pediatrician unplugged both babies from their tubes and wires, then took one baby in his arms and carried it outside in the hallway to its father. Shapiro went to Nancy, who was pale and had sweat on her forehead, and knelt before her.

"Miss, from now on I will never doubt that you are truly The Hand of God. Thank you for helping those two babies."

Nancy shook her head weakly, appearing actually dizzy.

“Thank The One, not me, Doctor. You will find out that my healing burst went way beyond the walls of this hospital. I...I am positively drained. Is there a place nearby where I could take a nap with Eli?”

“We have a staff lounge with a cot just besides the nursery, miss. Let me help you.”

Shapiro had to lend her the support of one arm to help her up on her feet, so weak she was. One nurse then took Eli, while the pediatrician lend an arm as well to Nancy to bring her to the lounge, where she was laid on a cot, with little Eli put besides her. The staff then retreated out of the lounge, with a nurse posted outside the door to stop anyone from disturbing Nancy. Shapiro would find out the next day that Nancy’s healing burst had reached all the way to Teheran in Iran, nearly one thousand miles away. The effects of that burst on the psyche of the populations of the Middle East were profound and lasting, even though the message Nancy had tried to pass was partly misunderstood. For them, God had spoken and shown his power.

### **16:30 (Jerusalem Time)**

#### **Jewish settlement of Kibbutz Hanita**

#### **Western Galilee, near Lebanon border**

“MOSHE, THERE ARE THINGS COMING DOWN FROM THE SKY!”

The scream of alarm from the lookout in the southern guard tower got the commander of the kibbutz’ Haganah<sup>5</sup> detachment out of his barrack at a run. Looking up, the thin man in his mid twenties effectively saw five shapes floating down silently towards the walled compound of the fortified Kibbutz. Moshe Dayan had heard of only one group that could fly silently like this: the Time Patrol. He thus shouted urgently at the sentries posted around the perimeter of the settlement.

“HOLD YOUR FIRE! DO NOT FIRE WITHOUT MY EXPRESS ORDER!”

Dayan had to resist his own urge to pull out his revolver as the five shapes turned into man-sized machines equipped with twin tracks and with a number of weapons mounted on a small turret on top of their body. The five machines soon landed smoothly in the middle of the compound and lay motionless there as Dayan and his men cautiously

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<sup>5</sup> Haganah: Early Jewish self-defense forces in Palestine

approached them while holding nervously their weapons. One of the machines finally spoke loudly in Hebrew as Dayan was six paces away from it.

“We are here to provide local protection to this settlement and have been sent on orders from the Overseer of the Holy Land. In return, you are required to store away your weapons until they can be collected along with all other illegal weapons in this country.”

“The Overseer of the Holy Land?” Said Dayan, intrigued. “Who is that?”

“Time Guardian Nancy Laplante is the Overseer of the Holy Land. All executive, military and judicial powers concerning the country previously known as British Mandated Palestine were transferred to the Overseer this morning by the British High Commissioner. The Time Patrol has taken over all security duties from the British forces in the country as of today. Fair warning has now been given to you, sir. You have ten minutes to put away all your weapons in a centralized storage area that will then be guarded by us. Once that delay is over, we will be forced to collect your weapons ourselves.”

“How could you pretend to provide adequate security for this kibbutz with only five machines?” Replied angrily Dayan. “We keep losing people to periodic Arab attacks and have to live in this fortified compound to insure a minimum of security.”

“This detachment is perfectly capable of securing this whole area against any attacker. You have now nine minutes and 24 seconds left to comply.”

Dayan realized with frustration that there was no point in arguing with that machine, however articulate it appeared to be. He thus turned around and shouted at his men.

“Take all our weapons and lock them up in the guardroom, quickly! We have less than ten minutes.”

To add weight to his order, he handed his own revolver to the nearest guard, who then ran away like the others to get together their meager arsenal. With a number of kibbutz members looking on from a safe distance, Moshe looked back at the machine that had spoken to him.

“We will obey your Overseer’s directive. I hope that we will not regret it.”

“The Overseer has only one word, sir. Be advised that an improvement project for your settlement is scheduled to be initiated this afternoon.”

“A what?” Exploded Dayan. “Who the hell does your Laplante think that she is? This is a kibbutz! We take our decisions collectively and we answer only to the Jewish Agency, which bought this piece of land and paid for our equipment and supplies.”

The voice of the machine, which had been up to now a monotone male voice, changed then to a female voice.

“Mister Dayan, this is Field Agent Anna Hauser, of the Time Patrol. Your kibbutz is due to receive by tomorrow a community services building and a fresh water tank, along with a team of three educators and one administrator who will do their best to improve life in your kibbutz. This is part of a countrywide infrastructure plan meant to bring peace and prosperity to the Holy Land. That team will come visit you tomorrow morning to brief your people about the details of all this. Please treat them with courtesy and do not try to harm or intimidate them, or our robots will react violently. Believe us when we say that we have only the good of everyone in mind. Once your weapons are declared stored safely away, a technical work team will visit your kibbutz to establish the foundations for your new infrastructure. It would be appreciated if the leader of your kibbutz could be handy then to discuss the installation plan with our engineer.”

“Wait a minute! How do you know my name? I didn’t present myself yet.”  
The female voice coming out of the robot sounded amused at his question.

“You are due to become a famous general in another timeline, Mister Dayan. Fortunately, you seemed to have avoided the loss of your left eye, a battle wound your timeline counterpart suffered while fighting French Vichy forces in Syria.”

“Well, I did fight for the British for over a year but the intervention of your Time Patrol kind of cut short the fighting in the region. Talking of wounds, can you tell me what was the wave of light that went through our settlement less than two hours ago and that healed instantly five of our people?”

“That was a burst of healing energy originating from Nancy Laplante in Jerusalem. We are still assessing ourselves the full effects from that burst.”

“You mean that you don’t know? But Laplante is part of your Time Patrol!”

“Yes, she is, but she is also a Chosen of The One and we do not control her actions when she follows the instructions of The One. Now, before I cut this link, is your kibbutz in any urgent need of supplies, especially food?”

“Uh, we get by somehow but I have to say that life here is hard and the times are lean for our people.”

“Then I will arrange for a supply delivery to your kibbutz right away. It was a pleasure to speak with you, General Dayan.”

“General Dayan...” Said thoughtfully Moshe after the communication link was closed. He then looked at the still motionless robots.



“When do you intend to start protecting our perimeter? We are going to be very vulnerable with our weapons stored away.”

“Border protection units are already in place east and west of your settlement, sir, along with combat robots posted in the four nearest Arab villages. We will start our patrols as soon as your weapons are certified to be stored away.”

“I see! You are a really trusting fellow, are you?”

“We are programmed to be thorough and to not overlook any possible scenario, sir.”

Moshe made a face at that: it was the politest way he had ever been called a possible cheat. He then went to a heavy-set man standing with the other members of the kibbutz. Itamar Ben Barak, one of the original founders of the kibbutz and a man whose opinion was listened to during community councils, was looking with some misgivings at the robots.

“What do they want, Moshe?”

“They are taking over the security of our kibbutz, Itamar. It seems that Palestine is now under a brand new administration.”

Moshe then took a minute to explain to Itamar what he had learned from the robot and from the woman from the Time Patrol. Itamar made a grimace at those words.

“Another occupier busy dictating to us what to do. I don’t like this.”

“Look, Itamar, this Nancy Laplante is not just another occupier. She has amply proved during the war that she cares about our people and that she is both kind and fair. There is also this business of her being linked to God. Look at how she healed our people from a distance. I say that we should wait and see what her plans are exactly before deciding on a course of action. Besides, as the local Haganah commander, I can tell you that those robots should not be trifled with: they wiped out the Nazis and the Japanese Army in mere weeks. Neither we nor the Arabs are a match for their combat power and resisting them would only result in a massacre.”

“Damn, you are too right about that. Still, I will reserve my judgment until I know more about the plans of that Laplante. We might as well call our people back from the fields: we will soon need to take some important decisions as a community. I will go talk to the others. Keep an eye on these machines in the meantime.”

Moshe nearly replied back that there was not much he would be able to do if the robots decided to become aggressive, but he kept his peace and let Ben Barak walk away. One of his Haganah men soon ran to him, unarmed and out of breath.

“Moshe, the last of our weapons are now in the floor hiding space of our barrack. We collected everything, including our spare bullets and our few grenades and explosives.”

“Thank you, Avi. Tell our men that they can now relax a bit.”

“Yes, Moshe!”

As his man walked away, Moshe went to the group of robots and stopped in front of their apparent leader.

“Our weapons and ammunition have been stored away. I can show you where they are kept.”

“Excellent! My subordinate units will sweep the camp while I go with you.”

On some silent order from the lead machine, the four other robots suddenly dispersed as one, rolling on their tracks and crisscrossing the camp in a pattern that Moshe could not figure out. Shrugging them off, he walked to the crude brick barrack that housed his small force of Haganah fighters. The wooden floor of the barrack bent and cracked as soon as the machine following him rolled inside. In reaction, the robot flew silently off the floor and floated a few centimeters in the air, watched by the incredulous fighters now assembled in the barrack.

“How the hell does it do that?” Exclaimed one of the fighters, a big Ukrainian Jew sitting with others at a table in the middle of the dormitory. The robot answered him immediately.

“I am equipped with an anti-gravity generator in addition to a directed gravity drive unit. Most mobile equipment from the Global Council is equipped with such systems.”

As the robot was passing by the table, following Moshe towards the hidden arms cache, it abruptly stopped and turned to face a young woman sitting at the table.

“That woman is hiding a pistol between her breasts. It must be handed to me now!”

While the woman froze and stared fearfully at the robot, Moshe sighed and approached her. Masha Lewinski, apart from being a very pretty brunette of 23 years old, was also one strong-headed girl who was prone to do things her own way.

“Give it to me, Masha. There is no sense in causing a fight over this.”

“But we will be defenseless, Moshe! How am I to protect myself from marauding Arabs?”

“We will protect you, along with all the lawful citizens of the Holy Land.” Said the robot in its monotone voice. “Please comply now!”

Swearing silently, Masha fished a small pistol from inside her bra and handed it to Moshe, who examined it: it was a tiny Beretta Model 1920 .25-caliber pistol, a weapon with hardly any punch to it. Masha vented her frustration as Moshe was giving her pistol to the robot.

“And what are we supposed to do, now that we have no weapons? I am a fighter, not a farmer!”

“The Time Patrol will guaranty the safety of the Holy Land from external threats from now on, miss,” replied the robot, “but applications will soon be accepted for those who wish to join the Holy Land Police Force. You appear to fit the personnel profile deemed appropriate by the Overseer for such candidates. I can forward your application if you wish so.”

Caught off balance by this, Masha was silent for a moment.

“Uh, I will have to think about that. Who is that Overseer anyway?”

“Time Guardian Nancy Laplante is the Overseer of the Holy Land, miss.”

That brought a smile to Masha’s face.

“Nancy Laplante? Now that’s what I call a bitch to my liking. She knows how to kick men’s asses like no other girl.”

Her enthusiastic remark made the men around the table look at her, some smiling, others frowning. Moshe Dayan himself was grinning.

“Hell, Masha, I knew that you were a feminist but I didn’t know that you were a fan of her.”

“Who isn’t a fan of her, apart from the Nazis and the Japanese, Moshe? She did save millions of lives during the war. If she is really in charge of Palestine now, then I’ll be ready to do about anything she asks.”

“Does that include sexual favors?” Said sneakily Yvan Rabinovitch, a big Ukrainian Jew, attracting knowing laughs from the men: many believed Masha to be a lesbian because of her tomboy attitude and feminist views. Unknown to them was the fact that Masha was actually bisexual.

“Fuck you, Yvan!” She replied firmly, attracting more laughs. Himself laughing, Moshe left his fighters and went to the next room, which served as a storage area. Pushing away a few boxes and crates, he uncovered a part of the floor where a number of wood planks were kept loose and pulled them out of the way, revealing a space now

containing a few dozen rifles and submachine guns along with boxes of ammunition and explosives. He put Masha's pistol with the other weapons and waited to let time to the robot to examine the cache. The machine did not sift through it, instead speaking after only a second or so.

"You may cover back your weapons, sir. Please refrain from accessing it again unless given specific permission by a representative of the Overseer."

"As you wish."

After covering again the cache, Moshe left the barrack, the robot still in tow. As he emerged outside, a sort of flying platform with a front cab but no wheels touched down silently in the middle of the settlement's meeting grounds. Four big, heavy machines also touched down besides the platform but those didn't seem to have any person onboard, being probably robots. Three persons then stepped out of the platform's cab. One of them was a woman wearing a silvery, futuristic uniform, while the two others were giant men standing over two meters and wearing dark gray uniforms. One of the giants and the woman walked towards him, while the other giant man went to the back of the platform, which was loaded with various boxes and containers. Moshe felt blood rush to his head when he recognized the woman: it was Nancy Laplante herself. She was the one to speak first, addressing Moshe in Hebrew.

"Moshe Dayan, it is a true pleasure to meet you in the flesh."

"And it is a honor to meet you, Miss Laplante." Replied Moshe, meaning it, while shaking hands with her. Her grip proved surprisingly strong for a woman. "We will certainly have a lot to talk about together."

"Well, I am unfortunately in high demand right now, so I will be able to spare only a half hour or so for this visit. By the way, this is Jens Lousma, a construction engineer. He will be in charge of putting in place the new infrastructure in your kibbutz. We have also used this opportunity to bring some food supplies and other basic necessities."

"Well, in truth, our biggest problem since we established this kibbutz in 1938 is the shortage of fresh water. Do you have something planned to correct that deficiency?"

"We do, Mister Dayan." Replied Lousma, a quiet, soft-mannered giant. My machines will prepare foundations for, among other things, a large water storage tank with a capacity of 800 cubic meters. That tank will in turn be refilled periodically from a flying tanker ship and will provide you with enough water for all your needs, until the tank can be connected to our new underground water pipeline network. The only thing we

need to decide now is the exact emplacement of the new installations. This is your kibbutz after all.”

Moshe smiled with satisfaction at that: Lousma’s attitude was refreshing compared with the high-handed way of doing things common to the British administration.

“Then I better lead you and Miss Laplante to our community meeting room, where we can discuss this in more comfort.”

“Could you first have someone assist our supply technician?” Asked Nancy while pointing at the platform. “He will need to know where to put these pallets of supplies.”

“Oh, of course, miss!” Replied Moshe before looking around him and waving at a man fifteen meters away. “YOSEF, WE HAVE FOODSTUFF AND OTHER SUPPLIES TO STORE AWAY. GET A FEW MEN AND COME HELP THAT GIANT OVER THERE.”

Next, Moshe grabbed in succession three men to ask them to assemble the committee members of the kibbutz in the community meeting room. He then smiled to Nancy and pointed at a wooden building adjacent to the meeting grounds.

“Please follow me.”

The people they met on their short walk either knelt at the sight of Nancy or opened their eyes wide on recognizing her. While feeling embarrassed by their marks of respect towards her, Nancy could do little but smile and say polite words. The children, with their infectious enthusiasm, were the easiest for her to deal with. The committee meeting room turned out to be a room next to the communal dining room of the kibbutz and was sparsely furnished with a few tables, chairs and wooden benches. An old manual typewriter and a small filing cabinet containing papers and office supplies were the extent of the office equipment available there. Ben Barak was the first to show up, shaking hands with both Nancy and Lousma, with fifteen more persons coming in soon afterwards. Lousma took the time to open and switch on his portable computer while Nancy spoke to the assembled Jewish settlers.

“Ladies and gentlemen, I am Nancy Laplante, Overseer of the Holy Land, and this is Mister Jens Lousma, a construction engineer of the Time Patrol. The reason he came here is to direct the installation of new infrastructures for your kibbutz. Before you shout in joy at having been chosen for some special favor, I have to tell you that all the villages and towns in the Holy Land will benefit from the same types of improvements, be they Arab or Jewish. As Overseer, my goal is to bring peace, justice and prosperity

to all the citizens of the Holy Land, irrespective of ethnicity, religion or sex. I know that the ultimate dream of many of you was to live in a sovereign Jewish state but historical hindsight showed me that this dream resulted in decades of war, suffering and injustice. What I am offering you is life in a new independent state, the Holy Land, protected from invasions and racial prejudice. All religions will be equally respected in the Holy Land, as long as they do not advocate hatred or violence towards others. I will govern according to the good of all, not to satisfy some personal lust for power or wealth, as was too often the case in the history of this land. One of my goals will also be to offer asylum and a new land to many of the unfortunate Jews of Europe who barely escaped death at the hands of the Nazis and who lost about everything but their lives. Tomorrow, a first group of 50,000 Jewish immigrants will start arriving from Poland to start new lives in the Holy Land.”

Wild cheers cut her off then, with the Jews present jumping up and down with joy and hugging each other. Nancy waited until they had calmed down somewhat before continuing.

“The Global Council, the future civilization served by the Time Patrol, will provide extensive financial, technical and humanitarian assistance in order to support the creation of the new state of the Holy Land. Mister Lousma and his machines are part of that assistance. In exchange for that assistance, I will ask two things from you: first, that you accept to live in peace from now on with your Arab neighbors; second, that you be ready to accept some of the new Jewish immigrants from Poland in your kibbutz.”

“And what guarantees us that our Arab neighbors will accept to let us live in peace, miss?” Asked a young man in the audience, getting many others to nod.

“I will guarantee it, mister. Anyone who will promote violence and hatred towards others will be deported; while those caught committing violence will be eliminated by my combat robots. These machines are quite literal about their orders and will shoot to kill. I can tell you also that they rarely miss. In case you think that I sound dictatorial, it is because I have effectively dictatorial powers over the Holy Land. Contrary to other dictators, however, I have someone watching over me who will certainly react if I turn into a petty tyrant. I call him ‘The One’, while you would probably call him ‘God’. By the way, I would appreciate very much if you would all call me simply Nancy and would drop that ‘Hand of God’ business.”

“Nancy it will then be, Miss Laplante.” Said Itamar Ben Barak after looking around him. “As for accepting fellow Jews here, I don’t think that anybody in this community will oppose that.”

There were effectively no negative comments or reactions to Ben Barak’s declaration, so Nancy went on speaking.

“Thank you for your confidence. A series of new measures will be introduced by the administration of the Holy Land, with the goal of improving the lives of all its citizens: free medical care; free education, up to and including university level; old age pension and a disability pension plan. Fresh water and electricity will be distributed for free, being deemed basic necessities. The new state will also have its own currency, the Holy Land Pound, backed up by a deposit of gold worth fifteen billion British Sterling Pounds made today to the Central Bank of Palestine. The new currency, which will have an equal value to the Sterling Pound, will be available for public distribution next week. Those are for the statewide measures. In terms of what is in store specifically for this kibbutz, I will let Mister Lousma explain our local projects.”

The settlers were still half-stunned by all the things announced by Nancy as the engineer spoke.

“Ladies and gentlemen, you will have to decide on the final location of the following structures for your kibbutz: a combined school and community center; a fresh water storage tank; a central sewage treatment plant; four housing units with eighty apartments each and ten hydroponics culture buildings. In view of the limited surface available inside your stockade, I would recommend that only the school/community center and the fresh water tank be located inside your compound. The other buildings, which are rather large by your standards, should be located outside of the stockade. If you have a reasonably flat area of ground that is too rocky for agriculture, then it would be ideal for those buildings. I am now open to your suggestions.”

“One question.” Said Ben Barak. “What is hydroponics culture?”

“Hydroponics culture is somewhat like greenhouse culture, except that hydroponics use materials other than common dirt as a support for plants. Those materials are in turn bathing in a nutrient solution that is constantly recycled. In the case of your kibbutz, hydroponics is ideal to grow food, as your natural soil is both quite poor in nutrients and lacking in water. Our specialists in hydroponics are ready to teach you this technique as soon as the buildings are in place.”

More questions followed on the subject of hydroponics, which seemed to fascinate the settlers. Nancy had to cut that short, in order to get back to the subject of the location of the buildings. The settlers and Lousma then moved outside, to visually survey the selected pieces of ground. Nancy stayed behind, preferring to tour the stockade instead. She found Moshe Dayan waiting outside as well and went to him. They looked at each other in silence for a moment, with Dayan breaking the silence with a smile and a nod.

“Meeting a soldier such as you is indeed a great honor for me, miss.”

“Coming from you, it is quite a compliment, sir.” Replied softly Nancy. “Your Haganah fighters had to face difficult odds and many hardships. I admire them for that.”

“Would you like to meet them, miss? They would love that.”

“I certainly would.”

“Then, this way please.”

The 37 men and women inside the Haganah barrack fell silent when Moshe entered with Nancy. They then spontaneously rose from their chairs and bunk beds and stood straight and still, something that touched Nancy.

“Please, sit down and relax.” She said softly. She waited until they sat back, and then took a chair offered to her by a Haganah woman at the table in the middle of the room. All eyes were now on her, expressing both anticipation and intense curiosity.

“Most of you probably joined the Haganah out of necessity, but some may have also joined out of a thirst for action and adventure. I will not blame the latter for that, especially since I am one crazy adrenaline-junkie myself. For those belonging to the first category, I am happy to announce to you that you will be able to live in peace from now on, that is except for the next day or two. For those from the second category, while the Holy Land will not have an army per say, it will have a police force that will be in need of volunteers. Those...”

A man quickly raised his hand, cutting her off politely.

“I’m sorry, miss, but why did you say that the next day or two won’t be peaceful?”

“Because that will probably be the time required for the hardliners in and around the Holy Land to understand that violence will not be tolerated and will be suppressed ruthlessly. If by chance someone decides to try to attack this kibbutz tonight or another night, that someone will be in for a rude welcome. So, if you hear a sudden gun battle nearby, just sit down and wait until my robots have dealt with the problem. Do not go for your weapons. Now, those who want to join the police force will have to be ready to



work side by side and in harmony with both British and Arab recruits and constables. If you cannot stomach that, then don't even bother putting in your request to enroll. I know that this may sound harsh, but the only way this land will know true peace is if all its citizens learn to live with each other in friendship. If you can achieve that, then you will have given to your children the greatest gift you could give them: peace."

One Haganah man lowered his head, having obviously problems with what she had just said. To his credit, he was honest enough to say it out loud.

"Miss, I know that peace is better than war, but I have dreamed since my youth of seeing a new Israel be reborn as a country for us Jews, a country that would have comprised the whole of biblical Israel. Now you are telling us to forget that dream. We as a people have suffered enough through centuries of deportations and pogroms to deserve a country of our own."

Instead of getting angry or defensive, as many expected, Nancy smiled gently and nodded her head at the man who had just spoken.

"I can understand the power of that dream, believe me. Through the ages, my spirit lived through this land during four separate incarnations, apart from visiting it during two more incarnations. As Nancy Laplante, I extensively visited Israel in the early first century, during the reign of Herod Antipas. I was baptized as a Jew by a rabbi at that time and visited the Temple of Herod in Jerusalem. I am not an observant Jew and my encounters with The One have deeply affected my religious beliefs, but I have felt within my heart the power of the dream of a land governed by God."

"You visited the Temple of Jerusalem?" Asked in unison a number of the Jewish fighters, excited at once by her revelations.

"Please, could you tell us about your visit at the Temple?" Asked the young woman sitting besides her. Seeing the expectant faces around her, Nancy felt that she could not refuse them that small favor.

"Well, as I said before, I am in high demand these days but I guess that one advantage of being a benevolent dictator is to be able to reschedule my time. There is only one thing that I cannot delay, however. If you give me fifteen minutes, I will briefly go back to Jerusalem and take care of that thing, then will come back with a viewing unit on which I will be able to show you films of the Temple of Jerusalem and of the Old City as they stood two millenniums ago."

"We will try to be patient, miss." Said Moshe Dayan, smiling with anticipation. Nancy then got up, imitated by the others, and walked out of the barrack. Under the

incredulous eyes of the Jewish fighters, she then flew off silently of her own, disappearing in a flash of white light once ten feet from the ground.

“She must be an angel.” Said Masha Lewinski fervently. “No human being could hold such powers.”

Moshe Dayan was about to reply to that when the heavy machines that had come with Nancy and Lousma became active at once, rolling on their tracks and taking positions at specific points inside the compound. Watched by the fascinated Jews, the machines started digging holes of various sizes and shapes at incredible speed, using a variety of digging power tools to pierce the rocky ground with apparent ease. One machine was in the process of filling the bigger hole with concrete when Nancy reappeared in mid-air and landed smoothly besides the Haganah fighters. She had a tiny baby in a frontal carrying pouch, a small carrying bag slung from one shoulder and a large, flat suitcase-like object she held by one handle.

“Let’s go back inside before this noise upsets Eli.” She said over the din of the working machines. They agreed readily enough, with a number of them then ganging around Nancy to admire and caress the baby, who was now awake and moaning softly.

“He’s adorable!” Said Masha, making Nancy beam with pride. “It’s a boy, isn’t it?”

“It is. I adopted Eli today. He was found abandoned in front of Hadassah Hospital.”

“The poor thing! Who could abandon a baby like this?”

“Probably an unwed mother who could not marry the father of that child.” Said Nancy soberly. “Maybe the father didn’t want to assume his responsibilities and the mother’s family shunned the baby. It can be a cruel world out there. Well, if you give me a minute, I will set up this viewing unit and we will be able to get down to the business of showing you ancient Jerusalem.”

The fighters eagerly took their seats as Nancy deployed the folding and telescoping legs of the unit and opened the cover protecting the meter-wide holographic screen. Sitting at the table and putting a soft blanket on top of it, Nancy put little Eli on the blanket before using a remote control unit to power up the viewing unit and select a video file out of the digital library contained in the unit’s computer.

“What you will now see is a side documentary from a long historical documentary made by the Time Patrol on the life of a Jewish rabbi from first century Galilee. That side documentary shows among other things my visit to the Temple of Jerusalem. At

the time, I was living in Jerusalem as a traveling Sarmatian warrior turned musician and who was on a spiritual quest. Enjoy!"

As the Jews watched religiously the short documentary, Nancy took care of Eli, giving him a bottle of milk and then changing his diaper. She had succeeded in putting him to sleep by the time the documentary ended. Moshe Dayan, his eyes moist from the emotion of seeing the Temple of Jerusalem in all its glory, looked with hope at Nancy.

"This was truly fantastic, miss. Would you by chance have more films about ancient Jerusalem?"

"I do have another short documentary, along with the main documentary on that Galilean rabbi. The short documentary should be of particular interest to you guys, as it is about a visit I made to the Roman garrison of the Antonia fortress."

"Roman soldiers?" Said enthusiastically a Jewish fighter originally from Italy. "Hell, let's watch it!"

"I have to warn you that there are scenes of nudity in that documentary: the Romans were famous for their rowdiness."

"Then the more reasons to watch it." Replied Masha Lewinski with a malicious smile.

"You asked for it!" Said playfully Nancy. She then selected a new video file and started the viewing. The title made Moshe Dayan look at Nancy in a funny way.

"Nauca rocks the Antonia? You wouldn't happen to be the one showing some nudity, would you, miss?"

"Me?" Said Nancy, grinning. "Of course! A girl is entitled to have fun from time to time."

"I second that!" Said Masha, attracting a concert of falsely indignant exclamations from the men around her. Everybody then fell silent as the viewing started.

The Haganah fighters were cheering on as Nancy was shown on the screen dancing half-naked on a table of the Roman garrison's refectory when Itamar Ben Barak came in. His mouth dropped open when he saw the picture on the screen. However, instead of protesting, he simply stood near the entrance and watched in silence, waiting until the documentary was finished before approaching the table and Nancy.

"I see that you guys are not getting bored here. Supper is ready. Would you like to join us for our evening meal, Miss Laplante?"

"I would be honored to, Mister Ben Barak. Are you happy with the plans made by Mister Lousma?"

"Happy? You mean ecstatic, miss. Our kibbutz is going to have a second life breathed into it. Those machines outside also work incredibly fast."

"They were built for that purpose. Let me just put Eli back in his pouch and I will follow you."

Gently picking up Eli, Nancy managed to keep him asleep as she put him back in his carrying pouch, then put the small blanket back in her bag. The viewing screen was simply left where it was as the whole group moved to the communal cafeteria of the kibbutz. There, a number of women were on hand to serve the members of the kibbutz. The menu was actually quite limited and frugal, consisting of bread and of a thin vegetable stew with a few small pieces of meat in it. Ben Barak was expecting Nancy to look down at the simple meal but she simply took her plate and sat at a table with a few of the Haganah fighters, eating the stew and appearing to enjoy it. Moshe Dayan saw his expression and got close to him, whispering in his ear.

"Don't forget that she lived through many centuries, Itamar: she must have experienced all kind of hardships in the past."

"Hmm, you are probably right, Moshe. Still, it is difficult to get accustomed to a person like her."

"Actually, I will find that quite easy, Itamar." Said Moshe before going to sit opposite Nancy. She was already engaged in deep conversation with Masha Lewinski, who was asking her about her past lives while eating her own stew and bread. Moshe, like the others at the table, listened with intense curiosity to Nancy's stories and was soon astounded at the variety of life experiences she had gone through. He also noticed that many of her lives had been either as a warrior or as a hunter and couldn't help wonder at how more dangerous that made her as a potential opponent. One aspect of her past lives did intrigue him, though, making him ask a question in a low voice while she was taking the time to eat a piece of bread.

"Excuse me if my question may sound indiscreet, miss, but you said that you lived many times as a man in the past. Does these souvenirs as a man bother you when you are with your husband?"

“Not at all!” She said with a smile. “They actually help me in guessing what would please him most. On the other hand, those male souvenirs also make meeting other women more agreeable.”

Moshe noticed the way Masha Lewinski froze for an instant and then smiled discreetly to herself. He didn’t remark on that, however, and let Nancy finish her food without further interruptions. As the members of the kibbutz were starting to leave their tables, Nancy got up and banged her metal plate with her fork to attract everybody’s attention.

“MAY I HAVE YOUR ATTENTION, PLEASE? I HAVE A SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT TO MAKE TO ALL OF YOU.”

Nancy waited until everyone in the cafeteria was listening before continuing.

“EARLIER, BEFORE SUPPER, I WAS TOLD ABOUT THE DREAM OF A HOMELAND FOR THE JEWS WHO WANTED TO LIVE UNDER GOD’S GUIDANCE. WHILE I CANNOT GIVE YOU A JEWISH COUNTRY, I CAN GIVE YOU SOMETHING TO HELP YOU PRAY GOD AND LET YOU REMEMBER THE ANCIENT GLORY OF ISRAEL. YOU MAY HAVE HEARD A FEW MONTHS AGO THAT THE ARK OF THE COVENANT HAD BEEN SAVED FROM LOOTING AND DESTRUCTION IN THE PAST AND HAD BEEN BROUGHT BRIEFLY TO WARSAW BY THE TIME PATROL AFTER THE LIBERATION OF THE CITY FROM THE NAZIS. I CAN NOW TELL YOU THAT I PLAN TO HAVE A NEW SHRINE BUILT ON THE TEMPLE MOUNT, BESIDES THE DOME OF THE ROCK AND THE AL AQSA MOSQUE. THAT SHRINE WILL HOUSE THE ARK OF THE COVENANT AND WILL BE OPEN TO ALL WHO WISH TO PRAY BESIDES THE ARK, ON THE SITE OF THE ANCIENT TEMPLE OF JERUSALEM. PLEASE JOIN ME NOW IN A PRAYER TO CELEBRATE THE BEGINNING OF A NEW LIFE FOR ALL OF US.”

The settlers then either knelt or bowed their head as Nancy started reciting an old prayer in ancient Hebrew. Few of them doubted that this was indeed a pivotal time for both their kibbutz and their lives.

**13:52 (Jerusalem Time)**

**Monday, April 19, 1943 ‘B’ (Nissan 14, Year 5703 ‘B’ of Hebrew calendar)**

**Erev Pesach (day before Jewish festival of Passover)**

**Minaret of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, Temple Mount**

**Jerusalem, Holy Land**

The Mufti of Jerusalem looked down eastward with bitterness at the procession approaching the Temple Mount. Leading the procession along the newly built causeway linking the Mount of Olives to the Gate of Mercy, known to the Jews as the Golden Gate, was the Overseer, Nancy Laplante. What she was doing now was to Amin al-Husseini pure sacrilege. Not only had she directed the building of the new Jewish shrine now standing north of the Dome of the Rock, on the Haram esh-Sharif, the ancient Temple Mount of the Jews, but she also had the double archways of the Gate of Mercy unsealed and reopened yesterday. The gate had been walled up nearly twelve centuries ago and was supposed to be reopened only on the day of the final judgment by God. For the Jews who were now massed on the Temple Mount and on both sides of the causeway, the Golden Gate was where their long-awaited Messiah was supposed to enter Jerusalem. While the Overseer had publicly stressed that she was no Messiah and that the reopening of the Golden Gate was done strictly to create an additional access to the Temple Mount, both the Jews and the Christians had attached great religious significance to this. The fact that the Overseer was preceding a group of Jewish rabbis carrying the Ark of the Covenant made the Jews present in Jerusalem today only more jubilant. The Mufti next looked at the new Jewish shrine, meant to house the Ark of the Covenant. It was a modest affair in terms of size compared to the nearby Dome of the Rock but it was of exquisite design, with walls of polished stone and its front façade of white marble. A bit over fifty meters long, it was forty meters wide and its curved, gold leaf-plated roof rose to a height of fifteen meters. The building stood where the small Islamic shrine of the Dome of the Spirits had been until recently, which was supposedly the spot of the original first and second Jewish Temples. Al-Husseini had tried to block the building of this Jewish shrine on what was Muslim sacred ground, using all of his quickly waning influence to convince others to act against the Overseer, but to no avail. He was now becoming rapidly irrelevant as a political figure in Jerusalem, while the Overseer commanded widespread respect and loyalty. Worse of all was the fact that the Jewish population of the Holy Land had grown by nearly 300,000 persons since last November, with more still arriving every week. At this rate, the Arabs in the country would soon become a minority.

Standing in the front ranks of the crowd on the Temple Mount, David Ben Gurion felt overwhelming emotion as the bearers of the Ark of the Covenant appeared at the top of the stairs coming from the Golden Gate, preceded by Nancy Laplante. Having the Ark

returned to the Temple Mount, even if it was to a shrine instead of to a true temple, was like an impossible dream come true. The Holy Land may not be a Jewish state in the sense he had envisioned but it had become a welcoming haven for the Jews fleeing from persecution or discrimination around the World. Only a very few extremists still talked of forcing the creation of a new, strictly Jewish state of Israel. With the economic boom from the agriculture, boosted tremendously by the hydroponics farms introduced by the Time Patrol, and from the flourishing tourism industry, everybody was too busy making a good living to listen to those extremists. The few who had used violence to promote their political goals had been crushed mercilessly by the ever-efficient combat robots of the Time Patrol. Ben Gurion, on his part, had found to his surprise that dealing with the Arabs had been easier than expected, once the true troublemakers and hate mongers had been taken care of. He was now free to concentrate on his job in the new government, which consisted in coordinating the selection and reception of the Jewish immigrants who wished to come live in the Holy Land. Overall, things had never been this good for Jews here in decades. The Arabs themselves weren't doing badly either, benefiting as much as their Jewish neighbors from the social programs and technical innovations implemented by the Overseer. Ben Gurion smiled at the latter as she walked past him at a solemn pace, heading towards the new shrine. Contrary to what some had predicted, Nancy Laplante had not used even once her position or powers to promote her own personal interests, showing flawless honesty and fairness in a region accustomed to corrupt, self-serving politicians and leaders. That, as much as her supernatural powers, had helped her gain the support of about everyone in the Holy Land. Funnily enough, the ones who were still vocal about criticizing her were some of the leaders of the various Christian faiths represented in Jerusalem. As much as they had been doing their eternal infighting about various petty issues, they were now nearly united in condemning her decision to reopen the Golden Gate, saying that the gate was supposed to be used solely for the return of Jesus Christ on the day of the final judgment. The rumors about Nancy Laplante having followed Jesus Christ during his lifetime had also inflamed the local Christian leaders, who had not taken kindly to being corrected by Laplante on many details of the life of Jesus. In this, Ben Gurion sympathized with the Overseer: the hypocrisy and inflexibility of those Christian leaders were enough to drive anyone mad with exasperation. For one thing, it had taken an expropriation order from the Overseer to finally gain access to a piece of land on the Mount of Olives that belonged to the Armenian Christian Orthodox Church. That piece

of land was necessary in order to complete the causeway now linking the Golden Gate to the Mount of Olives but the Armenian Patriarch had been unmovable on that issue, finally forcing Laplante to resort to expropriation. The Patriarch had since then been damning Laplante to Hell on every occasion he had. The Catholic Pope was also rumored to be miffed with the Overseer, finding her policies in the Holy Land dangerously similar to those of the Communists, whom he was said to hate and dread. The Overseer had not replied publicly to these criticisms yet, but Ben Gurion suspected that she would soon do something about this. Returning his full attention to the procession, Ben Gurion cheered with the rest of the crowd when the Ark of the Covenant entered the shrine: the tablets of the law were finally back in their proper place after being lost for so many centuries.

The crowd soon fell silent, expectation visible on most faces. After about ten minutes Nancy Laplante reappeared at the main entrance of the shrine, accompanied by the rabbis who had carried the Ark of the Covenant. A large group of police officers then marched to the shrine and took position around the building and at the main entrance. Once they were in place, the Overseer addressed the crowd, using a microphone connected to a voice amplifier.

“People of the Holy Land, this is an important day for all of you and not only for those of Jewish conviction. An important piece of the history of this land has been returned to its rightful place. This new shrine will be a shining example that the various faiths in the Holy Land can and will coexist peacefully together. Let us not forget that, be it in Islam, Christianity or Judaism, the true teachings of God promoted peace, kindness, compassion and tolerance. Let us live up to these teachings. The Chief Rabbi will now conduct a prayer to celebrate the return of the Ark of the Covenant in our midst, following which the shrine will be open to visitors.”

The Jews present, except for the police officers, knelt as the Chief Rabbi took over from Nancy Laplante to lead them through a prayer followed by a sermon recounting the story of the liberation of the Jewish people from slavery in Egypt. At the end of the sermon, Laplante made a sign to the police officers lined up along the way the procession had come. The police officers, backed up by 200 combat robots, then opened the barriers containing the crowd, letting the people surge in a controlled manner towards the shrine. Being in the first ranks, Ben Gurion ended up being part of the first batch of one hundred persons admitted in the shrine. Going through the massive bronze double doors, he



entered a large anteroom lined with white marble, then passed another, smaller double door also made of bronze, gaining access to the Holy of Holies proper. There, surrounded by elevated stands meant for praying worshippers, was a large Plexiglas cage containing the Ark of the Covenant. Standing on a meter-high base made of white marble, the cage was about ten meters long and seven meters wide, big enough to let bearers move the Ark around inside the cage. The Ark itself rested on a decorated marble block and was about level with Ben Gurion's eyes as he slowly went around the cage, walking on the wide marble floor surrounding it. Like the other visitors, he stopped briefly besides the cage to say a short prayer, then completed his circuit around it. He was surprised when police officers made him turn left after leaving the Holy of Holies instead of letting him go back out through the main door. He and the others then found themselves inside a dimly lit gallery with what looked like a series of big television screens, each two meters to the side, which covered the outward surface of the gallery. Each screen had a small bronze plaque with an inscription below it. Ben Gurion was about to read the first plaque when all the screens came to life at the same time, presenting various scenes in vivid colors. The first screen, the one Ben Gurion was facing now, was showing an aerial view of a tiny, primitive hamlet sitting on a hill that looked familiar to him. He felt a shock when he read the plaque: the view on the screen was that of Jebus, the ancient Cananean town that stood on Mount Sion before the arrival of the Israelites. The plaque also gave the year on which the Time Patrol had filmed the scene: what he was watching had existed over 4,000 years ago. A multilingual caption in Hebrew, Arabic, English and French appearing at the bottom of the screen also gave additional information about Jebus and its history. Moving on to the second screen, Ben Gurion saw a small caravan of people mounted on camels as they were traveling across desolated hills and valleys. That view quickly zoomed in on the leading camels, with names appearing in gold lettering besides a man and two women. Ben Gurion's heart nearly stopped as he read the names.

“Abraham? Sarai and Agar?”

He knelt for a moment, imitated by the others around him, to pray while contemplating the face of the ancient patriarch and of his wife and Egyptian slave girl. The view repeated itself after thirty seconds, prompting him to go to the next screen. That screen and the others following it also showed historical scenes from the past of the Holy Land, including pictures of King David and King Solomon, the first Temple, the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians and the deportation of the Jews to Babylon, their return to

Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the Temple. In all, there were a total of seventy screens showing historical scenes up to the last Jewish revolts against the Romans in the second century C.E. and the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem by the Romans. Ben Gurion was in a near state of stupor as he finally walked out of the shrine, overwhelmed by the power of the pictures he had just seen.

## **CHAPTER 4 – AMERICAN CITIZEN**

**14:07 (GMT)**

**Friday, July 18, 1941 'C'**

**Infirmery, Tower of London**

**England**

The British Army doctor, having finished his examination of Ingrid, grabbed his clipboard, scribbling down a few notes.

“Well, there is no point for you to stay anymore in this infirmary, Ingrid. Your ribs are mending nicely but they will be sensitive for another two weeks or so. In the meantime, you are to avoid any hard physical activity that could hurt your ribs again. As for your right eye, it will be fully healed in a few days and you will not suffer any loss of visual acuity. You may dress back now.”

“Thank you, Doctor.”

Ingrid slowly put back on her baggy gray fleece sport outfit, which was easier to slip in than her Luftwaffe uniform. While she dressed, she thought with bitterness at what had happened to her seven days ago and at the decision taken yesterday by Brigadier Browning to transfer her out of the Tower of London. The idea of leaving her friends and comrades here hurt her, but she could understand the decision of the Governor of the Tower of London. Anyway, with both Nancy and Mike now dead, she needed to rebuild a new life for herself, something she could not do while held here as a prisoner of war. The best place for that would be the United States, but who would then help and support her there? She then thought about Captain Kenneth Dows, the Marine Corps officer that had worked with Mike Crawford at the American embassy and had visited many times the Tower of London as a neutral country liaison officer. She had been attracted at once to the very handsome, athletic Marine officer, who had proved as well to be an intelligent, kind and tolerant man, all qualities that she had appreciated in him. Ken Dows had in turn shown discreetly that he also appreciated her, speaking with her in private a few times. In fact, Ingrid suspected that the Marine captain had a crush on her but had been too much of a gentleman to abuse for his personal advantage his position as a visiting neutral officer. In a more normal setting, Ingrid would have been more than willing to start a romance with him.

Knocks on the door of the examination room made the doctor open it, finding himself facing Brigadier Browning and a big American officer. Ingrid having already put back on her clothes, he let the two visitors in, saluting Browning briefly at the same time. The Governor of the Tower nodded and smiled at Ingrid.

“So, how is our sixteen year-old prisoner today?”

“I am alright, sir.” Replied Ingrid, her brain kicking into high gear at the sight of Ken Dows, who had entered behind Browning. She noticed in passing the new rank insignias on the collar of Ken. “Do you have news about my request, sir?”

“I certainly do.” Said Browning with a grin that made Ingrid’s heart accelerate. “The Army, being leery about keeping captive a pesky minor like you, decided to drop the hot potato in the lap of the American embassy. As of this morning you are now in the care of Major Dows, who will bring you to the embassy, where you will be briefed on what’s next for you.”

Ingrid contained with difficulty her joy at hearing this.

“Then, I will go pack my things quickly. Thank you from the bottom of my heart, sir.”

Before Browning could react, Ingrid kissed him on the cheek, bringing an embarrassed smile on his face.

“That was not necessary, Ingrid, apart of not being proper. I do wish you the best of luck, though. Major, she is all yours.”

Both Browning and the doctor then left, leaving Ingrid alone with Dows, who eyed with sorrow the still slightly puffy face of the teenager.

“My poor Ingrid. It pains me to see you in such a state. Have you learned who did this to you?”

“I actually have a good idea about that, but Hanna Reitsch is taking care of it. I see that you have been promoted, Ken.”

“I received my new rank yesterday, along with my transfer order.”

Ken didn’t miss the way Ingrid’s smile disappeared at once on hearing the word ‘transfer’. He thus hurried to reassure her.

“Ingrid, I have the firm intention to bring you with me, if you wish so. I couldn’t say it before, but now I can: I am in love with you, and have been since I first saw you. You are a truly exceptional girl in all respects, something that Nancy and Mike quickly

realized, and I wish from the bottom of my heart to be able to have you at my side...as my wife.”

Overtaken by emotion, Ingrid answered him by hugging him and kissing him passionately. Ken returned her kiss but didn't hold on to her, not wanting to hurt her mending ribs. Both had tears of joy when they finally parted, with Ingrid speaking in a strangled voice.

“Being with you will be like a dream come true, Ken. I am ready to follow you to Hell if need be.”

“Well, no need to go to such an extreme, Ingrid.” Replied the Marine, smiling tenderly to her. “I am going to Manila, in the Philippines, where I will be part of the staff of Admiral Hart, the commander of the Asiatic Fleet.”

“But...the Japanese will attack the Philippines at the end of the year.” Said Ingrid. “You could get killed there.”

Ken looked at her soberly. For one, she had just shown worry for him, not for herself. On the other hand, what she had said implied some knowledge that she should not have had as a German prisoner of war.

“Ingrid, I know that Nancy loved you and trusted you, but how much did she really tell you about the future? That information is supposed to be ‘Top Secret’.” The teenager then stared at him with her big blue eyes.

“Ken, Nancy had been teaching me everything she knew for five months when she died, apart from training me in physical fitness. She also secretly loaned me publications and documents to read on my spare time at night and had long discussions with me about this war and what will follow it. I basically know about everything she passed on to you and the United States, and more. About the Japanese, her history said that they attacked Hawaii and the Philippines, along with Malaya and Hong Kong, this December, on Sunday the seventh, Hawaii time. She however believed that the Japanese, knowing that she must know about their war plans, will most probably move their initial attacks to an earlier date, to keep the benefit of surprise. Her best guess was mid October, on a Sunday morning, Hawaii time. There is something else that you should know as well about me, Ken.”

Ken swallowed hard on hearing all this: Brigadier General Emmet Walker, his boss at the American embassy, would have probably pulled his hair out at this.

“I am listening, Ingrid.”

"Shortly after Nancy had captured me in France, and after she had taken the decision to educate me in secret, we both experienced something extraordinary. We simultaneously started remembering our past lives during our sleep. We don't know how that happened and what made it possible, but I believe that only God could gift us like this. In essence, I now remember everything about the 71 lives that my spirit lived through in the past 7,000 years, including the languages I spoke and the skills I learned during those lives. Nancy, on her part, lived through 92 lives spanning 9,000 years. As a result of that, I am much more mature as a person now and can speak over seventy languages, including Japanese, Chinese, Latin, Greek, Arabic and Ancient Egyptian. I can even speak Tagalog and Cebuano, the two main dialects spoken in the Philippines, thanks to my previous life as a Filipina woman in the late 14<sup>th</sup> Century. I also know how to fight, having been a warrior during many lives, including as a Spartan hoplite who was killed at the battle of Thermopylae in 481 B.C.. I realize that all this must be very unsettling to you, but I want to be completely frank with you. Will you still want me after knowing this?"

"How...how much do these souvenirs control you, Ingrid?" Asked Ken, stunned, after a few seconds of silence. Ingrid shook her head at that.

"They don't control me at all, Ken. They are just that, souvenirs. They make me a more rounded and vastly more experienced person but I am still the German girl you first met in February."

She then looked at him with pleading eyes.

"Ken, I love you, truly. Please tell me that you still love me even after learning this."

"I still do, Ingrid." Said softly Ken. "Please keep that to yourself, though: some could think that you are mad or making things up to make yourself interesting."

"I could then show them my language skills, but don't worry: I will stay mum about this. What do we do now?"

"I help you pack, then we will go to the American embassy, where General Walker wants to speak to you. Do you still have your American passport and adoption certificate with you?"

"Unfortunately, they disappeared the night I was beaten up: my attackers must have found them and then destroyed them."

"Then I will have new ones made at the embassy."

"Could I change my date of birth on them then, Ken?" Asked quickly Ingrid, surprising the Marine officer.

"Why? Was there a mistake on them?"

Ingrid made an apologetic smile then.

"Uh, not really. I just want to be officially seventeen years old, instead of fifteen, so that I can say that I am eighteen this September. I want to follow you to the Philippines, Ken, but I also want to be able to serve my new country in every way possible."

"You don't want to fight in the coming war, I hope?" Replied Ken, alarmed, attracting a resolute look from Ingrid.

"I want to be able to defend myself and to help defend the Philippines, Ken, so that I can stay near you instead of being evacuated like other American dependants. I am a qualified air plot specialist and telephone switchboard operator with war experience, plus I speak Japanese. From what I know about today's American forces, your own operators and specialists are amateurs compared to me, while the present American military doctrine is totally outdated, especially concerning air warfare. I saw in detail the tactics employed during what the British call the Battle of Britain and discussed at length fighter tactics and air combat with some of the best German aces in France...while they kept a cup of wine in my hands and a bed nearby, of course."

That last detail brought a meek smile to Ken's face.

"I could see how they got attracted to you, my sweet Ingrid. You are decidedly a bad girl, like Nancy."

"I know!" Replied the teenager with a malicious smile. "Wait until I can make a nice Polynesian dance for you."

"Hum! This business of past souvenirs could have some good to it, after all. Very well, let's pack up, young girl."

"Yes sir!" Replied Ingrid, grinning. She then pulled a duffel bag from under the bed of her infirmary room, filling it with the few clothes she had left, including her Luftwaffe uniform, and putting in as well her Jewish prayer book and a small tin box containing Nancy's medals and her own personal papers and pictures. She also carefully wrapped her Discman and portable radio/CD/cassette player she had inherited from Nancy with her clothes to protect them during transport. The small case containing Nancy's musical collection of CDs was last in the duffel bag. Ken however picked up her duffel bag before she could lift it.

“You should not carry anything heavy for a while, Ingrid, unless you want to hurt your ribs again. I will carry it for you. Come: my car is parked outside the walls. Our first stop will be the embassy, where our immigration consul will first brief you on your legal status. You can get a new passport and adoption certificate at the same time.”

Leaving the infirmary, they went around the huge mass of the White Tower and were passing by the Tower Green when Ingrid stopped Ken in front of Gaoler’s House.

“Could I take a minute to say goodbye to my comrades, Ken?”

“Take all the time you want, Ingrid.” Said softly Ken Dows. Ingrid then entered Gaoler’s House. When she went out again, twenty minutes later, her eyes were full of tears and her heart was heavy with sadness from having to leave her friends and comrades.

“We may go now, Ken.”

Ken could see a number of German women, including Frida Winterer, Susanna Berghof and Hanna Reitsch, with their faces glued to windows and waving goodbye at them. He waved back at the Germans, then led Ingrid out of the fortress and to his embassy car, parked near the main gate of Middle Tower. Ingrid sighed in relief as they drove away from the fortress.

“My God, I can’t believe that I am not a prisoner anymore.”

“Well, you better get accustomed to it, Ingrid: the United States awaits you.” Said Ken in a cheerful tone. To his surprise, Ingrid seemed to tense up a bit at those words.

“What? What did I say wrong?”

“Nothing, Ken. It is just that your words reminded me of something Nancy once told me about the treatment of Americans of Japanese, German or Italian blood by the United States government once it will join this war. I just hope that I won’t immigrate to the United States simply to find myself thrown in yet another prison.”

Ken couldn’t help glance at her with some reservation.

“I doubt that you will be bothered in any way with the kind of papers you will be holding. Our ambassador has bent more than a few rules in your favor in the last few weeks.”

They then kept silent for the rest of the trip. Parking his car in the inner courtyard of the American embassy, Ken then escorted Ingrid into the building, carrying her duffel bag for her. After going through a security check in the main lobby, Ken led the



teenager upstairs to the immigration section, eventually knocking on the door of the vice-consul for immigration. The vice-consul, a tall and thin man in his thirties, greeted Ingrid politely and offered a seat to both her and Ken.

“So, I finally get to meet the gem that conquered Major Crawford’s heart. May I start by offering my most sincere condolences for your personal loss?”

“Thank you very much, sir. It is appreciated. May I ask what my legal status will be in the United States?”

“Your new passport lists you as an adopted minor, with full American citizenship. Do you have your passport and adoption certificate with you, miss?”

“Unfortunately, they were destroyed the same night I was attacked and beaten, sir. I will need to have new ones redone.”

“That can be done easily enough, miss. You will only need to go see my assistant after this. I will now ask you to swear allegiance to the United States before you go see him.”

The vice-consul then produced a bible and asked Ingrid to stand, then made her repeat with him the allegiance declaration, shaking hands with her afterwards.

“Congratulation, miss. You are now officially an American citizen.”  
Ingrid smiled back at the vice-consul.

“Thank you very much, sir. This is indeed a great day for me.”

“It was a pleasure, miss.”

Leaving the vice-consul’s office, Ken and Ingrid went next to the adjacent office, where Ingrid explained her need for a new passport and adoption certificate. When the functionary gave her forms to fill in order to get her new papers, Ingrid put 1923 instead of 1925 as her year of birth. To her relief, the employee didn’t check his archived files to vet her information before stamping her forms and putting them in a file docket marked ‘Urgent’, then smiling to her while giving her the file.

“If you will now go see our immigration clerk, he will take official passport pictures of you and start producing your new passport and adoption certificate, miss. Everything should be ready by noon tomorrow.”

“Thank you, sir. You were most helpful.”

Going yet to another office, Ingrid had pictures taken of her and was promised again to have her papers ready by tomorrow.

Leaving the immigration section, Ken led a secretly jubilant Ingrid to the offices of the Defense Attaché, where Brigadier General Emmet Walker was waiting for them.

“Aaah, Miss Crawford! Am I happy to see you! Please, take a seat.”

As soon as Ingrid had sat down, Walker opened a file and took a document out of it, presenting it to the teenager.

“This is Major Crawford’s last will, which has a few clauses concerning you, miss. Most of his belongings are still here in London, since they were slated to go to the States by air after his departure. His untimely death resulted in the shipment being kept here pending the legal execution of his will. As you can see, he left you all the items that he inherited from Nancy Laplante, including her car and guns. For reasons that you may understand easily, the American government is most anxious to gain the property of most of these items, since they are advanced technology artifacts from the future. Since you are now legally the owner of these items, I am authorized to offer you a deal concerning these items.”

Ingrid read the will carefully before answering Walker.

“You can have everything except for Nancy’s weapons. They have enormous sentimental value for me and I believe that they don’t really represent advanced technology anyway.”

“Hmm, true enough. You will have to go see our FBI Attaché afterwards to get possession permits for those guns, though. This said, how about a sum of 10,000 dollars for the lot, excluding the guns of course?”

Ingrid didn’t take long to make her mind: she owed a lot to Brigadier Walker and his officers, who had essentially made possible her release from the Tower of London.

“I accept your offer, General. May you be able to use those items to shorten this damn war.”

“Well said, miss! Major Dows will get the guns for you and arrange to get you possession permits while I prepare your money.”

“Thank you, General. When do you think that I could leave for the United States?”

“How about in two days? We wanted to bring to the States as quickly as possible those items we just bought from you. You could take place in the same plane, along with Major Dows, who will at the same time escort a few diplomatic bags to Washington. Major Dows, you may take Ingrid with you and get her guns and permits.”

“Right away, sir!”

As they walked out of Walker's office, Ingrid had a nasty thought and spoke in a low voice to Ken.

"Ken, Nancy told me a number of time about how inter-service rivalry in the American forces and between various government departments would hamper or even sabotage the war effort. Are you sure that all her information that you sent to Washington was shared wisely?"

Ken stopped walking at once, struck by her question. He was not naïve enough to deny the fact that such inter-service rivalry indeed existed. In truth, it went to a level that he himself found positively stupid, with the Army and the Navy refusing most of the time to even speak to each other, even when operational emergencies would warrant an exchange of information. Nancy Laplante herself had raised that point a number of time in the past, sometimes in a very adamant tone.

"Uh, to be frank, I can't vouch for that, Ingrid. Why do you ask?"

"Because, if we are about to go together to the Philippines, now would be a good time to produce extra copies of Nancy's information from the future, so that you could bring them with you. Ideally, we should bring with us three copies: one for the Army department in the Philippines, one for the Navy there and one for us."

"For us?"

"Well, for me, actually. I already know a lot about that information but I would like to be able to refresh my memory."

"That would constitute a major breach of security regulations, Ingrid. However, you are already one big walking breach of regulations, in many ways. I do agree however with you that it would be prudent to bring extra copies of our ATHENA files to the Philippines. They are kept here in both paper and microfiche forms and, if I spend some hours tonight, I could produce copies discreetly, using our photographic lab. Our embassy photographer is a good friend of mine and can give me access to his equipment."

"I could help you then by collating together those copies, if you don't mind."

Ken sighed but relented.

"Alright! You might as well help me in this, since you proposed this in the first place. We will do that after supper, once we are finished here and have had time to go to your bank to get the money you inherited from Nancy, before the bank closes for the weekend."

“Oops! I nearly forgot about that.” Said Ingrid, making a face. She had over 2,300 Sterling pounds in that account, the equivalent of about 9,300 dollars, a big sum by today’s standards. Added to the 10,000 dollars promised by Brigadier General Walker, she was going to end up with a small fortune at her disposal, more than enough to realize a few dreams she had for a while already.

**14:19 (Manila Time)**

**Saturday, August 2, 1941 ‘C’**

**Nichols Field military airfield**

**Three kilometers south of Manila**

**Philippines**

Ken and Ingrid, both numb from the series of long airplane trips that had brought them to the Philippines, gladly stepped out of the PBY Catalina amphibian aircraft and looked around the airfield, which was surrounded by dense tropical jungle. Visible a couple of kilometers away were the southern outskirts of the city of Manila. Ingrid was immediately glad that she was wearing a light cotton dress: the heat and humidity were nearly oppressive. As airmen and Filipino workers took out their few suitcases and duffel bags, along with the mailbags from Hawaii, a staff car stopped smoothly besides the amphibian aircraft. Ken came to attention and saluted the Marine Corps lieutenant colonel than stepped out of the car. The senior officer returned Ken’s salute before shaking hands with him and Ingrid.

“Major Dows, welcome to the Philippines! I am Lieutenant Colonel William Clement, your new boss. And this must be Misses Dows?”

“Call me simply Ingrid, sir.” Replied the teenager, smiling back at Clement.

“Ingrid it will be then. I hope that you will like Manila, even if the winds of war are just over the horizon.”

“We already have had our taste of war in London, sir.”

“Indeed! Excuse me for asking but you have a noticeable accent. Are you Scandinavian by chance?”

“I was born in Berlin, sir.” Replied Ingrid calmly even while expecting a negative reaction from Clement. The latter looked surprised for a second but quickly smiled at her.

“Well, you should be interested to know that there are quite a few people of German descent here in Manila, including some German Jews.”

“There are German Jews here?” Said Ingrid happily. “Is there a synagogue here as well?”

“Uh, I believe so. I gather that you are Jewish, Misses Dows?”

“Correct, sir.”

“You will have to tell your story to me and my wife tonight then. We have a little garden party scheduled to celebrate the arrival of the new Assistant Operations Officer in charge of land defenses for the Asiatic Fleet headquarters. Your trip was a long one, so let me drive you to your assigned quarters, so that you can refresh yourselves.”

With airmen loading quickly their luggage in the big trunk of the staff car, Clement sat in the front passenger seat, letting Ken and Ingrid take the back seat. The staff car was soon rolling north towards Manila along a narrow road bordered by jungle on both sides. The jungle quickly made place to a collection of shanties inhabited by the poorest crust of the local population, then to more prosperous buildings made of either wood or bricks. The staff car finally stopped in front of a small bungalow situated with many similar houses along the banks of a river. From the posh appearance of the houses and the various people living here, it was obvious to both Ken and Ingrid that this district of Manila was reserved for American officers and businessmen and their families. A few hundred yards away to the Northwest the fortified Spanish walls of the old city were visible. Clement smiled at Ken and Ingrid while showing the bungalow.

“Your new house for the duration of your posting. It belongs to the Navy and comes fully furnished, like the other married quarters in Manila. A Filipino cook and a maid have already been assigned to your house and they have the keys to the place. Our administrative officer will explain to you the financial arrangements tomorrow, Major. My own house is down this street, at number 58. Could I expect both of you at about seven, in relaxed attire?”

“We will be there, sir.” Replied Ken. “Where will I be working out of, sir?”

“Fleet Headquarters main building is on the waterfront, near the Manila Hotel on Bonifacio Drive. Present yourself at the operations section for eight in the morning tomorrow. Let’s unload your things now.”

With the help of the staff car driver, their few pieces of luggage were brought inside the house, where two Filipina women greeted them. One was in her late thirties

and presented herself as the cook, while the maid was much younger, being barely older than Ingrid. Both spoke broken but passable English, the cook being a bit better at it than the maid. With Clement and the driver leaving them, Ken and Ingrid found themselves alone with the two servants. Ingrid then surprised the Filipinas by speaking in Tagalog, the dialect mainly spoken on the island of Luzon, in which Manila was situated.

"I am happy to meet you. My name is Ingrid and my husband's name is Ken."

The older servant smiled with joy on hearing her speak the local language.

"You speak Tagalog, madam? But, you just arrived in the Philippines."

"I studied Oriental culture in college." Lied Ingrid, attracting an admiring look from the youngest Filipina.

"Thank God! My English is so bad."

"Your English is most probably better than the Tagalog of most of the Americans living in Manila, Juanita. We will however use English with my husband, who does not speak Tagalog. Could you give us a tour of the house, please?"

"With pleasure, madam."

The bungalow proved to be small but comfortable and compared well to other, past military accommodations Ken had seen in the past. He, like Ingrid, was however not accustomed to having servants at his disposal, especially when they seemed as eager to do everything in the house as were the two small Filipina women now waiting expectantly for their new masters' orders. Of a common accord, Ken took the maid with him to help unpack and place their things while Ingrid left the house on foot with the cook to go buy some groceries at the nearest market. The deference of the maid, which approached servility in the eyes of Ken, was nearly embarrassing to him and he had to stop for a moment to speak to her as gently as possible.

"Look, Juanita, I appreciate very much your help but there is no need for you to act as if you are inferior to me and my wife in any way. We are both very open-minded and we wish to deal with you as equals. How much are you paid for this work normally?"

"Navy gives this much dollars per month." She said in her broken English while flashing all her fingers twice.

"That's it?" Exclaimed Ken, nearly scandalized. "You get only twenty dollars a month for this work?"

“That normal pay for maid, master. Julia gets half more.” Replied the maid in her tiny voice, surprised by his surprise.

“First, Juanita, I want you to stop calling me master. You will call me simply Ken, while you will call my wife Ingrid. Second, while you will keep getting your basic pay from the Navy, I want you to take this as your first monthly supplement from me.”

The young woman looked with incredulity at the twenty dollars Ken put in her hands, then smiled at him, overjoyed.

“Thank you mas...uh, Ken. You very generous.”

“You and Julia can also expect a few gifts on special occasions. Don’t take this as a request for you to do more than your normal work, though. Now, could you suspend Ingrid’s dresses in the closet while I take care of this suitcase?”

“Yes, Ken!”

Ken then opened one of his suitcases and took out his uniforms, suspending them in the left half of the bedroom’s closet. Next out of the suitcase were two medium-sized framed pictures. One was that of Ingrid while the other was an official military picture of Nancy Laplante, wearing her medals and smiling at the camera. Ken then put a smaller picture showing Ingrid in her Luftwaffe uniform and flanked by both Nancy Laplante and Mike Crawford on the dresser. Juanita’s eyes widened at the sight of Nancy’s picture.

“That Nancy, woman from future?”

“Yes. You know about her?”

“She known well around, Ken. Great woman. You knew her?”

“I met her many times in London. Ingrid was adopted by her a few months before she died.”

Ken then continued unpacking. Juanita looked at the picture of Nancy for a few more seconds, her eyes sparkling with interest, before resuming her work. Ken did not open the locked case containing Nancy’s weapons in front of the maid though, simply putting it inside the closet, behind a pair of boots.

Once the unpacking was done and everything was in its proper place, Ken moved the larger picture of Nancy and that of Ingrid with her adoptive parents to the lounge, hanging them on one of the walls. He also plugged in Ingrid’s portable radio/CD player unit in the lounge, storing the CD disks inside the glass cabinet that supported the player unit. There was already a contemporary radio receiver in the lounge but, apart from being bulky, its sound quality was probably nowhere as good as that of the

transistorized set that had belonged to Nancy. The modern set was also much easier to tune than the other one, which required constant manual adjustment in order to stay on a given station. Ken used the automatic scanning mode of the player unit to see what kind of radio stations they could receive in Manila. He actually got one local station that broadcasted in Tagalog, the local dialect, plus two American local military entertainment stations broadcasting in English. He was tuning in on the Navy station when Ingrid walked in with Julia, the cook. Both were carrying paper bags full of groceries.

“Hi Ken! How’s the unpacking going?”

“It’s done, dear! Do you need a hand with those bags?”

“I won’t say no to that.”

Leaving a few of the groceries out so that Julia could prepare supper, they stored away the rest either in the pantry or inside the bulky, limited capacity refrigerator present in the kitchen. Taking Ingrid aside, Ken then told her about Juanita’s salary and about the supplement he had decided to give. Ingrid nodded her head, visibly pleased by his initiative.

“Good move, Ken. As for doubling Julia’s salary as well, you have my benediction. My visit to the market was fairly short but it was long enough for me to see that our servants’ basic pay is a pittance. I also saw how most of the Americans in town deal with the locals: you wouldn’t believe how snobbish and arrogant some of them are.”

“Hey, not everybody can be expected to be as liberal as Nancy...or you.”

Ingrid glanced at the two servants, who were busy in the kitchen, then lowered her voice.

“Ken, while out at the market, I was struck by how little concerned the people are here about the war. It is as if nobody is worried about the Japanese attacking us.”

“Ingrid,” said Ken in an even lower voice, “don’t forget that what we learned from Nancy about the future is considered highly classified information. I suspect that even the staff at Asiatic Fleet Headquarters doesn’t know as much as you on the subject, with the possible exception of a few of the most senior officers. I will ask you to stay discreet about this while at Clement’s garden party tonight.”

“What about my links with Nancy?”

“Those links you can’t deny, Ingrid. Just pretend that Nancy didn’t tell you anything about the future. We will talk together tomorrow about our own future plans once I have had a chance to get a feel of the situation at Fleet Headquarters.”



"If you say so, Ken. I just hope that someone apart of us here has its head above the sand."

"Well, don't bet on that yet."

### **18:57 (Manila Time)**

#### **Residence of Lieutenant Colonel William T. Clement**

##### **Central Manila**

Rhonda Clement, even though she had been forewarned by her husband about the young age of Major Dows' wife, stiffened when she saw through the windows of her lounge the newly arrived couple approach the front door. Young Misses Dows actually appeared to be little more than half the age of her big, muscular husband.

"Dear God, Bill, she doesn't look to be more than eighteen years old."

"I know, dear. I understand that they married just before leaving London. She is also a German Jew. Quite an interesting girl actually. There was however nothing about her in Major Dows' file, apart from the telegram advising us about his marriage to her. By the way, her name is Ingrid."

Rhonda Clement nodded her head, then went to the front door to welcome the couple.

"Major and Misses Dows, it is a pleasure for me to greet you to Manila. I'm Rhonda Clement."

"Thank you, Misses Clement." Replied the man, whom Rhonda found most handsome. "May I present you my wife, Ingrid?"

"Welcome to our house, Ingrid." Said Rhonda while exchanging a hug with the young teenager. She had to recognize that the girl, while indeed very young, was also very beautiful and feminine. She could see already Major Dows having to keep an eye on the young officers under his command that would be turning around his wife like bees around a pot of honey.

"Please follow me to the back of the house, where the party is taking place, so that I could serve you drinks."

The couple followed her through the house, emerging in a large fenced yard where a handful of guests were already present, along with two Filipino servants. A long folding table on one side of the grass yard supported a collection of bottles and glasses, while another table supported a collection of appetizers. Rhonda insisted on serving the couple herself and smiled at Ingrid.

“What will you have, my dears?”

“A cold Coca-Cola will be just fine, Misses Clement.”

“I will have a Rum Punch, Misses Clement.” Said Ken Dows.

Rhonda was secretly relieved by Ingrid’s choice: serving alcohol to a minor was still a federal offence, even at private parties. She prepared and handed over the drinks, then led the couple towards her husband, who was talking with a mature, tough-looking man.

“Major and Misses Dows, may I present to you Lieutenant Colonel John Adams, commander of the Marine battalion in Cavite Navy Base.”

Adams shook hands with the couple, quickly measuring up Ken Dows and noting his athletic shape and resolute expression.

“I heard that you had the chance to meet many times the famous Nancy Laplante before her untimely death, Major. Did she tell you anything about the future situation in the Pacific by chance?”

Ken nearly froze at those words: as the commander of a combat unit vital to the defense of Manila area, Adams should have been briefed about the known Japanese attack plans. William Clement, who was watching him closely, saw his reaction. He also saw for a second dismay on the young face of Ingrid. Clement was thus listening and watching very carefully as Ken answered John Adams.

“She certainly did, sir. Everything she told us in London was sent to Washington by high priority courier. The headquarters here should have had this info for months now.”

“I never saw a damn thing about it, Major.” Said Adams before looking at Clement. “What about you, Bill?”

Clement hesitated, glancing at Ingrid. Ken understood that he was not ready to discuss classified information in front of her and made a sign of the head to Ingrid, who understood and walked away with Rhonda Clement to go speak with other wives. Clement then spoke in a low voice.

“The only thing we received via the headquarters of the Pacific Fleet is a warning to expect hostilities with Japan at the end of this year and to prepare for war.”

“That’s it?” Exclaimed Ken, shocked. “But, we sent hundreds of pages of information to Washington, everything from detailed battle plans to Japanese equipment specifications and performances.”

Clement and Adams exchanged confused looks before Clement spoke again.

"I will certainly inquire tomorrow at Fleet Headquarters about those documents and if we received them at all. That information could prove vital for the defense of the Philippines."

"It effectively is, Colonel." Said Ken. "For your information, I took the liberty before leaving London of making extra copies of the files we got from Nancy Laplante, concentrating especially on the information pertinent to the war to come in the Pacific and the battle for the Philippines. Those copies are presently kept discreetly under key in my bungalow and I was planning to bring them to Fleet Headquarters tomorrow morning."

"Excellent, Major!" Replied Clement, most happy to hear that. "Admiral Hart will certainly will want to see that information and discuss it with you tomorrow."

Ken then decided that he might as well put all his cards on the table now and steeled himself before speaking again.

"In this case, Colonel, I suggest that he speaks as well with my wife. Ingrid knows even more than me about the future of this war."

"How could that be? We are talking about Top Secret information, Major."

"Colonel, Ingrid was adopted by Nancy Laplante months ago. Laplante then educated her in secret, apart from directing her physical training. What I can tell you right now about the future is that, according to the history known to Nancy Laplante, the Japanese will attack simultaneously Malaya, Hong Kong, Hawaii and the Philippines. In her timeline, that attack will happen on December eight, Manila time, or on the seventh, Hawaii time, on a Sunday morning. Burma and the Dutch East Indies will then be attacked by the end of December. Since the Japanese know about the existence of Nancy Laplante, the opinion of Nancy was that they would attack earlier than December, in order to preserve surprise. Her best guess was mid October, on a Sunday, Hawaii time. The Japanese attack on the Philippines would start the same day, with airstrikes against our airfields and our naval bases, followed a few days later by amphibious landings by two divisions reinforced with light tanks."

"Only two divisions? Then we should be able to repulse that invasion: we have many more troops here."

Ken eyed his superior with caution: Nancy had warned him and Mike that racism and prejudice would taint American preparations for war and cause the Japanese to be grossly underestimated. He now could see that she had been right.

“Colonel, the majority of our soldiers in the Philippines consist of Filipino soldiers that are poorly trained and equipped. According to Nancy Laplante, even our own American soldiers will show less than stellar performances in combat at first. You better believe that the average Japanese soldier is brave, in good physical shape, well trained and, especially, experienced, something our soldiers are not. I realize that many will deny that, but it is the judgment of history, nothing less, Colonel.”

On her part, Ingrid kept to general subjects as she spoke with Rhonda Clement and three other Navy wives, who were mostly curious about the situation in England. At one point, Rhonda Clement smiled gently to her.

“You must have had a rough time indeed in London, my dear. I hope that this little reception is helping you forget that and your long trip to here?”

“It certainly does, Misses Clement. I will however go to bed early tonight: all that time lag from traveling has exhausted me.”

“I can believe you on that, Ingrid. Have you started to think about how you will use your free time around Manila?”

“Well, I already spoke with Ken about that. While he will teach me how to shoot pistols and rifles, I will take as well driving lessons. If I find a proper flying school, I will also learn to fly. I always was fascinated by airplanes and already have a few hours on sail planes.”

“I see!” Said Rhonda, hiding her surprise. The young wife of Major Dows was decidedly proving to be quite unconventional, to say the least. Rhonda had heard her earlier on speak in fluent Tagalog with one of the Filipino waiters, something quite surprising for someone just arriving in the Philippines.

“Uh, Ingrid, could I ask you where you learned Tagalog?”

“I was studying Oriental culture in college before the war, Misses Clement. “I also can speak Japanese and Chinese.”

As the women around her looked at her with wide eyes, Ingrid saw Ken make a sign for her to approach. She thus excused herself before joining Ken, Colonel Clement and another graying man.

“Yes, Ken?”

“Ingrid, Lieutenant Colonel Clement and Lieutenant Colonel Adams would like to ask you a few questions about what Nancy Laplante told you about the war.”

“Very well! What would you like to know exactly?”

"Misses Dows, your husband told us about the documents you brought from London. Is there something of interest to us that Laplante told you and that is not in those documents?"

"Actually, a lot, Colonel." Replied calmly Ingrid, making Clement and Adams stiffen. "Nancy discussed at length with me the war to come and many other things. She especially commented to me what she perceived to have been significant mistakes and blunders that are going to cost us dearly. Please don't be mad at me for saying this but she thought that General MacArthur's defensive strategy sucked, big time. One big factor that played against your forces was the insufficiencies in food supplies. Thousands of tons of foodstuff were not centralized properly and were either abandoned or left behind. As a result, our forces eventually had to surrender, mostly due to starvation. There were also a few other stupid mistakes done that cost us dearly, like having anti-aircraft shells equipped with old fuses that could not be set to explode high enough to catch the Japanese bombers. I could go on for a while on the subject, sir. She also told me about what could have been done in her opinion to help resist the Japanese. I would however prefer not to talk about this here."

Clement, a grave expression on his face, pointed an index at her.

"That was already plenty for me, Misses Dows. I definitely want you to be with your husband tomorrow morning when we will go see Admiral Hart."

Clement then turned to face Adams.

"John, the first thing you do tomorrow morning is to check this story about short-ranged anti-aircraft shell fuses. If this is confirmed, then we will place an emergency supply request for higher altitude fuses, to be sent by air within a week."

"Got that!" Replied the Marine battalion commander in a sober tone. Somehow, he had lost his party mood by now.

**13:26 (Manila Time)**

**Sunday, August 3, 1941 'C'**

**Headquarters of United States Army Forces in the Far East (HQ USAFFE)**

**Manila, Philippines**

Ingrid was a little nervous this afternoon as she stood besides Ken in the company of Admiral Thomas Hart and of Lieutenant Colonel Clement while an army major was knocking politely on a door bearing a brass plate with the acronym 'CinC

USAFFE' engraved on it. Someone inside then shouted for them to enter and she followed Ken in, staying a bit behind him. Sitting behind a huge work desk and with a corn pipe in his mouth was Lieutenant General Douglas MacArthur, commander of all the American and Filipino army troops in the Philippines, while two other senior officers sat on a sofa to the left of the desk. Ingrid came to attention the way she had learned to as a Luftwaffe auxiliary while Ken and the others saluted MacArthur. The latter then told them to take place in chairs placed in advance for them in front of the desk and examined briefly Ken and Ingrid before looking at Admiral Hart.

"So, Admiral, what is exactly this classified information you spoke about on the telephone this morning?"

"Information from the future, General." Replied Hart while taking out a thick file from his attaché case and handing it to MacArthur. "Major Dows, sitting on my right, arrived yesterday from his previous post, London, with his young wife. Both of them met and spoke extensively with Brigadier Nancy Laplante before her death, while Major Dows actually worked in the liaison team that transmitted to Washington the info obtained from Laplante. Fortunately for us, Major Dows brought with him copies of the ATHENA info relevant to the war in the Pacific. I reviewed this info with him and his wife this morning and, in my opinion, it is enough to warrant a complete review of our operational plans."

MacArthur's eyes narrowed as he focused on Ken and Ingrid again. The two other senior officers also showed immediate interest at the news brought in by Hart.

"I do not want to be rude to the major's wife, Admiral, but why did you feel that you had to involve her in this?"

"Because she is the adopted daughter of Nancy Laplante and has some knowledge that is not in the file I just handed you, sir."

"If I may, sir..." Said one of the senior officers sitting on the left to MacArthur, who nodded his head.

"Go ahead, Colonel Willoughby."

"Thank you, sir."

The army colonel then looked sternly at Ingrid.

"Misses Dows, I am the intelligence officer of this headquarters and Washington never deemed appropriate to communicate to us the information originating with Nancy Laplante, even though it would have been highly relevant to help prepare the defense of

the Pacific. Why would Nancy Laplante have discussed with you, a civilian, such highly classified information, even if you were adopted by her?”

Ingrid, who had worked in the past with general officers of the Luftwaffe, didn't let herself be intimidated by the colonel and returned his stare while answering politely but firmly.

“Colonel, that information was for Nancy no more than widely known historical data, that is for persons from the year 2012. She discussed history with me because she had absolute confidence in me and because she wanted me to learn from the lessons taught by history. She not only discussed that information with me: she also commented it, pointing at mistakes made and at opportunities lost. I learned a lot from her and am ready to pass on to you what she told me. It is up to you to use it or not, but ignoring those lessons will cost dearly in lives, in my opinion.”

Willoughby's expression then told Ingrid what he thought of her opinion. MacArthur, who had been sifting through the file while listening, then intervened.

“Your comments and recollections will be welcome, Misses Dows. We have the whole of the Philippines to defend and I will use anything that can be useful. Major Dows, could you resume quickly what this information is telling us about the Philippines?”

“Yes, General!” Replied Ken, who then spoke for a few minutes, covering the Japanese actions to come. MacArthur listened to him carefully, taking as well a few notes. At the end, the old general's face had become quite somber.

“And, concerning our own actions, did Laplante make any recommendations or suggestions, Major?”

“Not in this dossier, General. However, my wife Ingrid has these details.” While Willoughby and the major general sitting next to him stiffened with indignation at having to listen to suggestions from a simple army wife, MacArthur nodded his head and stared at Ingrid. The latter carefully chose her words as she took out of a pocket a folded sheet of paper. Nancy had not been very tender about her opinion of Douglas MacArthur, describing him as a grandstanding egomaniac who rarely listened to the opinions from others around him. She however had acknowledged him to be both a brave officer and a top strategist. The trick was going to be very diplomatic with him now.

“General, I must remind you that what I will show you comes from Nancy Laplante and constitutes no less than the collective judgment of eminent military historians and senior officers from the 21<sup>st</sup> Century who extensively studied and

analyzed this war to come. Some of it is not very flattering about many senior commanders in the Pacific, I must warn you. I wrote this last night, from the memories of my conversations with Nancy and from what I read in his information. The first point has already been discussed with Admiral Hart and concerns the fuses of our anti-aircraft shells. They are of an old model unable to reach the operating altitude of Japanese bombers.”

“If I may interrupt Misses Dows for a moment, General,” said Lieutenant Colonel Clement, “I personally checked that particular point and I can tell you that our anti-aircraft shells cannot reach higher than 20,000 feet, well below the operational altitude of 25,000 feet used by the Japanese bombers.”

“All of our shells, Colonel?” Asked MacArthur, both incredulous and furious. Clement could only nod his head gravely.

“All of our shells, General. On order from Admiral Hart, I sent this morning an urgent request for newer fuses. Misses Dows further helped on that subject by suggesting that we request specifically a new type of anti-aircraft fuse, the design of which was given to us by Nancy Laplante last year. They are called ‘proximity fuses’ and use the same principle than radar to detect nearby aircraft and explode near them.” MacArthur glanced quickly at Ingrid before looking at the major general sitting to one side of his desk.

“General Wainwright, I want you to send today a similar request for such anti-aircraft fuses to replace all of our present fuses. I will be damned if we let such a stupid factor give a free hand to Japanese bombers.”

“Uh, yes, General!” Could only reply the major general, scribbling furiously on a notepad. MacArthur then took the list of suggestions and comments from Ingrid and read it quickly. He glanced at Ingrid a couple of times, visibly disturbed or irritated by a few of the points on her list, but read it from end to end before nodding to her.

“Your list will be quite helpful, Misses Dows, and I thank you sincerely for your information. Be assured that I will act on it. Do you have anything further to say before I study with my officers how to modify our defense plans?”

While Willoughby and Wainwright appeared stunned to hear MacArthur give her a vote of confidence, Ingrid secretly felt relief wash over her. Many points in her list pointed at specific errors and cases of bad judgment on the part of MacArthur himself and she had been afraid that he would have simply ignored or thrown away her list out of anger or vanity. Steeling herself, she then presented her last point, a personal one.



"General, I know that the American forces don't accept women, except as nurses, but I am a qualified military air plot specialist and telephone switchboard operator. I also speak and read Japanese fluently. I thus request to be able to stay here in the Philippines, even if you order the evacuation of American dependants and civilians. I request as well the privilege of being able to serve with your forces, ideally with the Army Air Corps, as a civilian auxiliary."

MacArthur, like all the other officers present except for Ken, looked at her with incredulity.

"But, how could you possess such qualifications, Misses Dows?"

Ingrid took a deep breath before letting go her last bomb.

"I was a German Luftwaffe female auxiliary before being captured by Nancy Laplante, General. I served with the headquarters of a Luftwaffe fighter division in France during the air battles of 1940."

After a moment of shocked silence, MacArthur burst out in laughter.

"The famous Nancy Laplante adopted a Luftwaffe girl? That's rich! And the British let her do that?"

"Uh, not really, General. Nancy kept that a secret and the British learned about it only after her death. She also educated me in secret during my months of captivity in London."

MacArthur eyed her for a long moment in silence, finally taking a decision.

"In view of your qualifications and of your knowledge of the Japanese language, I accept your request to stay in the Philippines in case of a civilian evacuation. I will take a decision later about your request to serve with my forces. You may now wait outside while I discuss with my officers and with Admiral Hart."

Ingrid got up at attention then, having won more than she had hoped for realistically.

"Thank you, General!"

She then pivoted on her heels and walked out in a military step, attracting an amused comment from MacArthur to Ken Dows.

"Quite a special girl you married there, Major."

"Effectively, General." Replied Ken proudly. "If anything, she is following in the footsteps of her famous adoptive mother."

**09:32 (Manila Time)**

**Tuesday, August 5, 1941 'C'**

**Far East School of Aviation**

**Airfield of Nielson Field, South suburbs of Manila**

**Philippines**

Ingrid could barely contain her excitement as the taxi that she had taken dropped her in front of a hangar in Nielson Field, an airfield that served both as the official Manila airport and as the location for the headquarters of the United States Far East Army Air Force. Dressed in a light shirt and cotton trousers, Ingrid entered the hangar's annex that housed the offices of the Far East School of Aviation and presented herself with a smile at the young Filipina secretary manning the reception desk, speaking to her in Tagalog.

"Good morning, miss. I came to get flying lessons classes, if your school is still active, of course."

"Uh, we are still opened for business, miss," answered the secretary, surprised to hear an American speak Tagalog, "but customers have been effectively rare lately." The secretary then got a form and presented it to Ingrid, along with a pencil.

"Could you please fill this form while I get one of the flying instructors, miss?"

"With pleasure, miss."

Ingrid had just completed the form when the secretary came back with a man in his forties who was already half bald. The man, of medium built, smiled to Ingrid and shook hands with her while presenting himself with a distinct American accent.

"Good morning, miss. I am Jack Gavin, head instructor of this flying school. So, you want to learn how to fly?"

"I certainly do, Mister Gavin. My name is Ingrid Dows and I arrived a few days ago with my husband, a Marine Corps officer posted to Manila. As you will be able to see from my questionnaire, I already possess theoretical notions on flying and have a few hours on sail planes. I must tell you in advance that I am in quite a hurry to learn to fly and that I plan to go further than a simple license for single engine airplanes. I would also like eventually to learn notions of aerobatic flying, if that is possible."

"Uh, that will all depend on how fast you will learn, Miss Dows. I must also warn you that flying lessons can be quite expensive."

"Money is no object, mister: I recently received a substantial inheritance."

Gavin nodded his head at that, satisfied: a customer with deep pockets was always welcomed at the school, especially in these rather lean times.

"Be assured that you will get your money's worth, Misses Dows. Let's see your questionnaire."

Gavin soon raised an eyebrow, impressed by Ingrid's information.

"I must say that your basic knowledge on the theory of flight and on air navigation seems to be quite solid. Your sail plane club must have been run by real pros."

"You may say that." Replied Ingrid, smiling. In truth, the instructors of her flying club, affiliated like all other youth clubs in Germany to the Hitler's Youths, were pilots seconded from the Luftwaffe. "I suppose that there is a starting fee for the courses?"

"Yes, miss." Answered jovially Jack Gavin, who was already liking this young woman, apart from finding her extremely beautiful. "You can pay separately for each lesson, or pay for the complete course in advance. The basic course costs 500 dollars, plus two dollars per hour of flying."

"I will pay in advance for the whole course and for the first ten hours of flying." Answered Ingrid, who then took out her wallet and counted 520 dollars on the counter, to Gavin's surprise: that sum represented a third of the average annual salary of an American. Jack took the money and made a receipt for Ingrid, then escorted her inside the school's hangar, leading her to a small monoplane with high wing and enclosed cabin.

"Here is the plane you will use to qualify yourself as a pilot, Misses Dows. It is a Fairchild MODEL 24, with a 150 horsepower radial engine. It can attain a top speed of 120 miles per hour and has a range of 525 miles. It is a good plane, sturdy and reliable."

"I already love it, Mister Gavin." Said Ingrid, her eyes sparkling, as one of her dreams was about to come true. "When could I start flying in it?"

"This afternoon, after I have had the time to give you a detailed tour of the plane." Answered Jack, amused and intrigued by her apparent hurry.

**16:27 (Manila Time)**

**Nielson Field, Manila**

Jack Gavin stared with admiration at Ingrid as she cut her engine after rolling her Fairchild up to the school's hangar under his supervision. They had just spent over three hours in the air, partly because a sudden tropical shower had delayed their landing and partly because of the enthusiasm of Ingrid, who had insisted on continuing to fly.

"Well, madam, you must have been born to fly. You are the most talented student I ever had. You are sure that you only flew sail planes before?"

"Positive, Mister Gavin." Said Ingrid truthfully. "When could I fly another lesson?"

"Uh, that will depend on your available time, Misses Dows."

"I still have plenty of free time, mister." Answered Ingrid. Despite his promise to consider her for a position as a civilian auxiliary, General MacArthur had not contacted her yet. Ken had however warned her to be patient about that. Well, if that helped her get her flying license faster, then so be it. She was resolved not to waste any of her time here in the Philippines. God knew that time was running out for her and the other Americans in the Philippines.

### **17:33 (Manila Time)**

**Friday, August 29, 1941 'C'**

**The Dows' residence**

**Manila**

"HONEY, I'M HOME!"

"I'M IN THE KITCHEN, KEN!"

Ken, in combat uniform and wearing his regulation pistol on his belt, crossed the entrance lobby and entered the kitchen, going to Ingrid and taking her in his arms for a long kiss. Julia and Juanita, who were helping Ingrid prepare supper, giggled while watching the young couple kiss. Apart from being generous and kind towards them, Ken and Ingrid proved every day to be a couple deeply in love. Once he unglued himself from Ingrid, Ken smelled with delight the odor floating in the kitchen.

"What's for supper? I am starving!"

"Pork fried rice. I hope that you will like it."

"The smell is already maddening me." Replied Ken. "So, how was your day, Ingrid?"

"Both satisfying and terrifying. First off, though, I have a good news to tell you: I passed with success my high school diploma equivalency test: I got the results today from the Santo Tomas University."

"But that's fantastic news, Ingrid!" Said joyfully Ken before kissing her again. "You worked so hard at your studies. And what about your flying and driving lessons?"

"My flying lesson this morning went very well, but my driving lesson didn't go as smoothly: a truck nearly smashed into my driving school's car this afternoon after speeding through a stop sign. My heart is still beating fast from the scare I got then."

"I must say that the local driving techniques are, uh, interesting." Said Ken, attracting a sarcastic look from Ingrid.

"Interesting? I would say suicidal. And your day, how was it?"

"I will tell you later." Said Ken in a low voice, signifying to Ingrid that he didn't want to talk about it in front of the two servants. Ingrid understood and smiled at Julia and Juanita, speaking to them in Tagalog.

"I kept you away from your families long enough. Fill your containers and go pass a nice weekend with your husbands and children."

"You are too kind, Ingrid." Replied Julia happily. Ingrid, with the consent of Ken, had taken the habit of making Julia cook a very large supper on Fridays, so that the two servants could return to their families with the surplus of food in thermos containers. This, along with the fact that the couple treated nicely the Filipinos around them and that Ingrid spoke both Tagalog and Cebuano, had rendered them popular with the locals. In contrast, some of their American neighbors were starting to find them too liberal by American standards.

Once Julia and Juanita were gone with their containers full of pork fried rice, Ingrid served a generous portion to Ken before serving herself and sitting down in front of him at the small table of their kitchen.

"So, Ken, what is going on?"

"Incompetence and racism, that's what!" Said Ken in a bitter voice before taking his first bite of food. "I spent the day briefing officers about the Japanese and their military equipment, using Nancy's information. I had a hard time convincing most of them that I was serious. Some of these officers still believe that the Japanese are some sort of monkeys equipped with junk weapons. What a bunch of idiots!"

Ingrid kept silent for a moment: the subject of racism in the United States had been one on which Nancy had warned her to expect.

“Does Colonel Clement know about this?”

“I told him about it before leaving the office. He promised me to shake a few of those morons tomorrow and he will also raise the subject with Admiral Hart.”

“Ken, you are doing the best you can.” Said softly Ingrid, caressing his left hand.

“Maybe, but I am not proud of some of my compatriots today.” Replied Ken before chasing his anger away and smiling to her. “I am sorry to be such a killjoy today, Ingrid. There is however still so much to do before we are really ready to fight the Japanese.”

“Well, if that can help your morale, I can tell you that I did my part concerning that today, after my driving lesson. Continue eating while I go get something.”

Ken followed her with his eyes, intrigued, as Ingrid left the kitchen and went to their bedroom. He nearly choke on his fried rice when she came back with a rifle equipped with a long bayonet in her hands.

“A Springfield 1903? Where did you find it?”

“In a sporting goods store here in Manila. It was supposedly used during the Great War in 1917. I also bought a good amount of .30-06 ammunition, plus a web belt and cleaning accessories and supplies.”

Inspecting quickly the bolt action rifle, Ken found it functional and well maintained.

“Well, even if it is officially an obsolete weapon, the Springfield 1903 is still a very good rifle with an excellent reputation for accuracy and dependability. You now have a serious weapon, Ingrid.”

“And I hope that you will find the time during this weekend to add the practice of rifle shooting to that of pistol shooting to my training, my lovely husband.”

“My God, Ingrid! Are you trying to become an infantryman or what?”

“Ken,” said Ingrid in a dead serious tone while starring into his eyes, “my past lives included seven lives as a hunter, plus four lives as a warrior. I already know how to fight. I only need to learn how to fight with modern weapons.”

**10:56 (Manila Time)**

**Thursday, September 18, 1941 ‘C’**

**USAFFE HQ, Manila**

**Philippines**

"General, a group of eight enemy bombers was just signaled by the 60<sup>th</sup> Artillery Regiment. The group was seen over Fort Wint twenty minutes ago, flying Southwest at an altitude of 18,000 feet and at a speed of about 200 miles per hour."

"They were spotted twenty minutes ago and we are advised about them only now? Have our fighters in Nichols Field been advised about them?"

"Uh, we don't know about that, General." Answered the captain who was trying to coordinate the confused bits of information reaching the USAFFE headquarters.

"Well, find out about it, dammit!" Replied in a furious tone Major General Sutherland, General MacArthur's chief of staff. MacArthur, who was letting his subordinates run this air defense exercise and was watching from a corner of the operations room, was becoming more and more impatient and unhappy as he observed the growing confusion around him. The poor captain trying to keep the large tactical map of the Philippines up to date then got another telephone call.

"USAFFE HQ, Captain Tremont!... A group of eight enemy bombers just flew over San Fernando, coming from the Northeast?... You mean that they were seen over one hour ago?... Uh, thanks!"

Tremont then shouted at his sergeant working the tactical map with two corporals.

"Eight bombers from the Northeast were seen over San Fernando at nine fifty. Plot their position and direction!"

The sergeant looked at the map for a moment and hesitated before looking back at his captain.

"Sir, I believe that those bombers are the same as the ones seen over Fort Wint, based on their speed and time observed."

The captain nearly ran to the map to check, but soon had to agree with his sergeant. Ten minutes later, another call infuriated Sutherland.

"Eight enemy bombers just overflowed Nichols Field, sir. Our fighters were caught on the ground."

"SHIT! WHAT WERE THEY WAITING FOR TO TAKE OFF?"

"Nichols Field says that they never got the warning about these bombers, General."

MacArthur finally had enough and got up from his chair, raising both arms up and shouting to be heard around the room.

“THAT’S IT! I HAVE SEEN ENOUGH! CALL AN END TO THIS EXERCISE AND HAVE ALL OUR PLANES LAND RIGHT NOW.”

He then signaled his chief of staff to approach him and spoke to him in a low but firm tone.

“Dick, I want a meeting of all the unit commanders involved in this exercise here at four this afternoon. I believe that we seriously need to shake this house: if the Japanese would have attacked us this morning, we would now be knocked down on the floor.”

“I am afraid that you are right, General. Our big problems are the lack of coordination and our poor communication lines. The information from our outposts often take over a hour to get to our headquarters...when it gets through.”

MacArthur shook his head in disgust as he watched his staff try to pass his order to stop the exercise to the units of his command. The worst part was that the Asiatic Fleet, which was supposed to play a vital role in the defense of the Philippines, had not even been involved in this exercise. Nobody in his staff had any experience with combined operations and there was not even a direct telephone line linking both the Army and Navy headquarters. Every call had to go through the civilian telephone switchboards of Manila, which were notoriously easy to clog due to the limited number of lines available.

“Dick, this can’t go on! I intend to tell the chief of signals to start laying dedicated telephone lines to link together our various units with our headquarters. I want to be able to centralize all the information here so that we could command, instead of simply watching another screw-up like this.”

“But, I don’t know if we have enough reserves of telephone wires in the Philippines to do that, General.”

“Then order some more wires!” Replied brusquely MacArthur. “And find me someone who can better keep this tactical map up to date.”

MacArthur then left the operations room at a quick pace, leaving his chief of staff with his problems. Sutherland scratched his head, unsure how to go about his orders. He couldn’t really blame the poor Captain Tremont about today’s fiasco. Tremont had nothing to do with the deficient communications and nobody here had any experience about modern air warfare. The United States had not known war since 1918 and Sutherland, who was an ethnic German, was the first to recognize that, by present European standards, American military doctrines were obsolete, even if Washington refused to acknowledge that fact. An idea then came to his mind.



**19:46 (Manila Time)****The Dows residence, Manila**

"So, my poor Ken, they made you work overtime today?" Said Ingrid with a malicious tone before welcoming her husband in the lounge with a kiss. Ken gave her a tired smile after ungluing himself from her.

"You can say that again. The Army ran, or rather tried to run, a big air defense exercise this morning. Let's say that the result was not very pretty, if I can judge from what I heard at Fleet Headquarters this afternoon."

"So that's why I had to reroute my Fairchild 24 so many times this morning to avoid all those military planes flying around like mad bees. A pair of P-35 fighters even tried to intercept me, maybe thinking that I was one of the fictitious enemy planes."

"Tried?" Said Ken, freezing with surprise. "Don't tell me that you managed to escape them."

Ingrid made a big grin then.

"Let's say that Jack Gavin was kind enough to let me use that occasion to test my new abilities in aerobatics. I kept my speed as low as I could while twisting around constantly. Those two P-35 finally had to get off my tail in order to avoid stalling and spinning out of control. I didn't have that much fun in a long time."

Ken could not help burst out laughing on hearing that.

"You managed to shake off two P-35 fighters, while having only 55 hours of flying in your credit? You are truly incredible, Ingrid."

"Correction, Ken: 58 hours after this morning. Besides, the level of skill of the two pilots that intercepted me didn't impress me one bit: a very average Luftwaffe pilot would have humbled them. If those two P-35 pilots really represent the best we have in the Philippines, then I am afraid that the Japanese will eat them raw for breakfast."

Ken eyed Ingrid soberly, now very serious.

"Please keep that last remark to yourself, Ingrid: quite a few persons could cause you problems if they heard you."

"Screw them! I fully intend to keep calling things as they are."

"Well, talking about calling things up, Major General Sutherland, the chief of staff of General MacArthur, called me this afternoon. He wants you tomorrow at nine in the morning in his office. He wants to discuss with you about your experience with the

Luftwaffe. Something tells me that someone finally realized that they need to learn from a pro like you.”

“YES! THEY ARE READY TO USE ME!” Shouted Ingrid, overjoyed.

## **CHAPTER 5 – NEANDERTHAL**

**02:41 (Paris Time)**

**November 10, 50,000 Before Common Era (BCE)**

**Time Patrol scoutship ANGEL OF MERCY**

**Dordogne region, future territory of France**

Sylvie Comeau was alone at this late hour on the bridge of the scoutship ANGEL OF MERCY, floating silently high in the night sky of the Dordogne region, in Central France, or rather what was to become part of Central France in 51,000 years or so. The rest of the crew and of the supplementary mission specialists involved in this historical documentation mission were sleeping, like the targets of the crew's mission. The scoutship had been following and studying discreetly for four months via remote-controlled spy probes a small group of Neanderthal humans as it traveled around the forested, snow covered hills and valleys of the Dordogne region, following the herds of reindeers and buffalos that constituted its main source of food. That group of Neanderthals had proved quite unlucky so far, barely surviving in the harsh climate of this ice age period, known as the Würm Glacial Period. They had first lost a hunter to an infected wound three months ago. Then, one month ago, a young woman had died in labor, along with her baby. That loss had particularly devastated the small group, for which women able to reproduce were a vital factor in their long term survival. The group was now down to only two adult men, two women and three children, ranging in age from four months to six years. As a doctor of medicine who had recently chosen anthropology as her second area of expertise, Sylvie Comeau had deeply felt the sense of loss and despair of the surviving Neanderthals. Contrary to long-held myths, Neanderthals were far from being the massive, savage brutes they had been believed to be during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. They were surprisingly human in appearance, apart from being a bit smaller but also much more robust and muscular than modern Homo Sapiens, adult males typically reaching heights of around 160 centimeters and a mass of eighty kilos. They were incredible long distance runners, could throw spears or stones further than a modern man and also had a better hearing. Their skin was typically pale, with often blue or gray eyes and red or blond hair. More importantly, they had proved in

the last four months of observation to be basically as intelligent as an average modern man and had an articulated language, even though it was a rather simple one. They also had shown distinctly human feelings, often displaying love or affection for others in their group, while proving able to show solidarity and to help strangers, like when they had helped another group that had crossed their path three months ago. When the young mother in their group had died in labor a month ago and when one of their hunters had died from a wound earlier still, they had buried their dead in simple but moving ceremonies. All that had been filmed and recorded from various angles, with the goal of producing a visual documentary and an illustrated book at the end of the mission. The mission team had already more than enough quality material to produce something that was going to force many to completely reassess their opinion of Neanderthals.

Fighting the urge to sleep, Sylvie, sitting at one of the sensors stations of the small bridge, grabbed her cup of coffee and took a sip while keeping her eyes on the screen showing the view from the large spy probe floating under cover of a cloaking shield near the entrance of the hillside cave used as a shelter by the Neanderthals. One of the Neanderthals, a young man named Tar, was presently on guard duty besides the small fire maintained just inside the shallow cave. A beeping noise and small flashing red light on her control panel then made Sylvie straighten in her seat: the sensors of the spy probe were detecting something approaching the cave. Pushing a button that would order the three spy probes posted around or in the cave to start recording from all their sensors, Sylvie looked at another viewing screen that showed a thermal sensor scan of the area of the cave. Her heart jumped in her chest when she saw a group of five thermal signatures approaching the cave from one side of the hill. Zooming one of the surveillance cameras of the scoutship on those signatures, Sylvie felt dread on recognizing the five quadrupeds approaching silently the cave, obviously intent on catching the Neanderthals by surprise.

"Cave hyenas! Shit!"

Sylvie then punched a button on her intercom panel, calling Angie Wells, the pilot and mission commander of the scoutship, hoping for a quick answer from her. Cave hyenas were nasty, ferocious predators with powerful jaws able to rip apart even a bear. Against five hyenas, the group of Neanderthals would be lucky indeed to survive, especially if caught by surprise. It took a few seconds for Angie to answer in a groggy voice, by which time the first hyena was less than fifty meters away from the cave.

"Yes, what is it, Sylvie?"

"You better wake up quickly, Angie, along with the rest of the crew: a group of five cave hyenas is approaching the cave used by our Neanderthals. This could end in a bloodbath."

"Oh my God!" Said the blond pilot, waking up fully. "Are you recording this?"

"Yes, for the good it will do for those unfortunate Neanderthals."

Angie didn't make a remark then about her last comment, simply acknowledging her information.

"Very well, sound the general alarm! I am on my way to the bridge."

Sylvie immediately opened a large red lid on her control console and pushed a red button, starting the modulated howling of a loud alarm. She then returned her attention on her observation screens. The Neanderthal man on watch duty was now clearly suspecting something and had gotten up on his feet to go look outside the cave. Things then happened very quickly. The watchman barely had the time to see the approaching hyenas and to start shout an alarm cry when the five hyenas broke as a group into a run, rushing towards the cave's entrance with ferocious snarls. Tar, despite being visibly terrified, bravely held his ground, his spear held solidly and pointing at the rushing hyenas while taking a few steps in order to better block their path to the cave. The leading hyena jumped on him, only to skewer itself on Tar's spear, which went all the way through the beast's torso, killing it nearly instantly. Tar was still trying to take out his spear when the following hyena jumped on him and snapped its jaws around his left forearm, making the man scream with pain. Another hyena then bit him deeply in the right leg, making him fall on his back. Sylvie watched that with horror from her station in the scoutship as the other male hunter of the group, Kem, got up from his deer skin and grabbed his own spear to face the two remaining hyenas of the pack, who had gone around the unfortunate Tar. With the two women of the group hurriedly gathering the three children in the farthest corner of the cave, Kem made a series of quick jabs with his spear to keep the hyenas away. He managed to wound one hyena before he himself had his left leg partly ripped away by the powerful jaws of one of the hyenas. With Tar now being eaten alive by two hyenas and Kem down, reduced to punching with his fists the wounded hyena intent on ripping open his throat, one hyena attacked the group of women and children cowering in one corner. It went after young Kiri, the widow of Dan, the hunter who had died from a wound three months ago. Kiri held on to her infant daughter in her arms and tried to simply kick the beast on its nose but missed. The jaws

of the hyena opened wide before it lunged at her, closing on her joined arms and her baby. The screaming Kiri and her infant, the latter already mauled to death inside the jaws of the beast, were then dragged away by the powerful predator, to be eaten outside the cave. Nana, the wife of Kem and the last adult remaining intact, then jumped forward and grabbed the spear dropped by her husband. Her strength doubled by her fury and despair, she skewered the hyena biting Kem with a mighty downward lunge, making it howl with pain. One of the two hyenas eating Tar, seeing its mate being killed, then attacked her. Nana was able to wound it seriously before having her left arm literally ripped away above the elbow. With blood pumping out of her body through her terrible wound, Nana grabbed a large stone lying on the ground and smashed it on the hyena's nose, making it retreat in howls of pain, Nana's arm still in its jaws. As Nana slowly collapsed to her knees, her six year-old son Kin grabbed a few small stones around him and started throwing them at the two hyenas devouring Tar, screaming as loudly as he could at the same time. The desperate act of the small boy succeeded in convincing the two hyenas to leave, dragging away Tar's disemboweled body.

Utterly horrified and with tears in her eyes, Sylvie Comeau could do nothing but watch the tragedy on the viewing screens of her bridge station. As the last hyena left the cave with its human catch, she saw young Kin go to his mother, who had now fallen face down on the ground, dying. The sight of the small boy crying over his mother then made her snap. Getting up from her station and going in a couple of steps to a nearby emergency equipment locker, she opened it and grabbed the large medical first aid bag inside, along with a machine pistol in its belt holster. Buckling quickly the pistol belt around her waist and slinging the first aid bag across her chest, Sylvie looked at the coordinates of the cave entrance visible in a corner of the viewing screen of her observation station, mentally reading them so that the computer of her implanted time distorter could register them. She then mentally ordered her time distorter to jump to the cave, disappearing from the bridge in a flash of white light just as Angie Wells was emerging at a run from the access door.

Falling down a few centimeters to the snowy ground at the entrance of the cave, after having appeared out of nowhere in the air, Sylvie quickly looked around her, her machine pistol firmly in one hand. With the hyenas now disappearing in the night, Sylvie then ran to Nana, who was apparently still alive. Her intact right hand was squeezing

the bleeding stump of her left arm in an attempt to stop her remaining blood from pumping out. Little Kin, who had by then being joined by four year-old Ani, was still over her mother, crying for her while Nana seemingly talked in a weak voice to her son. In the four months that Sylvie and her comrades had been watching and studying the Neanderthals, Sylvie had been able to pick up quite a few words from their language, which was actually quite simple. Nana was basically telling her son to protect the toddler girl. Nana stopped speaking and gasped in shock and surprise when Sylvie knelt beside her, while the two young children recoiled away, looking at her with wide eyes.

"Ne, ada te." Said softly Sylvie, meaning that she wanted to help her. She then started opening her first aid bag as Nana eyed with incomprehension her uniform, weapon belt and multi-function helmet. The Neanderthal woman's eyes were however already becoming unfocused as Sylvie was starting to apply a garrote around the stump of her left arm. With an ultimate effort, she managed a few last words while pointing the two children to Sylvie.

"Ada le! Ada Kin u Ani!"

Nana's eyes then became fixed, staring at nothing, while her breathing stopped. Sylvie, despite not wanting to accept this at first, understood that she was now beyond help. Nana would need an immediate, massive transfusion of blood in order to be revived, something that Sylvie didn't have with her. Still kneeling besides the Neanderthal woman, Sylvie cried silently over her, gently caressing her dead face. Seeing that, the small boy, who had retreated to a far corner with the toddler girl, cautiously approached, finally kneeling himself besides his dead mother, opposite from Sylvie. Both exchanged long, sad looks in silence. As little Ani joined Kin behind Nana's body, Sylvie took a decision from deep in her heart. Slowly putting her left hand on her chest, she softly said one word, then pointed the two children and said five more words.

"Sylvie... Sylvie ada Kin u Ani."

She then opened her arms wide in an inviting gesture. After a short hesitation, the boy got up and walked around his dead mother to be hugged by Sylvie, soon imitated by the toddler girl.

Sylvie was still emotionally holding the two children in her arms when she heard a radio message in her helmet.

"Sylvie, we have you and those two children on our cameras. Jack is going to go down now with a team of combat robots in order to hunt down and kill the hyenas and

recover the bodies of the Neanderthals dragged away. How is that wounded Neanderthal woman doing?”

“She is dead, Angie.” Said softly Sylvie in English, surprising Kin and Ani. “She died from massive blood loss before I could help her. Angie, we can’t leave those two children here: they would die within days. I am going to bring them back to the scoutship.”

“Uh, we should study this situation first, Sylvie. Normally, you shouldn’t even have shown yourself to any Neanderthal.”

Sylvie, from sad, then became nearly enraged but she kept her voice down, in order not to scare the two children she still was holding in her arms.

“There is nothing to study, Angie. Those two children are now orphans and will die if abandoned here. I am a doctor and have vowed to protect and preserve life, and that’s what I intend to do.”

“But, what will we do with them, Sylvie? They were not meant to see or meet modern Homo Sapiens. And who will take care of them?”

“They will do as you did in 2021 ‘A’, Angie: they will disappear from their original time period to go live in the future. I will take care of them: I am adopting Kin and Ani. Now, I believe that we should do the decent thing and bury properly those poor dead people before leaving, Angie.”

There was a long silence on the radio before Angie Wells spoke again.

“Very well, Sylvie. Four of us will come down with picks and shovels to do the burial work once Jack Crawford has recuperated the remains of the others. You should come up now with the two children.”

“Not yet! Their parents died in front of their eyes and they will wish to see them buried properly. I want to give them closure on that, Angie. I will do my best here to reassure them in the meantime.”

“As you wish, Sylvie.” Said Angie in a resigned tone. “The others will come down in a few minutes.”

Now feeling better, Sylvie looked softly into the eyes of the boy and girl still in her arms.

“Kin u Ani, oot u oum fa Sylvie. Kin and Ani, son and daughter of Sylvie.”

The children’s answer was to hold on to her even more tightly then, bringing warmth to her heart and fresh tears to her eyes.



The first to show up at the entrance of the cave was young Karen Taggart 'A', one of the three sensors operators assigned to this mission on the ANGEL OF MERCY. The American teenager, carrying two picks and two shovels, plus a spare winter coat, entered the cave slowly and fully standing, trying not to scare the two Neanderthal children. She stopped just past the entrance, so that the children could have time to examine her and decide that she was not a threat, then spoke in a soft tone.

"I brought your winter coat, Sylvie. Angie noticed that you went out in a bit of a hurry."

"Thanks, Karen. It is indeed quite cold down here."

Releasing her hold around the children, Sylvie got up and quickly put on the coat offered by Karen, putting on as well the gloves stuffed in one cargo pocket. In the meantime, Karen eyed soberly the two children and the dead Neanderthal woman: to study Neanderthals from a distance via a camera and facing them from close by were two very different things. Even for Time Patrol members, this meeting was a first.

"Poor kids: to see their parents killed in such an atrocious way right in front of them. That woman showed a lot of courage in defending these children like this. Many modern women would have simply cowered in a corner, too scared to act."

"That's quite true, Karen. Hand me a pick, will you? I will start digging Nana's grave."

Giving one pick to Sylvie and putting down her other tools, Karen then slowly approached the two children while smiling to them and pointing at herself.

"Karen, amosh. Karen is a friend."

Searching in a pocket of her coat, she took out an energy bar and, unwrapping it, broke it in two before giving one half to each child.

"Fom! Food."

Ani, still too young to understand yet the full extent of her situation, obeyed her instincts and took the piece of energy bar readily enough. She however sniffed it before biting in it, soon masticating with obvious pleasure. That convinced Kin to accept his own piece but he was still clearly on his guard. Before biting in it, though, he took the time to bend down and grab the bloody spear that Nana had used. Karen tensed up on seeing that but the boy then simply took a step back and started eating his piece of energy bar, the spear in one hand, while keeping his eyes on Karen. The latter understood that the boy still didn't fully trust her. In view of the circumstances, she could certainly understand his caution. Karen thus didn't insist for the moment and joined Sylvie in her digging work.

The ground of the cave was frozen and it proved to be quite hard work, even with picks, to dig a shallow grave for the dead Nana. They were still working at it when William McGarry 'B' and Sally Nolan 'B' showed up, carrying between them a plastic ground sheet supporting the horribly dismembered body of Tar, the young watchman. Little Ani, on seeing the body of her father, forgot at once her energy bar and ran to it, screaming and crying.

"ATA! ATA!"

One look at the body was enough to make Karen turn her head away: the powerful jaws of the cave hyenas had literally ripped to pieces the Neanderthal man, apart from disemboweling it. Another vision of horror came when Jack Crawford 'A' and Prince Len of Cardiff 'B' arrived, carrying in a ground sheet what was left of Kiri and of her baby. Len, a bald giant teenager from the now erased 34<sup>th</sup> Century's Imperium 'B', eyed sadly the five Neanderthal bodies now on the cave's floor, then the two Neanderthal children. At seventeen, he stood close to two meters tall but was actually rather small for an Imperium teenager. He was however a very intelligent young man and also a kind and sensitive one, apart from being a promising historian. He fully realized the seriousness and significance of this moment, for both the surviving children and for the potential impact of this on the society of the Global Council, in the 34<sup>th</sup> Century of Timeline 'A'.

"What a tragedy this is. It makes you wonder how humans survived in such conditions."

"Well, the Neanderthals did so for nearly a quarter of a million years, Len." Said Jack Crawford, an assault trooper who had become the Time Patrol field expert on early hominids. "Compared to them, the average modern man is a wimp, and not much more intelligent, on top of that. Let's start digging more graves."

As the six Time Patrol members worked on digging four separate shallow graves, Kin went to the body of his father, kneeling besides it and caressing Kem's head and face, while little Ani stayed by the side of Tar. After about twenty minutes of hard work, the graves were declared ready and the group gently picked up first the remains of Kiri and of her baby daughter Rana, depositing them at the bottom of one grave. Kem was next to be put down, with Kin holding up his head as his body was being carried. Kin did the same when Nana was put down in her grave, while Ani had to be picked up by Sylvie Comeau after she refused to leave the side of her father. As the group stood by the graves in a moment of respectful silence, Kin grabbed a few stone tools that his father

had made and solemnly deposited them besides his body at the bottom of the grave, adding his spear as well. He next put Tar's spear next to his body, then climbed out of the shallow grave. At the end of the minute of silence, the six modern humans poured back over the bodies the dirt and stones dug up, then piled on top of the mounds large rocks, to deter predators from digging up the cadavers. As the group got ready to return to the scoutship via space-time jumps, Sylvie grabbed Kin in her arms, while Karen took Ani. Sylvie then spoke softly to Kin in order to prepare him for he was about to experience.

"Kin u Sylvie shou. Kin and Sylvie will leave."

Sylvie disappeared from the cave first, followed closely by Karen, then by the others. All of them reappeared in the large cargo bay of the scoutship, brightly illuminated by ceiling lamps. Kin looked wide-eyed around him at first, then started howling with fear while trying to wiggle out of Sylvie's arms. She had a hard time calming him down, her Neanderthal vocabulary being too limited to be able to explain to him what had just happened. The boy finally calmed down enough to let Sylvie bring him to the crew quarters of the scoutship, Karen following her with Ani. Sylvie's first order of business was to show them a bathroom and make the children understand as best she could tell them with words and signs that only a toilet was the proper place to urinate and defecate. While there were a number of janitor robots on the scoutship, Sylvie didn't wish for her or others to inadvertently step in a puddle in some corner of the ship. Once Kin and Ani seemed to have mostly understood her, she then undressed them with the help of Karen, unlacing the pieces of animal fur that had protected them from the intense cold of the glacial period. Karen wrinkled her nose on smelling the body stench from little Ani.

"Phew! They sure didn't bathe too often."

"Would you bathe often if you lived inside a cave with sub-zero temperatures, Karen?"

"Uh, maybe not." Recognized the teenager. "Let's see if they like showers."

The answer to that was soon a resounding 'yes', with Kin and Ani giggling and screaming while playing under the spray of warm water. Sylvie, smiling at that spectacle, reasoned that a shower was very much like a warm rain for the two children. She was however more cautious when she applied cream soap to their bodies after two thorough, successive cycles of soaking, scrubbing and rinsing meant to remove the thick

coat of grime on the children's bodies: she didn't want them to get soap in their eyes, something that would somehow ruin part of the fun. The hair shampoo part was definitely the trickiest one, needing repeated rinsing and scrubbing before Sylvie was satisfied that the long curly hair of both children was reasonably clean. While drying Kin up with a towel, she was able to appreciate how robust and strong his body already was. His prominent eyebrow ridge and receding chin however left no doubt that he was not an Homo Sapiens, even though his expression was most human. Despite all of that, Kin and Ani were still quite pretty children by any standards. Finding something the right size to dress them up was however a challenge, until Karen came back with two T-shirts that belonged to Jenny Kawena 'B', a rather small young woman from 1942 'B' Hawaii that was one of the sensors operators of the scoutship. They were still too big for the two children but made the equivalent of robes for them, with the bottom of the T-shirt worn by Ani nearly dragging on the floor. Sylvie grinned as she eyed the now clean and dressed children.

"Well, that should do it for the moment. Now, let's give them a decent meal for a change."

"You do realize that they eat with their hands, do you?" Said Karen. "Are you sure that you knew what you were getting into when you decided to adopt them?"

"I know that raising and educating them will be hard work, Karen, but I believe that it will be well worth it in terms of human rewards."

"What about the reactions of others to them, Sylvie?" Then asked the teenager, her tone cautious. Sylvie took the time to think her answer to that: Karen's concern was both logical and justified.

"I will deal with that as things arise, Karen. If anything, the people living at our secret main base are by far the most susceptible to be open and tolerant to Kin and Ani. I will however wait at least a few months or years before introducing them to the Global Council society or to that of 20<sup>th</sup> Century 'B'. I can already guess the reactions of my parents, who live in 1943 'B' Montreal. They still have not digested the fact that I decided not to go back to Montreal to live near them. To be frank, I have lost much of the love I had for the Quebec of the 1940s since joining the Time Patrol, after seeing how intolerant and bigoted my original society was and still is. My Montreal has in fact very little in common socially with the Montreal of Nancy in 2015 'A'. I certainly will not expose Kin and Ani to the abuse and loathing I expect them to get from what calls itself 'the good society of Montreal' in 1943 'B'."

Karen winced slightly at the bitterness in Sylvie's voice. She didn't know much about her past life but Karen knew that the welcome Sylvie had received in Montreal after reappearing in 1942 'B' as a member of the Time Patrol had turned frosty quite quickly. Much of that was due to the negative reactions of the Catholic Church, which had a tight grip on the Quebec society of the time, to what it perceived as the immoral and heretical attitudes of the members of the Time Patrol. Nancy Laplante, who should have justly been considered a local heroine for her role in putting an end to World War Two in 1942 'B', was being increasingly bad-mouthed by the Catholic Church and by many Quebec politicians, who were afraid of her quasi-messianic status in Jerusalem as the 'Hand of God' and of her supposedly communist-like social views. A brief flash of white light then permeated the inside of the ship, interrupting Karen's train of thoughts.

"I think that we just jumped space-time back to base. I guess that we might wait until out of the ship before offering a meal to your two kids."

"I think that you are right, Karen. Let's go, kids! Ye shou!"

### **10:06 (New Zealand Time)**

**Wednesday, December 7, 3,000 BCE**

**Main Time Patrol base, future site of Auckland**

**New Zealand**

Alerted by a radio message from the ANGEL OF MERCY, Farah Tolkonen 'A' was present when the scoutship entered its hangar, after cycling through the main ship airlock of the huge cylindrical structure that constituted the secret main base of the Time Patrol. Present besides Farah was Miri Goshenk 'B', previously First Mistress of the erased Imperium 'B' and now the head psychologist of the Time Patrol. Mike Crawford 'B' was present as well. All three were grave, not because they were unhappy at Sylvie Comeau but because they were genuinely saddened by the tragedy that had happened in the Pleistocene. Tenderness showed on Farah's face when she saw the two Neanderthal children come out of the scoutship with the mission crew, holding hands with Sylvie Comeau. On her part, Miri eyed carefully the expressions of the children, trying to ascertain how traumatized they were. The only thing she could see in their expression right now was a mix of wonderment and curiosity, something quite understandable. Angie Wells was the first to report to the trio in the informal manner customary to agents of the Time Patrol.

"We had to interrupt our mission when the Neanderthal group we were studying was decimated by a pack of cave hyenas, Farah. Only two of the seven Neanderthals survived the attack. It was a rather horrifying affair, by any standards. Sylvie took on her to go help the two survivors, who would have certainly died within days from either starvation or from predators if abandoned."

Sylvie Comeau then came forward, still holding the hands of the two children.

"I am sorry if what I did may seem rash, Farah, but abandoning these children was not an option in my mind."

"Sylvie, you do not have to excuse yourself for saving two young children from certain death. Without a written Neanderthal language, this incident will be quickly forgotten in history, even if some survivor would have escaped and then seen you."

Farah then crouched and smiled at the little boy and girl.

"And do you have the names of these two little ones, Sylvie?"

"The boy is named Kin and he is about five or six years old, while the girl's name is Ani. She is three or four."

"Kin and Ani. Cute names indeed. Uh, did they witness the death of the others?"

"They saw everything, Farah. Kin's mother and father were killed in front of him, while Ani's father was killed first by the hyenas. They however defended themselves quite fiercely, killing or wounding three of the five cave hyenas that attacked them as they slept inside a shallow cave. Kin even threw stones at the hyenas, chasing the last ones away. What I would like to do now is to bring them to our mnemotronic lab, so that they could assimilate our language and be able to understand us."

"We will have to proceed cautiously in this respect, Sylvie." Cut in Miri Goshenk. "We still know little about the morphology or functioning of the Neanderthals' brain. We thus don't know if our mnemotronic techniques will be compatible or even safe with them."

"Then we can take a brain scan of them, to see if their brains are similar enough to ours. If they are, then we could proceed one language at a time, in order not to overload their minds."

"That sounds reasonable, Sylvie." Agreed Farah. "Go with them and Miri, then. Oh, and consider yourself from now on as on maternity leave. Concentrate on taking care of them for the weeks to come."

"Thank you, Farah. You are the kind of boss I like. Kin, Ani, ye shoul!"

Farah and Mike watched Sylvie and Miri walk away with the two children, then looked at each other somberly, with Mike speaking first.

“The knowledge of these children should be restricted to members and dependants of the Time Patrol only for the moment, Farah. I have no wish to see a wave of anthropologists and historians descend on these kids with the goal of studying them like lab rats. They are already traumatized enough by the tragedy that struck their parents.”

“I agree. I will spread right away a directive to all members to avoid mentioning those children to outsiders, and that until further notice. I just hope that our own people will be open and tolerant to these two poor kids. There were so many ignorant beliefs and misconceptions going around about Neanderthals in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and before.”

“I know. I am not however worried about our adult members, Farah. You know how cruel children could be without realizing it. Much will depend on the reactions of our own children here.”

Four levels down from the main hangar deck, Sylvie had Kin sit in one of the assimilation chairs of the mnemotronic laboratory, speaking softly to him to chase his sudden nervousness at facing this incomprehensible contraption. Miri, sitting at the lab's control station, then initiated a slow, cautious brain scan of Kin. The boy quickly fell asleep in the chair, hypnotized by the color patterns swirling on the screen close in front of his face. After a few minutes, Miri spoke up, apparently satisfied.

“The brain morphology of the boy shows only very few minor differences with that of modern human brains. I believe that we can proceed without significant risks with an assimilation program.”

“I will still wait to confirm that everything is alright before having Ani go through a session as well, Miri. Kin might as well learn Neo-English first.”

“I concur. I am loading the program now... Here we go!”

Sylvie, staying near Kin's chair with little Ani, watched on anxiously as the mnemotronic session ran its course. Normally, a modern human took an average of twenty minutes to learn Neo-English or another language of similar complexity. The speed at which Kin would complete the assimilation was going to tell them a lot about his true intellectual capacity. Sitting Ani in a nearby assimilation chair, so that she could be more comfortable than just standing around, Sylvie armed herself with patience. A surprised

exclamation from Miri Goshenk about ten minutes later attracted Sylvie to the control station of the lab.

"Is something wrong, Miri?"

"Uh, not at all, Sylvie. In fact, the verdict from the mnemotronic computer is now in on Kin: your boy has an I.Q. of 96, very close to that of an average modern human."

"But, that's very good news!" Exclaimed Sylvie, overjoyed. "This means that Kin should not have serious problems to adapt to the modern world."

"Hopefully, no. You still should go cautiously about that, Sylvie. Oh, by the way, your little Ani has fallen asleep in her chair, I believe. Should I use that chance to start her own assimilation program?"

"If you think that there is no danger, then I would say yes."

"Then you may go position the mnemotronic helmet around her head."

"Right!" said Sylvie before walking to Ani's chair to adjust her helmet.

Eleven minutes later, Miri announced Ani's measured I.Q.: 94. As Sylvie and Miri were pondering that, Kin woke up from his assimilation session. Opening his eyes and seeing Sylvie over him, he spoke a few words in his dialect, to which she replied in Neo-English.

"Can you understand me, Kin?"

"Yes!" Replied the boy in Neo-English, still sleepy. Kin then opened his eyes wide when he realized that he now understood a new language and nearly shot out of his chair, only stopped gently by Sylvie.

"How is this possible, Sylvie? Did the Great Spirit do this to me?"

Sylvie and Miri were left with their mouths open ajar at his last question.

"The Neanderthals believed in a spirit?" Said Miri, stunned. "Just that notion would be enough to reassess completely the public knowledge on them."

"What knowledge?"

"Kin," said softly Sylvie, "we will have ample time to discuss all this in private. Do you feel any confusion in your head right now?"

The boy thought for a moment before shaking his head.

"No! Why do you ask?"

"Because we could then teach you another language now, along with Ani, a language called English that would help you two better play with other children here."



"I believe that we can even add French to that, Sylvie." Said Miri from her station. "According to the readings from the control computer, learning Neo-English didn't stress Kin's mind at all. In fact, his reaction was no different from that of a modern boy."

Sylvie was thoughtful for a moment before nodding her head.

"If you think that there is no risk, then I agree. Kin, would you mind sleeping a bit more, so that you could learn more?"

"I can learn more?"

"Yes, Kin. We use these machines often to perfect ourselves and learn about many new things."

"Will you stay near me and Ani, Sylvie?"

"Yes I will, my sweet boy." Replied Sylvie, moved by his question. "Now, you just need to lay back in the chair and watch the images."

Kin did as told, allowing Miri to reprogram his chair and that of Ani, who was still asleep and learning Neo-English. Miri smiled to Sylvie as she pushed a button that would initiate the additional programs.

"This is a very good news for them and you, Sylvie. Being able to use the mnemotron will speed up greatly their ability to adapt to their new world."

"Yes, but will the modern world accept them as they are?"

"Only time will tell, Sylvie."

### **14:39 (New Zealand Time)**

#### **Daycare and playground complex of the Time Patrol base**

Sylvie felt warmth in her heart when she saw Kin and Ani open wide their eyes and grin happily before running to the large, colorful play module where other preteen children were playing. She watched them mix and play with the other children for a moment before going to sit on a bench nearby, besides the large sand square of the playground complex. Suzan Laplante 'B' and Miriam of Magdala were already sitting on the bench, watching respectively one year-old Nancy Laplante 'B' and two year-old David of Nazareth play in the sand with plastic toy shovels and buckets. Both women, who had heard about the arrival of the two Neanderthal children, smiled in welcome to Sylvie.

“You did a good deed by adopting those two unfortunate children, Sylvie.” Said Suzan Laplante ‘B’. “What happened to them was a true tragedy.”

“It was a tragedy indeed, Suzan. I could not in good conscience let them be abandoned in the Pleistocene, with no adults to protect and care for them.”

“Yeshua would have smiled on you for what you did, Sylvie.” Added Miriam of Magdala. “You showed true kindness and compassion, the way he preached. I understand that your new children were able to use the mnemotron without problems.”

“That’s correct, Miriam. Miri found then that the respective I.Q.s of Kin and Ani are 96 and 94, very near the average I.Q. of modern humans. Furthermore, we found then as well through Kin that Neanderthals believed in a greater spirit. That, along with what we saw and recorded during our four-month mission, will prompt major changes to the outlook we had of the Neanderthals before.”

“Farah did well to put you on maternity leave, Sylvie.” Said Suzan after a short silence. “You may find that raising two little children out of the blue like this will be quite a challenge.”

“I already am starting to find that out, Suzan. Talking of maternity leave, I heard that, now that Nancy ‘A’ has been confirmed to be pregnant, she has decided to stay for a year in Jerusalem ‘B’, to avoid the people from 2015 ‘A’ learning she is having a child. Are the Israelis still after her in 2015?”

“Well, not for her time machine, although the Russians may be after that now. The Israelis simply want her dead for the humiliation she inflicted on them during the Israel-Iran conflict.”

“The Israelis started both that war and the confrontation with Nancy.” Cut in Miriam of Magdala in an incensed tone. “They got what they deserved.”

“I can’t agree more with that.” Replied Suzan. “I was happy when Farah decided that further attacks on Nancy would attract in return an anonymous but stinging response.”

“Well,” said Sylvie with a smile, “let’s hope that your little Nancy here will not grow up to be as much of a shit disturber as her big timeline twin is.”

In response, Suzan looked down at her little toddler daughter, still playing in the sand near David of Nazareth, smiling to her.

“You are not going to be a shit disturber, are you, my sweet Nancy?”

The toddler girl looked up at her, grinning, then flattened with slaps of her two hands the sand castle David had just built, attracting screams of protest from the little boy. Sylvie, like Miriam, broke out in laughter on seeing that.

“You sure got your answer on that, Suzan.”

Suzan could only roll her eyes as Nancy ‘B’ giggled at her exploit.

### **09:06 (Paris Time)**

**Wednesday, April 28, 1943 ‘B’**

**Louvre Museum, Paris**

**France**

The close to a hundred anthropology experts and historians assembled in an empty room of the Louvre Museum, sitting on folding chairs facing a huge video viewing unit, fell silent when Jan Bella walked in, coming through a door situated behind the video unit. The chief historian of the Time Patrol took place behind a lectern equipped with a microphone and looked briefly around at his audience before starting to speak.

“Welcome back to this conference on early humans, ladies and gentlemen. Since this Monday, you have had the chance to view a number of video documentaries and expositions of ancient artifacts that were the result of extensive research and of on the spot studies in the distant past by agents and reconnaissance probes of the Time Patrol, some of it conducted as far away in time as five million years ago. You, as known experts on early humans, were invited by the Time Patrol to be the firsts to view and discuss the results of our work in the past. You certainly realize by now the amount of controversy our results and conclusions will raise, or in fact already raised, thanks to early unauthorized disclosures.”

Many heads nodded soberly at that. The reactions of the Catholic Church and of other religious orders and conservative associations to leaks about the studies of early hominids done by the Time Patrol had been quick and fierce. It basically came down to the tired debate about scientific facts and research versus the beliefs based on religious books like the Old Testament and the Bible. Due to her high visibility in this time period as the Overseer of the Holy Land of Palestine, Nancy Laplante ‘A’ had received the brunt of the criticisms and protests from the various churches and even from some governments, with the Catholic Pope even calling her ‘The Witch of Jerusalem’. By now,

both Nancy and Jan Bella had had enough of this nonsense and had decided to counterattack with the best weapon they had: the truth.

“Well, the Time Patrol deals with facts, not fiction, however old or supposedly holy that fiction can be. After the viewing of the next video documentary on Neanderthals, the Time Patrol will release to you free copies of illustrated book versions of our various documentaries. Those illustrated books contain a wealth of still pictures from our documentaries, plus maps and various analysis and annexes. Furthermore, the Time Patrol will release next week for general sale to the public the same illustrated books and will distribute them as widely as possible. At the same time, various selected theaters around Europe and Asia that have accepted to show our video documentaries will do so, starting Friday of next week. Some religious fanatics may call that propaganda work but I call it educating the public about the truth.”

As the experts and historians smiled and looked at each other, babbling excitedly at these news, one anthropologist got up from his chair with a question.

“DOCTOR BELLA, WHY SHOW YOUR DOCUMENTARIES ONLY IN EUROPE AND ASIA? WHY NOT IN THE UNITED STATES?”

“Because the American cinema censorship board has refused to let us distribute our documentaries around theaters in the United States, on the pretext that they are blasphemous and go against public morality. The sale of our books was blocked there for the same reason. We still hope to convince eventually the American government to change its mind on this. However, when considering that many American states still refuse to allow the teaching of the theory of evolution, this could take some time.”

“Indeed!” Replied the American anthropologist, sounding discouraged, before sitting back down. Bella then flashed his best smile, trying to raise the spirits of his spectators.

“Well, let’s forget all this obscurantism for the moment, ladies and gentlemen, and let’s watch some facts. I will now start the viewing of our latest documentary, filmed in 50,000 BCE in the Dordogne region of France. I hope that you will enjoy it.”

After activating the large viewing screen and starting the documentary produced from the work of the team from the scoutship ANGEL OF MERCY, Jan Bella sat in a chair of the last row, in order to watch the reactions of the spectators. The excitement among the anthropologists and historians, who came from dozens of various countries, including the Soviet Union and the United States, was palpable as the first images

appeared on the screen. Hardly anybody got up to go to the washrooms during the two hour presentation, so captivated the audience was. The final scene, showing the attack by the cave hyenas and ending with little Kin and Ani crying over the dying Nana, struck many in the audience hard, with more than a few crying on seeing the tragedy. Despite having reviewed the documentary many times already, Jan Bella still had a hard ball in his throat when he got up at the end to return to the lectern.

“Before I make my concluding remarks on this video documentary, I will now give you a ten minute washroom break, for the benefit of those who have been holding it in and are now dancing on their chairs.”

Laughter greeted his announcement, with many then rising from their chairs and leaving the room in a hurry. Those who didn't go to the washrooms went to the tables lining one wall of the room and supporting hot and cold beverages and a collection of sandwiches, cheese bits and other snack food. Jan Bella made sure in the meantime that nobody went sneaking before the appropriate time towards another line of tables supporting piles and piles of books covered by linen sheets. More books were prepackaged in boxes under the tables, with the boxes being pre-addressed in the name of the most prestigious universities and history institutes of Europe, to be shipped out or carried away after the conference.

Once everyone was back in their chair, Jan Bella spoke softly in his microphone.

“Our documentary ended in what was certainly a true tragedy. Unfortunately, life in those past millenniums was harsh and unforgiving. It is to the tribute of the Neanderthals that these hardy, exceptional hunters survived for over a quarter of a million years in such conditions. I would now like to bring to you one happier ending to our documentary. As you were able to see by yourselves, little Kin and Ani survived the hyenas' attack but were left stranded and alone with their dead parents. What our documentary didn't show, however, was what happened afterwards. SYLVIE, YOU MAY COME IN NOW!”

Stunned gasps and exclamations went around the anthropologists and historians when Sylvie Comeau, wearing her Time Patrol uniform, entered the room by its back door, holding the hands of Kin and Ani, who were dressed in colorful children's clothes. All eyes stayed on the two Neanderthal children as Sylvie took place behind the lectern and spoke in the microphone.

“Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Sylvie Comeau, a doctor of medicine and amateur anthropologist with the Time Patrol. I was part of the team that filmed the scenes from the Pleistocene that you saw. When tragedy struck the group of Neanderthals we were studying, I could not in all conscience do nothing and let Kin and Ani die from starvation and neglect in that cave. I thus decided to save them and adopt them. They now live with me at the main base of the Time Patrol and are being educated along other children of the Time Patrol. I can tell you that they were able to assimilate various learning programs through our mnemotronic techniques and that they proved to have I.Q.s very close to that of average modern humans. Kin has a proven I.Q. of 96, while Ani’s I.Q. is 94. Both now speak Neo-English, English and French, plus of course their native Neanderthal dialect. I must caution you right now that they are not to be considered like study specimens and that I will protect their privacy, fiercely if need be. You may now approach them in an orderly fashion to speak to them. Please keep in mind that they are only six and four years old, respectively, so don’t expect scientific dissertations from them.”

Still stunned and not believing their luck at being able to meet true Neanderthals, the anthropologists formed quickly an orderly line, with Kin and Ani then going slowly down the line, speaking briefly with the scientists and shaking hands with them. Sylvie watched the process from a few paces away with Jan Bella, speaking softly to the chief historian.

“I hope that Kin and Ani will still be able to live like normal children after this. I would like so much to be able to show them Paris after this without being pursued by a horde of reporters and photographers.”

“Don’t worry about that, Sylvie: I have already taken care of that. Otto Skorzeni and Jack Crawford will escort you and your kids around Paris this afternoon, so that you can enjoy a nice trip with Kin and Ani without being annoyed.”

“Jan, you are a sweetheart!”

“For them, nothing will be too good, Sylvie.” Replied the historian, his eyes moist as he watched the two children go down the line of anthropologists.

## **CHAPTER 6 – THE JAPANESE ARE COMING**

**12:37 (Manila Time)**

**Sunday, October 19, 1941 'C' (Saturday, October 18 in Hawaii)**

**The Dows' residence,**

**Manila, Philippines**

“HONEY, I'M HOME!”

Julia, who was washing some rice before cooking it, giggled as Ken, busy helping her by cutting up chickens, shouted back towards the door to tell Ingrid that he was in the kitchen. Like most Filipinos, Julia believed in traditional values and roles. Having a wife come back from work to be greeted by her husband working in the kitchen was a notion that had made many of Julia's friends and neighbors laugh. While amused, Julia herself did not however think less of her employer for that: Ken Dows, like Ingrid, was easily one of the most caring persons she had worked for. Contrary to many American men she had known before, Ken also respected her and young Juanita, not using his position of authority to abuse or harass them. That American couple was definitely a refreshing change from other employers Julia once had.

Ingrid, wearing a set of old combat fatigues without any insignias save from a black armband with the words 'USAAF AUXILIARY' in white, entered the kitchen and exchanged a kiss with Ken before dropping her backpack in a corner.

“Another quiet day in the Pacific.” She announced in English before switching to Tagalog to speak to Julia. “What do we have for supper, Julia?”

“Chicken fried rice, Ingrid. Are you hungry?”

“Oh yes! I will go have a shower first, though.”

While Ingrid was taking her shower, Ken reflected on their first two and a half months in the Philippines as he finished cutting the chickens. While the life here was agreeable and easygoing, the work they had put in during the last months had in his mind helped change things enough to make a real difference. The arrival by ship two weeks ago of a sizeable supply of modern fuses for the shells used by the anti-aircraft guns in the Philippines had especially done a lot to improve their chances against a Japanese attack. That same transport ship that had brought in the fuses, along with other vital

combat supplies, had left Manila harbor three days ago, now loaded with Army and Navy dependants headed for the safety of the continental United States. There still weren't enough modern fighter aircraft in the Philippines in Ken's opinion but that was something he or even General MacArthur could do little about. One idea from Ingrid that MacArthur had gladly adopted was to use his old B-10 and B-18 bombers to keep a nearly constant airborne watch off the coasts west, east and north of Manila, thus supplementing the PBY amphibious reconnaissance planes of the Asiatic Fleet. Hundreds of miles of telephone wires had also been laid, finally providing dedicated communications lines between the various outposts and headquarters, thus improving tremendously the coordination between American and Filipino units. The beaches that they expected the Japanese to use for their landings had also by now been discreetly mined and prepared for defense, while every Army unit had been kept busy with either training or with digging of defenses. General MacArthur and Admiral Hart, motivated by the information from Nancy Laplante brought from London by Ken and Ingrid, had also taken the unprecedented step of fully coordinating the activities of Army and Navy units around the Philippines and of exchanging all the tactical information as it came. In contrast to all this, Ken had realized quickly with dismay through the situation reports he saw from Hawaii that the other forces in the Pacific had been much less diligent in their war preparations. Apparently, Admiral Kimmel and General Short still clung to the belief that the Japanese attack would come on the original date of December 7 and thus were taking their sweet time in preparing themselves, while the Army and Navy units in Hawaii kept up their petty inter-service rivalry. From the little that Asiatic Fleet headquarters could pick up from the British side, the situation was about as poor in the various British and Australian bases around the Pacific as in the American bases in Hawaii. Ken had understood why after reviewing the historical notes from Nancy Laplante. The British and Australian commanders presently in place were the same myopic incompetents who, in the original history, had dismissed the Japanese as mere sub-humans to be brushed aside. With the British still giving absolute priority to the European theatre, little of their new advanced equipment had made it through to their Pacific garrisons. Thus, all the conditions were present to literally repeat history in most places around the Pacific, except for the Philippines.

On a more personal note, Ken was proud of the role Ingrid was playing, however modest it was, in the defense of the Philippines. After meeting her and questioning her



about her Luftwaffe experience, Major General Sutherland had then assigned her to the operations center of General MacArthur's headquarters in Manila, where she was now working as a civilian army auxiliary with the title of 'tactical information coordinator'. In that post, which she filled from four in the afternoon to noon, Friday to Tuesday, the periods judged most critical in terms of possible Japanese invasion, Ingrid's job was to receive and collate the information from all sources and then mark it in clear symbols on the giant tactical map of the operations center. Despite her lowly status of civilian auxiliary, Ingrid was thus filling a position normally reserved for a junior officer or a senior NCO. Ingrid loved her new job, with her work schedule allowing her to continue her flying lessons and her pistol and rifle shooting practices. Apart from having earned her driver's permit and single engine pilot's license, plus her high school equivalency diploma, she was spending a little fortune on obtaining her twin engine pilot's license on Lockheed 10 ELECTRA and was also renting regularly a Stearman biplane to practice aerobatic flying. Some had criticized what was for them wasteful spending but, in truth, Ingrid easily had the financial means to pay for all this. The bulk of the money from Nancy's will and from the sale to the United States of Nancy's car and electronic equipment, close to 19,000 dollars, was now in a Chase Manhattan bank in Detroit, Ken's native city. With now 95 flying hours accumulated in her pilot's booklet and still flying as much as time and weather permitted, Ingrid was about as happy about her present life as she could be.

Looking briefly through one of the windows of the kitchen, Ken was reminded that all had not gone as well as expected here. A number of their civilian neighbors, most of them prosperous American or European businessmen and professionals, could be seen in their backyard or on their patio, lounging around with their families while their Filipino servants took care of their every needs and wishes. Washington had flatly refused to let General MacArthur order the repatriation of the American civilians living in the Philippines, arguing that such a move would only create unnecessary panic and economic chaos. Those same civilian neighbors had scoffed at Ken and Ingrid when the couple had tried to gently suggest to them that maybe their children would be safer back in the States or in Australia. They had even laughed at seeing the couple dig up their backyard to build a small but solid underground air raid shelter with the help of paid Filipino laborers. Those laborers were in fact Julia's husband and brothers. If and when

the Japanese would start bombing Manila, Julia, Juanita and their immediate families had been promised a place in that shelter by Ken and Ingrid.

Having finished his job of cutting the chickens, Ken washed his hands and grabbed Ingrid's backpack to bring it in their bedroom. While not a large one, it was surprisingly heavy, as it contained a gun belt with Nancy Laplante's Glock 17 pistol, lots of spare 9mm ammunition, a full water bottle with carrier and mess tins and a dozen tins of canned meat. A set of spare clothes and some hygiene items completed the list of things in the pack, which Ingrid meant to be a getaway pack in case they would have to run away from the Japanese. Ken certainly could not accuse Ingrid of not planning for the worse, a trait she had probably picked up from Nancy. He himself kept a few extra items and cans of meat in his regulation backpack and web gear, just in case. Ken was putting down Ingrid's backpack by her side of their bed when she entered the bedroom, coming from the bathroom. As was her habit, which had scandalized at first Julia, she was naked and had not bothered to wrap a towel around her body. Seeing Ken look at her hungrily she smiled and went to him, gluing herself to him.

"We never know, Ken: this could be our last occasion for a while if the Japanese attack tomorrow."

She then proceeded to undress him. Ken did not resist and soon got on top of her on the bed, using his tongue at first to truly excite her before penetrating her.

Much later, after the departure of their two servants and after eating supper, the couple put the dirty plates and utensils in the sink, so that Julia could wash them tomorrow morning. Then moving to the lounge, Ken sank in their sofa while Ingrid selected a CD and placed it in her portable unit. Many young officers working at the CinCAF and USAFFE headquarters jumped at every occasion they had to be invited in the couple's house so that they could listen to music from the future. With the soothing music of Enya playing on, Ingrid sat besides Ken and snuggled up to him with a moan of satisfaction.

"Ken, life with you is so sweet. I wish there wasn't a war to sour things up."  
Ken, an arm wrapped around his young wife, played gently with her hair.

"Unfortunately, we can't just wish it away, Ingrid. We will have to take the best out of life as we go."

“Ken, I have a feeling of foreboding. Somehow, I believe that war is about to start here, maybe tomorrow. I want you to promise me something.”

“Anything you want, Ingrid.”

“I want you to promise me that you will not let yourself be taken alive by the Japanese. I just couldn’t live with the thought that you could be subjected to their cruelty.”

Ken looked gravely in the big blue eyes of his wife: she was dead serious about this, as the tears about to roll on her cheeks showed.

“I promise, but you will have to promise me the same thing. Just try your best to escape first, if it comes to that.”

“I promise.”

Both then looked longingly at the official picture of Nancy Laplante, hanging on the wall in front of them.

“I miss her terribly, Ken.”

“I do too. I still have you, though. Come, you should go to bed early: you have to take your shift at USAFFE HQ early in the morning. I will give you a good massage at the same time.”

### **03:43 (Manila Time)**

**Monday, October 20, 1941 ‘C’ (Sunday, October 19 in Hawaii)**

**Operations Center, USAFFE HQ**

**Manila, Philippines**

“Hi, guys!”

The arrival of Ingrid in the operations center attracted happy smiles on the faces of the few men on duty on the night shift: even though she was known to be married, Ingrid still made most men in the headquarters dream about her angelic face and her slender, feminine body.

“Good morning, Ingrid!” Replied First Sergeant Chris Altman, who was in charge of the night shift operators. “You are early, as usual. You are well awake, I hope?”

“I had a cup of strong coffee at home before coming. So, nothing new?”

“Nothing! However, the Sun will rise only in a bit over two hours. No air activity is possible before that.”

Ingrid took off her backpack and put it down behind the small table reserved for her use that supported a battery of field telephones and one standard commercial telephone set. She then went to the big tactical map of the Philippines, resting on four tables pushed together, to examine it.

“Who is the duty officer at this time, Sergeant?”

“Captain Foster. He went up on the roof to go smoke a cigarette.”

Ingrid hid a frown on hearing Foster’s name. She then went to check the meteorological information board and frowned again: even though partially cloudy skies were announced for the Philippines and Formosa, the conditions predicted for today were passable, thus making a Japanese air attack possible as soon as the Sun was up. Ingrid was still examining the meteorological predictions when a corporal from the transmissions department came in, a catastrophe air on his face and a message in his hands. Looking around the room, he then went to First Sergeant Altman, who was the highest ranked man present, and presented him his message while speaking in an urgent tone.

“We just received a message with ‘CRITIC’ priority in clear, sent by the Army headquarters in Hawaii: the Japanese are presently attacking Pearl Harbor. We had the Hawaii operator authenticate and he did it correctly.”

Everybody in the operations center fell silent and looked at Altman, who read aloud the message.

“To all Army units in the Pacific and Far East, from Army Command in Hawaii. Japanese planes are presently bombarding Pearl Harbor and a number of our airfields around Hawaii. The first bombs fell at about eight o’clock, Hawaii time. This is not a drill. Signed: Major General Short.”

As the soldiers around her looked at each other, having difficulty to believe what they had just heard, Ingrid walked quickly to the large Pacific map hanging on one wall and, using a red grease pencil, annotated it, writing a number of symbols and a date-time group over Hawaii. This done, she turned around as Altman ordered a soldier to go fetch Captain Foster on the roof. Going to him, she spoke in a low voice to the senior NCO.

“We should advise General MacArthur immediately, Sergeant.”

“I know, but I must wait for the decision of Captain Foster before acting on this.”

Ingrid sighed with frustration then: the fear to take an initiative, at the risk of displeasing a superior, was in her mind one of the biggest problems existing presently in the United States Army.

"Sergeant, I have no rank to lose: I will call General MacArthur now. This cannot wait."

Walking quickly to her table, she grabbed the receiver of her commercial telephone and formed the personal number of General MacArthur. The latter answered her after four rings, his voice sleepy.

"MacArthur!"

"General, this is Ingrid Dows, at the operations center. We just received a message from the Army headquarters in Hawaii: the Japanese are presently attacking Pearl Harbor."

MacArthur's voice suddenly became much more firm.

"Do we have more details?"

"Only that the first Japanese bombs fell on Pearl Harbor at about eight o'clock, Hawaii time, General."

"Very well! I'm on my way!" Said MacArthur before hanging up. Ingrid next grabbed one of the field telephones on her table and called the Asiatic Fleet headquarters, situated near the docks of Manila. Getting the duty officer there, she repeated to him the message received from Hawaii. Next, she called the headquarters of the Far East Army Air Force in Nielson Field and warned it, then called her home, waking Ken.

"Hello?"

"Ken, this is Ingrid. You better get up and go to the Navy headquarters: the Japanese have started attacking Hawaii and are bombing Pearl Harbor."

"Good God! Alright, I am getting up. Thanks for the warning. And Ingrid...be careful today."

"I will be, my lovely hunk. Be careful too."

Ingrid had done all that and still had to wait a few minutes more before Captain Foster, who had probably taken the time to finish his cigarette, finally showed up in the operations center, barking an order to Altman.

"Sergeant Altman, call immediately General MacArthur to inform him of this message from Hawaii."

"That has already been done, sir: Ingrid took care of it."

Foster turned around to face Ingrid, visibly irritated.

"Who told you to place that call, madam?"

"Nobody, Captain." Replied Ingrid in a resolute tone. "I simply took that initiative on myself in view of the urgency of the message. I also informed the duty officer at Asiatic Fleet headquarters and the one at FEAAF headquarters in Nielson Field."

"Why did you call the Navy?" Shot back Foster, nearly livid. Ingrid eyed him with near contempt.

"Why, Captain? Because we are supposed to defend the Philippines together with the Navy. Because nothing tells us if the Navy headquarters in Hawaii is not presently a pile of burning rubble. Because wars are not won with suppositions. My job is to coordinate and disseminate all tactical information from this headquarters and that is what I did. The information about the attack on Hawaii is already marked on our map of the Pacific, by the way."

She then ignored the discomfited duty officer and placed a few more calls, alerting the various regional Army commands in the Philippines.

General MacArthur entered the operations center twenty minutes after having been called by Ingrid and went straight to the duty officer.

"Captain Foster, show me that message from Hawaii."

Taking the message presented by Foster, MacArthur read it quickly and nodded once, somber.

"Captain, have all our units put on maximum alert. Even if war has not yet been declared officially, I now consider this command as being at war with Japan."

One of Ingrid's field telephones then rang, making her pick up the receiver.

"USAFFE HQ!... Very well! Thank you and keep us informed if they see anything, please."

Getting up and going to the large tactical map table, Ingrid lined up a series of wooden, plane-shaped blue plaques over the Bay of Manila.

"General, the Asiatic Fleet is scrambling right now twelve PBY amphibian patrol planes, which will go take patrol stations to the North, Northeast and Northwest of Luzon, in order to watch for the possible passage of Japanese planes."

"Excellent! We can't do less in view of the Navy's celerity, gentlemen. Have our B-10 and B-18 bombers take off as quickly as possible, without bombs but with

maximum fuel, to take their predetermined patrol stations. I don't want the Japanese to be able to fly to Manila without being detected. Have also our B-17 heavy bomber ready to take off for their preplanned mission against Formosa. All our pilots and aircrews are to stand by their planes, ready to take off in case of an attack, until further notice. I don't want a single one of our planes destroyed on the ground if the Japanese attack here." MacArthur's orders triggered a storm of activity in the operations center, with Ingrid jumping from one telephone line to another.

After a quick breakfast at six, Ingrid returned to her post and waited for new developments. The full headquarters staff was now in place, while Captain Foster was gone, to Ingrid's relief, having returned to his normal logistics desk. Brigadier General Marshall, the command's operations officer, was now in charge of the center. Just before seven o'clock, a signals officer handed somberly a message to MacArthur, who read it once in silence before repeating it aloud.

"Gentlemen, this is a coded message sent from the Hawaii headquarters of General Short. Quote, to all Army units in the Pacific. Massive Japanese air attacks occurred against Pearl Harbor and the airfields of Hickam Field, Wheeler Field, Bellows Field, Ewa and Kaneohe, starting at eight o'clock, Hawaii time. The attack was made in two waves and caused major damage. Seven battleships, two aircraft carriers, three cruisers and six other ships were either sunk or gravely damaged. Over one hundred planes were destroyed on the ground. The losses in personnel are estimated at over 2,000 men killed or missing. The possibility of further enemy attacks against Hawaii remains. All Army units are to go immediately to maximum alert and to consider themselves at war with Japan, end of quote."

MacArthur then looked around him, a hard expression on his face.

"Gentlemen, Japan has attacked an American territory and has killed American servicemen. According to the information brought from the future by Nancy Laplante, we can now expect the Japanese to attack the Philippines by air today. Our job, in cooperation with the Asiatic Fleet, will be to repel those attacks and to inflict as many losses as we can on the enemy. I also have the firm intention to go to the offensive, right now! Be watchful and give your maximum from now on."

As the officers and enlisted men looked at each other, MacArthur walked to Ingrid's table and grabbed the field telephone connected to the headquarters of his air force in Nielson Field.

"This is General MacArthur! Get me Major General Brereton at once!... General Brereton, this is MacArthur. Hawaii just confirmed by coded message the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. The losses there are unfortunately severe. Japanese planes are also probably on their way or about to be on their way to strike the Philippines. Launch immediately your B-17 bombers on their preplanned attack against Formosa. Also, have all your fighters ready to take off on five minute notice. Once your B-17s will be back, rearm them and send them back for a second raid. How is the reassembling of the P-40 fighters that arrived by sea early this month proceeding?... I see! Do your best to speed that up and hit Formosa hard for me."

MacArthur then hung up, visibly unhappy. Brigadier General Marshall went to see him, worried.

"Something is wrong, General?"

"Yes! Of the 81 new P-40 fighters we received early this month in disassembled state, only eleven have been reassembled to date, thanks to a lack of technicians and of specialized tools. Worse, the majority of the pilots for these P-40s is still stateside. Brereton thus has only 42 P-40 fighters ready to fly and 37 pilots qualified to fly them. Damn! We need those P-40s! Our old P-26s and our P-35s are not up to face Japanese ZERO fighters."

"We could transfer some pilots from P-35 and P-26 onto P-40s, General." Suggested Marshall, making MacArthur think for a moment.

"That's not a bad idea, Dick. However, the P-40 has the reputation of being a tricky plane to fly. Look at the accident rate on P-40s that our pilots here suffered. And that would in turn leave some P-26s and P-35s without pilots. Even though those two types of fighters are obsolescent, they can still be useful against Japanese bombers. We simply need more fighter pilots. Alright, Dick! Call Brereton and tell him to start transferring P-35 and P-26 pilots on P-40s as more P-40s are reassembled. Tell him to try giving at least a couple hours of flying instruction on P-40 to the transferred pilots but tell him to do it quickly. Also, I want the P-40s still in crates to be immediately dispersed away from our main airfields. I don't want those planes to be destroyed on the ground while still disassembled."

"Understood, General."

Ingrid then grabbed her courage with both hands and got up, to then talk to MacArthur in a low voice.



"General, I know that what I will request is completely irregular, but I have both a monoplane and a twin engine plane flying license, with a total of 95 hours of flying. While I am not qualified as a fighter pilot, I frequented for months the greatest air aces of the Luftwaffe in France, who taught me their tactics. I would thus like to volunteer to pilot any P-26 or P-35 that will become available."

As MacArthur eyed her sharply, Brigadier General Marshall answered her in a categorical tone.

"That's out of the question, Misses Dows! First, you are a civilian, apart from being a woman. Second, you already have a job to do here."

"General," replied Ingrid politely but firmly, "the pilots of the American Volunteers Group in China, who are flying on P-40 against the Japanese, are also considered as civilians and as mercenaries. The Filipino Army Air Corps, which possesses P-26A fighters, could always hire me as a mercenary, something which would short-circuit all the regulations of the American Army, I believe."

As Marshall looked at her with big eyes, MacArthur burst out laughing.

"Dick, I believe that her argument would hold. If President Quezon decided to hire her as a mercenary fighter pilot and gave her a P-26, there is nothing that I could do then."

"But a woman fighter pilot? That's unthinkable, General!"

"That is actually a reality, General." Replied Ingrid. "The R.A.F. has been using women as combat pilots for over six months now, while the Soviets employ women as bomber or fighter pilots in three regiments."

MacArthur then eyed Ingrid with a mix of admiration and pride.

"Madam Dows, I admire your combative spirit and your willingness to fight for the United States. Your husband can be proud of you. I will keep your proposition in mind but, for the moment, you are more useful to me here."

"General, this raises a question about my present post. I am officially a civilian employee of the Army and my contract says that I was hired to work from Friday to Tuesday, on the night shift. I can't in all conscience leave my post here at noon simply because my contract says so."

"Are you ready to contribute voluntarily supplementary time, Madam Dows?"

"All the time you want, General."

"Excellent! Stay at your post until four today, then come back at six o'clock. I will have your pay adjusted to reflect this."

MacArthur then walked away, leaving Ingrid alone with Marshall. The latter eyed Ingrid with contempt.

“Don’t push your luck too far, Misses Dows. If it would depend only of me, you would stay at home, like all good American housewives.”

Ingrid did not reply to that, hiding the best she could her anger and disdain for this old misogynist fossil.

### **09:05 (Manila Time)**

#### **Operations center, USAFFE HQ**

##### **Manila**

Douglas MacArthur, returning to the operations center after conferring with a group of senior officers in his office, saw that new symbols had been added on the wall map of the Pacific. Walking to the map, he saw that, according to the symbols, the Japanese had apparently attacked this morning Hong Kong, Thailand and Malaya, using both ground troops and air attacks. The island of Wake, in the middle of the Pacific, had also been attacked. MacArthur nodded at these developments, which conformed with the information from the future given by Nancy Laplante: it further convinced him that his changes to his operational plans following the bringing of that information from London had been well justified. Calling Brigadier General Marshall to his side, he pointed to him the new symbols.

“When did we receive those reports on Hong Kong, Thailand and Malaya, Dick? I didn’t see them.”

“Uh, we didn’t exactly receive reports on these places, General.” Replied Marshall in apparent embarrassment. “Misses Dows took on her to call via the Transpacific submarine telephone cable the British in Hong Kong and Singapore, this without any prior authorization from me. As for Wake, we received a situation report from the island garrison only a few minutes ago. They were attacked by a Japanese amphibious force but were able to keep it at bay and inflict serious casualties to it.”

Something in Marshall’s tone made MacArthur glance at him.

“And you think that she acted incorrectly by calling the British?”

“Yes, General! She completely bypassed the chain of command and contacted foreign officials without proper authorization. I thus sent her back to her home.”

MacArthur suddenly pivoted on his heels on hearing those last words, anger flaring.

"Did our intelligence department or our signals office warn us of those Japanese attacks on Hong Kong and Malaya before she made her calls?"

"I haven't received official reports yet on this, General, but..."

MacArthur then interrupted him, furious.

"Somebody used her initiative and intelligence to obtain vital strategic information on the situation around the Philippines and your reaction was to send her home? If she was one of my staff officers I would promote her on the spot for that initiative. What the hell were you thinking? That following regulations to the letter is more important than winning this war?"

MacArthur then turned towards the young lieutenant that was sitting at the table previously occupied by Ingrid, barking an order that all the men in the operations center heard.

"LIEUTENANT, CALL IMMEDIATELY MISSES DOWS AT HER HOME AND TELL HER TO COME BACK HERE AT THE DOUBLE!"

Returning his attention on Marshall, MacArthur pointed an index at him.

"General, from now on, I want to see initiative and common sense used in this operations center. Do you understand me?"

"Perfectly, General." Stuttered Marshall, reddening from the barely disguised blame dished to him by MacArthur. The latter then went to the big tactical map table of the Philippines and examined the wooden symbols on it before looking at his intelligence officer, Colonel Charles Willoughby.

"No signs yet of the Japanese?"

"Not yet, General. Their planes should however be spotted soon by our bombers or by the Navy's PBYs, if they are on their way, of course."

"And our B-17 bombers?"

Willoughby pointed at a blue plaque positioned near the island of Formosa, which housed numerous Japanese bases.

"They should arrive over Formosa in about a half hour, General."

"At about the same time the Japanese should arrive here." Said MacArthur to himself, thoughtful. Before the arrival of Major Dows and his priceless package of information from Nancy Laplante, he had planned to safeguard his precious heavy bombers by evacuating them to Mindanao, out of reach of the Japanese. However, the detailed reading of Laplante's info had convinced him that many of his standing operational plans had been deeply flawed. The mention in that info of the distorting

influence of Philippines' President Quezon on his strategy, influence that apparently resulted in some disastrous decisions on his part, had embarrassed him into discreetly revising his command relationship with Quezon, making MacArthur cut the local political factor out of his strategic and tactical planning. As a result, he would not wait anymore for the Japanese to strike first before reacting, something he originally wanted to do at Quezon's behest, who was still hoping not to involve the Philippines in the coming war if it could be avoided. Stockpiled reserves of food had as a further result been moved from local Filipino warehouses and then centralized in Bataan and Corregidor, against the wishes of President Quezon. MacArthur had also given in to the recommendations of his aviation commander, Lewis Brereton, and reestablished the plans for a counter-attack on Formosa by his B-17 heavy bombers. At least, his bombers could not be destroyed on the ground now, an added plus to the benefit of striking back at the enemy.

Eight minutes later, the lieutenant sitting at the telephones table took a call, then shouted towards MacArthur.

"GENERAL, ONE OF OUR PATROL BOMBERS JUST SPOTTED A FORMATION OF ABOUT 120 PLANES APPROACHING, SIXTY MILES NORTHWEST OF LINGAYEN. THEY ARE FLYING AT 20,000 FEET AT A SPEED OF ABOUT 170 MILES PER HOUR AND ARE HEADING FOR CLARK FIELD. OUR FIGHTERS HAVE RECEIVED THE ORDER TO TAKE OFF AND INTERCEPT THEM."

"PUT HIS INFO ON THE MAP AT ONCE!" Ordered MacArthur. "LIEUTENANT, ALERT BY PHONE THE 60<sup>TH</sup> ARTILLERY REGIMENT AND THE DEFENSES OF THE MANILA BAY AND SUBIC BAY, THEN ADVISE THE HEADQUARTERS OF THE ASIATIC FLEET. GENERAL MARSHALL, ACTIVATE THE AIR RAID SIRENS ACROSS MANILA!"

Less than five minutes later, the lieutenant got another call.

"GENERAL, OUR BOMBER REPORTS A SECOND GROUP OF A HUNDRED PLANES FOLLOWING THE FIRST ONE. THE PLANES ARE CONFIRMED AS A MIX OF 'ANN', 'NELL' AND 'BETTY' TYPE BOMBERS, ESCORTED BY 'NATE' AND 'ZERO' TYPE FIGHTERS."

MacArthur frowned on hearing that.

"Damn! Over 200 enemy planes for our ninety fighters to face. The battle will be tough."

The news became even worse two minutes later.

“GENERAL, A THIRD GROUP OF PLANES WAS SPOTTED BY A NAVY PBY AMPHIBIAN. ABOUT EIGHTY ‘VAL’ AND ‘KATE’ BOMBERS, ESCORTED BY FORTY ‘ZERO’ FIGHTERS, ARE PRESENTLY 150 MILES NORTHEAST OF MANILA, HEADING FOR US.”

As he observe the personnel of the operations center scramble to update the tactical map, MacArthur whispered to himself.

“May God help our pilots. They will need it.”

### **09:34 (Manila Time)**

#### **Lead Boeing B-17D FLYING FORTRESS**

#### **14<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Squadron (Heavy)**

#### **Northeast coast of Formosa (Taiwan)**

Major Randolph Masters was crossing the coast of Formosa, leading the seventeen bombers of his squadron, when his radio operator stuck his head between his seat and that of his copilot, Lieutenant Peter Stuart.

“Major, Nielson Field just advised us that close to 300 Japanese planes are presently attacking Manila and our airfields around it. Our orders are to continue with our mission and to inflict maximum damage to the enemy before returning to Clark Field to rearm and refuel for a second strike.”

“THREE HUNDRED PLANES?! Damn! We may not have an airfield left to return to. Too bad: let’s concentrate now on our objective and make those Japs pay.”

Flying in combat formation at an altitude of 7,500 meters and a speed of 450 kilometers per hour, the four-engine bombers approached rapidly their primary objective, a Japanese military airfield near Taipei. Masters, seeing no Japanese fighters in the sky nor any reaction from air defense guns, then took a sudden decision and spoke in his radio microphone.

“To all Blue Boy call signs, this is Blue Boy One. The enemy doesn’t seem to be reacting to us. We will thus go down now to an altitude of 10,000 feet, in order to add to our bombing precision. Follow me and have all your gunners ready for action.”

As he put his heavy bomber in a dive, Masters thanked the fact that most of the Japanese fighters based in Formosa must now be busy over the Philippines, something

that was now opening the way to the objective for him. His navigator/bombardier soon contacted him as he recovered from his dive at 10,000 feet.

“Major, I have the objective in sight. Make a heading correction of five degrees to the left.”

“Understood, Jacob.”

Making sure that his other bombers were following him as he veered slightly to the left, Masters looked nervously around the sky, searching for enemy fighters. To his relief, he saw nothing but his own bombers.

“Pilot to bombardier: I am now giving you steering control for the final bombing approach.”

“Understood, Major. I now see clearly the objective in my sight. There are about fifty planes lined up along the taxiway, apparently ready to take off.”

“That must be the Japanese second attack wave for the Philippines.” Said Masters, suddenly excited. “Cut across at an angle through those planes. Blast them to bits, Jacob!”

“Understood, Major. Effecting a correction now. Bomb release in two minutes.”

Those two minutes seemed to be an eternity for Masters. Japanese air defense guns belatedly opened a rather sparse fire against him as his squadron was about to overfly the airfield. The triumphal scream of his bombardier, along with the jump made by his plane as it suddenly was unloaded of its payload, then told him that his three tons of bombs were on their way.

“BOMBS AWAY!”

Looking anxiously downwards while turning his bomber around, Masters observed the fall of the 204 500-pound bombs released by his squadron. He screamed with joy on seeing the carpet of explosions on the ground that hit across the files of Japanese bombers, followed by giant fireballs from a fuel depot hit by his bombs.

“YES! TAKE THAT FOR PEARL HARBOR, MISTERS JAPS! Winslow, contact Nielson Field and tell them that we successfully hit our objective and are on our way back.”

**10:03 (Manila Time)**

**Operations center, USAFFE HQ**

**Manila, Philippines**

Ingrid, who had returned to the operations center barely ten minutes earlier, put down the receiver of the field telephone linking her with Nielson Field and got up, to then walk quickly to the big wall map of the Pacific. Many officers and enlisted men followed her with their eyes, fixing on the pistol held in a modern combat holster on her right upper leg. Now that the war was officially on, Ingrid had decided to openly wear her GLOCK 17L pistol, which she had inherited from Nancy, taking it out of her backpack and strapping it to her leg. The detonations of bombs exploding in the distance, along with the heavy firing from American air defense guns around Manila, told clearly to anyone that the battle for the Philippines was now on. Taking a blue grease pencil, she drew a symbol over Formosa before going to see General MacArthur, who was observing the action from beside the tactical map table.

"General, our B-17 bombers have just hit successfully their objective in Formosa and are on their way back."

"Excellent!" Said MacArthur, happy. "In maybe four hours, if all goes well, we will be able to make another raid on Formosa."

"General, may I make a couple of comments based on our observations to date?"

MacArthur looked at her with curiosity, while his staff officers around him appeared scandalized at seeing a woman give her opinion on a military situation to a general.

"Go ahead, madam."

"First, the composition of the third group of enemy planes that was detected suggests that it was launched from two aircraft carriers situated to the Northeast of Luzon. Second, while the Japanese were caught by surprise by our raid on Formosa, they will not make the same mistake twice and will probably keep from now on a heavy fighter cover over Formosa. However, striking another alternate target away from Formosa may allow us to keep the element of surprise."

"And what alternate target are you suggesting, Misses Dows?" Asked MacArthur, now truly interested to see what she would propose. The next four words from Ingrid then struck like a bomb around her.

"Nagasaki, in Japan, General."

All the officers around looked at her as if she was crazy. Even MacArthur was left stunned. She thus went on quickly before someone could shut her up.

"Nagasaki is within range of our B-17s, if carrying a reduced bomb load, General. Furthermore, the position of Nagasaki along the southern coast of Kyushu makes it

relatively easy to spot in terms of air navigation. The material damage from a bombing raid would probably be minimal, but the psychological impact, both in the United States and Japan, would be immense. A successful bombing raid on Japanese home soil, so early in the war, would shake hard the enemy morale, while reinforcing the morale of our own public. It would also reflect well on your command and may even convince Washington to send you reinforcements. From a strategic point of view, the Japanese would be so shocked by that raid that they could very well decide to delay their planned invasion of Burma and of the Dutch East Indies, in order to redirect more forces against the Philippines.”

“You want to attract more Japanese forces against the Philippines?” Exclaimed in a horrified tone Brigadier General Marshall. “Are you crazy?”

MacArthur then raised his hand swiftly, cutting off Marshall.

“Let her finish! I want to hear what she has to say.”

“Thank you, General.” Said Ingrid, secretly relieved to see that she was not going to be simply kicked out of the operations center. She then looked gravely at Marshall.

“General Marshall, I am fully conscious that we will probably lose the Philippines in the months to come, save for a miracle. The Philippines are right now the only base from which we can directly strike Japan with our B-17s. Thus, we must exploit that asset to the maximum before losing it, in order to provide precious breather time to our allies around the Pacific. Yes, we will suffer from such a stronger Japanese pressure, but each week of resistance on our part will give more time to our other forces in the Pacific to prepare their defenses. In view of the strategic importance of our B-17 bombers and of the submarines and ships of the Asiatic Fleet, we should thus concentrate our defenses around our airfields and the Navy base at Cavite. If we are to lose this battle eventually, which is probable, then let’s extract the most benefits possible out of that for the United States and our allies in the Pacific.”

The reaction of MacArthur was to applaud her briefly before looking at his staff officers. Ingrid’s deep sense of strategy and her ability to accept the bitter price of war had impressed him, while the horrified looks on many of his officers’ faces was disappointing him.

“Gentlemen, I believe that you just have been served a lesson in grand strategy, a lesson I fully concur with. We must consider the wider strategic implications of this battle and get out the most we can from a bad local situation. Once this air battle is



over, I will confer with General Brereton and modify our air strategy to includes strikes on Japan. Misses Dows, please follow me to my office.”

“Yes, General!” Could only say Ingrid. A major whispered to a colonel as she left the operations center behind MacArthur.

“This girl must be in his bed for him to listen to her like this.”

MacArthur led Ingrid to his large office and closed the door behind them before going to sit behind his work desk, fixing the teenager standing in front of him.

“Misses Dows, you told me before that Nancy Laplante educated you and that you often discussed air tactics with many Luftwaffe air aces, but what I just heard was far beyond what I could have expected from a teenage girl, however intelligent she may be. Where did you get this sense of military strategy?”

Ingrid took a deep breath before answering. She now had little choice but to reveal her secret if she didn't want to lose her credibility with him.

“From history, General. In truth, I possess an experience of life spread over 7,000 years. Early this year, while still interned at the Tower of London, I started one night to remember my past incarnations, the same night in fact that Nancy Laplante also started remembering her own past incarnations. I know that this sounds totally preposterous, General, but I can prove it easily by speaking in a number of ancient languages I used in previous lives. I still am not sure why me and Nancy got that gift and from whom, but I believe that there must be a higher purpose to all this. As for my sense of strategy, I once wielded the might of an empire, while in another life I and 300 other Spartans made the ultimate sacrifice at the battle of Thermopylae, in order to save the rest of Greece from the Persians. I also own the ability to speak Tagalog and Cebuano to a previous life as a Filipina woman.”

She then spoke a few phrases in Latin, Greek and Hebrew for good measure, to help convince MacArthur that she was not simply delusional. The latter, who knew notions of Latin and Greek, sat back in his chair, overwhelmed.

“My God! This is truly incredible, yet I would tend to believe you right now.”

“Thank you, General. Could I ask you to keep this strictly to yourself, though? Only my husband knows about my special talent.”

“I will be discreet, Misses Dows. I however sense that you want something else. What is it?”

"Only to serve my country of adoption to the best of my abilities, General. I know that I am presently most useful to you in the operations center, but officers and NCOs could eventually take my place. You however are facing a critical shortage in fighter pilots and, once you are out of fighters, the Japanese will then be able to bombard your troops and the Philippines at will. You said that President Quezon could legally hire me as a mercenary fighter pilot. Well, General, that is what I wish from the bottom of my heart. I know that I may not survive long as a fighter pilot, but at least I will have done my utmost to help defend my husband and the Philippines, once my country of birth. Every Japanese bomber I could shoot down would be one bomber less left to threaten my husband."

MacArthur was silent for a long moment while staring at her, then spoke up in a sober voice.

"Very well, Ingrid. I will see what I can do about your request and will speak to President Quezon on your behalf. You may now return to your post."

"Thank you very much, General." Replied Ingrid, coming to attention and saluting him before turning around and leaving the office. MacArthur thought over what he had just heard, then finally grabbed his telephone receiver and called the headquarters' switchboard operator.

"This is General MacArthur. I would like to be connected with President Quezon, at Malacanang Palace."

## **19:06 (Manila Time)**

### **Main briefing room**

### **Asiatic Fleet headquarters, Manila**

### **Philippines**

The nearly 200 Navy and Marine Corps officers packing the fleet main briefing room got up from their chairs as one when Admiral Hart entered the large room with his main staff officers.

"Please sit, gentlemen!" Said Hart while walking at a quick pace to the first row of chairs, which had been reserved for him and his aides. His fleet intelligence officer, standing behind a lectern set besides a large map of the Pacific pinned to a wooden board, started his briefing on a nod from Hart.

“Admiral, gentlemen, the United States are now officially at war with Japan. President Roosevelt made the announcement on statewide radio today after learning of the Japanese surprise attacks against us and the rest of our Pacific Fleet. I am pained to confirm to you that, for reasons still unknown here, the Japanese managed to take our ships and aircraft in and around Pearl Harbor by complete surprise and were able to inflict catastrophic damage to our fleet. The battleships ARIZONA, WEST VIRGINIA, OKLAHOMA, UTAH, TENNESSEE, PENNSYLVANIA and NEVADA were either sunk or badly damaged, along with the cruisers HELENA, RALEIGH and DETROIT and four destroyers. Worst of all, the Japanese were able to catch and sink the carrier LEXINGTON, while the SARATOGA was seriously damaged. Over 110 planes of all types were also destroyed and the port infrastructure and Navy installations suffered greatly. For all intents and purposes, our Pacific Fleet is out of combat for weeks, if not months. In the same day, as we were being attacked here, the Japanese also launched assaults against Wake Island, Thailand, Malaya and Hong Kong. On our side, our air defenses have done a good job today, shooting down close to thirty Japanese planes, mostly bombers, but at the cost of twelve of our fighters and eleven pilots killed or wounded. Thankfully none of our planes was destroyed on the ground and the damage to our airfields was minimal. The new proximity fuses for our anti-aircraft shells also performed miracles, surprising and disrupting the Japanese bombers.”

Hart then took a moment to turn around in his chair and speak to Ken Dows, sitting two rows behind him.

“Major Dows, you may thank your wife on my behalf for having suggested to us those proximity fuses: her information saved many lives today.”

“Thank you, Admiral.” Replied Ken, as proud as a peacock. The intelligence officer then continued his briefing.

“The best news of the day concerns the raid by Army B-17s against a Japanese airfield in Formosa. They were able to catch on the ground what seemed to be part of a second wave of bombers about to take off. Our B-17s destroyed on the ground 23 enemy bombers and eight fighters and were able to return intact to Clark Field.”

The officers in the briefing room cheered briefly at that, then let Wallace continue.

“If the Japanese stick to their original plans, which I believe they will do for at least a while, they will continue their heavy air attacks for the next few days until our airpower is all gone. In two days, on D+2, they will land battalion-sized forces in the morning in two points in Northern Luzon: Vigan and Aparri. Another secondary landing

will follow two days later, on D+4, at Legaspi on the southern tip of Luzon. On D+14, the Japanese will land their 48<sup>th</sup> Division, reinforced with two regiments of light tanks, on the beaches between Bauang and Agoo in the Lingayen Gulf. On D+16, they should land southeast of Manila, in Lamon Bay, with their 16<sup>th</sup> Division. According to the Laplante files, the Japanese will be outnumbered by us but will benefit from superior training and equipment. Before any of you jump to his feet to protest that no Jap soldier can outfight our men, I would urge you to think with a cool head on this. Nancy Laplante had the advantage of historical hindsight concerning this whole war and her information has proved to be invaluable countless times. Just consider the fact that she warned our navy months before her death about grave defects in our torpedoes. At the time, a number of American admirals treated that information as pure bunk, claiming that nothing was wrong with our torpedoes. Well, tests were done on our torpedoes, just in case she could be right. Our weapons turned out to be actually nearly useless, with the defects found in them the exact same ones predicted by Nancy Laplante. That episode is by the way the reason why all our torpedoes were exchanged for new models two months ago. So, I would advise you all to treat that information very seriously while formulating your next plans. My department will be more than happy to provide any additional info you may require in the future.”

Admiral Hart then got up from his seat and faced the spectators with a stern expression.

“Captain Wallace has my complete support on this subject, gentlemen. I intend to plan our defense based on that information and I expect all of you to consider our opponents as well trained professionals with fanatical resolve and good quality equipment. We will thus in turn have to prove ourselves as professional and stouthearted as the Japanese if we want to win. Now, we do have a few important cards in our hands, starting with our 29 submarines. If we use our cards well, we will have a decent chance in this fight. The Fleet Operations Officer will now review our battle plans for your benefit.”

As the operations officer was about to replace Wallace at the lectern, a liaison officer entered the room and went to Admiral Hart, whispering into his ear. The other officers saw Hart show surprise before smiling and then getting up to face them.

“Gentlemen, I was just informed of the next objective for the Army B-17s, to be struck tomorrow morning.”

Taking a pointed, he then slapped its point on the briefing map in a theatrical gesture.

“Nagasaki, Japan!”

Much later, a tired Ken Dows returned home, to find Ingrid already in bed. Taking a quick shower, he then quietly slipped under the bed sheets, hoping not to wake her up. The teenager however had her eyes open when he got in bed.

“Ken, I have something to tell you.”

She then told him about her conversation in private with MacArthur, finally looking anxiously at him.

“Ken, I hope that you will not be displeased by that. I love you more than anything else in the World, but I have to do my best to serve and protect my new country and help save as many American and Filipino lives as possible.”

“I...I understand and support your decision, Ingrid.” Answered Ken, a ball in his throat, before hugging her tightly. “Be careful, my sweet Ingrid.”

### **07:49 (Tokyo Time)**

**Tuesday, October 21, 1941 ‘C’**

**Headquarters of the territorial defense forces of Japan**

**Tokyo, Japan**

General Naruhiko Higashikuni, Commander of the Territorial Defense Forces of Japan, was stepping out of his staff car to enter his headquarters building when a staff officer ran to him, speaking urgently after bowing deep to him.

“General, the Americans bombed Nagasaki this morning.”

“WHAT?” Shouted Naruhiko, shocked and furious. “WHEN? HOW?”

“About one hour ago, General. Close to twenty B-17 heavy bombers coming probably from the Philippines dropped about a hundred bombs on the Mitsubishi shipyards in Nagasaki.”

“Have we at least managed to shoot down some of those bombers?”

“Er, no, General! The Americans managed to take by surprise our local defenses. Major General Shimura, the military commander of the Nagasaki Prefecture, committed Seppuku<sup>6</sup> after the raid.”

Naruhiko clenched his teeth as he tried to calm down and think logically.

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<sup>6</sup> Seppuku : Japanese ritual suicide, normally done to atone for a failing that brought dishonor to the person concerned.

"At least, Shimura did the honorable thing. What are the damages to the Mitsubishi shipyards?"

"The shipyards themselves were only lightly touched, General. However, the new battleship MUSASHI, which was being completed in one of the dry docks in Nagasaki, was hit by a number of bombs and a fire started aboard. The firefighters of the shipyard are still battling the flames."

"By the Kamis! Admiral Yamamoto will be furious on hearing this. And what will the Emperor say? Our own soil, bombed only a day after the official start of this war."

### **06:42 (Manila Time)**

**Wednesday, October 22, 1941 'C'**

**SARGO Class American submarine USS SWORDFISH**

**32 nautical miles north of the coast, off Aparri, Philippines**

The captain of the USS SWORDFISH grinned with anticipated pleasure as he lined up the Japanese troop convoy in the crosshairs of his periscope. A heavy cruiser was leading a double file of ships made of three troop transports and four destroyers. The orders were however to consider any troopship as a priority target, since the main goal here was to prevent the Japanese from landing on Filipino soil. The voice of the weapons officer then sounded around the control room of the fleet submarine.

"All tubes loaded and ready, Captain. Fire solution ready on first target."

"Then fire all forward tubes in quick succession, Mister Lumley."

"Aye sir! Fire tubes one through four!"

"Firing tubes one through four, sir!" Replied the torpedo chief as the noise of compressed air and a shudder marked the launch of the first of the four forward torpedoes. The three other weapons followed quickly one by one. Not waiting for the results of his first shoot, the captain then turned his periscope towards the second troopship.

"Turn hard port 180 degrees! Open aft torpedo tubes!"

"Turning hard port 180 degrees, sir!"

"All four aft torpedo tubes ready, sir."

"Fire solution team...Mark! Heading 176, distance 2,400 yards. Second heading...Mark! Heading 171!"

"Fire solution ready, sir!"

“Then match bearings and shoot all four stern tubes.”

“Firing tubes 5 through 8 now, sir!”

The submarine shuddered again as the four heavy torpedoes left their launch tubes. Fifteen seconds later, the noise of four underwater explosions could be heard through the hull, making the American sailors shout in triumph: their four first torpedoes had connected with the first target. The captain was able to see in his periscope four huge geysers erupt along the side of the first troopship. That ship started to list heavily nearly immediately. Turning his periscope towards the second troopship, he waited with growing excitement for his other torpedoes to hit. To his slight disappointment, only two torpedoes hit that troopship. They were however enough to make the Japanese ship start sinking by the stern. About three kilometers away, the captain of the USS SWORDFISH could see a Japanese destroyer approaching at full speed towards him.

“Japanese destroyer approaching from port, distance 3,000 yards. Engines full ahead! Keep periscope depth!”

Normally, he would have dived as deep as he could while turning, to avoid the depth charges the Japanese destroyer was certainly intending to throw at him. However, the fantastically detailed intelligence that the Asiatic Fleet possessed had allowed to preposition for an ambush no less than six submarines. The Japanese were about to learn about the German ‘wolf pack’ tactic. Doing his best to ignore the incoming destroyer, the captain looked around the horizon with his periscope, trying to find another nearby target. He nearly jumped with joy when three torpedoes from another submarine hit the last troopship, breaking it in half.

“The last troopship has been hit. We will thus go for the heavy cruiser. Mister Lumley, what is the status of our forward tubes?”

“Tubes one and two are loaded and ready, Captain. Tubes three and four will be ready in one minute.”

“Very well! Turn to port, heading 085! Fire solution team...top! Heading 042, distance 2,600 yards... Second bearing...top! Heading 045, distance 2,500 yards.

“Fire solution ready, Captain!”

“Fire tubes one and two!”

There was again the noise of compressed air as two torpedoes left their launch tubes.

“Tubes one and two fired, Captain! Torpedoes on the way.”

The underwater noise of three explosions then made the captain turn his periscope to port, in time to see the destroyer coming at him stagger under the impact of three torpedoes.

“YES! The SCULPIN has just plugged the destroyer that was after us. Let’s concentrate on that cruiser, gentlemen. Mister Lumley, are tubes three and four ready?”

“One moment, Captain... Tubes three and four now confirmed ready.”

The captain then renewed his firing solution on the heavy cruiser before shooting his two last forward tubes. Out of four torpedoes, two hit the cruiser that was frantically zigzagging in order to avoid torpedoes coming from multiple directions. Four more torpedoes from another submarine then hit as well, dooming the cruiser. In total, the six American submarines of the pack off Aparri shot 37 torpedoes, sinking the whole Japanese force heading for the coast.

Nearly at the same time, another pack of six American submarines ambushed and sank with similar success the Japanese troop convoy heading towards Vigan, on the Northwest coast of Luzon. One heavy cruiser, one light cruiser, three destroyers and four transport ships went to the bottom, victims of American torpedoes.

One hour later, an even bigger success was achieved near the Palau Islands, 900 kilometers to the East of the Philippines. A pack of eight American submarines ambushed a large Japanese combat flotilla as it barely started its way towards Legaspi, on the southern tip of Luzon. Taken completely by surprise as they were still forming up their ships after leaving their harbor, the Japanese lost in less than thirty minutes the light aircraft carriers ZUIHO and HOSHO, the heavy cruisers MIKUMA and KUMANO, one destroyer, one tanker ship and five transport ships crammed with troops. The heavy cruiser MOGAMI, flagship of Vice-Admiral Kurita, absorbed the impact of four torpedoes but managed to flee under the protection of the five surviving destroyers. The MOGAMI was however severely damaged and was now condemned to long repairs in Japan. The triumphant pack of American submarines, now nearly out of torpedoes, then retired in good order towards the Philippines to rearm and then take watch positions. Air patrols of long range amphibians were already tasked to support them by signaling in advance the approach of any new Japanese force.



The fourth pack, counting six submarines and posted off the port of Naha, on Okinawa Island, to the Northeast of the Philippines, didn't see action that day as they waited for the Japanese convoy due to leave harbor the next day. The B-17 heavy bombers of Major Masters however did attack that day, arriving just after Sunrise from the East at very low altitude. The Japanese coastal observers, blinded by the rising Sun, were too late in giving the alert as the B-17s jumped over the coastline and rushed towards the port of Naha, imitating tactics introduced to the British by Nancy Laplante. The American bombers attacked in fact from such a low altitude that their gunners were able to shoot to their content at anything that appeared to be a worthwhile target. That same low altitude also ensured enhanced accuracy for their 1000-pound bombs. Twenty planes were destroyed on the ground by machinegun fire at Naha Airfield, while the troopships loading up combat supplies and troops in the harbor were all either sunk or heavily damaged. The damage caused by the B-17 was then amplified in a spectacular manner by the explosion of an ammunition ship docked in Naha Harbor, after it was put on fire by a bomb. The titanic explosion and fireball that ensued was clearly seen by the waiting American submarines off Okinawa, which then passed that information by radio to the headquarters of the Asiatic Fleet in Manila.

**22:38 (Washington Time) / 11:38 (Manila Time)**

**Tuesday, October 21, 1941 'C' (Washington) / October 22 (Manila)**

**The Oval Office, the White House**

**Washington, D.C.**

**U.S.A.**

President Roosevelt, having lived through two long and difficult days, was about to leave the Oval Office to go to bed when his military chief of staff, Admiral Leahy, knocked and entered, a happy grin on his face.

"Mister President, we have just received some very good news from the Philippines. Our submarines and our B-17 bombers based there have caused very heavy casualties to Japanese ships preparing to invade the Philippines. This combined message from General MacArthur and Admiral Hart arrived less than one hour ago."

Taking the offered message, Roosevelt read it carefully while sitting in his wheelchair, a growing smile coming to his face.

"Two light carriers, five cruisers, eight destroyers and twelve troopships sunk, plus one cruiser damaged? This is fantastic!"

He then read the paragraph about the B-17 attack against Naha and pointed it to Leahy.

"Admiral, I intend to give presidential unit citations to this squadron of B-17 bombers and to the submarines of the Asiatic Fleet. These men did an incredible job."

"In truth, Mister President, all those fighting now in the Philippines would deserve a citation. Despite being in an impossible situation, our forces in the Philippines are about the only source of good news we had in the last two days."

Roosevelt nodded his head at that and continued his reading. The paragraph concerning the requests by MacArthur and Hart for reinforcements and extra materiel made him look at Leahy.

"I always thought that MacArthur was a loud mouth, but I believe that his requests for reinforcements are justified, especially after such successes around the Philippines."

"Well, Mister President, I am afraid that any sea shipping would be both too late and too risky, considering the Japanese blockade around the Philippines. That leaves us with air deliveries only, but we have only a limited number of transport planes with enough range to fly from Hawaii to Manila, and those planes would have a strictly limited transport capacity."

"Then let's do a prioritized list of the items deemed most urgent by MacArthur and Hart and let's establish an air bridge to the Philippines. MacArthur mentions in particular an urgent need for antitank weapons, anti-aircraft guns and shells with proximity fuses, while Admiral Hart wants more torpedoes. As for sending more fighter pilots, that should be easy to do, no?"

"Uh, not really, Mister President. We have lost a lot of fighter pilots during the attack on Pearl Harbor and we have to replace those men as quickly as possible in order to be able to defend Hawaii. Also, the next fighter pilot promotion has not yet completed its training, which will take another few weeks. If I may, despite their recent successes, our units in the Philippines are stuck in a trap and the men we may send there as reinforcements are practically condemned in advance to either death or capture."

Roosevelt lowered his head, discouraged by these words and saddened at the idea of losing all those men of valor.

"Admiral, losing simple materiel is of no importance to me: only the men count. I want a massive air bridge towards the Philippines to be installed as soon as possible, in order to at least send there the items most urgently required by MacArthur and Hart."

"It will be done, Mister President."

### **15:46 (Tokyo Time)**

#### **Residence of the Prime Minister**

#### **Tokyo, Japan**

"Please sit down, gentlemen. We have some grave business to discuss." Said dryly Hideki Tojo to the admirals and generals assembled in the conference room of his official Prime Minister's residence, which he had occupied for less than three weeks now. Once all seated, Tojo looked around the table and spoke in a somber tone.

"Gentlemen, I will not tell you anything new by telling you that His Majesty is extremely concerned, not to say angry, at the events of the last three days. Not content to cause us heavy losses in ships and planes, the Americans in the Philippines dared strike the sacred soil of Japan itself. These Americans seem in fact to know in advance our every moves, probably thanks to that damned Canadian from the future and her information. We thus must change drastically our plans if we want to avoid more nasty surprises."

"But," objected his military advisor, "if they had such good information to start with, then why did the Americans let themselves be caught the way they did in Hawaii?"

"Maybe the ones in Hawaii were idiots who ignored the warnings given to them, while the ones in the Philippines were able to use that information properly." Replied Rear-Admiral Ugaki, the chief of staff of the Navy. "This tells us as well not to underestimate the Americans in the Philippines. Their submarines and heavy bombers in particular must be considered as important factors in any new plan."

"At the rate things are going, are the forces presently designated for the taking of the Philippines sufficient?" Asked Tojo. Admiral Ugaki, as well and Lieutenant General Homma, who commanded the invasion force for the Philippines, shook their heads, with Homma speaking first.

"I lost already over one full regiment of infantry, as well as the majority of the heavy equipment of the 16<sup>th</sup> Division, which was being loaded on ships in Okinawa when the American bombers hit there. With sixteen transport ships now gone, I don't even

have enough place left on the remaining ships to transport in one trip my 48<sup>th</sup> Division to the Philippines. I also lost a lot of planes. My aviators are unanimous in saying that the American anti-aircraft guns around Manila are extremely accurate and deadly.”

“My own aviators report the same thing about the American anti-aircraft guns.” Said Ugaki. “As for my losses in ships, they are nothing less than catastrophic.”

“What about the American fighters? How dangerous are they?”

“Their pilots are brave but lack experience, while their planes are outclassed by our own fighters. They managed to destroy some of our bombers but invariably lose when facing our fighters. At the rhythm of their present losses, the American fighter planes will not be a decisive factor anymore in two weeks.”

“Very well. It now seems evident to me that our forces around the Philippines must be seriously reinforced if we want to respect our operational calendar and be able to seize the Dutch East Indies and its precious oilfields and refineries.”

“But with what, General Tojo?” Objected Marshall Sugiyama. “All our troops are already either engaged in combat or committed to various operations.”

“My opinion would be, in view of the importance of taking the Philippines and thus deny to the Americans a base for their heavy bombers and submarines, that we should delay our invasion of Burma and assign General Lida’s 15<sup>th</sup> Army to the Philippines invasion force.”

“And the ships needed to move those troops, where will we find them?” Asked Homma. All the other participants then looked at Admiral Ugaki, who spoke after a short hesitation.

“I can reassign some transport ships from our strategic reserve. Admiral Nagumo’s fleet, which is on its way back from its raid on Pearl Harbor, can also be rerouted towards the Philippines. With six aircraft carriers, that force should be able to crush Manila and its airfields under bombs in a few days. Admiral Nagumo will however have to be very careful not to expose his carriers to the American submarines. We cannot afford to lose those ships.”

“That goes without saying.” Said Tojo. “Now that we have found extra forces to conquer the Philippines, we will now discuss the changes we need to bring to our plans.”

**16:05 (Manila Time)**

**Thursday, October 23, 1941 ‘C’**

**USAFFE HQ, Manila, Philippines**

Ingrid, her shift completed for the day and having briefed her replacement, was grabbing her backpack to leave the operations center when an American lieutenant came to her.

"Misses Dows, a Filipino Army major is waiting for you at the main entrance."

"Oh? Has he been waiting for long?"

"I don't know, madam. General MacArthur asked me to lead you to him and to make sure that you meet that major. The general also said that he wishes you good luck in your new job."

Ingrid's heart jumped in her chest at those words. Following eagerly the lieutenant, she went to the main entrance of the headquarters building, where a Filipino officer got up from his chair and went to her, presenting his right hand for a shake. Ingrid shook the hand of the man, who was much shorter than her and spoke to her in English.

"Misses Dows? I am Major Francisco Bandong, one of the military aides of President Quezon. Could we speak in private?"

"Certainly, Major! Let's go outside for some fresh air."

Leaving the building, Ingrid led Bandong far enough from the sentries that they could not listen to her, stopping under a palm tree before speaking in Tagalog.

"I believe that we can now speak in privacy, Major."

"You can speak Tagalog, madam?" Said Bandong, pleased. "Few Americans can say the same."

"I also speak Cebuano, Major, and know quite well the Filipino culture, especially that of the region of Mindanao."

"Even better. I am told that you have won recently your pilot's license. How many hours of flight do you have, and on what plane type?"

"I have accumulated a total of 95 hours: 52 hours on Fairchild 24; twenty hours on Lockheed 10 ELECTRA and 23 hours on Stearman biplane."

"Hum, not bad at all. You learned to fly at the Far Eastern School of Aviation, I believe?"

"Correct, Major. My instructor was Jack Gavin."

"Gavin?" Said Bandong, smiling. "He was also my instructor. Do you have other flying qualifications, like experience in air navigation?"

"I have seven hours of flying on sail planes in Germany, plus six weeks of ground classes on map reading, air navigation and basic theory of flight. I realize that I have no

formal training as a fighter pilot, but I must tell you that I once was an auxiliary in the German Luftwaffe. As such, I spoke often with some of the greatest German air aces, who were most willing to discuss in detail air combat tactics with me...with a bed nearby, of course.”

Bandong smiled at that.

“A story worthy of the adopted daughter of the famous Nancy Laplante. Misses Dows, your offer to fight to defend the Philippines has sincerely touched President Quezon. The sad truth is that we suffer a cruel shortage of pilots, a shortage that is getting worse every day. We also lost many planes but the losses in pilots are more critical now. I must warn you before going on that your survival odds as a fighter pilot will be like those of our other pilots, meaning next to nil. Do you still want to become a fighter pilot in the Filipino Air Corps, madam?”

“More than ever.” Replied Ingrid without hesitation. Impressed, Bandong stared at her for a moment, then took out of one pocket of his uniform a document, unfolding it and presenting it to Ingrid, along with a pen.

“This is your enrolment contract with the Filipino Air Corps as a fighter pilot, Misses Dows. Read it and sign it if you agree with its terms. I can already tell you that, if you ever want to fly with the American forces in the future, you will have President Quezon’s benediction to do so.”

“And under what legal status will I fly? Am I going to be considered a mercenary, like the American volunteer pilots in China?”

Bandong smiled at that and took out a small box from one pocket. He then gave Ingrid an order on a martial tone.

“Atten...hut!”

Opening the box in his hands, he took out of it a pair of second lieutenant’s rank insignias and fixed them on the collar of Ingrid’s old combat uniform.

“Lieutenant Ingrid Dows, by the authority conferred on me by President Quezon, I now commission you as an officer of the Filipino Air Corps, with the rank of second lieutenant. Now, you may sign your contract on the last page.”

Ingrid did so at once, not believing her luck: her old dream was now being realized. Bandong then made her sign a second copy that he then gave to her, looking at her with a mix of gravity and admiration.

“Thank you for enlisting as a fighter pilot, Lieutenant Dows. I will now drive you to your residence, where you will have the chance to pack your essentials before I bring

you to Batangas, home of the 6<sup>th</sup> Pursuit Squadron, your new unit. The way things are going, you will probably be flying your first combat mission tomorrow, on a P-26.”

“I will do my best not to disappoint President Quezon, Major.”

“I am certain you will, Lieutenant. Let’s go to my car now.”

Bandong’s vehicle, a big Ford sedan of the Filipino Army driven by a soldier, got to Ingrid’s house ten minutes later. To Ingrid’s relief, her residence proved undamaged by the Japanese bombs that had been raining on Manila for two days. She however found her two servants, Julia and Juanita, in the house, along with their husbands and a total of five children. After bowing to Bandong, Julia presented herself to Ingrid with an embarrassed look.

“I am sorry for bringing my family and that of Juanita here without your permission, Ingrid. Our district was bombed today and our houses burned down. We barely had the time to save some clothes and other essentials before fleeing to here. Will you forgive us for this, Ingrid?”

Touched, Ingrid hugged her servant and spoke to her softly.

“My poor Julia! You have nothing to be excused for. Me and Ken would have offered you refuge any time. Use all the space you need: me and Ken only need our own bedroom. Once Ken is back, he will sign for you an authorization to live here, so that the military police doesn’t expel you.”

“Thank you! Thank you so much, Ingrid!” Said Julia, bordering on tears. Bandong looked on at that scene with silent appreciation. Too many Americans would have simply told the servants to fend for themselves alone. Ingrid then presented the major to the Filipinos assembled in the lounge.

“Julia, Juanita, I present you Major Francisco Bandong, one of the aides of President Quezon. He just enrolled me in the Filipino Air Corps as a fighter pilot. I will now pack a few things before departing for my new unit in Batangas.”

The servants and their families were left open-mouthed for a moment before Julia resumed their general thought.

“Ingrid, you would have made a marvelous Filipina woman.”

“I now consider myself as much a Filipina as an American woman, Julia.” Replied Ingrid, who then emptied her pockets of most of the money she had on her, giving it to Julia.

"Go buy as much food as you can for your two families. We don't know how long the markets will stay supplied. Buy in priority non perishable items, like rice and canned meat and fish. Take your husband and that of Juanita with you, so they can carry the maximum of food possible."

"Thank you again, Ingrid. You are too generous." Said Julia before leaving the house with the two Filipino men. Ingrid then turned to face Bandong.

"You can wait in this lounge while I go take a shower and pack up, Major. If you need anything, just ask Juanita."

"Thank you, Lieutenant. Take all your time."

As Ingrid disappeared in the direction of her bedroom, Bandong looked around the lounge, noting the picture of Nancy Laplante on the wall and the futuristic portable radio on a small table. Intrigued by the radio, he approached it to examine it. Juanita smiled to him timidly.

"That radio belonged to Nancy Laplante and came from the future. Ingrid also has a collection of disks of music from the future."

"Oh? Would it be possible to listen to some of that music?"

"I don't think that Ingrid would object, Major: she lets me and Julia play discs from time to time. I will play one disk that Ingrid finds most relaxing."

A minute later, the Filipino officer was sitting in a sofa and happily listening to songs by Sarah Brightman. Juanita also served him a glass of fresh fruit juice, which he accepted with a thank you. He was listening to the fourth song of the disc when someone opened the entrance door and a man's voice shouted in English.

"INGRID, I'M HOME!"

Getting up from the sofa, Bandong faced the tall, powerful American officer in combat uniform that had just entered. He stepped forward at once to shake hands with him.

"Major Francisco Bandong, of the office of President Quezon. I met your wife at General MacArthur's headquarters and then drove her here in my staff car."

Ken eyed Bandong cautiously, having a fair idea of why Bandong would have met Ingrid.

"Major Kenneth Dows, Assistant Operations Officer at the Asiatic Fleet headquarters. I suppose that you saw Ingrid concerning her request to become a fighter pilot?"



"Correct, Major Dows. Your wife is now a second lieutenant in the Filipino Air Corps and will be going tonight to join her new unit, the 6<sup>th</sup> Pursuit Squadron in Batangas."

"On what type of fighter will she fly?"

"On a Boeing P-26A PEASHOOTER, Major. It is however possible that her squadron will soon be reequipped with Curtiss P-40 fighters."

"A P-26..." said slowly Ken, visibly not impressed. Bandong tried to reassure him at once.

"Major, the P-26 may be slow and obsolescent according to present standards, but it is extremely maneuverable and is easy to fly, contrary to the P-40."

Ingrid showed up at that moment in the lounge, wearing a clean combat uniform. She hugged and kissed Ken before looking at Bandong.

"Could you give me a minute with my husband, Major?"

"Certainly, Lieutenant."

Ingrid then went with Ken to their bedroom, returning a few minutes later with a rather sad Ken in tow. To Bandong's surprise, apart from her pistol and a large backpack, she was carrying a Springfield 1903 bolt-action rifle, a common weapon in the Filipino Army.

"I am ready, Major. I will give my goodbyes to Juanita and I will follow you."

The goodbyes to the maid were quick but emotional. With tears in her eyes, she planted a last kiss on Ken's lips.

"Be careful and take care of you, my beautiful husband."

"The same for you, Ingrid." Replied Ken in a strangled voice. Watching her leave, he cried silently as Bandong's car rolled away with Ingrid inside. Once the staff car was out of sight, he faced Juanita.

"Juanita, Ingrid asked me to write for you and Julia signed authorizations for your families to live in this house. I will write and sign these tonight and will advise personally the commander of the American military police unit of Manila about it. Also, the air raid shelter in our backyard is as much for the use of your families as it is for me and Ingrid. If the Japanese bomb again Manila, do not hesitate to use it. There are reserves of canned food and bottled water in it, in case of emergency. Use them only if necessary but you are welcomed to them if things really sour up in Manila.

"Ken, you and Ingrid are too good." Said Juanita, near tears. Ken shook his head slowly.

"No, Juanita. We simply are thankful for your loyalty and friendship. There is another last thing that Ingrid asked me to do but I will wait for the return of Julia and of your husbands for that."

Julia and the two Filipino men returned to the house half a hour later, loaded down with bags of rice and boxes full of tins of meat and fish, plus some cooking oil and salt. Ken gave them the time to put the foodstuff away in the kitchen's pantry, then repeated to them what he had said to Juanita. He then presented to Julia's husband, a short but solid man of nearly forty years of age, a heavy chrome-plated revolver in its leather belt holster, plus four boxes of bullets.

"Mateo, you were a policeman for many years before you had to leave the police force because of a wound. Ingrid is giving you this Colt PYTHON .357 Magnum caliber revolver, so that you can defend your family and that of Juanita. This gun came from the future and belonged to the famous Nancy Laplante. It can use as well standard .38 Special caliber bullets, which should be easy to find here in Manila."

Mateo took with a smile the big revolver, admiring it before looking at Ken, glee in his eyes.

"This is a most precious gift, Major. I will take good care of it. Thank you for everything that you and Ingrid did for us."

"You can thank us by surviving this war, so that we could see you again." Replied Ken, who then took out a 12-gauge pump-action Remington shotgun from a gun cabinet in the lounge, along with one hundred rounds, presenting them to Juanita's husband.

"Felipe, this shotgun is now yours. Mateo can show you later how to use and maintain it. Defend your family with it."

The Filipino started thanking him profusely but was cut short by Ken, who spoke gravely.

"No need to thank me, Felipe. If you and Mateo really want to do something for me, then pray that Ingrid lives through the coming days."

## **CHAPTER 7 – MOTHERHOOD**

**17:40 (Jerusalem Time)**

**Tuesday, July 20, 1943 'B'**

**Arab Quarter, Old Jerusalem**

**Holy Land of Palestine**

Having finished for the day with her official duties as Overseer of the Holy Land, Nancy had decided to go have an informal supper outside of the futuristic steel and armor glass tower that housed the administration of the country. Slinging first across her chest a pouch containing baby supplies, then strapping to her front torso a baby carrier, she had grabbed eight-month old Eli from the large play crib sitting behind the work desk of her official office and walked out. The administrative tower being besides the southwest corner of the Old City walls, she was soon inside the Old Jerusalem, walking calmly along its narrow stone-paved streets and enjoying the sights of its animated popular life. As per her habit, and despite her title of Overseer and the immense powers she held from The One, she wore only a simple but nice white embroidered cotton robe and a pair of laced sandals. She thus looked little different from many of the Palestinian women of Jerusalem, apart from her uncommon height and muscular built for a woman. Nancy in fact preferred to stay as much out of the limelight as possible, partly because she wanted her little Eli to be disturbed as little as possible, but mostly because she didn't crave attention the way most politicians or celebrities did. Her ministers and administrators did the bulk of the public work, with her staying quietly in the background, overlooking their activities and formulating policies. About the only times she really appeared formally in public as Overseer was on Thursday afternoons, when she held her court of high justice to judge severe criminal cases or hear judicial appeals. Then, helped by her power of telepathy, she passed judgment on those brought before her, with her word being final. Many foreigners and governments called her a dictator handing out summary justice for that, but the citizens of Palestine overwhelmingly approved of her justice, having seen in the seven months since she had become Overseer how fair and just she was. While some foreign governments and medias called her derisively 'The Queen of Jerusalem' or, worse, 'The Witch of Jerusalem', her

people widely called her 'The Hand of God', rather than simply 'Overseer'. Personally, she would rather be called simply 'Nancy'. In fact, going out like this in informal clothes was one way for her to mingle with her people without fuss or ceremonial.

After passing through the Jaffa Gate and walking along the Street of David, she turned left on Saint-Etienne Street, soon passing by the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, built on the ancient site of the Golgotha, the execution place of Yeshua, more commonly known by Christians as Jesus Christ. Every time she came around the place, it made her remember the sad day when, disguised as Nava the Disciple, she had witnessed Yeshua's death on the cross, close to 2,000 years ago. The last words of Yeshua to her then had been to ask her to care for and protect his wife, Miriam of Magdala, which Nancy had done, bringing a bit later Miriam and her still to be born son to the future. Now, the church built to commemorate his death was run by Christian monks and priest who practiced too rarely the virtues held by Yeshua and who kept quarrelling between themselves about who ran the church...and split its revenues. The greed and pettiness of those priests and monks had been grating on Nancy for months, apart from bringing popular disrepute to their church for decades now. If things didn't improve, she was going eventually to have to put her foot down and bring some order and decency to the place.

Little Eli babbled happily as she passed close to the colorful fabric of a terrace's sunshade along the Via Dolorosa, with Eli trying to grab the tissue flapping in the wind. Nancy stopped for a moment, letting Eli play with the fabric, then kissed his head before resuming her walk.

"Come, my sweet Eli. You will soon be able to get out of your carrier."

The baby boy, who could sense telepathically her mood, quieted down as Nancy approached the Arab Quarter. She finally entered a small restaurant-terrace near the ruins of the old Roman fortress of Antonia. The owner, who knew her well as a regular customer, grinned on seeing her and her baby and hurried to lead her to a small table in a corner.

"Good afternoon, Nancy! It is nice to see you again, especially with your cute little Eli."

Instead of frowning at his apparent familiarity, Nancy smiled with gratitude, as the owner was consciously helping her to stay anonymous, and this at her past request.

"And a good afternoon to you, Mahmud. How are your wife and children?"

"They are fine and my children are growing up real fast. What can I serve you?"

"I will have a plate of shish taouk and a couple of falafel balls, along with a cup of tea. Can I bother you to bring as well a baby chair for Eli?"

"With pleasure, Nancy." Said the owner with a smile before disappearing in his backroom for a moment, returning with a modern high baby chair and placing it besides Nancy's table.

"Here you are, Nancy. I will go get your food and tea right away."

"Thank you!"

Placing first Eli in the high chair and buckling his belt, Nancy then took out of her slung pouch a pot of baby food, a bottle of milk and a spoon, then a bib that she tied around his neck. She had time to start feeding spoonfuls of baby food to Eli before Mahmud came back with her plate and a tea service. She thanked him, then slowly ate while continuing to feed her adopted son. At the same time, she discreetly kept watching and listening to the activity around her and the restaurant. Jerusalem and Palestine as a whole were now largely peaceful, safe places, but trouble now came too often from passing or visiting foreigners, some of which had a beef or two with her or with what the Time Patrol said about the life of Yeshua or the origins of man. More and more of those troublemakers were actually representatives or hardcore followers of the various Christian churches, who objected violently to her portrayal of the life of Yeshua, which was at odds with what one read in the Bible. The fact that she had actually gone in time and witnessed Yeshua's life firsthand seemed to count for little to these hardcore Christians. The recent release for public distribution and sale of the various historical documentaries made by the Time Patrol, including its most recent one on the Neanderthals, had only inflamed even more those Christian hardliners.

She was about finished feeding Eli and was halfway through her own food when an old, frail woman supported by a mature woman entered the restaurant. The mature woman then helped gently the older woman sit on a chair of the terrace, speaking to her in Italian.

"Please rest a bit, Mama. You have walked way too much today for your arthritis and your heart. I will get you some cold water."

"But, I want to finish retracing the Via Dolorosa, Gina."

"Please, not before resting a bit, Mama."

The mature woman, who was in her forties, then went to the service counter and tried to order a glass of cold water, but her English was nearly non-existent, while the Arab waiter's English was not much better. Taking a quick decision, Nancy got up and went to the counter, smiling to the Italian woman and speaking to her in her native tongue.

"I do speak Italian, miss. May I help you?"

"God bless you! I was trying to order a glass of cold water for my mother. I'm afraid that the Sun was hard on her."

"Sunstrokes and dehydration are indeed things to be careful about here in Jerusalem at this time of the year, especially when old people are concerned."

Nancy then switched to Arabic, asking the waiter to bring her a glass of cold water. The young man hurried to get one, bowing when he gave her the glass. Thanking him, Nancy then gave the glass to the Italian woman.

"Here you go, miss. Do you mind if I check quickly your mother? I am familiar with sunstrokes."

"If you wish, miss." Replied the Italian, not too sure about letting a stranger check her mother but also not wanting to insult someone who had just helped her. Both went to the table occupied by the old woman, with Gina sitting beside her mother and giving her the glass of water while Nancy stayed up near her.

"Here, Mama, have some water."

"Please, don't drink it too quickly, madam." Added Nancy in Italian. "The shock could hurt you. May I check your pulse while you drink?"

"Are you a doctor, miss?" Asked the old woman. Nancy shook her head.

"No, but I am qualified in first aid."

"Then, go ahead, miss."

The old woman then started drinking slowly her glass of water while Nancy checked her pulse. She found it weak and irregular and eyed the old woman with worry. She appeared quite pale and her breathing was laborious. In most places, she would have been a borderline case for a quick ambulance trip to a hospital. Here, with the hot sun of Palestine and the walking to be done up and down steep streets and stairs, she was at high risk of keeling over on a moment's notice. Nancy thus looked at the woman's daughter with concern.

"Your mother's pulse is weak and irregular. She should see a doctor as soon as possible."

Those words brought a look of near despair on the daughter's face.

"But, we don't have the means to pay for a doctor here. We barely had enough money to pay for this pilgrimage, which my mother hoped would help get her health back."

Nancy nodded soberly: she had guessed by the worn clothes of the two women that they were of limited means. She then gently put one hand on the hand of Gina.

"Miss, if your mother was hoping to recover her health by coming to Jerusalem, then her hope is going to be fulfilled."

Nancy then put her other hand against the back of the old woman and closed her eyes, concentrating. Gina nearly jumped out of her chair when Nancy's hand started to glow against her mother's back.

"WHAT ARE YOU DOING TO MY MOTHER?"

"I am healing her. Please be quiet, miss."

On her part, the old woman didn't protest, a smile coming instead to her face as she felt her arthritic pain fade away and her lungs clear up. Her daughter watched her smile, then looked at Nancy with disbelief, but didn't dare speak up until Nancy's hand stopped glowing and she opened her eyes.

"What did you do to my mother? Who are you?"

Nancy straightened up before answering her in a sober tone.

"My name is Nancy Laplante and I am the Overseer of the Holy Land of Palestine. Your mother is now much healthier than before and will be able to resume her pilgrimage. She should however finish her glass of water first and rest a bit before walking again. If you will now excuse me, I have to go take care of my baby son, over in that corner."

Gina looked briefly at Eli, growing restless in his high chair, then knelt in front of Nancy.

"You performed a miracle. You healed my mother. How could I ever thank you?"

"By practicing the true teachings of Jesus Christ and showing kindness and tolerance towards others, miss."

Gina then noticed the roundish belly of Nancy, level with her face as she was on her knees.

"Are you pregnant, miss?"

"Six months pregnant, as a matter of fact. Have a good stay in Jerusalem, you and your mother."

Nancy then left the two Italian women and returned to her table, watched with disbelieving eyes by most of the other customers of the restaurant, who were in majority tourists.

The old woman, her daughter behind her, soon came to Nancy's table and knelt in front of her, taking and kissing her right hand.

"Miss, you are an angel. I will be forever in your debt. So, it is true that you met Jesus Christ while he was alive? Our priest in Naples kept saying that you were a fraud and a liar, but I don't believe it anymore."

Nancy made a wry smile then: this was far from being the first time that the Catholic Church smeared her name in the last few months.

"Yes, I met Yeshua of Nazareth. In fact, I helped her mother Miriam to give birth to him. If you want to know more about the true life of Yeshua, then I would counsel you to go see the documentary film on his life produced by the Time Patrol. It is presently playing in at least two theaters in Jerusalem. There are also printed editions of the same documentary on sale in bookstores in Jerusalem."

The fact that the two Italian women probably would not have the money to buy the book on Yeshua then it her as soon as she had spoken. Getting up from her chair, she called for the waiter to bring her bill and looked at the old woman, making her get up.

"I tell you what, madam. I will guide you to a bookstore I know nearby and will get you a copy of the book on Yeshua. Just give me time to put back little Eli in his carrier."

Putting back the baby supplies in her slung pouch, then lifting Eli from his chair and sliding him down in her chest carrier, his back to her, she paid her bill and left the restaurant with the two Italian women. They walked together for less than 400 meters, with Nancy keeping her pace short and slow in consideration for the old woman, before arriving at a combination bookstore and souvenir shop near the limits of the Jewish Quarter. The Italian women were surprised to see that the shop was still opened at this hour.

"This shop stays open until nine in the evening and is also opened on Sundays? But that's improper!"

"It caters mainly to tourists who come from afar to visit Jerusalem and Palestine, miss. As for being opened on Sundays, the Jews and Muslims celebrate their days of



rest on Fridays and Saturdays, respectively, not on Sundays. Please come inside with me.”

Like most stores and restaurants inside the walls of the Old Jerusalem, the shop was small and cramped inside, something aggravated by the large number of customers browsing through the rows of shelves. Nancy soon stopped in front of a shelf that seemed very popular with passing customers and showed to the Italian women stacks of large books with covers illustrated with high quality color holographic images.

“These are printed editions of the various historical documentaries produced to date by the Time Patrol. They have been available for sale to the general public for less than two weeks now. Apart from the documentary made on the life of Jesus, the Time Patrol has produced to date three documentaries on the origins of man, plus one documentary on the history of Jerusalem and of the Holy Land. All of them are available in a number of languages.”

Nancy then took two copies of one of the large but relatively thin books and gave them to the two Italian women, who eyed with awe the holographic picture of Yeshua on its front cover.

“This is Jesus, as he really appeared. Those copies you are holding are of the version made with trilingual captions in French, Spanish and Italian. There are as well other versions, one an English-German-Russian and the other an Arabic-Hebrew-Farsi version. Please accept those books as gifts from me.”

As the Italian women were profusely thanking her, Nancy had a second thought and gave them as well copies of the documentary on the history of Jerusalem and of the Holy Land.

“Since you came on a pilgrimage, you might as well learn about the ancient history of this land, back to the time of Abraham. In this book, you will see my spirit as it lived within the body of Sarai of Ur, wife of the great patriarch. Again, consider these as a gift. Now, let’s go to the cashier before we get trampled by the other customers.”

They actually had to squeeze past a line of shoppers to get to the cashier, where Nancy paid for the four books, which were fairly expensive in view of the abundance of high quality photos and holograms in them. After wishing the two Italian women a good trip back home and letting them out of the store to show them the way out of the Old Jerusalem, Nancy went back inside to speak to the owner of the commerce, a Polish Jew that had emigrated to Palestine after the liberation of Europe by the Time Patrol in 1942 ‘B’.

"So, Samuel, how are the sales of the Time Patrol documentary books doing?"

Samuel Dubinsky grinned at her question and rubbed his hands together.

"They are flying out of the shelves like hot cakes, Nancy. My clerk has to refill the shelves at least once a day, particularly for the books on Yeshua and on the history of the Holy Land. They are by far my best selling items."

"And the books about the origins of man?"

"They sell well also, but not as much as the two previous ones. However, I noticed that American tourists in particular often buy numerous copies of the same books, especially those about the origins of man. I bet that they intend to give or sell those extra copies once back home."

"Hum! With the ban on Time Patrol documentaries in the United States, I am not surprised by that. Hopefully, those clandestinely distributed copies will help open a few minds in the United States. The official attitude there is frankly discouraging."

"I have a cousin that emigrated to the States. Maybe I should write to him to ask him about the true public opinion on those documentaries."

"I would actually love to hear from him about that, Samuel. Please visit me if you hear from your cousin on that subject."

"I certainly will, Nancy."

"Well, I better let you take care of your business now: I see a horde of German tourists about to invade your shop."

"That kind of invasion I can handle, Nancy." Replied Samuel, smiling. "May I kiss your little Eli before you go?"

"Of course, my friend!"

Samuel then delicately planted a kiss on the head of the baby boy, then waved a hand at him.

"Bye bye, little Eli."

The baby's response was to giggle while grabbing one end of Samuel's moustache and playing with it, to the man's amusement. Nancy then left the store after a last handshake with Samuel.

**13:01 (Jerusalem Time)**

**Thursday, July 22, 1943 'B'**

**Justice court, government administrative tower**

**Jerusalem, Holy Land of Palestine**

“All rise for the Overseer of the Holy Land!”

At the call of the court clerk, the mixed crowd of spectators, reporters, witnesses and relatives of accused or victims got up from their seats as Nancy walked in the large hall. She sat on the elevated throne at one end of the hall before speaking up.

“Please be seated! The court clerk will now call in the first case.”

The judicial clerk grabbed a sheet of paper and read from it in a solemn tone.

“This court will now hear the appeal of the case of incest and theft against Aisha Haram.”

Nancy took one of the files put on the small table besides her throne and read quickly through it as the clerk resumed the substance of the case. A teenager had been accused by her parents of pushing her uncle, who was employing her as a maid, into an incestuous affair. She had also been accused of stealing from her uncle. The girl had been found guilty by a lower court before Nancy’s arrival in Palestine and condemned to five years in jail, but was now appealing her sentence. Her quick reading of the case file raised at once a number of suspicions in Nancy’s mind: for one thing, the case had been purely circumstantial, with the teenager condemned solely on the strength of the words of her uncle and parents, and this despite her vehement protests that her uncle had been the one abusing her. Another point was the fact that the parents had loaned their daughter as a maid in order to repay a debt due to the uncle. This smelled of slave labor and abuse at the expense of the poor teenager, but past standards of justice in the region had been heavily biased in favor of the word of men versus that of women. She however had the means to find the truth quickly. She spoke up in her microphone as the teenage girl was brought forward by a policewoman.

“I will remind all that my judgment will be final and will not be subject to further appeals. I will also reserve the right to use my powers of telepathy and of time travel if necessary to find the truth in the cases presented before me. If, however, I am forced to use those powers to find the truth, then the guilty ones will be punished more severely. Those who wish to avoid such stricter sentences are thus encouraged to confess at once and then ask for the court’s leniency. In the case of a confession, I will still make a telepathic mind introspection, in order to insure that an accused is not being intimidated into such a confession. Aisha Haram, do you still want to appeal your past conviction for incest and theft?”

"Yes, I do, Overseer." Said timidly the girl. Nancy then looked at the two men and one woman dressed in Arab garb waiting in the witness dock.

"Yusuf and Mariam Haram, Hassan Eid Dinn, do you still hold to your accusations against Aisha Haram?"

Nancy, along with many of the spectators, saw the parents and uncle of the girl hesitate before answering, with the uncle finally speaking up.

"We still do, Overseer."

"Very well! Aisha Haram, step forward."

More than a bit intimidated, the teenager advanced a few steps, stopping finally two paces in front of Nancy. The latter then got up from her throne and stepped down from the dais, to face the girl from up close. She put one hand on the girl's forehead and closed her eyes, concentrating. She stayed like that for a good two minutes, while the parents and uncle of the girl sweated profusely as they waited nervously for the result of her mental introspection. Nancy's face was severe when she stepped back from the teenager and looked at the uncle.

"Do you still hold to your side of the story, Hassan Eid Dinn?"

"I...I do, Overseer."

Nancy then looked at the father.

"And you, Yusuf Haram?"

"I still hold my daughter to be a whore and a thief, Overseer."

"And you, Mariam Haram? Do you still hold your daughter to be guilty?"

The woman in her forties was about to answer, fear evident on her face, when she hesitated and swallowed hard. She then fell apart and lowered her head.

"No, Overseer. My daughter is innocent: we accused her to cover the dishonor brought to her by my brother and to be able to erase our financial debt to him."

"Will you shut up, you foolish woman?" Raged her husband, as gasps went around the crowd of spectators. Two policemen present started taking out their riot batons as Nancy shouted at the father.

"NOT A WORD MORE, YUSUF HARAM! What i saw in your daughter's mind exonerates her fully of the charges against her. You are the one who lied to protect your brother-in-law, who abused and raped your own daughter. You are thus as guilty as hassan eid dinn and will suffer a similar punishment."

As exclamations and comments went around the crowd, and with policemen stepping forward to grab and handcuff both the father and the uncle, Nancy returned to her throne and sat back before speaking again in a firm voice.

"Hassan Eid Dinn, I find you guilty of perjury, rape and abuse of a minor, and condemn you to ten years in jail. Yusuf Haram, I find you guilty of perjury and complicity in the rape and abuse of a minor, who was your own daughter no less, and thus condemn you as well to ten years in jail. Mariam Haram, your late confession and the fact that your husband probably pushed you into this will save you from the same sentence as your husband. Instead, you are condemned to one year in jail for perjury and for unjustly causing the imprisonment of your own daughter. May you reflect on your morality while you serve your sentence. Aisha Haram, I declare you innocent of the charges on which you were unjustly jailed for a year. Those charges will be erased from your file and you will receive a monetary compensation of 10,000 pounds from the state for the time you spent in jail. Furthermore, as you are now eighteen years old, you are now considered an adult and will be free of any family bond from now on. You will live as my guest for the next three months, so that you may have time to rebuild your life and find a job. I have thus spoken!"

As the parents and uncle were led out of the courtroom by policemen, Nancy looked gently at Aisha Haram, who was now crying profusely.

"I will come speak to you later in private, after I am finished with today's cases, young Aisha. We will then speak about your future. My aide will now lead you to a suite that will be yours for the next three months."

"Thank you, Overseer. Thank you so much." Could barely say the girl, still crying. One of Nancy's secretaries then stepped to her and led her out through a back door.

The crowd of spectators was now quite subdued when the second and last case of the day was called up. This time, it was a straightforward case of murder, with a young woman having been murdered by her parents in a classic case of so-called honor killing, after trying to marry a man the family had not approved. While the parents and dead woman were Muslims from a nomadic Bedouin tribe, the accuser, who had been the prospective groom and lover, was a young Jewish man living in one of the new European refugee settlements in the Negev Desert. In a sense, the case was open-and-shut for Nancy, as the parents of the murdered young woman had not even denied

killing her, pleading instead that Islamic law and traditions gave them the right to kill her daughter for bringing dishonor to her family. Nancy listened first to the story given by the distraught ex-groom, then to the family of the murdered girl. Her blood was close to boiling as the father and brother of the victim ranted on about their right to cleanse the dishonor brought by the dead young woman. She finally slammed her fist on the right armrest of her throne.

“ENOUGH! You keep talking of that poor woman as if she was nothing but a piece of furniture to be disposed of according to your will. Well, let me remind you of a few facts pertaining to the current laws of the Holy Land. First, all the persons in the Holy Land have equal rights and privileges, irrespective of their age, sex, race or religion. Second, no person can be owned or be considered to be owned by other persons, even a child in relation to his or her parents. Parents have the responsibility to care for and raise their children, but that does not give them the right to kill them, for any reason whatsoever. Third, marriage is a fully-agreed union between two consenting adults, not some kind of business deal where the child is given away according only to the will of his parents. Fourth, there can be no honor in murdering someone else. Even in the Koran that you keep mentioning, there is no written justification for an act as vile as killing your own child or sibling...”

“SO, WE WOULD HAVE HAD TO LET MY SISTER MARRY A JEW!” Shouted the brother of the deceased, interrupting Nancy. “AND WHAT WOULD YOU KNOW ABOUT THE KORAN, YOU INFIDEL!”

Many in the spectators gasped as Nancy shot up to her feet, her eyes glaring at the young Bedouin man.

“SO, NOT CONTENT WITH BRAGGING ABOUT BEING A MURDERER, YOU ALSO DISPUTE MY AUTHORITY AS OVERSEER? YOU ARE TRULY AS STUPID AS YOU ARE WITHOUT SHAME OR HONOR. THERE IS ONLY ONE PENALTY IN THIS LAND FOR PREMEDITATED MURDER: DEATH!”

Pointing her right hand at the father and brother of the dead girl, Nancy threw in quick succession two plasma fireballs that incinerated the two Bedouins with the loud cracks of thunder. As the horrified mother looked at the ashes that were all that was left of her husband and son, Nancy stared hard at her.

“Leyla Mohsen, I should also put you to death for what you did, but you still have two young children in your care. I will thus let you live, so that you can care for them,

and not because I approve of your conduct. May you raise your remaining children with more true maternal love in the future. Now, go!”

The few reporters present in the crowd wrote notes frantically as the distraught Bedouin woman was escorted out by two policewomen. Nancy, still calming down, looked severely around the crowd facing her.

“Let it be known from now on that arranged marriages made without the free and express approval of both the bride and groom will be considered null in the Holy Land. Those who may not agree with that rule are free to leave the Holy Land and never return.”

As Nancy declared the court session closed and then left, a visiting British reporter wiggled his hand while glancing at a nearby Jewish colleague.

“Wow! Justice is rather swift here in the Holy Land.”

“Yes, but it is also more just, with no fancy technical arguments by lawyers to cloud the facts concerning capital crimes. I believe that the English kings and queens of the past had the same kind of powers of high justice, no?”

“Like the other past monarchs of Europe, yes.” Agreed the British reporter. “All turned on how just or fair the monarch in question was in his judgment.”

“And how would you rate the fairness of our Overseer, then?” Asked the Jewish reporter, bringing a forced smile on the British’s face.

“Should I really tell my mind on this, here?”

“Here, only the truth will do.” Replied the Jewish reporter, very serious.

#### **04:11 (Jerusalem Time)**

**Monday, October 18, 1943 ‘B’**

**Infirmery of the Government Administrative Tower**

**Jerusalem, Holy Land of Palestine**

“God! Why do all births have to happen at impossible hours?” Said a nervous and tired Mike Crawford ‘B’ while sipping on yet another cup of coffee. Ingrid Weiss ‘B’, also sipping a coffee in the small waiting lounge of the tower’s infirmery, made a weak smile to him.

“Maybe it is the way for women to get revenge at having to endure childbirth.”

Mike chuckled at that. Both he and Ingrid had been anxiously waiting for hours while Nancy went into contractions, watched by an obstetrician and a nurse. The worst part

was that Nancy had ordered her obstetrician from the start of her pregnancy to not tell to herself, Mike or Ingrid what to expect. Mike thus didn't know if a boy or a girl was coming, or even if only one baby was expected, and was by now a nervous wreck. The door of the waiting lounge suddenly opened and Nancy's obstetrician entered, still wearing surgical garb now stained with some blood and amniotic fluid. The doctor gave a big smile to Mike, who had risen to his feet, like Ingrid.

"Congratulations, Mister Crawford: you are now the proud father of a boy...and a girl."

"YAHOO!" Shouted Ingrid, overjoyed, while Mike's heart missed a beat.

"Nancy had twins?"

"Healthy ones, in fact." Answered the obstetrician. "Your wife is also alright and gave birth naturally, without the need for a cesarean section. She is tired but able to see you and your adopted daughter now, with her two new babies. If you may follow me, please."

Mike and Ingrid didn't waste time in following the doctor to a small private room where Nancy lay in a semi-reclined bed, two small babies in her arms and a tired smile on her face. Mike kissed first his wife, then admired the two newborns in her arms.

"They are beautiful. Thank you for such marvelous gifts, Nancy."

"They are indeed lovely, Mike. I may be dead tired, but this is about the most beautiful day of my life. It seems that both of the names we had chosen in advance will be used, after all."

"You are right about that, Nancy." Said Mike before caressing the heads of the sleeping newborns. "Welcome to the World, Patrick and Suzanne. Little Eli will be pleased to have someone to play with."



## **CHAPTER 8 – FEMALE FIGHTER PILOT**

**18:46 (Manila Time)**

**Thursday, October 23, 1941 'C'**

**Batangas military airfield**

**Ninety kilometers south of Manila**

It was dark when Major Bandong's staff car arrived at the Batangas Airfield, near the coast. Two Filipino soldiers on guard duty at the main gate of the airfield examined briefly their papers before saluting and letting them pass. The Ford sedan finally stopped in front of a long, rather decrepit wooden building. Close by, along the tree line, were two P-26A fighters covered with camouflage nets. Bandong stepped out with Ingrid, who insisted on carrying herself her kit and rifle, and led her inside the hut, which turned out to be the barrack for the pilots of the 6<sup>th</sup> Pursuit Squadron. A small young man with brown skin greeted them inside, saluting Bandong, who returned the salute before presenting him to Ingrid in Tagalog.

"Lieutenant Dows, this is Captain Jesus Antonio Villamor, Commanding Officer of the 6<sup>th</sup> Pursuit Squadron. Captain Villamor, this is Second Lieutenant Ingrid Dows, your new pilot."

"Pleased to meet you, Lieutenant Dows." Said with a smile Villamor. Ingrid found him at once to be a pleasant man. She also noted with surprise the ribbon of the Distinguished Service Cross, or DSC, the second highest American medal for bravery, on Villamor's combat shirt. The Filipino pilot noticed where she was looking and smiled.

"I got it from General MacArthur this morning, after shooting down a NELL bomber and a ZERO fighter."

"Wow! That's effectively quite an exploit, especially when flying a P-26. In fact, I am quite anxious to discuss air tactics with you and your other pilots."

The pained look that Villamor suddenly showed alarmed Ingrid. Villamor then spoke in a sad voice.

"You didn't know, Lieutenant? You and me are the only pilots left in the squadron. Of the last three I had, two were killed and the last was wounded this afternoon."

Bandong the judged that the time had come for him to go.

“Uh, I see that you will have a lot to discuss together. I will thus will let you in the good hands of Captain Villamor, Lieutenant. Good night and good luck in the air.”

He didn't add that she would need it, something that would be frankly in bad taste, then left after an exchange of salutes.

Now alone face to face, Ingrid and Villamor looked at each other in silence for a moment before the Filipino pointed a camp cot in a corner that was surrounded by a mosquito net.

“If you will put down your things under that cot: it is now yours.”

“Right away, Captain.”

A few minutes later, as she was finishing to place her things under her cot, Villamor brought her a flotation vest, a leather pilot's helmet with oxygen mask and flight goggles and a parachute.

“These are yours, Lieutenant. Could you describe to me your flying experience and your qualifications as a pilot?”

“Certainly, Captain. Sit down on that cot next to mine.”

Once both were seated, Ingrid described herself, her experience with sail planes in Germany, her service in the Luftwaffe, her capture and adoption by Nancy Laplante, how she had married Ken and followed him to the Philippines and, finally her course in flying and her hours flown from Nielson Field. The Filipino was particularly impressed when she described to him the air combat tactics she had learned from German aces. He finally shook his head with regret and sighed.

“Too bad that you didn't come sooner, so that my other pilots would have been able to benefit from your tactics, Lieutenant: those tactics could have saved some of them. I have to say in all frankness that the fighter tactics I learned in the United States have proved totally deficient.”

“First, Captain,” said softly Ingrid, meaning no malice, “I am not a member anymore of the Luftwaffe. I swore off my German nationality after what the Gestapo did to Nancy. Second, I have something even better than German tactics for you. Nancy taught me the lessons that were to be won the hard way in this war concerning air combat against the Japanese. I don't know if the American fighter pilots present in the Philippines shared those lessons with your squadron, but I am ready to tell you about the

tricks you can use to fight against ZERO fighters, starting with the 'Thatch Weave' defensive tactic."

"The Thatch Weave? I never heard of that tactic, Lieutenant."

"Well, I can teach it to you tonight, Captain." Said Ingrid, smiling. "In exchange, you can describe in detail to me the P-26 tomorrow morning."

### **06:11 (Manila Time)**

**Friday, October 24, 1941 'C'**

### **Batangas Airfield**

The first thing that Ingrid did in the morning on waking up was to go look outside of the hut, to inspect visually the airfield. Many things that had not been obvious in the dark last night then became evident. For starters, Batangas was in reality a secondary field meant as an emergency landing strip, and its installations were thus minimal, but were adequate to support a small group of fighters or medium bombers. There were also the wrecks of many P-26 fighters along the periphery of the airfield, having been either destroyed on the ground or cannibalized for parts. About a hundred technicians and soldiers were visible around the airfield, including many men around three groups of big wooden crates hidden by camouflage nets besides the tree line. Intrigued, Ingrid walked to the nearest group of crates, which was guarded by four Filipino soldiers. Once close, she saw as well three tents erected inside the jungle nearby, from which came audible snoring. The sentries let her approach the crates, which wore inscriptions in English. Those made Ingrid's eyes open wide.

"Damn, P-40E fighters! This is a lot better than P-26s."

Unfortunately, the sentries couldn't tell her what those dismantled fighter planes were doing in Batangas. She thus returned to the pilots' hut, where a soldier brought to her and Villamor a frugal breakfast of porridge and coffee. Jesus then told her that the P-40s had been brought to Batangas to safeguard them from the constant Japanese air attacks hitting Clark Field.

"And who will pilot those P-40s, Jesus?" Asked Ingrid. "Even the American fighter squadrons are short of pilots."

"I don't know, Ingrid. Major Bandong told me two days ago that President Quezon wanted to buy some of those P-40s for the Filipino Air Corps but, with the present state of our pilot roster, this is now rather moot."

“Not for us, Jesus! Look at what you did with a P-26. Imagine what you could do with a P-40.”

“Ingrid, I will probably be dead in a week or two, like you.” Said Villamor with brutal frankness. “Also, those P-40s are still not assembled, something that will take at least a few more days still. At least for the next few days we will have to fight with our old P-26s. Come, finish your porridge so that I can describe to you in detail a P-26.”

Villamor needed less than one hour to give a detailed tour to Ingrid of one of the two P-26A fighters still operational in Batangas. The Boeing P-26A PEASHOOTER, while obsolescent, was at least a simple and robust plane that was also easy both to pilot and to maintain. It was armed with one medium .30 caliber machinegun and one heavy .50 caliber machinegun, apart from possessing wing pylons for light bombs. That actually was quite comparable to the older models of Japanese fighters in service, like the CLAUDE and the NATE. Its main deficiency was however its maximum speed, which was inferior by about 150 kilometers per hour to that of the Japanese ZERO and was barely equal to that of most Japanese bombers. That made Ingrid think seriously about that.

“Hum, with such a disadvantage in speed, we will not be able to truly chase after the enemy, which will be able to break away from the fight at will. We thus must position ourselves ahead of them and then wait for them if we want to be able to touch them.”

“Correct, Ingrid.” Said Jesus. “The only other time when we will be able to catch the enemy is when a Japanese dive bomber will start a vertical attack dive. Even if we don’t manage to shoot down that dive bomber, we could at least disturb its aim and make it miss its target.”

“Which is already a success for us, especially if its target is one of our B-17 bombers parked on the ground. Shooting down Japanese planes is good, but protecting our soldiers and installations on the ground is better.”

Jesus smiled to her at those words.

“Ingrid, I wish that the other American fighter pilots in the Philippines be as practical and modest as you. Most of them only think about gaining personal glory by becoming air aces.”

Ingrid laughed at that.

“And you think that the Luftwaffe fighter pilots were modest, Jesus? I heard all kinds of stories from them, some amusing, others terrifying.”

"And you, Ingrid, what kind of stories will you be telling?"

Ingrid's smile faded, replaced by a sad look.

"I will only describe reality, no more, no less."

One hour later, as Ingrid was reading the pilot's manual of her P-26 while sitting fully equipped in her cockpit, the alert siren of the airfield started blaring. Her heart accelerating, Ingrid stowed away the manual and started her engine with the help of a Filipino mechanic. A sergeant soon ran towards Villamor's plane, where he spoke briefly with Jesus before running to Ingrid's plane, screaming over the noise of her engine.

"A LARGE GROUP OF JAPANESE PLANES WAS SPOTTED COMING FROM THE NORTHEAST AND FLYING LOW BELOW THE CLOUDS. THEY ARE HEADING FOR CLARK FIELD. THE ORDERS ARE TO INTERCEPT THEM, IF POSSIBLE BEFORE THEY GET TO CLARK FIELD. USE FREQUENCY NUMBER THREE."

"UNDERSTOOD!"

Switching her radio to the designated frequency, Ingrid then looked at Jesus, who signaled her to follow her before starting to roll his plane towards the dirt strip. Ingrid pushed the throttle of her engine and released the brakes, making her plane roll forward and following her squadron commander. The Filipino soldiers and ground technicians around the airfield waved their arms with enthusiasm to salute the two pilots as they took off. Ingrid thought then that today was one of the most important days of her life: she was taking off on her first combat mission as a fighter pilot. She then realized that this could also as well be the last day of her life.

The flight to Clark Field took more than thirty minutes, even at the maximum speed of the P-26: 377 kilometers per hour. Ingrid did not speak on the radio, listening instead to the air controller in Nielson Field as he reported the approach of the Japanese planes and was giving interception vectors to other fighter planes. About five minutes before she and Jesus arrived over Clark Field, the excited voices of American pilots that had just attacked the Japanese planes filled the radio frequency. It was however soon apparent that the American fighter pilots had gotten in big trouble, with ZERO fighters swarming over them. A radio message from Nielson Field then got to Jesus and Ingrid as they arrived over Clark Field.

"Papa One, this is Junction Box. Call sign Red made contact but is now submerged. Some Japanese bombers have broken through and are heading to Clark Field. Do your best to block their path, over."

"Understood, Junction Box. Papa One out!" Answered Jesus before speaking on the radio to Ingrid. "Papa Two, from Papa One, we will try solo frontal passes first, as discussed yesterday. Take the bomber to my left, then follow me."

"Papa Two understood!"

Ingrid then reviewed in her head the things she had to do. Thankfully, the P-26 was the epitome of simplicity in terms of fighter planes. She only had to take off the safety of her two machineguns. Her sight had no electronic part, being a simple steel rod supporting a ring with a crosshair. She didn't even have to worry about being able to open her canopy if she ever had to parachute out, as her plane had no canopy, her cockpit being completely opened to the wind except for a small windshield. Her gun safeties off, Ingrid started to look at the sky all around her, trying to spot the Japanese planes. Her extremely sharp vision, which a Luftwaffe doctor had described as phenomenal, then made her see tiny trails of black smoke far ahead.

"Papa One, from Papa Two, I can see smoke trails far ahead at two o'clock. The enemy must be there."

"I see them! Follow me and then line up to my port side, out!"

Ingrid was again the first to see the enemy bombers, which were flying just under the low clouds covering the sky.

"Papa One, from Papa Two. I see the enemy straight ahead at a distance of about four miles. I count at least twelve bombers in two waves."

Ingrid watched with growing excitement the Japanese bombers approach, her index ready on the trigger of her machineguns. She however remembered the cardinal rule told many times to her by Major Adolph Galland: always look around you while in air combat, to avoid surprises. The majority of the fighter pilots killed had been shot down by enemy planes that they never saw coming. Her piercing eyes then spotted three flying dots above and behind the enemy bombers.

"Papa One, from Papa Two. I see three enemy fighters flying above and behind the bombers. I make them as three ZERO fighters escorting eight BETTY bombers."

"I see them now! You really have a good pair of eyes, Papa Two. Line up on one of the bombers for a frontal pass and fire when in range, then follow me."

"Papa Two understood!"

While keeping a wary eye on the ZERO fighters, Ingrid lined up carefully her sight on one of the Mitsubishi G4M BETTY twin-engine bombers that was approaching rapidly. She had no training in aerial gunnery, but she had lots of practice at rifle shooting, a sharp vision, excellent hand-eye coordination and had also listened to the best air aces of the Luftwaffe as they told her how to calculate a shooting deflection. With her enemy coming straight at her, part of her firing equation was already simplified. She decided to fire a long burst and to correct her aim as needed with the help of her tracer bullets. Opening fire from a distance of 800 meters and keeping her trigger squeezed, Ingrid adjusted her aim as her first tracers passed just under the bomber she was targeting. Her bullets started hitting the target after one second of firing, devastating the front of the bomber. The BETTY, which would earn in the months to come the nickname of 'flying lighter' because of the facility with which it caught fire due to its enormous, unprotected fuel tanks, suddenly turned into an enormous flying torch. Ingrid, concentrated on her firing, nearly forgot to raise the nose of her plane, avoiding only at the last second the doomed bomber.

"I GOT ONE!" She screamed on the radio, elated. She then remembered the Japanese ZERO fighters and look up and around the sky. As she could have predicted, the three enemy fighters were now diving on her and Jesus. Looking to her right, she saw Villamor's plane, which had just shot down a bomber by cutting off one of its wings.

"PAPA ONE, THREE ZERO FIGHTERS ARE DIVING ON US FROM TWELVE O'CLOCK HIGH."

"FOLLOW ME IN A DIVE, PAPA TWO."

Ingrid obeyed immediately, imitating Jesus as he dove between the two successive waves of bombers. Jesus then proved that he was a fine air tactician, climbing back nearly at once to be able to shoot at the vulnerable belly of the bombers of the second wave. The three ZERO fighters rushing in then found their own bombers between them and the two Filipino fighters and were unable to shoot. Following Jesus slightly to his left and 150 meters behind him, Ingrid saw him turn his second target into a fireball. As the two P-26 were climbing behind the surviving bombers, the Japanese escort fighters, enraged at having been tricked like this, climbed after them after a tight half looping. Jesus then gave an urgent order on the radio.

"PAPA TWO, TURN PORT TOWARDS CLARK FIELD! THATCH WEAVE NOW!"

Having discussed in detail that tactic with Jesus last night, Ingrid made a tight turn to follow her leader, then, following the same general direction as him, started to zigzag, crossing repeatedly paths with Jesus but always passing just above him, while he always passed below her. The three Japanese fighter pilots, having never seen that tactic before, assumed that Ingrid and Jesus were just attempting to avoid their fire by zigzagging. One ZERO fighter quickly appeared in the rear view mirror of Ingrid as she was reversing her turn to come back towards Jesus. Knowing that her salvation would be in the mutual protection given by the Thatch Weave maneuver, she did her best to ignore her fear and continued towards Jesus, who was also approaching her. She saw with a pang of the heart that two ZERO fighters were pursuing Jesus, with the leading Japanese pilot already firing short burst at the Filipino. Tightening her turn, Ingrid aimed at the leading Japanese behind Jesus and started firing a long burst, again aiming with the help of her tracers. The Japanese, surprised to see bullets coming from his front, missed his own target and hesitated between continuing to pursue Jesus or face Ingrid. Ingrid didn't hesitate, though, keeping the ZERO in her sight and riddling it with many bullets. The Japanese fighter then exploded into a fireball, making Ingrid scream in triumph and forcing the Japanese wingman to veer away to avoid the debris from his leader's plane. At the same time, the Japanese pursuing Ingrid found himself under the fire of Jesus and veered off to avoid his bullets. Both Ingrid and Jesus then reversed their turns in order to continue using the Thatch Weave.

On the ground, along the outer perimeter of Clark Field, the American anti-aircraft gunners of the 200<sup>th</sup> Regiment defending the airfield had followed anxiously the deadly ballet in the sky and had screamed with joy at seeing the two intrepid P-26 pilots shoot down three bombers and one fighter. Their battery commander then returned them to reality with a firm order.

**"BE READY TO FIRE AT THE JAPANESE STILL APPROACHING. THIS FIGHT IS NOT FINISHED YET!"**

The servants of the four 75mm guns, six 37mm cannons and six .50 caliber heavy machineguns defending this sector of the airfield quickly reacted at that order. Having the longest range, plus proximity fuses on their shells, the four 75mm guns opened fire first, bracketing quickly the BETTY bombers approaching at low altitude. One BETTY, its big, unprotected main fuel tank pierced by red-hot shrapnel, turned into a flying torch, soon imitated by another bomber. With a third bomber suffering an engine fire, the



Japanese raid commander decided to abandon his attack, thoroughly disgusted by the Americans' resistance, and ordered his surviving pilots to drop their bombs without aiming them. The bombs exploded in the jungle, causing no damages or casualties. The American guns however kept pursuing the three surviving bombers as they turned around. The BETTY with an engine on fire was then hit a second time and dived into the jungle, crashing in a spectacular fireball. The two surviving ZERO pilots, seeing this, decided to abandon their pursuit of the two P-26s and turned around as well to return to Okinawa.

Ingrid, covered with sweat despite the howling wind blowing around her open cockpit, sighed with relief on seeing the ZEROs giving up. A radio call from Jesus then made her look at her fuel gauge.

"Papa Two, this is Papa One. We will have to land in Clark Field to fuel up: we don't have enough fuel left to return to our own airfield. I will contact the control tower of Clark Field. Follow me and keep your eyes open."

"Understood, Papa One."

Ingrid then started again to constantly turn and twist her head around, inspecting visually the sky in all directions in a manner that was going to become for her a reflex during her career as a fighter pilot. Although exhausted by her first air combat, she felt happy, having survived it and having destroying two enemy planes as well. She couldn't have hoped for better today. Ingrid then analyzed mentally her encounter, trying to single out of it lessons that could help her in her next fight. Frontal passes seemed to work well against Japanese bombers, while the Thatch Weave certainly had proved its value as a defensive tactic. She however needed to seriously improve the accuracy of her air gunnery. While good by accepted standards, she had spent way too many bullets in only two long bursts. Correcting her aim with the help of her tracers may have worked but, in a long fight, she would have found herself quickly out of ammunition, thus becoming a defenseless target for the Japanese.

Following Jesus' plane, Ingrid soon landed with him on one of the long runways of Clark Field and then rolled towards a parking apron still littered with debris from a P-35 fighter destroyed on the ground the day before. A jeep with an orange signal panel guided them to one corner of the apron where a fuel truck and a truck full of ammunition crates were waiting for the two P-26, with also about ten men in uniform near the trucks.

Ingrid braked her plane some distance from that of Jesus, to avoid giving a group of targets on the ground, then shut down her engine. She was starting to undo her seat harness when an American mechanic jumped on her right side wing to help her. The young man looked at her with utter surprise before twisting his head around and shouting at the other men approaching Ingrid's plane.

"IT'S A WOMAN!"

"So what?" Replied Ingrid, now tense. Nancy had told her many stories about the countless times she had faced prejudice in England in 1940 just because she was a woman. Taking off her leather helmet and getting up from her seat, she looked at the two men standing in the back of the ammunition truck.

"I NEED TO REARM AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE. THE JAPANESE STILL COULD COME BACK."

"ER, YES MAAM!"

Stepping out of her cockpit and setting foot on her right wing, she left her pilot helmet on her seat but kept on her parachute and floating vest. She next opened the panel covering the refueling cap of her fuel tank, opening the cap as well as a half-dozen incredulous men surrounded her plane to stare at her. She then jumped on the ground to open the ammunition bins of her machineguns. A young American lieutenant approached her as two mechanics started filling the bins with long bandoleers of bullets.

"Miss, who let you fly a mission on a fighter?"

Ingrid eyed him coldly, not liking his tone.

"First, you can call me Lieutenant instead of miss. Second, President Quezon enrolled me as an officer and fighter pilot in the Filipino Air Corps. You got problems with that, Lieutenant?"

The man clenched his teeth but, having no reply to that, walked away. An old sergeant then approached Ingrid and saluted her.

"I just inspected visually your plane, Lieutenant: you were not hit once. We will finish fuelling it in a few minutes."

"Thank you, Sergeant. Your men are qualified to maintain a P-26?"

"Certainly, Lieutenant! Unfortunately, all our P-26s have been shot down or destroyed on the ground in the first three days of the war."

"And how are our pilots flying on P-35 doing, Sergeant?"

The old mechanic frowned in response.

"Badly, I must say, Lieutenant. The P-35 is a piece of junk in my opinion. It is faster than your P-26 but is also less agile, less dependable and offers a bigger target while being unstable in flight. We already lost about sixty percent of our pilots and over three quarters of our P-35s in the 21<sup>st</sup> and 34<sup>th</sup> Squadrons. Of the few P-40s we managed to reassemble, three have already been lost in ground accidents: the P-40 is a difficult plane to control, especially when taking off or landing. By the way, you and your leader did a hell of a nice job up there. Which type of plane did you shoot down, Lieutenant?"

"One BETTY bomber and one ZERO fighter, Sergeant. My leader got two BETTY bombers."

The old NCO looked at her with genuine admiration.

"One BETTY and one ZERO? Wow! And you have been flying for how long as a fighter pilot, Lieutenant?"

Ingrid gave her an angelic smile then.

"Since this morning, Sergeant. If you don't believe me, just ask Captain Villamor."

The jaw of the sergeant nearly dropped on the pavement on hearing that.

"Uh, I see! I will go take care of the other P-26 with your permission, Lieutenant."

"Then I'll go with you."

Jesus jumped on the ground as the duo approached his plane and shared a happy accolade with Ingrid.

"Ingrid, you were fantastic up there. You are a born fighter pilot. We will do great things together in the air."

"I don't doubt that for a minute, Jesus. Your maneuver to catch your second bomber was brilliant."

"And the Thatch Weave worked like a charm, Ingrid."

"It sure did! Is your plane intact?"

"Yes! And yours?"

"Intact as well. Once rearmed and refueled, we will be ready to go back up."

Their two P-26s were nearly finished being refueled when a jeep stopped near Ingrid and Jesus, with an American Army major jumping out while shouting a question.

“YOU TWO ARE THE PILOTS OF THESE...”

The major was left open-mouthed when Jesus and Ingrid turned around to salute him. After a short hesitation, the major returned their salute and approached them, stopping in front of Ingrid.

“You are the pilot of one of those P-26s, miss?”

“Yes, Major! Second Lieutenant Ingrid Dows, 6<sup>th</sup> Pursuit Squadron, Philippines Army Air Corps.”

“Captain Jesus Villamor, Commander of the 6<sup>th</sup> Pursuit Squadron, sir.” Said Jesus firmly. “I am claiming the shooting down of two BETTY bombers on my part, while Lieutenant Dows shot down one BETTY bomber and one ZERO fighter.”

“You are joking, right?” Replied the major, refusing squarely to believe him. Jesus threw him a mean look.

“Major, the air defense gunners and technicians around the airfield saw our fight in the air and we have also the films of our gun cameras. I can vouch that Lieutenant Dows did shoot down two Japanese planes. In fact, she saved my life up there.”

“The captain is right, Major: I saw everything.” Then said the old mechanic NCO. “First Sergeant Jim Bradfield, Major.”

The major was about to reply when a damaged P-35 fighter crash-landed in the grass besides the main runway. A second, then a third P-35 landed next in a more conventional way on the runway. Bradfield left at a run while shouting at his mechanics.

“OUR PILOTS ARE BACK, AT LEAST THE SURVIVORS. REARM AND REFUEL THESE TWO INTACT P-35 WHILE I GO SEE HOW OUR THIRD PILOT IS DOING.”

The major took that opportunity to disappear with his jeep, not daring to look an angry Jesus in the eyes. Jesus watched the jeep go away, then spat on the ground.

“A damn ground pounder will not call me a liar. Don’t worry, Ingrid: I will make sure that your air victories are officially registered.”

“That is the least of my concerns now, Jesus.” Replied Ingrid. “I am more concerned about the pilot of that crash-landed P-35.”

She and Jesus watched on as an ambulance and a fire truck stopped near the crashed P-35. A number of men then jumped out and ran to the cockpit of the plane, extracting a limp form from it and carrying it to the ambulance, which then rolled away at full speed. By that time, the two other P-35s that had landed parked side by side on the apron and cut their engines. Ingrid saw one of the two pilots lower his head inside his cockpit and

cry, still buckled to his seat. His plane was full of holes, especially the wings and the tail, and she could see what appeared to be hydraulic fluid leaking under the plane. The other P-35 didn't seem to be in much better shape. Ingrid then understood with a pang of the heart that the American fighter squadrons in the Philippines were about to cease to exist, despite the bravery of their young pilots.

### **06:50 (Manila Time)**

**Saturday, October 25, 1941 'C'**

#### **Bay View Hotel, Manila**

"ANNALEE, GET DRESSED QUICKLY! GENERAL MACARTHUR WILL DISTRIBUTE MEDALS IN CLARK FIELD AT EIGHT O'CLOCK."

Annalee Whitmore, reporter for the LIBERTY magazine, walked out of the bathroom, attracted by the shout from her husband, Melville Jacoby, reporter for the TIME-LIFE magazine. The small, young woman was still in a bathrobe and her hair was a mess.

"How did you learn about this so early, Mel?"

"Easy: one of MacArthur's staff officers pinned a notice on the board at the entrance of the dining room of the hotel." Answered Melville, a thin young man with brown skin. "A number of fighter pilots will be decorated for bravery. A bus will bring the reporters from this hotel to Clark Field, with the departure from the hotel being at seven thirty. We better hurry up!"

Annalee didn't need more precisions to start dressing as quickly as she could. Like Melville, she grabbed her 35mm camera before leaving their hotel room at a run.

### **07:56 (Manila Time)**

#### **Clark Field, to the Northwest of Manila**

The group of reporters and correspondents stepped out of the bus once it stopped behind one of the hangars of Clark Field. They were then guided by a public affairs officer to the apron in front of the hangar, where about twenty soldiers and officers were waiting, some being obviously photographers or cameramen for the United States Army. Mel and Annalee, accustomed to the obsession with personal publicity shown constantly by General MacArthur, were not surprised to see those cameramen. What surprised them however, like the other correspondents, was the presence of a very

beautiful young woman wearing a combat uniform. The couple immediately started to take pictures as the young woman and two men, including a Filipino, formed up in line in the middle of the apron, while the other soldiers and officers withdrew to a side. Annalee's heart accelerated when she understood what was going to happen.

"Mel, that girl is going to be decorated with these two men."

"That's impossible, Annalee!" Replied at once Melville. "This ceremony is supposed to honor fighter pilots. There are no female fighter pilots in the Army." Pointing her camera and using her zoom lens, Annalee then saw something that shocked her.

"Mel, this girl is wearing a pilot's insignia on her shirt, along with lieutenant's ranks."

Melville, now having doubts, pointed his own camera and did a double take.

"Good God, you're right! But, how..."

The arrival of MacArthur's staff car, accompanied by its usual escort jeeps and the blaring of its siren, cut him off. Photographed and filmed by the reporters and the Army correspondents, the tall general got out of his car and walked to a spot three paces in front of the girl and two men, then spoke to the reporters in a strong voice.

"Ladies and gentlemen from the press. We are here this morning to honor three brave fighter pilots who risked their lives to defend the Philippines from the Japanese. Other brave pilots unfortunately paid the ultimate price for their devotion to duty. My public affairs officer will give you after this ceremony a list of the posthumous awards authorized by me yesterday. The three fighter pilots to be honored this morning are First Lieutenant Jack Dale, of the 21<sup>st</sup> Pursuit Squadron of the United States Army Air Corps, Captain Jesus Antonio Villamor, of the 6<sup>th</sup> Pursuit Squadron of the Filipino Army Air Corps, and Second Lieutenant Ingrid Dows, also from the 6<sup>th</sup> Pursuit Squadron."

MacArthur then faced the three waiting pilots and gave a curt order.

"Lieutenant Jack Dale, step forward!"

As the young pilot stepped to a position one pace from MacArthur and saluted him, a staff officer read aloud a citation.

"First Lieutenant Jack Dale, of the 21<sup>st</sup> Pursuit Squadron, will now receive the Silver Star for his extraordinary heroism shown yesterday as he was intercepting with his comrades a large group of enemy bombers escorted by Japanese fighters. Despite the fact that the enemy had an overwhelming numeric advantage and that he was pursued by Japanese fighters, Lieutenant Jack Dale pushed his P-35 fighter among the enemy

bombers and destroyed a Mitsubishi G4M BETTY bomber. Lieutenant Dale will now receive the Silver Star from Lieutenant General Douglas MacArthur, Commander of the United States Army Forces in the Far East.”

The soldiers and officers present applauded as MacArthur pinned the small medal on the shirt of the young pilot, while the reporters and correspondents took picture after picture. After shaking hands with Dale, MacArthur then called forward Jesus Villamor as his staff officer read a second citation.

“Captain Jesus Antonio Villamor, from the 6<sup>th</sup> Pursuit Squadron of the Filipino Army Air Corps, was recently decorated with the Distinguished Service Cross for destroying one enemy bomber and damaging a Japanese fighter. Captain Villamor will receive this morning the Silver Star for the exemplary courage he demonstrated yesterday at the controls of his P-26 fighter. With only one wingman in support, he attacked a group of twelve enemy bombers escorted by three ZERO fighters. Demonstrating superior qualities as a fighter pilot, he destroyed in quick succession two Mitsubishi G4M BETTY medium bombers that were going to strike Clark Field, forcing the rest to withdraw in disorder. Lieutenant General MacArthur will now give the Silver Star to Captain Villamor.”

While the spectators applauded again as Jesus received his medal, Ingrid realized too well that the reporters were in reality impatient to learn what she had done to be here. Her turn in front of MacArthur finally came, with all the reporters taking photo after photo of her as the staff officer read her citation.

“Second Lieutenant Ingrid Dows, born Weiss, of the 6<sup>th</sup> Pursuit Squadron of the Filipino Army Air Corps, will receive this morning the Silver Star for the exemplary courage she showed yesterday during her first combat mission as a newly accepted fighter pilot. As the wingman of Captain Jesus Antonio Villamor and flying a P-26 fighter, Lieutenant Dows, not content to destroy one Mitsubishi G4M BETTY medium bomber, also destroyed one Japanese ZERO fighter that was attacking her leader. Lieutenant General MacArthur will now give the Silver Star to Second Lieutenant Dows, who will also be promoted at the same time to the rank of First Lieutenant.”

As he pinned the medal on Ingrid’s shirt, then changed her rank insignias on her collar, MacArthur spoke to her in a low voice while smiling to her.

“I see that I took the right decision concerning you, Lieutenant. You can be proud of you. In view of the exceptional services of your squadron, I ordered that it be

reequipped with Curtiss P-40E fighters. With such planes, you and Captain Villamor will have more decent chances to survive air combat against the Japanese.”

“General, I will never be able to thank you enough for the chance you gave me to accomplish my dream.”

“You can thank me by shooting down more Japanese planes, Lieutenant. I am sure that your two victories of yesterday will not be your only or last ones. Again, congratulations, Lieutenant Dows.”

“Thank you, General!” Said Ingrid, proud as a peacock, before saluting MacArthur and returning besides Dale and Villamor. MacArthur then gave a final speech and left in his staff car, leaving the three medal recipients in the hands of the reporters. As she had expected, Ingrid found herself the center of attention of all the reporters and was bombarded with questions from all sides. She then raised both hands to demand silence.

“Ladies and gentlemen, know that I will not answer your questions if you don’t show equal courtesy to my comrade pilots. They are as deserving as me, or even more. I don’t want to be singled out just because I am a woman.”

“But you are the first known female fighter pilot, Lieutenant.” Shouted a reporter. “We want to know how you were able to become a fighter pilot.” Having already spoken with Jesus and Jack Dale about the undue attention she was expecting from reporters at their detriments, Ingrid again asked for silence.

“In that case, I am ready to make a statement on that subject. Then, you will have to switch your attention to my two comrades: I don’t believe in personal glory seeking: I became a fighter pilot simply to help defend the Philippines. First, I was born Ingrid Weiss in Berlin, Germany, on September 7 of 1923. I met an American officer in London and married him there in July of this year. My husband is Major Kenneth Dows, of the United States Marine Corps, who is presently posted to Manila. I obtained my civilian pilot’s license here in Manila. When war was declared in the Pacific, and knowing that the United States Army did not accept women as fighter pilots, I asked to join the Filipino Army Air Corps. President Quezon personally accepted my request and commissioned me as a Filipino Army officer two days ago. My mission yesterday was in fact my first combat mission as a fighter pilot.”

“And how do you explain your performance in the air, miss, despite the fact that you didn’t get any training as a fighter pilot?” Shouted a reporter, attracting a severe look from Ingrid.



"First, mister, call me 'Lieutenant' and not 'miss'. Second, I would say that I apparently have a natural affinity for flying. Third, I had the chance to be able to discuss at length air combat tactics in Europe with confirmed air aces there and learned much from them. Now, I believe that it's the turn of Lieutenant Dale and of Captain Villamor to field your questions."

The reporters, frustrated, then had to talk with the two male pilots. Mel Jacoby, who had a very powerful visual memory and had seen nearly all the pictures taken by TIME-LIFE correspondents in this war, suddenly remembered where he had seen the face of that beautiful teenager. Approaching Ingrid, he spoke to her in a near whisper, so that the other reporters wouldn't hear him.

"Lieutenant Dows, weren't you present at the funeral of Brigadier Nancy Laplante, the famous Canadian from the future? Weren't you in fact one of her pallbearers and were seen afterwards with her now dead husband, Major Crawford?" Ingrid stiffened then, having hoped to keep hidden her connection to Nancy, connection that would have only attracted more undue media attention on her. Taking Jacoby by one arm, she led him away from the other reporters, with Annalee the only one to follow the two of them.

"Please don't repeat that in front of the other reporters, mister. I don't want to end up been hounded down constantly and thus appear to be a simple glory seeker."

"Lieutenant, rest assured that I don't intend to blow an exclusive in such a stupid way. However, the truth will come out eventually. You might as well tell your story to a serious magazine like TIME-LIFE, rather than to some of those rags."

"And what about that woman?" Said Ingrid, pointing Annalee. That made Mel Jacoby grin.

"That woman is my wife, Annalee Whitmore, of the LIBERTY magazine. I believe that I can trust her, Lieutenant."

"Oh! In that case... Yes, I was at the funeral of Nancy Laplante. I am in fact her adopted daughter. I am also a German Jew and was an orphan before being adopted by Nancy and by Mike Crawford. That is how I got my American citizenship. That is all that I am prepared to say at this time."

"That is already plenty, Lieutenant." Replied Mel, smiling at the thought of the exclusive he had just secured. "Thank you for answering my questions and good luck in the air."

"Thank you, mister."

After a few more minutes of questions from the reporters, MacArthur's public affairs officer put an end to the interview session and led the three pilots away from the crowd of reporters. Ingrid was sighing with relief when a young American Army Air Corps captain joined them and spoke to her and Jesus.

"Captain, Lieutenant, could you come with me, please? General MacArthur told me to qualify you on the P-40E."

"And Lieutenant Dale?" Asked in return Ingrid. The captain nodded his head while looking at Dale.

"Lieutenant Dale will also get courses on the P-40E this morning, along with the other pilots of his squadron. There are now enough assembled P-40s to allow our remaining P-35 and P-26 to be put in reserve. Unfortunately, the word from Washington is that we cannot hope to get more fighter pilots here in the Philippines: our losses in Hawaii were too heavy and the absolute priority was given to replace our losses there. Thankfully, the weather over the Japanese airfields in Formosa and Okinawa is quite bad and we should enjoy a respite in the air today. Once you will be qualified, you will be able to take possession of the three P-40Es now assembled in Batangas."

Jesus smiled, happy, and looked at Ingrid with gleaming eyes.

"I liked my old P-26, but I must say that flying the P-40E will give us a much better chance in air combat against the Japanese."

"You bet!" Replied Ingrid, equally pleased. "With a maximum speed of 362 miles per hour instead of 234 miles per hour for our P-26s, and with six .50 caliber heavy machineguns, we will now be able to catch up to Japanese bombers and destroy them faster. Well, let's not waste time and let's follow the good captain."

As she and Jesus were taking place in the jeep of the American captain, a big four-engine C-87 LIBERATOR EXPRESS, a cargo variant of the B-24 heavy bomber, came in and landed on the main runway of Clark Field. Looking up at the sky, Ingrid saw a formation of fifteen other C-87s that were waiting to land, flying under the low clouds. Joy and hope filled her as a second C-87 landed.

"HURRAY! WE WERE NOT ABANDONNED AFTER ALL!"

**19:54 (Manila Time)**

**USAFFE HQ**

**Manila**

Douglas MacArthur felt truly optimistic for the first time in this war tonight. With Admiral Hart and some of his staff officers sitting with him and senior officers of the USAFFE in the conference room of his headquarters, MacArthur signaled to his chief of staff, sitting near him at the big table, to start.

"You can give the good news, Dick."

"Yes, General!" Said politely Sutherland before looking at a document in his hands. "The news are effectively good today, gentlemen. Washington put in place and inaugurated today an air bridge between Australia and us to satisfy our most urgent needs. A total of 27 C-87 heavy transport aircraft, each carrying four tons of cargo, landed today on our airfields. They then left immediately after unloading and being refueled. We used their return trip to evacuate to Australia over 300 of our wounded. We intend to continue using the return trips in the following days to evacuate our wounded or other non-essential personnel."

MacArthur interrupted Sutherland then to speak briefly to Admiral Hart.

"In view of this unexpected evacuation capacity, I have given orders this afternoon to start evacuating, by force if necessary, the American civilians still present in the Philippines. From what we know thanks to Nancy Laplante, I do not want to see American civilians eventually fall in the hands of the Japanese. British and Australian citizens will also be evacuated forcibly towards Australia."

"That will definitely be one weight less on our shoulders, General." Agreed Hart. "Also, being able to evacuate our wounded will help a lot the morale of our men."

"Very true! Dick, you may continue."

"Yes, General! Those 27 C-87 brought part of the 206<sup>th</sup> Anti-Aircraft Regiment, including twelve of the new dual purpose 90mm guns, dismounted for transport, plus 5,000 90mm shells equipped with proximity fuses. They also brought thousands of antitank rifle grenades, which will finally allow our troops to face eventually Japanese tanks. More 90mm and 75mm shells will follow, along with six more 90mm guns and essential spare parts for our planes. To avoid being caught on the ground by Japanese air raids, the transit schedules will be modified so that the planes will arrive just before Sunset and will depart the next day at Sunrise. That should allow them time to unload under the protection of the night. The air logistics senior officer that came with the first group of C-87s assured me that we could expect a minimum of 24 flights per day, depending of course on the weather."

MacArthur then interrupted a second time his chief of staff.

“Admiral Hart, we decided nearly three months ago to jointly defend the Philippines and to coordinate our defenses. I have thus decided to allocate the 206<sup>th</sup> Anti-Aircraft Artillery Regiment to the defense of the Cavite Navy Base. Its 90mm guns have a maximum horizontal range of eleven miles and can engage ships as well as planes. The commander of the regiment told me that a load of armor piercing rounds will be part of the coming air shipments.”

“Excellent!” Replied Hart, happy. “Then I can give you in exchange another good news, General. We are expecting tonight a small convoy escorted by the Dutch destroyer TROMP. The convoy includes a tanker ship full of aviation gasoline, another tanker ship full of diesel fuel for my submarines and a cargo ship loaded with torpedoes and aviation bombs. Two of my destroyers are already off Manila Bay, ready to guide the convoy through our minefields.”

“Our B-17 bomber crews will be happy to hear that, Admiral. They hit a Japanese airfield on Hainan Island, on the Chinese coast, this morning and are going through their stocks of bombs quickly.”

“And in what state is your bomber force, General?”

MacArthur’s smile faded as he answered Hart.

“I have fourteen B-17s left operational, but my biggest worry is about the crews. Our pilots are exhausted and are too few, especially where fighter pilots are concerned. I pleaded with Washington to get more fighter pilots but top priority is presently going to Hawaii. Washington is ready to send us all the ground equipment and munitions that we want, but no planes or pilots, at least not for the weeks to come.”

“And how are your ground defenses doing, General?”

“Our training program for our infantry is still going full steam, and I clearly indicated that no time be wasted on simple parade drill practices. Our engineers are proceeding with the fortification of the Bataan Peninsula, which has been designated with Corregidor as our place of last stand, while our logisticians are centralizing there all the food, ammunition, fuel, spare parts and medical supplies that can be collected. If the Japanese land on Luzon, we will have enough supplies to hold Bataan and Corregidor for many months and thus deny the use of Manila Bay and Subic Bay to the Japanese.”

“Let’s hope that we will not need to retreat to those bastions, General. However, in line with those preparations, I will make sure that, if Cavite has to be evacuated, that

the 90mm guns placed there will be moved to the Bataan Peninsula, to be used there as coastal defense batteries.”

“Then, I will direct my artillery commander to select and prepare in advance suitable fortified coastal positions for those 90mm guns.”

MacArthur was silent for a short moment before speaking in a subdued tone.

“Without more fighter planes and pilots, the Japanese will eventually gain the control of the air over the Philippines. Then, the best we can hope for will be to inflict as much casualties to them as we can and to deny to them the Philippines for as long as we can.”

### **07:49 (Manila Time)**

**Monday, October 27, 1941 ‘C’**

**Batangas Airfield**

**Philippines**

Ingrid, having gone out on the porch of the pilots’ hut after breakfast, looked up critically at the sky. The cloud ceiling was much higher this morning than it had been for the last two days and there may even be a chance that no rain would fall today. At least, the poor weather of the last two days had allowed her and Jesus to familiarize themselves with their new P-40Es and to fly a few hours on them. Ingrid had needed all of her innate pilot’s abilities to keep control of her P-40 at low speeds, especially during takeoffs and landings. The strong engine torque of the P-40, allied to its tendency to stall without warning and drop a wing, had caused the death of many young American pilots. The P-40E, while not an exceptional fighter in any way, was however well armed and surprisingly agile at high speeds and low altitudes, making it an excellent fighter-bomber. It however climbed slowly and its high altitude performances degraded quickly as it went up. Despite that, Ingrid now felt reasonably comfortable with her new plane and was ready for her next combat mission. With the acceptable temperature announced for today, she suspected that the Japanese were probably going to use it to attack the Philippines again. Jesus Villamor soon joined her on the porch and also looked up at the sky.

“We should see the Japanese today, and in less than a few hours if I go by their habits. Let’s go put on our flight gear, Ingrid.”

Going back in the hut, which was also used as the squadron's operations center and alert lounge, they started to put on their gear. They had just put on last their parachutes when the telephone on the desk of the operations room rang. A Filipino sergeant jumped on it and answered in English.

"Sixth Pursuit Squadron, Sergeant Arcibol!... Understood, Captain!"

The sergeant then looked at Jesus and Ingrid.

"One of our B-10B bombers used as an early warning plane west of the Manila Bay just spotted a large formation of Japanese planes approaching from the Northwest. It is now 200 miles from Manila. Our bomber is however being pursued by three Japanese fighters and is trying to attract them towards Batangas."

"Tell Nielson Field that we are taking off now!" Ordered Jesus, grabbing his leather helmet. "Let's go, Ingrid!"

Ingrid did not need to be told twice and ran outside with Jesus. The latter then shouted at the soldiers and mechanics close to their aircraft, which were camouflaged in individual clearings made in the tree line of the jungle.

"RAISE THE CAMOUFLAGE NETS! WE ARE TAKING OFF!"

A dozen soldiers immediately grabbed long bamboo poles attached to the corners of the camouflage nets and raised them to the vertical, unmasking the front of the two P-40Es, while mechanics pushed the planes in the open and out of their hiding places. Ingrid and Jesus jumped quickly in their cockpits and started their engines after a quick check of their instruments. Only four minutes after receiving the alert call from Nielson Field, the two P-40s had taken off and were climbing in the direction of the Northwest.

Five minutes later, guided by radio calls from the pursued Filipino B-10B bomber, Jesus and Ingrid made visual contact with the antiquated bomber, which had found a second life as an early warning plane thanks to its long air endurance. Ingrid's sharp eyesight then spotted as well three dots just behind the bomber.

"Papa One, I see three fighters with fixed landing gears behind our B-10 bomber, probably Nakajima Ki-27 NATE fighters. Should we go for frontal passes first?"

"It sounds like a good idea, Papa Two. Take the Japanese on the left of us: I will take the one on the right. You will then cover my tail."

"Understood, Papa One."

Her heart accelerating, Ingrid slid to the left, away from Jesus and took the safety off her six heavy machineguns. Ingrid knew that the Ki-27 NATE was quite similar to the P-26,

but even more agile. It however sacrificed everything to agility, having no armor whatsoever and being armed with only two 7.7mm medium machineguns. One well-placed salvo should be enough to destroy her first adversary. Calculating in advance her gun deflection, Ingrid flew to a straight frontal approach against the NATE on the left of the Japanese formation and opened fire at a distance of 600 meters, with Jesus firing at about the same time. To Ingrid's surprise, the Ki-27 coming at her was literally shredded to small pieces by her bullets, bursting into flames and disintegrating in many parts in midair. Surprised by her easy victory, she glanced at the target of Jesus, to see it become a flying torch. The surviving NATE, flying a bit behind its now destroyed wingmen, performed a tight right turn to flee, presenting its belly and wings to Ingrid. She fired a short burst but missed. Her P-40E was however much faster than the NATE and she closed in on the Japanese, firing once at 300 meters behind it. The diminutive Japanese fighter then caught fire, with one wing cut off by a second short burst from Ingrid. It then entered a terminal dive while spinning wildly. Ingrid watched the NATE fall for a moment, then formed back with Jesus, who spoke to her on the radio.

"Good shooting, Papa Two. You are becoming quite good at this. We will now head towards Manila to intercept that bomber formation signaled by our bomber."

As Ingrid followed Jesus in a turn towards Manila, the latter called the air controller at Nielson Field.

"Junction Box, this is Papa One. Three Ki-27 NATE enemy fighters shot down off Batangas. Owl Two now safe. We are on our way to Manila to intercept the enemy bombers sighted previously, over!"

"Papa One, from Junction Box: good job! A Navy PBY just updated the position of the incoming enemy bomber force. It is now 115 miles west of Cavite and is flying at an altitude of 25,000 feet. Our PBY counted about sixty bombers, escorted by forty fighters. Our other fighters are already on their way to intercept. You are to hit those bombers before they get over Cavite, over!"

"Understood, Junction Box. Papa Two, start climbing towards 27,000 feet." Ingrid did not answer as she put her fighter in a slow climb, the P-40E being rather lazy at high altitude. Sixty Japanese bombers could do a lot of damage to the naval base in Cavite and she was not certain if Ken was still at the Asiatic Fleet headquarters or at Cavite. She had to give her very best to turn around that enemy raid, but would have to make her every bullet count. That meant shooting short bursts only from short range, to ensure hits on each pass.

Jesus and Ingrid arrived over Cavite as the Japanese planes started to be visible in the distance. Tails of black smoke told them that the other American fighter pilots in the air had already started engaging the enemy.

"Papa One, from Papa Two. If the escorting enemy fighters are all NATEs, then we will have a serious speed advantage on them. The NATE also loses much of its agility at speeds above 250 miles per hour. I believe that we should keep our speed to maximum and limit ourselves to high speed passes on the bombers while ignoring the enemy fighters, over!"

"I buy your plan, Papa Two. We will start with individual frontal passes on the lead bombers while on a shallow dive, then engage the second wave while leveling up. Protect my tail once we turn around to fall behind the bombers, over!"

"Understood, Papa One!"

Lining up in a near collision course with one of the lead bombers and pushing her P-40E in a shallow dive, Ingrid could soon identify the enemy planes.

"Papa One, I identify the enemy as about sixty Mitsubishi G3M NELL, escorted by twelve Ki-27 fighters. Where are the other NATE fighters signaled by Owl Two?"

"Probably busy with our other fighters, Papa Two. We will probably be alone to deal with those bombers."

Ingrid felt both anger and frustration on hearing that. All the American fighter pilots in the Philippines had received instructions to avoid dogfights with Japanese fighters. The few American fighter pilots still alive seemed to have ignored that directive...again! Concentrating back on her target, she lined up her gun sight on the nose of the bomber. The Japanese pilot saw her coming but couldn't do a thing about it, having no forward-firing guns and not being permitted to break formation without order. The unfortunate Japanese pilot, along with his copilot and his navigator/bombardier, died in the first burst from Ingrid, shredded to pieces by the .50 caliber bullets. The NELL then caught fire and fell out in a death dive as Ingrid flew through the first wave, already lining up on the bomber that had followed her first victim. A quick look around showed her Jesus, flying parallel to her a hundred meters to her right, while eleven NATE fighters were diving on her and her leader to attempt high frontal passes. Keeping her engine power to maximum, she fired a devastating burst in the nose of her second target, exploding the NELL. She then slid on one wing to take position to the rear and left of Jesus as the Filipino pilot started a wide high speed turn to come back behind the bombers. Ingrid



followed him, enduring a good five Gs of centrifugal force in the process and having to breathe through short intakes. Seeing through a pink haze a NATE attempting to get on the tail of Jesus, Ingrid immediately lined the enemy fighter in her sight and fired a short burst but missed. Correcting her aim, she fired a second burst as the enemy pilot made the mistake of concentrating solely on Jesus. The Japanese pilot suddenly found himself in a cockpit full of flames, his engine and main fuel tank hit by heavy .50 caliber slugs. Ingrid did not have the time to observe the poor Japanese as he fell out of his plane, transformed into a human torch. She watched Jesus' tail as the Filipino fired burst after burst against a bomber, with the gunners of the bomber and of its wingmen replying frantically with their defensive machineguns. Jesus finally cut off the right wing of his target, sending it in a terminal spin and overcoming the rear wave of bombers with a speed advantage of 280 kilometers per hour. The enemy fighters, about one hundred kilometers per hour slower than the P-40Es, were now being left behind despite their best efforts at catching the two marauders. The Filipino then engaged a bomber of the next wave, firing a short burst but missing, while tracers from the bombers defensive machineguns came at him and Ingrid from all directions. Jesus then swore violently on the radio.

"DAMNATION! MY GUNS ARE JAMMED! TAKE OVER THE ATTACK, PAPA TWO!"

Ingrid did not hesitate and lined up the NELL in her gun sight, while Jesus performed a barrel roll to take position behind her. Ingrid heard a couple of bullet impacts on her plane but ignored them, firing a burst that pulverized the canopy of the bomber, killing its pilot and copilot and sending the bomber spiraling out of control. She immediately switched target, aiming at the lead bomber of the formation as more bullets impacted against her plane. Her long burst swept the bomber from tail to nose along its fuselage. The enemy plane then exploded in a huge fireball, forcing Ingrid in veering away violently to avoid the debris. She immediately looked anxiously for Jesus.

"PAPA ONE, ARE YOU OKAY?"

"Affirmative, Papa Two! I am right on your tail. Keep taking care of those bombers and don't worry about me. You are doing magnificently."

"Thank you, Papa One! I will now take some distance ahead and then turn around for another frontal pass."

Followed closely by Jesus and still flying at maximum speed, burning fuel quickly, Ingrid passed the now shot up and shaken bomber formation and took a lead of over two kilometers, turning around once nearly over the base of Cavite and returning with Jesus towards the Japanese bombers. She then noticed that one of the bombers had left the formation, one of its two engines on fire: the NELL must have been damaged by debris from its leader. Many fighter pilots would have jumped on that easy target to obtain a quick victory. Ingrid however had only one goal in mind: to stop as many bombers as possible from hitting the naval base in Cavite. The damaged bomber, which was dropping its bombs into the sea, was no more a threat to Cavite and would cost her precious bullets. She thus kept on her collision course towards the lead bomber and waited until nearly the last moment to fire her next burst from her six heavy machineguns, shredding the cockpit and right side engine of the NELL. She jumped over the doomed bomber and immediately targeted the following bomber, which was barely 200 meters behind its now dead leader. She missed with her next burst, having had only a fraction of a second to aim, but scared to death the Japanese pilot as she flew past the bomber from barely three meters away. Suddenly seeing Villamor's P-40 barreling down at him and following Ingrid, the pilot of the NELL lost its nerves and threw his bomber in an evasive turn to the left, convinced that Jesus was going to collide head on with him. Unfortunately for the Japanese, his uncoordinated maneuver within the tight formation of bombers made him collide with his left wingman. The two NELLs exploded under the impact of the collision, sending debris all around and damaging other bombers around them. One radial engine that had flown off one of the two bombers then hit one of the NATE fighters still trying without success to catch the two P-40s. With one wing ripped off by the impact, the fighter fell down and crashed in the sea below. Trying to shoot at a bomber of the third wave, Ingrid managed to fire only a few bullets before the firing pins of her machineguns hit empty chambers.

"DAMN! I'M OUT OF AMMO!"

"THEN LET'S GO, PAPA TWO! WE CAN'T DO MORE HERE."

What Ingrid and Jesus didn't see immediately then was that panic had swept through the surviving Japanese bomber crews. One of the enemy squadron leaders took on him to order a retreat and make his pilots drop their bombs into the sea, soon imitated by the other two bomber squadrons of the attack formation. On seeing that, Jesus burst out in a nervous laughter.

"Papa Two, I believe that we made quite an impression on those Japanese: they are dropping their bombs into the sea and turning away."

"It can't be true!" Replied Ingrid, unable to believe her eyes. "Well, I will have seen it all."

The surviving NATE fighters, many now extremely short on fuel, turned around as well, following their bombers. Seeing that, Jesus spoke again on the radio, elated.

"I guess that we can throttle down now, Papa Two. How about a little victory flyby over Cavite?"

"A great idea, Papa One!" Replied Ingrid, ready to jump with joy in her seat.

In the base of Cavite, the commander of the anti-aircraft guns defending the naval base had watched the air battle with his powerful binoculars and shouted with joy, like his gunners and the Marines and sailors nearby, when the bombers turned around while dropping their bombs into the sea less than five kilometers away from the base.

"OUR TWO FIGHTERS SCARED AWAY THOSE JAPS! THEY ARE ALL TURNING AWAY!"

He then saw the two P-40s that had attacked repeatedly the Japanese bomber formation slow down and form up in a tight pair before coming towards Cavite.

"OUR TWO FIGHTERS ARE GOING TO PASS OVERHEAD. WEAPONS TIGHT! WEAPONS TIGHT! NOBODY SHOOTS AT ANYTHING UNLESS I SAY OTHERWISE. SECURE THE GUNS!"

His gunners obeyed him at once, while his signalers passed the order by field telephone and radio. The Army gunners, Marines and Navy men all cheered and waved when the two P-40s passed slowly over the base, wiggling their wings triumphantly as a victory sign. The artillery commander took good note of the Filipino markings and plane identification numbers on the two P-40s, grinning as he did so: he had fully expected to be blasted to bits by the bombs from the mass of bombers coming at Cavite. Now, he and his men were going to live for at least another day, thanks to those two Filipino P-40 fighters.

**19:39 (Manila Time)**

**Far East Air Force headquarters**

**Nielson Field, southern suburbs of Manila**

Major General Lewis Brereton, Commander of the United States Far East Air Force, was puzzled as he reviewed with Brigadier General Clagett, the commander of his fighter force, the results of the day, which were decidedly mixed. On one hand, two American squadrons totaling at the start of the battle 22 P-40 fighters had tried to intercept the big group of enemy bombers heading for Cavite this morning but had clashed instead with over thirty escorting Ki-27 NATE fighters. The pilots of the 24<sup>th</sup> Pursuit Group had suffered heavily in the ensuing melee, losing nine of their planes and with eight more P-40s returning to their base with varying degrees of damage. In exchange, the pilots of the 24<sup>th</sup> Pursuit Group had claimed a total of fourteen Ki-27s shot down, a claim that had proved since then to be quite exaggerated, if Brereton could believe the review of the films from the gun cameras of the group. The true number of Japanese fighters shot down seemed to actually be more like six Ki-27s. The worst part was that, contrary to their orders, the pilots of the 24<sup>th</sup> Pursuit Group had not gone after the bombers, instead entering in a series of dogfights with the escort Japanese fighters, with the nimble Ki-27s easily gaining the upper edge over the P-40s despite their light armament and lack of armor. The only fighters that had actually attacked the Japanese bomber force were two Filipino P-40s out of Batangas, but their results were nothing like those of the pilots of the 24<sup>th</sup> Pursuit Group. Clagett had an embarrassed look on his face when he had approached Brereton with the results of the day, which included claims by the two pilots from the 6<sup>th</sup> Pursuit Squadron for a total of eleven Japanese planes shot down. The problem was that, according to Clagett, the gun camera films from those two pilots corroborated their claims. Brereton gave another skeptical look at his fighter commander.

“So, the claims of those two 6<sup>th</sup> Pursuit Squadron pilots really did pan out?”

“Yes sir! On top of the films from their gun cameras, their combat was observed by the gunners defending Cavite. The commander of the anti-aircraft artillery regiment there noted down the serial number of those two P-40s, which managed by themselves to make the Japanese bomber force turn around in panic and drop its bombs into the sea. The numbers correspond to the plane registry numbers of the P-40s flown by Captain Villamor and Lieutenant Dows. Out of those eleven victories claimed, eight are for Lieutenant Dows.”

Brereton then exploded with frustration.

“And how the hell do you explain that a rookie female pilot with no actual training as a fighter pilot could achieve such successes when our own pilots, formed at our

fighter school in Arizona, barely manage to survive their own encounters with Japanese fighters? That teenage girl is making our pilots look like a bunch of flying monkeys!” Brereton regretted his words as soon as he said it. Looking apologetically at Clagett, who had stiffened on hearing the term ‘flying monkeys’, he spoke in a softer tone.

“Sorry, Henry: I shouldn’t have used those words. It is just that the fact that a teenage girl can outfight our pilots is damn hard to digest. You know what kind of reactions there would be in the United States if this became known.”

Clagett nodded slowly his head, able to imagine the political storm that some could raise by claiming this as proof that official fighter pilot training was next to worthless.

“Should we then deny the victory claims from Lieutenant Dows, sir?”

Brereton snapped his head around to stare at him with indignation.

“I wasn’t suggesting that, dammit! That girl risked her life today to defend the Philippines and she is entitled to get her proper dues. It is just that I want to know what she and Captain Villamor are doing so differently from our pilots of the 24<sup>th</sup> Group.”

After a moment of thinking, Brereton looked up at Clagett.

“Call Batangas and tell Captain Villamor and Lieutenant Dows to come here right away to talk with us. While you do that, I will go watch their gun camera films to see if there is a pattern in their successes.”

“Yes, General!”

Twenty minutes later, Brereton came out of the small viewing room adjacent to the photo section, shaking his head in disbelief. Clagett, who was waiting for him back in the operations center, looked at him questioningly.

“So, what do you think, General?”

“That this girl is one deadly shot in the air, apart from being brave as hell. The amount of tracers flying around or coming at her was frightening, yet she shot up those bombers like she was a flying Calamity Jane<sup>7</sup>. I also noticed how fast she and Villamor flew while in combat. They kept zipping around the Japanese bomber formation, never slowing down. Maybe that’s the secret of their successes. Are they on the way to here?”

“They should arrive here in less than one hour, General.”

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<sup>7</sup> Calamity Jane : Famous female adventurer in the history of the American Far West. Calamity Jane was reputed to be an elite shot.

"Good! One more thing before they arrive here, Henry: have the victory claims of both Captain Villamor and Lieutenant Dows officially accepted."

His commander of fighters eyed him cautiously.

"Sir, you do realize that this would make Dows a double ace...our top air ace of this war. Villamor would also be an ace now."

That made Brereton freeze on the spot for a second.

"Damn! I didn't think about that. The press will have a field day on that. Well, an ace she is, Henry. We can only hope that she will continue to shoot down Japanese planes at her present rate. While we are on this subject, write down for my review tomorrow suitable award recommendations for both Villamor and Dows."

"Sir, if one of my regular pilots would have performed like Dows, only one award would be appropriate, in my honest opinion."

Brereton looked at Clagett calmly.

"Then, go for it, Henry."

Just before nine in the evening, Villamor and Dows arrived at his headquarters and were then introduced in Brereton's office, escorted by Clagett. Brereton was struck at once by the youthful beauty of Ingrid but didn't remark on it. He returned their salutes, then pointed at the chairs set in front of his desk.

"Please, have a seat: I asked you to come so that we could discuss the tactics you used today over Manila Bay. By the way, your victory claims were accepted officially...in full. Your personal scores thus now stand respectively at six and a half victories for you, Captain Villamor, and at ten victories for Lieutenant Dows. "

Both Villamor and Dows smiled, with the girl grinning the widest.

"Thank you, General."

"I'm the one that needs to thank you both, for shooting down all those Japanese planes and to have turned away that bomber formation. I just want to know how you did it."

Villamor and Dows then exchanged a glance, with Villamor speaking to Ingrid.

"Go ahead, Ingrid: you introduced us to those tactics, so it is only just that you get to describe them to General Brereton."

"Thank you, Jesus." Replied Ingrid, who then looked calmly at Brereton. "General, I don't know how much you do know about my personal background, so I will start from the beginning. Before marrying Major Kenneth Dows and coming to the

Philippines with him, I was a German Luftwaffe auxiliary serving at a fighter division headquarters in France. I was able to observe first hand there the various tactics and strategies used by both the Luftwaffe and the R.A.F.. Since I was fascinated by flying and often met some of the top German air aces in France, I was able to discuss at length with those aces things like air tactics, deflection aiming calculations and the rules of air combat.”

Brereton, who actually knew nothing about that apart from the fact that she was the wife of an American officer, stared at her in stunned disbelief, like Clagett.

“You...you were in the Luftwaffe before? And why would such top air aces take the time to teach you all those things, if you were not a pilot?”

Ingrid smiled at his somewhat naïve question and looked at him with the sexiest, most sensual expression she could muster while answering in a mellow voice.

“Why, General, if you were a young and energetic fighter pilot, wouldn't you want to speak in private to a young and beautiful girl who is ready to listen to you as you talk and brag about your exploits in the air, with a bottle of wine at hand and a bed nearby?” While Jesus Villamor strangled his laughter with difficulty and Henry Clagett hid his face with one hand, Brereton was left open-mouthed. Ingrid then went on, putting back on a serious expression.

“While I learned basic air tactics and deflection shooting from those German aces, what helps me most to shoot down Japanese planes came from my adoptive mother. Please understand that I was in 1940 a war orphan, after my whole extended family was killed in Berlin by a British air bombardment. I enlisted in the Luftwaffe in order to avenge them, not because I was some kind of Nazi fanatic. Then, in January of this year, I was captured along with other German staff in a commando raid led by Nancy Laplante, the famous Canadian from the future. I was then interned with other German female auxiliaries in the Tower of London. However, Nancy Laplante and I quickly became good friends and she helped support my morale and that of my comrades with frequent visits, arranging film or music nights and dances. She and her husband, Major Mike Crawford of the U.S. Corps of Engineers, eventually decided to secretly adopt me and she started to secretly educate me, while also helping openly with my physical training. She then told me what she knew about this war and the future as it happened in her variant of history. Being especially interested in planes, she discussed in detail with me the tactics and lessons about the air war in this conflict. I also had access to her historical files that described in detail this war, which also taught me the

various strengths and weaknesses of Japanese planes. To cut this to the essential, the cardinal rules pertaining to air combat against Japanese planes, especially fighters are, first, to never engage in a low speed, turning dogfight with a Japanese fighter. Instead, you keep your speed as high as you can through the whole engagement. Second, since our planes dive better than theirs, we are to try as much as possible for diving passes, followed by a quick withdrawal, a climb back to altitude and another diving pass, using vertical combat rather than turning combat. Third, since most Japanese aircraft have little or no armor and have mostly unprotected fuel tanks, they are in general quite fragile and catch fire easily, even though they benefit from superior agility due to their light weight. A single well-placed burst will thus often be enough to down them. That same light construction also limits their diving speed. The ZERO fighter in particular loses much of its agility at speeds above 250 miles per hour and is limited to a maximum of 350 miles per hour in a dive, at which speed its thin wing revetment will start ripping away and its ailerons becomes impossible to move. In contrast, the Curtiss P-40 is at its best at low altitudes and high speed, where it rolls faster than the ZERO. In terms of armament, the Japanese fighters generally have lighter armament than our fighters, while most Japanese bombers have no forward-firing defensive machineguns. During our fight this morning, me and Captain Villamor thus used as much as we could frontal passes against the Japanese bombers, while we kept our speed up and thus basically ignored the escorting NATE fighters, which were too slow to catch us or even follow us. Some may call our tactics cowardly, but I became a fighter pilot to defend the Philippines and destroy as many Japanese planes as I can, not to gain personal glory. I also will concentrate first on Japanese bombers, since they can hurt the most our troops and civilians on the ground. Well, that's it in a nutshell, General."

Brereton, who had been frantically scribbling down notes while listening to her, stared at her in silence for long seconds. This stunningly beautiful teenager was nothing like the wild child he had expected. He then looked at Jesus Villamor.

"Captain Villamor, do you have something to add on this subject?"

"One thing, General: Lieutenant Dows also taught me four days ago about a defensive tactic called the 'Thatch Weave'. We used it to good effect last Friday."

The diminutive young Filipino pilot then spent a minute describing the Thatch Weave to Brereton and Clagett, along with the results it gave in combat. At the end of it, Brereton exchanged looks with Clagett.



"General Clagett, I want you to ensure that all our pilots know about these new tactics and put them into practice. From now on, getting sucked into a low speed dogfight with a Japanese fighter will be considered by me to be an act of incompetence and will be treated accordingly. Also, Japanese bombers are to be considered at all times to be the top priority targets."

"The word will be passed, sir."

Brereton then turned back his attention on Villamor.

"In what state are your two planes, Captain?"

"They suffered multiple hits from 7.7mm bullets but nothing vital was touched, except for my machineguns trigger wire, which was cut, resulting in my weapons jamming. Everything will be repaired by tomorrow morning, sir. We will then have two fully operational P-40s in Batangas."

"Excellent! I will thus let you go back now to Batangas, so that you could have a good night of rest and be ready for combat tomorrow morning. Dismissed!"

Getting up from their chairs, Jesus and Ingrid saluted in unison Brereton, then walked out of his office. The graying general was thoughtful for a moment, then looked at his watch and decided to call General MacArthur. Thankfully, Major General Sutherland, MacArthur's chief of staff, was not at the USAFFE headquarters anymore at this hour and thus did not block access to his commander, like he did way too often to protect his influence on MacArthur. Instead, the duty officer at the Manila headquarters patched him with MacArthur's suite, situated in the same requisitioned hotel than the USAFFE HQ. Brereton soon had the old general on the line.

"MacArthur!"

"General, this is Lewis Brereton, calling from Nielson Field. I am happy to announce to you that we now have our two first air aces of the war."

MacArthur's tone then changed immediately, indicating instant interest: anything that could be splashed on newspapers' front pages and that made him or his command look good was always of prime interest to him, a trait Brereton knew too well. MacArthur actually took the time to get a notepad and a pencil before speaking again.

"What are their names and their victory scores, Lewis?"

"Captain Jesus Villamor, with six confirmed kills and one damaged, and First Lieutenant Ingrid Dows, with ten confirmed kills, as of this morning. Lieutenant Dows is thus a confirmed double ace. Captain Villamor and Lieutenant Dows were responsible for turning away by themselves the Japanese bomber force that tried to attack Cavite

this morning, sir. I personally reviewed their gun camera films and I have to say that both their bravery and skills in air combat were extremely impressive. I intend in particular to put up Lieutenant Dows for the Congressional Medal of Honor, while Captain Villamor deserves at least the DSC in my opinion.”

MacArthur was left speechless for a moment at the other end of the line, speaking hesitantly after a good five seconds.

“Ten confirmed victories? Damn, this girl is positively hell’s on wheels.”

“She definitely is, General. I just spoke in person with her and Villamor, to discuss the tactics they used. She proved to be surprisingly mature and responsible for her age, I must say. I however called you mostly because of the potential impact on the American public her exploits may cause if and when they become known. In essence, she is making most of my other fighter pilots look like incompetents, even though she never got any formal training as a fighter pilot.”

“Hum, you are right about the possible reactions in the United States. However, that girl, like Captain Villamor, earned her success the hard way and saved many lives in Cavite this morning. In fact, Admiral Hart called me earlier in the afternoon to pass a big thank you from the Navy about that aborted Japanese bomber raid. I will thus inform the press representatives about this tomorrow morning, Washington’s opinion be damned! I will be awaiting your written recommendations for awards and I can assure you that I will back them up to the utmost. Maybe this will convince Washington to finally send us some more planes and pilots.”

“I sure hope so as well, General. Uh, what are the chances that this could convince the Army to officially accept her as an officer and a fighter pilot?”

“That is unfortunately something that would need an act of Congress and the President’s approval, Lewis. You know also as well as me the kind of reactions this would get from other generals in the Army. I wouldn’t hold my breath about this. Let’s just count ourselves lucky to have her as a Filipina fighter pilot.”

“I understand, General. Well, I will now wish you a good night, sir.”

“Thank you for the good news, Lewis: I will certainly sleep better because of them. Good night to you as well.”

MacArthur then put down his receiver, imitated by Brereton. The latter reflected for a moment about the conversation he just had, then left his office, intent on going soon to sleep. Tomorrow was another day with good weather announced, which meant more incoming Japanese air attacks.

**10:38 (Manila Time)**

**Tuesday, October 28, 1941 'C'**

**Batangas Airfield**

**Philippines**

Tired and drenched in sweat but happy, Ingrid jumped down from her plane after it had been pushed back in its hiding place in the jungle tree line. She then made a visual inspection tour of her plane, sighing with relief at finding no damage or bullet holes in it. Her head mechanic also smiled on seeing that.

"Excellent, Lieutenant! With no damage to repair, we will now have the time today to paint over your plane the way you wanted. How did your mission go?"

"It was a piece of cake, Felix. Our repeated high speed passes prevented the enemy dive bombers from dropping their bombs with any precision and I was able to confirm as well that ZERO fighters lose much of their agility at speeds above 320 miles per hour. One ZERO tried to follow me in a high speed dive at over 400 miles per hour. I then performed a barrel roll and cut my speed to get on his tail. The pilot of that ZERO was then unable to use his ailerons, which were frozen stiff by the speed, and I was able to shoot him to pieces at will. I then shot down two VAL dive bombers, while Jesus also shot down two VALs."

The head mechanic's smile widened into a grin on hearing that.

"Then, this is decidedly a good day for the squadron."

"You can say that, Felix!" Said Jesus Villamor, who had just approached Ingrid's plane. "Ingrid, you should paint a name or a logo on your plane. A pilot as dangerous as you must have a name on his plane."

"Me, dangerous? What about you, Jesus?"

The Filipino pilot stared at her, suddenly very serious.

"Ingrid, believe me when I say this: I never saw before you someone with such a natural talent for flying that you have. You just completed your third combat mission and I can already detect major improvements in your air gunnery, which was deadly enough on your first mission. You also control your P-40 like a pro and I doubt very much that I could win a dogfight against you. To sum up my humble opinion, you have the potential to become the greatest air ace in the whole Pacific. Hell, you ARE already our top ace!"

"I will probably never have the chance to keep that title, Jesus." Replied Ingrid in a bitter tone. "The Filipino Army Air Corps accepted me as a fighter pilot, but the United States Army will probably never accept me. By American law, women are barred from combat, or even from joining the Army, except as nurses."

"Your example may well change a few opinions in the United States, Ingrid. You may actually play an even more important role here than you think, after all."

"I hope with all my heart that you are right about that, Jesus."

"Then, let's go back to the subject of your plane's name. Have you thought of a name or logo yet, or of a nickname for you on the radio?"

"Uh, not really, Jesus."

"Well, we will take care of that quickly enough." Said Jesus, smiling widely, before shouting in Tagalog at the mechanics close by.

"HEY, GUYS! INGRID NEEDS A NAME FOR HER PLANE. ANY SUGGESTIONS?"

Ingrid reddened with embarrassment as the mechanics enthusiastically proposed various names, many of them rather spicy ones. One armorer who had started to clean Ingrid's machineguns then shouted a name that struck her imagination.

"Why not 'Lady Hawk'? She has the piercing eyes and sharp claws of a falcon."

"YES! I LOVE IT!" Exclaimed Ingrid with enthusiasm. Jesus nodded his head, smiling.

"That's you alright, Ingrid. You will thus be known from now on as 'Lady Hawk'. Raphael will paint it on your nose once our new paint scheme is done. Now, let's go fill our mission reports."

Much later, at the end of the afternoon, Ingrid and Jesus went to their planes, which had been pushed out of their camouflaged spots so that they could be painted, to admire the new paint scheme that Ingrid had proposed, based on pictures of modern jet fighters that she had been given as a gift by Nancy Laplante. Their P-40Es were now painted all over in a sort of dirty light gray, while their national Filipino insignias and plane numbers were painted in subdued black. A false cockpit had also been painted in black on the belly of the planes, under the real cockpit, in order to fool from a distance an enemy pilot about which way they were turning. Each plane also sported a personalized logo by now. While Ingrid's fighter bore on each side of its engine the words 'LADY HAWK' in big pink letters outlined in black, Jesus' plane sported the words

'GRAY GHOST' in large white letters. The two pilots stood still for a long moment while admiring their planes.

"I love this!" Said Jesus, grinning, while still looking at his plane. "HEY, RAPHAEL! IS THE PAINT DRY YET? CAN WE STEP ON OUR PLANES NOW?"

"YOU CAN IF YOU WANT, CAPTAIN!" Replied from twenty meters away the mechanic and designated paint artist of the squadron. "JUST DON'T LET THE JAPS SCRATCH YOUR NEW PAINT."

Jesus and Ingrid laughed heartily at that. They were about to approach their planes to do a summary check of them when what looked like a convoy of civilian cars escorted by three armed jeeps and led by a big army staff car flying a red pennant with three stars on it rolled on the airfield. Jesus had one look at the staff car and tensed up.

"Uh oh! Here is General MacArthur and his traveling public relations circus. "EVERYBODY, STRAIGHTEN UP YOUR UNIFORMS! GENERAL MACARTHUR IS HERE!"

Ingrid, like Jesus, then quickly put on her forage cap and tucked her shirt properly in her pants, then came to attention.

MacArthur's staff car soon stopped in front of them and their planes, with an aide opening the rear door for his commander while the convoy of civilian cars disgorged an army of press photographers and cameramen that ran to form a half circle in front of Jesus and Ingrid. The two pilots saluted as MacArthur stepped out of his car, with photographers starting already to take pictures of them and their planes. MacArthur saluted back, then walked ceremoniously to them, shaking the hand of Jesus.

"Captain Villamor, I am happy to be able to finally to visit you at your airfield. Your squadron has truly accomplished miracles in the air."

"Thank you, General. Your visit honors greatly my unit." Replied Jesus, not knowing what else to say on such an unannounced visit. MacArthur nodded, then shook hands with Ingrid, smiling to her and making sure that he spoke loud enough to be heard by all around him.

"And here is our new top air ace in the Pacific, Lieutenant Ingrid Dows. You now have a total of ten air victories up to now, I believe?"

"Ten confirmed ones, General. I have claimed as well a further three Japanese planes shot down this morning, but they have not yet been officially confirmed." MacArthur turned sideways then to smile at the reporters and photographers.

"I am sure that these new victories will be promptly acknowledged in the official records. In the meantime, I came here to bring something for you and Captain Villamor. Major Stark!"

MacArthur's aide stepped forward and took out of a briefcase carried by a sergeant two certificates and four small boxes, handing first one of the boxes to MacArthur, who faced the reporters and spoke up. His speech was relatively short but grandiose, describing yesterday's air battle in heroic terms that were hard on Ingrid's modesty. He however gave as much credit to Jesus as he did to her, something she appreciated. MacArthur finally had two citations read aloud and gave to both Jesus and Ingrid their second and first DSC, respectively, then promoted Jesus to major, while Ingrid was boosted to captain, all done in the name of President Quezon. The catch was however when MacArthur pinned on Ingrid her new DSC and then turned towards the reporters to speak to them.

"This DSC is however only provisional, as I will be forwarding to President Roosevelt a request that it be upgraded to a Congressional Medal of Honor, in view of the extraordinary heroism shown in combat by Captain Dows."

As many around gasped, a reporter then shouted a remark at MacArthur.

"But, no woman has ever won the Medal of Honor, or even the DSC until one week ago, General."

"Valor is valor, irrespective of who shows it, and it will always be rewarded by me." Replied the old general. "As collective valor goes, I am also pleased to announce that President Quezon has decided to reward today the exceptional services in combat of the 6<sup>th</sup> Pursuit Squadron with the Philippines Presidential Unit Citation. I, as commander of both American and Filipino army forces in the Philippines, can only say to the personnel of the 6<sup>th</sup> Pursuit Squadron: well done and thank you!"

MacArthur then ceremoniously saluted the personnel of the squadron and shook hands one last time with Jesus and Ingrid before getting back in his staff car and leaving. That however left the two pilots at the mercy of the reporters. Ingrid tensed up and whispered to Jesus as the correspondents and photographers rushed at them to be first to ask them questions.

'Incoming!'

**15:28 (Washington Time) / 02:28 (Manila Time)**

**Wednesday, October 29, 1941 'C' (Washington) / October 30 (Manila)**

**Oval Office, The White House**

**Washington, D.C.**

**U.S.A.**

Franklin Delano Roosevelt stared with shock at the large picture on the front page of the newspaper brought by his military chief of staff, Admiral Leahy.

"A woman fighter pilot, and our top air ace to boot? How could this be?"

Lieutenant General Henry 'Hap' Arnold, Commander of the Army Air Corps, who had come along with Leahy, Admiral Stark, Secretary of the Navy Knox and Secretary of War Stimson, answered him with some hesitation.

"She actually enlisted with the Filipino Army Air Corps, which allowed her to circumscribe all American regulations about the non-employment of women as fighter pilots, Mister President. She is however still an American citizen and the wife of an American officer serving in the Philippines."

"And the top air ace part, General, how do you explain it?" Replied in a critical tone the President, sitting in his wheelchair behind his desk. "We have our own Army Air Corps fighter pilots, formed and trained at great expense here in the United States, who are being decimated by the Japanese fighters and can barely hold their own. On the other hand, if I can believe this newspaper, we have a teenage girl with a civilian pilot's license but no formal military training at all, who is chewing the Japanese and spitting them out while nearly making it look easy. What the hell is wrong with that picture, General Arnold? What do you think that the American public or the Congress will think of that?"

Arnold didn't answer at once, being deeply embarrassed by Roosevelt's question, which he had to recognize was a most valid one.

"Uh, Mister President, I did speak yesterday by submarine telephone cable with Major General Lewis Brereton, our air commander in the Philippines. He gave me a few details about that young Ingrid Dows, who by the way has now a confirmed total of seventeen Japanese planes shot down as of yesterday night. She actually had some prior military training and experience...with the German Luftwaffe. She is also the adopted daughter of the late Nancy Laplante, Mister President."

Roosevelt, who had met at length Nancy Laplante during her visit to Washington last December, put down the newspaper he was holding and stared at Arnold.

"Go on, General."

"Well, while it is true that Dows was not formally trained as a fighter pilot, she did benefit from the knowledge and experience of top German air aces serving around her in France. The main thing however, according to Brereton, is that she is applying the lessons from the future that her adoptive mother gave her, exploiting the Japanese planes weaknesses to out fly them. She is also supposedly a born pilot and an extremely accurate shot in air combat."

"So, this girl is applying the lessons and knowledge Laplante brought us, but our pilots don't. Is that it?"

Arnold cringed under the angry glare of the President.

"Until two days ago, yes, Mister President. General Brereton has however told in no uncertain terms to his fighter pilots to use Dows' tactics, or else. It seems that our present fighter doctrine and tactics are nearly useless and need to be completely reviewed. I have directed that such reviews be started at once, using the lessons learned in the Philippines."

"And what about that girl?" Said Roosevelt, pointing at the picture of Ingrid on the front page of the newspaper. "Up to now, the Army, Navy and the Congress have all refused to follow the example of the British, who are now employing women by the thousands in nearly every military trade and seemingly doing quite well despite of that. Could that girl, who is a legal American citizen, be enrolled in our own air corps, especially in view of her phenomenal successes?"

"Legally, she can't, Mister President. To be completely honest, even if we somehow managed to find a way to enroll her in the Army Air Corps, she would probably end up being subjected to an intolerable level of harassment of all kind from officers resenting the idea of having female fighter pilots."

Roosevelt, even if he didn't like that last statement from Arnold, had to agree with him.

"So, we may have a winning ticket in the Philippines in the person of that girl, but we can't use it ourselves because of ingrained misogyny? Great!"

"Uh, while we are still talking about her, Mister President, General Brereton informed me that General MacArthur is forwarding to you a request to award Dows the Congressional Medal of Honor, for the way she and her leader turned around a



Japanese bomber formation heading towards the Cavite Navy Yards. Admiral Hart is said to be warmly supporting that award request.”

“The Medal of Honor, for a girl? Are you nuts, Hap?” Exclaimed in a horrified tone Admiral Stark, the Chief of Naval Operations. Before Arnold could reply to that, Roosevelt cut him off by answering Stark himself.

“Nancy Laplante won three times the Victoria Cross, a medal that is easily an equal to our Medal of Honor, Admiral Stark. I had and still have a profound admiration for that incredibly brave and capable woman and I find your prejudiced view on this quite myopic, if not to say downright stupid. Should I remind you of the cost to the Navy and this nation of having ignored Laplante’s advice concerning the defense of Pearl Harbor? Are you again ready to prejudice the nation because you oppose the service of women, Admiral? If you do, then I will expect your immediate resignation. We have a war to win, a war that is shaping up to be both costly and lengthy, and we will need to use all the resources at our disposal, including the service of women if need be.”

“Are you considering having women serve on warships, Mister President?”

“On warships, no! But in an isolated, cocooned environment such as found on airfields, why not? General Arnold, I want you to study the question of eventually enrolling and employing female aviators, including as fighter pilots and bomber crews, like the British do, and to submit a report to me on the subject, so that I could approach the Congress with an appropriate law proposal. Consult also the Athena files received from Laplante last December to see what they say about military service by women. It may tell us about potential problems to watch for about that subject and how to avoid them. Admiral Leahy, once you will have received that award proposal for Dows from MacArthur, prepare a certificate for my signature.”

“It will be done, Mister President.”

“Good! Now, let’s discuss what we could do to help our men in the Philippines resist the Japanese.”

The discussion that followed proved to be both long and frustrating to Roosevelt, with little being truly decided by the end of the meeting.

**20:13 (Manila Time)**

**Thursday, October 30, 1941 ‘C’**

**The Dows’ residence, Manila**

**Philippines**

Ken's heart accelerated when he arrived at his bungalow and found a Filipino Army jeep parked in front of it. His fatigue evaporated at once and he entered his house at a near run.

"INGRID, YOU'RE HOME?"

At first glance, he saw only Julia and Juanita and their families in the lounge, listening to a local radio station. He smiled to them briefly and was about to rush to his bedroom when Ingrid appeared to him at the corner of the hallway, smiling. She was wearing her combat uniform and Ken was able to see her new rank insignias on her collar, as well as the medal ribbons pinned to her shirt.

"A captain? And with the Distinguished Flying Cross added to your DSC?"

"Yup! General MacArthur promoted me on Tuesday, apart from giving me the DSC. I got the DFC yesterday, for shooting a ZERO and two VALs. My total in the air now stands at seventeen victories."

Ken's eyes glowed with pride as he glued himself to her for a kiss.

"When I think that I married our first air ace. Nancy would be proud of you."

They then exchanged a long kiss before Ingrid took one step back and grabbed his hand, leading him towards the bedroom.

"Let's forget the war tonight, Ken. I only have a short permission and I have to be back in Batangas by tomorrow morning. Let's use our time well in the meantime."

### **06:59 (Manila Time)**

**Tuesday, November 4, 1941 'C'**

**American submarine USS SARGO**

**On patrol 720 kilometers east of Manila, in the Central Pacific**

The captain of the USS SARGO, one of the submarines of the Asiatic Fleet on patrol off the Philippines, didn't know if he should scream with joy or cry with despair as he looked through his periscope. His radar had warned him thirty minutes ago, while he was cruising on the surface, of the approach of a large group of fast ships heading Southwest towards the Philippines. He had then ordered his submarine to dive to periscope depth, while slowing down to silent running. Now, his caution had paid off, handsomely. With his boat chief standing beside him and holding an opened ships recognition book, he inspected the long triple file of warships about to pass him.

“Exo<sup>8</sup>, write the following message down for immediate transmission in clear to the Asiatic Fleet headquarters, with info copy to the Pacific Fleet headquarters. Start with our actual position. From USS SARGO, have detected a large group of enemy ships heading Southwest on heading 220 at 25 knots. Made visual contact with Japanese Combined Fleet at 06:57, Manila time. Following ships identified in order of progression: battleships KIRISHIMA, HIEI, NAGATO and MUTSU heading triple file of ships; fleet carriers AKAGI, KAGA, ZUIKAKU, SHOKAKU, HIRYU and SORYU; escort screen made of heavy cruisers TONE, CHIKUMA, TAKAO, ATAGO, MAYA and CHOKAI, plus six AGANO-class light cruisers and fourteen FUBUKI-class destroyers. Repeat the message at intervals until you receive confirmation of receipt from Asiatic Fleet.”

The Exo, like the other men in the cramped control room of the submarine, looked wide-eyed at his captain.

“My God! This is what I call hitting the jackpot, Captain. These ships must be the ones that attacked Pearl Harbor. Are you sure that you want to send this message in clear, Captain? The Japanese will know that we are here if they intercept our message.”

The captain of the USS SARGO looked with a resolute expression at his executive officer.

“The Japanese will know very soon that we are here anyway. Send that message immediately and advise me the moment that we get receipt confirmation. This may be the most important message we will ever send in this war.”

“Right away, Captain.”

As his exo hurried towards the radio compartment, the captain returned his attention on the view from his periscope and gave a series of curt orders.

“Torpedo Officer, prepare all tubes for firing! Have your men ready to reload them immediately once the first salvo is fired. Turn starboard, ten degrees! Raise speed to seven knots! We will try to slip between two of the heavy cruisers of the screen, then will approach the carriers.”

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<sup>8</sup> Exo : Term used in the U.S. Navy to designate the second in command of a ship, or Executive Officer.

The next ten minutes were very tense, with all the American sailors most conscious of the risks they were now taking. The exo then returned in the control room to speak to his captain.

"Captain, the headquarters of the Asiatic Fleet have confirmed receipt of our message, as did the Pacific Fleet headquarters."

"Perfect! We will try to torpedo the SHOKAKU, then will dive to a depth of one hundred feet and let ourselves float down the lineup as the Japanese ships pass by. With all the noise from these big carriers, their escort destroyers should be unable to hear us on their sonar. Then, if we are lucky, we will attempt a second attack."

"Understood, Captain!" Replied the exo, his heart accelerating.

After another two minutes, the captain judged from his calculations to be in the optimum situation for his attack and raised again his periscope. His heart jumped in his chest when he saw that the port flank of the SHOKAKU, barely 300 yards away, filled the field of view of his periscope. He then gave the order that all had been waiting for.

"STEADY ON COURSE! FIRE TUBES ONE TO FOUR!"

The submarine shuddered as compressed air ejected the torpedoes in the four forward tubes. The captain then gave the order to immediately turn 180 degrees to port and fired his four aft tubes in succession, watching the boat's compass as he did to spread out his four aft torpedoes. The last of the eight torpedoes was barely out of its tube when four powerful explosions were heard in quick succession, making the American sailors scream with joy. The captain didn't waste time in giving more orders then.

"DIVE TO ONE HUNDRED FEET! TURN PORT, HEADING 060! SLOW DOWN TO SILENT RUNNING!"

Less than a minute later, three more explosions were heard through the submarine's hull, making the captain smile with satisfaction.

"With seven torpedoes in his belly, the captain of the SHOKAKU must have one hell of a stomach ache now. Let's drift quietly down the line of Japanese ship for a few minutes, then we will go back to periscope depth to see if any ship stopped or slowed down to give assistance to the SHOKAKU."

With the machinery noise from the big Japanese warships reverberating inside the submarine as they dispersed in one big hurry, the captain was quite certain that there was no way that the escorting destroyers could hear him on their sonar. His

suspicion was confirmed when the explosions of dozens of depth charges were heard, at least a few hundred meters to his aft. He then smiled to his sailors to reassure them.

"The Japs are depth-charging blind. They don't know where we are. Torpedo Officer, how is the reloading of our tubes going?"

"Tubes one, two, five and six are now reloaded and ready, Captain. The other tubes will be all reloaded in five minutes."

"Good! Helm, turn starboard to heading 220 but stay at present depth and speed. We will listen to see if anyone slowed down to help the SHOKAKU."

"Aye, Captain!"

After another four minutes, the chief sonar operator's voice came on the intercom.

"Captain, I have two contacts on heading 220 that are slowing down considerably. I also have noises of steel bulkheads giving up."

"I knew it!" Said triumphantly the captain. "Any sign of a destroyer actively pinging for us?"

"Four destroyers are pinging, but they are actually sailing away from us, Captain."

"Perfect! Helm, steer to 205 and raise speed to five knots. Let's put ourselves on the port flank of the SHOKAKU and of those two rescuing ships."

After a further twenty minutes at slow speed, and guided by the reports from his sonar operators, the captain had his submarine go back up to periscope depth and anxiously looked through his optics the moment the periscope head broke the surface. He smiled at the sight that greeted him.

"The SHOKAKU is listing heavily to port and is in fact close to capsizing: it is finished! There is also one light cruiser and one destroyer alongside its port flank, probably taking on survivors from the carrier. Helm, steer to heading 352 and reduce speed to three knots. Torpedo Officer, stand by to fire all forward tubes... Steady as she goes!... FIRE ALL FORWARD TUBES!"

Again, the noise of compressed air and shudders told him that his four torpedoes had hit the water. Again, he ordered a half-turn to point his aft tubes while still watching the three Japanese ships through his periscope. He started to feel worry when the Japanese destroyer that had stopped alongside the sinking carrier suddenly broke away and accelerated while turning towards him, passing besides the still stopped light cruiser: the Japanese must have spotted his periscope. Then, like a miracle, a geyser of

water erupted against the hull of the destroyer, half raising it out of the water, while three more geysers erupted against the flank of the light cruiser. The captain whooped with savage joy at that sight.

“WE GOT BOTH THE DESTROYER AND THE LIGHT CRUISER! LET’S FINISH THE SHOKAKU! TORPEDO OFFICER, FIRE OUR AFT TUBES IN A SPREAD, NOW!”

“AYE, CAPTAIN!... ALL AFT TUBES NOW FIRED! IMPACT DUE IN TWENTY SECONDS.”

The results from those four torpedoes was nothing less than dramatic. Shaken by three more explosions, the carrier SHOKAKU’s list to port quickly got more severe, with the 32,000 ton ship finally capsizing and then sinking by the bow. The fourth torpedo hit the already gravely damaged light cruiser, breaking it in two, while the destroyer slowly sank by the bow. All the while, the captain took pictures with a camera through his periscope, to substantiate his victory claims and document the end of the Japanese ships. For good measure, he fired two more torpedoes at the destroyer once his forward tubes were reloaded again, giving the coup de grace to the destroyer. The captain was all smile when he gave his next set of orders.

“Helm, steer to 220, make your speed six knots and dive to fifty feet. Once out of sight of those sinking ships, we will surface and recharge our batteries while trailing the rest of the Japanese fleet. With luck, we will be able to catch them later.”

The USS SARGO was not able to catch up to Kido Butai, Admiral Nagumo’s force, but it caught a day later Nagumo’s resupply flotilla as it hurried to join up with the surviving five fleet carriers and their escorts. Expending his last torpedoes, the captain of the American submarine managed to sink a precious oiler ship and an ammunition ship before retiring back to Cavite for rearming and refueling. The crew was met on the Cavite docks by a thankful Admiral Hart and a crate of bourbon bottles, plus the news that they had earned a Presidential Unit Citation.

**14:39 (Manila Time)**

**Batangas Airfield**

**Philippines**

Jesus Villamor was sitting near his plane, on which six mechanics worked frantically to repair the damages received during the air battle of the morning over Manila Bay, when his operations sergeant ran out of the pilots' hut and shouted at the top of his lungs.

"ENEMI AIR RAID CROSSING THE EAST COAST NEAR SAN FERNANDO, HEADING FOR CLARK FIELD!"

"DAMNATION!" Exclaimed Jesus, furious. "They sure chose their timing well." Turning his head towards his chief mechanic, he was going to ask him if his plane would be ready soon but the burly NCO shook his head, anticipating his question.

"No way that you can take off with that radiator leak, Captain. It will take at least another hour to repair, plus we have to replace the rudder's command cable, which was half cut by a bullet. I'm sorry, Captain, but you will have to wait out that battle."

"DAMN, DAMN, DAMN!" Said Jesus, frustrated, before looking at Ingrid's plane, barely visible through the trees separating their two plane hideouts. Ingrid was already stepping inside her cockpit to take off in a hurry. Running to her plane, Jesus arrived near her just before she started her engine.

"My plane is still unserviceable. You will have to take off alone, Ingrid." The teenager gave him a wide smile and a thumbs up to reassure him, then started her engine. She was rolling out of her hiding spot less than a minute later and took off, followed by the eyes of the Filipino ground crews. Ingrid's crew chief watched her take off with gleaming eyes as he stood besides Jesus.

"What a girl! She is indeed a lady hawk."

Having already flown many interception missions towards Clark Field in the past days, Ingrid did not need to consult her map to navigate. Knowing that the Japanese favored approaching at high altitude, Ingrid put her P-40E in a slow, progressive climb towards its ceiling of 8,700 meters. The P-40E being a poor performer in terms of climbing, she barely had time to attain her top ceiling before coming within sight of Clark Field. By now, her attention was however on a number of black smoke trails far away in the sky to the East, which told her that an air battle was already in progress. The few American fighter planes still left in the Philippines had seemingly already intercepted the Japanese force. Ingrid thus decided to post herself above a point a few kilometers east of Clark Field, to intercept any group of bomber that would break through the American fighters. She then tried to contact the fighter controller in Nielson Field but found the

frequency jammed with excited shouts and exclamations from the young pilots that were presently engaging the Japanese. Sighing with frustration at that fresh example of the typical lack of radio discipline among the American fighter pilots, Ingrid finally decided to contact the control tower of Clark Field instead.

"Clark Control, this is Papa Two, over!"

"Go ahead, Papa Two." Said a male voice after her second call.

"From Papa Two: I am now five miles east of your airfield and will orbit there to intercept any Japanese bomber coming through. I will advise you if any of them show up. In exchange, could you warn your gunners of my presence, over?"

"Will do, Papa Two! How many fighters do you have with you, over?"

"I am alone, Clark Control."

There was a moment of silence on the radio before she got a reply.

"Uh, understood, Papa Two. Good luck!"

"Thank you, Clark Control. Over and out!"

Soon, Ingrid saw in the distant sky something that froze her blood.

"Clark Control, this is Papa Two, urgent message! Enemy planes now about ten miles east of your airfield. I can now see two successive waves of Japanese planes, with about one hundred planes per wave. KATE bombers are forming the first wave at an altitude of 22,000 feet, followed by a wave of VAL dive bombers at an altitude of 25,000 feet. I can also see about forty ZERO fighters at 27,000 feet. They will be over your airfield in less than three minutes, over."

She nearly heard the air controller swallow hard before he replied.

"Understood, Papa Two. We will send our personnel to the shelters. You better get out of the way yourself before being swept out of the sky, over."

Ingrid knew that the suggestion from the air controller was full of common sense: no sane pilot was supposed to attack alone 240 enemy planes. She also knew that very few senior officers would take that against her if she decided to withdraw. She however could not in good conscience let the way opened to the enemy without doing anything.

"Negative, Clark Control! I will do my best to disrupt the aim of the enemy bombers. Papa Two out!"

On the ground, an observation post of the 200<sup>th</sup> Anti-Aircraft Artillery Regiment was observing nervously the approach of the Japanese with its binoculars and a



stereoscopic rangefinder on tripod. A young American lieutenant cranked the handle of his field telephone to contact the command post of Clark Field and spoke in the receiver.

"Hello, CP? This is OP Number Three. We have two massive waves of Japanese bombers on approach from the East at over 20,000 feet, with fighters on top cover. I evaluate the enemy force at over 200 planes. The leading bombers are now three miles southeast of my position... Uh, one moment!"

Covering his receiver with one hand, the lieutenant shouted at his sergeant, who was watching the Japanese plane through binoculars.

"HEY, SARGE, THE CP IS ASKING IF WE SEE ONE OF OUR FIGHTERS ABOVE US."

The NCO, originating like most of his comrades from New-Mexico, looked around the sky for a moment before freezing to follow a single dot in the sky.

"I have it, Lieutenant! It's a P-40 and he is diving alone on the VALs of the second wave. This guy is either completely nuts or he is the bravest sonovabitch I ever saw."

The lieutenant relayed that information, less the last remark of the sergeant, getting in return a directive.

"...Understood, Major! SERGEANT, KEEP AN EYE ON THAT P-40 AND TELL ME WHAT HE DOES. CAPORAL MARTINEZ, GET ME A COUNT OF THE JAPANESE PLANES BY TYPE."

"YES, LIEUTENANT!"

The sergeant spoke again a few seconds later.

"The ZEROs just saw our P-40, with six Japs diving on him. If this guy does not leave now, he is cooked... The P-40 is now above the second wave of bombers and is turning to his right... He is lining up to fly down the left wing of the wave... He is opening fire... YES! ONE VAL IS ON FIRE!... The ZEROs are now behind him but this guy is diving hard and they can't seem to be able to follow him... POW, IN THE KISSER! ANOTHER VAL JUST EXPLODED!... This guy is a real ace! He is now turning while diving and is going towards the KATEs of the first wave, with the ZEROs still in pursuit."

As his sergeant commented the air battle, the lieutenant relayed his account by telephone to Clark Field in more sober words.

"... Our P-40 is now going down the left wing of the first wave of bombers... He's firing... ONE KATE IS HIT! ITS ENGINE IS ON FIRE AND... A SECOND KATE JUST LOST A WING AND IS FALLING DOWN. Our pilot has now bagged four

Japanese planes but the ZEROs must be really mad at him. He is now turning back towards the second wave and picking up speed. The ZEROs still seem unable to catch up with him... Our P-40 is now climbing and is firing again. ONE MORE VAL CAUGHT FIRE!"

"Christ!" Said one corporal near the lieutenant. "One against 200 and he still managed to shoot down five Japs? This guy is incredible."

"He's not finished yet, José." Replied the sergeant, his eyes still glued to his binoculars. "He is now turning back again and diving at the ZEROs pursuing him... HOLY SHIT! HE JUST EXPLODED ONE ZERO! I CAN'T BELIEVE THIS GUY!... SHIT! HE'S NOW GOT BLACK SMOKE COMING OUT OF HIS ENGINE... HE'S HOWEVER STILL DIVING BACK ON THE KATES OF THE FIRST WAVE... His engine is now clearly on fire. He better parachute out now if he wants to survive this fight... MY GOD! HE RAMMED ONE OF THE KATES! Both planes are now falling in flames. I don't see any parachute opening."

The artillery lieutenant, like many of his men, lowered his head in silent tribute to the brave P-40 pilot, then passed the news by telephone. The surviving ZEROs were climbing back to their original positions when Corporal Martinez announced the result of his count.

"Lieutenant, I can count 96 remaining KATEs in the first wave and 93 VALs in the second wave, plus 39 ZEROs on top cover."

The young officer passed that information along and was about to put down his receiver when he saw a parachute pop open less than 300 meters above his observation post and about 500 meters away, making the lieutenant nearly shout in his receiver.

"OUR P-40 PILOT WAS ABLE TO JUMP. HE IS GOING TO LAND NEAR US... Yes, Major! With pleasure!"

Putting down his receiver, the lieutenant blew a loud whistle towards two mounted soldiers of the Philippine Scouts who were waiting on their horses near the OP, ready to relay messages if need be.

"HEY, GUYS! FOLLOW THAT PARACHUTE AND BRING ME OUR PILOT."

"SI, LIEUTENANT!" Replied one of the scouts before spurring his horse forward and leave at a gallop, followed by his comrade. In the meantime, the guns defending Clark Field had opened a dense, murderous fire on the Japanese planes, their proximity-fused 75mm shells exploding among the KATEs of the first wave. One, two, then three KATEs were hit in succession, falling in flames or breaking up in midair before they

could drop their bombs. The anti-aircraft guns were still firing at maximum rate, sending over 200 shells per minute in the sky, as the KATEs started lobbing their bombs all over the airfield. Most of those bombs however simply created craters in the ground. The light bomb load capacity of the Japanese planes, combined with the spoiling effect of the fire from the guns, helped limit the damages to the airfield. However, the bombs from the following VAL dive bombers proved more accurate and destroyed or put on fire many hangars and buildings, apart from hitting one of the fuel dumps of Clark Field. Seven VALs paid for that, shot down by the combined fire of the 75mm and 37mm guns and of the .50 caliber heavy machineguns of the 200<sup>th</sup> Regiment. Once out of bombs, the Japanese air armada then turned back and withdrew towards the East, leaving the shaken Americans to look over the damage to their airfield.

The young lieutenant at the OP was looking anxiously at the fires on the base when the two scouts came back at a trot, one passenger sitting behind the leading scout's saddle. The young officer hurried to them, followed by his sergeant, only to see with disbelief that the pilot was a young woman. The latter was wincing with pain and seemed to have been burned to her back, neck and left arm. The leading scout saluted the lieutenant before asking him a question.

"We picked up Lady Hawk, Lieutenant, but she is seriously burned. Do you want us to bring her to the infirmary of Clark Field?"

"Yes, but just a moment, please." Answered the lieutenant before approaching the pilot, a beautiful teenager with reddish-brown hair whose face was now darkened by smoke.

"You were fantastic up there, miss. Can I have your name, rank and unit, so that your airfield can be advised that you are alive?"

"Captain Ingrid Dows, 6<sup>th</sup> Pursuit Squadron of the Filipino Army Air Corps, based in Batangas." Answered the girl, clenching her teeth in order not to moan with pain. The lieutenant noted down that information, then came to attention and saluted her.

"Your unit will be advised without delay, Captain. Corporal, you can now bring her to the base infirmary...gently."

"Si, Lieutenant!"

**19:15 (Manila Time)**

**Infirmary of Clark Field**

Major General Lewis Brereton looked around with sadness at the crowded room of the infirmary serving the airfield. While casualties could have been much higher, the number of dead and wounded was still too much for his overwhelmed, suffering command. The pilots from the 24<sup>th</sup> Pursuit Group had done their best to stop the Japanese before they could arrive over Clark Field but had to face nearly sixty ZERO fighters. They still had managed to shoot down five of the ZEROs and eleven of the bombers, but at the cost of seven of their P-40s and four pilots confirmed dead. One of the 34<sup>th</sup> Pursuit Squadron's pilots that had bailed out was here, wounded, and Brereton had the firm intention to shake his hand, as well as the hand of another fighter pilot that had done the impossible today. He, like his aide, Captain Norman Lewellyn, came to attention and saluted as two stretcher bearers were passing by them, carrying out of the infirmary a body covered by a bloodied blanket. The general and his aide then slowly walked down the central alley of the ward, talking with the wounded and attempting to raise their morale. Brereton, who knew by sight and name the few fighter pilots left in his command, stopped finally at the foot of the stretcher occupied by Lieutenant Ralph Carey, whose left upper leg sported a wide, blood-soaked bandage. Brereton started by shaking his hand after crouching besides him, smiling to the young pilot.

"You and the other pilots of your squadron did a magnificent job today, Lieutenant Carey. What is your personal score in air combat now?"

"I have three confirmed victories, General." Answered the pilot in a tired but proud voice. "I shot down one ZERO today, but his wingmen didn't appreciate. I was able to damage one but his buddy nailed me before I could finish him."

Brereton, a veteran pilot from World War One, smiled on hearing that account.

"I'm sure that you will find that Japanese again one day and teach him a lesson, Lieutenant. How is your leg?"

"The doctor told me that a 7.7mm bullet went through the muscles of my leg but didn't touch the bone. I should be back in a cockpit in a few weeks at most, General. We will get more planes, General, will we?"

"New planes are already on their way by sea towards Australia, where we will establish a training and conversion center for fighter pilots. I have given orders so that the wounded pilots, aircrews and ground support crews be evacuated by air to Australia, for treatment and recuperation. They will then be reorganized into a new, provisional unit. You should be on your way to Darwin in two days at the most, Lieutenant."

“And her, General?” Asked timidly Carey while pointing at another stretcher three meters away. “Will she also get another plane?”

Brereton looked in that direction and saw a young woman lying down on her belly, her torso bare but still wearing combat trousers and boots. A medic was busy delicately applying bandages to large burns covering her left arm, neck and part of her back. The girl was evidently suffering a lot but was clenching her teeth to keep silent, her eyes closed. Brereton looked at her for a moment before returning his eyes on Carey.

“Captain Dows will also get another plane, Lieutenant. We can’t waste such a good fighter pilot. I will see you on your departure for Darwin, Lieutenant. Again, congratulation for your heroic stance in the air.”

“Thank you, General.” Replied proudly the pilot.

Brereton and his aide spoke with two more wounded before stopping at the foot of Ingrid’s stretcher. The general then contemplated the teenager, thoughtful. According to all American regulations, she should not be wearing a combat uniform and, even less, be a fighter pilot. However, she had proven the hard way that she was not only worthy of being a fighter pilot, but that she was also made of the stuff of great aces. Apart from being, by far, the top allied air ace in the Pacific, her seven victories of today, which had been confirmed by numerous witness accounts from gunners and observers of the 200<sup>th</sup> Anti-Aircraft Artillery Regiment, put her total at 29 air victories. She had thus broken the old record of 26 victories held until now by the great Eddie Rickenbacker in 1917 and was now the top American air ace of all times. Her incredible courage, shown again when she had attacked alone over 240 enemy planes, also put her in a class apart. From what he had heard recently from the United States, her name was now making many around the country question the conventional wisdom that women didn’t belong as combat pilots, while many Air Corps generals could be described as being in a state of near denial concerning her case. However, as much as those generals and many politicians didn’t like it, she had to be employed as a fighter pilot, for the greater good of the country.

Brereton was about to speak to Ingrid when General MacArthur, followed by his usual public relations circus act, entered the infirmary. Someone then shouted an order that made the medics present come to attention. MacArthur looked with big eyes at the one who had shouted the order.

"Sergeant, this is an infirmary, not a parade square. You don't expect all these brave men to get up from their stretchers, are you?"

"Uh, no, General." Answered the sergeant, embarrassed, before making himself rare. MacArthur then started to inspect the wounded one by one, talking briefly with each of them and also distributing at the same time Purple Hearts<sup>9</sup>, of which an aide carried a box-full, while another aide noted down the names, units and serial numbers of the recipients, so that official lists could be made afterwards. A sizeable group of civilian reporters and photographers, along with two Army photographers, were following MacArthur, taking picture after picture. Brereton didn't like this egomaniacal aspect of his commander, but he had to concede that he was a competent strategist and a strong-willed commander. Brereton saluted him when he arrived near Ingrid's stretcher. MacArthur returned his salute, then looked down at the teenager, who was still lying on her bare belly but had opened her eyes.

"Captain Dows, you would have made your adoptive mother proud today." The compliment made Ingrid smile.

"Thank you, General! I however only did my duty, like all those brave men around me."

"Well said, Captain! How are your wounds?"

The Army doctor in charge of the infirmary, who was anxiously following MacArthur, took on him to answer.

"She sustained first and second degree burns to parts of her back, to her neck and to her left arm, General. Her burns are painful but superficial and she will be able to pilot again in a few weeks. She will however be left with some permanent scars."

MacArthur looked again at Ingrid, truly saddened to see such a brave and beautiful girl in such a state.

"Captain Dows, I suppose that you realize that, with a total of 29 air victories, you are now officially the top American air ace of all times, dethroning Eddie Rickenbacker?" Many of the civilian reporters, who had not realized that, scribbled frantically in their notebooks or took pictures of her. Ingrid then answered MacArthur in a subdued voice.

"I know it, General, but is the American public or government ready to accept it? Are they ready to follow the example of the British, who took the counsels of Nancy

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<sup>9</sup> Purple Heart : American decoration given to personnel wounded or killed in combat, irrespective of rank or occupation.

Laplante and are now using women fully in the war effort? You know that I am able to pilot a fighter only through the good graces of President Quezon, and that the American Army Air Corps would not accept me, even now.”

“Many things could be arranged with some good will, Captain. For the moment, I am more than happy to have you as a Filipino Air Corps fighter pilot and I consider your services as such to be essential to my command and to the defense of the Philippines. I thus can assure you that you will get another fighter plane as soon as you are healed. I can also assure you that your incredible bravery and devotion to duty shown today will be rewarded properly. Captain!”

The aide carrying the box of Purple Hearts stepped forward, letting MacArthur fish out a Purple Heart that he then pinned to Ingrid’s pillow, near her head, before coming to attention and saluting her.

“Again, I wish you a prompt recovery, Captain.”

Ingrid saluted back the best she could without exposing her naked chest.

“Thank you, General!”

MacArthur, satisfied with himself, then made a last public gesture and looked at an aide while giving an order that all could hear.

“Lewis, make sure that Captain Dows gets a new combat uniform with the appropriate insignias and award ribbons. If a quartermaster refuses to give you a combat uniform for this air heroin, then you have my benediction to boot his ass.”

“Understood, General!”

MacArthur then quickly concluded his visit and left with his followers, leaving Ingrid with Brereton, his aide and a pair of reporters. The man in the couple of reporters smiled to Ingrid, his camera in his hands, while the woman stood ready to take notes.

“Uh, could we ask you a few questions, Captain? I’m Melville Jacoby, of the TIME-LIFE MAGAZINE, and this is my friend Annalee Whitmore, of the LIBERTY MAGAZINE.”

Ingrid winced as the medic treating her put on a new piece of bandage, then nodded her head.

“Go ahead, Mister Jacoby.”

“Well, you must realize that your case is rather exceptional, not to say unique, in American military history. It is also quite controversial in the United States. Could you tell me what makes you able to be a top fighter pilot, an occupation considered to be strictly for men?”

"Mister Jacoby, nothing makes women inapt to serve as fighter pilots, contrary to the many tired and untrue beliefs held on that subject. The Soviets presently use women as combat pilots in at least three air regiments, and even use many as snipers on the battlefield. In Nancy Laplante's time, in 2012, many air forces used female fighter pilots with great success. As for me personally, I possess a very acute eyesight, have excellent eye-hand coordination, a good sense of equilibrium and am in good physical shape. I am also said to have a rare natural talent for flying. I also learned in the past from a number of air aces in Europe, but the main thing is that I use the strengths of my plane as well as the weaknesses of the Japanese planes."

Annalee Whitmore then jumped in with a question of her own.

"Captain, why did you want to become a fighter pilot?"

"First, I love flying. I started flying on sail planes at the age of twelve and was hooked on it at once. Second, being a fighter pilot means to be able to fly the fastest and best performing planes in existence. Thirdly, as a fighter pilot, I am in a position that allows me to defend thousands of persons from enemy bombers and fighters. That last reason, more than anything else, motivates me to give my best in the sky of the Philippines."

"Captain, many in the United States, including my own editor, say that it is immoral to let a woman fight, that women are too precious for the country to be risked on the frontlines." Said Jacoby, trying to elicit a reaction from her. He was not disappointed, as Ingrid shot him a sharp look and raised her tone of voice.

"I'm too precious to be risked on the frontlines? And what do you think about all those young men here in this infirmary? That their lives are not as equally precious? Go tell such a stupid thing to the mothers of these men and you will see what they will answer you. Excuse my choice of words, but their asses are as precious as mine in my eyes. What is truly immoral is to demean the death of a man compared to that of a woman. Look at this man to my right! Take a picture of me and him, both on our stretchers, and publish it while asking which one of us is more precious in the eyes of the parents of that young man."

Even Brereton was shaken as he looked at the young American, who was at most twenty years old and was covered with bloody bandages. Seen under that angle, many arguments against the military use of women became questionable, to say the least. The other wounded men in the infirmary were not saying a word then while staring at Ingrid, some with grave expressions, others looking grateful. Mel Jacoby then took



multiple pictures of Ingrid and of the young soldier. For good effect, Ingrid also added to the dramatic flair of the pictures by holding the right hand of the soldier while smiling gently to him. Once his photos were taken, Mel thanked Ingrid and left with Annalee. Brereton nodded in approval at Ingrid.

"Captain Dows, I think that you just nailed one of the realities of war in a way I am not about to forget. I will await with impatience your return at the commands of a fighter. Good night and good luck!"

Ken was next to show up, mad with worry, forty minutes later. Nearly running to her stretcher, he kissed her passionately before speaking.

"My God, Ingrid! You really scared me today."

Ingrid smiled to him, trying to reassure him.

"And you think that I was not scared up there, faced with all these Japanese planes?"

Ken then eyed with sadness her burns, now covered with bandages or antiseptic cream.

"What did the doctor say about your wounds, Ingrid?"

"I got first and second degree burns, but they are superficial and will heal in a few weeks. General Brereton told me that I am going to be shipped to Australia for treatment, along with other wounded pilots. General MacArthur also visited me and promised me another fighter plane, apart from giving me a Purple Heart. By the way, I now have 29 confirmed air victories and beat the old record held by Eddie Rickenbacker. You are now married to the top American air ace of all times."

Tears rolled on Ken's cheeks as he kissed her again.

"Just being married to you makes me proud, Ingrid. Let me just go find a combat shirt or a T-shirt for you: you should not stay bare torso like this."

"Why not?" Replied Ingrid, a malicious smile on her lips. "I haven't heard any complaints yet about that here."

A concert of laughs and of spicy comments from the other patients made Ken smile. He then wiggled an index at her.

"You don't need to raise the morale of the other wounded that way, my young perverted wife. I won't be long."

By the time Ken returned a few minutes later with a green T-shirt given by one of the medics, he found Major Jesus Villamor and Major Francisco Bandong at the foot of Ingrid's stretcher, speaking to her. Jesus gave a sober look at Ken.

"We came as soon as we learned where Ingrid was. I took the liberty to bring with me her backpack, filled with her things from Batangas, along with her rifle."

Ken nodded with appreciation as he eyed the Springfield 1903 lying besides the stretcher, along with a combat web belt supporting its bayonet and ammunition pockets. He then noticed a bit late the GLOCK 17L pistol that Ingrid was still wearing in its holster on her right upper leg.

"I approve of anything that can help her defend herself, Major villamor. Thank you for coming, you and Major Bandong."

The latter smiled politely while presenting him a large parcel wrapped in brown paper.

"President Quezon was greatly relieved to learn that your wife is alive, Major Dows. He sent me to bring to your wife these two going out uniforms of the Filipino Army, specially tailored to fit your wife. He also told me to deliver this envelope, which contains your wife's next three months of pay, in American dollars. She may need that money in Australia."

"Please thank in my name President Quezon for his consideration, Major Bandong." Said Ken before accepting both the parcel and the envelope. He then gave the envelope to Ingrid, who pocketed it at once, revealing briefly her bare breasts in the process. A concert of admiring whistles greeted that, making Ken smile as he presented the T-shirt he had obtained for her.

"I believe that it is time for you to put this on, my beautiful temptress of a wife." Ingrid, grinning, got up on her knees and put on the T-shirt, attracting more whistles. The doctor in charge of the infirmary arrived as Ken was putting in Ingrid's backpack her new Filipino uniforms after taking out first a fresh combat shirt.

"Major, be advised that your wife will be transferred tonight to the Sternberg Military Hospital in Manila, for more elaborate treatment. From Sternberg, she will then be evacuated by air towards Darwin the day after tomorrow, in the early morning."

"Thank you for informing me, and for treating Ingrid, Doctor."

Ken then planted a last kiss on Ingrid's lips.

"I will bring you a few things in Sternberg to bring with you to Australia, including your portable radio and music collection: it should help your morale during your recovery."

"Thank you, Ken. I wish that I could stay here with you."

"Just come back at the controls of a fighter plane and you will make me happy, Ingrid. Take care of yourself."

"You too, my dear Ken."

Ingrid then looked at Villamor and Bandong, who were about to leave with Ken.

"Thank you for visiting me, Jesus. Major Bandong, tell President Quezon that I will return as soon as I can to continue defending the Philippines. Thank him as well for his consideration towards me."

"I will pass the word, Captain Dows."

Once they were gone from the infirmary, Ingrid grabbed the fresh combat shirt left by Ken and pinned to it her rank insignias, as well as the medal ribbons for her DSC, Silver Star, DFC and her new Purple Heart. She finally pinned on the left chest her insignia of fighter pilot. The young wounded soldier to her right watched her do that, then spoke in a weak voice.

"Captain, thank you for having spoken the way you did to those two reporters."

"I only said the simple truth, Corporal. We are all equal in the eyes of God, after all."

The young corporal, like many of the other wounded, nodded at those words. Without realizing it, Ingrid had just made herself be accepted as a combat comrade by many men who previously thought that she didn't belong here.

### **06:31 (Manila Time)**

**Thursday, November 6, 1941 'C'**

**Clark Field, Philippines**

Ken pressed cautiously Ingrid against him, careful not to touch her burns under her combat shirt as they stood besides the C-87 heavy transport aircraft that would bring her and other wounded to Australia.

"Be back quickly and in good health, Ingrid. I already miss you."

"And be careful yourself, my beautiful husband. I will think of you every day while in Australia."

After a last, long kiss, Ken let her go with regret and grabbed her backpack to help her carry her things in the plane. Ingrid, on her part, grabbed her kit bag and slung her rifle

on her right shoulder. Her pistol, as well as her web belt with bayonet and ammunition, was already around her waist. The couple was walking towards the access door of the C-87 when the noise of an approaching siren made them and the other passengers of the plane turn their heads to look at an approaching convoy of staff cars and jeeps. Ingrid was the first to see the red pennant with three silver stars floating from the bumper of the leading staff car.

"It's General MacArthur! Don't tell me that he is traveling so early in the morning just for me."

"It seems so, Ingrid." Said Ken quietly as MacArthur's car stop in front of her. The couple came to rigid attention and saluted when the commander of the USAFFE stepped out. They were soon surrounded by civilian and military photographers as MacArthur stopped in front of Ingrid and returned her salute.

"Captain Dows, according to Army regulations, I should be the one to salute you first and I am sorry to hold this ceremony in such an improvised way. Know that I received a message from President Roosevelt awarding you the Medal of Honor for your heroic actions of last Tuesday. I am happy to have been able to catch up to you before your departure for Australia."

While filmed and photographed from all sides, MacArthur took a small box from an aide and took out of it a medal shaped like a star with five points suspended from a sky blue ribbon bearing white stars. He then pinned it carefully on Ingrid's shirt.

"Captain Ingrid Dows, of the 6<sup>th</sup> Pursuit Squadron of the Philippines Army Air corps, I am bestowing on you in the name of the President and the Congress of the United States the Medal of Honor, for extraordinary bravery and intrepidity well above the call of duty while engaged in active combat with the enemy. Congratulations, Captain Dows!"

Ingrid, her heart now racing, swallowed hard.

"Thank you, General! This makes me very humble indeed."

"A fighter pilot, humble? That can't be!" Joked MacArthur, making the others around him laugh. "You can be truly proud of your exploits, Captain. Come back quickly from Australia at the commands of a fighter, so that I can watch you shoot down more Japanese planes. Good trip and good luck!"

MacArthur gave her the small box containing undress ribbons of the CMOH, then took one step back and solemnly saluted her, to which Ingrid saluted back. MacArthur then

went back in his car and left with his escort of cars and jeeps. Ken then hurried to the plane with Ingrid, putting her things inside and kissing her one last time.

‘Take care, my love.’

His heart heavy, Ken left the plane and walked away to a safe distance. He watched as the big transport started its four engines one by one and then started rolling towards the main runway with other C-87s. He waved with his hand as the heavy transport took off and turned South, towards Australia.

‘Fly, my beautiful angel! Fly!’

## **CHAPTER 9 – DARWIN**

**17:25 (Darwin Time)**

**Thursday, November 6, 1941 'C'**

**Consolidated C-87 LIBERATOR EXPRESS**

**On approach to Darwin**

**Northern coast of Australia**

Ingrid, numb from nearly ten hours of flying in the noisy heavy transport aircraft, woke up slowly when Helen Cassiani, one of the two army nurses escorting her and the eight other wounded in the C-87, gently shook her up.

“Captain Dows... Captain Dows, we are about to arrive in Darwin.”

“Uh, thanks, Lieutenant.” Managed to say Ingrid before taking a deep breath to wake up. She then looked through the small window near her seat and saw that they were approaching a large bay in which dozens of ships were anchored. A small town and a port, along with two airfields were also visible on the coastline. As she was observing the semi-arid landscape, souvenirs from nearly 700 years in the past came to her mind. Back then, she had been a nomadic aborigine named Djanggawula who had lived with his tribe in the region south of Darwin. Djanggawula had lived to the old age for the time of 52 and had been the father of four children before dying from an infected wound during a hunting expedition. Ingrid whispered a few words in Wagiman, a dialect of the Ginwinyguan tongue that Djanggawula had spoken.

“The time of dreams is back...”

The C-87 soon approached one of the two airfields, whose dirt and gravel strips were bordered by a sparse vegetation. The facilities at the airfield appeared to be minimal but the mass of planes and materiel cluttering the field made her swear.

“The idiots! They haven’t learned a thing.”

Juanita Redmond, the second army nurse aboard who was sitting near her looked at her with confusion.

“What do you mean, Captain?”

Ingrid gave a bitter look at the small, young and beautiful Latino woman.

"What I mean is that the ones in charge of this airfield seem to have learned nothing from the Japanese raid on Pearl Harbor, Lieutenant Redmond. Look at all those transport aircraft, lined up wingtip to wingtip. A single Japanese fighter could destroy them all in one pass. And all this materiel, fuel and equipment stacked like sardine cans in the open: a few bombs and everything would go up in smoke."

Juanita, a young woman beautiful enough to become a Hollywood star, was silent for a moment as she stared at Ingrid. The teenage fighter pilot had quickly become a legend around the Philippines, her phenomenal abilities as a fighter pilot allied to a beauty that made most of the soldiers and sailors there dream about her. Many officers and soldiers had mocked at first the idea of a female fighter pilot. Their derision had however turned quickly to disbelief, then to respect as Ingrid accumulated air victories at a dizzying speed.

"But, if the attack on Pearl Harbor showed what the Japanese could do, then why would the commanders in Darwin fall for the same trick, Captain?"

"Because they are idiots or incompetents, or both." Replied at once Ingrid, who was getting more furious by the minute as she looked at the close to twenty four-engine transport planes lined up as if on parade on the airfield.

Her plane finally landed third out of the 25 C-87s back from the Philippines. It then rolled to a parking apron where a long line of ambulances was waiting. Ingrid got up with relief from her seat but waited for the other eight wounded, lying on stretchers, to be carried out before grabbing her backpack, kit bag and rifle and stepping out, careful not to rub her still very sensitive burns. An Australian Army doctor and a number of nurses and medics, along with two officers of the Royal Australian Air Force, or RAAF, were waiting near the ambulances to sort out the fifty or so wounded Americans that had arrived. Ingrid, standing near the end of the line, caused a small commotion when the Australians saw that she was a woman. One of the RAAF officers went to her at a near jog and stopped before her, detailing her with growing disapproval.

"What are you doing, carrying a rifle and a pistol, miss? You..."

"First, Lieutenant," replied Ingrid, cutting him off in a cold voice, "call me Captain, not miss! Secondly, I am a commissioned fighter pilot of the Filipino Army Air Corps and have the full right to carry weapons. Now, stuff your rear echelon asshole act and get lost! I am here to have my wounds treated, not to waste time with men like you."

"How dare you call me a rear echelon asshole?" Started to protest the Australian, not believing her. Ingrid then cut him off again.

"Because you are one, compared to me and all these wounded men, Lieutenant. Now, I believe that you owe me a salute."

The Australian, furious, swallowed his pride after a look at her rank insignias and at her medal ribbons and saluted her, then turned around and walked away. Now really in a bad mood, Ingrid continued to advance with the line, arriving finally in front of the Australian army doctor, a major. Ingrid saluted her after putting down on the ground her kit bag and coming to attention.

"Captain Ingrid Dows, 6<sup>th</sup> Pursuit Squadron, Filipino Army Air Corps, reporting for treatment, sir!"

The major, amused as well as surprised, returned her salute before looking briefly at the medical file that Helen Cassiani had handed him.

"Hum, first and second degree burns to the back, neck and left arm. Your case, while painful, does not require urgent or intensive treatment. You will then be treated here at the infirmary of the station, rather than on the hospital ship MANUNDA, anchored in the port. You can get in in the fifth ambulance with your things, Captain."

"Thank you, Major!"

Ingrid then carried slowly her things to the designated ambulance, joining there three other walking wounded Americans. One of them, a young anti-aircraft gunner with an arm in a sling, smiled at her as she climbed inside the ambulance.

"You sure plugged that big loud mouth, Captain."

"Let's say that he asked for it, Corporal. How serious is your wound?"

"Just a few pieces of shrapnel in the arm, Captain. I should be back to my gun in a couple of weeks."

"That's the spirit, Corporal." Said Ingrid, smiling. The doors of the ambulance were then closed and it rolled for only a couple of minutes before stopping in front of the airfield's infirmary. Entering with her things the wooden building, with a medic helping her by carrying her kit bag, she was greeted by a captain of the Medical Corps who was ready to treat her first. She however stopped him with a sign of the hand.

"I can wait, Captain. Take care of these men first, please."

Favorably impressed by her attitude, the young military doctor had Ingrid and two of the other wounded sit down in a small waiting room, admitting first the young gunner with the wounded arm in his examination room.



Ingrid's turn came after about forty minutes. Nearly asleep on her chair, she left behind her rifle and two packs and entered the examination room, where the doctor and a nurse were standing besides an examination table.

"If you can please remove your shirt and then lie on your belly on the table, Captain."

Ingrid obeyed readily, revealing that she was not wearing a bra under her combat shirt.

"Excuse me for not wearing a bra, Doctor, but my back is too sensitive to stand straps."

"I understand, Captain." Said softly the Australian doctor. "You may now lie down."

Ingrid lay down as asked and did her best not to wince as the doctor, helped by the nurse, removed her bandages and inspected her burns. The doctor then gave his verdict a few minutes later.

"Your burns will leave a few permanent but faint scars but should heal without a problem, unless infection sets in. I will now remove some pieces of burned skin, in order to minimize scarring, but will first give you some morphine for the pain."

"NO! No morphine, please, Doctor!"

"Are you sure, Captain? This will be rather painful."

"I don't like the idea of losing control of my mind, Doctor. I will clench my teeth instead."

"As you wish! If you change your mind, just say it."

The doctor then tried to relax her by talking with her while starting her treatment.

"So, Captain, how did you get those burns?"

"I had to jump out of my burning P-40 fighter over the Philippines, Doctor. I had time to destroy seven Japanese planes before that but there were just too many of them."

The nurse, like the doctor, was left open-mouthed for a second before speaking excitedly.

"You are the famous Lady Hawk, Captain?"

"Well, famous may be too strong a word, Nurse."

"Not at all! Do you know how many of our pilots are jealous of your score? They all wonder how you do it. Some even say that your scores are boosted for propaganda purposes."

"Well, you can tell those pilots that, if they want to learn something about air combat, they are welcomed to come talk to me. As for the doubters, screw them! I...OUCH!"

"I told you that it would be painful, Captain." Said the doctor. "You better clench your teeth for the next few minutes: I'm starting the serious things now."

Ingrid didn't answer, closing her eyes and tightening her jaws to avoid screaming from the pain. The doctor then reassured her after about fifteen minutes, having applied new bandages.

"Here you are, Captain. We are done for the day. The nurse will now bring you to your bed in the ward. We are sorry if we don't have private rooms but the nurse will pull curtains around your bed to give you some privacy. We will change your dressings once a day, until your burns start healing and the risk of infection will pass. You will then be able to handle light duties, but it will be a month or two before you can pilot a plane again."

"A MONTH OR TWO?! But, that's an eternity for me, and for the Philippines. My husband is still fighting there against the Japanese and we need all the fighter pilots we can get. The Japanese could have taken the Philippines in two months. Can't you be more optimistic in my case, Doctor?"

The army doctor hesitated, eyeing her before answering.

"Alright, I will do my best to speed your return to combat, Captain. Everything will however depend on how your burns heal. If infection gets in..."

"I understand, Doctor. Could I start exercising soon, by running or doing calisthenics?"

"We will see in a few days, Captain Dows. You can now put your shirt back on. Nurse, could you show her to her bed?"

A few minutes later, Ingrid was putting down her things besides a bed in a small ward, with the nurse pulling a curtain around the bed, which also had a mosquito netting and was near a window. She looked through the window for a few minutes, examining the airfield around the infirmary. The field personnel seemed busy refueling and servicing the C-87s that had arrived from the Philippines, while another group of transports were being loaded up at what Ingrid considered a lazy pace. Exhausted by her long air trip and her wounds, she put away her rifle and luggage in the nearby locker, then got down on her belly in the bed and went to sleep in a few seconds.

**03:47 (Manila Time)**

**Sunday, November 9, 1941 'C'**

**Observation tower of Fort Drum, El Fraile Island**

**Entrance to the Manila Bay**

**Philippines**

The corporal of the 59<sup>th</sup> Coastal Artillery Regiment serving as one of the sentries in the observation tower of Fort Drum stiffened when he spotted a dark mass about ten kilometers to the West. Adjusting the focus on his rangefinder, he soon had a clearer image of the unknown ship, which was nearly invisible in the dark.

"LIEUTENANT, I HAVE AN INTRUDER ABOUT SIX MILES AWAY, ON HEADING 275."

The duty officer of the tower of Fort Drum, also known as 'The concrete battleship' because of its unusual construction, pointed his own rangefinder in the said direction and looked through his optics for a few seconds before shouting orders to his watchmen.

"ENEMY MINESWEEPER IN THE BAY'S ENTRANCE! WATCH FOR MORE INTRUDERS!"

As the watchmen, now fully awake, were scamming slowly the waters of the bay with their binoculars and rangefinders, the lieutenant picked up the receiver of the telephone linking him with the command post of the fort.

"Hello!... This is Lieutenant Fullner, in the observation tower. We have spotted an enemy minesweeper in the entrance of the bay, about six miles away at heading 275. The minesweeper is going at slow speed and seems to be opening a path through our minefields. My men are now looking for more possible enemy ships... Understood, Major!"

Fullner then hung up and was about to shout an order to the two men manning one of the big sixty inch-diameter projectors situated on a platform above his head, when a watchman shouted a warning.

"LIEUTENANT! TWO OTHER MINESWEEPERS ARE FOLLOWING THE FIRST ONE ON BOTH FLANKS, ABOUT 200 YARDS BEHIND THE FIRST SHIP. THEY MUST HAVE SWEEPED THROUGH AT LEAST HALF THE DEPT OF OUR MINEFIELDS BY NOW."

"SHIT! GIVE ME A NEW AZIMUTH AND DISTANCE FOR THE LEADING MINESWEEPER!"

"THE AZIMUTH IS NOW 278, DISTANCE 9,200 YARDS, SIR! THEY ARE HEADING EAST AT ABOUT SIX KNOTS."

The young artillery lieutenant picked his telephone receiver again and passed that information in an anxious tone, then asked a question.

"Should I light up our projectors now, sir?"

"Negative! Wait until our guns are trained on target and ready to fire. I will give you the order when we are ready."

"Understood, sir!"

Fullner hung up again and resumed his observation, this time with binoculars. The Moon was at its last quarter and the Japanese ships had been observed nearly at the maximum distance possible in the present light conditions. The two big armored turrets that constituted the main armament of the fort, each one housing two huge fourteen inch guns, then started pivoting to point their barrels at the three intruders. Fort Drum was unique as a coastal defense fortress by being armed with battleship gun turrets. It also looked like a battleship, having been built around a rocky reef that had been razed first and then wrapped in a concrete shell up to ten meters in thickness, making it nearly invulnerable to ship guns. However, the builders of the fort had not built it with air attacks in mind, something that had become too obvious during the last three weeks, with Japanese bombers flying over Fort Drum with impunity.

The first shot of the battle was fired by one of the fort's three inch guns positioned on the roof of the fortress, which sent a star shell high in the sky to the West. Fullner smiled ferociously when the light from the shell, now floating down under a parachute, made the three enemy minesweepers fully visible. The second shot came from one of the six inch guns installed in casemates around the base of the fort. The heavy shell zipped just above the deck of the leading minesweeper, creating a geyser of water 200 meters past it. The four big fourteen inch guns of the fort then opened fire, blinding for a moment Fullner and his watchmen with their departure flashes. More gun flashes then lighted up the night as the heavy guns of Corregidor, Fort Hughes and Fort Frank, which also defended the entrance of the bay, opened fire as well. Despite the hurricane of shells fired at them, the crews of the Japanese minesweeper showed suicidal courage and continued sweeping a path in the minefields as if on exercise. Fullner was watching this, awaiting the first hit on the minesweepers, when a series of flashes on the horizon made him snap his head. His heart missed a beat as he

understood that an enemy battle fleet, probably made up of battleships or heavy cruisers, had just opened fire. Rushing to his telephone, he called again the command post while expecting to hear soon the screeches of incoming heavy shells.

“MAJOR, A LINE OF ENEMY COMBAT SHIPS JUST OPENED FIRE ALONG THE HORIZON. I CAN COUNT AT LEAST TEN HEAVY SHIPS.”

“TEN SHIPS?!” Exclaimed the gunnery officer. “Shit! Give me an azimuth and distance on the lead ship.”

Fullner looked through a nearby rangefinder while still holding the receiver and was passing on the first reading when the howl of a heavy shell came in. He only had the time to crouch down before he and the other occupants of the tower, which was made of an open lattice of steel girders and was not armored, were drenched by the spray of water from a series of near misses. He finally looked back in his rangefinder and gave a new reading, then shouted an order at his watchmen.

“EVACUATE THE TOWER! TAKE SHELTER INSIDE!”

As his men scrambled down the steel stairs, Fullner kept updating the azimuth and distance to the leading enemy battle unit. As the six inch guns of the fort continued firing on the enemy minesweepers, the two main turrets pivoted again, aiming at the lead battleship and soon firing a salvo of four fourteen inch shells. Fullner observed their fall and gave a fire correction. Fort Drum's main guns were firing their fifth salvo when the lead enemy minesweeper started sinking, reduced to a blazing wreck by multiple impacts from medium guns. A fourteen inch shell fired by the Japanese battleship KIRISHIMA then hit the northwest face of the thick concrete shell of the fort, exploding and digging a crater in it but not penetrating all the way. Fullner was shaken but not wounded by the powerful blast and kept giving aiming corrections to the main turrets. Utterly terrified but resolved to stay at his post, the young officer did not have the chance to witness the first hit on the KIRISHIMA before a fourteen inch shell exploded against the base of the tower, shredding him to pieces.

Ken Dows was running towards his trench, which was facing the sea and was part of the defensive perimeter of the Cavite Naval Base, when he saw the hit on Fort Drum. Jumping in his trench, he took place behind the field telephone installed under the sandbag parapet and looked around him. His Marines were reacting quickly and were also occupying their trenches. The artillerymen of the 200<sup>th</sup> Regiment were already at their post, pointing frantically their 90mm guns towards the sea as the coastal guns of

the bay's forts continued exchanging fire with the Japanese heavy ships. The American forts were however over thirty kilometers away, while the Japanese ships were another twelve kilometers behind, so he could only see the flashes from gun departures and shells exploding. Ken finally decided to make a tour of the trenches of his company, which he had taken command of three days ago, after his predecessor had been killed by a Japanese bomb. The sea battle was still raging when he returned to his trench half a hour later.

### **06:41 (Manila Time)**

#### **Command bridge of the Japanese battleship NAGATO**

##### **Off the entrance to Manila Bay**

Admiral Yamamoto Isoroku lowered his binoculars for a moment as the big sixteen inch guns of his flagship fired another salvo, shaking the 43,000 ton battleship. The battle, which had started with a rather slow exchange of fire due to the darkness, was now heating up seriously. To date, his four battleships and four heavy cruisers, which had rounded up the northern tip of Luzon during the night and sailed down the Filipino coast to the entrance of the Manila Bay, had only suffered minor damage from a few shell hits. The American mines cut adrift by the now sunk three minesweepers had by now ample time to float away, carried by currents, thus opening the South Channel for his ships. It was now time to get down to serious business.

"Signal to Admiral Kondo on the KIRISHIMA: turn East and lead the battle line through the path in the minefields."

"Yes, Admiral!"

Yamamoto then observed, apparently impassive, as his eight heavy units steered towards the entrance of the bay in a long single line. In reality, the robust and tenacious resistance from the American forts had made him nervous. With the Sun now up, American bombers could now take off and attack his fleet, while the American submarines were also a major worry. However, by forcing his way inside Manila Bay, he could then systematically destroy with ship gunfire the naval installations in Cavite and the airfields of Nichols Field and Nielson Field. That job had initially belonged to the bombers of the Imperial Army and Navy, but the unexpectedly tough resistance of the American fighters and anti-aircraft guns had bitten big holes in the Japanese air units, with many air regiments having to be withdrawn from combat in order to be reorganized

and reequipped, having lost sometimes up to two thirds of their planes. Taking the Philippines, apart from costing him dearly in ships, planes and men, was also upsetting mightily the overall strategic plans of Japan, forcing the reassignment of many ships and units to what was looking more and more like a bottomless pit. As the NAGATO was turning in sequence, Yamamoto gave another order.

“Launch our seaplanes number one and two! Have them take positions to spot and correct our incoming fire against Nichols Field and Nielson Field.”

Less than six minutes later, as the line of Japanese ships was entering the cleared path in the minefields through the South Channel, two of the Aichi E13A seaplanes of the NAGATO were catapulted from the battleship and climbed into the sky, flying first to the South to avoid the dangerous anti-aircraft guns protecting Cavite.

Things became critical as the Japanese fleet sailed through the South Channel, passing between the American forts defending the bay. The American heavy guns only had rudimentary fire control systems and were mostly of old manufacture, things that had hurt their long range accuracy. Now, however, the American gunners had daylight to help their aim, while their targets were within six kilometers of them. Despite the heavy fire from the 72 Japanese guns of sixteen, fourteen and eight inches in caliber, the eighteen old guns of fourteen, twelve, ten and six inch replied with a persistence that was to their honor. Some of the American guns were also mounted on retracting mounts, disappearing after each shot, time to reload and be raised again, thus making them very difficult to take out with direct fire. The Number One main turret of the KIRISHIMA was suddenly hit in its rear plate by a fourteen inch shell from Fort Drum as it was pointing the opposite way, at Corregidor. Yamamoto saw a gigantic flame burst out of the stricken turret before it flew off in the air as a titanic explosion rocked the battleship. The KIRISHIMA, which was leading the battle line at a speed of 27 knots, wobbled in the water and started at once to sink by the bow. Apparently out of control, it started as well a wide turn to starboard, its forward half hidden by a cloud of black smoke. Yamamoto, containing his fury, gave a curt order to his signals officer.

“TRANSMIT BY FLAG AND LAMP IMMEDIATELY: FOLLOW ME AND CONTINUE TOWARDS CAVITE.”

“Hay!”

As the NAGATO took the lead, Yamamoto examined the KIRISHIMA with the help of his binoculars and clenched his teeth: the forward half of its hull was ripped open over the

fifth of the ship's length, where its first main turret had been. The KIRISHIMA then received two more hits, this time in its superstructures. With its command bridge now on fire, the battleship was practically condemned. Yamamoto then had a minute later the small consolation to see one of the main turrets of Fort Drum be destroyed by a direct hit from a sixteen inch shell. The other guns of the fort however kept firing, despite dozens of impacts on its concrete shell. A warning shouted by a nearby watchman then made his head snap around.

"LARGE FORMATION OF HEAVY ENEMY BOMBERS IN SIGHT!"

Running to the port open bridge wing, Yamamoto pointed his binoculars at a big group of planes seemingly coming from Clark Field. Despite the distance, he identified them as being B-24 LIBERATOR heavy bombers, the most recent type of American bomber in service. There was close to thirty of them. For a moment, Yamamoto feared for his fleet. He then noted the strange conduct of the bombers, which flew in a long file instead of forming attack waves. Furthermore, the B-24s were apparently trying to stay away from his ships, heading due South instead. Yamamoto was confused by that for a moment: Japanese bomber crews that would act like this would be promptly executed for cowardice. The truth then brushed his mind and he walked quickly to one of the heavy, high-powered optical scopes of the bridge, pushing away the sailor manning it and pointing the scope at the planes. He swore loudly after a few seconds and looked at one of his aides.

"Commander, these planes are not bombers: they don't have defensive turrets. Come here and identify their exact type."

The officer, a naval aviator, hurried behind the scope and looked for a few seconds before looking with surprise at his commander.

"You are right, Admiral! These planes are C-87 LIBERATOR EXPRESS, a transport variant of the American B-24 bomber. What could they do here in such numbers?"

"Transport in reinforcements and critical supplies, of course!" Replied Yamamoto while following the planes with his eyes as they flew southward. "What kind of range do they have, Commander?"

"Uh, about 4,500 kilometers, according to our intelligence, Admiral."

"Thus, enough to come straight from Australia, right?"

"The Americans are operating an air bridge between the Philippines and Australia?" Said the aide, now understanding. Yamamoto nodded his head slowly.



"It seems so, Commander. I want you to follow visually those planes and to find their exact heading, so that we could later find out where they come from exactly. Then calculate how much they can carry on such a distance. Even if this raid does not succeed, at least we will have learned something important today."

"It will be done, Admiral."

A geyser of water from a near miss then sprayed the occupants of the open bridge, reminding Yamamoto that he had a battle to lead.

Ken Dows watched with growing worry the approach of the Japanese battle fleet, which was still exchanging salvos with the surviving guns of the American coastal forts. The lead battleship hit thirty minutes earlier was now sinking near Fort Drum, but that still left three battleships and four heavy cruisers that were about to come within gun range of Cavite. Ken revised his opinion when he saw the turrets of the lead ship pivot towards him and fire. He looked at the artillerymen near his trench, standing behind their 90mm guns and protected only by sandbag parapets.

"BATTLESHIP SHELLS ON THE WAY! HIT THE TRENCHES!"

The gunners didn't have to be told twice, diving head first in their own nearby trenches. The terrifying screech of incoming heavy shells passing overhead froze Ken's blood in his veins for a moment as he crouched down in his trench. Thankfully, the first salvo of shells landed in the water in front of the Cavite docks, causing no damage. Ken knew however that this was only a start. A joyful shout then made him look up at the sky.

"OUR BOMBERS ARE COMING!"

Ken effectively saw an attack formation of twelve B-17 bombers approaching the Japanese fleet at high altitude. He watched with hope their attack as the Japanese ships kept shelling Cavite and its harbor. One heavy shell finally hit its mark, exploding in the middle of barracks near the docks. Another twenty or so big caliber shells exploded inside the naval base before the B-17 dropped their bombs. To Ken's disappointment, none of the bombs made a direct hit. They however forced the Japanese ships to zigzag, which completely threw off their shooting against Cavite. Ken, who took that occasion to inspect visually the damage to the naval base from a distance, suddenly saw a submarine that was coming out of the harbor while diving.

"But, he's mad! Either he will be pulverized by the Japanese or he will get stuck on the bottom."

The Japanese shellfire soon resumed, making him forget about the reckless submarine commander. Still harassed by surviving American coastal guns, the Japanese units proceeded in systematically destroying the installations of Cavite as the Marines could only watch, helpless. A big storage tank full of aviation gasoline erupted in a spectacular fireball, raining burning fuel all over the base and starting many fires. As Ken was about to write off the base as finished, one of the Japanese heavy cruisers was rocked by four enormous geysers erupting against its flank in quick succession. Ken screamed with joy when he understood that the submarine that had left the harbor had just torpedoed the cruiser. Without destroyer escort and with his ships inside a bay that restricted ship movements, the Japanese admiral probably decided that the game wasn't worth it anymore and turned around his ships, all of which were already damaged to various degrees. That did not stop a battleship from being soon hit by two torpedoes. Contrary to the heavy cruiser, though, it managed to sail out of the bay with the other five surviving Japanese units after a last exchange of fire with the coastal forts. Ken nervously wiped off sweat from his forehead, happy to be still alive. Many Americans had however died today, while the installations of Cavite were devastated. Looking with his binoculars the Japanese heavy cruiser that was sinking inside the bay, he saw a number of lifeboats and rafts being put at sea. Looking at his second in command, a young captain in his twenties, he gave a few orders in a firm voice.

"We will disperse our men along the coastline, in order to stop or capture the Japanese sailors coming from that sinking cruiser. Tell the men to be wary if attempting to take prisoners: the Japanese are likely to resist or even to commit suicide. Our men will shoot first and ask questions later: I don't want to lose men on this. I will take the first and second platoons with me in trucks. You stay here with the rest of the men to hold our positions."

"Yes, Major!"

Calling forward the light trucks of his company, Ken mounted them with 65 of his men and led his small convoy along the road that followed the southern coastline of Manila Bay, stopping at intervals to drop his rifle squads at eight points chosen by him close to the location where the Japanese cruiser had sunk. Staying with his last squad, Ken arrived at a beach six kilometers from Cavite as two life rafts overloaded with Japanese sailors were approaching the coast. At least twenty Japanese were aboard the rafts, with many more holding to them and pushing them towards the beach.

Jumping out of his jeep, Ken ran to the shore, his rifle in hand and followed by nine Marines, while one Marine manned the machinegun mounted on his jeep. Arming his Browning AR-41 assault rifle, Ken deployed his rifle squad in extended line along the beach and shouted in Japanese at the sailors, now about a hundred meters away, using one of the phrases he had learned from Ingrid.

“SURRENDER OR DIE!”

“NEVER!” Replied at once in a defiant tone a young Japanese officer. Ken shook his head slowly, having hoped for a more reasonable answer. His next words were in English, to his Marines.

“THEY ARE REFUSING TO SURRENDER. SLOW FIRE, ONE BULLET PER TARGET. TAKE YOUR TIME AND SHOOT TO KILL!”

His Marines, finally able to let out their rage and hatred contained for weeks now against the Japanese that had been bombing them nearly every day since October 20, obeyed him without hesitation. Doing as if at a firing range, they aimed carefully their shots and started killing the Japanese sailors. Ken also started firing, shooting first the officer that had answered him and feeling no remorse as he shot bullet after bullet.

### **20:19 (Manila Time)**

#### **Operations center, Japanese battleship NAGATO**

#### **170 kilometers northwest of Manila**

#### **South China Sea**

While showing an impassive face, Yamamoto felt discouragement and sadness fill him as he read the casualties list for the operation while standing near the big chart table, observed by his staff officers. Lost during the attack on Cavite were the battleship KIRISHIMA and the heavy cruiser SUZUYA, with the battleship HIEI seriously damaged by two torpedoes and now on its way to Japan for repairs under the escort of two destroyers. All the other ships of his force, including his own flagship, had suffered various degrees of damage from the gunfire coming from the American coastal forts. Worse, his battle squadron had been ambushed by three American submarines during its withdrawal, losing the heavy cruisers ATAGO and MAYA, which had absorbed a total of eleven torpedoes. Over 4,000 of his officers and sailors were now dead or missing, including two of his best squadron commanders, Vice-Admiral Kondo and Rear-Admiral Kurita. For that price, he had been able to inflict severe damage to the Cavite Naval

Base and to the coastal forts. However, his ships had been unable to fire on Nichols Field and Nielson Field, his two spotter seaplanes having been shot down by a solitary gray P-40 fighter. He could only characterize this operation as a costly failure. Raising his nose from the list of casualties, Yamamoto looked at his aviation staff officer.

“Commander Kawaguchi, what are the results of today’s air raids on the Philippines?”

The officer carefully chose his words, not wanting to appear defeatist.

“Three raids were launched today, Admiral: one against Clark Field, one against Nichols Field and one against Cavite. In the three cases, our planes encountered American fighters and anti-aircraft gunfire but were able to drop their bombs on target. Our losses in all three raids were light.”

“Light, Commander? What is light for you?” Asked Yamamoto in an irritated tone. “Our carrier squadrons are now down to 65% of their original strength and our stocks of bombs on our carriers are dwindling rapidly. Despite all this, the Americans still find a way to send up fighters to intercept our bombers.”

“But, the Americans have only a handful of fighters left, Admiral. A few more raids and there will be none left.”

“And what tells us that they won’t get more fighters, probably via Australia? Talking about that, were you able to find out the probable destination of those transport planes we saw in the morning?”

“Yes, Admiral! Those C-87s were most probably heading to Darwin, on the northern coast of Australia. Darwin is by far the Australian airfield and port nearest the Philippines and would constitute a logical base for an air bridge.”

“Are you thinking about attacking Darwin, Admiral?” Asked the captain of the NAGATO. Yamamoto nodded at that.

“This may prove necessary, Captain. That air bridge is the sole external source of supplies for the Americans in the Philippines, who had been firing thousands of anti-aircraft shells in the last weeks. Without that air bridge, they will probably run quickly out of shells, something that would make our bombing raids much easier. The same could be said about the stocks of torpedoes for the submarines of the Asiatic Fleet, which are a curse upon our fleet. If we could cut that air bridge from Australia, then the Americans will quickly run out of ammunition, spare parts and medical supplies.”

“But that would delay further our invasion projects for the Dutch East Indies and Burma, Admiral.” Objected the army liaison officer attached to Yamamoto’s staff. “We

have already redirected much precious resources from those vital objectives in order to take the Philippines, and we still haven't landed troops there."

Yamamoto threw a cold look at the colonel.

"And what would be the chances of success for the invasion of these territories if the Americans are permitted to keep control of the Philippines, Colonel? Do you want to have to explain to His Majesty the Emperor why the Americans still can bomb Japanese home territory with their B-17s? The American submarines in Cavite and their heavy bombers in Clark Field are too much of a long range threat to our forces and to Japan itself. We must eliminate those threats! In my opinion, Burma is a secondary objective for us. The oil fields of the Dutch East Indies are however of prime importance for us. I will thus counsel to the Prime Minister to launch a limited invasion of the Dutch East Indies, centered on the oil fields, while keeping the Philippines under sea and air blockade. Before any landings in the Philippines, though, I want to cut that air bridge from Australia."

Yamamoto then looked around the chart table at his staff officers.

"Are there more objections or suggestions? No? Then I will send tonight a message to Tokyo, asking for the approbation of the plan I just outlined. You are dismissed, gentlemen!"

## **20:56 (Manila Time)**

### **Operations center of the Asiatic Fleet**

#### **Manila, Philippines**

Like Yamamoto, Admiral Hart had to deal with his lot of bad news and with a long list of losses, mostly in Cavite. As for the army, the gunners of the coastal forts had suffered severely, even though they had made the enemy pay a heavy price for their incursion. However, despite the 860 American soldiers, sailors and airmen killed today, Hart still could legitimately consider this battle as a victory. Another victory, in a sense, was the fact that the air bridge with Darwin was still operating, with 32 heavy transports having landed just before Sunset, loaded with over 120 tons of munitions and vital spare parts, including 36 precious torpedoes for his submarines, which had done such a stellar job today. Equally important was the fact that those 32 transport planes were going to be able to evacuate most of the men seriously wounded in the Japanese attack. This was alleviating a major subject of concern for him and General MacArthur. This medical

evacuation route also did a lot for the morale of the men, who knew that they would not be stuck, wounded, at the mercy of a Japanese invasion. After a last glance at his charts, Hart then gave his orders for tomorrow.

"Gentlemen, I want the torpedoes received tonight to be loaded as quickly as possible on our submarine tenders and in our submarines presently in Cavite. Our submarines presently at sea, except for the TARPON and SCULPIN, will continue to patrol Filipino waters and to harass the Japanese ships they find. As for the TARPON and SCULPIN, once fully rearmed and refueled, they will leave tonight for the Japanese home waters and take ambush positions off Tokyo Bay, to wait there for any Japanese warship of value. To sink their ships so close to home should keep the Japanese focused on us. As for Cavite, I want our stocks and equipment there dispersed out of the base as much as possible, to make it less vulnerable to bombardment. I will send another message to Admiral Stark tonight, asking him to send more submarines from Pearl Harbor to support the TARPON and SCULPIN off the Japanese coast."

"And our surface fleet, Admiral?" Asked a staff officer.

"Our two old cruisers and our destroyers will stay in reserve for the moment. Even with the recent heavy enemy losses, they are still not up to engage the Japanese fleet in decisive combat. Finally, I want our seriously wounded men to be evacuated by air tomorrow morning. I want a list of replacement personnel made quickly as well and sent to Washington. Our ranks are already way too thin to my taste."

"More fighters and bombers couldn't hurt either, Admiral." Said a commander, making Hart nod at that.

"Amen to that, Commander!"

### **17:39 (London Time)**

**Monday, November 10, 1941 'C'**

**Gaoler's House, Tower of London**

**London, England**

Hanna Reitsch was getting ready to go have supper at the Waterloo Barracks, along with the other German women detained in the Tower of London, when Brigadier Browning entered the main hall of Gaoler's House. Hanna immediately called the auxiliaries to attention, prompting the old British officer in signaling them to relax.

"At ease, ladies!" Said Browning in a jovial tone, seemingly in good humor despite the horrible weather of this November. "I brought you an American magazine that could interest you all."

Now having the full attention of the nine Germans present, Browning put on the big, massive table of polished wood of the hall a magazine with a large picture on its front cover. Hanna felt her heart skip a beat when she saw that the picture showed Ingrid Weiss, wearing a combat uniform and smiling while standing in front of a Curtiss P-40 fighter painted all gray. The title of the TIME-LIFE MAGAZINE shocked her even more.

"Ingrid, the American Ace of aces? But, that's impossible!"

"But it is a fact." Replied Browning to the German test pilot. "It seems that our intrepid Ingrid has realized her dream of becoming a pilot, and not any pilot. This magazine is now yours. I will thus let you read Ingrid's story in it. Have a good evening, Flugkapitan!"

"Uh, good evening, Brigadier." Replied Hanna, still stunned. She waited until Browning had left before rushing to the table to grab the magazine, with the other women clustering around her to read over her shoulder as she opened it to the article about Ingrid.

"Mein Gott! According to this magazine, Ingrid has 29 confirmed air victories against Japanese planes over the Philippines, two while flying a P-26 and the rest of them on P-40. She received the Medal of Honor, the highest American decoration for bravery, for attacking alone 240 Japanese planes and destroying seven of them before being shot down herself. She was wounded but was able to parachute out and should recuperate fully in a few weeks. The previous American record for air victories was 26 planes shot down by Eddie Rickenbacker and dated from 1917."

"But, the Americans do not accept women in their army, as far as I know." Objected Lisa Hartmann, the most senior auxiliary held in the Tower of London. "How could she become a fighter pilot?"

"Uh, good point! Let me read through this... Ha, here we are! She was actually commissioned as an officer and fighter pilot in the Philippines Army by President Quezon. She is thus considered a Filipina officer, which allows her to circumscribe American military regulations. This also refers to another article in this magazine about a law proposal pushed by President Roosevelt to allow American women to serve in the military. According to this, there is already a lot of protests and resistance towards that law proposal in the American Congress."

With the other women reading over her shoulder and with more auxiliaries coming down at a run, alerted by shouts from their comrades in the hall, Hanna read carefully the whole article, which had multiple pictures of Ingrid, including one of her as she lay on a stretcher of the infirmary in Clark Field and another showing her receiving the Medal of Honor from General MacArthur, with Ken Dows standing nearby. She finally looked up from the magazine, a dreamy look on her face.

“When I think that the Luftwaffe refused to let me be a fighter pilot. What I would be able to do in a Messerschmitt Bf 109...”

“How could you admire this girl?” Exclaimed Grete Messner in an indignant tone. “She betrayed Germany and she now fights for our enemies.”

Hanna gave an icy stare at the matron, who was still a fanatical follower of the Nazi Party and who was strongly suspected by Hanna of having led the group that had beaten Ingrid at night in her sleep.

“Messner, Ingrid married an American officer when the United States was still neutral in this war. The Americans became our enemies only after Germany declared war to them after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. She now fights for her country of adoption and against the Japanese, not against Germany. I do not consider her as a traitor for that.”

“Japan is our ally. To fight the Japanese makes a traitor of that Weiss. What could we expect anyway from a Jew like her?”

Frida Winterer, one of Ingrid’s best friends, stepped towards Messner, her fists tight, but was stopped by another friend of Ingrid, the tall and beautiful Susanna Berghof, who eyed the matron with contempt.

“Don’t dirty your hands on her, Frida: she is only able to attack others at night while they sleep.”

Sensing that the majority of the group was against her, Messner didn’t dare reply to that and returned to her room, furious. Hanna Reitsch watched her go, then led the others out for supper, making sure first that the precious magazine was in safe hands.

**09:08 (Darwin Time)**

**Tuesday, November 11, 1941 ‘C’**

**Infirmary of RAAF Station Darwin**

**Darwin, Australia**



"Well, I have the pleasure to announce to you that your burns seem to be healing without signs of complications, Captain Dows. I now consider you medically fit for light duties. However, it is still too early for you to pilot a plane, especially a fighter. You may now dress."

"Can I start exercising again, Doctor?"

"Moderately only, and doing nothing that could infect your burns. Quick walks or on the spot calisthenics are acceptable. I will write down a medical chit to certify that you are on light duties."

"And how much longer will I have to stay in Darwin, Doctor?" Asked Ingrid, who was becoming bored to death. The Australian Army doctor thought over his answer for a moment.

"I suppose that a two-week medical leave period in Melbourne or Brisbane would help your healing...and your morale. I will talk to the commander of your transport group, Colonel Sneed: technically, he controls all the American personnel here in Darwin."

Instead of encouraging her, the mention of Sneed discouraged Ingrid. She had earlier tried to convince the old colonel, who had no combat experience in his whole career, to disperse his planes and supplies to at least make them less vulnerable to air attack. Sneed's response had been that there was not enough space around the airfield to properly disperse his planes, which was partially true. Sneed had also given at the same time the impression to Ingrid that he didn't take her seriously.

"Yeah! He could very well send me to Tasmania if he could."

The doctor smiled at that, knowing how Sneed was.

"Well, at least you wouldn't have to constantly turn down the advances of drunk soldiers in Tasmania, Captain. Now that you are better, I will transfer you in the room used by Nurse Watkins, so that you could finally have some privacy. You can free your actual bed right now."

Once out of the treatment room, Ingrid moved her things to the room of the head nurse, then changed into a loose fitting sports outfit of T-shirt, shorts and running shoes. Buckling around her waist the fanny pack she had inherited from Nancy, she put in it her Discman CD player and connected to it a pair of light headphones, then went out to the back of the building, where she would be partially out of sight. Playing one of her favorite CDs, she started doing stretching and warming up exercises before starting the

serious workout. Despite her attempts at being discreet, she soon attracted within twenty minutes a growing crowd of admirers. Finally having had enough of the lecherous looks from about sixty Americans and Australians watching her exercise, Ingrid stopped for a moment and shouted at the men around her.

"DON'T YOU HAVE ANYTHING ELSE TO DO? THERE IS A WAR TO FIGHT, IF YOU HAVEN'T NOTICED. DISPERSE NOW BEFORE I CALL IN THE MPs!"

Some of the men did walk away then, but many others stayed, grinning like idiots and refusing to leave. Swearing to herself about the poor level of discipline on this airfield, Ingrid finally decided to walk away. Thankfully, none of the men followed her and she started on a quick-paced walk around the airfield. As she had covered about one third of the length of the perimeter and was passing near the piles of supplies haphazardly dropped in one corner of the airfield, she saw between the widely spaced small trees a nearly naked man with dark skin that was looking at her with apparent curiosity. Slowing down her pace, then stopping for a moment, she took a chance and shouted out in Wagiman to the Australian aborigine.

"Hello! My name is Ingrid. Can you understand me?"

The man, looking surprised at first, then smiled and answered her in a dialect close enough to Wagiman for her to understand.

"You speak the tongue of a nearby clan, white girl. How come?"

"I once spent some years in this region in the past." Answered Ingrid, basically saying the truth. "What is your name, friend?"

"Gwandwiligin!"

Ingrid then approached the aborigine and gave him a sign of friendship.

"In the past, the aborigines I knew called me Djanggawula. You may call me that way if you wish so: it would please me."

"Then Djanggawula it is. Are you staying here for long?"

"Only a few more days at the most. Is your camp very far from here?"

"My hut is about an hour's walk from here. I was returning to it after hunting and gathering some food for my family. You are welcomed to come visit it."

Ingrid looked at the old canvas bag slung across the chest of the aborigine: it contained a few roots and wild berries. There was also a young kangaroo suspended in his back, probably killed with one of the three primitive javelins he held in one hand.

"I would be happy to meet your family, Gwandwiligin. Lead the way."

Walking behind the aborigine, Ingrid waited to be hidden from the airfield by the trees, then stopped briefly to take off her T-shirt, tying it around her waist before resuming her walk with her torso bare, happy to be able to freely soak some sunrays. The aborigine man took that in stride and didn't ogle her, women aborigines not wearing tops in the bush.

"You are indeed not a typical white girl, Djanggawula."

"Not one bit, friend." Replied Ingrid, smiling maliciously.

Ingrid returned alone to the airfield more than three hours later, feeling good about having been able to get back in touch with her old aborigine roots. The head nurse intercepted her the moment she entered the infirmary to wash and change herself.

"Captain Dows, Colonel Sneed called an hour ago to say that he wanted to see you in his office."

"Did he say what it was for?"

"Don't know! Uh, I have been looking for you for a while now. Where were you, Captain?"

"Me? I was in the bush, doing a walkabout."

Leaving the mystified nurse there, Ingrid went to take a sponge bath, in order not to wet her bandages. Once washed, she put on a clean combat uniform, buckling as well her pistol belt around her waist to remind the men around the station that she was a combatant, and not simply a pretty toy for their entertainment. Walking out of the infirmary, Ingrid adopted a quick step along the dusty road leading to the airfield's headquarters, ignoring the male stares she attracted on the way. She smiled to herself while thinking at the reaction of all these men if they ever learned that she was only sixteen, and not eighteen as her official military file and her passport stated.

She found the American section of the headquarters boiling over with activity, with clerks and officers doing their best to coordinate and administer the airlift program for the Philippines with the few resources available in Darwin and the rest of Australia. Ingrid didn't envy their job, which was a nearly impossible one. In contrast, the Australian part of the headquarters looked like a retirement home, with a few officers and NCOs sipping calmly on tea cups while seemingly accomplishing as little as possible. That same lazy, careless attitude was in fact reflected throughout the various Australian

units and services in and around Darwin, as if the war didn't exist. The aide of Colonel Sneed, a young and sympathetic captain of the Air Corps, greeted her with a big smile.

"Ha, Captain Dows! I will go tell the colonel that you have arrived."

Ingrid needed to wait for less than a minute before being introduced in Sneed's office, which was cluttered with piles of papers, files and other documents. She came to attention and saluted in front of Sneed's desk.

"Captain Dows, 6<sup>th</sup> Pursuit Squadron of the Filipino Air Corps, reporting as requested, sir!"

Sneed returned her salute while glancing at her pistol.

"At ease, Captain! After seeing you last Friday, I sent messages to ask what to do with you once you were declared fit. Now that the doctor has declared you fit for light duties and suggested that you take some medical leave, I can tell you that Brigadier General Julian Barnes, newly arrived in Australia, is now the commander of all American units in the country. He arrived in Brisbane with a convoy originally destined for the Philippines and transporting reinforcements and equipment, including a number of disassembled P-40 fighters and A-24 dive bombers. General Barnes has ordered that all American pilots, aircrews and ground crews available in Australia, including those on medical leave, be sent to Brisbane, to help in the assembly of his planes and then to fly them in a succession of humps to the Philippines. You and two other wounded pilots from the Philippines that are convalescing will go to Brisbane and report to General Barnes, to get new orders from him. You will leave on a C-87 tomorrow morning for Brisbane, along with a lot of wounded men due to be returned to the United States by ship. My aide, Captain Manning, will give you the details of your trip, along with your travel orders. Do you have questions, Captain?"

"None, sir! Thank you very much, sir!" Replied Ingrid, happy.

"In that case, dismissed!"

Ingrid saluted him again, then left his office and went back to see again Captain Manning, bending over his desk and looking tenderly at him with her big blue eyes.

"My good Captain Manning, I am told that you have the details and papers about my trip to Brisbane tomorrow morning."

Manning, melting under her smile, handed her a large envelope.

"Certainly, Captain Dows. Here is your itinerary, your travel claim and your mission order for Brisbane. Is there something else I can do for you?"

Ingrid flashed him a warm smile before answering.

"Unfortunately, no: I am married."

Manning became as red as a tomato as Ingrid took the envelope and left, while the other officers and clerks around him broke out in laughter. Once out, Ingrid started walking at a relaxed pace to return to her room. Looking up at the blue sky, she saw the condensation trail of a solitary plane overflying the station at high altitude, coming from the North. Intrigued, she followed the trail with her eyes for a moment, doubt and suspicion growing in her mind. Deciding to make sure, she ran back to the headquarters building and went to see Manning again, worry showing on her face.

"Captain Manning, do you have a pair of binoculars here that I could borrow for a moment?"

"Why, Captain Dows?" Said the aviator, surprised by her request. "Did you see a kangaroo?"

"No, a suspect aircraft overflying the station. Do you have binoculars here? This could be important."

Manning hesitated for a moment, then got up from his chair and went to an equipment locker, taking out a pair of heavy, powerful artillery binoculars of the model used by air observers. He gave them to Ingrid, then followed her outside, curious. Pointing the binoculars at the plane still overflying the station, Ingrid swore violently after a few seconds.

"SHIT! THAT'S A JAPANESE RECONNAISSANCE FLOATPLANE!"

"Are you sure?" Said Manning, unable to believe her at first. Ingrid nodded her head.

"Positive! I make it as an Aichi E13A JAKE floatplane, a model often carried on Japanese heavy cruisers. Here, look for yourself!"

Manning took the binoculars and looked up for about ten seconds before speaking while still observing the plane.

"I am not very good at plane recognition, but this is definitely a floatplane, with one engine and two floats."

He then turned his head towards the nearby headquarters building and shouted out loud.

"SERGEANT RITTER! BRING ME A PLANE RECOGNITION MANUAL, ON THE DOUBLE!"

By the time that the NCO ran out with a recognition manual in his hands, the plane above did a slow turn and retraced its steps, but on a parallel trail to the first one.

"He's doing a photo-reconnaissance run." Said Ingrid as Manning flipped through the recognition manual to the page on the Aichi E13A. After a second good look at the plane, Manning nodded his head, his expression hardening, before handing the binoculars to his sergeant.

"Sergeant, look at that plane and confirm to me that this is indeed a JAKE floatplane."

The NCO looked up for a few seconds, glancing a couple of times at the recognition manual to check some features, then looked with alarm at his officer.

"Shit! This is indeed a JAKE, sir. What could it mean?"

"That a Japanese naval strike force, possibly one that includes carriers, is approaching Darwin to attack it." Answered Ingrid, glum. "According to the history as known by Nancy Laplante, the Japanese attacked Darwin, using a number of fleet carriers and devastating the airfields and the ships moored in the port. Colonel Sneed must be told about this."

Manning then took a quick decision and started running towards the entrance of the building while shouting at Ingrid and his sergeant.

"STAY THERE AND CONTINUE OBSERVING THAT PLANE! I'M GOING TO GET THE COLONEL."

Less than two minutes later, Manning was coming out at a run, followed closely by Colonel Sneed. Ingrid gave the binoculars to the latter while pointing at the plane, which had turned again for a third pass.

"We have a JAKE Japanese reconnaissance floatplane overhead, Colonel. It has been flying racetrack patterns and came from the North, sir."

Sneed didn't say a word at first, looking through the binoculars as Ingrid spoke again.

"The JAKE is the only single-engine plane with two floatplanes in service in the Pacific area, sir. Furthermore, no allied floatplane with one engine and two floats exist, except for the French Latécoère 298, which is not in service in the Pacific. All other allied floatplanes either have one float only or have two engines."

"Damn! You're right, Captain Dows." Said Sneed after consulting the recognition manual and taking a last look at the plane, which was now turning again, this time flying away. "The JAKE is usually carried on Japanese cruisers or seaplane tenders. According to this manual, it has a range of over a thousand miles, which means that there is at least one Japanese cruiser within 500 miles of Darwin."

"I strongly suspect that there is a lot more approaching us right now, sir. According to the history known by Nancy Laplante, the Japanese attacked by air Darwin, using a number of fleet carriers, and bombed the hell out of this airfield and the port area."

Sneed looked at Ingrid with a mix of surprise and curiosity.

"How would you know that, Captain Dows? The information from Nancy Laplante was kept highly classified."

"She was my adoptive mother, sir." Said in a sober tone Ingrid, making the men around her open their eyes wide in surprise. "She educated me and passed on to me her knowledge of the future...and of this war. We can now expect in the next few days, maybe as soon as tomorrow morning, a massive Japanese air attack by carrier-borne planes."

"But, there are no fighter planes here and only a few machineguns for air defense. Even around the port, we have only the guns on the ships there to defend against air attacks."

"I know that too well, sir." Replied Ingrid, sounding bitter. "We can thank the carelessness and lack of planning of the Australians for that. They have been officially at war for two years now and they still act here as if they are at peace. The only thing we can do on our part is to disperse as much of our planes and equipment as fast as we can, to minimize the damage from an attack on Darwin. If the Navy commander in the port could be convinced to take similar precautions, so much the better, sir."

Sneed looked up at the departing Japanese plane, which was now heading North-northeast.

"His heading is roughly 030. Its ship must be somewhere around the Sea of Ceram, possibly even further South than Ambon. You have experienced Japanese air raids for weeks in the Philippines, Captain Dows. What is your best guess for the timing of a Japanese air raid on Darwin following this reconnaissance flight?"

Thanking mentally the fact that Sneed was showing common sense and was not dismissing her warning, Ingrid answered after thinking for a few seconds.

"My bet is that the Japanese will approach further during the night before launching an attack at dawn, either tomorrow or the day after. We should thus expect them in the mid morning, time for them to get here from their carriers. The Japanese normally try to fly their ultimate reconnaissance missions on an objective within a day or two of a planned attack, sir."

"Then, we have little time to lose." Replied Sneed in a firm tone before looking at Manning. "Captain, call the airfields at Batchelor and Parap and tell them to get ready to receive a large number of C-87s. We are going to disperse our planes before the night, once they are loaded up for their next run to the Philippines. We will also move as much of our stocks of fuel to those fields as time permits, plus will disperse what's left here."

"Can I help, sir?" Asked Ingrid, making Sneed look at her, thoughtful, before he nodded his head and smiled to her.

"You certainly can, Captain. You can follow me around and use your experience of combat with the Japanese to counsel me on how to prepare this airfield for an air attack."

"What about the port, sir?"

Sneed's smile faded then.

"Unfortunately, I have no authority on the American ships moored in the port. The best I can do is to warn them about this Japanese reconnaissance flight. We also will have to prepare to receive our planes now on their way back from the Philippines. Let's get inside: we have a million things to do and quite a few messages to send to pass the warning around."

To Ingrid's fury, but not to her surprise, the Australian commander and the RAAF staff of the airfield all but ignored the warning passed by Sneed, discounting it as 'misidentification of some allied plane'. Worse, the local commander refused to lend the help of his men to the efforts at dispersing the American planes and equipment presently on his airfield, calling it a waste of time and effort. The Australian Navy officer in charge of the port of Darwin proved as skeptical and unhelpful, declaring rather summarily that no Japanese fleet had been signaled anywhere near Australia or even the Dutch East Indies. As for the few American ships present in Darwin, mostly transport or support ships, they took their cues from the Australian port commander, deciding that his opinion was worth more than the one from an American army commander. Adding to Ingrid's fury, and also to that of Colonel Sneed, was the fact that the Australians on the airfield, on top of refusing to help, also mocked the Americans running around them and working to disperse as much equipment and supplies as possible before the next morning. The return from the Philippines of the 26 C-87s that had departed at dawn from Clark Field added to Colonel Sneed's worries, as the hundred or so American wounded aboard



them had to be treated quickly. After a telephone conversation with Brigadier General Barnes in Brisbane, Sneed and Barnes decided to refuel the C-87s on arrival and send them with the wounded still on board directly to Brisbane for treatment. Barnes, as overall American commander in Australia, was able at the same time to convince the American ships in the Darwin harbor to raise anchor and sail out during the night. When Sneed told Ingrid that she would be sent to Brisbane with the wounded about to arrive from the Philippines, she refused politely, pointing out that there were many men in Darwin that were more seriously wounded than her. Sneed nearly ordered her then to get on one of the planes, but one look at her resolute face and to her Medal of Honor ribbon convinced him to respect her request to stay until the more seriously wounded could be evacuated first. The C-87s already present in Darwin were loaded up with priority supplies for the Philippines and departed for Clark Field two hours after the passage of the Japanese floatplane, a factor that helped calm somewhat the worries of Colonel Sneed. Once the planes that had returned from the Philippines had been refueled and had departed for Brisbane, leaving the airfield in Darwin nearly empty of planes, Sneed then concentrated the efforts of his men on dispersing the most dangerous or vulnerable supplies stacked around the airfield, with the priority put on the ammunition and fuel. Those were trucked to short distances off the airfield and dumped in small, well spaced piles under camouflage nets around the bush. Ingrid, despite of her wounds, worked all day and night, helping Sneed's men as much as she could, notably by helping prioritize the movement of planes, equipment and supplies. By the time that the Sun rose the next day, a Wednesday, Ingrid was exhausted and covered with sweat and dust. She however refused to go get some sleep, feeling that the Japanese attack was imminent and not wanting to be caught napping then. There was anyway a lot still left to be done, with thousands of tons of supplies still littering the airfield and needing to be dispersed.

Ingrid was having a cup of coffee and a quick late breakfast when the faint noise of distant planes approaching the airfield made her come out of the headquarters building to look up at the sky. Her blood froze in her veins when she spotted over 150 planes approaching from the Northeast in multiple V-shaped waves. She ran up the steps of the headquarters entrance while shouting.

**"THE JAPANESE ARE COMING! SOUND THE ALERT!"**

While the Americans inside started moving at once, the few Australian officers and airmen present in the building simply looked at each other in indecision. Only the noise of distant explosions coming from the port area finally made them move, but not in the way Ingrid had hoped. Instead of using their telephones to alert the various sections of the airfield and to have the air raid siren sound the alert, the Australians ran out at once, heading for the bushes to go hide there. In Nancy's history, this disgraceful scramble to safety and the subsequent exodus of most of the Australian servicemen in Darwin to other towns to the South would be sarcastically called 'The Great Darwin Handicap'. Swearing on seeing this, Ingrid took on her to run to the nearby empty watch tower and climb it, turning the handle of the alert siren once on top. The sinister owl of the siren at least made the other occupants of the airfield take shelter, even though there was little else that could be done about the incoming Japanese planes. The Japanese planes were nearly overhead when Ingrid decided that it was time for her to climb down from the watch tower and find a shelter. As she was running towards a shallow ditch parallel to the main road around the airfield, she saw the Australian doctor and his few nurses and medics still in the process of taking the wounded out of the infirmary. Changing direction, she ran to the infirmary and entered it as Nurse Watkins also went back in to get another patient.

"Let me help you, Nurse Watkins."

The Australian senior nurse smiled briefly on seeing her, nodding her head and pointing at a patient who was trying to walk out by hopping on his one good leg.

"Then help support that man, Captain."

"Got it!"

Taking position to the left of the patient, so that he would not touch her burns on her left arm, back and neck, Ingrid made him put his hand on her right shoulder and escorted him out of the infirmary and towards the roadside ditch, where the other patients were taking cover. Once the man was safely down in the ditch, Ingrid ran back into the infirmary and grabbed her backpack, kit bag and rifle and ran out again to the ditch, dropping her things in it and crouching down as the first bombs, dropped from high altitude by Nakajima B5N KATE carrier-borne bombers, started to fall on the station. The few Australian planes on the airfield, along with two American C-87s immobilized for repairs were quickly bracketed by 250 kilo bombs and burst in flames one after the others, while the piles of supplies and equipment still left in the open were also hit. A few bombs also cratered the two landing strips, making them temporarily unusable. One

bomb hit a corner of the headquarters building, blowing open the façade and killing the servants of one of the two only anti-aircraft machineguns on the station, which occupied sandbagged positions on each side of the headquarters building. To the indignation of Ingrid and of Chief Nurse Watkins, who was looking in the same direction, the two servants of the remaining machinegun then ran out in the bush, abandoning their post.

“The bloody cowards!” Spit out the Australian nurse, furious. The sight of the machinegun, left without servants, was too much for Ingrid, who got up on her feet, her rifle in hand, and started running towards the machinegun, 150 meters away.

“WERE ARE YOU GOING, CAPTAIN?” Shouted Watkins. “COME BACK!” Ingrid didn’t answer her, continuing her sprint while ignoring the bombs exploding around her and the station. Climbing over the sandbag parapet of the machinegun position and leaning her rifle against the sandbag wall, she inspected quickly the machinegun, a Vickers of .303 caliber mounted on an anti-aircraft mount: it had a full belt in place and four more boxes of ammunition lay near it. Knowing that she could do nothing about the KATE bombers, which flew too high for her machinegun, she waited for the VAL dive bombers to start their attacks, her two hands on the firing handles of the Vickers. She was still waiting when Lieutenant Carey, one of the American wounded still in Darwin, entered the sandbag position, limping as quickly as he could with a tight smile.

“I thought that you could use a loader, Captain.”

Ingrid smiled tenderly to him, appreciating his courage.

“In that case, open these ammunition boxes and prepare them for loading, Lieutenant.”

The first VAL bombers started diving two minutes after the KATE level bombers had finished dropping their bombs. Most of the planes parked on the station were now burning or were damaged, while a number of buildings had been hit. Thick columns of black smoke were also rising over the port and harbor area, where bombs were still exploding. Ingrid was furious at these sights, for many reasons: for the losses in lives and materiel that were bound to impact on the precious air bridge with the Philippines; for the stupidity and incompetence of many Australian and American officers in Darwin and, finally, for the fact that, after being officially at war for two years already, Australia was still so badly prepared and careless that Darwin could find itself under attack with no fighters or anti-aircraft guns, or even ground troops to defend such a strategically important location. That she had to man herself with the help of another wounded

American the sole machinegun left to defend the station only added to her bitterness. She however did her best to control her rage and keep a cool head, knowing that she would soon be in what Nancy would call a target-rich environment and would probably become quickly herself a prime target for the Japanese. Looking around her, she saw that an Australian Avro ANSON twin-engine coastal patrol aircraft sitting less than fifty meters away from her, apparently still mostly intact. That plane was bound to attract a dive bomber or two, so she prepared herself to greet warmly any Japanese plane that would dive on that ANSON. Effectively, a pair of VALs quickly dove on the Australian plane, one behind the other. Because of the limited range of her weapon, Ingrid had to wait until the Japanese dive bombers were at an altitude of 800 meters before opening fire, when the first VAL had just released its bomb and was starting to raise its nose up. Firing short bursts, Ingrid made the VAL fly through her lines of tracers, but without apparent results, while the Japanese' bomb exploded just besides the ANSON, flipping it upside down and destroying it. The VAL then passed right above Ingrid as it came out of its dive, giving her a chance to fire a long burst at its belly from less than 300 meters, pressing on the trigger until her machinegun went silent, short of bullets.

"NEW AMMO BELT!" She screamed to Carey, while opening at the same time the breach cover to expose the feeding claws of the weapon. In her haste to reload her Vickers, she did not see the VAL that she had fired on continue its dive at a slight angle, its pilot killed by one of her bullets. The explosion that resulted from the crash of the dive bomber finally attracted her attention and that of Carey.

"MY GOD, WE GOT HIM!" Shouted Carey, suddenly jumping with joy. Ingrid smiled as well but reminded him that there was more to do as she cocked the breechblock of her machinegun.

"One down, 149 to go! Let's serve our next customer now."

Those words quickly cooled down the enthusiasm of the fighter pilot, who then got ready with another belt of ammunition as Ingrid pointed her machinegun at the second VAL, which had already flown over them. The pilot of the second VAL, seeing that he had lost his leader, performed a tight turn at low altitude to return over the station and look for the one that had shot him down. Ingrid didn't fire then and stayed immobile, to stay unnoticed as long as possible and take the VAL pilot by surprise. The latter, his vision blocked partly by his big Mitsubishi Kinsei 44 14-piston radial engine, didn't see the small silhouette waiting for him. With a target coming at him in a straight line and at low altitude, Ingrid's aim was greatly simplified and she fired a long burst into the nose of the

dive bomber. The VAL suddenly turned into a flying torch, its forward fuel tank pierced by many bullets. Its pilot and rear machine gunner were still screaming with pain as they were burning alive when the VAL crashed on top of the already ruined Avro ANSON.

Despite her joy at having shot down two VALs, Ingrid concentrated her attention on the Japanese planes still flying over the station, ignoring the enthusiastic screams coming from the Americans and Australians that had taken cover in the nearby roadside ditch. With her position situated near the headquarters building, she soon had two ZERO fighters speeding directly towards her, apparently intent on strafing the building behind her.

"Uh, Lieutenant Carey, you better stay down behind the parapet now: this will become really exciting very soon." Said Ingrid in a tense voice. The ZERO fighter, with its two 20mm cannons and two 7.7mm machineguns, vastly outgunned her. She still had a slight chance to survive against one ZERO. Against two ZEROs, she was now nearly as good as dead. Her stomach knotted by fear and feeling her hair rise on her head, she concentrated her full attention on the two approaching fighters, adrenaline flooding her veins and experiencing tunnel vision as well. The two ZEROs, flying side by side, opened fire well before she did, strafing the headquarters building and turning it into a sieve. She heard many bullets whistle by her, with more bullets impacting against the sandbags of the parapet. One 20mm cannon shell even exploded against the outside base of the parapet, but its fragments didn't penetrate the rows of sandbags. Firing only at the last moment, as the ZEROs were about to overfly her, she aimed at the nose and belly of the leading ZERO. The Japanese fighters were then past her, leaving Ingrid to wonder how she could still be alive. Taking a deep breath to chase her fear, she looked at the ZEROs that were flying away. Only then did she see that she had hit her target, with the leading Japanese fighter now trailing black smoke.

"WE GOT HIM!"

Ralph Carey, still hiding behind the parapet and severely shaken by his close call with death, got up with difficulty on his one good leg and patted Ingrid's shoulder.

"Captain, I would follow you in Hell if need be."

Still breathing fast and as tense as an iron bar, Ingrid looked around her and saw that all the Japanese airplanes were now turning around and regrouping before leaving in the direction of the Northeast. She had to sit down on top of the parapet of her position, her

legs shaking, as she realized how close to having been killed she had come. Carey also sat beside her and took out a pack of cigarettes from one pocket, offering one to Ingrid.

"Cigarette, Captain?"

"No but thanks, Lieutenant. I don't smoke."

"Even after such a moment?"

"It's tempting, but no. Damn, I was never as scared as I was during the last minute."

"The same for me, Captain." Replied Carey before looking around him at the ruined airfield. "The Japanese sure gave this station a beating this morning. There must be dead and wounded everywhere. Thank God that you did alert us to that scout plane yesterday, though. Imagine if this airfield would be still full of C-87s."

"Then, our air bridge to the Philippines would be history, Lieutenant. Still, we will have to repair the landing strips before our C-87s returning from Clark Field can land here. Let's go see how the other wounded are faring."

The duo barely had time to get up on their feet before Colonel Sneed, accompanied by four of his staff officers, including Captain Manning, arrived at a run, their uniforms covered with dust and dirt. To Ingrid's surprise, Sneed saluted her first, his eyes fixing her with admiration.

"Captain Dows, you just gave us an incredible demonstration of courage and cool-headedness. Be assured that Brigadier General Barnes will hear about this. Lieutenant Carey, I also intend to mention your heroic conduct today."

"Thank you, Colonel." Said softly Ingrid. "Unfortunately, I'm afraid that this airfield is now a complete shambles."

"You are too right about that, Captain." Said Sneed, nodding his head, before looking at Captain Manning. "Captain, find out if a radio or a telephone is still working inside the headquarters building. We must warn General Barnes in Brisbane and General Brereton in Manila about this Japanese raid. Tell them that those planes came from carriers and that Darwin Airfield is presently out of service. Major Cuccinik, tell Batchelor and Parap airfields to be ready to receive our C-87s that will arrive this afternoon from Clark Field. Lieutenant Hughes, take a jeep and go see in what state are the port and the ships moored in the harbor. I want a list of the damages and losses there. Captain Simpsons, you will be in charge of the rescue operations here. From what I was able to see up to now, it seems that we can't count on our Australian

comrades for nothing here. I will try to find Wing Commander Griffith in the meantime, to liaise with him.”

“Can I help with something, Colonel?” Asked Ingrid. Sneed nodded his head at once.

“Yes, you can, Captain. Find the men and equipment still available around the station and have repairs started on the two landing strips. Find out at the same time how much aviation fuel is still left intact around the station.”

“Will do, sir!” Replied Ingrid, saluting Sneed. The latter was about to return her salute when he froze and looked down at Ingrid’s right armpit.

“Uh, did you have a hole in your shirt before this attack, Captain?”

Ingrid, surprised, looked down at her armpit and was shocked to see the hole that a 7.7mm bullet had made in her shirt just under her right armpit, having missed her by a few millimeters.

## **20:41 (Brisbane Time)**

**Friday, November 14, 1941 ‘C’**

**Reception lobby of Lennon’s Hotel**

**Corner of George, Ann and Adelaide Streets**

**Downtown Brisbane, East coast of Australia**

“Hey, Jim, stop ogling that magazine! I would like to look at that babe too.”

“But I’m reading the article to see what they say about her tactics against the Japanese.” Protested Lieutenant Jim McAfee, of the 16<sup>th</sup> Bomber Squadron (Light), getting a sarcastic reply from his squadron mate, Lieutenant Bob Ruegg.

“Yeah, that’s why you have been looking at the same picture during the last minute? The one that shows her bare torso and lying on her belly?”

One of the four pilots looking at the copy of the TIME-LIFE MAGAZINE over the shoulder of McAfee, who was sitting in one of the sofas of the reception lobby of their hotel, then took his defense.

“Hey, we also want to read the article.”

Captain William Hipps, commander of the 16<sup>th</sup> Bomber Squadron, smiled in amusement at the exchange while reading the latest edition of the main daily newspaper in Brisbane. Since he and his men had arrived by sea five days ago with the convoy escorted by the cruiser PENSACOLA, they had been working hard to reassemble their Douglas A-24

dive bombers, which had made the long sea trip across the Pacific in giant crates. The opportunities to relax and change their minds at night were however fairly limited in Brisbane, save for the pubs and clubs where they could go drink. Hipps had however made abundantly clear to his men that he expected them to be sober and fit in the morning. Flirting with the local girls was a risky activity, in view of the jealous attention with which Australian men guarded their wives and daughters. That mostly left reading or listening to news of the war in newspapers and on the radio. The news from the Philippines were regularly featured in the news, while the Japanese attack on Darwin was on all the lips. However, few details were known publicly about that attack, thanks to official censure.

As McAfee finally handed his magazine to Bob Ruegg, a group of American pilots and aircrews entered the hotel lobby at a tired pace, escorted by Major Hicks, an officer on the staff of Brigadier General Barnes. Hipps and his men had seen such processions twice already and understood that those aviators were arriving from Darwin with a new lot of wounded. McAfee, who was already regretting having given his magazine to Ruegg and was watching the newcomers enter the lobby, nearly strangled up with surprise when a beautiful teenager in combat uniform entered, carrying a rifle, a backpack and a kit bag. He then smiled with contentment as he followed Ingrid with his eyes.

“Hey, guys, forget the magazine: the real thing is here.”

Hipps, like the rest of his men, watched with intense curiosity as the teenager went to the reception desk with the rest of her group. Bandages were visible on her neck, sticking out of her shirt’s collar.

“My God! She’s even more beautiful than on picture.” Exclaimed a bit too loudly McAfee, deciding Hipps in reminding something to his men.

“Calm down, guys! This girl is married to an officer of the Marines who is presently fighting in the Philippines. She also has the rank of captain and is a recipient of the Medal of Honor, so please show her respect and courtesy.”

“But, her rank must not be for real, Captain.” Protested Samuel Dillard. “She’s in the Filipino Army, not the United States Army.”

That got him a warning look from Hipps.

“She got her rank of captain directly from General MacArthur, who is our theatre commander, Dillard. You want to discuss that point with him?”



"Uh, no, Captain."

"Good! Now, I believe that it is quite late already and that we have a lot of work to do tomorrow, so I counsel you to go up to your rooms and go to bed, gentlemen."

His pilots obeyed reluctantly, commenting between them about what they had seen of the girl. McAfee however made sure to grab the magazine left on a table by Ruegg before going up to his room.

After leaving her two pieces of luggage and her rifle in the small room with private bathroom assigned to her, Ingrid followed Major Hicks to the door of a room on the highest floor of the hotel. Knocking on the door and waiting for a response, Hicks opened the door after hearing an answer, leading Ingrid in the room and coming to attention, imitated by Ingrid.

"General, Captain Dows here has just arrived from Darwin and is carrying a report from Colonel Sneed for you."

Brigadier General Julian Barnes, an old, experienced aviator, got up from behind his desk, which was actually a simple folding table set up in the lounge of his suite, returning their salutes. He couldn't help be shocked by the young age of the beautiful girl wearing the rank insignias of a captain. She however wore as well fighter pilot's wings and the ribbons of the Medal of Honor, DSC, Silver Star, DFC and Presidential Unit Citation, or PUC. This was definitely no ordinary girl.

"At ease! Show me this report, Captain Dows."

"Here it is, General." Replied politely Ingrid while stepping forward and taking out the envelope she had brought from Darwin. Barnes took and opened the envelope, taking out a document counting a few pages and sitting back to read it. Ingrid stayed quiet and still as Barnes read. The old brigadier general finally shook his head in disgust.

"This could have turned into a true disaster if not for your timely sighting of that Japanese scout plane, Captain Dows. However, the lack of warning or even of proper response from the Australians is simply inexcusable. Are the Australians in Darwin this incompetent?"

"If I may speak, General." Said Ingrid while coming to attention. Barnes eyed her with interest.

"Go ahead, Captain."

"General, this fiasco is due mainly to serious deficiencies in the warning and command system of the Australian Air Force, including the total lack of radar stations, fighter planes and anti-aircraft guns, slow and non-secure communications lines and, especially, a confused and inefficient chain of command. Colonel Sneed covers that last point in detail in his report, General."

"Did he show you his report, Captain?"

"Actually, General, he asked me to help him write the section containing the details about the Japanese attack on Darwin Airfield."

"I see!" Said Barnes before rereading that part of the report. He finally put down the document and looked again at Ingrid.

"Did Colonel Sneed show you his report in its entirety, Captain?"

"No, General! Only the part concerning the Japanese attack and the probable causes of the failed response."

"Well, he mentions you by name at the end of his report and recommends that you be assigned to the reassembly of the P-40 fighters we brought by sea, then that you help convoying them to the Philippines via the Dutch East Indies. Know however that the few fighter pilots that I have here are mostly inexperienced and never saw combat. They seriously need in my opinion some serious extra training. You will thus take charge of those fighter pilots and teach them all you can about how to fight the Japanese. These pilots are lodging here in this hotel, like the pilots and aircrews of the 27<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Group, which arrived here with 52 Douglas A-24 dive bombers. Major Hicks will introduce you to these pilots tomorrow morning. Report to him at eight tomorrow morning, in Room 607, in combat uniform. Dismissed!"

Ingrid, happy to see Barnes show confidence in her, saluted him and pivoted on her heels, then walked out. Barnes signaled Hicks to stay and spoke to him once the door closed behind Ingrid.

"What do you think of her, Major?"

"That she looks even younger than I expected, General. She however appears competent and surprisingly mature for her age."

"Hicks, know that the last page of Colonel Sneed's report is actually an official letter of recommendation for a medal: he wants a Silver Star for her. According to what he wrote, it seems that this young girl amply deserved it. Here, read!"

Hicks took the letter and read it quickly before looking back at his superior with wide eyes.

“This girl is positively incredible. The DSC wouldn’t be too much for what she did in Darwin.”

“Yeah, and she already won it in the Philippines. Girl or not, we just can’t waste such talent, especially now.”

### **08:14 (Brisbane Time)**

**Saturday, November 15, 1941 ‘C’**

**Reception lobby of the Lennon’s Hotel**

**Brisbane, Australia**

The 58 pilots in combat uniform were waiting in a corner of the hotel lobby, ready to receive their instructions for the day from Major John ‘Big Jim’ Davies, the commander of the 27<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Group, when Major Hicks showed up, with Ingrid close behind him. With all eyes now on Ingrid, Hicks exchanged a salute with Davies and spoke to him briefly in a low voice before departing, leaving Ingrid besides Davies. The latter signaled Ingrid to join the other pilots, then spoke up in a firm voice.

“Gentlemen, I would like to introduce to our group Captain Ingrid Dows, also known as ‘Lady Hawk’, from the Filipino 6<sup>th</sup> Pursuit Squadron. She will work with us to help reassemble our A-24s and P-40s loaded on the MEIGS, then will act as air combat instructor for the few lost fighter pilots in our midst.”

Davies let the few laughs caused by his joke quiet down before continuing.

“As you know too well, despite three days of intense efforts, there is still a lot left to do before our first plane is finished assembling and is ready to be tested in the air. We will thus report again this morning to Captain Gunn, at Eagle Farm Airfield. The fighter pilots in our group will work under Captain Dows on the P-40s, while we will concentrate on our A-24s. Two buses are waiting at the main entrance to bring us to the airfield. Let’s move, people!”

Ingrid waited to be next to last, just ahead of Major Davies, to board the first bus, wanting to avoid having wandering hands scrub against her body. Davies noticed that and gave her a reassuring smile.

“Don’t worry about my men, Captain: they can behave when they want to.”

“Men will be men, Major.” Replied Ingrid with a slight smile, not wanting to antagonize him. “As for me, I’m no virgin myself, so I will try to minimize temptation...on both sides.”

A number of young pilots around her then faked indignation at her incendiary declaration, while Davies rolled his eyes.

### **17:25 (Brisbane Time)**

#### **Lennon's Hotel, Brisbane**

Ingrid was exhausted, covered with sweat and dust and was famished when she entered the hotel lobby with the other pilots. She was however happy, first for having helped assembling a P-40F fighter at Eagle Farm Airfield, second for having had the chance to meet there an old friend she had known in the Philippines. Paul Irvin Gunn, a small 42 year-old man with a moustache, had been a commercial airline pilot in the Philippines and had first met Ingrid when she had started taking flying lessons at Nielson Field. Now, Gunn wore the ranks of captain and was in charge of assembling the planes brought by ship to Brisbane. Gunn, who had traveled with Ingrid in her bus back to the hotel, patted her right shoulder once in the lobby.

"My wife and kids are due to meet me here before going to a restaurant for supper. It would really please me if you could join us."

"I would be most happy to, Paul. Let me just go up to my room to shower and change first."

When she reappeared in the lobby 35 minutes later, Ingrid was wearing her adjusted going out uniform of the Filipino Army, plus was carrying a regulation black purse, making the men present in the lobby stare hungrily at her. Paul, who was waiting with his wife Clara and his four young children, simply smiled in amusement on seeing her.

"You will always have an effect on the men around you, Ingrid, whatever you will wear."

"Thanks for the compliment, Paul." Said Ingrid before sharing a hug with Gunn's wife. "I'm happy to see you again, Clara."

"Me too, Ingrid. You certainly made a name for yourself in the last few weeks."

"Hey, I was simply defending myself. The Japanese have the bad habit of constantly flying across my sights."

Paul Gunn broke out in laughter on hearing that.

"Ingrid, you are the gutsiest girl I ever met."

"You should have met my adoptive mother: compared to her, I am positively lame."

Paul's smile faded as a dreamy expression came on his face.

"Nancy Laplante, the most extraordinary woman to ever be. I would have loved to meet her, just to speak with her of course."

"Of course!" Said Clara Gunn in a sarcastic tone. "Well, let's find a good restaurant now: the kids are famished."

Walking out of the hotel with the Gunn family, Ingrid went with them to a small restaurant visible on George Street. It was now a bit past six in the evening and the Sun had just set. They also quickly found that it was the closing hour for the bars and pubs, by the number of drunk Australians circulating on the sidewalks. Paul Gunn instinctively put one arm around his wife's shoulders to discourage possible advances from drunken men. On her part, Ingrid kept her right hand close to the opening of her service purse, which contained her telescopic steel baton and her compact GLOCK 26 9mm pistol inherited from Nancy. Their group however made it without incident to the restaurant, where they took a table in the half full dining room. A loud speaker was broadcasting some music from a local radio station, helping to give the place a more relaxed environment. The Gunns and Ingrid promptly chose from the menu and placed their orders, then started conversing together while they waited for their food. They were served twelve minutes later and were starting to eat when the music on the radio was interrupted by the voice of an announcer.

"Ladies and gentlemen, we regret to have to interrupt briefly our musical program in order to pass a special news bulletin. The Australian High Command has announced that the Japanese have attacked this morning the Dutch East Indies and Timor, with sea landings in Medan, Batavia, Fretan, Wetan, Kendari, Bali, Ambon and Kupang, plus airborne landings around Palembang. The Dutch colonial forces are however resisting the invaders with determination and are causing them heavy losses."

"In clear language, the Dutch were taken by surprise and are fighting a rear guard action." Said Ingrid in a low voice as the music resumed. Clara Gunn looked at her with shock.

"You don't think that the Dutch are able to repel the Japanese?"  
Ingrid shook her head, her face somber.

"No! The Japanese naval and air superiority is too great for that. Unfortunately, the Japanese just achieved two important things: they will now be able to exploit the oilfields and refineries on Java and Sumatra and, at the same time, they shut down to us the airfields of the Dutch East Indies. Paul, what is the range of the A-24?"

"About 450 miles with a full load of bombs, or 1,100 miles without bombs."

"Hum, that means that our A-24s could not get to Kupang or Ambon, the two points closest to Darwin, and come back, even without bombs. Has someone in General Barnes' staff realized yet that the A-24s and P-40s that we are reassembling here are essentially useless because of their short range? We don't have access anymore to the Dutch East Indies airfields that would have allowed our aircraft to get to the Philippines by a series of staging points, while our planes don't have enough range to hit those same airfields, which will soon be used by the Japanese to hit Australia."

Paul Gunn swore quietly when he realized that Ingrid was right.

"My God! That leaves us with only a handful of medium and heavy bombers able to attack the Japanese and with nothing to reinforce the Philippines. But, we can't simply let these planes dismantled and do nothing with them, Ingrid."

"No, but their utility is now limited to the direct defense of Australia and nothing else, unfortunately, unless we find a way to augment dramatically their range, something I strongly doubt."

Paul, his mind struck by Ingrid's verdict, thought furiously about how to circumvent that problem, eating absent-mindedly during the rest of the meal. Embarrassed for having caused Paul to neglect his family, Ingrid did her best to distract Clara and her four children, telling them stories about her flying. Paul was still absorbed in his thinking when the group returned to the hotel after supper. Saying goodbye to the Gunns, Ingrid then went to her room and took off her uniform to be more at ease. Sitting at the small desk of her room, she started writing a memo addressed to General Barnes, with the firm intention to give it to him first thing in the morning. Her memo done, she went to bed but had problems falling asleep, haunted by the thought that she and the other pilots were wasting their time with inadequate planes. What the American forces needed in the Pacific were planes with really long range, not light bombers that would need four stopovers just to get from Brisbane to Darwin. Unfortunately, Washington seemed unshakeable about its doctrine of giving absolute priority to the European front, at the expense of the Pacific front. The A-24s and P-40s in Brisbane would thus have to do.

**09:26 (Brisbane Time)**

**Sunday, November 16, 1941 'C'**

**Temporary headquarters of the United States Forces in Australia (USFIA)  
Lennon's Hotel, Brisbane**

Brigadier General Julian Barnes swore in frustration as he examined his map of the Pacific Southwest and of Australia, with Ingrid's memo in his hands. He had no choice but to agree with her: the dive bombers that he had brought from the United States, along with over 800 men of the 27<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Group, were now effectively good only for local defense. The Dutch liaison officer in Brisbane had unfortunately confirmed the bad news about the Japanese invasion of the Dutch East Indies and had told him that the Dutch forces wouldn't be able to resist for more than a week. He couldn't even send his planes to the Philippines by stages anymore. Discouraged, Barnes looked at his staff officer in charge of aviation matters, Major Hicks.

"Well, I'm afraid that the Japanese truly screwed us up this time. Apart from gaining the oil wells of Java and Sumatra, they also cut off our route to the Philippines. Now, only our C-87 transports can make it to the Philippines. Unless we can improve dramatically the range of our A-24s, they will be stuck in Australia. Captain Dows is right: we need B-17s, B-24s and P-38s here in Australia. If not, Washington will have to try to slip a sea convoy loaded with planes to the Philippines, with the real risk of seeing that convoy be intercepted by the Japanese fleet."

"What about Dows' suggestion to reload our planes on our transports and sail immediately for the Philippines, while the Japanese fleet is busy invading the Dutch East Indies?"

Barnes was silent for a long moment, debating what was one of the most difficult decisions of his career. The worst part was that he did not really have the authority to take such a decision by himself. However, waiting for a decision from Washington on this would take many precious days and would close the window of opportunity that he had now. Fully realizing that he could end up in front of a court martial if he ever lost his convoy at sea, Barnes took a deep breath and signaled his signals officer to approach him.

"Captain MacNamara, write a coded message for General MacArthur in Manila, CRITIC priority and TOP SECRET. Put as well Admiral Hart, of the Asiatic Fleet, as info recipient, but nobody else, especially not Washington or Hawaii."

"Uh, understood, General." Replied MacNamara, realizing that his superior was probably about to overstep his authority. He was not disappointed when Barnes started dictating his message.

"To General MacArthur, from Brigadier General Julian Barnes, Commander USFIA in Brisbane. Following the Japanese invasion of the Dutch East Indies, the A-24 and P-40 planes brought to Australia by sea are now out of range of the Philippines. Pursuant to the directives of the War Department, which places the highest priority in reinforcing our aviation in the Philippines, I have thus ordered that the planes and materiel unloaded from the PENSACOLA convoy be reloaded aboard their transport ships, so that the convoy could secretly sails to the Philippines as quickly as possible. I am hoping to push my convoy through while the majority of the Japanese fleet is still occupied around the Dutch East Indies. The window of opportunity is however very limited and your authorization is requested in the shortest possible time, to allow me to send my convoy as soon as possible. The utmost discretion on this subject is also required, as any security leak could endanger the convoy. I await with impatience your directives. Signed, Julian Barnes, Brigadier General. Add as an annex an abbreviated list of the materiel and planes contained in the convoy and the list of ships in the convoy, along with the planned route to the Philippines. Encode it and send it as fast as you can, Captain."

"Right away, General!"

Barnes then turned to face Hicks.

"Major, stop immediately any unloading work of our ships and have everything that was already taken off put back aboard our transports. The planes already assembled will be transported whole, as deck cargo. Be discreet about those orders, though: I don't want those damn Australian newspapers or radio announce publicly our impending departure."

"Understood, General!"

Next, Barnes looked at his Australian liaison officer.

"Major Somerville, I want you to put an official gag on the radio stations and newspapers in Australia, especially those in Brisbane, to prevent any rumor or speculation about our convoy to put our men and ships at risk. Also, tell your damn stevedores to stop working to rule: we are at war, if they haven't understood that yet."

"Uh, I will do my best, General."



**08:33 (Manila Time) / 10:33 (Brisbane Time)**

**Office of General MacArthur**

**USAFFE HQ, Manila**

**Philippines**

“General, you have a message with CRITIC priority from Brigadier General Barnes, in Brisbane.”

Douglas MacArthur, who was discussing with Admiral Thomas Hart their respective situations facing the Japanese, took the message handed by an aide and thanked the junior officer before starting to read. Hart saw him soon smile as he read.

“Some good news, General?”

“Possibly, Admiral. Brigadier General Barnes, in view of the Japanese invasion of the Dutch East Indies, which just cut off the air transit itinerary between Australia and the Philippines, has ordered the PENSACOLA convoy to be reloaded with the planes and materiel already landed in Brisbane. He is asking my permission to send the convoy to Manila, while the majority of the Japanese fleet is still busy around the Dutch East Indies. Barnes just proved that he has both guts and initiative. My God, this could really work, if he acts quickly.”

“What is transported by that convoy exactly, General?” Asked Hart, instantly interested. MacArthur handed him the message while answering him.

“A complete dive bomber group of 52 Douglas A-24s, forty P-40s, an aviation depot and forward maintenance unit and three field artillery regiments. Here, you are an info addressee.”

Hart, reading quickly the message, hesitated on seeing the extremely limited list of addressees.

“The Pacific Fleet headquarters and Washington are not getting this message? But, Barnes is risking a court martial if he loses his convoy after sending it like this without higher authorization.”

“A good leader knows when to take an initiative without wasting time to ask for authorization, Admiral. Barnes just proved that he is one of them. I will immediately answer him to tell him that he has my authorization to send the PENSACOLA convoy on its way to Manila as soon as possible. What could your fleet do to help this convoy arrive in one piece, Admiral?”

Hart thought his answer for a moment before replying.

"It is true that Japanese ships are somewhat rare around the Philippines these days, while the intensity and frequency of the air raids have gone down quite a lot, thank God! I can move a few of my submarines to sweep down and cover the proposed route of the convoy, to chase away any Japanese ship that could spot the convoy. The unloading of the convoy once in Manila harbor will however take many days, during which those ships will be very vulnerable to air attacks. This is a risky bet indeed, General."

"All bets worth taking are dangerous, Admiral." Said MacArthur in a firm voice. "You may start sending your submarines. On my part, I will make sure that everything is done in Manila harbor to expedite the unloading of this convoy once it gets here. God, what I could do with three full artillery regiments!"

### **20:17 (Brisbane Time)**

**Wednesday, November 19, 1941 'C'**

**Brigadier General Barnes' office**

**Lennon's Hotel, Brisbane**

**Australia**

"At ease, gentlemen...and lady!"

Ingrid, like the fourteen other fighter pilots ordered to show up in Barnes' suite, adopted a relaxed position and waited in silence as Barnes reviewed a message in front of him on his work table. Barnes finally looked up from the message and examined the young pilots lined in front of him.

"I know that you are all busy packing up your things for your departure at sea tonight, but I just received this message from General MacArthur which concerns you directly. As you already know, the men of your group were sent to Australia as reinforcement for the various pursuit squadrons in the Philippines, with a secondary mission to convoy forty P-40F, our latest model of the P-40, that were brought by the PENSACOLA convoy. As such, you had not been assigned yet to a specific squadron and had no commanding officer, nearly all of you being fresh out of the fighter school in Luke Field and having also completed the P-40 conversion course. Well, this message from General MacArthur assigns you finally to a squadron and a commander. You will now be part of the 17<sup>th</sup> Pursuit Squadron, a provisional unit, and your commander will be Captain Dows, a veteran and air ace from the Philippines."

Barnes watched carefully the reactions of the male pilots at his last sentence, expecting objections from them at being put under the command of a woman. While he saw some surprise and skepticism on a few faces, none of them was stupid enough to protest a decision coming from a lieutenant general. Satisfied, Barnes continued.

“Other fighter pilots that had been wounded in the Philippines and then sent by air to Darwin for treatment will accompany you on the convoy. While still considered as convalescing, those whose healing is considered advanced enough are being sent back to their respective squadrons in the Philippines, where they will complete their medical recovery and then will be given new fighter aircraft out of the lot of P-40s transported by the convoy. Twenty of the P-40Fs in the lot are however reserved exclusively for the use of the 17<sup>th</sup> Pursuit Squadron and of the 6<sup>th</sup> Pursuit Squadron of the Filipino Air Corps.”

Seeing Ingrid smile on hearing his last words, Barnes looked at her and nodded his head once.

“You will certainly be happy to learn that Major Villamor is still flying from Batangas and shooting down Japanese planes on a regular basis. It seems that two of his original squadron pilots that had been wounded in combat are now fit again to fly. Four of the twenty P-40Fs I mentioned earlier will go to the 6<sup>th</sup> Pursuit Squadron, along with sets of spares, while you will keep the remaining sixteen P-40s for your squadron, Captain. Once you are in the Philippines, with your planes assembled, your squadron will operate from the airfield in Batangas, which is still the home of the 6<sup>th</sup> Pursuit Squadron. The facilities there are limited, but Batangas has the advantage of having been mostly ignored by the Japanese, since only a single plane was using it. In advance of your arrival, General Brereton has ordered that an engineer unit improves the facilities of the airfield as discreetly as possible, in order to avoid unwanted attention from the Japanese. Another advantage is that the 6<sup>th</sup> Pursuit Squadron, while it was down to only one pilot and one plane, still has a full complement of ground servicing and support crews familiar with the P-40. Your ground echelon is thus already in place and ready to receive you. You will all travel on the MEIGS, which will carry the twenty of our forty P-40s assigned to you. Now, this leaves me with only one more last thing concerning you. Squadron, ATTEN...HUT!”

As the fifteen fighter pilots came to attention, Barnes got up from behind his work table and, grabbing a small box on his table, approached Ingrid, stopping one pace in front of her.

“Captain Ingrid Dows, of the Filipino Air Corps 6<sup>th</sup> Pursuit Squadron, I am happy and honored to award you your second Distinguished Service Cross, for your heroic actions in defending Darwin from Japanese air attack on November twelve of this year.” Barnes then opened the small box and took out a DSC with oak leaf cluster, pinning it to Ingrid’s combat shirt, above her left breast pocket. Taking a step back, he saluted her, with Ingrid proudly saluting back. The brigadier general then looked at the male pilots in the room, giving them a sober, nearly severe look.

“Gentlemen, never let the youth or sex of your new squadron commander fool you about her abilities as a fighter pilot and officer. I have had to deal with hundreds of young pilots in my career and I can say with confidence that few of them ever showed abilities as high as those demonstrated to date by Captain Dows. Listen to her and obey her without reserve and you will be able to hurt the Japanese in the air. Well, that is all that I had for you, gentlemen and lady. You are dismissed to your rooms. Captain Dows, please stay for a moment more.”

Now somewhat nervous, Ingrid, stayed at attention while the fourteen male pilots left the room. Barnes then spoke to her in a friendly tone.

“Captain Dows, many people in the United States are disturbed by the fact that you are a fighter pilot, even though you are officially part of the Filipino Air Corps. They will most probably be even more disturbed to learn that you are now the commanding officer of a United States pursuit squadron. Know however that I am not part of that crowd. You amply proved your valor in combat and showed intelligence and initiative, which I appreciate a lot. I know however that your lack of formal military training as an officer is putting you at a severe disadvantage in terms of filling the administrative duties a squadron commander is normally expected to accomplish. I have thus assigned to you and your new squadron two experienced officers, one an administrative officer, the other a logistician. You will also have with you Captain Paul Gunn, who will act as your maintenance officer. These three officers, along with eight clerical, signal and logistical NCOs, will travel with you on the MEIGS: you will thus have ample opportunity to get to know them. Here is a copy of the message from General MacArthur naming you commander of the 17<sup>th</sup> Provisional Pursuit Squadron, plus a mission order signed by me. Do you have questions, Captain?”

"Only one, sir. Since I am now in command of a United States pursuit squadron, does that mean that the United States Army is ready to accept me officially as an officer and a fighter pilot, sir?"

That brought a pained look on Barnes' face, who answered her in a soft voice.

"Unfortunately, no! I realize how stupid and illogical this could appear to you, but you are still officially considered simply as a Filipina officer in temporary command of an American unit. Present Army regulations still prohibit women from serving, except as nurses. I was made to understand that the President himself is trying to change that, but it would technically take an act of Congress to officially change those regulations. That could still take quite some time."

Ingrid hid as best she could her bitterness and kept her voice tone neutral.

"I will still do my best to serve the United States and the Philippines, sir."

"That's the spirit, Captain!" Said Barnes, smiling to her. "Good luck in your new command, Captain. I am sure that you will accomplish great things."

"Thank you, General!"

"You are welcomed, Captain. Dismissed!"

Ingrid saluted Barnes, then turned around and left his suite, her heart beating at an accelerated pace: fighter squadron commander at the official age of eighteen, after only a month as a fighter pilot. The fact that she was in reality only sixteen only added a spicy touch to her situation.

### **01:29 (Brisbane Time)**

**Thursday, November 20, 1941 'C'**

**Army transport ship USAT MEIGS**

**Brisbane harbor**

Having dropped her things in the small cabin assigned to her on the big transport ship, Ingrid went out on the forward weather deck to look at the lights of Brisbane as the ships of the convoy started peeling off the quays. The MEIGS, like the other ships of the flotilla, were in complete blackout condition, contrary to the city of Brisbane, which seemed to have no worries at all about possible Japanese air or sea raids. Seeing Paul Gunn leaning against the deck's railing, near one of the P-40F that had been assembled at Eagle Farm Airfield and was now firmly tied to the deck under a protective tarp, Ingrid went to lean on the railing next to him. She immediately noticed his somber expression.

"You are missing your family already, Paul?"

Gunn nodded slowly his head while still contemplating the city's lights.

"I do, Ingrid. My greatest fear is to never see my wife and kids again. I am now leaving them alone here in Brisbane, without any guaranties that I will be able to return to them."

"Paul," said softly Ingrid, "I am certain that they have as much confidence in you as you do in them. You just need to have confidence in yourself. You and your family will survive this war, I am sure of that."

Gunn turned his head to look at her, thoughtful.

"Ingrid, you are truly a girl apart. On one side, you have the beauty and youth of a teenager, on another the wisdom of an old traveler that has seen everything. In comparison to you, your pilots look and sound like rambunctious kids. Where does this incredible maturity of yours come from?"

Ingrid hesitated before answering him: Paul Gunn and his family had quickly become some of the best friends she and Ken counted in Manila and she had full confidence in the veteran aviator. The secret she kept was however a big one. She finally decided that, if she could reveal her secret to General MacArthur, she could do the same with a good, trusted friend.

"Paul, I am an old traveler that has seen everything...for over 7,000 years."

As Gunn looked at her with total incomprehension, she took a few minutes to tell him how she and Nancy had suddenly and simultaneously started to remember their past lives, mentioning in passing her past life as a young woman from Mindanao who had died over 500 years ago. Despite being thoroughly shaken by Ingrid's revelations, Gunn seemed to believe her nearly at once.

"I always wondered how a young German teenager could have learned in Europe two obscure dialects like the Cebuano and the Tagalog. And you don't know why you and Nancy Laplante got to remember your past incarnations?"

"Paul, don't laugh, but I think that it was a gift from God. As for the why, I don't know. I however intend to use this gift to help the ones around me...and to better understand our Japanese enemies. I was a Japanese geisha in the 9<sup>th</sup> Century and lived then at the imperial palace in Kyoto. I can speak and read Japanese fluently, plus dozens of other languages and dialects, most of them now extinct."

Gunn stared at her in silence for a moment before speaking quietly.

"Ingrid, even without this capacity to remember your past lives, you are still an extraordinary girl. None of your lives could have prepared you to become the ace fighter pilot you are today."

"Thank you, Paul." Said Ingrid, flashing a tender smile. "You are yourself a man that I am proud to call a friend. Between friends, I have another confidence for you, a confidence that you must absolutely keep to yourself."

"Uh, let's see: you are an angel coming from paradise?"

"Not really! In reality, I am sixteen years old, not eighteen. I lied to the Luftwaffe recruiters when I volunteered to become an auxiliary just before my fifteenth birthday."

"Good God! Sixteen and already wounded once in air combat. This is nearly obscene!"

"What is truly obscene is this damn war and its collection of atrocities." Replied Ingrid as she watched the heavy cruiser PENSACOLA glide silently past the MEIGS.

## **08:42 (Brisbane Time)**

### **Forward weather deck of the USAT MEIGS**

#### **Coral Sea**

Ingrid, wearing a combat uniform and with her pistol strapped to her upper right leg, had assembled her pilots, her ground support NCOs and her three support officers on the forward deck, near a tarp-covered P-40F, wanting to introduce herself and each other. She flashed a charming smile as she started her introductory speech.

"Welcome all to the 17<sup>th</sup> Provisional Pursuit Squadron, gentlemen. For those of you who don't know me yet, I am eighteen years old and was born in Berlin, Germany. I became an orphan in 1940, when a British bomb killed my whole extended family during a bombing raid on Berlin. I then enrolled as an auxiliary in the Luftwaffe, out of a desire to avenge my family and help protect my country. If any of you is tempted to think that I joined the Luftwaffe because I was a convinced Nazi, then don't! I was actually a German Jew, something I kept secret from my recruiter, thus have no love for the Nazis, on the contrary. My future adoptive mother, Nancy Laplante, then captured me, along with many other Germans, during a raid in France last January. Eventually, she and her husband, a major in the United States Army Corps of Engineers, adopted me and I was finally pardoned by the British, who then let me leave for the United States after the death of both Nancy and her husband. I have thus been orphaned twice. Before leaving

London, I married a major of the Marine Corps and followed him to his new post in the Philippines. My husband Ken is a big, tough guy standing six foot two. You thus may look and dream, but you can't touch."

A concert of laughs greeted her joke. With the atmosphere now more relaxed, she went to more serious things.

"For those who are wondering how a young girl without any formal training as a fighter pilot could become the American Ace of aces, there are three factors to explain that. First, flying comes naturally for me. Second, during my time as a Luftwaffe auxiliary, I was able to frequent some of the greatest German fighter pilots serving in France. Those German aces were in turn more than happy to describe in detail to me their air combat tactics and to teach me the theory of deflection shooting, with of course a bottle of wine and a bed handy nearby."

Exclamations of amusement and false indignation met that declaration, with the young pilots facing her obviously envious of those German aces.

"Third, and most importantly, Nancy Laplante educated me in secret while I was still interned by the British, teaching me about the future, this war and combat planes, including Japanese planes and their strengths and weaknesses. This last point, more than anything else, will be primordial for your future successes against the Japanese. I know that you all learned the standard air tactics of the Army Air Corps during your fighter pilot course. You can however take those tactics and throw them in the garbage can: against the Japanese, these tactics will only get you killed in short order."

One of the young pilots immediately raised a hand to ask a question.

"Why do you think that Army air tactics are inadequate, Captain? Our instructors at fighter school were experienced, competent aviators."

"I don't doubt it, Lieutenant. However, those instructors probably never saw real air combat in their career, since the last time the United States flew combat missions was in 1918, a full generation ago. More importantly, they never flew against the Japanese or their planes. I saw quickly over the Philippines the results of those standard Army tactics against the Japanese: our pilots got wiped out. If you don't adjust your tactics to use the weaknesses of the Japanese planes, then they will eat you raw for breakfast. When I speak about Japanese weaknesses, don't think that I mean to say that the Japanese are bad pilots. Nothing could be further from the truth. The pilots that you will face are very well trained and experienced, most of them having fought over China for years. Their planes are also excellent in general terms, even though they



have some significant weaknesses. What you heard in the United States about the Japanese being inferior pilots and their planes and equipment being junk is nothing but racist, xenophobic nonsense. Tomorrow, I will start giving theoretical lessons on the Japanese planes and tactics, where I will cover in detail the dos and don'ts of air combat against them. Now, a point that I hope I will not have to repeat to you. In Batangas, you will be working closely with Filipino ground crews and soldiers and at least one Filipino pilot. You will treat those men with the same respect as you would American servicemen, as I will not tolerate any racist attitudes or remarks from you."

Seeing one of her pilots make a face at that, she stared hard at him.

"Do you have a problem with that, Lieutenant Simpsons?"

The lieutenant, a man in his late twenties with red hair and freckles, stiffened.

"Uh, no, Captain!"

"Good! Now, before I give you the dismiss so that you can go rest until tomorrow morning from your days of hard work in Brisbane, I will present you the three officers in charge of support and servicing for our squadron. Captain Paul Gunn, an old hand from the Philippines, will be our maintenance officer and also the second in command of this squadron. He will be assisted by Staff Sergeants Andrew Rockford and Tony Rizzuto and by Technical Sergeant Bill Smith. Lieutenant Ernest Wakefield will be our administrative officer and will be helped in his functions by Staff Sergeant James Burton and Corporal Bill Ashton. Finally, we have our logistics officer, Lieutenant Peter Shmelling, who has Technical Sergeant Timothy Allen to help him out. Rounding up our squadron are two signals specialists, Technical Sergeant Arthur Woods and Corporal Matthew Rowlin, who brought with them from the United States two long range radios of the latest model. That is all for the moment."

Letting her pilots disperse, Ingrid retained around her for a moment her three support officers and eight NCOs to speak to them in a relaxed tone.

"Gentlemen, you were assigned to this squadron to help me run the administrative and support side of it and, frankly, I need you badly in that respect. I may be a top ace in the air but I know nothing about United States administrative and logistical procedures and regulations. I will thus count heavily on your expertise to run the squadron. Also, I will be most happy for you to teach me as we go about those regulations, procedures and administrative rules. So, don't be surprised to see me hang

around when you will be doing your paperwork. Please don't take that as a sign of personal interest in your male body."

Her joke made the eleven men around her laugh for a moment. Ingrid then pointed at Paul Gunn.

"Paul, we already have three P-40s fully assembled and parked on the deck. Our trip to Manila will take about twelve days. Could we assemble more planes in the meantime? Do we have the tools for that?"

The aviator and mechanical genius thought for a moment, while also looking at the three giant crates occupying the forward deck of the transport, along with the three assembled P-40 fighters.

"Well, the convoy brought a full complement of tools and the deck cranes of the MEIGS will facilitate a lot our work in lifting and assembling large parts, but it will all depend on the weather during our trip. Sunny days and calm seas would certainly help, contrary to our arrival, when we will want overcast skies and rain to discourage Japanese air raids while we unload the ships of the convoy. My answer would be yes, Ingrid. Count about three days of good weather to assemble each extra plane."

"Excellent! We will thus start assembly work tomorrow morning. The men not working on plane assembly will be painting the already assembled fighters in the paint scheme I and Major Villamor had adopted. It is actually a camouflage pattern from the future."

She spent a moment describing that paint scheme to the men around her, attracting a slow nod from Paul Gunn.

"An interesting paint scheme indeed. I am curious to see the final result."

"It works very well in air to air combat, I can tell you that, Paul. Well, since it is going to be a nice, warm sunny day, I think that I will go change into an appropriate attire to soak some sunrays. Feel free to do the same, gentlemen. Lieutenant Wakefield, would you mind if I start learning with you this afternoon about Army administrative regulations and procedures as it pertains to a squadron commander?"

"No problem, Captain. I will have my various forms laid out for you."

"Then I will see you after lunch. You are dismissed, gentlemen."

The convoy was nearly out of sight of the Australian coast when Ingrid and most of her men showed up on the aft deck in either bathing suits or army shorts, ready to get some suntan. Ingrid, who had climbed on deck wrapped in a bathrobe and wearing

sandals, created a near riot when she took off her bathrobe, revealing a tiny (and perfectly indecent for the time period) bikini that barely hid anything of her young, slender but feminine body. She faked surprise at the shocked looks she drew.

“What? I had this bathing suit copied in my size from a model that belonged to Nancy Laplante, my adoptive mother from the year 2012. This isn’t even the most revealing bathing suit I have. You should see what a thong bikini looks like.”

“That thong bikini, you are planning to wear it during the trip, Captain?” Asked one of her younger pilots, who was plainly showing his physical reaction to her. Ingrid gave him her most innocent smile.

“Of course! What is the point of owning a bikini and not wearing it? Patience, though, Lieutenant.”

She then chose a spot on the deck that was out of sight of the watchmen on the ship’s bridge and laid down a large towel before getting on her back to enjoy the Sun. Her men soon imitated her, surrounding her in strategic fashion and throwing occasional, not so discreet glances at her. She smiled at that and whispered to herself in German.

“Ingrid, you are indeed a bad girl...but Nancy would approve.”

### **16:28 (Manila Time)**

**Tuesday, December 2, 1941 ‘C’**

**Army transport ship MEIGS**

**Manila harbor, Manila Bay**

**Philippines**

Ingrid felt pure triumph as the mass of Filipino dock workers waiting on the docks of Manila harbor to unload the convoy greeted the ships with loud cheers, with the MEIGS slowly approaching one of the quays of the port. Despite a tense, risky trip marked by the destruction of a Japanese destroyer by an American submarine along their route, the convoy escorted by the heavy cruiser PENSACOLA had finally arrived in Manila Bay, safe and sound. Now, they just needed enough time to unload the precious cargo contained by the seven transport ships of the convoy and let the ships go out again before the next Japanese air raid. Thankfully, the weather this afternoon was heavily overcast, with dark clouds announcing rain sometimes during the night and also possibly tomorrow as well. In order not to present a concentrated target, the ships of the convoy had split in two widely dispersed groups between Manila harbor and the Cavite

naval yards, with the PENSACOLA staying in the middle of Manila Bay, its boilers kept under pressure and ready to use its guns to defend against any Japanese attacks. Four of the old destroyers of the Asiatic Fleet were also cruising inside Manila Bay, ready to lay protective smokescreens if need be. Paul Gunn had accomplished miracles during the trip, with a total of seven fully assembled, painted and ready to fly P-40F fighters now sitting on the decks of the MEIGS, while nine assembled A-24 dive bombers sat on the decks of two other transport ships. From what Ingrid knew of the actual state of what was left of the American air fleet in the Philippines, just those sixteen assembled warplanes would be enough to make an immediate difference locally. While still a dangerous threat, the Japanese air forces had somewhat slackened their efforts against the Philippines in the last couple of weeks, having suffered very grievous losses themselves and being probably in bad need of reinforcements. Maybe, hoped fervently Ingrid, the Japanese would find themselves overextended with all their new conquests around the Pacific and would give up on taking the Philippines if they suffered too many casualties. She was however realistic enough not to be willing to bet on that.

The sight of long lines of trucks, including dozens of flatbed semi-trailer trucks that would be ideal to transport the giant aircraft crates of the convoy, encouraged further Ingrid. It seemed as if all the trucks in Manila had been requisitioned in advance of the convoy's arrival, along with thousands of extra dock workers. Somebody had done its homework in the logistics section of General MacArthur's headquarters. Leaving her fourteen pilots with Lieutenant Ernest Wakefield, her administrative officer, Ingrid went with Paul Gunn to the boarding ramp as soon as the MEIGS was tied alongside one of the quays. The captain of the ship was already there and greeted with her an American major of the logistics branch that was the first to climb aboard. The major saluted the ship's captain while presenting himself.

"Major Reading, from the USAFFE headquarters. I have been tasked to organize the prompt unloading of your ship, Captain. General MacArthur is particularly anxious to have the warplanes you have aboard unloaded as quickly as possible. I have flatbed trucks ready to carry your plane crates to our various airfields."

"I am happy to see how well prepared you are, Major. The first priority will be to lift off my decks the seven fighters already assembled, in order to be able to open my cargo holds. Captain Gunn and Captain Dows will help you with that task. I also have a

number of pilots and aviation support personnel to transport to Batangas airfield and to Nielson Field.”

“I have two buses lined up for them and their baggage, Captain. They may come down as soon as they are ready. As for the planes already assembled, they will be towed across downtown Manila, but the Filipino police has already cleared all the obstacles along the way.”

“Including Bonifacio and Rozas Boulevards, Major?” Asked Ingrid, suddenly excited. The logistics major seemed confused by her question.

“Uh, yes! Why do you ask, Captain?”

“Because these boulevards, which follow each other, form a wide, long straight line nearly two miles long, Major. If no electrical or telephone wires are in the way, we could then take off with our seven P-40s already assembled directly from downtown, instead of having to tow them all the way to Batangas and Nielson Field.”

“You want to take off from downtown Manila, Captain?” Exclaimed the incredulous major. Ingrid nodded, very serious.

“Yes, Major! That would save over six hours of towing for my planes, which could suffer some damages if towed to Batangas. I only need a jeep to go inspect quickly those two boulevards in order to ensure that there are no wires or other obstacles for our planes. Paul, are you ready to pilot the second P-40 in line?”

“Of course, Ingrid!” Replied without hesitation Gunn. Go do your reconnaissance while I direct the lifting of our fighters off the ship.”

“Excellent! Would you have a jeep or car to spare with driver, Major?”

“You can borrow my own jeep for your reconnaissance, Captain. It is right there on the quay, near the bow of this ship.”

Excusing herself with the major and with the captain of the MEIGS, Ingrid ran down the gangplank and along the quay to Reading's jeep, jumping in it and explaining to the corporal driving it what she wanted to do. The driver nodded and started his engine, then maneuvered around the long lines of waiting trucks and started rolling towards the main boulevards cutting through downtown Manila. Ingrid was satisfied to see that Filipino policemen were already posted at each intersection along those boulevards, ready to block the traffic the moment the convoy of planes would pass. All the vehicles that were normally parked along those same boulevards had also been moved away by the police, with large panels indicating temporary parking prohibitions on

each side of the boulevards. Checking the odometer of the jeep, Ingrid was pleased to find that more than a mile of absolutely straight boulevard was free of any overhanging wires or poles that could impede the taking off of her fighters. Returning to the MEIGS, Ingrid ran back on the ship to collect her luggage and rifle, putting them in the bus that was about to drive her personnel to Batangas. By then, five of the seven reassembled P-40s were already on the quay and were being hooked with A-frame towing bars to light trucks. Selecting her five most experienced pilots on top of Paul Gunn to pilot the fighters that would take off from downtown, she then went back down on the quay and jumped in the cockpit of her P-40F, painted in her trademark gray camouflage scheme and with the words 'LADY HAWK' and 29 small Japanese flags painted on each side of the nose. The huge crowds of Filipinos lining up the streets between the docks and the downtown boulevards cheered her wildly as her plane started being towed towards Bonifacio Boulevard. Feeling like a million dollars, Ingrid got up in her cockpit and returned the salutes and wishes of good luck.

Douglas MacArthur, who had just arrived in the suite of the Manila Hotel that served as his residence for him, his wife and his young son Arthur, was suddenly attracted towards his balcony by the noise of approaching aircraft engines. Taking his three year-old son in his arms, he went out on the balcony, just in time to see a P-40 fighter accelerating along Bonifacio Boulevard and towards his hotel. The plane took off 200 meters before the hotel and started climbing, zooming past his balcony, level with MacArthur. The old general shouted out in joy on seeing the name painted in pink and black on the nose of the P-40.

"YES! SHE'S BACK!"

His wife Jean Marie ran out of the bathroom of the suite and onto the balcony as a second P-40 flew past with a roaring engine noise, its wing tip barely eight meters away from the balcony.

"But, these pilots are completely crazy, General! You should have them sent to a court martial."

"On the contrary, my dear." Replied MacArthur, smiling widely, just before a third P-40 swept by the balcony. "These pilots deserve the Air Medal for showing initiative and allowing their planes to be at their airfields faster. This is also great for public morale. Look at the people in the street: they are wild with joy."

Little Arthur then clapped his hands, excited, as a fourth P-40 flew by, making his father grin to his mother.

“You see? Arthur agrees with me.”

## **CHAPTER 10 – ALTERNATE FUTURE**

**08:14 (Auckland Time)**

**Wednesday, May 23, 2,999 B.C.E.**

**Time Patrol main base, future site of Auckland**

**New Zealand**

Farah Tolkonen eyed carefully Nancy Laplante as the Canadian entered her office: while Nancy was still officially a senior field agent of the Time Patrol, she was also a semi-independent operator who had connections of a quasi-divine nature and who answered as much if not more to the powerful being called 'The One' as to Farah. The powers Nancy held as a Chosen of The One were of great benefit to Farah and the Time Patrol but they also could create problems, as they nearly did in 2014'A', when Nancy had been targeted by the Israeli secret services following a most unfortunate chain of events. Thankfully for Farah and the Time Patrol, Nancy was too honest and decent a person to even think about using her powers for her personal benefit. If anything, Nancy's uncommon generosity and compassion tended to land her in trouble. However, Farah was not about to criticize Nancy for being a nice person.

"Good morning, Farah!" Said Nancy, smiling to her friend and superior.

"And a good morning to you as well, Nancy. You wanted to talk to me about something?"

"I did!" Replied Nancy, taking place in an armchair facing Farah's desk. She was dressed in her gray Time Patrol work uniform and looked as fit as ever, despite her giving birth recently to twins. "I need to go explore the 34<sup>th</sup> century of timeline 'B', to see what replaced the Imperium. We know already that, whoever they are, the people of the rewritten timeline 'B' have manipulated history by introducing Yeshua into the 1<sup>st</sup> century. We certainly want to know if they made more manipulations and modifications to history. Simply waiting for them to show up would be asking for a disaster."

"I would tend to agree with you on that: Yeshua was already a hell of a big pill to swallow as far as manipulation of history goes. If these people from the future of timeline 'B' go at it again, there is no way to know how bad the damage would be. Would you want to go with a team or alone?"



“Definitely alone, Farah. In view of the mental powers that Yeshua possessed, those people probably have paranormal powers as well. Even if their powers are weak compared to my own powers, they would still be very dangerous to our field agents. Only I could face them and have a chance to complete the mission.”

“But we know nothing about them. We don’t even know how they look like or what language they speak. We should at least send a scout ship do a discreet survey from orbit before you go.”

“Farah, just the mental thoughts of our crew could be enough to give them away. What if those people take the emergence of a scout ship as an act of war and attack us? Are you ready to deal with hundreds of people with the same kind of powers as me? On the other hand, a single visitor from the past could hardly pass as an invasion for them.”

“If that person is you, then you could be considered a one-person invasion in view of your powers.” Joked Farah. She however turned serious again, looking straight into Nancy’s eyes. “I meant to ask you about your powers, Nancy. The biggest power you showed yet was what you call a healing burst, a power that is definitely a positive one, apart from being impressive as hell. I know that you can and did make some persons burst into flames from the inside but do you have destructive powers of the scale of your healing burst?”

Nancy was silent for a moment, something that actually scared Farah: if Nancy hesitated to answer her on that, then it probably meant that she possessed such powers. Nancy finally spoke in a slow, cautious voice.

“Farah, as a Chosen of The One I am tasked with promoting protection and justice. Protection of the innocents from acts of evil or calamities and justice for all. I never had to use all of my powers yet, even if I was furiously tempted to do so at times, and I can assure you that you don’t want to see their full extent. In essence, if the situation warrants it, I can tap on the full power of The One itself. I can also become a focusing point for The One, in which case I basically become The One temporarily. Healing bursts are cases when The One and I formed a single entity. The feelings and thoughts that came with those unions are simply impossible to describe, Farah.”

“I will take your word on that, my friend. So, when do you want to go explore timeline ‘B’?”

“As soon as I can change into something more anonymous than my present uniform. A good old robe will do just nicely, as it is about the most timeless piece of garment ever devised. I will also wear my old headband with micro-camera, of course. I

will go to the London of May 23, 3387 'B'. If the Imperium is truly dead, then London will be the best place to verify that."

**09:00 (GMT)**

**Wednesday, May 23, 3387 'B'**

**London, England**

Nancy materialized fifty meters above the Thames River, close to where the government buildings of Whitehall district had been in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Levitating in midair, she did a quick visual scan around her to make sure that no flying vehicle was about to collide with her, then examined with interest the city below her. It was nothing like the London of 1942 or the one that had been the capital of the Imperium. In fact, it was a much smaller city than what she had known in 2014 'A'. Nearly all the historical landmarks she had known before were gone, replaced with modern buildings that were well separated, with plenty of green space between them. There were lots of pedestrian trails but none of the streets that had crisscrossed London for centuries. This civilization definitely had no resemblance with that of the Imperium. Reassured in that aspect, Nancy floated down to the left bank of the Thames, landing on the stone trail that ran along the river. There were hundreds of people within sight of her, but the most attention she got was a few admiring stares from men nearby. The people were standard humans, rather tall by 21<sup>st</sup> century average but not by much. They had hair on their heads and some men sported beards and mustaches. More than a few of the people she could see were actually flying, apparently by levitation, but at quite a lazy pace by her own standards, and stayed at low altitudes. The local fashion seemed to be unisex in style, with robes made of elaborately embroidered holographic silk being apparently in favor. Something bothered Nancy at once but it took her some time to catch on to what it was: children were rare in proportion to the number of adults visible. At least, the language should not be much of a problem: it sounded very close to Neo-English and she figured that she would probably pass as someone with a strong provincial accent. The city was a quiet one for its size, with the only vehicles going around being air cars and other, bigger flying vehicles meant for cargo hauling.

Following the left bank of the Thames, Nancy walked at a leisurely pace towards what had been Trafalgar Square, actually enjoying her stroll. Neither the roundabout nor

the column supporting the statue of Nelson were there anymore but what was there both stunned and shocked her. Standing in the middle of a small park where the square had been was a large bronze statue of a woman that looked furiously like herself, dressed in what appeared to be an Arabic robe very similar to the one she was presently wearing. Feeling blood rush to her head, Nancy slowly approached the statue, which stood on a stone base and looked very ancient. A bronze plaque was fixed to the base and bore an inscription she was easily able to read.

“In honor of Nancy Laplante, The Creator. Overseer of the Holy Land. Queen of Jerusalem. Protector of the innocents. 1982 – 2012 ‘A’, 1942 – 2997 ‘B’.”

She was still staring at the plaque, utterly stunned, when a little girl’s voice returned her attention to her surroundings.

“Mommy, look! The woman looks like the statue.”

Looking to her left, Nancy saw a girl of maybe six or seven years pointing her to a woman that was obviously her mother. The woman, along with a growing number of passersby, was staring at her with doubt and disbelief. The girl insisted, actually breaking free from her mother’s hold and coming to two paces of Nancy, smiling up at her.

“Are you The Creator?”

The question, asked with all the innocence of youth, made Nancy melt inside. Crouching in front of the child, she grinned to her.

“I prefer to be called Nancy. And what is your name, my little angel?”

“Sarah! Are you THE Nancy Laplante?”

Nancy decided then and there that hiding her identity would be both futile and counter-productive.

“My name is effectively Nancy Laplante and I just arrived from the past. Why am I called ‘The Creator’ here?”

“But...because you made us all!” Replied the girl as if it was a law of the universe. Those words actually made sense to Nancy: by erasing the Imperium and changing the history of timeline ‘B’ she had effectively made possible the existence of all the people living in this time period. She was not sure however that she liked the idea of being worshipped like this. She caressed gently the long brown hair of the child.

“Sarah, I like to be called Nancy much better than be called The Creator. I am only a woman, after all.”

Nancy then straightened up and looked at the girl's mother, who appeared overwhelmed by the events.

"Could you tell me where the government offices are in this city, madam?"

"Uh, you are quite close to them actually, Creator. The City Hall is that bronze and blue glass building behind you."

"Thank you for the information, madam. It was a pleasure to meet you, Sarah."

"Could you visit my home tonight?" Asked quickly the girl, hopeful. That made Nancy smile but the girl's mother chided her.

"Sarah, that's not polite!"

"Please, don't rebuff her: her enthusiasm is quite normal for such a young child. If you don't mind, I would love to pay her a visit today. At what time will she be out of school this afternoon?"

The blank look from the mother rang an alarm bell in Nancy's mind.

"School? There are no such things left around, miss. Children are too few and far between now to justify the need for such an antiquated institution. Sarah learns at home, with me. You may come at any time this afternoon, miss. We live in apartment 14, building 35-06-22-17."

The woman took out a small card from a belt pouch and gave it to Nancy.

"My name and address is on this card, miss. We will be honored to have you for supper."

"Thank you, madam. I will certainly come by the end of the afternoon."

The little girl was jumping with joy as Nancy put the card in her belt purse and left with a last smile at the child. She was starting to walk towards the City Hall when she felt the light brush of a mind trying to read her thoughts. She immediately closed herself telepathically but didn't look back. That those people had some mental powers was now obvious. The thing about children being rare was however something with possibly far reaching meaning. In fact, only a society where deaths were rare could afford to have few children. That meant in turn either long life spans or even near immortality. She would definitely have to research that point. Thinking about it, there was a lot she should research before visiting the local government officials. Her mind made, she sent a mental command to her implanted time distorter and entered phase shift, switching to her own little bubble of time. She then disappeared suddenly from the view of the local people, while they apparently froze in her eyes, their time passing much more slowly than her time.

Now invisible and nearly undetectable, Nancy explored the district she was in, trying to find something that would look like either a museum or a public library. She found one of the latter and was delighted to see that it had both electronic data banks and old-fashioned paper books. Going through the rows of books while still in phase shift, she soon found the section dedicated to history books and reviewed the various titles. Only when she had located three books of immediate interest to her did she return to normal time after checking that nobody could see her. With the three books under one arm, she calmly walked to one of the numerous reading tables and sat down. The people in the library paid only scant notice to her as she started sifting through the first book, one titled 'History of humanity – From the antiquity to the present'. The hour she spent reading through it was time well spent, as it answered many of her questions about this society. The parts about ancient history, meaning pre-technological ages for the locals, were full of mistakes and suppositions that made Nancy sneer more than once. The periods starting with the 19<sup>th</sup> century were much better documented, though. One period of high significance for Nancy as well as for the locals, who called their society 'The World Council', was the 29<sup>th</sup> century. That time was called 'The Psyonic Renaissance' and marked the appearance in growing numbers of people with previously unheard of mental powers. At first, those psyonics, as they were called, were treated with hostility by non-psyonic people, sometimes to the point of being hunted down. The number of psyonics however increased rapidly at one point, possibly due to an increase in background radiation causing genetic mutations, until they had become the majority. The non-psyonics then basically got back what they had sown. Widely considered as inferior beings by the psyonics and often being called so, they were gradually pushed to the lowest levels of the society and forbidden from reproducing, with measures such as forced sterilization being applied to them. With short life spans compared to the close to 400 years a person of the World Council could hope to attain, the non-psyonics eventually became extinct. Then, in the 31<sup>st</sup> century, a further split happened in the humanity. Many people, realizing that their mental powers could replace a number of technological devices in their lives, decided to return to a simpler, non-technological form of life. Gradually forming simple agricultural and pastoral societies in the regions of the globe with the most benign weather, they soon became known as the 'Edons'. The book Nancy was reading ended with a part dedicated to the growing attraction of Edon for many citizens of the World Council. It was now at the point that technological progress

and even the maintenance of the actual technology of the World Council was becoming more and more problematic because of a severe lack of people interested in technical careers.

Nancy then opened the second book, one that was of direct personal interest to her, as it was supposed to explain the 'Legend of The Creator'. Nancy chuckled at first while reading what was supposed to have been her story: the passage of time and the resulting deformation of the information made for a captivating but also wildly inaccurate picture of herself. There was however a passage clearly mentioning the prior existence of the Imperium and the fact that Nancy had created the present timeline by traveling back in time and changing history. There were also many mentions made of the Time Patrol but the information pertaining to it was mostly inaccurate and based on hearsay. There was one fair quality picture showing herself as Overseer of the Holy Land, dressed in a robe very similar to the one she was wearing right now and with a gold tiara on her head. Her mental powers were explained by the affirmation that she had been the first true psyonic in history, while there was no mention at all of The One.

Now more disturbed than amused, she closed the second book and grabbed the third one, titled 'Time travel and history'. That book turned out to be mostly of a speculative nature and never said that the World Council had been able to find the secret of time travel. Nancy knew better, however. Her own travel to the past from 2012 to 1940 was however related, along with the interference by the Imperium with the year 1942 and her counter-move that eventually made the existence of the World Council possible at the expense of the Imperium. The book's last part asked the reader about what could happen to history if a number of hypothetical cases happened. Nancy felt her blood freeze when she saw that one of those hypothetical cases was about the introduction of a psyonic in the distant past. The author justified that in order to supposedly close a time causality loop and make possible the appearance in history of a religious figure whose existence could not be explained otherwise. That religious figure was named: it was Jesus Christ! Another case described how agents of the World Council could visit and study the past while impersonating ancient deities in order to explain their psyonics powers. Nancy, frankly alarmed by now, looked at the name of the author on the cover of the book.

“Sheryl Ekart, Doctor of history...we will definitely have to have a serious chat together, Doctor Ekart.”

Consulting mentally the internal clock integrated to her implanted time distorter, she then realized that she had spent over two and a half hours reading the three books she had selected. Her stomach also reminded her that she was close to noon hour. Getting up from behind the reading table, she brought the books back to their proper place and walked towards the exit. On second thought, she took a few minutes to visit the washrooms and then went to the service counter of the library, where two young women were working. One of the women smiled to Nancy when she arrived at the counter.

“May I help you, miss?” She asked in the quasi Neo-English used in the World Council.

“You may, miss. I am a visitor here in London and I have only gold and silver as currency on me. Is there a place where I can change some of it into the local currency?” The woman gave her the cautious look one would give to a visitor from some far away, backward place. She also looked up and down at Nancy's relatively simple robe and at her headband.

“Ah, you must be an Edonist! The best place for you would be a jeweler. There is one down the second building to the left once you go out of this building.”

“Thank you!”

The jeweler store was easy enough to find and the clerk accepted readily to change two of Nancy's small gold unmarked coins for 240 units of the local currency, called the Hex. Nancy put the holographic chips in her belt purse and thanked the clerk before leaving the store. She then walked back towards the City Hall while looking around for a restaurant. There were quite a few of them around, this sector seeming to be both a commercial and a governmental one. She chose a small restaurant that served grilled meats cooked in front of the customer and served with rice. She ordered kebabs and ate quickly once served: the people at City Hall must have been warned of her arrival and were probably wondering where she was by now. She was nearly finished eating when her eyes caught the approach of four big men dressed in black coveralls and boots and wearing helmets. They also had what appeared to be pistols worn on belts. Their appearances and the nervous looks some of the customers at the restaurant gave them were enough for Nancy to tag them as some sort of security officers. The four men in turn quickly spotted her and walked resolutely in her direction.

Nancy watched them with one eye while she paid her bill and got up from her table, ready to enter phase shift in an instant. The officers soon stopped in front of her and bowed their heads in respect to her, with one of the men speaking.

“Are you Nancy Laplante, miss?”

“I am! What may I do for you, gentlemen?”

“The High Administrator of London sent us to tell you that she would be honored to receive your visit today, Creator.”

“I will be pleased to meet her, and please call me simply Nancy or Miss Laplante. I may have unwillingly created this timeline but I am still only a simple woman. Please show me the way.”

There were surprised exclamations around the other customers at those words, with the people nearby bowing their heads at Nancy’s passage as the four men escorted her towards the City Hall.

Going up the stone stairs of the City Hall building, the group entered through glass sliding doors into a large reception lobby and went to a bank of elevators. The security officers were polite at all times with her but Nancy understood by the way they watched her that she didn’t really have a choice in following them.

She was finally introduced into a huge office on the fourth floor, where a woman flanked by two men bowed to her before speaking up.

“Welcome to the World Council and the City of London, Miss Laplante. I am Lara Bowen, High Administrator of London. Would you like to sit down, miss?”

“With pleasure, Lady Bowen.”

Nancy, Bowen and the two men sat in sofas around a low table, with the High Administrator waiting until two servants brought a tea service and served cups to all four before addressing Nancy.

“May I present my two top aides, Charles Hoddens and Dick Pond. I was quite excited when told that you had appeared in the city this morning, miss. May I ask what brings you here through the times?”

“Simple curiosity mostly, Lady Bowen. The Time Patrol, of which I am a senior agent, spent a lot of effort and also suffered losses in order to change the history of World War Two in 1942 and thus erase the Imperium from this timeline. I wanted to make sure that the Imperium was indeed erased and decided to come personally to check. Are you familiar with what the Imperium is, Lady Bowen?”



“Only through old legends, miss.”

“Then let me elaborate a bit. The Imperium was a militaristic, technically highly advanced society that existed for centuries in this timeline as a result of the involuntary changes to history I made in 1940. When the Imperium discovered how to travel through time in the year 3385 it unfortunately acted very rashly and went to the point of sending a military expedition to 1942, a move that forced the Time Patrol to react in order to protect history. Since the Imperium was too powerful militarily to be defeated directly in battle, the Time Patrol and I decided to erase it by modifying history in 1942. That plan was apparently successful and the modifications we made to history resulted in your society replacing the Imperium in this timeline. I will now be able to report back to the Time Patrol that the Imperium is indeed dead.”

“And how did you travel through time, if I may ask? Nobody mentioned seeing a time machine when you appeared, miss.”

Nancy touched her head and smiled.

“It is all in the head, Lady Bowen. I just need to think it to travel to a given date and time. I am sorry if I didn’t come to visit you right away but I took a few hours to visit your city and get acquainted with your society. Your London is a fine place indeed.”

Lara Bowen tensed up very slightly at those last words but kept smiling to Nancy.

“I am happy to hear that, miss. Do you intend to visit other places after London?”

“I would actually like to be able to speak to the central government of your World Council, Lady Bowen, in order to arrive at an understanding on the protocols concerning time travel.”

“But...I do not believe that we know how to travel through time, miss.” Said Bowen, looking and sounding truthful. Nancy couldn’t however scan her telepathically to check on that since the people of the World Council, as natural telepaths, could block out their minds at will.

“That is one of the things I would like to discuss with your central government, Lady Bowen.” Replied Nancy, non-committal. “A video link would suffice on my part.”

“Then, I will certainly arrange a call between you and the Grand Administrator at once! Dick, could you take care of that?”

“Certainly, High Administrator.” Said the man, getting up from his sofa and leaving the office. Lara Bowen then looked back at Nancy.

“May I ask you if there are many psyonics like you in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, miss?”

“There are two toddler boys who have mental powers like me, Lady Bowen. I also recently gave birth to twins who have started to show some signs of having mental powers.”

“That’s all?” Said Bowen, truly surprised and also a bit disappointed.

“That’s all! Furthermore, there probably won’t be any others for quite a while.”

“Oh dear! Don’t tell me that the non-psyonics are hunting you down.”

“In two of the three timelines I roam, they would actually be afraid of psyonics and would try to capture us for studies. I must tell you that we do not hold our mental powers from some genetic mutation, Lady Bowen. The two boys and I were given our powers by a higher spiritual being of immense power, a being I call ‘The One’. I actually am a Chosen of The One and promote his values through time. The One is immaterial but he is everywhere and is the source of all human spirits. Are you familiar with the concept of reincarnation, Lady Bowen?”

Bowen, shaken by Nancy’s revelations, nodded after a second of hesitation.

“I read about it. Your ‘One’, is he a kind of god?”

“Most people would call him so in view of his powers. I wouldn’t equate it with God, though. I mentioned reincarnation because The One, as the source of our spirits, is central to the concept.”

Nancy then spent a few minutes describing to the two World Council officials the reincarnation cycle and the fact that she could remember her past lives and skills. Bowen looked back at her with awe and envy.

“You can remember 9,000 years of history? This is fabulous! You must possess skills that are long forgotten by now.”

Nancy nodded gravely.

“I can play ancient music and sing songs long forgotten; live off the nature in about any climate and terrain and fight proficiently with about any weapon ever invented. I however can also remember countless human tragedies, including more than a few personal ones. I was man and woman, peasant and warrior, noble and merchant, and roamed all the continents of Earth during a total of 93 lives. I have lately developed a mental technique to awake the souvenirs of past lives in other people, something I make my friends profit from. It however takes some time to awake a significant number of past life memories in a person.”

“It must be quite an experience, miss.”

“It can also be a traumatic experience if you went through a tragic life once, Lady Bowen.”

Dick Pond then walked back into the office and whispered in Bowen’s ear for a moment, following which Bowen got up and excused herself for a moment, leaving Nancy with the other male assistant, Charles Hoddens. She smiled to the man while grabbing her cup of tea for a sip.

“And what is your function, Mister Hoddens?”

“I am the City Assistant Administrator and right hand man of Lady Bowen, miss. Your life sounds like a positively fascinating one, I must say. Did you travel a lot in the distant past, I mean in your present body?”

“Not that much yet, sir. The period of the Second World War and its immediate aftermaths has kept me very busy for a few years of my personal time and I only recently was able to start exploring other time periods in earnest. The Palestine of the 1<sup>st</sup> century was the goal of my first extensive study trip.”

If the man knew about Yeshua and the ones who inseminated Miriam of Nazareth he didn’t let it appear.

“And what is it like to live around such barbarians? They must be quite inferior to you or me in all respects.”

Nancy kept a straight face with some difficulty, blocking her surge of anger towards the World Council official.

“Mister Hoddens, you would be surprised by how much wits and character one needs to survive in ancient times. Yes, they were ignorant and superstitious by modern standards but the men and women of ancient times were far from stupid. In fact, I am sure that you would be impressed by the skills of some of the merchants and local administrators I met during my travels.”

“Really? I suppose that studying the life of one of those persons could be interesting.”

“It would indeed. You may even learn from them.”

Hoddens smiled in amusement at that, making Nancy wish she would be allowed to send him back in time for some hard-nosed lesson in humility.

“You think so, miss? Whose career would be worth reviewing for me, in your opinion?”

“I have quite a few in mind, but Queen Cleopatra VII of Egypt would definitely be a good case to study. Other ones would be Queen Elizabeth I of England and Cardinal

Richelieu of France, both great statespersons. All three of these rulers truly made history, each in their own way. Queen Cleopatra was a refined and intelligent woman and a born seductress, even if she was not in reality the physical beauty she was claimed to be. Queen Elizabeth was a woman of iron will concerned with the good of her subjects, while Cardinal Richelieu must have been one of the all times masters of political intrigue. Believe me, Mister Hoddens, history is full of great people, even if they were not psyonics.”

“If you say so, miss.” Replied Hoddens, not sounding too convinced. Lara Bowen then came back, smiling to Nancy.

“The Grand Administrator of the World Council, The Honorable Den Roklan, would like to speak with you on a private line, Miss Laplante. If you may follow me.”

Nancy was then led into a smaller office adjacent to the main office that looked like a private study. Bowen showed her a videophone on the work desk and left her alone in the room. Nancy sat in the luxurious swivel armchair behind the desk and looked in the screen of the videophone, where the head and upper torso of a mature man was visible. She bowed her head in respect.

“Shelama, Grand Administrator. It is an honor to speak with you.”

“And it is an honor to speak with the legendary Creator. The City Administrator has told me quickly what you told her and stated your wish to discuss the subject of time travel. May I inquire why you want to discuss that particular subject, Miss Laplante?”

“You may, Grand Administrator. I have very serious reasons to believe that members of the World Council traveled back in time at some point to inseminate a woman from 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine, in order to make possible the emergence of a religious prophet known to history as Jesus Christ. I was there at the time and someone else also tracked these persons through time. I also read this morning a book by a Doctor Sheryl Ekart about time travel that advocated placing a psyonic in the past to fill the role of Jesus. Please be truthful, Grand Administrator: it will save everybody’s time.” Roklan stayed impassive, looking intensely at Nancy.

“Miss Laplante, a project to study the past through time travel effectively existed seven years ago but it has since been terminated when the risks to history were fully realized. Further travel through time has been banned ever since and all the pertaining equipment has been dismantled. You thus do not have to fear anymore about this subject.”

“I am pleased to hear that, Grand Administrator. I would still like to meet with the members of that project and with Doctor Ekart, if it would be possible.”  
Roklan’s expression then changed noticeably, showing some hostility.

“Some of those project members are not available, as they never returned from their mission to Palestine. You should know that, miss, as you probably had something to do about their disappearance and that of another of our craft.”  
Nancy immediately became fully alert: while she had more than a good idea of what had happened to the craft sent to Palestine, she and the Time Patrol had never detected another illicit craft in the ancient past.

“Grand Administrator, the Time Patrol has strict procedures when it comes to stopping illicit time travelers. It always gives a warning first and then shoots only when absolutely necessary or in self-defense. Your craft sent to Palestine was not intercepted by the Time Patrol or by me. Rather, it was the entity called The One that did so. City Administrator Bowen must have told you already about The One. As for your second craft, I have no idea what you are talking about. When and where did it disappear?”  
Roklan looked at her with barely disguised anger.

“So, you pretend to have no responsibility in the loss of our two craft? I was hoping that you would have shown enough moral fiber to acknowledge your acts, Miss Laplante. You...”

“YOU WAIT A MINUTE, MISTER!” Cut loudly Nancy, fired up by the man’s arrogance. “You are not going to call the Chosen of The One a liar so easily! I told you that neither the Time Patrol nor I had anything to do with your crafts’ disappearances and you better accept my word for it. I made possible your civilization and I could as easily erase it from history, so I certainly wouldn’t be so petty as hiding such a small feat as destroying a simple craft, even if I were bloody-minded enough to do such a thing. Tell me where and when that craft disappeared and I will do my utmost to find what happened to it.”

Suddenly looking much less sure of him following Nancy’s veiled threat, Roklan had to lower his eyes under her fierce gaze.

“Alright, miss, I believe you. Excuse me for accusing you but we lost eight good people with those two craft and all of our people are very precious to me. I will have the pertinent data about the loss of our two craft sent to Administrator Bowen’s office within the hour.”

“Thank you, Grand Administrator Roklan.” Said Nancy curtly. “Be assured that I will do my best to find your people and return them to safety. I have been through enough lives to know how precious and unique each of them are.”

“When would you be able to go search for our people?”

“I will probably depart your time period tonight or tomorrow. Then, however long it takes me to find your people, I will reappear in London with them tomorrow at four in the afternoon, local time. If I don’t show up then, that will mean that I will be dead.”

Roklan seemed shaken by the casual way she had said those last words.

“You make it sound as if you don’t care about your own life, Miss Laplante.”

“Oh, I care a lot about it, Grand Administrator. It is just that time travel is a dangerous business and that I accepted the risks associated with it years ago. I will be waiting for your information package.”

Nancy then cut the link and sat back, thinking. She also inspected visually the videophone unit, checking its features and functions. Once that was done, she walked back into the larger office, where Lara Bowen and her two assistants were waiting, sitting in the sofas.

“The Grand Administrator is going to send me some documentation within the hour through your office, Lady Bowen. Do you mind if I wait here in your office?”

“Not at all, miss!” Replied happily Bowen. “That will give me an excuse to keep conversing with you. Your stories are truly fascinating.”

Nancy smiled at her enthusiasm.

“Then I will be more than please to entertain you with them.”

Less than forty minutes later a female secretary came in with a large envelope and bowed to Bowen.

“The office of the Grand Administrator has just downloaded electronically a number of documents addressed to Miss Laplante, High Administrator. Here are the printed copies.”

“Then you may give them directly to her, Fiana.”

The secretary presented the envelope to Nancy, who took it and thanked her. The secretary then left the office. Watched by a curious Lara Bowen and her assistants, Nancy extracted two folders from the envelope and opened the top one. A short report was in it, accompanied by the photos and biographical sheets of three men and two women, plus a photo of a small craft the size of a light shuttle. Reading through the

report quickly, Nancy nodded her head: it was the team that had been sent to Palestine to inseminate Miriam of Nazareth. Closing the first file and opening the second one, she couldn't help recoil in surprise when she saw the pictures of the three persons missing with the second craft: apart from a man and a woman there was also a young boy of maybe ten years of age. Smelling something truly rotten, she read the brief report and sighed with regret. The boy was actually eight years old.

"Is something wrong, Miss Laplante?" Asked Bowen, who had seen her reaction. Nancy gave her a wry smile.

"You may say that, Lady Bowen. I have to go try to find and rescue the three passengers of a time shuttle from the World Council that went missing in the distant past. One of them is a mere boy. Look for yourself."

Lara Bowen looked genuinely shocked when she took the picture of the child and examined it. She then looked back at Nancy at the same time she gave her back the picture.

"How could they risk a child in such a way? Our children are rare and very precious to us."

"I noticed that this morning, Lady Bowen. With your long life spans you obviously have to apply a severe birth control program in order to avoid overpopulation. The fewer the children, the more precious they are. I have a baby boy that I adopted myself, plus twins born three months ago, so I know about that. It seems that the parents of this boy actually stole that craft and went in the past with him to fill some misguided dream of living there while passing off as gods with the help of their psyonic powers."

"But, that's completely irresponsible!"

"It certainly is, Lady Bowen. If you will now excuse me, I will let you go back to your other duties. I still have some background research to do before I leave for the past to try to find them. If I am successful in finding them, I will be back here tomorrow at four in the afternoon. If not..."

Bowen understood the meaning of her missing words and nodded gravely while getting up from the sofa.

"I sincerely wish you the best of luck on your mission, miss."

"Thank you, Lady Bowen. I will see you back tomorrow afternoon then."

Dick Pond gracefully escorted her back to the main entrance of the City Hall building, where he shook hands with Nancy before she left. Once outside on the

pedestrian trail, Nancy walked back towards the public library she had been to before lunch. Passing in front of an office supply store while on her way, she decided to go in and bought a carrying bag that she could sling from one shoulder, plus a notepad and a pen. Thus equipped, she walked to the public library and entered it, going to one of the electronic information booths that were not taken. The booth she took was little different from the Internet stations of the 21<sup>st</sup> century she was used to, except of course for the content of the data banks and the performance of the computer. Taking out the documents sent by the Grand Administrator, she went through them carefully, looking for hidden clues that she could use to piece the puzzle she was facing. That the Grand Administrator had told her only the bare minimum about the time travel program of the World Council and that he had lied to her outright on a few points was not in doubt in her mind. For one thing, the adults who had supposedly stolen the time shuttlecraft should not have known how to operate it unless they had received some prior training on it. Setting a spacetime coordinate was more complicated than just simply selecting a date and a location. For another thing, those adults and their son, if Heracles Sirtis was really their son, would have needed to learn or assimilate at the least ancient Greek before departing, something one should not be able to do here except in a few select places. As for the time travel program of the World Council having been dismantled, Nancy had big doubts about that. She grinned with amusement after only a minute of looking at the documents: one of the reports had been produced on a format that included an official logo. It was also signed, with a complete block signature printed at the bottom.

“And they think that they are so smart. Let’s see what I can find on that Agency for Archaeological Field Research.”

The program used to consult the data banks was actually very user-friendly and she had no trouble finding a well-documented site on the AAFR. Officially, it was dedicated to study history through field research and employed a number of historians and other specialists, including a certain Doctor Sheryl Ekart, of which she was even able to view a picture. The main research laboratories were located near a city called Novi Basan. After opening a second search program, Nancy found out that Novi Basan was in fact built on the site of the old city of Boston, on the American East Coast. Punching in the address of the AAFR laboratories, she was able to view a detailed map of its location on the coast, which she printed a copy of by using the printer of her computer station. Now armed with plenty of information, Nancy looked at her watch and



saw that it was only 14:20 hours: she still had plenty of time before paying her promised visit for supper at little Sarah's apartment. This was as good a time as any to go pay a visit to the laboratories of the Agency for Archaeological Field Research, especially since it was now only early morning on the American East Coast. Gathering her documents, she put them in her carrying bag and left the information booth. Going to the public washrooms of the library, she hid in one of them and jumped spacetime.

Nancy reappeared at 06:30 local time off the American East Coast, in sight of Novi Basan and floating at an altitude of 1,000 meters. Taking the time first to locate visually the AAFR complex, which stood on the coast just outside of the city limits, she effected a second, shorter range spacetime jump and materialized just above the trees of a forest bordering the research center. Levitating down to the ground, she then immediately went into phase shift and ran to the edge of the forest, stopping there behind a bush to observe the complex. It was made up of three distinct buildings surrounding a large paved area that looked furiously like a landing zone for shuttlecraft. One of the buildings was large and had the appearance of a hangar, with one large sliding door big enough to let a small ship through. The building next to it looked like a production or maintenance facility, while the third building was a typical four-story office building. A parking lot and landing pad for air cars was adjacent to the office building but had only six air cars parked in it, even though it was made for over a hundred vehicles. A security fence with sensors and cameras surrounded the facility and the guardhouse and sentry posts around it were manned by armed men. Two shuttlecrafts similar to the ones depicted in the photos sent by the Grand Administrator were parked on the edge of the central landing zone and technicians were working around one of them. All this made Nancy smile wryly.

"All the equipment and facilities concerning time travel have been dismantled, he said..."

Nancy next concentrated on how she would infiltrate that complex. What looked like a surveillance radar and other panoramic sensors on a small tower atop the hangar would make a flying approach risky indeed. The office building and the production/maintenance annex were however quite close to each other and materializing between the two buildings would put her in a dead zone for those sensors. There was also a secondary entrance to the office building on the side facing the annex. She thus

picked up that spot and jumped spacetime again, appearing just outside that door. Taking only a few seconds to calculate her next jump, she materialized inside the office building and went into phase shift the moment she was in. She now stood at the end of a hallway with a number of doors opening on each side. While virtually invisible to anyone in the building, Nancy started roaming it, using the fact that most of the occupants had not arrived yet for their day of work to investigate each office on her way. She didn't find much of interest at first until she moved to the offices on the third floor, which seemed to be reserved for the executive offices. There, an office marked as belonging to the 'Project Manager' also had a nameplate on the executive work desk saying 'Doctor Sheryl Ekart'. Nancy searched it thoroughly after coming out of phase shift and found a number of handwritten notes and memos referring to two projects named 'Trojan Horse' and 'Olympus' respectively. One alarming note in particular was about project 'Trojan Horse' and said that 'nine agents are now in place and operating', without giving further details. Nancy was still speculating about that when she noticed that a blinking light on the desk videophone indicated that someone had left a message. She was tempted to listen to it at first but thought better of it: it could give her visit away. Completing her search of the office and finding nothing else of interest, she had to conclude that the really interesting information must have been in the computer data banks of the center. Going back into phase shift, she left Ekart's office and roamed through the rest of the third floor. Her next big find was when she entered a large room that seemed to be used as a communal office for seven persons. A large pinning board on a wall had all kinds of pieces of papers with either text or pictures on them. From the happy disorder on the desks, Nancy guessed that this was some kind of working group in charge of a current project. From the number of notes concerning it, these persons were probably involved with project 'Trojan Horse'. She thus searched carefully through the office once back in normal time, noting down any information of interest on her notepad. The pinning board in particular was a plentiful source for her. There were line diagrams with names underlined that particularly got her attention. Pictures of the persons whose names were underlined surrounded the diagrams, bearing names, dates and positions. Blood rushed to Nancy's head when it became quickly apparent to her what Project 'Trojan Horse' was all about.

"The damn fools!" She muttered to herself while looking at the pinning board, letting the cameras in her headband picture the documents on the board. She then carefully noted down the names, dates, positions and organizations shown on the

diagrams. Resuming her search, she found a few minutes later a thin file titled 'Original position recipients – modes of substitution and elimination'. Opening it with dread, she stared at each printed sheet inside the file, letting the micro-camera hidden in her headband film them in detail. She had cold rage in her eyes after she put the file back where she had found it.

"Doctor Ekart, you will pay for this, I swear!"

Seeing that it was now half past seven O'clock, she realized that the first office workers should be about to arrive by now. Quickly completing her search of the communal office, she then switched back to phase shift and returned to Ekart's office, where she returned to normal time. Looking cautiously through the large windows of the office, she saw that air cars and taxis were starting to arrive with their loads of workers. She didn't have much time left now. Opening an equipment pouch hooked to her belt, she took out a micro-probe kit and flipped open the covering lid of the pad-like device, revealing a small viewing screen and touch controls. Activating the kit, she then opened a small, drawer-like compartment on the side of the pad that stored a micro-probe. The fly-sized sphere flew out under her commands and took position behind and above the work desk, in a corner that was out of the field of view of the videophone's camera but that still let the micro-probe spy the videophone screen. With her probe in place, Nancy went to a wide sofa backed against a wall to the right of the work desk and hid behind, lying down on the carpet. Pulling out an earpiece and putting it in her right ear, she then waited, ready to activate the micro-probe's camera. She had to wait less than fifteen minutes before a woman that looked in her late thirties entered the office. She was of Caucasian type and medium stature, had dark brown hair and gray eyes and was moderately pretty. Her long dress was richly embroidered and she wore expensive-looking jewels. Unaware that she was being watched by Nancy via the micro-probe, the woman put down on the desk her briefcase and looked at the videophone, activating it when she saw that a message had been left on it. The face of the Grand Administrator appeared on the screen, a bit of impatience showing off.

"Doctor Ekart, please call me back as soon as you are in your office. I have bad news from the past."

Sheryl Ekart grunted in frustration and composed the number of the Grand Administrator, getting him within seconds.

"I just saw your message, sir. What's up?"

“We have big trouble from the past, Doctor Ekart, that’s what! None other than The Creator herself appeared in London a few hours ago, asking questions about your team that disappeared on their way back from Palestine.”

“Nancy Laplante? She showed up in our time? What does she want, sir?”

“That we terminate our visits to the past.” Said Den Roklan, who took a minute to tell Ekart about his conversation with Nancy and about the information given on her by Lara Bowen. The historian shook her head slowly in mild irritation.

“You shouldn’t have mentioned Heracles’ craft to her, sir. She is now liable to find out about Mount Olympus before we are able to relocate the installations there.”

“Listen, Doctor! I had a chance to enlist her help in finding some of our citizens that could be in big trouble in the past. You may have your projects as your top priority but I am concerned with the safety of my people. That is my job, remember.”

Ekart lost some of her arrogant self-confidence at Roklan’s outburst and lowered her eyes for a moment.

“I am sorry, Grand Administrator: you are right about this. What do we do now with Laplante? Do we know where she is now?”

“We unfortunately don’t. She mentioned something about being invited for supper at a little girl’s apartment in London today but we don’t know more than that for the moment. As for what we do with her, we have little choice but to let her go back to the past. With luck, she will be able to save and return our citizens from the past and will then leave us alone.”

“Sir, I think that you are underestimating her curiosity and abilities. She is the head of a rival, well-equipped organization that will not take lightly to our activities in the past. It was most unfortunate that she was present in Palestine when our team was doing its work there. I frankly don’t buy that supreme being business she told you about. I am sure that she and her Time Patrol are the ones who destroyed our Palestine team. Maybe we should retaliate against the Time Patrol and make them pay for killing our crew.”

“Are you crazy, Doctor?” Replied Roklan, getting agitated. “They already erased the first Imperium out of history. Do you want us to be next? Any hostile actions against Laplante or the Time Patrol are out of the question. Am I clear on that, Doctor?”

“Yes, sir!” Said Ekart reluctantly. “I will have however to put my agency on an alert footing, in case Laplante becomes too nosey. Did she give away any indication that she knew about the events of 2997?”

“None! The site of the old Jerusalem is anyway in territory controlled by the Edon. Even if she goes there, we can do nothing about it.”

“That bunch of backward idealists. They are as pitiful as they are laughable.”

“And they outnumber us.” Retorted Roklan. “Do you want to start a psyonic war with them over The Creator, Doctor? You know how much the Edonists respect her memory. Again, we will let Laplante go without troubling her. Keep working on Project ‘Trojan Horse’ but warn our agents to be on the lookout for Laplante and her Time Patrol.”

“It will be done, sir.” Said Ekart before cutting the link. She then sneered at the blank screen of the videophone.

“What a wimp that Roklan is. We could handle that Laplante any time we wanted as easily as we could teach a lesson to these Edonists.”

The historian next activated her intercom, making her voice boom all around the complex.

“To all the personnel, this is Doctor Ekart speaking. We are now going to alert status orange until further notice. The Creator, Nancy Laplante, has appeared this morning in London and the Time Patrol may try to spy on us from now on. If Laplante is sighted around our installations, keep her under observation and advise me immediately but do not shoot her. Be extremely vigilant from now on.”

Ekart’s next move was to get up from her chair and to leave her office. That let Nancy retrieve her micro-probe and leave her hiding place. Once up in the open, she concentrated and jumped spacetime, disappearing from the office in a flash of white light. Seconds later, loud alarms sounded all over the complex. Within two minutes, a squad of armed guards followed by Sheryl Ekart ran into the office, guns at the ready. They looked around for a moment, consulting as well their handheld detectors, before gathering around Ekart, who was positively fuming with rage.

“Are you sure that someone jumped spacetime directly from my office, Commander?”

“Absolutely, Doctor.” Replied the head of security. “Our internal security sensors had been activated right after you announced Alert Orange and positively located a single spacetime distortion from inside this office just two minutes ago. Someone probably spied on you, Doctor.”

“Laplante!” Hissed Ekart angrily.

From the AAFR complex on the American East coast, Nancy jumped spacetime back to London, arriving there at half past four in the afternoon. Landing softly besides a public communication booth in what had been Green Park, she took out the calling card the little girl's mother had given her and called an air cab. The flying vehicle, piloted by a man with graying hair, landed besides her six minutes later. She got in and showed the calling card to the cab pilot, who nodded his head once.

"That's a kilometer away, miss: we will be there in a minute."

The pilot kept his word and landed on the roof landing pad of a large apartment building 54 seconds later. Nancy paid him, leaving him a hefty tip before leaving the cab. She was walking towards the roof access cabin when she hesitated, then stopped: she had forgotten to get a small gift for little Sarah before coming. That was however too easy for her to take care of. Mentally marking the spacetime coordinates she was at presently, Nancy then jumped spacetime and disappeared. She reappeared ten meters above her previous spot five minutes later. Those five minutes had in reality been three hours for her: two hours spent at the main Time Patrol base in 2999 B.C.E., briefing Farah Tolkonen and the senior staff of the Time Patrol on what she had learned about the World Council, and another hour spent finding gifts for her hosts. Because of her last errand she had changed her clothes to those of a noble Swedish woman from the ninth century, the golden age of the Viking era. She also wore the appropriate jewels for a Viking woman of the rank she had held as Skadi of Upsala in the tenth century. Getting into one of the four elevator cabins, she rode it down to the first floor and got out in a wide hallway lined with doors with numbered brass plaques on them. Smiling and nodding politely to the people who had been waiting for an elevator and were now staring at her with curiosity, she went down the hallway, looking at the door numbers. Finally arriving in front of door number 14, she pushed the buzzer button and waited. Sarah's mother opened the door after a moment and waived her in while smiling.

"Please come in, miss. You really look fascinating in this attire, I must say."

"Thank you, Misses Coles." Replied Nancy while entering the apartment.

"Please, just call me Lyn."

"With pleasure, Lyn. You may call me Nancy then. Is Sarah here?"

"Of course! She was so impatient to receive your visit. She is changing right now. May I take that bag you are carrying on your back?"

"I will keep it with me if you don't mind, Lyn: I have musical instruments in there, along with a few gifts."

A tall man with black hair and wearing an embroidered robe like Lyn then appeared from what appeared to be the kitchen. He came to Nancy and shook her hand.

“Welcome to our home, Miss Laplante. I am Allen Coles, father of Sarah. This is a great honor indeed to have you with us this afternoon.”

“And it is a pleasure to enjoy your hospitality, Allen.”

“Please, come to the lounge and make yourself comfortable. Would you like something to drink?”

“Uh, I don’t know what is served in the World Council. Do you have wine?”

“Wine is timeless, miss. Will a chilled white wine do?”

“It will be perfect, thank you.”

Allen Coles led her to a comfortable lounge and showed her a padded sofa before going back to the kitchen, leaving her with Lyn. Little Sarah then ran into the lounge, excited and happy. Nancy opened her arms wide for her and gave her a warm hug and kisses on the forehead. Sarah sat between Nancy and her mother and looked at the bag Nancy had put down at her feet: it was made of leather sewn with leather strings and was obviously of primitive manufacture by World Council standards.

“What is in the bag, Nancy?”

“My musical instruments and a few gifts from the past. Would you like to see them now?”

“Oh yes, please!” Nearly shouted Sarah. Her youthful joy made Nancy grin at her mother.

“Children will never change through the ages. I really love their company.”

She then picked up a shiny brown fox fur from her bag and unrolled it, revealing a gold and amber necklace of Scandinavian manufacture. Taking the necklace, she put it around the little girl’s neck.

“This amber and gold necklace was made in the ninth century, 25 centuries ago, in a place then called Sweden. I am not sure how you call that country now.”

“It is called Sweden but very few people live there now.” Said Lyn. “It is a bit too cold for most citizens of the World Council and definitely too inhospitable for the people of Edon.”

Nancy nodded in acknowledgement and looked at Sarah, who was admiring her new gift. She seemed particularly fascinated by the big amber pearls.

“Do you like it, Sarah?”

“A lot! It is beautiful!. I never saw those yellow balls before. What are they called again?”

“They are amber pearls, Sarah. They are made by the resin of trees as it drips or flow down and then petrifies. Amber was very popular in the distant past as a material to make decorations and jewels.”

Allen Coles, who had come into the lounge with a cup of wine for Nancy, also admired for a moment the necklace before giving the cup to Nancy.

“I don’t believe that you can find amber anymore, miss. I never saw the like of it in any jewelry store in London.”

“Thank you!” She said on taking her cup. “It’s a pity: amber is such a beautiful material. Well, time for the other gift.”

Taking a sip from her cup before putting it down on the low table in front of her, she then extracted another rolled fox fur from her bag and opened it, exposing to Lyn and Allen’s admiring gaze a sculpted horse carved out of a single, big chunk of amber and hand-polished with infinite care. Lyn took it from Nancy’s offering hands and stared at the small sculpture.

“This is truly a work of art!. This is too much, Nancy.”

“Not at all! Such sculptures are fairly common in ninth century Sweden. The people of that time produced many very talented artists and artisans. Would you like to listen to an old Scandinavian song?”

“Yes, yes, please!” Said Sarah excitedly. Nancy smiled to her and took a lute from her bag. Closing her eyes and picturing back in her mind her souvenirs from her life as Skadi of Upsala, she started singing in Old Norse and playing her lute. Her first song was a soft love song that left the Coles clapping their hands.

“That song sounded so melancholic, especially in that old language.” Said Lyn, smiling in contentment. “How could you remember it so well if it is so old?”

“I remember clearly the skills, languages and souvenirs from all of the 93 lives I lived through in my past incarnations, Lyn. I could sing right now a song from 7,000 B.C.E. without missing a beat. Let me show you.”

Switching to Proto-Semitic, she then performed for them a funeral song from Ancient Jericho. Allen Coles felt deeply moved by the sad tone of the song and by how words and music came from deep within Nancy, resuming Lyn’s own feelings at the end of the song.

“Wow! This is one evening I will remember.”



Nancy ended up saying goodbye to the Coles at well past ten O'clock at night. By then she had already sung little Sarah to sleep in her bed. It was with a bit of regret she left their apartment and went back to the roof landing pad. Levitating a few meters off the roof, she then jumped spacetime for her next destination, still clad in her Viking clothes and jewels.

### **07:00 (Jerusalem Time)**

**Thursday, May 24, 3387 'B'**

**Mount Sion, Jerusalem**

**Palestine**

Nancy lost her concentration and fell a good forty meters before she regained enough control of herself to levitate to a safe hover. She then flew down to the rocky ground and fell to her knees, sobs choking her: Mount Ophel, on which had stood the Temple Mount of Jerusalem, had been decapitated by a nuclear weapon that had also razed everything for kilometers around the site. Wild vegetation and trees had grown through the ruins, showing that the disaster was an ancient one. That it had happened centuries ago did nothing to diminish the overwhelming sense of loss and the grief she felt at looking at the site of the ruined city.

"NOOO! NOT JERUSALEM!" She shouted, despair in her voice. She then collapsed on the ground, crying uncontrollably. She did not notice the robed and bearded man that silently flew down to a spot behind her until he spoke gently.

"Didn't you know about this already after all these years?"

Nancy rolled over and jumped to her feet in a flash, angry at having been spooked like this. Her combat stance and fiery eyes made the man take a step back.

"Wait! I wish you no harm. I was just curious as to why you were ignorant about this. It did happen nearly four centuries ago after all."

"This abomination happened in 2997?" Asked Nancy, relaxing a bit her stance. "Who did this?"

"Yes, it did happen in 2997 and a faction of the World Council did it. Where do you come from? I do not recognize your style of clothes."

Nancy then relaxed her body and softened her expression. She couldn't help let a few tears roll down her cheeks, though.

"I come from the distant past. My name is Nancy Laplante."

The man seemed thunderstruck by her name and nearly knelt before her.

"The Creator! You are the Creator? So, you didn't die when Jerusalem was destroyed?"

"I probably died long before 2997, my good man: I come from the Jerusalem of 1943."

The man was apparently confused by this for a few seconds, then nodded his head once and pointed towards the South, where a small village was visible in the distance on top of a low hill.

"I was out collecting wild berries but this is clearly a lot more important. The elder of our village is a very old man near death who was also alive when Jerusalem was destroyed. I am sure that he will want to speak to you. By the way, my name is Samir."

"I will certainly want to speak with him as well, Samir. There is a lot that I am ignorant about what happened here in the last centuries. Is this part of Edon?"

"This is the heart of Edon, Creator. The people of the World Council don't come here unless they come in peace."

The way the man said that showed that he believed his people able to keep the World Council at bay if need be. He then concentrated and floated off the ground, taking slowly speed towards the distant village. Nancy followed him easily, actually flying at a speed she would normally qualify as lazy. As they flew over the hilly, rocky terrain, she saw numerous traces of human occupation but none that involved any technology per say. The people of the Edon seemed to be purely farmers and herders and lived in simple houses made of stones or mud bricks.

Nancy, with Samir still leading, landed in the central square of the village, which counted maybe no more than 300 houses. A water well stood in the center of the square and half a dozen men and women were surrounding it, waiting their turn to pull some water out. They and a dozen other people standing around or sitting in front of their homes looked with curiosity at Nancy, with her unfamiliar Viking attire. That was when Samir emitted a powerful mental message.

"Friends of Temos, The Creator has returned. Join her in the central square."

That soon made the inhabitants pour out of their houses to converge on the square, where curious but friendly men and women rapidly surrounded Nancy. Here, as in

London, children seemed rare, with at most a dozen being visible. An old man with white hair and beard and wrinkled skin came out of one of the houses lining the sides of the square and walked slowly and laboriously towards Nancy, using a cane. The crowd respectfully parted to let him pass and Nancy bowed deeply to him in respect.

“It is an honor to meet you, village elder.”

The old man opened wide his eyes when he could detail her from up close. Tears then ran down his face.

“The Hand of The One! You appear as youthful as you were 390 years ago, when I last saw you.”

Nancy understood with a shock that she somehow had been still alive in 2997, an apparent impossibility. Leaving that mystery to be solved later, she stepped forward and gently touched the old man’s face with her hands.

“But the years have been hard on you, elder. Let me see if I can help this.”

She then concentrated, with her hands still on the old man. She soon started to glow, with the glow enveloping the old man as well. The glow turned to a bright halo and stayed so for half a minute, with the villagers watching in religious silence. The halo then dimmed out progressively, leaving Nancy holding the face of a young man apparently in his early twenties. His beard had turned dark brown and his eyes were clear and focused. The elder looked at his hands, and then touched his face with growing emotion. The crowd erupted in happy shouts and danced with joy while the ones around Nancy kissed her hands, making her withdraw them in embarrassment.

“Please, thank The One, not me. I am only its messenger and focus point.”

“Then we will thank The One through you.” Replied a woman that was kneeling besides her before kissing her hand again. As gently as she could, Nancy broke away and took the hand of the elder, who didn’t look like his title any more.

“Could we talk alone about what happened in 2997? I don’t have much time left before I must leave for another task.”

“Anything you want, Great One.” Replied with a grin the man. He then made his way back to his house with Nancy and invited her in, then told the crowd that he needed to speak privately with her. The villagers took that in good stride and dispersed peacefully, discussing excitedly what had just happened.

The elder, whose name was Toma, lived alone in his house, his wife having died of old age fourteen years ago. His house was simply furnished but comfortable enough

in view of the hospitable climate. Everything in it had been produced by hand but had also benefited from what their mental powers let the Edonists do to put a better finish to an object. Toma briefly showed his house to Nancy before sitting with her on thick pillows of wool in his living room. He longingly admired her young face, then spoke softly.

“To see you so young and beautiful still after all these centuries. I was nineteen at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem and had seen you a few times on public events. You must however be impatient to learn about the events of 2997, so I will not delay further. By 2997, the non-psyonic humans were then a small minority on Earth and were increasingly being persecuted by the various governments of the World Council, which was still badly divided at the time. Some of those governments even forced the non-psyonics to be sterilized, considering them remnants of an inferior race. Violence against non-psyonics was also common in the World Council but the ones who would eventually form the Edon were against that violence and prejudice and did what they could to shelter the non-psyonics. One preferred place of refuge for these poor, beleaguered people was Jerusalem and its surrounding area, over which you still ruled with your time-proven kindness and tolerance. As a very powerful kind of psyonic in your own right, you were able to keep at bay the extremists in the World Council who wanted simply to exterminate the remaining non-psyonics. You even handed them a painful defeat when a large group of them tried to attack Jerusalem in 2996. By then, over a million non-psyonics were sheltering in and around the old city and it became an attractive target for many arrogant leaders of the World Council. One of them was finally able to obtain the use of a nuclear weapon and launched a surprise attack on Jerusalem at night, managing to destroy it and to kill everybody in it, including you and your son. I myself barely survived the nuclear explosion and took weeks to recover from it.”

“My son? Which one?” Said Nancy, a lump forming in her throat. “I have one adopted son at the moment, plus baby twins, a boy and a girl.”

“I unfortunately can’t remember his name. Anyway, with you and the city destroyed, the forces of the World Council started hunting down the last surviving non-psyonics. The future founders of Edon finally had enough of the World Council’s arrogance and intolerance and opposed it openly. The World Council tried to intimidate us by sending a fleet of combat craft but our mental powers were already superior to those of the World Council people and we sent them fleeing, but not without taking some dreadful casualties. The World Council has never dared face Edon again in battle since

then. Our mutual relations improved somewhat in the following centuries but there is still some tension between our two societies.”

Nancy was by now overwhelmed again with grief and was sobbing quietly at the end of Toma’s story.

“I failed all those poor people. They were hoping for my protection and I failed them, miserably.”

Toma shook his head and gently pressed his hands on hers.

“You didn’t fail them, Great One. You protected them for years, nearly alone and against impossible odds, and even gained the respect of many in the World Council for your show of compassion and courage. You could have left Jerusalem any time you wanted for the safety of another time period but you stayed despite all the dangers and hardships. The one who destroyed Jerusalem was eventually ostracized by his own people and died in disgrace. For nearly all on this world you are and always will be a most exceptional person.”

Nancy was silent for a long moment, looking down at the floor of the house as she grieved past losses and fully measured the crushing weight of responsibilities she would bear in her future. This moment more than any other until now showed her how much she was destined to serve others as a Chosen of The One rather than have others serve her needs. It was a profound lesson in humility indeed and one that would change her outlook on life forever. She finally looked back at Toma.

“Toma, I will have to go now. There are people in danger in the distant past that needs help. I will however be back in a few days with my children to visit your village again.”

“You will always be welcome here in Edon, Great One.”

Nancy got up and, followed by Toma, left the house. Taking a few steps towards the water well, she then flew upwards, disappearing in a flash of white light once ten meters from the ground.

## **CHAPTER 11 – A CHILD LOST IN TIME**

**13:03 (Auckland Time)**

**Friday, May 25, 2999 B.C.E.**

**Main Time Patrol base, future site of Auckland**

**New Zealand**

Farah Tolkonen waited for Nancy to take a seat before looking at the other members of the Time Patrol present for this command meeting.

“May I have your attention, ladies and gentlemen? As you all know already from the information brought back from 3387 ‘B’ by Nancy, we are now faced with another rival organization that is capable of time travel. While the World Council’s Agency for Archaeological Field Research does not have the combat punch of the Imperium, it can be about as dangerous for history, if not more. Apart from having psynic powers that will make the job of countering them vastly more difficult, they have already proven that they won’t hesitate to fiddle with history, as was the case with Yeshua. Now, we know that they have introduced clandestine agents in timeline ‘C’ as early as 1938, with the long-term goal of preventing the future formation of an Imperium ‘C’. Their plans seem to be well thought of and actually have a good chance of success if nobody else intervenes to counter them. We cannot of course let them proceed and will have to oppose them. As for their ‘Olympus’ project, the scoutship WIKING has already conducted a discreet reconnaissance of Mount Olympus, in the Greece of 555 B.C.E., and what Sven, Susanna and Frank found was shocking, to say the least.”

A series of aerial photographs then started showing on the large wall display screen behind Farah, who commented them to her assembled command and mission staff.

“As you can see on these pictures, well camouflaged installations have been put in place by the World Council at the bottom of the inner slopes of Mount Olympus. These installations probably were meant to support a team of agents that would have stayed in Greece for long duration missions. What their exact mission was supposed to have been, we don’t know for sure at this time but we certainly won’t let the World Council conduct that mission or relocate those installations to another spot in the Antiquity. They have just proven themselves too irresponsible with history for us not to react. We will however have our hands full trying to counter both their operations ‘Trojan

Horse' and 'Olympus'. Thus, we will concentrate on countering their project 'Olympus' first, the one most dangerous for the integrity of history since it touches at timeline 'A'. Even then we are starting with a problem that has proven already to be a difficult one indeed: to find a time shuttle supposedly stolen from the World Council by a couple with a young son. The scoutship ANGEL OF MERCY waited near the predicted emergence point in 555 B.C.E. near Mount Olympus that had been provided by the World Council, but to no avail. Our time surveillance network did not detect the reemergence of that shuttle within a hundred years plus or minus of the indicated date. It did detect one unidentified possible reemergence in 420 B.C.E., but that one was over the western Mediterranean and nothing was detected flying around at that point and time by the ANGEL OF MERCY when it investigated that report."

Farah then smiled wryly at Nancy.

"What didn't help in that case was something we can thank you for, Nancy."

Pushing a button on her computer, she made a map of the Mediterranean Sea and of the surrounding countries appear. Hundreds if not thousands of red dots, each indicating a spacetime distortion detected by the Time Patrol network of surveillance satellites over the centuries, covered the land areas, with Greece, Italy, Palestine and Egypt being particularly covered with dots. The dot indicating the point investigated in 420 B.C.E. by the ANGEL OF MERCY was now all but lost in a sea of dots.

"Those are the spacetime distortions that you either left or will leave behind you around the Mediterranean between the 15<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. and the 7<sup>th</sup> century C.E., Nancy. The least I can say is that you are one prolific time traveler. It took the scoutship BRITANNIA a full three weeks of their relative time to confirm that you were in fact the source of those distortions."

A bit embarrassed, Nancy made an apologetic smile at Douglas Wilson, the pilot of the scoutship BRITANNIA, who was eyeing her and making a face.

"Uh, sorry about that, Doug. I hope you at least saw a few nice sights in the process."

"Oh, I sure did! You at least have good tastes when it comes to men...and women. I won't mention a few visits you did to the island of Lesbos."

There were a few laughs and giggles around the office at those words, while Mike Crawford smiled and winked once at Nancy. The latter looked back at the screen showing the dots, studying it. Something then occurred to her.

“Farah, could you trace a straight line from Boston, where the shuttle came from, to the suspected point of emergence in 420 B.C.E. and then extend it eastward?”

“Sure! Give me a second.”

A moment of stunned silence fell on the room when the line traced by Farah passed over Mount Olympus. Nancy sighed quietly.

“I knew it! The World Council shuttles must be equipped with very efficient cloaking devices. That one must thus have emerged at the point spotted by our satellite, then flew for an unknown distance under cloak. It however didn’t arrive in Mount Olympus, as we were right there and waiting under cloak.”

“But why emerge over the Mediterranean so far west of Greece and why in 420 B.C.E.?” Asked Peter Stilwell, the captain of the time cruiser KRONOS. Nancy shook slowly her head.

“I don’t know, Peter. Maybe that shuttle had mechanical problems. What I saw and heard in the London of 3387 ‘B’ indicated that the World Council was becoming critically short of qualified technicians, engineers and scientists because of the steady exodus to the Edon. That shortage in turn was causing major maintenance headaches in the World Council. Still, this is the best and only trail we have to find those three World Council citizens...if they are still alive.”

“That search could take a hell of a long time, Nancy.” Replied Stilwell. “A course deviation of a few degrees by that shuttle on emergence would mean a search footprint hundreds of kilometers wide. We are searching for three persons that may or may not be alive, something a lot less conspicuous than a ship or even a scooter. As I see it, we would need to comb an area of sea and land covering the northern half of Sardinia, the southern half of Italy and about the whole of Greece, plus about ten percent of the Mediterranean Sea. This is nearly hopeless.”

“Not so hopeless, Peter.” Disagreed Nancy. “We know that those three persons, if still alive, will most probably try to get by any means to their original intended destination: Mount Olympus. Only there will they get technical support and a safe refuge. We will have to concentrate our efforts on the roads and transport links leading to Mount Olympus. I intend anyway to do most of the searching myself. I have already a plan shaping in my head. Farah?”

“Go ahead, Nancy: nobody here will dispute your mastery of planning.”

“Thank you!”



Getting up from her sofa, she then went to the map of the Mediterranean world of the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. appearing on the wall viewing screen behind Farah Tolkonen and pointed at various points as she mentioned them.

“First of, our top priority now is to deny the use of the Mount Olympus installations to the World Council and to prevent them from being moved to another location. I propose that the transport GILGAMESH go there at night, physically root out the installations and remove them as soon as possible. I would only leave in place that single, separate pavilion that seems to be self-sufficient, so that our three lost World Council citizens could find shelter if they ever show up in Mount Olympus. Combat robots will be waiting in force there, ready to report back any visit by the World Council. They are mostly immune to the mental powers of World Council agents and have infinite patience, so they will be perfect for that role. We will also put in place a radio warning beacon that will emit continuously on multiple frequencies a short message warning the World Council that Mount Olympus is now out of bounds for them. One scoutship should be in long-term orbital watch as well over the site, to provide an armed response if needed.”

“And what will prevent World Council agents from taking control of the minds of that scoutship’s crew, Nancy?” Asked Carmen Sanchez, the senior scoutship pilot. Nancy in turn looked at Farah.

“Farah, this is more your domain than mine. I know that the Imperium ‘B’ had an emitter that neutralized psyonic powers. Could we use something like it to fashion some protection against psyonic waves for our people?”

“It should actually be fairly simple, in theory. We already use extensively remote control systems that receive commands via mental waves. We also found that Imperium anti-psyonic emitter inside the royal escape pod of the battleship ROYAL SOVEREIGN. I or my timeline ‘B’ counterpart could probably develop quite quickly an individual protective device against psyonic waves.”

“Then we should make that a priority, Farah. Just make sure that it won’t give me a headache every time I go near a member or ship of the Time Patrol.”

“Point taken, Nancy. What else?”

“Well, those measures should take care of Mount Olympus. As for our three stray time travelers, we can start by posting an extensive network of spy probes that will cover every port on the coasts of Central and Southern Italy and of Greece. Those probes will have in their computers a facial recognition program with the faces of young

Heracles and of his parents in memory. If any of those three show up to take a ship for Greece or arrive there by ship, we will know nearly immediately and will then be able to pick them up. To supplement these probes, I intend to implement a ground search along the most probable land routes in Italy that a traveler trying to head towards Greece would take. The agents assigned to that search should not depart before we devise an anti-psyonic waves protective device, though. I envision four pairs of agents to assist me in the ground search in Italy, all on robotic horses and all of them assault specialists. That ground search job will be a risky one for all involved in it; I won't hide that from you. Those four pairs of agents will sweep northwards along the four main North-South roads and land routes in Italy, while I will travel southwards down the western coastal road of Italy. Since I have very little to fear from World Council psyonics, I intend to leave tomorrow, alone. Nauca the Sarmatian warrior will ride again."

**15:57 (Italy Time)**

**Monday, September 12, 420 B.C.E.**

**Mediterranean Sea, off the coast of Latium**

**Western coast, Central Italy**

Heracles broke through the surface of the sea and avidly gulped air, having nearly drowned while escaping from the sinking time shuttle. Melina's last act of blowing away the escape hatch by firing its explosive bolts had saved him from dying with the two adults that had stayed trapped in the flooded craft. Now bobbing up and down the waves, the boy quickly became cold, with his sole clothes being a pair of leather sandals and a short Greek tunic called a chiton. Thankfully, Heracles had learned how to swim and he could stay on the surface without problems. He looked around him for a few minutes, hoping still that Glen and Melina could have somehow escaped from the doomed shuttle, but nobody came to the surface after him. Tears and sobs came to him as he realized that he was lost, alone in a distant past. He couldn't even tell where he was now, as Glen had shouted something after reemergence about their shuttle being completely off course. Spotting land in the distance, Heracles, still despondent about the loss of his surrogate parents, started swimming towards it. He was unfortunately still too young and insufficiently trained to use his mental powers to fly on anything but very short distances without growing excessively tired and had to keep swimming old fashioned style.

Thankfully the sea was fairly calm and he was able to make good time. The coast was however a good two kilometers away and he had to slow down a number of times to recuperate despite his uncommon muscular strength and good physical shape. He was still more than half a kilometer away from the coast and was nearly ready to give up, chilled and exhausted, when a human shout made him snap his head to the right. The next wave that raised him allowed him to spot a tiny boat with two men on board that were waving at him. Hope coming back, he used the last of his strength to swim to the boat, which was also approaching him. A few minutes later he was pulled out of the water and into a small wooden boat by a man with a graying beard and a young man in his early twenties. From the net and the dead fish resting in the bottom of the boat, Heracles understood that he had been rescued by fishermen. The two men, who were naked save for loincloths, were looking down at him with interest while chatting in a language unknown to Heracles. Whatever it was, it was not Greek. The older man tried a few times to communicate with him but his responses in Greek drew a blank. Heracles finally pointed at himself, using the simplest form of communication he knew of.

“Heracles.”

Both fishermen nodded their heads in comprehension and pointed at themselves as well, pronouncing a single word each. The older man turned out to be named Ilius and the younger one Sardus. Giving up on further attempts at communicating, the fishermen grabbed short oars and started rowing towards the shore. Left alone at the bottom of the boat, Heracles was able to recuperate somewhat and to warm up under the rays of the sun, which was already going down towards the horizon.

The boat reached the shore about forty minutes later on a small, sandy beach in a cove that sheltered a tiny, primitive village. There were fourteen small houses and huts made of wood and mud along the beach and about fifty men, women and children were visible around, busy at various tasks. Heracles jumped out of the boat and into the low water and helped his two saviors drag the boat out of the water, pulling it besides six similar boats. Curious villagers quickly surrounded Heracles as Ilius spoke to them, probably telling them about how they had found him. One man that seemed to have some authority in the village examined carefully Heracles, touching his muscular arms and legs and looking at his teeth. Surprised at first and not knowing what this could mean apart of simple curiosity, Heracles let him do his inspection but reddened in

embarrassment when the man raised the front of his tunic, exposing his genitals, and said something that made the women and girls around giggle. Heracles found himself to be actually as tall as the men of the village and was much taller and bigger than the generally scrawny boys that seemed to be his age. Most of the young children of the village were naked, with only the adult women being fully clothed in long tunics made of very rough wool. The men, many of whom had knives at their belts, mostly wore either short tunics or loincloths. Ilius soon led Heracles to one of the houses, a primitive wooden building with only two small rooms in it. There was an open hearth with a smoldering fire in it in the middle of the main room, where an old woman and a young woman were kneeling and preparing some kind of stew in a clay pot. The women eyed Heracles with curiosity as Ilius spoke to them before leaving. The boy was then made to sit in a corner, Ilius using sign language for this. The young woman soon brought him a wooden cup full of water and put a piece of dried fish in his right hand. She frowned in reprobation when Heracles cautiously sniffed the smelly fish, being accustomed to modern food. That brought the whole reality of his situation to the boy, who quickly took a bite off his piece of fish and chewed on it with apparent content to placate his host. In reality he was tempted to spit out the rancid fish but he now understood that this was about the best he would get in this impoverished village. He secretly hoped that the rest of this world would include some places less primitive than this as he ate in his corner, discreetly watched from time to time by the young woman.

Ilius and Sardus soon entered the house through its narrow door and sat around the fire, with Sardus exchanging kisses with the young woman. The four villagers then served themselves some stew and started eating supper, mostly ignoring Heracles while discussing in their local language. That let the boy plenty of time to reflect on his grim situation. Instead of the life of honors and adulation Glen and Melina had told him repeatedly about, he was now lost in a primitive time period, alone and without any resources save his own wits. The worst part was that this had never been his own choice: he had been conceived artificially and raised for something he still didn't clearly understand by surrogate parents with dreams of grandeur. With the time shuttle now at the bottom of the sea, he was trapped for good in the past. The only hope left to him was if he could somehow find his way to Mount Olympus in Greece, where there was a hidden base according to Glen and Melina. Still tired by his long swimming session and

with no artificial light used by the villagers except for their fire, Heracles soon fell asleep on the dirt floor as darkness fell.

He was roughly awakened at dawn by Sardus, who led him outside and made him understand by sign language that he was to collect dead wood around the village and bring it back to fuel their fire. Sardus then left him to his task, with another boy assigned to follow Heracles around. There was a distinct lack of warmth from the villagers as Heracles proceeded with his work during the day and food and water was brought to him nearly as an afterthought. Heracles got a bad feeling from all this but, at the age of eight, his limited experience of life had ill prepared him for such a situation and he basically did as he was indicated to do. Another task he was given was to go with three women collect water in clay jars from a small spring a few hundred meters from the village. The ease with which he carried on his shoulders two heavy jars filled to the brim seemed to astound the women, who chatted animatedly with the village chief on their return, pointing repeatedly at Heracles. The village chief simply nodded in apparent satisfaction and then let the women use the boy for more physical tasks around the village. Heracles was dead tired and not a little hungry when he was finally allowed to go to sleep in Ilius' house shortly before sunset.

Heracles was brutally awakened at dawn by two men who jumped on him and tied his hands in his back with a rough rope despite his surprised protests. He looked at the old woman of the house, pleading with his eyes for help as he was being led outside, but she averted his eyes and turned her head away. Both bitter and frightened, Heracles was pushed towards a group of three men standing on the beach and that were not from the village. They were armed with knives and swords and there was no pity or sympathy in their eyes as one of them inspected Heracles roughly before discussing with the village chief, who was standing nearby with Ilius. After what sounded like a harsh banter, the man who had inspected Heracles handed some small silver and gold objects to the village chief, then stripped the boy of his short chiton and leather sandals, leaving him completely naked. The clothes were thrown to Ilius, who greedily grabbed them, along with a few of the silver pieces given to the village chief. The two villagers then turned around and left Heracles in the hands of the three armed men, who roughly pushed him along a trail that led away from the village. Heracles understood with disgust and horror that he had just been sold like a vulgar object by the

villagers to the armed men. He had learned about that revolting concept called slavery that was supposedly common in the dark ages of humanity, but living it was a lot worse than simply reading about it. The trail eventually crossed what could nearly be called a dirt road. A small, four-wheeled chariot pulled by two mules and watched over by another armed man waited by the entrance of the trail. The chariot had a wooden cage in its back. As the men pushed Heracles towards the back of the chariot, the boy saw with horror that there were already two persons in the cage, a young girl and a woman, both totally naked. The door of the cage was unlocked with a primitive key and Heracles was pushed inside. Feeling more desperate than ever, the boy eyed his two companions of misfortune as the cage was locked again and the men sat in the chariot before urging their two mules southward along the dirt road. The young girl was approximately twelve years old and had black hair and the same kind of brown skin as he had. She was skinny and her body bore the marks of a recent beating but her pretty face still showed grim resolve. The woman was around twenty years old and was very pretty and feminine, with large and firm breasts, but her face reflected only helpless despair. The young girl spoke to him first in the local language, her broken and hesitant words showing that this was not her native language. When Heracles shrugged in incomprehension she switched to Greek, to the boy's delight.

"Do you speak Greek, by chance?"

"Yes, I do! Are you Greek?"

"I am a Spartan." Answered proudly the girl, her tone defiant as she glanced at her captors. "Nobody will ever break me. And you, where are you from?" That made Heracles hesitate: he could not simply tell her that he was from the future, as she would probably laugh at him in disbelief.

"Uh, I'm from Olympus. My name is Heracles."

"And I'm Tera. How did they catch you?"

Heracles lowered his head as bad souvenirs came back to his mind.

"My ship sank near the coast and my parents drowned. I was saved by fishermen but they just sold me off as if I was a mere object."

Tera nodded once, sympathy showing on her face.

"My own ship also sank after being attacked by pirates as we were heading towards Massilia<sup>10</sup>, where we were hoping to start a new life. My own parents were

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<sup>10</sup> Massilia: Name of Greek city-colony that became modern day Marseilles

killed and me and Lydia, who is an Illyrian, were the only ones spared and then sold to these slavers.”

“And what will happen to us next, Tera?” Asked Heracles, dread in his voice. Some despair then showed up through the façade of defiance of the girl.

“We are heading towards Rome, where we will be sold to the highest bidder. From then on, our future will be in the hands of others and we will be treated like mere possessions.”

Touched by her despair and himself fearful of what was to come, Heracles moved to sit besides the girl and passed one arm around her shoulders. Tera was a good fifteen centimeters shorter than him and she felt tiny to Heracles. He did appreciate her warmth in the early autumn morning air. She in turn hugged him and looked up at him.

“We have more chances to face this together than alone, Heracles. What do you think?”

“You are right, I believe. But what can we do?”

“We could try to escape when we have a chance. Maybe we could then find a ship that could take us back to Greece.”

“If we could do that, where in Greece would you like to go? Sparta?”

Bitterness showed on her face as she shook her head twice.

“I can’t! My parents had to flee Sparta because of bad debts. If I go back there, I will be sold into slavery again in order to help pay my parents’ debts.”

Heracles closed his eyes, crushed by the cruelty of this world. Tears were next and he cried shamelessly, watched by Tera. She searched for his hand and grabbed it.

“You are big and strong, Heracles, like your hero namesake. You shouldn’t lose courage so easily. How old are you?”

“Eight!”

His subdued answer made Tera open her mouth in surprise.

“Only eight? And I thought that you were at least twelve.”

“And you?” Said Heracles, strangling out his sobs.

“I am twelve. Heracles, we should try to escape before we arrive in Rome. Once there, it will become much more difficult to do so and we could also be separated.”

The chariot suddenly came to a halt and three of the armed men jumped out of it, going to the back of the cage. The door of the cage was then unlocked and a man entered it, grabbing roughly Tera by an arm and pulling her out. The door was locked again before Heracles could react and Tera was dragged screaming and kicking towards the trees.

One of the men made a mean smile at Heracles as the boy came out of his paralyzing fear and threw himself at the door, trying to shake it open.

“You thought that we couldn’t speak Greek, hey? Your girlfriend will now get a good lesson that will teach her how to behave and obey.”

“Let her go, you cowardly bastard!” Raged Heracles, putting all his strength in trying to break the door of the cage open. The cage was however a sturdy one, reinforced with iron loops, and it resisted his efforts, even though some of the wooden bars started to break. The slaver didn’t notice that, being already on his way to join his two comrades. Heracles could only watch and listen with helpless rage as the three men gang-raped and beat up Tera. The girl was thrown back in the cage, soiled and bloodied, fifteen minutes later. Heracles immediately hugged protectively the crying girl and shot a murderous look at the chief slaver.

“You will pay for this!”

The man suddenly held his head with both hands and grimaced with intense pain. Heracles however shifted his attention to Tera and the man was left wondering what had happened as his headache disappeared as quickly as it had come. Putting it on the account of the intense sun beating on his head, he joined the other men on the chariot, which resumed its slow trip towards Rome.

They made a brief stop at noon for lunch by the side of the road. The three prisoners were put into leg irons chained together and were permitted to get out of their cage in order to relieve themselves in the woods. They were then given some water but no food but could at least benefit from the shade of the trees for a short while. Lydia, who spoke no Greek, stayed silent all the while, the image of resigned prostration. Tera, whom Heracles comforted as well as he could without showing off his mental powers, had by now regained some of her initial combativeness, showing a resilience Heracles could only admire. The slavers, who kept food only for themselves, ate a frugal meal of cheese and bread and forced their prisoners back in the cage after twenty minutes. The chariot then rolled until sunset, crossing at increasing frequency other travelers and chariots as they got closer to Rome. The road also got progressively better and larger and became paved as they arrived in view of Rome. When they stopped again, this time for the night, Heracles debated if he should take that opportunity to try to escape with Tera but thought better of it. He could maybe dispose of one or two of the men but he and Tera would then probably be killed by the surviving slavers. They were also still



chained together and, as strong as he knew he was, he still wasn't strong enough to break their chain, which had been wrapped around a tree so that they couldn't run away during the night. At least they were given some bread to eat for supper, which helped calm some of Heracles' hunger pains. While the slavers slept rolled into wool blankets besides their campfire, Heracles, Tera and Lydia had to huddle close together on the long grass, still naked. The night became quite fresh and they quickly started shivering, making the three of them press together to share body heat, with Tera in the middle. Heracles couldn't help caress her hair while looking into her eyes and smiling, to which she responded by a smile and by putting an arm around him. Next, Heracles applied gently his hands in succession on the spots where she sported bruises, slowly healing them through his mind the way he had been taught to do like all the children of the World Council and of Edon. With the sources of her pain soothing down one after the other, Tera sighed with relief and glued herself even closer to Heracles, who soon experienced an involuntary erection that pressed against Tera's belly. She looked down and then smiled to him.

“You've got a big one...for a big boy.”

She then giggled and hugged him tight. They stayed as quiet as they could in order not to attract the attention of the slavers but that didn't save Lydia from a late night visit by one of the men, who raped her right besides the two children. Tera and Heracles could only close their eyes and try to ignore the muffled sobs of Lydia, who did her best not to traumatize the children by screaming or crying loudly while the man was on top of her. Thankfully, none of the slavers decided to have fun with Tera that night, probably deciding that she should be kept in the best shape possible in order to draw the best price.

### **08:46 (Italy Time)**

**Thursday, September 15, 420 B.C.E.**

### **Slave market, Rome**

The fat trader had the woman and two children lined up, still naked and dirty from their trip, in front of him and then inspected them one by one. His trained eyes had however already caught on Heracles as a particularly worthy prize but he kept an impassive face so that the four brutes that had brought the new merchandise would not

know how interested he was by the boy. The woman was first of the lot to be inspected by him. He checked her teeth, then fondled her breasts.

“Firm chest, nice shapes: she will make a fine nurse or party girl for a few years.” Tera was next, her face a mask of defiance. The trader grabbed her jaw and forced her to look up at him, something that made the boy next to her tense up as if to jump on the trader, who made a mean grin.

“Oh oh! A couple of young lovers, or are they brother and sister?”

“They were caught separately, sir.” Answered the head brute. “The boy grew protective of her. Both are Greek and don’t speak Latin. The boy is very strong and...”

“I will be the judge of that.” Cut firmly the trader, who then looked back down at the girl. “She looks like a real troublemaker to me. She’s also skinny. I suppose that you already had your fun with her?”

The silence from the brutes was enough of an answer for the trader, who stepped in front of Heracles and touched the muscles in his arms and legs, then checked his teeth. The trader had to secretly admit that this boy was about the healthiest slave he had ever seen and was powerfully built for a mere child. He looked coldly at the head brute, dropping his price in a take-it-or-leave-it tone.

“I will give you 110 bronze As for the lot: thirty for the woman; ten for the girl and seventy for the boy. The girl would have brought an additional twenty As if she would have been still a virgin.”

“Only 110 As?” Exploded the head brute, prompting the four huge men standing behind the trader in giving him mean, warning looks. “The boy alone is worth more than that.”

The trader’s answer was to turn around and walk away, followed by his bodyguards. The head slaver panicked at possibly losing the chance to sell to the best-known trader of slaves in Rome and shouted at him.

“Wait! How about 150 As? Uh, 140 As!”

The trader slowed down and looked briefly behind him.

“I’ll give 120 and not an As more!”

“Deal!”

The trader turned around again and went to the head slaver while taking a heavy leather bag from one of his bodyguards. He then counted 120 big bronze coins in the hands of the slaver, who quickly left with the money and his three partners. The trader next called his head foreman and pointed his three new slaves to him.

“Rufus, have these three cleaned up and fed and prepare them for tomorrow’s auction. Keep the boy and girl together for the moment. By the way, they speak Greek.”

“It will be done, sir.” Replied the tall, thin man, who then had an assistant take away the woman. The head foreman led himself the two children to one of the baths of the establishment, where a middle-aged woman was officiating.

“Clara, give a good scrub to those two. I will pick them up afterwards. They speak Greek.”

Clara eyed with interest Heracles while smiling.

“Now that’s what I call a nice-looking boy.” She said in Greek. “It’s a good thing that you are not in Athens: one of those buggers would have slammed you in the ass pretty quick.”

She then laughed loudly and signaled Heracles to approach her. Taking a wet sponge from a basin full of water, she then started scrubbing down the boy, working quickly and efficiently. Clara next had Heracles dunk his head in a barrel full of water and scrubbed vigorously his hair with her fingers. Sending him to soak in a large stone bath full of warm water, the cleaning lady next washed up Tera, showing gentleness with her: Clara was after all a slave herself and had gone through the same ordeal as Tera when she was young. The fact that Caius the slave trader had enough good commercial sense to treat his merchandise with care had allowed Clara to have a tolerable life up to now. Washing the girl’s hair took a while, though, as Clara had to undo her braids, which were full of dirt and dried salt from seawater. Tera finally ended up in the bath with Heracles, dipping herself up to the neck in the warm water with a sigh of relief.

“At least this part is not too bad.”

“Yeah, until we are sold to some man who will abuse you at will.” Replied Heracles in a bitter tone. Clara, who was changing the water in her basin, pointed a warning finger at him.

“Boy, you should be careful about what you say and on what tone you say it from now on. Whoever will own you will have the power of life or death over you and could flog you at will. A slave has no rights in Rome. You can just hope for a kind master.”

“I was not born to be someone’s object!” Raged Heracles. He then realized with bitterness that his own people of the World Council had done just that to him: he had been conceived via In Vitro fertilization and from carefully selected and manipulated DNA with the specific goal of preparing him to go to the past as the Greek hero Hercules. That the project had been hastily cancelled two years ago did little to lessen

the fact that his people had used him from the very start of his life. Heracles then retreated in a brooding silence. Tera swam to him and hugged him, looking gravely into his eyes.

“Heracles, I’m scared.”

“Me too!” Said Heracles, a lump forming in his throat. “But I will do my best to protect you, Tera.”

The Spartan girl pressed her head against his chest, a tear appearing at the corner of one eye.

“If we can stay together, then we will be alright.”

Clara, despite being hardened by years of slavery, couldn’t help shed a tear too on hearing that.

### **10:53 (Italy Time)**

**Friday, September 16, 420 B.C.E.**

#### **Slave market, Rome**

Flavius Aurelius Quintus never let his majordomo or other servant choose a slave for him when he needed to buy one. The servants of a house, down to the lowest slave, reflected on that house and Flavius Aurelius was too conscious of his rank to let anything detract on his name or that of his family. That was also one of the reasons why he treated his slaves well by local standards: happy slaves made for a better atmosphere in the house. It also made them more productive and they lived longer, something not negligible in view of the prices slaves went for these days. Another factor that Flavius was not about to admit about why he treated his slaves well was that his wife Milvia wouldn’t let anyone treat them badly. Years ago, as Flavius was leading an army in the field against the Etruscans, his wife and her suite had been ambushed by raiders while on the way to join him, with Milvia being captured by the Etruscans. Promised to slavery, she had been saved in extremis by a detachment of Roman cavalry as she was being led away naked and in chains. Milvia had built an empathy with her slaves ever since, even making a habit of enfranchising her slaves after a few years of good services. That was a potentially expensive habit but, to Milvia’s credit, the enfranchised slaves tended to stay on in the service of the family and to serve well until old age. Flavius’ two bodyguards were in fact enfranchised slaves in which he had total confidence.

There was quite a crowd this morning in the slave market of the Forum, the main market area of Rome situated near the Capitol and the Palatinus. Most of the people were just onlookers who would enjoy the often juicy exchanges between the traders and the prospective customers and also have a peek at the naked girls and women being sold off. There would even be some old widows too poor to buy slaves who would come admire the young men on sale. While obviously not an old widow or a voyeur, Flavius was after a young and strong male slave that could provide a solid ten or twenty years of work and also produce many strong slaves in the future. That last goal of course implied having lots of young, pretty and healthy girls to help produce those slaves, so Flavius was also in the market for a few girls as well. One of his bodyguards had slung over one shoulder a leather pouch with enough gold ingots and bronze coins to buy such slaves.

Flavius approached the selling platform as a young woman was just being given away to a customer who had disbursed the fair sum of sixty bronze As for her. Looking at the naked slave, Flavius judged that, while beautiful and in her early twenties, she was already getting too old for what he wanted: slaves tended to live short lives and child rearing was hard on female slaves. What he wanted were girls in their early teens, who would have the most years available to have many babies. Really young ones would also have the benefit of being unable yet to become pregnant from the morons who had captured them and, most likely, raped them. Flavius didn't want to get an unwanted surprise of low bloodline in a few months. His attention was then drawn as the slave trader who was currently monopolizing the platform announced that it was time for the sale of teenagers and children. A teenage girl was then brought on the platform. She was maybe fourteen years old, was extremely pretty and had long blond hair. The trader started shouting his arguments as the naked girl was made to slowly turn around to show herself to the crowd.

"We have here a prime slave girl from Celtic stock, tall, strong and beautiful. The bidding will start at fifty bronze As."

"Sixty!" Immediately shouted a man wearing a rich toga. Another man then raised the ante to 65, with the first replying by going to 70 As. Flavius then got in the game and bid 80 As, something that made the two other bidders hesitate. It was already a lot of money but that Celtic girl was truly of prime stock and would be about perfect for Flavius' needs.

"I give 85 As!" Said the man in the toga.

"I raise to 95!" Replied Flavius, making it sound clearly that he was ready to go much higher yet if need be. The other man gave up in disgust and the pleased trader conceded the sale to Flavius, bringing down the girl along with an assistant that collected the money from Flavius and quickly recorded the sale with him. The patrician took a short, sleeveless tunic, or stola, from a bag carried by one of his bodyguards and put it on the Celtic girl, who was actually as tall as him despite her young age. A rope was then passed around the girl's waist, its end held by a bodyguard: it was a much less humiliating way to secure a slave in public than chaining them by the neck, as was the normal custom.

A second young girl was then brought up on the platform but it quickly became apparent to Flavius and the others in the crowd that something was happening behind the platform: the girl was being forcibly dragged up the stairs while she kept looking down and behind the platform, where there seemed to be some kind of disturbance. Flavius, who spoke Greek like many Roman nobles, heard a boy shout with despair in his voice.

"LET ME GO! I MUST STAY WITH HER! LET ME GO, I TELL YOU!"

There was a noise of metal clanking on the pavement behind the platform and a naked boy then ran up the stairs, closely pursued by two of the trader's henchmen. The man who had dragged the girl up on the platform let go his hold on her and faced the boy rushing him, his club held high. That proved to be a mistake for him, as the girl then kicked him in the testicles from behind, making him collapse to his knees with a grunt of pain. The boy then pushed him out of the way with apparent ease and posted himself resolutely in front of the girl, facing the two incoming goons. Flavius, as a veteran of many military battles, couldn't help admire the courage of the big boy and his fidelity to the girl, who was also proving to be quite a feisty type and had grabbed the club from the man she had downed. Because of the narrowness of the stairs of the platform, the goons had to attack one behind the other, rushing at the boy with their big, bare hands. The boy then astounded everybody present by delivering a single, lightning-quick right hook that connected with the first goon's jaw with a sharp crack and knocked the man out cold. The second goon watched with disbelief his comrade crumple down in a heap and earned an uppercut under the jaw for his hesitation. The impact actually made his feet lift from the platform and he fell backward down the stairs, also knocked out. The

boy then grabbed quickly the club presented to him by the girl. Backing to a corner of the platform and shielding the girl with his body, the boy held the club high and looked at the trader with fierce eyes.

“NOBODY WILL TAKE TERA AWAY FROM ME!”

“CALL THE GUARDS!” Shouted the trader, near panic. That was when Flavius decided to intervene and shouted as loudly as he could.

“NOBODY TOUCHES THAT BOY AND GIRL! I WILL TAKE BOTH FOR 250 BRONZE AS!”

His shout brought silence around the platform and both the children and the slave trader looked down at Flavius. To his credit, the trader recovered his composure quickly and shouted around him.

“I HAVE 250 AS FOR THIS SPECIAL PAIR! WHO WILL RAISE THIS BID?”

“MAKE IT 280 AS!” Quickly shouted the man in the toga, who now wanted badly that incredibly strong boy, like many in the crowd. Flavius Aurelius eventually nailed the deal with a bid of 340 As, to the satisfaction of the trader, who had not hoped for so much at first from the separate sale of the boy and girl. Going in person with one bodyguard on the platform, Flavius paid the trader and got his certificate, then cautiously approached the boy, who was still shielding the girl but had lowered his club. Flavius’ own bodyguard had drawn his short sword and stood ready to protect him in case the boy attacked again. The patrician presented his empty hands to the boy and spoke calmly to him in Greek.

“Calm down boy and drop the club. You won’t be separated from your friend, I swear: I bought both of you. I am Flavius Aurelius Quintus, a senator of Rome.”

The boy eyed him carefully, creating a funny feeling inside Flavius’ head for a moment, then put down the club and spoke back.

“I’m Heracles, from Olympus, and my friend is Tera, from Sparta. What will happen to us now?”

“I will bring you to my house, where you will be fed and well treated. In exchange, I will expect good, honest work from you.”

The boy and the girl exchanged a brief look before the boy nodded to Flavius.

“We will follow you peacefully, sir.”

“That’s good. Otherwise, the city’s archers would have been obliged to shoot you, which would have been a true pity.”

The two children snapped their heads around and only then saw the dozen Roman archers standing ready around the market.

“You are a brave boy and, as a soldier, I admire that. You however have to accept your present fate. Come with me.”

To Flavius' relief the boy followed him quietly. The senator inspected quickly the man that had been knocked out first by Heracles: a big bruise on his chin was already turning blue and his jaw seemed to have been broken. That a mere boy of maybe twelve could do this was incredible. The two men and two children climbed down from the platform and joined up with Flavius' second bodyguard and the Celtic girl. Short tunics were then given to the two Greek children. Tying up at the waist his new acquisitions with the same rope as the Celtic girl, Flavius and his bodyguards then proceeded in single file back to the palatial house of the Aurelius family.

Once inside the central court of the house and with the gates closed and under guard, the rope tying together the three slaves was removed and the teenagers brought to the servants' quarters while Flavius went to see his wife to tell her about his new acquisitions. Heracles, somehow expecting that they would be chained or put in isolated cells, was greatly relieved to see that the head servant, a Greek slave with apparently good education, simply made them sit on a stone bench in the servants' kitchen and had them served bread and cheese. Armed with a tablet and a piece of chalk the head slave, who was actually the majordomo of the house and was named Praxis, took a stool and sat facing Heracles.

“Alright, boy, tell me your name, place of birth, your age, the name of your parents and how you ended up in Rome.”

Heracles had to think for a second about that, as he could obviously not tell the simple truth, nor could he pretend to be THE hero Heracles without starting something he could not control afterwards. His young mind, while extremely well educated by the time period's standards, didn't have however the experience and deviousness an adult would have. He thus made it up the best he could.

“My name is Heracles and I'm from Olympus, in Northern Greece. I am eight years old and...”

“Wait!” Cut off the stunned majordomo. “You are only eight? But, you are big enough to be twelve or more.”

Heracles smiled and shrugged.



“That’s the way I am, I guess. My parents drowned when our ship sank two days ago off the coast. Fishermen picked me up but sold me the day later to slavers.”

Praxis nodded, passing over the fact that Heracles had not given the names of his parents: it wasn’t really important now since they were dead.

“Did you get an education? Do you know how to read, write or count?”

“I can read and write Greek and I know basic mathematics, geography, history and physics.”

Praxis looked up sharply from his tablet: this was a lot more than what he expected. The word ‘physics’ was also unfamiliar to him.

“Physics? What’s that?”

Caught short, Heracles just blurted out the simplest explanation he could think of.

“Uh, that’s the science that explain the laws of nature, how things are made, how they behave and so on.”

“Oh, I see: cosmology. Did you study the great historian Herodotus?”

“Uh, yes, a little bit.” Answered Heracles, who had followed mnemotronic sessions on Greek history, sociology, arts and mythology while being educated by the World Council. He could not tell Praxis that his World Council teacher on Greek history had declared to him that Herodotus was basically full of shit. Praxis then handed him the chalkboard and chalk.

“Here! Write down your name in Greek, then add five and nine together.”

Heracles did so quickly and without mistakes, making Praxis smile with satisfaction.

“Excellent! You are indeed a well-educated boy and you seem to be in perfect health. Let’s see how your girlfriend fares.”

Letting Heracles continue to eat, Praxis shifted his stool to be in front of Tera, who eyed him with suspicion.

“Are you Athenian?”

“No, I am from Megara. Let me guess: you are from Sparta. You are arrogant enough to be a Spartan.”

Tera grinned with malice and bit on her bread, then spoke while chewing.

“Yes, I am Spartan and proud to be. My name is Tera, I’m twelve years old and my parents were killed two weeks ago when our ship was attacked by pirates while on its way to Massilia. I can’t read, write or count but I can catch hares with my bare hands and shoot a bow.”

Sighing with exasperation, Praxis pointed a warning index at Tera.

“Listen to me well, young girl!. What you are now is a slave, no more. The master is to be called ‘Dominus’ inside this house and his wife is to be called ‘Lady Milvia’ or ‘Domina’. You are to show the proper respect to the master, his family and his guests at all times. You are especially to be careful not to be disrespectful to him in front of guests or you will earn a flogging, a few days in a cell without food or both. Count yourself lucky that your master is Flavius Aurelius Quintus, as he is one of the kindest masters you could find in Rome, but don’t push his patience.”

He then shifted position again, sitting in front of the Celtic girl, who had not said a word yet. He tried questioning her in Latin, Greek and Thracian but couldn’t get through to her. Heracles then spoke up after looking at the Celt.

“The trader said that she was Celtic, Praxis. I also think that her name is Boecia.”

“Thanks, boy! Damn, we don’t have anybody in the house who speaks Celtic.”

“They have hundreds of various dialects anyway, Praxis. I guess that she will have to learn Latin, like me and Tera.”

Praxis looked keenly at Heracles.

“You are decidedly quite bright, boy. Using you solely for physical tasks will be a waste. Talking of tasks, you will now start earning the money the master spent on you. Follow me!”

Heracles had to take Boecia’s hand and make signs to her while reading her mind to make her understand that they were needed to work. The tall blonde, who stood at 165 centimeters like Heracles, gave him a resigned smile and followed. Praxis led the three of them to a kind of large stone tub sitting in a corner of the kitchen, empty. He then pointed at the house’s water well, situated in the central courtyard.

“This tub is used to wash the kitchen’s pots and utensils. Servants already drained away the old, dirty water. You will use the buckets here and fill them at the well, then transfer the water into that tub. Get to work!”

The three youngsters each grabbed two wooden buckets and went to the water well, which had a hand crank to lower a rope with a hook to the water below. The three of them quickly decided on a routine, with Boecia and Tera filling and winching up the buckets of water and with Heracles carrying the full buckets to the tub in the kitchen and emptying them. The heavy buckets, weighing each about twenty kilos when full, proved no big burden for Heracles, who could easily carry four times that load. He was on his third round trip when he noticed a richly dressed Roman woman in her late thirties that

was watching him from one corner of the courtyard. He however went on with his work and didn't stare at her. She was gone out of sight by the time he was on his fifth trip.

Praxis put them successively through a variety of jobs during the afternoon, gradually shifting Tera, then Boecia to kitchen or laundry duties while keeping Heracles for the truly physical work. The other slaves of the household quickly marveled at his strength, with one Greek man joking that he must be the actual hero Heracles. The boy gave him a funny look but didn't say a word then. The three children were finally reunited for supper, when they sat in the servants' kitchen to eat with the other slaves of the household. The two girls looked quite tired when Heracles sat besides them at one of the two tables after getting his bowl of stew and cup of water. Tera looked up and down at her friend, frowning and making Heracles look back at her.

"What?"

"How come you don't look tired? Did you take a break or what?"

"Did I take a break? Tera! Didn't you see me hauling those ceramic roof tiles up the stairs?"

Tera touched his chest, checking for sweat, and then sniffed his shoulder.

"But you hardly sweat at all! Are you sure that you are only eight years old? Let me see!"

She then playfully pulled up the bottom of his tunic and looked at his groin.

"I see your first body hairs starting to come out. You must be at least eleven."

"No! I'm eight! That's because the way I was made."

Heracles then realized too late that he had said too much: those who could understand Greek in the room now were looking questioningly at him. Tera then pursued him on the subject.

"What do you mean, the way you were made? I may be only twelve but I know how babies are made. Do they have another way to do them in Olympus?"

"Hey," cut in a man from Thracia, on the northeast border of Greece, "isn't Olympus near Mount Olympus? Maybe a god came down from his mountain and played with his mother."

The Greeks in the room then looked with wide eyes at Heracles: in his ignorance, the Thracian's joke had actually depicted the mythological story of the birth of the hero Heracles, who had been conceived when the almighty god Zeus had taken human shape for one night to make love to a mortal woman. Young Heracles knew that fable

well, as it had been part of his mnemotronic lessons on ancient Greece. For a moment he was tempted to say that he was the legendary hero, something that could probably help him greatly in getting back to Greece and Mount Olympus. He then realized that placing the hero Heracles in Republican Rome would be wrong and could change history in ways he couldn't even imagine. He thus lowered his head, unable to face Tera.

"Alright, I give up: I'm twelve years old."

"I knew it!" Said Tera triumphantly. The Thracian was not satisfied with that explanation, however.

"Wait a minute! Being twelve doesn't explain your strength, boy."

"Hey, my father was twice your size, mister." Replied Heracles. In this he was not far from the truth, as he had been told that parts of his genes had come from the strongest and biggest man in the World Council, an anomaly of a man who stood close to two meters tall and weighed well past 150 kilos, with no fat. That man would actually have easily passed on as the hero Heracles but the scientists of the World Council wanted someone even stronger. So they took this man's genes and had enhanced them further, apart of splicing them with the genes from one of the women of the World Council with the strongest psynic abilities. One of the Greek slaves then came unknowingly to his help.

"If his father was anything like the famed Milon of Crotone<sup>11</sup>, then I could see why he could be so big and strong for his age."

Approving comments went around the kitchen and Heracles was finally able to eat his stew in peace. He didn't take notice when Praxis, who had been eating at the other table, got up and left the kitchen. Seeing his big appetite, the graying woman who was the servants' cook poured what was left of the pot of stew in Heracles' bowl as he was spooning the last of his initial portion. Heracles returned her smiled and attacked his stew with gusto. He suddenly realized that Boecia was looking with envy at his bowl and was obviously still hungry. Her problem was that the cook had given her a woman's portion but Boecia was actually taller than half of the men present. Without hesitation Heracles poured half of his stew in her bowl, then put two spoonfuls in Tera's bowl. His generosity drew a pleased nod from the cook and big smiles from the two girls, plus a

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<sup>11</sup> Milon of Crotone: Greek athlete of the Sixth century B.C.E. famous for his immense strength and size.

kiss on the cheek from Tera that made him redden in embarrassment. That in turn made the adult slaves laugh.

After the supper, Praxis had the three young new slaves brought to a quiet storeroom where an old slave in his late forties was waiting with small terracotta figures, chalkboards and pieces of chalk. The old man then spent over an hour until sunset to start teaching them the rudiments of Latin. By the end of the lesson, servants around the big house were lighting torches around the building. One female Greek servant showed up to pick up the three youngsters and brought them down to a small room used by female slaves to wash. Heracles had to take off his tunic, like the two girls, but was then surprised to see the female servant inspect his groin closely, then doing the same with the girls but also making those two open their legs so she could look from up close. The intrigued boy was then told to wash, using a sponge and a basin of water. To his surprise a third young girl joined them and stripped before also washing herself. She was an exotic beauty of about thirteen with still tiny breasts, curly black hair and light brown skin. While the newcomer was still washing, the female servant led by the hand both Heracles and Boecia, still naked and with their tunics over one arm, to a small room poorly illuminated by a single torch and where four large sheepskins had been laid side by side on the tile floor. There was also a low table in a corner with a washbasin, a jar of water and a pile of towels. The servant made signs to Boecia that Heracles thought to be obscene, then faced the boy.

“Please listen to me carefully, Heracles. You may be still quite young for this and probably never slept with a girl before but one of the reasons the master bought you was to have a strong young man that would help produce many strong slaves for his household. You are just old enough now to start coupling with girls and the master wants you to start now, to maximize the chances that the girls you sleep with will become pregnant quickly.”

Heracles was left speechless for a moment, stunned and scandalized.

“But, but I’m just a boy and forcing those girls to sleep with me isn’t fair.”

A sad smile came to the servant’s face.

“Young Heracles, there is nothing fair in the life of a slave. One can only live it with as little pain and discomfort as possible. Besides, you and the girls have no choice: you either do as told or you will be punished. If you need help to know how to do such things, I am ready to explain to you the basics.”

Heracles looked down sadly at Boecia, who had laid down on one of the sheepskins and was waiting for him.

“Will they be also punished if I refuse to do this?”

“Possibly.”

“If I do it tonight, what after that?”

“This will actually become your room and that of the three girls you will keep around you. You are expected to couple with each of them every night, until they become pregnant. Then, other girls will be provided.”

The sheer inhumanity of it all then overwhelmed Heracles, who couldn't help his eyes from filling with tears. The servant, moved by his reaction, kissed him gently on his forehead.

“You have a heart of gold, young Heracles. Many men would simply think of this as a great favor and not hesitate to use those girls for their pleasure, without a single thought for them.”

Heracles had to swallow the lump in his throat before he could speak.

“Then I ask one favor from you: teach me how to do it in a way that will please my friends the most. I don't want to make this a selfish act.”

The servant gave him a big smile, her eyes sparkling, and caressed his hair.

“Heracles, know that I was a courtesan before being enslaved. I'm going to make an expert lover out of you.”

### **09:48 (Italy Time)**

**Wednesday, September 21, 420 B.C.E.**

**Fregenae, Roman coastal outpost**

**Nineteen kilometers west of Rome**

“Now, what is this, by Jupiter?” Exclaimed one of the two Roman soldiers standing guard on the road leading to Rome, making the rest of their squad get up from their hiding place in the woods and come to their side to see. The armies of the Roman Republic were still a far cry from what the legions of Imperial Rome would look like and they appeared more than anything else like Greek hoplites, with round shields, bronze helmets and breastplates. What they were now seeing approaching their border post near the Roman town of Fregenae was something the soldiers had never seen before: a female warrior on horseback. One thing was certain, though: she was no Etruscan. She

wore blue trousers with brightly colored geometrical patterns, a pair of soft leather shoes, a red long-sleeved tunic, an iron scale-mail coat of armor, scale-mail leg protectors and a conical bronze helmet with cheek and neck guards that only partially hid her black shoulder-length hair. An oval shield covered with iron scales and a lance were hooked to the left side of her horse, a big and powerful brown beast, while the woman wore a sword across her back, a quiver filled with a bow and dozens of arrows, at least two daggers and, finally, a war axe. The horse itself wore pectoral and head iron scale armor.

“Look at all that equipment! She must be rich.” Exclaimed one of the soldiers.

“Or she won a lot of loot.” Replied the commander of the squad. “I am surprised that those Etruscans let her pass without stripping her of her equipment.”

“Maybe they tried and she killed them all.” Suggested happily one soldier, making the squad commander smile.

“That would be just fine with me. Deploy across the road but don’t threaten her yet: I want to speak to her.”

The nine soldiers formed a line across the narrow road, with the squad leader in the center, as the woman approached at a trot. Apparently not intimidated one bit by the Roman soldiers, the stranger kept her horse at a trot until she stopped it ten paces short of them. She looked at them impassively for a moment, letting them realize how tall she was, then raised one hand in salute and spoke in excellent Latin.

“I come in peace, Romans. There is no need for you to be afraid.”

The Romans looked at each other in surprise and then burst out in laughter.

“Us, afraid of you? You must be joking, woman.” Replied the squad leader. “You do have a lot of gall, I will give you that. Who are you and what is your business?”

“I am Nauca of Sauromatia. I am on a personal quest.”

“What kind of quest?”

“Greek friends of mine were due two months ago by ship in Massilia, but their ship never made it to port. I am looking for them, in case they were shipwrecked along this coast. You wouldn’t have seen a Greek family of three, all very tall, including a young but strong boy, by chance?”

“We have not seen such a family, woman. Shipwrecks are however frequent along these coasts. You would be better to ask the fishermen that live in the various villages of the coast.”

“A sensible proposition, Roman. Now, I suppose that there is a toll to pay to enter Roman territory?”

The squad leader nodded his head once: collecting entry taxes was effectively one of his duties. The female warrior may have looked fierce but she was also quick on the uptake and apparently reasonable.

“The toll is one bronze coin per person, plus another one per horse or work animal.”

The woman searched for a moment in a belt purse, extracting two coins from it, then threw them at the squad leader, who caught them quickly.

“Thank you, stranger. You may pass. Uh, could you tell me where Sauromatia is?”

The woman smiled and looked at him while spurring her horse past the Roman soldiers.

“Sauromatia is east of Scythia, Roman. Ask the Persians about us: we showed them the way out the last and only time they tried invading us.”

“East of Scythia?” Said to himself the squad leader as the woman rode away towards Rome. “That’s a long way from here.”

Nancy was satisfied that the Romans had proved manageable...this time. She already had to bash the heads of three Etruscans soldiers bent on having fun with her since she had started on her land search mission three days ago. She was of course not alone on this trek down the west coast of Italy: the research ship BABYLON was flying high above her under cloak, controlling the many reconnaissance probes accompanying her and the eight other Time Patrol field agents sweeping northward in pairs under various disguises. Two reconnaissance probes actually flanked her, flying too high to be seen but able to sweep and scan in detail a path five kilometers wide on each side of the road she was following. The pictures from the probes were in turn relayed to the BABYLON and processed. If anything worthwhile showed up, a sensor operator on the research ship would warn her by radio.

Nancy got such a call half an hour later, shortly after she had stopped for a minute at a poor family’s hut near the road to ask them if they had seen the three persons she was looking for.



“Nancy, this is Xinia. There is a small fishermen’s village 800 meters further ahead. You will see a small trail connect with the right side of the road. The village is 500 meters down the trail, on a sandy beach.”

“Thanks, Xinia. It will be my next stop.”

Nancy then urged Pegasus to a gallop, since there was nothing and nobody else along the road in the interval. The robotic horse could have made it all the way to Rome at a gallop without slowing down once but thoroughness was important in this mission, not speed. Once at the opening of the trail, Nancy made Pegasus follow it at a trot while she bent forward to avoid the trees’ low branches. She soon emerged in the open just behind a tiny village of poor huts lined along a sandy beach. The few women and children outside the huts froze on seeing her, then ran to their huts to hide. Nancy could perfectly understand their reaction: the appearance of a heavily armed warrior in such a place normally meant big trouble for the villagers. Dismounting from her horse, Nancy then walked to the biggest house of the lot, which still wasn’t much by any standards.

“Hello in there! I come in peace: there is no need for you to be afraid.” She shouted in Latin. A woman’s voice answered her from the inside of the house.

“What do you want, stranger?”

Nancy then concentrated, scanning telepathically the minds inside the house as she spoke up.

“I am looking for three friends of mine that may have been shipwrecked along this coast. They were a man, a woman and a boy. All of them were tall and the boy was very strong. Did you see them?”

A mental wave of panic then came from inside the house and the woman’s voice turned decidedly nervous.

“They were not here! We saw no strangers here lately.”

Nancy’s expression hardened: it was clear to her that the woman was lying. She had panicked especially when Nancy had mentioned a strong boy. Picking up the wooden panel that acted as a door and putting it to one side of the entrance, Nancy stormed inside the house and faced angrily the woman in her thirties who had answered her.

“You just lied to me, woman. Speak the truth or you will regret it. Where are the boy and his parents?”

The fisherman’s wife fell to her knees and tried her best to shield two small children crouched in a corner.

“Please, don’t hurt us! Two of our men picked up a big, strong boy floating on the surface of the sea over a week ago. The boy was alone and didn’t speak Latin. We sheltered him for a day, then the village chief decided to sell him to slavers the day after that.”

Fury and rage made Nancy’s blood boil.

“You sold into slavery a shipwrecked boy who had just lost his parents? Where were these slavers headed to and how long ago did they leave with the boy?”

“They were going to Rome, I believe. They left seven days ago. Please, spare us!”

Feeling telepathically that the woman had told her all that she knew, Nancy stomped out of the house and returned to her horse. Once back up on Pegasus, she called the BABYLON via her implanted radio.

“BABYLON, this is Nancy. I have important news: Heracles was picked up from the sea by fishermen from this village but was then sold to slave merchants seven days ago. Those slavers supposedly were heading for Rome. Heracles’ parents apparently did not make it out of the crash. I want an underwater search made off this village in a zone fifteen kilometers to the side. The time shuttle we were after is probably at the bottom just off the coast. Also, I want our four land search teams to converge on Rome at once and be ready by noon today to start combing the city for young Heracles. Acknowledge, over!”

“This is BABYLON, we acknowledge. How are you going to proceed yourself, over?”

“I’m going to ride to Rome. Reprogram our probes for a sweep of Rome based on a facial recognition scan of young Heracles.”

Nancy then turned Pegasus around and spurred it back along the trail towards the road. Once off the dirt road, she launched her mount on a furious gallop, not slowing down once until arriving in Rome near noon hour.

Nancy had Pegasus slow down to a trot just one kilometer short of the main western gate of Rome, which was still decades away from being called the Aurelia Gate. Crossing a stone bridge over the Tiber River and attracting stares from the fair-sized crowd of travelers also crossing the bridge, she was challenged at the western gate by a Roman officer commanding six soldiers. Nancy served him basically the same story than she had given the soldiers at the border, only adding that the boy she was looking

for had taken a ride to Rome in a passing wagon after being saved by fishermen from drowning. She telepathically influenced the Roman officer, as he was at first quite suspicious about her and was ready to call her a spy for a possible invasion army of barbarians. Finally admitted through the city gate, Nancy asked for directions to the slave market from passersby and then rode along the busy streets towards the Forum Romanum, the main market area of Rome. She was still 400 meters away from the market when she got a discreet radio call from her implanted radio.

“Nancy, this is the BABYLON. One of our spy probes has just located young Heracles: he is accompanying a Roman woman, a young girl and a man who is possibly a bodyguard on what is probably a routine shopping trip. The group is in the Forum Romanum area. We will guide you to their location. Land teams Alpha and Charlie are already inside the city and are also being guided towards Heracles. What are your orders, over?”

Nancy mentally replied, not wanting the Romans around her, who were already intensively curious about her, to have more reasons to watch her.

“Nobody tries to get closer to Heracles than twenty meters for the moment, unless he walks directly towards one of the teams. Tell the teams to activate their anti-psyonic skullcaps and to avoid detection. We will follow Heracles and find where he is kept at night before doing anything else. I myself will stay at a distance, since Heracles could distinguish my unusual aura even in a crowd. Nancy out!”

She then kept riding cautiously towards the Forum Romanum, trying to spot Heracles from as far as possible. Finally emerging in the wide open spaces of the Forum Romanum, Nancy stopped besides the corner of a building and scanned the market area, which was quite crowded with shoppers and passersby walking through the sea of small shops and vending stalls. One could easily hide in such a place. She then got an updated location report from the BABYLON that permitted her to spot one aura that was distinctly stronger than the others around it. Dismounting and grabbing the reins of her horse by the left hand, Nancy started following that aura from a respectable distance. What she could not possibly appreciate, as she couldn't see it herself, was how intense her own personal aura truly was.

Heracles was actually enjoying his outing with Tera, Lady Milvia and Felix the bodyguard to the city market, as it finally made him venture out of the big Aurelius residence. His job for this shopping trip was simple and consisted in carrying whatever

Lady Milvia bought, while Tera's job was to carry a cup and a small sac of wine for their mistress, so she could drink from it if she got thirsty. Their group was stopped in front of a small shop while Lady Milvia was looking through an assortment of fine cloth when Heracles spotted an impossibly strong aura some distance away in the crowd. His heart skipped a beat when he saw it: even the aura of a citizen of the World Council or of the Edon wouldn't be this intense. A truly powerful psionic was close by. Focusing his young eyes, he could distinguish part of the owner of the aura: it was a very tall woman with dark hair that was wearing a helmet and was holding the reins of a big horse. She was maybe a hundred meters away and didn't seem to look in any particular direction, apparently browsing around the shops of the market square while advancing slowly in his direction. Feeling real hope for the first time since his time shuttle had crashed, Heracles couldn't restrain himself and concentrated on the woman's head, sending a telepathic message.

"Who are you?"

He saw the woman stop abruptly and snap her head around towards him: she had heard him. The strong female voice that next echoed in his mind was the proof that she was a true psionic. It also transported him with joy.

"I am The Creator, Heracles. I will come to save you tonight."

Tera saw the way Heracles' face lit up with joy and how he was looking in the distance. Intrigued, she looked in the same direction and only saw a dense crowd of people. She got closer to Heracles and spoke in a low voice to him.

"What's the matter, Heracles?"

"Wait! Let me concentrate for a moment." He replied urgently in a near whisper before resuming his telepathic conversation.

"Will you save also my three girlfriends? I love them very much."

There was a distinctive pause before he got a reply.

"Did you sleep with your girlfriends, Heracles?"

"Yes, every night. My master, Flavius Aurelius Quintus, wants me to help produce many strong future slaves."

"Then we will take them as well. I will use diplomacy, not force, so just behave as usual until I come to get you and don't tell anything to your...girlfriends."

"I will do that, Creator. Thank you for coming to save me."

"It is the least I could do, Heracles. I will see you tonight."

An insistent shake from Tera then returned Heracles to his immediate surroundings.

“Heracles, what are you looking at?”

Felix, who was no dummy and was a very perceptive man, had also noticed the way Heracles was staring in the distance and also questioned the boy.

“Heracles, what did you just see?”

“Uh, I thought that I saw a woman wearing armor, that’s all.”

Those words made Tera open her mouth wide in wonder.

“An Amazon, here?”

Felix’ curiosity was also raised by those words and he and Tera peered in the direction Heracles had been looking. Being taller than the children, Felix soon spotted something and grinned.

“You are right, boy: I see a very tall woman with armor, helmet and weapons and holding a horse. I will be damned if she is not effectively one of those legendary Amazons.”

Lady Milvia, who had completed her inspection of the cloth shop, returned to her servants and saw the way they were all looking in one direction with excitement.

“What is happening, Felix?”

“Nothing really, Lady Milvia. Heracles spotted an Amazon in the crowd. She’s about a hundred paces away and has a horse with her.”

“An Amazon?” Said Milvia, suddenly excited. “I must see her from up close. Lead me to her, Felix.”

Heracles bit his lip as their group waded through the crowd towards the so-called Amazon: The Creator was not going to be pleased with him. He didn’t actually know more about her than what was taught to every child of the World Council. She was in essence a figure of legend and the most powerful psyonic ever known in history. She was of course also known as a time traveler and a warrior of great prowess that had changed early history and permitted the emergence of the society of the World Council and of the Edon, thus her title of ‘The Creator’. She was reputed as well for her kindness and compassion as the ultimate protector of the remnants of non-psyonic humanity, a role that had supposedly cost her her life in 2997.

It took them a good five minutes to get to the Amazon, due to the dense crowd of shoppers. There was however a small hollow in the crowd around the woman, so intimidating was her appearance. Both Milvia and Tera looked up and down in awe at the Amazon, who was towering over all of them, including Felix. Clad in scale armor and

armed to the teeth, she was truly formidable-looking. As a Spartan, a people which revered military prowess over everything else, Tera was particularly fascinated by the Amazon, who was now staring back calmly at them. On his part, Heracles couldn't get his eyes off his potential savior. The Amazon then spoke to Milvia in excellent Latin.

"May I do something for you, noble lady?"

"Uh, I was simply curious about you, stranger. Are you one of those female warriors the Greeks call amazons?"

"My people is properly called the Sauromatians and we are the eastern neighbors of the Scythians but we are effectively called, improperly, Amazons by the Greeks. The latter keep saying that their warriors defeated us but the reality is somewhat different."

Her mean grin made Milvia smile nervously.

"And what would a, uh, Sauromatian be doing so far west of her country?"

"We are in essence nomads, noble lady: home is where we happen to be at the time. I left my tribe years ago to wander the World and learn more while traveling. I am only passing through Rome and visiting it for a few days."

"That is most fascinating. You would please me much if you would accept the hospitality of my house so that we could listen to the stories of your travels at supertime."

The Amazon thought that over for a second or two, then nodded her head.

"I accept your generous offer, noble lady. My name is Nauca."

"And I am Milvia, wife of Senator Flavius Aurelius Quintus. We will now go back to my house."

"Then, would you like to ride on my horse for your return trip?"

Milvia looked at the big, armored beast, a bit intimidated by it, then smiled to Nauca.

"I would like that very much, Nauca. Could you help me up?"

"Certainly, Lady Milvia."

Forming her hands into a cup and bending forward, Nauca let Milvia put one foot in it and then lifted her up until she could sit Amazon-style on the wide padded saddle. With Heracles holding Milvia's left foot in order to secure her balance and with Felix leading the way while Nauca held the reins, the group proceeded out of the Forum Romanum towards the Aurelius residence.

The arrival of the group at the residence created quite a commotion, with the Greek servants in particular rushing to the central courtyard to see the Amazon. Forming nearly one-third of the household, the Greeks were also the ones most knowledgeable about the legend of the Amazons, who were their legendary enemies. Praxis kept an impassive face as he met his mistress in the courtyard, ignoring the Amazon. Milvia was helped down from the horse by Nauca and then faced her majordomo.

“Ah, Praxis, you are just in time. Have a guest room ready for Nauca and have someone take care of her horse. She will stay for the night and will entertain us at suppertime with the stories of her travels.”

“It will be done, Lady Milvia.” Replied Praxis, bowing to her. He then called up a stable boy to take care of the horse and faced the tall female warrior. “Please follow me, Nauca.”

Before leaving the courtyard, Praxis glanced at Tera and Heracles, speaking to them in Greek.

“Go to the kitchens and help Artemisia prepare lunch. Tell her that there is a new guest to feed as well.”

As the two children ran to the kitchens, Praxis led Nauca, who had grabbed a pair of saddlebags from her horse, upstairs to the first floor, finally introducing her into a fair-sized room with a bed, a low table and a big wooden footlocker.

“This will be your room during your stay, Nauca. Do you have any immediate needs?”

“Yes: I would like to quickly wash in order to get rid of the dust from my travel. By the way, I do speak Greek as well as Latin.”

Praxis bowed, hiding his hostility.

“Point taken. I will send you a young servant who will guide you to the washroom and will help you scrub.”

“Thank you, Praxis.”

Quietly sighing in relief, Praxis left her and went down to the kitchens, where he pointed at Tera.

“Tera, go upstairs and lead the Amazon to the washroom. You will help her scrub and will serve her needs until suppertime.”

“What about me?” Asked Heracles, hopeful. Praxis shook his head.

“You stay on kitchen duty.”

Tera ran upstairs, happy at having a chance to talk to a real Amazon. As she was about to enter the guestroom she suddenly realized that maybe Nauca didn't speak Greek. Her fear was lifted when the Amazon greeted her in perfect Greek.

"Come in, young girl: I will be ready to follow you in a minute."

"Yes, Nauca."

Tera stayed besides the bed while the Amazon finished removing her pieces of armor and her weapons, which she stored inside the footlocker. She stripped down to a loincloth and grabbed a change of clothes from her saddlebags before smiling to Tera.

"I'm ready, if you would be so kind to lead the way to the washroom."

"Come with me then. By the way, I'm Tera."

"And where are you from, Tera?" Asked the Amazon while following the girl out of the room.

"Sparta! My parents and I were on our way to Massilia when pirates attacked our ship. My parents were killed and I was sold as a slave. Flavius Aurelius bought me and the boy you saw in the market, Heracles, five days ago, along with a Celtic girl named Boecia."

"That boy, you like him?"

Tera stopped in the middle of the stairs leading down to the ground floor and looked up gravely at Nauca.

"Very much, Nauca. He is like a hero to me and he is very kind. He protected me ever since we were caged together by the slavers who brought us to Rome."

"I see! He is in fact a very handsome young boy, big and strong."

"That he is." Replied proudly Tera. "Diana has showed him how to properly care for the pleasure of girls, which only makes him a nicer boy."

The Amazon frowned at those words.

"Isn't he a bit young for that kind of pleasure?"

Tera resumed her walk while answering her.

"Yes, but the master wants us to produce big, strong babies with him. Better do it with Heracles than with some big brute."

"Us? How many girls is he sleeping with?"

"Regularly? Three: Boecia, Namet and me. I suspect that a few more girls secretly visited him, since he is now reputed to be a really good lover."



Nancy secretly swore to herself: apart from this being nothing better than child abuse of the worst kind, she would be forced to pick up as well all the girls that had made love with Heracles, who was turning out involuntarily to be quite a promiscuous boy. She could not allow any modified genes from the future to circulate in the past. History could not afford multiple repeats of what had happened with Yeshua, who had been the fruit of future genes mixed with a woman of the past.

“Do me a favor, will you: point to me Boecia and Namet if we meet them. I would also like to know that Diana.”

“Why?” Asked Tera, suddenly suspicious. Nancy put an index in front of her lips, speaking again only once they were inside the female servants’ washroom and had closed the door to it.

“Tera, I suppose that you wouldn’t mind escaping from this life of slavery.”

“Of course I wouldn’t mind.” Said bitterly the Spartan girl. “I prize my freedom too much to accept meekly to be a slave all my life. I however have nowhere to go now, with my parents dead and with Sparta being off limits for me because of my parents’ past debts, which they were fleeing from. My best hope up to now was to be able to escape with Heracles and to live with him. We love each other a lot in fact. He likes Boecia and Namet as well but I am still his favorite girl.”

Tera then grabbed a wet sponge and started washing Nauca’s back once the Amazon had removed her loincloth. Nauca spoke after a short pause.

“Tera, I plan to buy you, Heracles and the other girls back from your master and to take you out of Rome.”

“Why would you do that?” Said the shocked girl. “You don’t know us.”

“Tera, I may not know you girls yet but the truth is that I am in Rome in order to retrieve Heracles and return him to his proper place. You and the other girls will accompany him as well.”

Tera stepped back from Nauca, stunned by her revelations.

“Heracles’ proper place? You don’t mean that...”

Nancy nodded her head, then silently floated one meter off the floor before answering the girl telepathically.

“Yes! Your friend Heracles was slated to be the hero Heracles. Someone however played a dirty trick on him. I have a special interest in him and have vowed to protect him.”

Tera immediately put one knee on the floor and bowed her head.

“Athena! You must be the great goddess of war and wisdom Athena. I will do whatever you wish.”

### **17:08 (Italy Time)**

#### **The Aurelius residence, Rome**

Flavius Aurelius Quintus was truly happy to be back home this afternoon: the debates at the Senate today had sunk to a near record low in stupidity and naked greed. His accumulated frustration changed to agreeable surprise when he saw his fifteen year-old son, Markus, engaged in a furious sword practice session with a tall female stranger in the central courtyard while watched by most of the household and by Milvia. Both combatants were of course using wooden swords and shields but the combat was most vigorous nonetheless, with the woman showing an expertise with the short sword that Flavius could only admire and envy. She was visibly holding out on Markus, while his son was having a hard time stopping even half of her blows despite the counsels she kept giving. Flavius watched the practice as well and applauded with the others when it ended, with his exhausted son avidly drinking down a cup of water offered by a servant. Flavius first went to his son, slapping him in the back.

“It seems that you finally found a worthy sword instructor, Markus. Your technique has visibly improved.”

The teenager, still breathing hard, took a few gulps of air before replying to him.

“You...you should try a practice with that Amazon, father. She is the best sword fighter I ever saw.”

“An Amazon?” Exclaimed Flavius, turning around and facing the woman, who was wearing a colorful set of baggy trousers and caftan vest, plus a wide leather belt that supported a dagger and a pouch. Taller than Flavius by half a head and broad-shouldered, she was also beautiful and had a very feminine body, with large, firm breasts. She smiled to him and bowed.

“My name is Nauca, Senator Aurelius. I am a Sauromatian and I come from east of Scythia. Your wife saw me at the main market and invited me so that I could tell the tales of my travels.”

“I would say that my wife had a brilliant idea.” Replied Flavius as Milvia came to him to welcome him with a kiss. He smiled to Milvia after kissing her back.

“Before you ask, my day was quite rotten. How was yours?”

“A lot better than yours, fortunately. Nauca has already proved herself to be a very interesting guest. Come, have a hot bath before supper: it will relax you.”

“That will be nice, by Jupiter and Mars! You wouldn’t believe the ineptitudes I had to listen to today.”

While Flavius and Milvia disappeared in their private apartments and Markus went to wash himself, Nancy went to Heracles, who had watched the sword practice like everyone else, and sat besides him and Tera on a stone bench. Doing as if she was resting after the practice, she started a silent telepathic conversation with him.

“Heracles, please be honest: did you make love to other girls than Tera, Boecia and Namet? This is important, as those girls will have to come with us to the future, so that no baby from you could possibly be born in this time period.”

Heracles reddened in embarrassment. While making love to girls at first had disturbed him, he had quickly grown fond of sex. What he couldn’t know was that his manipulated genes, apart from increasing his muscle mass to a stunning ratio, also boosted his hormonal production and, as a direct result, his libido.

“I once did it with Diana and with a Persian girl called Yisha.”

“I know Diana already. Is Yisha around the courtyard right now?”

“Yes! She is presently standing in front of the water well and is wearing a pink robe.”

Nancy glanced briefly towards the water well and saw the girl in question. She was truly beautiful and was maybe fourteen years old. Heracles was decidedly building up quite a harem.

“Heracles, I intend to speak in private with Flavius and Milvia later tonight about buying you back. If offering gold or precious gems is not enough, I will then have to pass off as the goddess Athena. Tera already believes that I am Athena, as I showed her some of my powers. Tonight, if you are sent to your room with your girlfriends, try to invite Yisha and Diana as well and do as you would normally do, then ask them all to stay and sleep with you in that room. It will be simpler for me that way if I have to come to extract you out of Rome.”

“I understand, Creator.”

“Please, just call me Nauca for the moment.”

Nancy then left the two children alone to go back to her room and wash and change for supper.

**22:07 (Italy Time)****Banquet room, Aurelius residence**

Nancy silently sighed in relief when Markus, yawning repeatedly, left for his room: she had been afraid that Milvia would have retired to her apartments before Markus. Nancy however wanted both Flavius and Milvia to be present when she finally touched on the real reason of her presence in Rome. Most of the household had gone to sleep by now, leaving the three of them plus two bodyguards and two young female servants alone in the banquet room. She had seen Heracles and his 'girlfriends' been sent to their room over two hours ago and had felt telepathically their sexual exertions before they had fallen asleep. The way was now free for her to do her move. She put down her cup of wine, of which she had drunk with moderation, and looked gravely at the Roman couple slouched like her on a couch, with a low table set in front of them that supported their cups and food trays.

"Senator Flavius, Lady Milvia, I have a confession to make. Please don't get angry right away and listen carefully to what I have to say. First of, I would wish to speak privately with both of you."

Flavius, whose face had hardened somewhat, made a sign to the two female servants to leave, then looked back at Nancy.

"You will understand if I keep my bodyguards nearby, especially if you have not been forthcoming with me in the first place."

"As you wish, Senator Flavius. Do these two men have your complete confidence?"

"I trust them with my life, Sauromatian."

"Alright then, this is what I want to say: the reason I am here in Rome is to bring back young Heracles to his proper place. I am prepared to more than reimburse you for all your expenses concerning him and the girls he slept with. Those girls must go with him as well, as none of his blood can stay in Rome."

Flavius sat up abruptly on his couch, visibly angry.

"Who are you really? Why are you so interested in that slave boy?"

Nancy stayed down on her couch in order to reassure the two bodyguards, who were now tense and had taken hold of their swords' handles.

“What I am could disturb the whole of Rome if it becomes public knowledge, Senator. The reason I am interested in Heracles is that he wasn’t meant to be a slave. Let’s say that a dispute at a very high level resulted in someone playing a very nasty trick on that poor boy. If you still don’t understand, just consider that Heracles is not simply from Olympus in Greece, but from Mount Olympus.”

Milvia became livid and put a hand on Flavius’ arm.

“Flavius, I think that she means that Heracles is actually the Greek hero Heracles. It would explain his incredible strength and size for his age.”

Milvia then looked at Nancy with awe on her face.

“Then, you must be a messenger of the gods of Olympus.”

Nancy shook her head and slowly got up on her feet.

“I am no mere messenger, Lady Milvia. I am an Olympian.”

For a moment Flavius could not speak, thunderstruck like his wife and bodyguards. He then pointed an accusing index at Nancy.

“This would indeed be a clever ploy to grab that boy and my other slaves...if you could prove it. I have nothing but words from you up to now.”

Nancy’s answer to that was to float up and glide silently towards Flavius, attracting a strangled exclamation from Milvia. Flavius and his two bodyguards quickly knelt as Nancy stopped in midair in front of the senator.

“I will not hold your incredulity against you, Senator Flavius, as it was an understandable reaction. I am still ready to reimburse you for your slaves and for Heracles. By the way, with the boy’s libido being what it is, I am afraid that you will lose the services of four girls and one woman on top of him. Tera, Boecia, Namet, Yisha and Diana will have to accompany Heracles back to Mount Olympus. This should more than reimburse you for their loss, though.”

Flavius took with a shaking hand the small leather bag given by Nancy and emptied its content in his other hand. Fifteen large, splendid rubies rolled out, making his eyes pop out.

“This is more than enough, powerful one. How shall I call you properly?”

The answer boomed inside the heads of the Romans and of the bodyguards.

“You may call me Athena while in private. In public you will keep calling me Nauca. I will now go change and then will leave with Heracles and the five female slaves. Do not bother waking up your majordomo or anyone else to gather the girls: I will do it myself.”

“Yes, great Athena.”

Nancy then levitated down to the floor and bowed to Milvia.

“I was pleased by the wise way you treat all the members of your household, Lady Milvia. Your kindness will be paid back in the afterlife.”

Nancy then walked out of the banquet and went back to her room to change. Once inside the room she took her things out of the footlocker and then went into phase shift. That allowed her to put back on her armor and weapons in what would have seemed to an observer a mere fraction of a second. Reverting to normal time, she walked back down to the ground level and went to Heracles' room. She found the boy sleeping naked, surrounded by four equally naked girls and a woman. Nancy contemplated that scene for a moment, somber: this was no way to treat children...or anyone, as a matter of fact. However, what would constitute a despicable crime in modern times was normal and perfectly legal here in the Antiquity. In this time period, slaves were not considered as human beings, but as mere possessions, with little or no rights. That such an abomination had been practiced as late as the mid 19<sup>th</sup> Century in supposedly civilized countries was nothing less than a dark stain on Humanity. Chasing away her bitter thoughts, she mentally called by radio her eight field agents, who were waiting in side streets with their robotic horses.

“Nancy to land search teams. A deal has been reached to get Heracles and the slaves. I will need five agents to land on horseback discreetly in the central courtyard of the Aurelius residence in five minutes. Jack, Ken, Mike, Jeffrey and Heinrich, you are it! Look Olympian!”

Nancy then gently shook Heracles awake and smiled to him.

“You and your friends are leaving Rome now. Get dressed but be quiet.”

Diana was next to be awakened by Nancy, followed by the four teenage girls. It didn't take long for them to put on their simple clothes. Stopping the avalanche of questions from them was another matter. Nancy nearly had to get angry to quiet them down.

“Be quiet and just do as I tell you if you want to be free. Five of my warriors will soon arrive to fly you out. Heracles, you ride with me. Now, follow me in silence.”

Flavius Aurelius and Milvia were in the central courtyard of their residence, still traumatized by what had happened earlier on, when Nancy came out with their six ex-slaves. Acting on an impulse, Heracles went to Milvia and kissed her hand.

“Thank you for your kindness, Lady Milvia. I will always think well of you.”

The boy then faced Flavius Aurelius and looked gravely at him.

“You may have used me as a slave, Senator Flavius, but you did it without cruelty. May you live long.”

He then shook the senator’s hand vigorously and returned to the side of Nancy, who had called her horse Pegasus to her. A few seconds later five horsemen wearing shiny armor and helmets descended silently from the night sky and landed side by side in the courtyard, attracting awed comments from the Romans and ex-slaves alike. The horsemen, all big, powerful men, then dismounted and went each to one of the female ex-slaves, taking them gently by one hand and leading them back to their horses. The ex-slaves were then lifted onto the second seats attached to the back of the saddles and had safety belts fixed around them. Activating their hidden directed gravity drives, the agents seemingly floated up instead of jumping up to sit in their saddles. Nancy, who had secured Heracles behind her own saddle and had mounted up herself, then waved one arm upward and shouted in Greek.

“TO MOUNT OLYMPUS!”

She then had Pegasus fly off at a steep climb angle, followed one by one by the horsemen. The ex-slaves screamed in terror at first when they started flying but quickly grew quiet, frantically holding to the horsemen as the six flying horses formed up in echelon, Nancy in the lead. Back on the ground, Flavius and Milvia could only look up and follow the flying horsemen with their eyes until they were out of sight, then looked at each other with haggard expressions.

The formation of flying horses flew westward while steadily picking up altitude, crossing the coastline after six minutes. By then the ex-slaves were starting to enjoy their fantastic ride and could even shout at each other over the relative wind.

“HEY, HERACLES,” shouted Tera, “HOW WILL BE LIFE ON MOUNT OLYMPUS?”

“WE ARE NOT GOING TO MOUNT OLYMPUS, TERA. WE ARE GOING TO THE FUTURE!”

“TO THE FUTURE? WHAT DO YOU MEAN?”

“YOU WILL SOON SEE. IT WILL BE EVEN BETTER THAN MOUNT OLYMPUS. LOOK AHEAD OF YOU!”

Doing so, Tera and the others saw a huge dark mass flying ahead of them and approaching rapidly. Something that looked like a big door then opened in the mass,

revealing a cavernous hold lit by red lights. The horses soon flew inside the hold, landing at a trot on a metallic deck. The door of the hangar then closed and the lights turned from red to white, making them blink their eyes. Heracles then saw a metallic mass in the middle of the hold that made him undo frantically his safety belt.

“GLEN! MELINA!”

Nancy put a hand on his left shoulder to hold him quiet.

“I’m sorry, Heracles: they were dead when we found the shuttle. If you want, I could show you their bodies later on.”

Heracles started sobbing quietly as Nancy jumped down and then helped him down. Once on the deck, the boy glued himself to Nancy.

“What will happen to me now, Creator? I have no surrogate parents left and never had a real family. I don’t want to go back to the World Council either: they did nothing but use me all along.”

Nancy crouched down and hugged him, feeling a lump in her throat.

“Don’t worry, my brave Heracles: you will not be abandoned or used again.”

Tera then joined the two of them at a run, kissing Heracles repeatedly.

“WE ARE FREE, HERACLES! FREE!”

“I know, Tera.” Said the boy, then pointing at Nancy. “This is not Athena, Tera, but someone even more powerful: The Creator. She is the greatest woman to have ever lived.”

“The greatest woman will pinch your butt if you don’t call her by her real name. I am Nancy Laplante, Nancy for you and my other friends. I will now bring you to a quiet lounge where we will be able to talk in private.”

Nancy had Mike Crawford round up the ex-slaves and help her lead them out of the hangar of the BABYLON. A four-minute walk brought them to a small briefing room where they all sat in padded armchairs around an oval table. Nancy looked around at the ex-slaves, whose faces reflected a mix of awe, incomprehension and worry. She then spoke first in Greek.

“I will translate for the others in Egyptian, Persian and Celtic later on.”

She repeated that sentence in those three languages and then reverted to Greek.

“I realize that you just lived through a series of traumatizing events and that you are tired, so I will not say much before giving you rooms so that you could rest for the night. First of, the ship you are now riding in was built in the far future, nearly four millenniums from now. This ship can travel through time, like me, and you will probably



end up living as free persons in the future. To the exception of Diana, you are all orphaned children and will need to find new families to live and grow up with. Tomorrow, you will be given the options opened for your future lives and we will also start finding new parents acceptable to you. For the moment, I will want you to rest and recuperate. I will now translate this for the non-Greeks present.”

As Nancy did so, Tera grabbed Heracles’ arm and looked in his eyes.

“Heracles, I want to stay with you, wherever you decide to go.”

The boy hugged her tight, unable to answer with mere words.

**15:55 (GMT)**

**Thursday, May 24, 3387 ‘B’**

**Old Trafalgar Square**

**London, British Isles**

**World Council**

High Administrator Lara Bowen, with her Deputy City Assistant Administrator, Dick Pond, had been anxiously waiting outside of the London City Hall for over ten minutes when a shuttlecraft painted in a dark gray scheme appeared over the nearby Thames River. It silently flew down to land on the landing pad in front of the City Hall, around which a sizeable crowd, including quite a few news crews, had also been waiting. As the rear access ramp of the shuttlecraft went down, a huge, saucer-shaped ship also appeared in a flash of white light over the Thames and then positioned itself over the landing pad. A spider-like flying crane flew out of one cargo hold of the ship with what looked like a black-painted shuttlecraft in its holding claws, then gently deposited it besides the gray shuttlecraft before returning inside the big ship, which disappeared in a flash of light. A woman and two children left the gray shuttlecraft and went to Lara Bowen as the latter was examining from a distance the black shuttlecraft, which appeared badly damaged. Bowen sighed with relief and content when she recognized one of the children as being Heracles Sirtis, one of the eight citizens of the World Council declared missing in the past. The teenage girl holding Heracles’ hand was however unknown to Bowen. Four giant men and women then exited the gray shuttlecraft, carrying two body bags, and respectfully laid down the bags besides the black shuttlecraft. Bowen and his assistant, now tense, didn’t miss the fact that the giants had six fingers per hand and appeared to be bald under their soft gray caps,

features they knew the people of the Imperium had possessed. The four giants saluted the body bags and then returned inside the gray shuttlecraft as Nancy Laplante, wearing the same gray uniform as the giants, stopped with the two children in front of Bowen and bowed to her.

“Good day, Lady Bowen. I am back, as promised.”

“And I am pleased to greet you back, Miss Laplante. Some in the office of the Grand Administrator had voiced doubts about you ever returning. I however told them what I thought of their doubts.”

Nancy smiled, not a little pleased. From what she knew now of the World Council it was apparently a very loose confederation of national entities where the local governments kept much independence from the central government and in which political wrangling and disputes were far from rare. Lara Bowen seemed to be quite far from being a simple political stooge for Grand Administrator Den Roklan.

“I thank you for your confidence in me, Lady Bowen. I however have a few tragic news to pass on to you as a result of my search in time for your fellow citizens. Mainly, I established that the craft sent to 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine was actually destroyed while on its way back, with the loss of its crew of five. I linked up with The One and learned from him that he had decided to destroy them for grossly endangering the whole of Humanity’s history. I profoundly regret the death of these five persons but The One acted in the interest of the humanity of all three timelines. The one truly to blame for the death of those five persons is Doctor Sheryl Ekart, of the Agency for Archaeological Field Research, who sent them on their ill-advised mission.”

Bowen nodded her head once, glancing briefly at the wrecked shuttlecraft.

“I had a long discussion with Grand Administrator Roklan about the supposed non-existence of a World Council time travel program. He still was insisting as late as an hour ago that there was no such program still running. It seems now that he will have a few explanations to give to the Council of Administrators.”

Nancy took out a data chip from one pocket of her Time Patrol uniform and presented it to Bowen.

“Then you may want to review the video files on this data chip, which is compatible with your chip readers. Apart from sending a team to 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine, Doctor Ekart also had a complex built on ancient Earth, more precisely in the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E., on top of Mount Olympus, in Greece. The Time Patrol discovered it while searching for young Heracles and his surrogate parents. We have now dismantled that

installation, which was quite extensive and could have endangered the whole established history of Humanity if it would have been discovered prior to the 21<sup>st</sup> century.”

Bowen looked intensively annoyed at those words and put the chip in one pocket of her robe.

“The idiots! Their arrogance is only equaled by their irresponsibility. You can be sure that this subject will also be raised at the Council of Administrators.”

She then looked down at Heracles and at the teenage girl, her expression softening.

“I am happy to see you in good health and safe, Heracles. I hope that your ordeal was not too traumatic. Who is your young friend?”

“Her name is Tera and she is my girlfriend, Lady Bowen.” Replied the boy in a timid tone. “She is from 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. Sparta, in Greece, and was a slave, like me.” Looks of horror appeared on the faces of Bowen and Pond at those words, with Bowen nearly shouting.

“You were made a slave?”

Heracles nodded once his head, his face grave.

“Yes, Lady Bowen. After my shuttlecraft crashed in the sea near the Italian coast, fishermen picked me up but sold me to slave traders two days later. I was then brought to Rome, where Tera and I were sold to a rich Roman. Thankfully, Senator Flavius Aurelius and his wife were kind to us and we didn’t really suffer during the week we served them before Nancy showed up.”

“My poor children.” Said softly Bowen, caressing the heads of Heracles and Tera before looking back at Nancy.

“Were you able to establish what happened to Heracles’ shuttlecraft and to his surrogate parents?”

“We were able to find it after I traced back Heracles in time. Instead of going to Mount Olympus in the year 555 B.C.E., as told to me by Grand Administrator Roklan, their shuttlecraft malfunctioned and reappeared instead near Italy in the year 420 B.C.E.. Since it was under cloak when it arrived in the past, we had quite a hard time finding back Heracles’ trail and recuperated the shuttlecraft from the bottom of the sea only nine days after it crashed down. The bodies of Glen and Melina Sirtis, who had drowned as their shuttlecraft sank to the bottom, were still inside when we lifted the craft from the sea bottom. You can inspect their bodies if you wishes to.”

“It will not be necessary, Miss Laplante.” Said Bowen before looking briefly at her assistant. “Dick, please have the two bodies transported to the city morgue. Have an autopsy done as a routine procedure.”

“Right away, Administrator.” Said Pond, who then went to see two city security officers standing nearby and spoke briefly to them. Four more security officers quickly appeared at a run and the two body bags lying by the wrecked shuttlecraft were picked up and brought to an air car that flew down a minute later. Bowen, Nancy and the children watched in respectful silence during the whole process, with Bowen speaking only once the air car had departed with the bodies.

“Since Heracles is now an orphan, we will have to think about finding a new family for him, one that will truly care about him.”

“I have already decided to stay with Nancy, who will also take care of Tera.” Said firmly Heracles. That didn’t surprise much Lara Bowen, who smiled gently to the two children.

“With the Creator’s track record, I am sure that you will be well taken care of. Where will you live?”

“Wherever Nancy happens to live.” Answered the little girl in good but accented Neo-English while firming up her grip on Heracles’ hand. “As she said in Rome, home is where we happen to be.”

Nancy suddenly tensed up and snapped her head around and up, looking at the southern sky.

“Heracles, Tera, go to the shuttlecraft now! Armed ships are coming this way.”

“But, who...” Started to say Bowen as the two children started running towards the Time Patrol shuttlecraft. Three mean-looking craft about 25 meters in length each and painted matte black then flew down, coming to a stop over the Thames River while pointing their weapons’ snouts towards the landing pad and the Time Patrol shuttlecraft. An amplified voice then boomed down from the attack craft.

“TIME PATROL SHUTTLECRAFT, STAY WHERE YOU ARE: YOU HAVE VIOLATED WORLD COUNCIL AIRSPACE. NANCY LAPLANTE IS TO BE ARRESTED AS WELL FOR THE DESTRUCTION OF A WORLD COUNCIL CRAFT AND THE MURDER OF ITS CREW AND FOR SPYING ON GOVERNMENT FACILITIES.”

“What the hell is happening here?” Said angrily Lara Bowen before activating her wrist videophone. “City Security Central, this is High Administrator Bowen. Contact

immediately the Grand Administrator's office and tell him that I want him to recall at once his attack craft threatening me and my guests."

Bowen was about to say something to Nancy when the latter emitted a telepathic message so strong it nearly knocked her back.

"WORLD COUNCIL CRAFT, YOU HAVE TEN SECONDS TO LEAVE PEACEFULLY BEFORE I DESTROY YOU!"

The only answer she got was when squads of armed men jumped out of two of the three craft and started flying down towards the landing pad, their guns at the ready. The crowd surrounding the landing pad then dispersed in panic, with many screaming in fear. The city security officers present however ran to Lara Bowen and formed a protective wall in front of her, their own guns drawn. Having now no other choice left, Nancy decided to strike, hard. She stared at the attack craft, concentrating on one craft at a time. An internal explosion suddenly wrecked the nearest craft, sending it falling down in flames in the Thames River, followed at three-second intervals by the two other craft. The squads of armed men, now on the ground and running towards the Time Patrol shuttlecraft, looked on in stunned horror before their officer in charge gave the order to fire. A rain of explosive shells however enveloped them before they could fire a single shot, shredding them to pieces. Lara Bowen saw two dark gray ships appear out of nowhere at the same time as twenty machines a bit larger than big men materialized on the landing pad and immediately rushed on their rubberized tracks towards the bodies of the World Council soldiers. The few soldiers who were still moving were hit by stun beams within seconds and surrounded by the combat machines. While the machines stayed in place, the two gray ships disappeared from sight as suddenly as they had appeared, leaving a stunned Lara Bowen and the two news crews which had not fled to stare at the scene of carnage.

"What...what the hell just happened?"

"Doctor Ekart grossly overstepped her authority and overreacted. The Time Patrol and I then responded with appropriate force." Answered Nancy, her face hard, as she stared at the soldiers' bodies lying on the now shredded lawn near the landing pad. "Her agency has now proven that it is a clear menace to the integrity of history and will be taken out of business."

"Taken out of business? You don't mean..."

"Destroyed? Yes, Lady Bowen. Ekart was ready to endanger you and your citizens in order to arrest me. Her arrogance and sense of superiority made her

miscalculate very badly indeed. I am truly sorry that it had to come to this but I didn't erase a whole civilization only to let a new one endanger time again. This world is best to stay out of the time travel business altogether."

Bowen stared at the Canadian for a moment, having her first glimpse of the fighter's aspect of her personality. Her wrist videophone then beeped, making her look at its screen while she pushed the 'talk' button. The face of Grand Administrator Roklan appeared on the screen, making Lara grimace in anger at him.

"What the hell were you trying to do, Grand Administrator? I and many London citizens were nearly killed when three World Council craft and a number of soldiers attacked me while I was talking with Miss Laplante, who was returning one of our lost time shuttlecraft."

"But I didn't order such an attack." Protested Roklan, looking nervous and edgy. "Where are those three craft now? Our air traffic control system doesn't even show them in your airspace."

"That's because they are now lying at the bottom of the Thames River: Miss Laplante destroyed them, while two ships of the Time Patrol killed the soldiers charging us and the Time Patrol shuttlecraft. Miss Laplante just told me that Doctor Ekart's agency will be destroyed by the Time Patrol for repeatedly endangering history."

"But that's an act of war, pure and simple! Is Miss Laplante still with you?" Nancy moved into the field of view of the wrist videophone, looking coldly back at Roklan.

"Grand Administrator, you already lied to me once. You won't do it twice. If you consider our termination of your irresponsible program to interfere with the past as an act of war on our part, then tough! You should have known better than give the responsibility of your so-called time exploration program to a megalomaniac like Sheryl Ekart. For your information, your installations on Mount Olympus in ancient Greece have been dismantled and removed and your sleeper agents in timeline 'C' will soon follow. That you approved the kidnapping and marooning in prehistoric times of nine citizens of the 20<sup>th</sup> century of timeline 'C' is itself enough to normally earn you punishment, but I will let your own Council of Administrators deal with you. In the meantime, have fun."

Nancy then pushed the 'deactivate' button. Lara Bowen nearly had a haggard look as she stared at her.

"What is this business about kidnapping people from the 20<sup>th</sup> century?"

“Another so-called program of Ekart’s agency, of which Roklan was fully aware of. In the data chip I gave you, you will find that one of the files is an intercept of a conversation between Ekart and Roklan on that subject. Basically, nine American and British citizens from the 20<sup>th</sup> century of timeline ‘C’ working for their respective governments were kidnapped and replaced by look-alike agents of the World Council, then abandoned in the distant past, alone and helpless.”

“But, what would be the goal of all this? That’s not even our timeline.”

“Damn right it isn’t!” Replied Nancy. “That World Council program was trying to prevent by all means the appearance in the future of timeline ‘C’ of a second Imperium. Well, even if another Imperium sees the day in timeline ‘C’, I have no intention to have it harmed unless they prove to be a real threat to history or to the other timelines. As for those nine kidnapped people, the Time Patrol is about to get them back from prehistoric times.”

Bowen lowered her head, ashamed that someone from the World Council could do all this.

“I believe that you acted in the correct manner, Miss Laplante. It is time that the Council of Administrators makes the Grand Administrator and his Doctor Ekart account for their actions.”

“You may deal with Roklan, Lady Bowen. I will deal personally with Sheryl Ekart.”

The way Nancy said that nearly made Bowen feel sorry for Ekart.

### **09:49 (South Pacific Time)**

**April 18, 159,993 B.C.E.**

### **Bora Bora Island, South Pacific**

Tammy Greenwood sat besides the crate of supplies left by the freaks from the future and cried, having reached the height of despair. This was her seventh year alone on this deserted island and it looked like she would die here. Six times already a ship had dropped off a crate of supplies at yearly intervals, supposedly to check on her and ensure her health. From the cursory way the crew of those ships had visited her and from the pitiful amount of supplies they had left behind them each time, Tammy suspected that they only wanted to know if it was time to dispose of her remains. The crate they had left this time contained only a supply of vitamins and nutritional

supplements, a dozen cans of tinned meat and, as if it was the most important thing for survival, rolls and rolls of toilet paper. The way the crew from the future had laughed on leaving her with the crate made her think that this last item of supply was a cruel joke on her. After seven years of precarious survival on this tropical island she was skinny to the point of malnutrition and all her clothes had rotted away years ago, leaving her naked except for the steel necklace placed around her neck by the freaks after she had been kidnapped and brought here. The necklace was supposedly a radio emitter meant to help track her down and find her at any time. She however suspected that it would only help the freaks find her remains when she finally died.

Once her tears had dried out, Tammy got up and took out of the crate one of the tins of corned beef, craving for the meat she had not eaten for over ten months. Opening it with shaking hands, she then devoured its content in a couple of minutes. She still had not figured out how to start a fire without a match or lighter, two items the freaks never left her. She was after all a city girl, born and raised in Washington, D.C., and had never learned any survival skills before being kidnapped in 1943 at the age of 21, just as she was starting a promising career with the State Department. She was about to throw away the now empty can when her eyes caught a growing dot in the sky. Insane hope overtaking her, Tammy started running along the sandy beach, waving her arms and screaming. The dot quickly turned into a ship larger than the one used by the freaks to visit her. That ship was also painted dark gray instead of mate black. It soon landed on the beach, its rear end facing her, and a large access ramp lowered to the ground, revealing a wide hold. Six persons were visible inside the hold: two giants forcibly holding a woman in her thirties, a young and tall woman and a boy and a small girl. The sight of the woman held by the giants made Tammy see red: it was the bitch that had condemned her to this island after somehow recording all her personal souvenirs in a way she still didn't understand. The six persons then walked down the ramp towards her, the young woman in the lead. Once on the beach, the two giants proceeded in brutally stripping the bitch of all her clothes and jewels, including her watch, ignoring her loud protests. Tammy was watching the show with glee when the young woman, the two children besides her, stopped near her.

"Miss Tammy Greenwood, my name is Nancy Laplante. My friends and me are from the Time Patrol and are here to rescue you and eight other unfortunate ones kidnapped and marooned in the past by that woman. She will in turn take your place



here and die on this island as a punishment for her crimes. Hold still while I take off this collar from you.”

Producing a complicated-looking key, Laplante unlocked the mechanism of Tammy's steel collar and opened it, then took it off her. Tammy's sigh of relief turned to a gasp of incredulity as Laplante crushed and twisted the thick steel collar with her bare hands without apparent effort. She then threw the collar on the sand a few yards away. Tammy couldn't help jump back in stunned surprise when a blue ball of energy shot out of Nancy's extended right hand with a loud crack, vaporizing the steel collar and vitrifying the sand around it. Nancy then gently spoke to her.

“You will soon be able to return to a normal life in the United States, Miss Greenwood. We will first bring you to one of our facilities, where you will be briefed on what happened since your kidnapping while you physically and mentally recuperate. I am truly sorry that we couldn't rescue you before now but that woman's idea to have you visited every year threw a wrench in our plans to rescue you immediately after your kidnapping.”

“I WILL GET YOU FOR THIS, LAPLANTE!” Then shouted Sheryl Ekart, earning a resounding slap in the face from the giant woman that had helped strip her. The bitch was sent waltzing down, ending up spitting both sand and blood as the giant looked down at her with hatred and contempt.

“So, you wanted to erase the Imperium a second time, hey? Well, now you will end up eating bananas for the next few hundred years.”

“The next few hundred years?” Said Tammy, looking at Laplante. “I don't understand.”

“The people of the World Council, of which Doctor Ekart was part of, can live up to 400 years. She will thus pay for her crimes for a very long time. Come, let's board my ship and leave this bitch alone with her conscience, if she has one.”

## **CHAPTER 12 – BATTLE FOR THE PHILIPPINES**

**15:37 (Manila Time)**

**Friday, December 5, 1941 'C'**

**Batangas Airfield**

**Philippines**

When Ingrid landed back in Batangas with five of her pilots and with Jesus Villamor and another Filipino pilot, she found Major General Lewis Brereton waiting for them near the servicing area. Her heart jumped in her chest when she saw as well a Marine Corps major that she knew very well, waiting besides Brereton. Controlling with difficulty her excitement, she made her P-40F roll towards the cut in the jungle that served as her plane's hiding place when on the ground, making her fighter pivot on the spot at the last moment. Once her engine was shut down and her propeller had stopped turning, a dozen Filipinos quickly pushed the P-40F in its hideout, then draped back the camouflage net covering the front of the jungle cut. Ingrid jumped down from her plane as Brereton, two of his aides and Ken approached with Paul Gunn. As Gunn started inspecting her plane, looking for possible battle damage, Ingrid saluted Brereton, then took off her leather helmet, uncovering her reddish-brown hair mated with sweat.

"Good afternoon, General! What may I do for you?"

Brereton returned her salute and smiled to her.

"Nothing special, Captain. I simply wanted to visit my newest fighter squadron. How did your mission over Manila Bay go?"

"Very well, General. We intercepted 27 BETTY medium bombers that were escorted by fourteen Mitsubishi A5M CLAUDE fighters as they were overflying Corregidor, heading for Cavite. We started our attacks with frontal passes against the bombers, followed by high speed strafing passes. Their escort fighters were essentially helpless, being ninety miles per hour slower than us. Their armament of two 7.7mm machineguns is anyway totally inadequate against the P-40. I shot down four BETTY bombers, plus one A5M CLAUDE that was threatening one of my pilots on those first passes. My pilots shot down on their part a total of seven BETTY bombers, while Major Villamor shot down two bombers and one fighter. His wingman, Lieutenant Peraltas, shot down one bomber. The pilots of the remaining thirteen bombers then lost their

nerve and dropped their bombs in the waters of the bay before turning around. Their escort fighters tried to cover their retreat by a last frontal attack against us, but that proved to be a very costly mistake for them. Apart from losing badly the gunnery duel, they lost a further four fighters and allowed us to speed past them and catch the bombers for a last strafing pass against their unprotected bellies. We then shot down a further five bombers before running out of ammunition and having to break the engagement. My squadron will thus be claiming a total of fifteen BETTY bombers and four CLAUDE fighters, while Major Villamor and Lieutenant Peraltas will be claiming a total of four bombers and two fighters. Some of us got hit by a few 7.7mm bullets but we all were able to fly back without problems.

Brereton's smile turned into a grin on hearing this.

"Twenty-five enemy planes shot down against no losses? I love this exchange rate! I will make sure that your gun camera films are looked at favorably. So, where is your personal score at now, Captain?"

"With the five bombers and two fighters I shot down today, my score now stands at 39 victories, if today's kills are confirmed, of course, General."

"Impressive indeed! And how did your pilots perform overall? Did they follow your instructions about how to engage Japanese planes?"

"They now do, General. One pilot ignored my orders on Wednesday and got in a turning dogfight with a ZERO fighter, but was shot down and killed for his troubles. I believe that the lesson then sank in fully with my other pilots."

"I see!" Said Brereton, his grin fading away. "So, how many pilots and planes do you have operational now?"

"If my planes didn't sustain any serious damage today, then I can count on a total of fourteen pilots, including me, and eight P-40F fighters assembled and operational. Seven more P-40s are still in the process of being assembled. Major Villamor, on his side, has one wingman and two assembled P-40, plus one P-40 left to be assembled. May I ask you how our other fighter squadrons are doing, General?"

Ingrid didn't like the way Brereton's enthusiasm then cooled down.

"I had to replace the commander of the 21<sup>st</sup> Pursuit Squadron yesterday, after he ignored again my directives and insisted on using our old tactics, engaging the enemy escort fighters rather than the bombers. That cost us three pilots and four planes."

What Brereton didn't say to Ingrid was that, on personally investigating that fiasco, he had learned that the then squadron commander had told his pilots that he quote would

be damned if he was going to follow tactics advocated by a girl and fight like a coward unquote. Apart from losing his command, that had also earned that idiot a bullet in the leg and an extended stay in hospital. He then came to the main reason of his visit, not wanting to delve further on the problems of his fighter command.

"Well, Captain, thanks to your success today, the ships of the PENSACOLA convoy were able to finish unloading without losses and will sail out of Manila Bay tonight, under cover of darkness. General MacArthur is said to be totally ecstatic about all the equipment and supplies brought by the convoy, starting with the planes. This brings me to the subject of our new dive bombers. I would like to discuss with you and Major Villamor how to coordinate your actions and those of the 27<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Group. If operating alone, our 52 A-24 dive bombers would be cut to pieces in short order by Japanese fighters, so I intend to engage them only if escorted by fighters. This will in turn mean using different tactics than for pure interception missions."

"I agree, General. Let me just check on my pilots and planes and I will be with you shortly. May I propose that you go have a cup of coffee in our ready room in the meantime?"

"A good idea, Captain. I will be waiting for you and Major Villamor there."

As Brereton went to see briefly Jesus Villamor before going to the ready room, Ken approached Ingrid and took her in his arms for a long, passionate kiss, making the Filipino mechanics around them smile. They finally parted with regret, looking into each other's eyes.

"God, it felt like a long time without you, Ken."

"And life felt quite empty without you during those long weeks, Ingrid. How are your burns now?"

"They are mostly healed by now. I don't need to wear bandages anymore and I mostly don't feel them anymore. I will however have a few light scars left for life on my back and left arm."

"I will consider them as marks of your valor, my beautiful wife. General Brereton told me that I will be able to bring you home after your briefing, so that we could have an evening and night together. I will in turn bring you back to Batangas in the early morning. Julia and Juanita are also dying to see you again...for different reasons than me, of course."

Ingrid giggled at that.

"I imagine so, my dear Ken. Uh, you do have condoms left at home? Now would be a really bad time for me to become pregnant."

"Somehow, I suspect that General Brereton would skin me alive if I get you pregnant now."

"Right! Well, let me go check out my pilots and planes. You may go have a coffee with the general and his aides in the meantime. That will give you time to imagine all kinds of new ways to abuse my body tonight, my lovely hunk."

She exchanged another kiss with Ken, then left him to walk towards her planes and pilots. Ken sighed as he admired her bum as she walked away: living away from such beauty had been hard indeed.

**08:42 (Manila Time)**

**Monday, December 8, 1941 'C'**

**Command bomber of the 11<sup>th</sup> Air Fleet**

**7,500 meters above Lingayen Gulf**

**West coast of Luzon, Philippines**

Major General Minagumo Shoji, Commander of the 11<sup>th</sup> Air Fleet of the Japanese Imperial Army, based on Formosa, had not flown a combat mission since his last mission over China as a colonel, three years ago. At his actual rank level, he was not supposed to fly combat missions anymore. The state of the morale of his aviators, hit hard by the heavy casualties suffered in seven weeks of ferocious combat over the Philippines, however requested that he showed the example and boost the motivation of his pilots. If he could believe the reports from the other army air fleets involved with the Philippines campaign and those of the navy air units in Formosa, his fleet had not been the only one to suffer heavily. The campaign to reduce the Philippines in view of an eventual invasion was proving more costly every day, with the Americans showing incredible tenacity and toughness. The Imperial High Command in Tokyo was starting to ask pointed questions about the reasons for the lack of success of the air campaign against the Philippines, questions which Minagumo could not answer truthfully without losing face. He had been particularly mortified when his intelligence officer had told him that the top American air ace in the Philippines was a woman. A WOMAN! Some of his officers had laughed at that notion then, but their laughs were now quite forced. That was when Minagumo had decided to lead the next raid against the important American

airbase of Clark Field. He had managed by scrapping the bottom of his drawers to assemble 61 Mitsubishi Ki-21 twin-engine medium bombers, escorted by 43 of the new Nakajima Ki-43 HAYABUSA fighters, which had started to replace the inadequate Ki-27. Minagumo had however his doubts about the new Ki-43, which had the same weak armament of two 7.7mm machineguns as the Ki-27 and still no armor, even though it was much faster and about as agile. Minagumo raised his head to look up at his escort fighters, flying high above his bombers, as they were less than 130 kilometers away from their objective. Up to now, his armada had not been attacked yet, thankfully, and he then concentrated back his attention towards the Filipino coast, visible through the dispersed clouds. What he could not know was that one of the American surveillance radars had detected his planes half a hour ago, while a coastal observer had him in sight now.

The first sign of trouble was when Minagumo got a radio message from the commander of his escort, saying that four American fighters were diving on his fighters. Looking up, Minagumo saw two of the Ki-43 turn into flying torches, with the rest dispersing and turning around to try to pursue four speedy dots apparently intent on getting in the back of his bombers. Suddenly more nervous, Minagumo watched carefully the sky around him, trying to spot any other enemy planes. Unfortunately, the Sun was still low on the horizon and was blinding him when he looked to his front and left, while a thick cloud formation blocked part of the sky ahead of him. He suddenly saw something move in front of him, emerging from the clouds. Focusing his old eyes, he felt his heart accelerate when he finally made out ten small gray dots, deployed in a long extended line and coming directly at him. Activating his microphone, he shouted an urgent warning on the radio.

“AMERICAN FIGHTERS DEAD AHEAD ON A COLLISION COURSE. TIGHTEN THE FORMATION AT ONCE!”

He barely had time to complete his message before the canopy of his cockpit exploded under the impacts of dozens of .50 caliber bullets, killing Minagumo, his copilot and his radio operator. Out of control and with one engine on fire, the bomber entered a terminal spinning dive as the gray P-40F that had shot at it flashed by, already firing another salvo at the bomber that had followed behind the command plane. Six other bombers of the first wave either exploded or turned into flying torches, while three bombers of the second wave experienced the same fate. The attacking P-40s continued

on at full speed, then performed wide turns to come back in the rear of the bombers. The escort fighters, at least those not chasing the four first P-40s that had attacked them, tried to dive on the P-40s but, their controls hardened by their high speed dive, were unable to correctly aim their fire against the American fighters. The Japanese pilots all missed their targets and further had great difficulty turning around to follow the Americans, being close to their maximum allowed diving speed. The flimsy structures of the Ki-43, lightened to provide maximum agility at low and medium speeds and with no armor or even self-sealing fuel tanks, then came to haunt their pilots. Outrunning the Ki-43 fighters by a hundred kilometers per hour and the Ki-21 bombers by 160 kilometers per hour, the P-40s raced after the bombers while staying a bit below them, where the defensive armament of the Ki-21s was the weakest. With each bomber now having only a single 7.7mm machinegun able to shoot at the American planes, the Japanese gunners fired their guns frantically, but without apparent results. The P-40s then raised their noses and climbed at shallow angles as they were about to pass under the bombers, peppering their vulnerable bellies at a rate of close to eighty .50 caliber bullets per second per P-40. Eight more SALLYs fell in flames or exploded in that pass. The ten P-40Fs, pursued by the slower Ki-43 HAYABUSAs, doubled the remaining bombers and went on for four kilometers before turning around for another frontal pass in extended line. The pursuing Ki-43s, which would later get the allied nickname of 'OSCAR', were the first to absorb the bullets from that second frontal pass. Their flimsy structures and thin aluminum skins ripped open like paper under the heavy bullets, while their two medium machineguns didn't do much impression on the sturdy, well armored American fighters. Three of the Ki-43 disintegrated or exploded under the fire of the P-40Fs, the rest having to turn around yet again as the American fighters sped by, ignoring them and going at the bombers. The first four P-40s that had initially attacked the Japanese escort fighters then came in turn on the rear and under the bombers to shoot at their bellies, while the ten other P-40s performed frontal firing passes. That process was repeated three times, with fourteen additional SALLYs falling down in flames. The surviving bomber pilots then panicked and dropped their bombs over the Filipino jungle before turning around to return to Formosa. With the escorting Ki-43s still not having shot down a single American P-40, a further three bombers fell before the P-40s, out of ammunition, turned away, still going at top speed. To add insult to injury, the Japanese escort fighters then realized as they returned with the bombers to their bases in Formosa that they had burned too much fuel while trying to catch the speedy P-40s. Over half of

the Ki-43s ran out of fuel before they could land, crashing all over Formosa, while a few more had to literally glide in to land at their bases.

The intelligence officer of the 11<sup>th</sup> Air Fleet, who was anxiously waiting for the return of the bombers, looked on with growing horror and sorrow as only 23 of the 61 Ki-21s that had left for the raid on Clark Field returned to land, some evidently seriously damaged. He then ran to the first bomber to stop on the parking apron and nearly jumped on the pilot when the latter climbed out of his plane.

“Where is General Minagumo? Where are all the others?”

“Dead! All dead!” Replied the pilot in a shaking voice, obviously suffering from a nervous shock. “Gray ghosts ambushed us and played with us and our escort fighters. The HAYABUSAs couldn’t do a thing to stop them.”

“Gray ghosts? What type of American fighters attacked you?”

“Curtiss P-40s completely painted gray. They flew so fast while shooting at us that our fighters could not catch them. One of the Americans was their female ace: I saw the words ‘LADY HAWK’ painted in pink on the nose of one of the P-40s.”

The intelligence officer was silent for a moment, severely shaken by those news. Of the 117 bombers that the 11<sup>th</sup> Air Fleet counted originally at the start of the war against the Americans, only 23 were now left, despite the periodic arrival of new planes and crews. Their air fleet would now have no choice but to withdraw from combat in order to be fully reequipped and reorganized. The intelligence officer later learned that the surviving squadron commander of the escort fighters for that raid committed ritual suicide to atone for the failure of his unit, with many of his fighter pilots following his example.

**09:19 (London Time)**

**Friday, December 19, 1941 ‘C’**

**Prime Minister’s official residence**

**10 Downing Street, London**

**England**

Winston Churchill felt as much depressed as he was in a bad mood. Despite the fact that the Germans had finally been thrown out of Norway, that victory had cost Great Britain dearly in both lives and materiel. Many, including himself, then had to reevaluate their optimistic views about the state of the war in Europe and about the military



capabilities left to the Germans. As for the war in Asia and the Pacific, the situation there was nothing less than disastrous for the British Empire. Hong Kong had fallen over a month ago, while Singapore had surrendered to the Japanese just yesterday, with over 80,000 British, Australian, Indian and Malaysian soldiers killed or taken prisoner. Even more than the loss of all those soldiers, the taking of Singapore, which had been flaunted as a supposedly impregnable fortress, marked an enormous loss of prestige for the empire. The only good news out of Asia was the fact that the Japanese had yet to launch their feared invasion of Burma. Churchill however couldn't thank that to any British feat of arms, but rather on the heroic and unexpectedly pugnacious resistance of the American forces in the Philippines, which sucked in the Japanese reserves in planes and ships like a vacuum cleaner.

Shaking himself out of his dark thoughts, Churchill concentrated again his attention on the situation report given to him and his war cabinet by his military secretary, Lieutenant General Hasting Ismay. Ismay was now describing the situation of the American forces in the Philippines and that of the Japanese forces surrounding them. Something that Ismay said then attracted his curiosity.

"Did you just say that the Japanese air operations against the Philippines just slowed down, General? Why would that be?"

"Mister Prime Minister, our intelligence experts believe that the Japanese are in the process of regrouping and reequipping their air groups in Formosa and Okinawa, which have sustained severe losses in the last two months. According to our estimates, the Japanese have lost up to now more than 500 planes of all types over the Philippines."

"Ouch! The Americans must have many fighters left there to cause such losses."

"Uh, not really, Mister Prime Minister. The last report sent by General MacArthur to Washington five days ago stated that he had a grand total of 27 operational P-40 fighters left in the Philippines."

"That's all?" Exclaimed Churchill, incredulous. His ministers, admirals and generals sitting around the conference table were as surprised as him, with the chief of the R.A.F., Air Chief Marshall Charles Portal, objecting at once.

"But, that's impossible! The Americans must be grossly overestimating the Japanese losses."

Ismay, apparently certain of his numbers, answered him calmly but firmly.

"First, Air Chief Marshall, a good part of the Japanese losses in planes is due to the Americans air defense guns, which are using shells equipped with proximity fuses. While expensive to produce, those fuses have proved to be extremely efficient. Second, the few American fighter pilots left in the Philippines seem to have found the right tactics against the Japanese. Their top ace in the Philippines, or anywhere else as a matter of fact, now had a claimed total of 58 air victories, nearly all on P-40."

"More than our own best air ace? And what does that pilot do to get so much out of his P-40? The P-40 is not exactly what I would call a superior fighter aircraft. Our own models of P-40 have performed rather poorly against the Germans."

Ismay then smiled slightly, intriguing Portal.

"It is curious that you should mention the Germans now, Lord Portal. That pilot was until five months ago a German female auxiliary of the Luftwaffe held by us in the Tower of London. She was then pardoned by us and married an American officer before following him to the Philippines. That Ingrid Weiss, now named Ingrid Dows, is in fact the adopted daughter of Nancy Laplante, who secretly educated her before she died. It seems that Captain Ingrid Dows has put Laplante's lessons to good use."

Churchill couldn't help burst out in laughter then.

"The adopted daughter of Nancy Laplante, the American Ace of aces? That's a real good one!"

The Prime Minister then became serious again.

"Let's get back to the main subject, General Ismay. Can the Americans still stop an amphibious invasion by the Japanese in the Philippines?"

"That is doubtful, Mister Prime Minister. Most of the American ground troops in the Philippines are Filipino conscripts that are poorly trained and equipped. Against those, the Japanese have four divisions of hardened veterans. With the fall of Singapore, the Japanese will now have even more troops available to attack the Philippines. I am sorry to say that, however heroic the American resistance has been to date, that resistance is approaching the breaking point. On top of that, with the Japanese naval blockade of the Philippines, any evacuation by sea of those American forces will be nearly impossible, while the actual air bridge with Australia has a strictly limited tonnage capacity. Like our troops in Hong Kong and Singapore, the Americans in the Philippines are basically condemned in the long run to either die or become prisoner of the Japanese."

Churchill lowered his head, saddened by these words.

“More brave men that will be lost. When will we see an end to this damn war?”

**14:05 (Tokyo Time)**

**Saturday, December 20, 1941 ‘C’**

**Underground conference room, Imperial palace**

**Tokyo, Japan**

“His Majesty, the Emperor!”

On the announcement of the military aide of Emperor Hirohito, all the ministers and officers present and standing around the conference table bowed deeply as Hirohito entered the room and took place on an elevated dais facing one extremity of the table. Once the Emperor, wearing a ceremonial kimono, was kneeling on his cushion, the aide gave the permission to be seated. The Keeper of the Imperial Seal, Lord Kido, who spoke for the Emperor, then opened the meeting.

“Honorable ministers and officers of the Empire, we are here to respond to grave concerns that His Majesty has developed about the state of the war in general and about our campaign to take the Philippines in particular. We have now been at war with the American and their European allies for exactly two months now. Yet, after all that time, not a single army soldier has set foot yet on the Philippines, while the invasion of Burma has been postponed indefinitely. His Majesty is also deeply disturbed by the heavy casualties suffered around and over the Philippines, casualties that have upset many other operational war plans. His Majesty thus seeks your counsels about what to do concerning this sad state of affair.”

Many generals and admirals lowered their eyes, taking this declaration as the harsh rebuke it was. General Tojo, as both Prime Minister and War Minister, was the first to reply to Lord Kido, careful not to address the Emperor directly.

“We indeed have failed in our duties by not being able to invade yet the Philippines, but the American resistance there has been way more tenacious than expected. In particular, and in stark contrast to other enemy forces around the Pacific and Asia, the American forces in the Philippines reacted very swiftly to our attacks and apparently used to the full the information brought from the future by the late Canadian time traveler, Nancy Laplante. Our attacks around the Philippines thus didn't benefit from the factor of surprise, resulting in heavy losses to our forces. Those unexpected

losses have in turn forced us to reroute the forces slated for the Burma invasion and direct them towards the Philippines.”

“How heavy precisely have been those losses around the Philippines, Prime Minister?”

Tojo then made a short sign of the head to the Chief of Staff of the Navy, Admiral Nagano, who then started to read from a paper in his hands.

“Since the start of hostilities around the Philippines, the Navy has lost up to now in that theatre of operations one fleet carrier, two light carriers, one battleship, seven heavy cruisers, three light cruisers, eleven destroyers and 21 transport or tanker ships. Many more ships were also damaged to various degrees and needed extensive repairs. A total of 243 Navy planes, either carrier-borne or land-based, was also lost.”

The next to speak was the Chief of Staff of the Army, General Sugiyama, who read in turn from his own list.

“Army losses to date around the Philippines amount to 176 aircraft of all types, plus one infantry regiment, which was lost when its transport ships were sunk.”

There was a moment of silence as the Emperor, in appearance still impassive, digested those numbers with difficulty. Lord Kido then asked another question from the list prepared by Hirohito.

“In view of this, His Majesty wishes to know when the first Japanese soldier will be setting foot in the Philippines.”

General Sugiyama hesitated before answering, noting that the question had been ‘when’ and not ‘if’.

“Unfortunately, it is difficult to say when we will be able to land our first troops in the Philippines, as we have not yet won control of the air over that territory. The American fighter forces in the Philippines, which seemed until recently to be close to collapse, have apparently received substantial reinforcements from Australia in the last three weeks.”

The Emperor then surprised everyone by asking himself a question on an acerbic tone.

“Can’t the army set troops ashore in the Philippines, even if we do not possess complete air superiority?”

Tojo took on himself to answer the Emperor, bowing deeply as he did.

“Your Majesty, our valiant soldiers are ready to face any odds and to die in your honor. Having prior control of the air would however limit greatly our losses on landing.”

"Yet, our sailors and our aviators are presently dying around and over the Philippines, while our soldiers are waiting for more favorable conditions, Prime Minister." Tojo, like all the army officers present and many of the admirals, paled on hearing what amounted to an accusation of cowardice coming from the Emperor, one of the gravest insults possible. To utter such words, the Emperor must have reached the end of his patience indeed. However, if one looked at the facts, his statement was basically true, something that only made the rebuke even more stinging. There was only one answer left for Tojo to give to that. He bowed deeply again to the Emperor and made a pronouncement, basically writing off the alternate war plans he had in mind before coming to the conference.

"Our soldiers will be setting foot in the Philippines before a month has passed, Your Majesty."

Hirohito didn't say a word, instead nodding his head once before getting up. All present immediately bowed low until he was gone. The assembled generals, admirals and ministers then looked at each other, stunned and unsure what to do next. Tojo looked around him and gave the officers a curt order.

"Gentlemen, I expect to see in a week your updated plans for a landing in force in the Philippines within four weeks."

### **05:59 (Manila Time)**

**Sunday, January 11, 1942 'C'**

**Pilots' hut, Batangas Airfield**

**Philippines**

The sleepy Filipino sergeant on night watch duty with one radio operator in the ready room of the pilots' hut of Batangas Airfield nearly jumped out of his chair when one of his field telephones rang. Waking up in a hurry, he grabbed the receiver and answered, stifling a yawn.

"Batangas Airfield, Sergeant Arcibo!"

"Sergeant, this is Major Stanford, watch duty officer at FEAF HQ in Nielson Field. I need to speak at once with either Major Villamor or Captain Dows. This is most urgent."

"Uh, right away, sir! Please hold the line."

The Filipino then ran out of the ready room and went to the small cubicle formed in one corner of the pilots' dormitory by partitions made of wool blankets over wood frames. He then knocked on a wooden frame while calling for the occupant of the cubicle.

"Captain Dows!...Captain Dows!"

There was a noise of sudden movement inside the darkened cubicle, with a young female voice answering Arcibo after a couple of seconds.

"Yes, what is it?"

"Urgent call from Nielson Field, Captain."

"I'm coming!"

Sergeant Arcibo then ran to the small room used by Jesus Villamor, not waiting further for Ingrid. The latter quickly slipped on her combat trousers and a kaki T-shirt before coming out of her private cubicle and rushing to the ready room to grab the unhooked receiver of the field telephone connected to Nielson Field.

"Hello! Captain Dows speaking!"

"Captain, this is Major Stanford, watch officer at FEAF HQ. Two large Japanese amphibious fleets have been signaled by our coastal watchers, with landing barges approaching beaches in Lingayen Gulf and in Lamon Bay. The 27<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Group is being alerted to prepare strikes on the Japanese ships in both locations. The 21<sup>st</sup> and 34<sup>th</sup> Pursuit Squadrons will provide fighter cover for the dive bombers that will strike the Japanese fleet in the Lingayen Gulf, while your squadron and the 6<sup>th</sup> Squadron of Major Villamor will cover the planes of the 16<sup>th</sup> Bomber Squadron as they strike the ships in Lamon Bay, off Mauban."

"Understood, Major. How long will it take before our dive bombers can take off and be over their objectives?"

"Uh, the 27<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Group is being alerted right now and still needs to load bombs on their planes. With the flying time from Clark Field to Lamon Bay, I do not expect the 16<sup>th</sup> Squadron to be approaching its objective before at least one hour, at best. We will alert you when our dive bombers will be in the air."

Ingrid then spoke hurriedly, before Stanford could hang up.

"Major, hold on! My airfield is barely sixty miles away from Lamon Bay and my pilots know the terrain like the inside of their pockets. My planes can be over Mauban in fifteen minutes and start strafing the Japanese landing barges and troopships at once, before the enemy has time to land any sizeable force. We can thus soften up the enemy and reduce some of its air defenses before the arrival of our dive bombers.

Furthermore, by splitting in two my squadron, I can alternate them over the objective, attacking with one while the other refuels and rearms, thus keeping the enemy under constant fire and also providing continuous fighter cover for our bombers. We will have the huge advantage of long loiter time due to the proximity of our airfield to the objective, so I say let's use that advantage, sir!"

"Uh, one moment, Captain. I will get General Clagett on the phone for this."

As Ingrid was waiting impatiently for Clagett to come to the phone, Jesus Villamor showed up at a run, still half asleep.

"What's up, Ingrid?"

Ingrid took half a minute to explain what was happening and tell him about her proposition to attack early, getting a smile and a nod from the small Filipino pilot.

"I like your idea, Ingrid. I will get our pilots out of bed right away and will also alert our ground crews to start preparing our aircraft for takeoff."

As Villamor was running out of the ready room, shouting for the other pilots to wake up and get ready to fly, the voice of Brigadier General Clagett came on the field telephone.

"Captain Dows? This is Brigadier General Clagett. Can you detail your proposition for me?"

"Yes sir! Me and Major Villamor have a total of sixteen operational fighters already fuelled up and armed and our airfield is only fifteen minutes away by air from Lamon Bay. What I propose is that half of our P-40s in Batangas take off immediately to go strafe the Japanese landing barges and troopships before they could land any sizeable force on the beaches. That first group will empty its machineguns, then will fly back to Batangas to rearm while my second group takes over, keeping the enemy under constant fire. That will also allow me to soften up the enemy air defenses before the arrival of our dive bombers. By attacking repeatedly at very low altitude, I am hoping as well to suck down any enemy fighter cover from their high altitude orbits so that they come down on the deck to challenge us, where our planes are at their best. That way, our dive bombers may find the sky free of Japanese fighters at high altitude when they will start their attack dives. I would however need to be advised in advance before our dive bombers approach the objective. So, do I have your permission to start attacking the enemy at once, sir?"

Clagett was silent for a moment as he weighed Ingrid's proposal. The old American doctrine would say to wait in order to concentrate as big a force as possible before

attacking such a target, but Ingrid's idea had a lot of merit. Furthermore, her ideas up to now had proved to be right on the money every time. There was also that possibility of sucking down the Japanese fighters, thus leaving the high altitudes free for the dive bombers of Major Davis.

"Alright, Captain Dows! You and Major Villamor can organize and launch your alternating attack waves immediately. Just keep us apprised of your actions and results, so that we can coordinate the attacks by our dive bombers with you."

"Understood...and thank you, sir!" Said Ingrid before hanging down the receiver and running to her cubicle to finish dressing up.

Less than seven minutes later, she was running out of the pilots' hut with the seven pilots designated to join her on the first attack wave, with Jesus Villamor close behind with the second group of pilots. The camouflage nets had already been pulled from the front of the jungle hideouts of their planes, with soldiers and mechanics in the process of pushing in the open the P-40s and preparing them for takeoff. Ingrid had already taken the time to quickly explain to the other pilots the tactics she intended to use, thus was able to jump in her cockpit and strap herself in at once. Another two minutes later, she was taking off, leading her seven other pilots of the first wave towards the East-Northeast and Mauban, on the shores of Lamon Bay. She kept her engine at near maximum power and flew at an altitude of less than a hundred meters above the ground. She felt excitement rise in her as her group approached the eastern coast of Luzon, skirting the coastal town of Mauban from the North. The sight of dozens of warships, transport ships and landing barges filling Lamon Bay off Mauban made her heart jump in her chest. She didn't forget to look up as well and saw at least thirty Japanese fighters turning over the bay at high altitude, a good 6,000 meters above her head. She then activated her radio microphone to speak to her pilots, knowing that the FEAF HQ and Batangas Airfield were listening as well on her frequency.

"Ghost Force One, this is Lady Hawk. We have about thirty Japanese fighters overhead at high altitude. Ignore them for the moment and concentrate your first strafing passes on the landing barges and the troopships: consider them the top priority targets for the moment. Green Flight, you take on the landing barges approaching the beaches. Red Flight, you follow me towards the troopships, out!"



Splitting into two groups of four planes, the P-40Fs kept their speed at maximum and went down to an altitude of less than thirty meters above water, making them very difficult targets for the anti-aircraft gunners of the Japanese warships protecting the transport ships. Ingrid then split further her own flight into two pairs, sending one pair to strafe the decks of the nearest troopship while she headed with a wingman towards the next troopship, whose decks were covered with Japanese soldiers ready to board the landing barges positioned alongside the hull sides of the ship.

"Lady Hawk to Flyboy! Fall back behind me and get ready to strafe the barges alongside this troopship while I strafe the forward decks. Execute!"

"Got it, Lady Hawk!" Replied her wingman in an excited tone. The young American pilot flipped off the safety on his six .50 caliber heavy machineguns and slid on one wing to position himself behind and a bit to the right of Ingrid, lining up in his gun sight the two barges full of Japanese soldiers glued to the port flank of the troopship. He felt immense satisfaction as he opened fire, spraying the barges and the soldiers inside with over eighty heavy slugs per second and also turning at the same time the hull of the transport ship into a sieve. Thankfully, the troopship possessed only a few machineguns as defensive weapons and their fire proved completely inaccurate. His own fire proved murderous, with soldiers mowed down by the dozens inside the barges and over the climbing nets used by the soldiers to go down from the decks of the troopship. He could see as well Ingrid's fire turning the crowded forward decks into a butcher's shop. After three seconds of continuous fire, Lieutenant Mike Robertson veered off slightly, zooming by the wounded troopship and following his leader towards the next troopship. They had time to seriously pepper that ship and its barges before Ingrid gave a warning on the radio.

"ZEROS COMING DOWN FROM HIGH AT SEVEN O'CLOCK! KEEP YOUR SPEED TO MAXIMUM AND YOUR ALTITUDE LOW AND HUG THE ENEMY SHIPS. FOLLOW ME, RED TWO!"

Looking anxiously up and towards his back, Robertson saw about twenty dots falling from the sky and diving on them. Concentrating back on his low level flying, he followed about 150 meters behind Ingrid Dows, marveling at the way she was weaving her way from troopship to troopship while keeping herself between enemy ships and forcing them to fire towards their own ships in order to get at her and him. Robertson then saw something that amazed and confused him: a Japanese ZERO fighter that had been diving hard to try to catch up with Ingrid's P-40, which was going at a merry 300 miles

per hour while skimming the sea and never flying straight for more than a couple of seconds, apparently miscalculated his altitude or his safety margin to come out of its dive. It still was diving at an angle of about twenty degrees when it crashed into the sea, raising a huge geyser. The Japanese's wingman, following behind, was only a bit more successful, with its belly ricocheting off the surface of the sea before it made a spectacular cartwheel and sank as Robertson zoomed by. Robertson's laugh strangled when he saw in his rear-view mirror that he now had one ZERO on his tail. Doing everything that Ingrid did, he flipped his wings constantly, zigzagging just above the waves with his engine throttle pushed to the maximum. While the ZERO tried its best to shoot him down, its fire proved inaccurate, while it seemed to have difficulties to roll like him or Dows. Robertson grinned when he saw that the ZERO was actually losing ground on him: the Japanese was unable to catch up or even stay with him. His confidence soaring, he paid less attention to his pursuer and took the time to shoot up the crowded deck of yet another troopship before jumping over that ship, flipping on the side to avoid its superstructures. The machinegun and cannon fire from the ZERO trying to get him, while missing him narrowly, did pepper the troopship, adding to the casualties aboard. Then the ZERO's left wingtip clipped the superstructures, having rolled too slowly to avoid it, and the Japanese fighter pilot lost control of his plane, crashing into the sea. As Robertson yelled in delight while following Ingrid into another turn, his leader spoke up on the radio.

"LADY HAWK TO ALL GHOST FORCE ONE CALLSIGNS: KEEP YOUR ENGINES AT EMERGENCY POWER AND CONTINUE WEAVING AROUND THE JAPANESE SHIPS AT VERY LOW ALTITUDE, EVEN IF YOU ARE OUT OF AMMUNITION. MAKE THOSE JAPANESE FIGHTERS RUN OUT OF FUEL AND AMMUNITION."

While Robertson had cold sweats at the idea of continuing on as a flying bait for the Japanese fighters, he could see the worth of that tactic. Many of the landing barges had by now been seriously strafed before they could approach the shore and some of them were even sinking, while the decks of most of the troopships were strewn with horribly mutilated bodies. Ingrid then sent another radio message, this one intended for Batangas and Nielson Field.

"BARNYARD, THIS IS LADY HAWK. LAUNCH THE SECOND WAVE NOW! COME IN AT LOW ALTITUDE AND HIGH SPEED AS PLANNED. CENTRAL SOUTH, THE ENEMY FIGHTER COVER SHOULD BE BINGO FUEL IN A FEW MINUTES, THE

WAY THEY ARE PUSHING THEIR ENGINES TO CATCH ME. HAVE THE BIG BOYS COME HIGH WHEN THEY ARE READY, OVER.”

“Barnyard to Lady Hawk, acknowledged, out!”

“Central South to Lady Hawk, understood. Help is on the way, out!”

Robertson ran out of ammunition as he was spraying barges stationed alongside a fourth troopship. Thankfully, the Japanese fighters that had been pursuing the eight P-40s at low altitude seemed to have also run out of ammunition, with no results to show for their wild firing, and were now disengaging, slowing down and climbing back to altitude. The firing from the Japanese ships was however still unrelenting, although mostly inaccurate, and Robertson was quite certain that he had a few bullet holes in his plane by now. Ingrid then shouted a new warning on the radio.

“LADY HAWK TO GHOST FORCE ONE! KEEP WIGGLING AROUND AT TOP SPEED: MORE ZEROS ARE DIVING ON US NOW.”

A brief look up told Robertson that the last batch of Japanese fighters left at high altitude over the ships was now diving hard on the P-40s. With his body tensing up with renewed fear, he fervently hoped that those Japanese fighter pilots would repeat the same mistakes as their previous comrades. To his pleased surprise, they actually did, with at least one ZERO coming out of his dive too late and splashing in the sea. What he didn't know was that, in order to save weight and also because of the poor quality of Japanese radios, most Japanese fighters didn't have radios, so had to communicate by hand signals between themselves. Lessons that could have been given by the first wave of Japanese fighters had thus failed to be transmitted to their comrades. Looking quickly at his fuel gauge, Robertson saw that, even while flying continuously at maximum power and burning fuel at a crazy rate, he still could go one for another good five minutes still before having to turn away and return to Batangas, thanks to the proximity of their airfield. Their group of P-40s then suffered its first loss, with one P-40 hit by the fire from a Japanese light cruiser and then crashing into the sea. Clenching his teeth together, Robertson kept station behind Ingrid Dows, weaving like her between the ships, with three ZEROS chasing after them and firing their cannons and machineguns like madmen.

Captain Jim Rodman, leading the sixteen Douglas A-24 dive bombers of his 16<sup>th</sup> Bomber Squadron, came in over the Japanese invasion fleet in Lamon Bay at an altitude

of 6,000 meters. Looking nervously at the sky around him, he was surprised to see not a single Japanese fighter plane over or level with him. The only planes he could see, barely visible tiny dots, were weaving between the Japanese ships at very low altitude. He felt elation when he understood that the P-40s from Batangas had succeeded in sucking in the Japanese fighter cover down to sea level. His tone was a happy one as he called Nielson Field on the radio.

"Central South, this is Seagull Leader. We are now over the objective and are about to dive. All the enemy fighters are presently at sea level, chasing after Ghost Force One: the way for us is clear, over."

"Central South, understood. Hit the troopships as priority targets. Good luck, out!"

Rodman then switched to his squadron's frequency to give his final orders.

"From Seagull One to all Seagull: arm your bombs and start your attack dives by pairs on the troopships. Ignore the warships for the moment."

The panicked voice of one of his pilots, a young rookie, then came up on the radio.

"EIGHT BOGEYS COMING LOW FROM THE NORTHWEST!"

One quick look in that direction made Rodman frown and speak up again on the radio.

"Calm down, Seagull ten: these are friends coming to relieve Lady Hawk and her wingmen. They will chase away the remaining ZEROs for us. Now, concentrate on your attack and aim well."

Going himself for a big transport ship that stood nearest to the beaches of Mauban, Rodman deployed his dive brakes and lowered his plane's nose, diving at a sharp seventy degree angle, with his wingman following him closely. With the Japanese anti-aircraft fire proving decidedly anemic, he was able to concentrate fully on his aim, finally releasing his 1,000 pound armor-piercing bomb before pulling hard on his control stick to get out of his dive. While seeing red from the hard Gs he was pulling, he heard his rear gunner, Sergeant Martens, scream in triumph.

"A DIRECT HIT! YOU GOT HIM RIGHT BEHIND HIS FUNNEL, SIR!"

Looking down, Rodman saw a cloud of debris and smoke rising from the stricken troopship, while a big water geyser just besides it marked a near miss from his wingman. That kind of near miss was however most likely to have deformed the thin hull of the transport, opening serious leaks in it. Looking around him at the ships his pilots had attacked, he was somewhat disappointed to see that only two other of his pilots had achieved direct hits. Many had however achieved near misses. Half of the enemy

troopships were now in big trouble, not counting the strafing damage caused already by the first wave of P-40s. He then saw the last of the ZEROs, fleeing while being pursued by the P-40s of the second wave. He grinned ferociously while watching a ZERO go down in flames.

“This should create quite a nice hole in the Japanese air cover for our next attacks.”

As he regrouped his dive bombers in order to go rearm in Clark Field, he watched the second wave of P-40s switch their fire to the landing barges near the beaches and to the Japanese soldiers still visible on the beaches. Some enemy soldiers were going to be able to walk away from the beaches, but their numbers would be limited and they would do so with no heavy equipment and few supplies.

### **07:56 (Manila Time)**

#### **Air operations bridge**

#### **Japanese fleet carrier AKAGI**

#### **340 kilometers east of Lamon Bay**

Commander Genda Minoru watched grimly as the last of only four ZERO fighters to return from Lamon Bay landed rather sloppily on the deck of the AKAGI. Only four out of 36 fighters! He already knew from the radio transmissions of the warships supporting the Lamon Bay invasion force that American P-40 fighters and SBD-type dive bombers had hurt that force badly, causing huge losses among the assault troops of the 16<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division and sinking many of the precious landing barges and troopships. Resolved to learn what exactly happened over Lamon Bay to cause such a slaughter among his fighter planes, Genda went down from the air operations bridge, climbing down a series of ladders to the lower deck, where the intelligence section office was. He arrived there as the ship's intelligence officer, Lieutenant Omonishi, was finishing to debrief one of the surviving ZERO pilots. That pilot, visibly severely shaken, saluted Genda on his way out, then walked quickly away without a word. Genda watched him go for a moment, then went to Omonishi, who was looking at his notes. The intelligence officer, a young and well educated man who could speak English and Chinese, got up at rigid attention and saluted when Genda entered.

“At ease, Lieutenant! What do you have up to now? How many American P-40 fighters were there over Lamon Bay?”

"Uh, from the tales from the three pilots I debriefed to date, there were no more than eight P-40s at first, sir. They came very low and very fast from the Northwest, probably from Nielson Field or Clark Field, and immediately started strafing our landing barges and troopships. When our pilots dived on them to intercept them, they found out that they could not go fast enough to catch them. Furthermore, the high speeds made our own fighters hard to control, something that the American leader appeared to expect and did use to maximum effect."

"Hum... Anything else about them?"

"Yes, sir! These P-40s were all painted a sort of light gray, using a camouflage scheme uncommon for the Americans. That paint scheme was seen only once before by our navy pilots, when they fought with the American female ace, the said Lady Hawk, about a month ago. In fact, one of our surviving pilots think that he saw her plane, with pink letters on its engine sides, over Lamon Bay."

Genda frowned at these words: to lose so many planes was bad enough, but to lose them to a woman...

"What do we know exactly about this...Lady Hawk, Lieutenant?"

In response, Omonishi went to a steel drawer cabinet and, searching in one drawer, took out a thin file that he handed to Genda.

"Here is the file we have on her, sir."

"Thank you!" Said Genda, taking the file and then going to sit on a chair in a corner to read the file. Opening it, the first thing he saw was the copy of a magazine cover featuring a very beautiful young woman wearing a combat uniform and standing in front of a gray P-40 fighter aircraft. He couldn't help appreciate her beauty, noting as well the multiple medal ribbons on her chest. He then started reading the text accompanying the photo. The more he read, the more he became unsettled: a German girl adopted by Nancy Laplante, the Canadian time traveler? Genda was still digesting that fact when the last pilot to have returned was introduced into Omonishi's office. The pilot, on seeing Genda, stiffened and saluted crisply, with Genda saluting back and speaking to him in a friendly voice.

"Please do as if I am not here, Lieutenant Yamatsuta, and just tell Lieutenant Omonishi what happened over Lamon Bay."

"Uh, yes sir!"

Taking the chair offered by Omonishi, the fighter pilot sat down facing his desk and started answering his questions. Genda, having finished to read Ingrid Dows' file after a couple of minutes, then reacted to something the fighter pilot had just said.

"You said that the enemy fighters were out of ammunition, yet continued to fly low and fast around our ships, Lieutenant?"

"Yes sir! We still chased after them, to little avail. Then the enemy dive bombers arrived while we were still at sea level. We were thus unable to react to them."

Genda exchanged a shocked look with Omonishi, with the latter swearing.

"By the Kamis<sup>12</sup>! That Dows intentionally played bait, to attract our fighters and open the way to the enemy dive bombers."

"Decidedly, this young woman is proving to be a most dangerous adversary, and quite a crafty one as well." Said grumpily Genda. "Without firing once at our fighters, she made most of them burn too much fuel and thus caused them to crash in the sea short of our carriers. Unfortunately, the damage is now done: our fighter force has been severely diminished and we won't have enough left to adequately cover our troops in Lamon Bay against the American fighters."

"But, sir," protested Omonishi, "we can't let our troops without air cover!"

"And what are we supposed to do, Lieutenant? We already had to scrape the bottom of the drawers to assemble our present carrier-borne force, so heavy our past losses have been around the Philippines. The High Command in Tokyo refused to give us more because nothing more could be spared from other theaters. The truth is that those damn Americans in the Philippines have thrown a big wrench in our strategic plans, by costing us valuable time and resources. With the kind of losses I suspect our assault troops have suffered this morning, I doubt anyway that our landings in Lamon Bay will be successful. I will go see Admiral Nagumo to report this to him. I suspect that he will not like this one bit."

Genda then left the intelligence section, borrowing temporarily the file on Ingrid Dows, and went back up to the level of the command bridge of the carrier, where he presented himself to Admiral Nagumo, the commander of the support fleet for the landings in Lamon Bay. Nagumo listened grimly to Genda's report, nodding once his head at the end.

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<sup>12</sup> Kamis : Japanese god spirits.

"The 16<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division has indeed suffered heavily from the enemy air attacks, Commander Genda. Without fighter cover, our troops and ships have by now endured four successive waves of attacks by American fighters, plus two waves of dive bombers. Nearly all of our landing barges have been either sunk, destroyed on the beaches or shot so full of holes that they are now next to useless. Five out of nine of our troopships have been sunk, while the four remaining ones have been repeatedly strafed by American fighters. The commander of the 16<sup>th</sup> Division, General Morioka, was killed on the bridge of his troopship, while our assault troops have suffered a loss rate of close to sixty percent up to now. General Homma is now seriously considering cancelling further landing operations in Lamon Bay."

Genda was digesting that piece of news when a young officer brought a message for Nagumo, who read it quickly. Genda saw Nagumo's expression harden as he read. The old admiral finally looked up at his air commander, bitterness on his face.

"Enemy dive bombers just made a third attack on our ships in Lamon Bay. All but one of our remaining troopships have been sunk. Most of the 16<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division has been lost now and General Homma has ordered a halt to the landings in Lamon Bay. That will leave less than one battalion on the beachhead. Homma is considering getting those soldiers back to the ships."

Genda lowered his head, struck hard by the level of their defeat in Lamon Bay, as it could only be called a defeat.

"What about our landings in the Lingayen Gulf, Admiral?"

"Apparently, they went much better than ours here, Genda. The Americans did attack our ships and barges there and caused some damage, but our fighter cover there seemed to have done better, either that or the Americans there were not as skillful as the ones over Lamon Bay."

"Uh, talking about the Americans who attacked our ships in Lamon Bay, Admiral, we have some information on their leader."

Genda then presented the file he was holding to Nagumo, who took it and opened it. Nagumo nearly took a step back and threw an incredulous look at Genda.

"This can't be serious, Commander."

"I am very serious, Admiral. This Lady Hawk, as she is nicknamed on the radio, was seen leading the first wave of P-40 fighters. The unusual, crafty tactics used by the Americans this morning are also part of her trademarks."



Nagumo gave a second look at the photo inside the file, then read quickly the information on Ingrid Dows, finally shaking his head.

“So beautiful and young, yet so dangerous...”

### **20:34 (Manila Time)**

#### **Operations center, USAFFE HQ**

##### **Manila**

General Douglas MacArthur had mixed feelings as he listened to the reports and briefings from a succession of staff officers: while the situation around the Lamon Bay appeared under control, the same could not be said about the Japanese landings on the shores of Lingayen Gulf. Japanese troops were now ashore in strength in at least three separate points of the coast and had formed beachheads that were being steadily reinforced and supplied as night was falling. The problem for MacArthur was that he didn't have the kind of forces in that sector that would be sufficient to repulse those Japanese landings. He thus had no choice but to make his units there withdraw and take defensive positions behind the Agno River. That unfortunately meant that Baguio, one of the main cities in the Philippines and situated barely thirty kilometers away from the Japanese landing beaches, would have to be left undefended. That was a bitter blow to MacArthur, who had fervently hoped that his aviation could have blunted the Japanese invasion. It had actually done an excellent job in Lamon Bay, with results that had far exceeded his expectations, but somehow the squadrons assigned to attack the Lingayen Gulf enemy forces had not done as well, despite having more planes than those that had attacked in the South.

MacArthur's chief of staff, Major General Richard Sutherland, came to him at the end of the briefings, seemingly happy about something.

“Good news from Major General Parker, sir: His 51<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division, backed up by one artillery regiment, has sealed the Japanese beachhead near Mauban and is steadily pushing the surviving Japanese survivors back towards the sea. He expects to finish them off by tomorrow night.”

“Good! At least, the Japanese will not be able to take Manila in a pincer now and we will be free to concentrate on those landings along the Lingayen Gulf. Once Parker will be finished mopping up the Japanese around Mauban, we will transfer one of his two

divisions northward, to reinforce our defensive line along the Agno River. Tell Brereton that I want a renewed air effort tomorrow morning against the Japanese ships in the Lingayen Gulf: we must sink as much as possible of the enemy transports and supply ships there, to give a chance to our troops on the ground.”

“Uh, General, the problem is that the 21<sup>st</sup> and 34<sup>th</sup> Pursuit Squadrons, along with the 17<sup>th</sup> and 91<sup>st</sup> Bomber Squadrons, have suffered heavy losses today. They are now down to about 65 percent of their original strength and many of their planes are in need of repairs.”

Clearly displeased, MacArthur turned to fully face his chief of staff.

“These units possessed two thirds of our P-40 fighters and of our A-24 dive bombers, compared to a third in Nichols Field and Batangas. Yet, their performance paled compared to that of our squadrons in the South. Why?”

Sutherland hesitated, somewhat embarrassed by the answer he was about to give. He had already asked the same question to Major General Brereton and had gotten a rather unsettling answer.

“General Brereton says that it was a combination of stronger Japanese forces in the North and different tactics used in the South, General. It seems that Captain Dows, of the 17<sup>th</sup> Pursuit Squadron, showed some tactical genius, along with lots of guts, while attacking the Lamon Bay invasion fleet. She managed to empty the sky over Lamon Bay of its Japanese fighter cover, leaving the way open to our dive bombers.”

MacArthur crossed his arms and stared at his chief of staff.

“So, you are telling me that an eighteen year-old captain, and a girl to boot, performed better than half a dozen older, more senior captains and majors, is that it? Should I promote that girl to the rank of major, then? It would be commensurate with her present command position as a squadron leader.”

“Promote a teenage girl to the rank of major?” Exclaimed Sutherland in a horrified tone. “You can’t be serious, General! She has been serving as a fighter pilot for less than three months! Besides, she should not even be serving at all.”

“And we would lose the services of a fighter pilot with over sixty confirmed air kills and who just demonstrated better tactical sense than our other squadron leaders? I would call that shooting ourselves squarely in the foot, Dick. Alright, let’s leave her a captain, but give her at the least a DFC or a Silver Star for her actions today. In what state is her squadron and the 16<sup>th</sup> Bomber Squadron?”

“I will have to check on that, General.”

"Please do that, Dick. If those two squadrons down South are still in fair shape and if the Japanese fleet in Lamon Bay is not considered a threat anymore, then I may just transfer the efforts of Dows' squadron against the Lingayen Gulf invasion fleet."

"Understood, General. I will go get those figures right away."

## **22:46 (Manila Time)**

### **Pilots ready room, Batangas Airfield**

Having been just awakened from a deep slumber and still feeling dead tired from the six combat missions she had flown today, Ingrid grabbed the handset offered by Sergeant Arcibo and spoke in the mouthpiece of the field telephone.

"Captain Dows speaking!"

"Captain Dows, this is General Brereton speaking. I am sorry to wake you up like this and realize that you had a very long day, but I need again your talent for thinking outside of the box. General MacArthur has directed that we concentrate our efforts against the Japanese troopships in the Lingayen Gulf tomorrow morning and wants your squadron as part of that effort. Can you give me an update on your unit's operational status?"

"Certainly, General! Right now, I have nine of my planes fully operational, including mine. My mechanics are presently working hard to repair four of my P-40s that have sustained varying degrees of damage. My maintenance officer swore to me that at least two of those four planes would be ready to fly by sunrise. I also have twelve pilots with me, with one pilot wounded and at the infirmary. This does not include Major Villamor, his sole wingman or his two planes, General."

"The 6<sup>th</sup> Squadron will stay in Batangas to defend our southern zone, Captain Dows. As for our other two fighter squadrons, they are presently at half strength, like the 17<sup>th</sup> and 91<sup>st</sup> Bomber Squadrons."

"Sir, you are not expecting my squadron to do most of the job alone, I hope?"

"I would never ask you that, Captain Dows."

Brereton then paused, as if he was too embarrassed to say something. Ingrid suddenly understood the real reason he had called: he was facing a tactical problem to which he could not find a solution and was hoping to benefit from her unorthodox ways of fighting an air battle, like this morning, but was afraid of losing face if he openly asked the advice of a young captain.

"Sir, from what I heard about how things went over the Lingayen Gulf, the enemy air cover there was much more substantial than the one over Lamon Bay. I suspect that no more than two carriers provided the air support for the landing force in Lamon Bay, while planes from Formosa and Indochina are able to supplement any carrier force cruising to the West of the Philippines. Clashing head on with such an air cover would not be a good idea. What we need to do is to attack when that air cover is not up. I may have an idea, if we have the right ordnance still available, General."

"I'm listening, Captain." Said Brereton, suddenly hopeful.

### **03:13 (Manila Time)**

**Monday, January 12, 1942 'C'**

**Command bridge of the battleship NAGATO**

**Lingayen Gulf, West Coast of Luzon**

**Philippines**

"Admiral, we have a large group of aircraft approaching from the North at medium altitude. They sound like bombers."

Admiral Yamamoto, who had awakened early in anticipation of the action to come in the morning, raised an eyebrow in surprise at the report from the bridge duty officer.

"From the North? They must be coming from Formosa, then. Damn! Can't the Army properly coordinate its airstrikes with us for a change? And what are these idiots hoping to hit at this hour? It's still dark!"

The bridge duty officer shrugged, a slight smile on his face: if they wouldn't have been at war with the Americans and their allies, the Japanese Imperial Army and the Imperial Japanese Navy would be at war with each other, so intense was their inter-service rivalry. Still curious, Yamamoto went out on the open bridge wing and pointed his binoculars upwards.

"We didn't get any message announcing such a raid at this hour, Commander?"

"None, Admiral. But again, the Army never notified us in advance before, sir."

"True!"

At first, he couldn't see any of the approaching bombers. After a minute of looking and searching, he finally saw a black dot, barely visible against the dark sky, as it passed under a cloud over the invasion fleet.

“There’s one! It certainly looks like a multi-engine plane. If they are hoping to bomb Manila or Clark Field, then they are already a bit off course.”

A very bright spot of light then suddenly lit up in the sky, under the bomber, blinding Yamamoto and making him swear loudly. Another seven points of light, lined up in extended line, soon lit up the sky, illuminating the Japanese ships in the gulf in their harsh artificial lights. The approaching bombers, flying above the lights, were now impossible to see from sea level.

“PARAFLARES!” Shouted Yamamoto, furious, as he understood what was happening. “THE ENEMY IS ATTACKING WITH THE HELP OF PARAFLARES! CALL THE FLEET TO BATTLE STATIONS!”

The bridge duty officer obeyed at once, activating the battle alarm. Soon, thousands of men were jumping out of their bunks and running to their battle stations on the dozens of ships of the invasion fleet. Yamamoto, looking up at the sky with his bare eyes, saw the bombers drop a second line of paraflares about a kilometer ahead of the first line, then a third line. Most of the ships of the fleet were now plainly visible on the surface of the sea, while the harsh light of the flares made pointing accurately any anti-aircraft gun nearly impossible. Yamamoto had to grudgingly give credit to whoever had imagined this. Now expecting enemy attack planes to appear, he watched anxiously the sky but didn’t see anything. Then, a big white geyser of water erupted alongside one of the troopships of the fleet, marking a very near miss by a bomb, close enough to the hull to probably buckle it and create massive water leaks. Yamamoto saw a fleeting black dot overfly the ship, coming out of a steep dive, as the noise of the explosion reached him.

“ENEMY DIVE BOMBERS! LIGHT UP THE SEARCHLIGHTS!”

While a standard practice if attacked at night from the air, his order only made his escort warships more visible to the squadrons of dive bombers that had followed the B-17 heavy bombers launching the paraflares. Those dive bombers however had very strict orders: get the troopships first! The 33 Douglas A-24 thus avoided the warships now searching for them with their searchlights and concentrated on the more than thirty big transport ships carrying the 18<sup>th</sup> and 56<sup>th</sup> Infantry Divisions of Lieutenant General Lida’s 15<sup>th</sup> Army. As bombs landed on or close to troopships, a furious Yamamoto saw more flying dots appear, this time flying very low and close to the beaches. The dots turned out to be over a dozen P-40 fighters that became busy strafing the landing barges that had been using the cover of the night to ferry men, heavy equipment and supplies from the troopships and supply ships to the beaches already occupied by Japanese troops.

Yamamoto was looking at the big fireball caused by the explosion of an ammunition ship when the terrifying noise of heavy slugs whistling by made him crouch in a hurry, while more slugs pierced the superstructures of the battleship and shattered viewing ports. At least two of the big searchlights on his side of the ship were shattered by the rain of .50 caliber bullets, while some anti-aircraft gunners screamed with pain. A gray shape then zoomed close by, level with Yamamoto's bridge. A second fighter plane then roared by, firing its heavy machineguns and adding to the carnage among the anti-aircraft gunners standing in their open gun platforms along the superstructures. Yamamoto could only bang his fist in frustration against the bulwark. He didn't possess night fighters and his day fighters were not trained to do night intercepts. The fleet thus wouldn't benefit from any air cover until sunrise. The bridge duty officer, mortally worried, came to him at a run as he was straightening up.

"ADMIRAL! ADMIRAL! ARE YOU ALRIGHT?"

"Yes, Commander. Only my pride has been hit."

Yamamoto then embraced with bitterness the scene still illuminated by the paraflares. Having dropped all their bombs, the dive bombers had left as quickly as they had come, letting P-40 fighters continue the mayhem by strafing repeatedly the troopships and the landing barges visible, slaughtering thousands of soldiers packed on the decks and in the barges. The enemy fighters disappeared as soon as the flares burned out in the sky, returning the waters of the gulf to obscurity, save for the light from burning ships and barges. The old admiral then wondered what would be next.

With daylight came 23 ZERO fighters from the three fleet carriers supporting the landings in Lingayen Gulf. Those fighters then started orbiting the invasion fleet to provide it with a potent air cover. Yamamoto knew then that more carrier-borne fighters were on standby, ready to replace those 23 ZEROs if they became low on fuel or expended their ammunition during a possible attack by the Americans. However, there were no such air attacks on the fleet during the morning or afternoon. The only actions by the Americans were to harass with artillery fire the three battalions of Japanese troops already ashore. More than one officer around Yamamoto swore at the cowardly type of tactics of the Americans, who apparently didn't dare face Japanese pilots in broad daylight. Yamamoto was however inclined to call those American tactics 'devilish' rather than 'cowardly'. The American night attack had been short, but it had succeeded

in sinking nine of the precious troop transports, while nearly all the other troopships had been copiously strafed with heavy machinegun fire by the American P-40 fighters, killing or wounding a staggering number of Japanese soldiers that had been waiting on the decks to load up in barges and travel ashore to reinforce the beachheads. Worse, the majority of the landing barges used by the fleet had been either sunk or shot full of holes, making them unusable. That had greatly reduced the rate at which soldiers from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 56<sup>th</sup> Infantry Divisions, at least those that had survived the bombings and the strafing, could be transferred ashore.

Yamamoto looked on when a group of Formosa-based bombers escorted by Nakajima Ki-43 army fighters passed near the fleet in the early morning, on its way to attack the American airfields of Clark Field and Del Carmen Field, near Porac, to the South-southeast of Lingayen Gulf. When they passed by on their way back nearly one hour later, the admiral was shocked to see the gaping holes in the formation: American fighters had obviously taken a big bite out of the attack force. He later learned that most of the bombers had not even been able to drop their bombs on their objectives. An even more substantial attack formation, this time from Yamamoto's carriers, passed by two hours after the army planes, heading for the airfields of Nielson Field and Nichols Field, near Manila. Yamamoto couldn't help frown on seeing that the attacks by his navy planes and by army planes were not being coordinated, more than probably due to the running inter-service rivalry between the Army and Navy. Another detail that displeased him was the very light fighter escort of the navy attack formation. However, with the heavy losses in planes and pilots suffered in the last weeks and with the necessity to protect the invasion fleet from further air attacks, Yamamoto didn't have the number of fighters he had wished for or even needed. He was thus not surprised to see his planes come back as well with big holes in their formations. It was however infuriating to him to see how the Americans were able to handle his planes with apparent ease, and this after imperial planes had crushed one by one all their opponents in this war...until now.

Expecting more serious action after nightfall, Yamamoto went to get some sleep in the early afternoon, waking up at around seven in the evening and then having supper before going to the flag operations room of the battleship to see how the invasion force was doing. One look on the tactical map was enough to show him that progress in landing the invasion force was agonizingly slow, due probably to the limited number of

landing barges still operational. That meant that the surviving troopships remained atrociously vulnerable, with thousands of soldiers still on them, something that made Yamamoto frown again. He also wondered who among the American senior commanders he could blame for all this: contrary to the dismal combat performance of the British and Dutch troops in other parts of the Pacific and Asia, the American forces in the Philippines had consistently outsmarted the Japanese forces, either guessing in advance the Japanese attack plans or countering Japanese attacks with new and unpredictable tactics.

The first American air attack on the fleet that day actually took place just before sunset, with over twenty P-40 fighters zooming over the beachheads at high speed and skimming the waves, targeting first the surviving landing barges and shooting them full of holes before the Japanese fighters on top cover could even react. Then, as the ZEROs dove towards the sea to intercept them, the P-40s performed one strafing pass each on the troopships before fleeing inland at high speed. The ZEROs of the top cover, who had already been low on fuel and were about to return to their carriers when the P-40s showed up, tried to catch the American fighters but soon had to give up and turn around in order not to run out of fuel before they could land on their carriers. There was a lot of swearing around Yamamoto on the command bridge as his officers watched the action and the fruitless response by the ZEROs. Yamamoto couldn't however in all honesty blame his fighter pilots: the new enemy quick hit and run tactics played directly on the design weaknesses of Japanese planes, weaknesses that Yamamoto knew well enough. Cowardly or not, those American tactics just had sunk about every landing barge that had been previously left intact and added to the carnage on the troopships.

The widely anticipated American night attack came in at about ten in the evening and was basically a repeat of the first night attack, with B-17 bombers dropping paraflares in support of dive bombers and P-40 fighters concentrating again on the troop transports. Again, the frustrated Japanese could do little but fill the sky with shells, with little concrete results. However, that attack sank or disabled all of the remaining troopships, dooming the invasion to failure: there was now too few troops left intact and on the ground to even dream of being able to take the Philippines. That attack also had a minor variation, as the B-17 bombers, after dropping their paraflares, turned around to carpet bomb the beachheads from an altitude of no more than 3,000 meters.



As Yamamoto was assembling his battle staff to assess the situation after the attack, word came in that both Lieutenant General Homma and Lieutenant General Lida, the two senior army commanders for the operation, had been killed. Yamamoto stayed silent for a moment as he digested that piece of news, then looked around at his grim-faced staff officers.

"Gentlemen, the Army has now no more troops left to land and no senior commanders left to lead our troops ashore. We now have nothing left but ship launches and lifeboats that we could use to either land or pick back up troops, something obviously wholly insufficient to supply or sustain even the few troops we have ashore. Colonel Takeshita, how many troops exactly did we have time to land before we lost our last barges? Who would be left in command on the shore now?"

The army liaison officer attached to Yamamoto's staff, who appeared understandably shaken by the present situation, did a quick bow of the head as he answered.

"Admiral, we have the equivalent of five battalions, or about 4,000 men, dispersed around three beachheads. The most senior commander on the shore should be Colonel Sakamoto, of the 47<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment. However, our troops in the beachheads have little supplies with them and have maybe five days of rations and ammunition available to them. That is if the latest American bombardment of the beachheads has not destroyed any of our supply dumps on the shore."

"Four thousand men..." Said slowly Yamamoto. "And how many soldiers do we have remaining on our ships, Colonel?"

Takeshita lowered his head, answering in a weak voice.

"Less than one hundred, Admiral. They are aboard a destroyer that was going to drop them as an advance reconnaissance force on another beach. We have also saved about 400 men from the sinking troopships, but those soldiers are without any equipment or even rifles."

There was again a long silence before Yamamoto spoke again to his stunned and grieving staff.

"Gentlemen, we have now lost over 48,000 troops here and in Lamon Bay in only two days, along with all our troop transport ships and landing barges. Our losses in planes were also crippling. Our 4,000 men ashore cannot be reinforced or even supplied adequately and the Americans may launch more night attacks against our ships. After eleven weeks of hard fighting, we still haven't taken the Philippines, a task that the Imperial High Command had initially given fifty days to complete, and that

cannot possibly be accomplished now with the resources left to us. In my humble opinion, leaving those 4,000 soldiers ashore would be tantamount to sacrificing them for no good purpose. This is however a decision that is for the Army to take. Colonel Takeshita, prepare and send a message to Southern Army Headquarters, exposing to them our present situation and asking for a decision concerning our landed troops. Please stress the point that any delay in their response will only expose this fleet to further air attacks. In the meantime, all our ships will get under pressure and prepare to leave the Lingayen Gulf, while our anti-aircraft gunners will stay on alert. If the decision to evacuate our landed troops is taken, then we will use the motor launches of our warships to pick up our men. You are now dismissed, gentlemen.”

The gathered officers then dispersed, leaving Yamamoto alone to contemplate the tactical map of the Philippines, on which were marked only four minuscule areas as being in Japanese hands. In order to satisfy the orders to take the Philippines, the invasions of Thailand and Burma had been postponed, four army divisions had been wasted, hundreds of planes and thousands of aviators had been lost and dozens of ships had been sunk, with thousands of sailors killed in the process. The Americans had also undoubtedly suffered greatly, but they were the ones who were now left in possession of the prize. Worse for Japan, those Americans had by now found new ways and tactics to oppose successfully the Imperial forces and had shown themselves willing and able to use them. That, above all, could bring untold grief to Japan in the months of war to come.

American planes attacked again that night, around three in the morning, causing more damage and sinking a number of the transport ships carrying the supplies that had been intended for the invading troops. More ominous for Yamamoto was the fact that, this time, the destroyers holding his outer picket line were attacked as well, being copiously strafed by P-40s and ending up being severely damaged. That raised in the admiral's mind the specter of possible submarine attacks on his fleet. Unfortunately, the Southern Army Headquarters had simply acknowledged receipt of Colonel Takeshita's message, stating that the matter would be passed to higher authorities in Tokyo. In the meantime, permission was refused to withdraw the troops already landed, with the Navy being asked to do its best to continue running supplies and men to the beachheads. That response, while infuriating Yamamoto, didn't surprise him one bit: there was no doubt in his mind that the blame game in Tokyo about this defeat would be both

acrimonious and long. He was thus probably going to be stuck here for many days, under periodic air attacks and also possibly submarine attack.

That possibility materialized in mid morning, when one of the light cruisers of the outer screen was hit by two torpedoes and quickly developed an alarming list to starboard. As destroyers picked up speed and dashed towards the possible location of the attacking American submarine, intent on dropping depth charges, a third torpedo hit the unlucky cruiser, breaking it in two. That ship was only the first of four warships to be hit by torpedoes that morning. Having had enough, Yamamoto then ordered all ships out of the Lingayen Gulf and into the open seas, where they could better maneuver and protect themselves. That however left the Japanese troops in the beachheads isolated and without support, something the American forces surrounding them exploited at once by counter-attacking and starting to reduce the Japanese pockets. Despite their hopeless situation, the Japanese soldiers fought on with renewed ferocity, even charging with the bayonet when they found themselves out of ammunition. The American Marines and Philippine Scouts soldiers spearheading the counter-attacks were no less ferocious, resulting in battles of rare intensity for the possession of the coastal towns and villages in the area.

### **16:32 (Manila Time)**

**Wednesday, January 14, 1942 'C'**

**Pilots' hut, Batangas Airfield**

"Remember, guys: only one drink! The Japanese fleet may have pulled out, but we may still get air attacks from Formosa."

"Come on, Ingrid! They wouldn't attack so late in the afternoon." Objected Mike Robertson, who was pouring bourbon into the glasses eagerly presented to him by the other pilots in the ready room. "And where is your glass? You are the main reason why we can celebrate today."

"I'm only eighteen, remember? I am still legally too young to drink."

"Aw bunk! The hell with those hypocrites and prudes in the States! You deserve a drink more than anyone else here."

Ingrid was still debating mentally if she should cheat and have a drink when the field telephone linking Batangas with the FEAF headquarters rang. Jesus Villamor, a glass of bourbon in one hand, picked up the receiver to answer.

“Major Villamor, 6<sup>th</sup> Pursuit Squadron!... One moment please.”

Jesus then looked at Ingrid.

“It’s for you, Ingrid.”

Ingrid walked quickly to the table supporting the battery of field telephones and took the receiver from Jesus.

“Captain Dows speaking!”

“Ingrid, this is Lieutenant Colonel William Clement, at Asiatic Fleet headquarters.”

Ingrid tensed up at once on hearing the grave tone used by Clement.

“Yes, Colonel Clement?”

“I...Ingrid, I have some sad news to pass on to you. Your husband was killed in combat this morning while fighting to retake the coastal town of Agoo from the Japanese.”

Ingrid, suddenly overtaken by unspeakable grief, collapsed on a chair and started sobbing, the receiver still against her ear.

“Ingrid?... Ingrid? Are you still there?”

“Y...yes!”

“Ingrid, I am truly sorry for your loss. Is there something I can do for you?”

“Ken, has he been buried already?”

“He and his men that were killed with him have been buried in temporary graves in Baguio. I can send a driver with a jeep to pick you up tomorrow morning to bring you to Baguio.”

“Thank you, Colonel. I...I would appreciate that very much.”

“It is the least I can do, Ingrid. My driver will show up in Batangas at seven tomorrow morning. You have my most sincere condolences: Ken was a great officer and a great Marine.”

“Thank you again, Colonel. I will be ready for seven. Thank you for calling.”

Ingrid then slowly put down the receiver, watched by the now silent crowd of pilots. Looking with tear-filled eyes at Jesus Villamor, Ingrid managed to say a few words.

“Ken, my husband...he was killed this morning in Agoo.”

She then broke down completely and started crying without shame.

**09:20 (Washington Time)**  
**Thursday, January 15, 1942 'C'**  
**Oval Office, the White House**  
**Washington, D.C.**  
**U.S.A.**

Lieutenant General Henry 'Hap' Arnold had very good reasons to be happy this morning as he was introduced in the Oval Office, where the President was waiting with Admiral Stark, General Marshall, Secretary of War Stimson and Secretary of the Navy Knox. Apart from celebrating the fact that American forces had ultimately won the battle for the Philippines, Arnold could further rejoice at the fact that this victory was mainly due to the work of his aviators, who had decimated the Japanese invasion fleet. He found the other participants to the meeting in equally good spirits, sitting on sofas around a coffee table in one corner of the Oval Office, save for Roosevelt, who was in his customary wheelchair. Arnold came to attention and saluted on entering the presidential office.

"Good morning, Mister President!"

"And a good morning to you, General Arnold. Please, take a seat."

Arnold did so, sitting down besides General Marshall and Secretary of War Henry Stimson. President Roosevelt then opened the conversation by taking a newspaper and showing its front page to the others. A big picture of General MacArthur was splashed on it, with the caption 'Victor of the Philippines' in bold letters.

"I know that most of you are not too keen on seeing MacArthur acclaimed on the front pages, but I believe that he amply deserves the praise right now. The victory he pulled in the Philippines is as stunning as it was a surprise to us all. Your aviators in particular did an incredible job, General Arnold."

"Thank you, Mister President."

Arnold's smile then faded somewhat as he gave a sober look at Roosevelt.

"Concerning the praise to General MacArthur, I may have to qualify it, Mister President. Apart from receiving yesterday a complete situation report from Major General Lewis Brereton, the commander of our aviation in the Philippines, I also got from him a personal message, encoded for my eyes only. In it, Brereton said that neither he nor General MacArthur didn't really deserve the praise for the novel tactics

used to decimate the Japanese invasion fleet. In truth, those tactics and the general attack plan he used were suggested to him by one of his aviators.”

“Then, let’s promote that tactical genius, General!” Exclaimed with good humor Roosevelt. Arnold made an embarrassed smile at that.

“Mister President, that tactical genius is none other than an eighteen year-old girl, Captain Ingrid Dows, to be more precise.”

A stunned silence greeted his declaration, with Admiral Stark finally protesting, clearly incredulous.

“Come on, Henry! Do you really believe that? How could a girl think of all these tactics?”

“How, Admiral? By thinking outside of the box. That’s what Brereton said in his message. He says that this Ingrid Dows is thinking the same way that her adoptive mother, Nancy Laplante, did. She also happens to be a truly superb fighter pilot and, according to Brereton, showed herself to be a natural leader of men as commander of the 17<sup>th</sup> Pursuit Squadron.”

“She commands a pursuit squadron?” Exclaimed Roosevelt, who had not been told before about that. Arnold nodded his head once.

“She has been for two months now, on the authority of General MacArthur, Mister President. By the way, her victory score to date stands at 67, way ahead of any of our other fighter pilots. In fact, she would qualify as the highest scoring Allied air ace of this war right now.”

“Incredible! Well, we can discuss about this girl in more detail later. Let’s get to the reason we are all here this morning, gentlemen. What do we do now with the Philippines? Do we reinforce it? Do we simply leave it as is or do we evacuate our forces there?”

“To evacuate the Philippines after such a victory would be unthinkable, Mister President.” Retorted at once Henry Stimson. “I know that we have a ‘Europe first’ policy, but we can’t throw away such a triumph: the American public would never accept that. Surely, we could spare a few more squadrons of fighters and bombers to reinforce the Philippines and prevent the Japanese from trying again to invade. We should also send more regular troops there, to supplement the raw Filipino recruits forming most of MacArthur’s forces.”

“Can we really afford that, in view of the immense task facing us in Europe?” Replied the Secretary of the Navy, Frank Knox. “The British need all the help we can send them.”

“May I point out that the British did absolutely nothing to help us in the Philippines, rather using us to try retaining their colonies in Asia.” Pointed out Arnold. “We shouldn’t sacrifice our own troops and territories just to please Prime Minister Churchill. We are already doing an awful lot to help the British, gentlemen. Just in the last two months, as our men were fighting for their lives in the Philippines, I sent to England three full groups of heavy bombers and one group of fighters, while we sent nothing to the Philippines. I would certainly be ready to spare a few squadrons for the Philippines now. The British would be ill advised to object to that in view of our success there.”

Roosevelt was left thoughtful at that: he had given his word to Churchill that the European front would get absolute priority in the American war effort. On the other hand, simply abandoning the American forces in the Philippines at such a moment would not fly at all with the American public.

“What could you send quickly to the Philippines without hurting too much our buildup in England, General Arnold?”

“I could send a fighter group equipped with P-40s, plus at least one squadron of B-17 heavy bombers and one extra squadron of A-24 dive bombers. If the Navy could spare a carrier or two to help get those P-40s and A-24s within flying distance of the Philippines, then the better.”

Roosevelt nodded at that, then looked at General Marshall.

“And what could the Army send in terms of ground troops to the Philippines, General?”

“To say frankly, Mister President: nothing at the moment. Our army buildup is still only in midstride and what we have is a lot of half-trained troops, led by inexperienced divisional staffs.”

Frank Knox then came to the help of Marshall after a short hesitation.

“The Navy may be able to spare a regiment of Marines for the Philippines, Mister President, plus a battalion of navy combat engineers to help rebuild the Cavite Navy Yards, which suffered quite a lot during the campaign. Our submarines in the Philippines did a superb job and deserve to be well supported.”

"Well, that is certainly a good start, gentlemen." Said Roosevelt, pleased. What about the troops we already have there? They would certainly deserve some down time in the States as a reward for their heroic efforts."

"That could be done in rotation, once reinforcements had time to arrive, Mister President." Replied General Marshall. "Thinking of it, I may be able to spare an extra regiment or two of anti-aircraft artillery for the defense of the Philippines. We have a plethora of such units along the West Coast and, after the beating they just got in the Philippines, I doubt very much that the Japanese would seriously think about attacking the Continental United States."

"What about MacArthur?" Said Admiral Stark, a malicious smile on his face. "Could we recall him to the States and let him have his personal triumph, then keep him here, away from the Philippines? He is frankly becoming too much of a sort of local emperor there."

"So that the Navy could grab full control of the whole Pacific theater, Admiral?" Shot back Marshall, clearly not enjoying Stark's joke. "MacArthur may be a loud mouth and a glory seeker, but he did win that fight with the Japanese and is also venerated by the Filipinos. We need him there to finish training the Filipino Army, at the least."

"I would tend to agree with General Marshall on that." Said Roosevelt. "Please don't bring MacArthur here, in Washington."

The others laughed briefly at that remark. Roosevelt then became serious again.

"Well, I believe that we arrived at a consensus here, gentlemen. Without hurting in a major way our European buildup, we will send what we can as reinforcements to the Philippines, in order to prevent any other Japanese attempt at invasion there. Admiral Stark, do your best to help with your carriers for the movement of extra planes to the Philippines and try to push a supply and troop convoy through as soon as the extra army and Marine troops are ready to depart. On my part, I will do my best to assuage any British objections to these reinforcements. Keep me informed on the progress in these matters, please. You may now go, gentlemen."

While Knox and Stark left the Oval Office then, Arnold stayed, asking as well that Marshall and Stimson stay. Roosevelt waited for the four of them to be alone before addressing Arnold, curious.

"What do you want to discuss now, General Arnold?"



"Mister President, this may sound like a trivial matter, but I would like to discuss what we are going to do with Captain Dows. At the least, I would be very anxious to be able to use her as a combat instructor for our fighter pilot trainees. She has more than proven her worth in the Philippines and her new tactics and air combat concepts should be taught to all our pilots. The problem is that she is officially still a Filipina officer and would have no military status here in the States. We must find a way to best employ her, Mister President."

"Hum, I would tend to agree with you, General Arnold. However, this problem is as much a political one as a military one. You know what the American public opinion is about women serving in the military, do you? Besides, I am afraid that, if she serves as our sole female officer, she could be the target of endless harassment and discrimination. Being relegated to a desk or to rear area duties for the rest of the war could also destroy her. I would rather prefer to see her stay on as a fighter pilot, even if she serves a few months as an instructor. What did you find out about the possible ways of permitting the enrolment of women in the Army Air Corps?"

"Well, I have to tell you that I discussed that subject in some detail with Nancy Laplante, at her insistence, when she visited Washington in December of 1940. She was actually quite passionate about that subject, as you may guess. She told me about what happened to the American women who enrolled as auxiliaries in her history and about the various mistakes and abuses committed then. I thus put a colonel known by me to have an open mind in charge of studying the matter and also enlisted the help of Jacqueline Cochran, the famous aviatrix. Their report is still being finalized but I saw their preliminary findings and recommendations. If women could be legally enrolled in the Army Air Corps, then the best way to go at it would be to form all-women units, with a minimum of male specialists to help their training and with a special chain of command to avoid abuse of these women by male officers. One thing that Nancy Laplante warned me of, though, was to avoid treating these women as possible sources of discipline and morale problems, like keeping them under guard in segregated camps and denying them full rights as soldiers and aviators. As she told me rather bluntly, the problem of sexual abuse lies with men, not women."

Roosevelt wrung a hand at those words.

"You don't have to remind me of what kind of a feminist she was, General. My own wife would however probably agree with her views on that subject. In fact, I may just ask Eleanor to go meet with your colonel and Cochran, to discuss with them their

findings. As for the legal aspect of enrolling women in the Army, I am quickly growing fed up with the lame or squarely hypocritical arguments I am getting on that subject from most members of the Congress. I may just sign a Presidential Executive Order to make matters clear on this. General Marshall, would you see a benefit in enrolling women in the Army, especially in support and administrative positions, like clerks, radio operators and cooks?"

Marshall couldn't help snicker then as a thought crossed his mind.

"Well, I certainly wouldn't mind seeing female cooks prepare our soldiers' meals. I have been served some rather disgusting swill during my career by more than a few male army cooks who thought of themselves as great chefs. If a way can be found to avoid or minimize the problem of sexual harassment and abuse, then I could certainly use women in the rear areas. That would free more men for direct combat roles."

"Excellent! Then I will be awaiting your special report with anticipation, General Arnold. As soon as I get it, I will write an executive order to put it in effect. The good Captain Dows' talents will not be wasted."

## **CHAPTER 13 – REST AND RECUPERATION**

**13:50 (Midwest Time)**

**Sunday, February 22, 1942 'C'**

**Havre train station, Montana**

**U.S.A.**

Ingrid shivered when she stepped down from the train that had brought her from Seattle, as a freezing wind swept the train station platform. Six months spent in the tropical heat and humidity of the Philippines had not prepared her for the cold, dry winters of Montana. Thankfully, she had been issued an Army Air Force leather and mutton fur aviator's jacket, plus gloves and fur-lined boots on arrival in San Francisco. Zipping up fully her jacket, which she wore over her Philippines Army going out uniform, she also raised her mutton collar to protect her ears from the cold. While stared at by everybody present on the platform, she took out of the train her heavy foot locker, her backpack and her Springfield 1903 rifle, putting them down on the platform before going to get a luggage cart. Holding with one hand her officer's service cap in order to prevent it from flying away in the wind, she pushed her loaded cart inside the train station's waiting room, where about twenty travelers were either waiting for their train or had just disembarked from the same train as Ingrid. A young sailor sitting on one of the benches hesitated when he saw her, eyeing the rank insignias of a major on the epaulettes of her jacket, then got up and saluted.

"Good day, ma'am!"

"Good day, Sailor!" Replied Ingrid, returning his salute while going towards the public telephones in one corner of the room. She couldn't tell if it was her officer's rank insignias or her rifle that attracted the most whispered comments and exclamations on her passage and, frankly, she didn't care. She had been stared at as if she was a Martian since her arrival by plane from the Philippines, via Australia, and had to explain countless times, sometimes forcefully, how a young woman could end up being in military uniform.

Fishing out a small notebook from one pocket, she opened it and read a telephone number that she composed on one of the public telephones after dropping a dime in the telephone's slot. A woman's voice answered her after two rings.

"Hello?"

"Good afternoon! Am I at the Crawford's Nest Ranch?"

"Yes, you are, miss."

"Oh, goodie! This is Ingrid Dows. I just arrived at the Havre train station and should arrive soon at your ranch by taxi. I hope that you did receive the telegram I sent from San Francisco two days ago?"

"Yes, we received it, Ingrid." Said the woman, her tone now enthusiastic. "We will be most happy to have you at our home during your leave period. By the way, I'm Joan Crawford, the wife of John, your uncle. We are really anxious to greet you, Ingrid."

"And I am anxious to meet you all. I will see you in a short while, Joan."

Happy to have been able to contact the family farm of her late adoptive father, Mike Crawford, Ingrid pushed her luggage out of the train station, emerging on the front porch and going to the taxi waiting station. She looked around her with curiosity at the small town of Havre, situated 72 kilometers to the South of the Canadian border. It was an important relay along the railway that linked Seattle, on the American West Coast, and St-Paul, in Minnesota. I had no more than maybe eight thousand inhabitants and most buildings visible were at most two storey-high. While the air was cold and crisp, the sky was a nice blue and had barely any clouds in it. Going to the first of two taxis waiting in front of the train station, Ingrid bent down and knocked on the side window to attract the attention of the driver, who was reading a newspaper.

"Excuse me, sir. Could you open your trunk, please?"

"Sure, miss!" Answered promptly the taxi driver, who then stepped out and went to the rear of his car, opening wide the huge trunk of his vehicle. He started loading her things in it but hesitated when he saw her rifle.

"Uh, you are in the Army, miss? I thought that women could not enlist, except as nurses."

"They still can't, mister. I am actually an officer in the Philippines Army Air Corps."

The taxi driver then realized who she was and opened his eyes wide.

"You are the famous Lady Hawk, our Ace of aces in the Pacific?"

"...or anywhere else." Replied Ingrid, smiling. "Could you drive me to the Crawford's Nest Ranch, on Road 234?"

"With pleasure, miss. I know that ranch well. Get in!"

The driver closed his trunk, then went to sit back behind the wheel and started his engine as Ingrid sat on the rear bench seat. Driving away from the train station, the taxi driver looked in his mirror and started speaking in a jovial tone.

"So, this is your first time in Havre, miss?"

"It is. Montana seems to be a beautiful place."

"That's a fact, miss! You are planning on staying for a while in Havre?"

"I have three weeks of leave, then I will have to report to Washington. I however fully intend to use those three weeks to get back in shape and sleep out all my accumulated fatigue."

The driver looked at her with solicitude through his rearview mirror.

"I must have been hard at times in the Philippines, miss."

"It was hard for everybody, mister. We won there only by a hair."

"So, the Japanese have been pushed away for good from the Philippines, right?"

"Uh, not really. They still could regroup and attack again, but their losses were very heavy around the Philippines and I doubt that they will expend more forces to try taking it again. However, our own forces there are still in a rather precarious state, with reinforcements trickling in slowly and in small quantities."

"And General MacArthur, he is still in command there?"

"No! Lieutenant General Wainwright, his deputy, is now in command in the Philippines. General MacArthur is now in Australia, where he now commands the new Pacific Southwest Theatre, which includes the Philippines, Australia, Papua-New Guinea and the Dutch East Indies, among other places."

"I see! So, where is your air victory count at now, miss?"

"I have 68 confirmed air kills. I must say that we bled the Japanese dry over and around the Philippines."

"I sure can believe that, miss. They are not going to send you behind a desk, or on a war bonds tour after this?"

"Hopefully not!" Said Ingrid. "Besides, I am still technically a Filipina officer and they can't force me to take a position with the Army here unless I accept it. If they try to bury me in Washington, then I will go back by my own to the Philippines."

"I sincerely hope that these paper-pushers in Washington will see your real worth, miss."

"Thank you! I certainly hope so as well."

About fifteen minutes later, the taxi drove off the main road and took a private gravel road that led to the buildings of a large ranch, stopping finally in front of the main building, a large two-storey wooden house with a steep roof and dormer windows in the attic. The driver stepped out to help Ingrid take out her things from the trunk and carried her foot locker for her up to the main entrance door, where Ingrid paid him, leaving him a sizeable tip.

"Thank you very much for your help, sir. Keep the change."

"Thank you, miss. Have a good vacation!"

The driver then left as a tall woman close to forty opened the front door and invited Ingrid in with a big smile, three young teenagers behind her.

"Welcome to the Crawford's Nest Ranch, Ingrid. I am Joan Crawford and this is three of my five children: Sylvia, Helen and Steve. Please come in."

Young Steve volunteered at once to carry Ingrid's rifle, making the latter smile in amusement.

"Boys will be boys!"

"You got that right, Ingrid." Replied Joan with a smirk. "It is not loaded, I hope?"

"God no! My ammunition is locked up in my foot locker. Besides, I will take off the bolt and store it separately, along with my handguns."

"You have handguns with you?" Asked Joan, her tone more cautious. Ingrid nodded, herself becoming serious, as she carried her backpack and foot locker inside.

"I have three of them, which I inherited from Nancy Laplante, but they will be kept disassembled during my stay in your ranch. Is your husband home?"

"No! He went out on horseback with my oldest son, Patrick."

Those words awakened some old souvenirs in Ingrid's mind, making her look dreamy for a moment.

"Horse riding... I would love to do some of that in the days to come. It would be a fine way for me to change my mind from the war."

"You know how to ride, Ingrid?"

Ingrid didn't say that she had been riding horses in at least a quarter of her past 71 incarnations, instead smiling to Joan.

"I do, Misses Crawford."

"Then, you will find plenty of horses here for that. And call me simply Joan, instead of 'Misses Crawford'. Uh, I am not familiar with army rank insignias. What is your rank, precisely?"

"Major! I was promoted by General MacArthur just before I left the Philippines."

"A major? Goodness! You are quite high ranking for a girl your age. Uh, wait a second! Didn't Mike say in a letter that you were fifteen last year?"

"He must have made a mistake, Joan." Replied Ingrid as calmly as she could, hiding her sudden tension. If her true age became known, then her career as a fighter pilot would be abruptly put on hold, maybe permanently. "I was seventeen when he adopted me. I turned eighteen on September of last year. Mind you, it will be a while still before I could legally drink alcohol."

"As if the law ever stopped teenagers who wanted to drink." Replied Joan, forgetting her passing doubt about her age. "Well, let's go up to the room I reserved for you upstairs. You will also be able to wash up if you want as well before the men are back. My oldest daughter, Marilyn, should be back as well by supper time: she went to visit a neighbor."

The group went to the upper floor, where Joan introduced Ingrid into a fair-sized bedroom with a very comfortable-looking bed.

"Here you are, Ingrid. We will now let you unpack at your convenience. There is a bathroom with a tub at the end of the hallway, to the right. Take all your time."

"Thanks, Joan."

Joan then left the room with her children, closing the door behind her. Now alone, Ingrid looked around her and went to the window, which gave a splendid view of the Bear Paw Mountains, to the South. She sighed with relief, already feeling her accumulated stress from the war evaporate.

## **16:52 (Midwest Time)**

### **Crawford's Nest Ranch**

#### **Havre, Montana**

John Crawford, tired and cold, announced himself in a loud voice as he entered by the back door of his house.

"WE ARE BACK AND FAMISHED, JOAN!"

Joan, who had been preparing supper in the kitchen with Helen and Sylvia, answered at once in an ironic tone.

"You guys are always famished when you come back from work. By the way, Ingrid Dows arrived three hours ago and is anxious to meet you."

"Goodie!" Exclaimed Patrick, a tall, strong and handsome boy of sixteen. "Is she as beautiful as on the pictures sent last year by Uncle Mike?"

As Joan gave him an amused smile, Ingrid appeared in the door to the lounge, smiling to Patrick.

"Judge by yourself, Patrick."

Patrick opened his mouth in admiration as he detailed Ingrid, who was wearing a fresh going out tropical uniform that was tailored to fit her slender body. His father had to discreetly elbow him in the ribs then, whispering to him as well.

"Show some restraint, Son: you are nearly drooling."

John then stepped up to Ingrid, offering his hand for a shake.

"Hello, Ingrid. I am John Crawford, the brother of Mike, and this is my eldest son, Patrick."

"Pleased to meet you, John. You too, Patrick."

John didn't miss the way Ingrid's eyes sparkled as she detailed quickly his son Patrick while shaking hands with him. As for Patrick, it was too obvious that he had immediately become enthralled by the beautiful teenager. Joan then spoke, smiling at the scene.

"Why don't you guys go up and wash before supper?"

"A good idea, Joan." Replied John, before looking back at Ingrid. "We won't be long, Ingrid."

He then noticed the rank insignias on her shirt collar and hesitated.

"You are a major?"

"That's right, John. I was a squadron commander in the Philippines and General MacArthur promoted me after the Japanese were forced to withdraw their invasion fleet. I will be happy to talk more about that later."

"I sure am looking up to that, Ingrid. See you in a moment."

When John came back down, he found Ingrid in the lounge with seventeen year-old Marilyn, his eldest child. Marilyn appeared excited as Ingrid was plugging in a small portable radio. One look at that radio told him at once that it had not been produced in



this decade, or even in this century. Marilyn then turned her head towards him, grinning in excitement to him.

“Ingrid has a collection of music on discs from the year 2012 with her, Dad. I can’t wait to hear some of it.”

“I certainly wouldn’t mind listening to it after supper. Is it quite different from today’s music, Ingrid?”

The teenager laughed as she thought about the comparison.

“It is truly from another world, John. Some of the styles of music in 2012 don’t even exist now, while most styles from today have gone totally out of fashion. There are good and bad songs, like today, but Nancy had a fine taste in music and she edited out the stuff she found too crude or vulgar from her music selection. Should I put on some soft, soothing music during supper time or should I wait?”

“Let’s wait, so that we then could all enjoy it to the most.”

That answer obviously disappointed Marilyn, but she didn’t protest, instead going slowly through a small case containing dozens of small plastic laser disk holders, looking at the pictures or list of titles on them. Ingrid, her portable radio now set up, tuned it to the first station she found with a speed and easiness that amazed John.

“This technology is truly marvelous: normally, it takes me a good half minute to tune well to that station, yet you did it in seconds.”

“It has an automatic scan and tune mode. Electronics and computers were one of the technical fields that had advanced the most quickly in the decades following this war.”

Those last words brought a somber air on John’s face.

“Talking of the war, did Nancy Laplante tell you how long it will be and how it will end, Ingrid?”

“She did speak to me extensively about the war, but you must understand that the war she knew is not the war we are now living.”

“Uh, I don’t understand.”

It was Ingrid’s turn to look somber.

“John, this world we live in, including ourselves, is only a parallel copy of the world Nancy came from. When she involuntarily traveled to the past and ended up near London in September of 1940, her arrival and subsequent actions basically split time, creating a new, parallel history to the original historical line. From then on, her actions and those of others reacting to her progressively modified the history of this timeline

compared to that of the original one. As an example, in the history known by Nancy, the Philippines eventually fell to the Japanese after months of heroic resistance, while there was no such thing as a female ace fighter pilot like me shooting down Japanese planes over the Philippines. The only thing that Nancy was pretty sure about this version of the war is that we will eventually win it. How long it will be or how exactly it will go is still to be determined.”

“Us, mere copies of other selves? That’s quite hard to swallow, Ingrid.”

“It certainly is, John. Nancy didn’t tell that to many people, precisely because it is so unsettling. Like she told me once, the best we can do is to live our lives as if we are the only timeline in existence. Being copies doesn’t make us less human...or less real.”

“I’ll buy that, Ingrid.”

“SUPPER IS READY!” Shouted at that moment Joan from the kitchen, making John sigh.

“Ah, at last! I could eat a horse. Let’s go sit down in the dining room.”

They were soon two adults and six teenagers, including Ingrid, sitting or serving around the long dining table. John pointed four empty chairs around one end.

“We normally have four ranch hands to help with herding cattle and collect hay, but two of them have gone home to their families for Winter, while two others have decided to enlist in the army. With Patrick and Marilyn still in high school until Summer, it makes for quite busy days for me at the ranch for a few months.”

“Oh, but I would be delighted to help out, Uncle John.” Volunteered at once Ingrid with enthusiasm. “It would be a perfect way for me to change my mind from the war and to get back in top physical shape.”

“But, you do look in shape, Ingrid.” Objected Joan Crawford, making Ingrid smile and shake her head.

“Not by the standards of Nancy Laplante, Joan. Yes, I am lean and mean, but I need to build up further on my cardio-vascular capacity and on my muscle mass. It may not look like it, but flying combat missions as a fighter pilot demands lots of stamina and quite a lot of raw muscular power. Inhaling oxygen also burns up energy very fast.”

“Oh, I see!” Said Joan, who then started filling plates with chicken, potatoes and green peas. She then distributed the plates, serving Ingrid first. Once everybody was

served, she sat down and let John do a short prayer for the meal before they started to eat. Ingrid closed her eyes in delight as she ate her chicken leg.

"This beats spam any day."

"What's spam?" Asked eleven year-old Sylvia, making Ingrid laugh.

"A place where spam is not known? I must be in paradise. Spam is a sort of tinned meat that is too often on military menus, especially in the field. Its composition is often a mystery, even to the military cooks who prepare it."

"Yuck! I already hate it."

Ingrid, like John and Joan, laughed at that.

"A very sensible reaction, Sylvia. So, Marilyn, what are you planning to study once in college?"

"Photography and journalism. I love photography and have already my own camera and a small photo lab I installed in the attic. And you, Ingrid, what will you do after the war?"

Ingrid's smile faded somewhat then and she answered in a subdued voice.

"I am not sure yet, Marilyn. It will depend if the United States accepts me or not as a fighter pilot. Right now, I am still considered a Filipina officer, with no career status with the United States Army other than as a so-called foreign exchange officer."

"But," objected Joan, "you said that you were going to go to Washington after your leave period is completed. You don't know what they will do with you then?"

"That is correct, Joan. They may just turn and send me on a war bonds tour, in which case I will refuse at once: I didn't become a fighter pilot just to be part of a traveling circus. With my husband Ken killed in combat in the Philippines, I am now strictly on my own."

John then gently patted one of her hands.

"Ingrid, you will always be welcome here at the Crawford's Nest Ranch."

Ingrid couldn't help shed a tear then, deeply touched.

"Thank you, Uncle John. It means a lot to me."

From then on, the talk at the table stayed on mundane subjects or on the business of the ranch, in deference to Ingrid's emotions. Once the empty plates were gathered and put in the kitchen's sink, the family gathered with Ingrid in the big lounge of the ranch house to listen to her radio. Ingrid chose a CD out of her collection and put it in the reader unit, then smiled to the Crawford family.

"I will put on first some soft music, so that I won't upset stomachs after supper with some of the more phosphorous songs in my collection. This disk is a mix recorded by Nancy of some of the most beautiful diva songs of her time, like Sarah Brightman and Enya. I hope that you will enjoy."

With the first song starting to play, Ingrid went to sit besides Patrick in a sofa and looked through one of the windows of the lounge at the Bear Paw Mountains as the Sun was about to set. With the soft music playing, she felt her months of accumulated stress and painful memories starting to evaporate at last.

### **17:18 (Midwest Time)**

**Friday, March 6, 1942 'C'**

**Crawford's Nest Ranch**

**Havre, Montana**

Patrick, standing on the back porch of the family house, watched Ingrid approach with John at a trot, returning from a tour of the ranch's fences. Even after only nearly two weeks of vacation, Ingrid already looked much better and her skin had browned under the Montana sun, while daily morning jogs had helped her build up her endurance. To everyone's amazement, she had turned out to be an incredibly skilled horse rider, as if she had been born in the saddle, something that had pleased John and which he had used to the most, with Ingrid proving more than good enough to replace one of his departed ranch hands. Ingrid had also proved to be skilled in all the traditional shores of a farm, from milking cows to caring for chickens, thus helping greatly Joan as well. For Patrick, those two weeks had awakened hidden but intense desire for the beautiful and athletic redhead teenager. Unfortunately, the newspaper he held in one hand could very well take her soon away from Montana, but Joan had insisted that she needed to see it at once.

The two riders first went to the barn of the ranch, to take the saddles off their horses and feed and water them. Patrick, buttoning up his coat first, went as well to the barn to meet them, finding Ingrid already taking the saddle off her horse. He let her finish before approaching her with his newspaper.

"How was your day, Ingrid?"

"A real pleasure, Patrick. The air is so pure here in Montana and the landscape is beautiful. Riding around is a delight to me."

"I'm glad to hear that, Ingrid. Uh, I bought in Havre yesterday's edition of the Washington Post, after coming out of class. I believe that you should see the article on the front page."

He then handed the newspaper to Ingrid, who eagerly grabbed it and scanned quickly its front page. An instant grin appeared on her face as she read.

"The President has signed an executive order permitting the enlistment of women in the Army?"

She then read carefully the article, her grin slowly fading into an indecisive scowl.

"Damn! This says little about the conditions under which women will serve, apart from specifying that they must be single or without children under their charge and must be eighteen or over and fit. The Army says that it is still studying those terms and conditions of enrolment, but that the order excludes the Navy."

She then looked with discouragement at Patrick.

"It could still be a while before those paper shufflers in Washington make their minds. It could be a long wait for me before I could put on an American uniform."

Patrick didn't reply to that, wishing mentally that such wait would mean that Ingrid would stay longer here in Havre.

### **11:07 (Midwest Time)**

**Saturday, March 7, 1942 'C'**

#### **Crawford's Nest Ranch**

Young Helen, answering the doorbell for her mother, opened the door to find herself facing a tall Army officer, with an official Army staff car waiting in front of the house.

"Uh, yes? What can I do for you, mister?"

The officer smiled down at the fourteen year-old girl, who was a good head shorter.

"Good morning, miss. I am Captain Edward Bollins, from the office of General Arnold, in Washington. I am here to bring an urgent message to Major Ingrid Dows. She is still here in this ranch, I hope?"

"Yes, she is, sir." Replied Helen, her mind kicking in overdrive. Seeing that a driver was waiting in the staff car, she pointed him to Bollins. "You might as well get

your driver inside, mister: it is cold and I will have to find Ingrid for you. You could both have a cup of hot coffee while you wait in the lounge.”

“That sounds like an excellent idea, miss.” Said the captain before turning around and shouting at his driver.

“CORPORAL, SHUT DOWN THE CAR AND COME INSIDE!”

“YES SIR!”

The shouts attracted Joan from the laundry room. Sizing up the officer, she invited him inside, along with his driver, and took their coats while telling Helen to go get Ingrid. She then invited her guests to go sit in the lounge, then hurried to the kitchen to prepare cups of coffee. Ingrid, wearing dirty jeans and a wool pullover, showed up in the lounge four minutes later. Bollins and his driver got up and saluted her, to which Ingrid came at attention.

“Thank you, Captain. Please excuse my present appearance: I was milking the cows in the barn. So, you are sent by General Arnold?”

“Correct, Major. I have a plane waiting at Havre Airport to bring you to Washington, where General Arnold wishes to speak with you on Monday morning.”

“Is it about enrolling me in the Army Air Corps, Captain?”

“I believe so, Major. I understand that he wishes as well to discuss with you the enrolment and training program of our future female aviators.”

Hope and joy rising in her, Ingrid looked at Joan, who was entering the lounge with a coffee service tray.

“Joan, I will have to leave for Washington today with these gentlemen. I am going to wash up, change and pack.”

Joan looked surprised at first, then smiled to Bollins.

“It is close to lunch time, Captain. I would be most happy to invite you to eat here before you leave with Ingrid.”

“That is a fine thought, madam. I accept with pleasure.”

“Then, have some coffee first, to warm you up.”

As Joan took care of Bollins and his driver, Ingrid ran upstairs and undressed, then went to the bathroom to have a quick shower. Forty minutes later, she was back down in her Filipino going out uniform and with her personal belongings. By then, the whole family had been alerted to her imminent departure, with John, Patrick and Marilyn

gathering around her in the dining room. She looked at them all somberly, speaking softly.

"Listen! I do not know yet where I will end up or when I will be able to come back here. Just know that I will always cherish the souvenirs of my stay here. Marilyn, my radio and CD player unit, along with my laser discs, are irreplaceable. I may be sent to some jungle camp or other god-forsaken place and I don't want to have them stolen or damaged. I would thus like to let them here in your care until I can return to pick them up. If I don't return from the war, then I want you to keep them."

"Please, don't say this, Ingrid. You will come back from the war, I am sure."  
Ingrid then gave Marilyn a pained look.

"I would like to think the same, Marilyn. Unfortunately, I am in a specialty where the survival rate of the average pilot is measured typically in weeks, or in months at best. Please, take care of my radio and discs, whatever happens."

Tears then appeared on the cheeks of Patrick, who then ran out of the dining room without a word. Guessing what it was about, Ingrid excused herself with the others and ran upstairs, finding Patrick in his room, crying while sitting on the edge of his bed. Going to him, Ingrid crouched in front of him and gently took his face in her hands, forcing him to look into her eyes.

"Patrick, you don't need to cry because I am going."

"But...you may never come back." He replied in a strangled voice. She nodded to that and spoke even more softly.

"Patrick, I know that you were falling in love with me. You are a nice, kind boy and I am flattered by your love, but I must go and serve my new country. You will have to be strong and to be patient. I promise to send you letters regularly, though."

"I...I would like that very much, Ingrid."

"Good! Now, you better freshen up before going back down: your eyes are all red. Come!"

Making him get up from his bed, she led him to the bathroom and used a small towel to wash quickly his face, then kissed him and smiled to him.

"There! Feel better? Let's go back down now."

The others didn't ask or remark about what happened upstairs when they came back down, Joan instead sending them to the lounge while she and Helen finished

preparing dinner. Sitting on a couch facing Captain Bollins, Ingrid gave him an innocent smile.

“So, Captain, how is official Washington, or for that matter the public at large, reacting to the President’s executive order permitting the enlistment of women?”

Bollins paused before answering, the question being a hotly debated one. Ingrid then nudged him a bit.

“Don’t be afraid of saying things as they are, Captain: I realize that you don’t make the opinions around Washington and I have a rather thick skin.”

“Very well, Major. To be truthful, the talk around the officers’ mess at the Pentagon, where the offices of General Arnold are now situated, is quite heated on that subject, to say the least. Most senior officers think that the President is out of his mind for wanting to enlist women. I will not piss you off with the type of arguments against using women that are floating around Washington: I am sure that you heard plenty of that before.”

“That is quite correct, Captain. I managed to become a fighter pilot in the Philippines solely because the situation was so dire there, not because I was asked to become one. But go on, please.”

“Please don’t take this badly, Major, but many in Washington still don’t believe your successes in the air as a fighter pilot. Some media commentators, without being specific, also allude that you are basically a fake and could not do what was claimed publicly. However, General Arnold, through the reports from General Brereton, knows exactly what you did in the Philippines, which is why he is so anxious to meet with you. The way you developed new air tactics especially interest him. He told me to tell you that he will most welcome any ideas you could present him about new tactics and doctrines that you may have learned from your adoptive mother, Nancy Laplante.”

“Then, I shall pen some thoughts on paper for him in advance during our trip to Washington. In fact, many things I saw in the Philippines made me wish I could have changed them. Our biggest failings by far are in joint operations and tactics: this stupid inter-service rivalry between the Army and Navy has already cost us dearly in terms of duplication of efforts and lack of coordinated action. Fortunately for the Philippines, General MacArthur and Admiral Hart jointly decided to coordinate their efforts against the Japanese, something that actually saved us more than anything else in my opinion. Too many people seems to forget that they are wearing an American uniform, and not simply an Army or Navy uniform.”



Bollins nodded and took a sip of his coffee before making a remark on a polite tone.

"You are quite right about that, Major. If I may say so, while you look indeed very young, you do not speak like what I would have expected from a mere teenager."

"There is an explanation for that, an explanation that I will give in person to General Arnold. If he is to become my new commander, then he deserves to know about me."

Since Bollins couldn't understand what she meant and not wanting to talk about this in front of the others, Ingrid excused herself with the Crawfords and led the captain to the laundry room, where she closed the door behind them before speaking.

"What I am going to tell you now and to General Arnold later was known only by General MacArthur, to whom I confided my secret."

Ingrid then spent two minutes to tell Bollins about the souvenirs of her past incarnations, concluding with a sentence while looking the captain in the eyes.

"If General Arnold doubts this and wishes to test me on that, then tell him that I am ready to meet any group of historians or archaeologists and speak or write in the ancient languages that I know. I can tell you that I can speak and write at a minimum Latin, Attic Greek, Ukrainian, Polish, Russian, Romanian, Occitan, Hebrew, Japanese, Mandarin Chinese, Cantonese, Arabic, Persian, Norse, Old Gaelic, Tibetan, Sanskrit, Dravidian, Ionian Greek, Elamite, Chaldean, Aramaic and Old Egyptian. I can also speak but not read many more languages: most of my past incarnations were not well educated or were illiterate."

Bollins was left speechless for a moment, his face pale as he stared back at Ingrid. He finally nodded and spoke hesitantly.

"I...I will pass the word to General Arnold, Major Dows."

"Excellent!" Said Ingrid, becoming jovial and patting his shoulder. "Then let's go see what Misses Crawford has prepared for lunch."

Leaving with Captain Bollins after lunch was harder than expected for Ingrid. The two weeks she had spent in Havre had been the first time in months that she had felt part of a family. She was also sad to leave Patrick, whom she found to be a truly nice boy and whose obvious pain to lose her hurt her. She however had a destiny to fulfill, one more in a 7,000-year history of destinies, some fulfilled but many more cut short or ending in tragedy or disillusionment. By the time that they arrived at Havre Airport and took place in the Lockheed C-60A LODESTAR twin-engine transport plane,

Ingrid's mind had turned to her incoming meeting with General Arnold. Recollecting to the best of her excellent memory what she had learned from Nancy and what she had seen and experienced in the Philippines, plus adding her own personal thoughts, she started scribbling down notes, with the firm intention to type them into a proper memorandum once in Washington.

**08:50 (Washington Time)**

**Monday, March 9, 1942 'C'**

**Offices of Lieutenant General Henry 'Hap' Arnold**

**The Pentagon, Arlington**

**Virginia**

Having had time to speak first with Captain Bollins, Henry Arnold eyed Ingrid critically as she was introduced in his large office by his secretary: she either was a fraud, like many already believed, or she was a most extraordinary person that could be of tremendous help to him and the nation. However, her accomplishments in the Philippines could not be denied without a lot of bad faith and were enough by themselves to make her most valuable. Getting up from behind his desk, Arnold saluted her first, acknowledging her as a recipient of the Medal of Honor, then went around his desk to go shake her hand. He was immediately struck by her great beauty and tender age for her rank.

"I can't tell you how happy I am to finally be able to meet you, Major Dows. I have heard many things about you from General Brereton and even from General MacArthur, who told me that he would take you back as a fighter pilot and squadron commander any day."

"I am flattered, General."

"I'm just stating facts, Major. Uh, about what you said to Captain Bollins, know that I may in the near future take you on your offer to be tested. If you are what you say you are, then you will only become more precious to me and the nation than you already are."

"General, I am only a lone fighter pilot among many. I am no more precious than any of the hundreds of thousands of young men presently serving."

"I like your modesty, Major, but how many young captains could devise overnight a radical plan to ruin the Japanese invasion of the Philippines, with the air tactics to go

with it and the guts and skills to make it happen? None of my generals could have devised such a plan, even if given a month to do it. You think completely outside of the box and, right now, that is what I need. But please, let's sit down and talk."

They then took place on separate sofas facing each other across a low coffee table. Arnold discreetly admired her svelte silhouette, well molded by her tailor-fitted Filipino going out beige uniform, her huge blue eyes and her angelic face framed by reddish-brown hair falling to her shoulders. He had to say that a less scrupulous or gentlemanly commander would probably be most tempted to abuse her, something that was actually one of the problems he was trying to prevent.

"Let's not waste time by turning around the pot, Major. The main reason you are here this morning is because of the President's executive order allowing the enlistment of women in the Army and Army Air Corps. You will be the first but not by far the only woman to be enlisted, which brings me to the second reason you are here. An aide of mine, assisted by Jacqueline Cochran, the famous aviatrix, has already studied the question of how to employ women in the Army, especially as aviators and ground crews, and presented me recently with a report of their findings, conclusions and recommendations. Now that I have you here, I would like to get you to review that report and add to it your own ideas, if you have some to present on the subject."

"I do have many ideas and suggestions on that subject and on others, General. I took the liberty during my trip to Washington to write down a few things that passed in my mind about the possible organization and training of female aviators, rules about how to employ them and protect them from abuse while respecting their rights and also about joint tactics and doctrines. I typed up my notes in proper memo format last night. Here is what I came up with, General."

Arnold eagerly took the four page document given by Ingrid and started reading it. He nodded a number of times in appreciation, finding in the document many points already recommended by either his aide and Jacqueline Cochran or mentioned over a year ago by Nancy Laplante. There were also however many points that were completely new to him and that particularly attracted his attention.

"This idea of yours of composite air units, with a mix of fighters, bombers, transports and other types of aircraft, is quite interesting, Major. Such units could be very useful in isolated, dispersed locations like in the Pacific area. It could also solve one of my main problems I am facing with enrolling women: how to ensure their efficient

use without dispersing them around in small groups and thus making them vulnerable to abuse or harassment. By combining many female squadrons of various types in one group or wing and placing them under the command of a female officer, this would all but prevent any such abuse or harassment.”

Arnold then looked up from the document, staring into Ingrid’s eyes.

“You would be the perfect commander for such a composite unit, Major. You are combat-proven, are an effective leader and have the open mind to make such a novel unit work. What do you say to that, Major?”

“That I would be thrilled to command such a unit, General.” Said frankly Ingrid, not having hoped for that much. “If that is the case, then could I suggest that this composite unit also includes some helicopter sub-units as well? Nancy told me a lot about helicopter characteristics and operations, along with their tactical doctrine, but I have yet to see a single helicopter with the American forces in the Pacific. Yet, such units could prove invaluable, as long as the machines available have enough range. Another type of aircraft that would be useful in the Pacific would be an electronic reconnaissance and airborne radar platform.”

Arnold gave her a puzzled look, stunned by the extent of her knowledge on things that were supposed to be highly classified and were known by only a limited number of people.

“Your adoptive mother did tell you a lot of things, Major.”

That brought a malicious smile to Ingrid’s lips.

“Even more than you think, General. About this composite air unit, would you mind if I later prepare a proposed organization chart for such a unit?”

“I would actually appreciate that a lot, Major. I don’t want to reflect badly on my present staff officers, but none of them are really comfortable with anything that is not accepted Army Air Corps doctrine, if you see what I mean.”

“I fully understand, General. About the terms of service for women that would enlist, have any been decided on by now?”

“Me and General Marshall, the Army Chief of Staff, have already discussed that subject, armed with the report made by Colonel Maxwell and Miss Cochran. Any woman enlisted in the Army or Air Corps will enjoy the same terms of service and benefits as a regular male recruit. Enlisted women will have full military status, equal pay and equal authority to that of male soldiers of similar rank and seniority. They will have to be eighteen years old or over, be physically fit and be either single or married without

children in their charge. In the case of married women, they will have to obtain the permission of their husband to enlist. They will serve in mostly segregated units or sub-units under the command of female officers, to avoid possible cases of harassment and abuse. Some positions in those units needing experience and special qualifications will have however to be filled by men, at least at first, since there are no such thing right now as a female sergeant-major or a female senior ordnance specialist.”

“What if a case of sexual harassment or abuse, or even rape, occurs, General? In Nancy’s history, women who complained about such abuse or reported being raped were too often treated like the guilty ones or laughed at, with their attackers being covered up by the chain of command in order to avoid embarrassment to the unit.”

“Actually, Miss Roosevelt, the First Lady, came up with a most original idea, Major. Basically, chaplains will make sure that this doesn’t happen.”

“Chaplains, General?” Said Ingrid, utterly surprised. Arnold chuckled at her reaction.

“Yes, chaplains. Any case of complaint of sexual harassment, abuse or even rape will bypass the normal chain of command once above the level of the most senior female officer available in that unit or formation. It will instead go up through the chaplain chain of command and, if the complaint is deemed valid, will end up directly in Washington, where a mixed male and female Judge Advocate General board under my direct supervision will treat that case. Also, during the basic and specialist training phase of female recruits, chaplains attached to their courses will supervise the training to ensure that male instructors and commanders do not abuse their powers. Nancy Laplante did tell me about such abuses happening in her history and I had no problem believing her about that, Major. The last thing that I need is to have scandals and charges of abuse or rape impact on our war effort. To return to the terms of service of female recruits, all the Army and Army Air Corps trades will be opened to them except for the infantry, armored units, field artillery and combat field engineers. Women will however be allowed to serve as anti-aircraft artillery gunners and as airfield construction specialists, on top of serving as fighter pilots and as crews aboard bombers, reconnaissance and transport aircraft. I intend at first to send female units and sub-units of the Army Air Corps exclusively to the Pacific Theatre, in order to evaluate their effectiveness and adjust their employment doctrine before eventually sending female units to the European Theatre. As you may know already from newspapers, the Navy has flatly refused to enlist women anywhere, except as nurses.”

"I read about that and expected it, General. From what you have told me up to now, I am quite happy about the proposed terms of service for women. As you saw in my memo, I would propose that the first batch of women to be recruited in the Army Air Corps contain as much as possible women that are already qualified in civilian life as pilots, aircraft mechanics and the like, with such women skipping the need to attend basic flying or mechanical training. As for the women qualified as clerks, cooks and other trades widely occupied by women in civilian life, I believe that recognizing their training and expertise should be self-evident. You must have seen some male clerks that were rather crummy at typing, General."

"Oh, I have seen a lot of them, Major, believe me. If this could reassure you about this business of enlisting the right type of women, I am planning to put you in charge, along with Miss Cochran, of recruiting our first batch of women across the country. My initial goal is to enroll enough women at first to fill the ranks of one overseas air combat unit of at least group size, plus six or more squadrons in the United States charged with ferrying newly-built aircraft to their assigned bases. A number of female administrative support units will also be formed to serve the needs of higher headquarters, both in the United States and overseas. This way, we will be able to free the most men possible for actual combat duties."

"And after the war, General? What will happen to all those women? Will they be able to keep serving?"

Arnold hesitated for a moment before answering her.

"To be totally frank, Major, this is as much a political issue as it is a military one. However, I fully intend to support the retention of female veterans of the Army Air Corps under the same conditions as male veterans, unless Congress orders otherwise."

Ingrid nodded, both reassured and satisfied.

"Thank you, General. That is much appreciated. I have one last question to you about the enrolment of our first women. Will I be allowed to recruit any woman volunteer, anywhere in the United States and in Hawaii?"

"What do you mean, any woman anywhere, Major?" Asked Arnold, suddenly suspicious. Ingrid kept a straight face while looking directly into his eyes.

"I mean that I would like to be able to enroll women irrespective of their race or ethnicity, General. I know that the Army segregates black soldiers at present, but since female units will already be segregated on the basis of sex, then further segregation should be unnecessary in order to satisfy the present rules. Be assured that I am more

than ready to ensure that no objection or negative attitude towards non-white female recruits will come from within my unit, General.”

Arnold stared at her in silence for a long moment as he debated her request, then gave a tentative answer.

“I will talk with General Marshall and Secretary of War Stimson about that, Major. Your argument makes sense, but this question could be very sensitive politically.”

“I understand, General. Thank you again for your open-mindedness.”

“I will welcome anything that helps the effectiveness of the Army Air Corps, Major. Right now, we have an acute shortage of pilots and aircrews, while I know thanks to Miss Cochran that there are at least a few hundred qualified female pilots with lots of flying experience around the United States. Another thing, and this specially concerns you and your future combat command, Major. I fully intend to use your unorthodox thinking about air tactics and doctrines, along with your knowledge of future doctrines that you have learned through your adoptive mother. The unit you will form and command in combat will be in more than one sense an experimental one and I hope that you will be able to develop and prove new tactics and doctrines that could then be adopted by the whole Army Air Corps. I will thus give you wide freedom in how you prepare and lead your future command to war. I will also use your unit to test in combat some of our newest planes and systems and will make sure that your unit gets a high priority on equipment and materiel. You spoke earlier about helicopters and electronic reconnaissance planes. Well, Nancy Laplante did introduce us to those concepts and we did initiate the development and production of a number of new types of aircraft based on her suggestions. It will only be fitting that her adopted daughter test those same aircraft in combat. Your female unit will not be saddled with hand-me-down planes and materiel, Major.”

Ingrid felt immense joy and pride at those words: things were going much better than she had dared to hope.

“I promise you that you will not be disappointed, General.”

“Excellent! Then, let’s start all this on the right step. Get up and stand at attention, Major!”

Arnold got up as well and grabbed a bible lying on the coffee table.

“Please raise your right hand, Major Dows, then repeat after me: I, Ingrid Dows, swear to serve and defend the United States of America and its constitution, so help me God.”

Ingrid repeated the swearing-in formula, then shook hands with Arnold, who smiled to her.

“Welcome into the United States Army Air Corps, Major Dows. You may look very good in your Filipino uniform but I’m sure you will look even better in an American uniform.”

After making her sign her enrolment contract, Arnold then led Ingrid out of his office and handed her to Captain Bollins, who was told to guide her through the complete induction administrative process and also to have her kitted out. This took the rest of the day, with Ingrid ending up getting a room in the officers’ mess complex in nearby Fort Myers that evening. The next day, she met with Colonel Robert Maxwell, who was slated to be the initial commander of the so-called Women’s Division of the Army Air Corps, and with Jacqueline Cochran, who had also enlisted as a major and would become responsible for the running and administration of the female units engaged in training or aircraft ferrying in the United States. Maxwell proved to be for Ingrid an agreeable surprise, being both a competent, decisive and open-minded senior officer with plenty of experience as an aviator and administrator. As for Jacqueline Cochran, Ingrid was warm enough with her but remembered what Nancy had told her once about Cochran’s ambition and her tendency for serving her own interests first. After a lengthy conversation and exchange of ideas, the trio decided on the procedures for an initial recruitment campaign, with Cochran promising to use to the fullest her contacts with the female aviators association of the Ninety-nines, which counted the most experienced female flyers in the United States. While Cochran and Maxwell started setting up the concrete measures of that recruitment campaign, Ingrid worked on thinking over and producing a proposed organization chart for her future combat unit, helped in that by Maxwell, who gave her pointers about the types of servicing and support units and sub-units that already existed in the Army Air Corps and provided her with examples of tables of organization and equipment. That saved a lot of time to Ingrid, who was able to present on the following day, Wednesday, her proposed unit organization chart to General Arnold. Arnold studied it in silence for a long moment, with Ingrid waiting nervously waiting for his verdict. The graying general finally looked up from the document, his expression neutral.

“This is indeed quite an unorthodox unit, Major, but that is what I was expecting from you. Its mix of sub-units and equipment type is interesting and should in fact satisfy



the air support needs of most individual senior commanders in the Pacific. I approve your proposed chart as is. Do you have a proposed name or designation for your future unit, Major?"

"Yes, General! I wish to call it the 99<sup>th</sup> Composite Air Group, 'The Fifinellas'."

"The Fifinellas?" Said Arnold, smiling in amusement. Ingrid nodded her head.

"Yes, General! It is the name of the mascot adopted in Nancy's history by the female aviators enrolled as auxiliary pilots by the Army Air Corps. I have a picture of the logo of the Fifinellas here with me."

Ingrid then took out of her briefcase a thick black binder and opened it to the first page, which was like the other pages contained inside a plastic transparent holder. A large color picture was centered on it, showing a cute winged female figure wearing the goggles, helmet and leather jacket and boots of an aviator. A few words were printed under it in bold letters that Arnold read aloud.

"To my beloved Ingrid, from Nancy."

"This binder was a gift from my adoptive mother. So, what do you think of that logo, General?"

"I like it! You have my permission to have it registered officially, along with the proposed name and unit designation of your air group. Uh, what is contained in that binder, Major?"

"A most precious gift from Nancy, General." Said solemnly Ingrid while turning the first page. "It is a glimpse in the future of aviation."

Arnold nearly felt his knees give up as blood rushed to his brain at the sight of the color picture of the fantastic jet aircraft on the second page. Ingrid then started turning slowly each page of the binder, each showing a different aircraft.

"Sir, my ultimate dream is to make such aircraft possible and to put them into United States' service in the years to come. Right now, we have a war to win and I fully intend to devote myself to that end, but I later hope to help make that dream become a reality."

**19:28 (Washington Time)**

**Friday, March 13, 1942 'C'**

**Official residence of Lieutenant General Arnold**

**Fort Myer, Arlington**

Henry Arnold's wife got close to her husband and whispered to him as their military steward let in another two civilian men, to then lead them to Arnold's private lounge.

"Henry, who are all those graying civilians you have invited tonight? I never met them at any official reception before."

"That is understandable, dear: they are either historians, linguists or archaeologists, not government bureaucrats or politicians. These two should be the last of them. I will now go talk to them briefly. If Major Ingrid Dows shows up in the meantime, just escort her to my private lounge."

"Dows, the young female fighter ace? First, a bunch of old goats, then a teenage girl? This meeting of yours sounds most strange, Henry."

"Because it is a strange meeting, dear." Replied maliciously Arnold before kissing her quickly and going up to his private lounge. He found there a steward in the process of serving tea or coffee to the nine men sitting around on sofas and easy chairs. None of the men was less than forty in age and most looked like the academics they were. Arnold politely dismissed his steward once he had finished serving the guests, then closed the door behind the steward and faced the civilians. One of them gave him an inquisitive look then.

"At first, getting an invitation from you made me quite curious, General. Now that I see that you invited as well other fellow historians and archaeologists to your house tonight, I am downright puzzled. I didn't know that you were so interested in history, General."

"Actually, I have only a passing interest in history, to be totally frank, Professor Holtz. You are actually here to help me answer a question about something that has troubled me for the last four days. A young officer will soon show up here at my invitation and I will then ask you to test that officer about her historical knowledge and linguistic skills. That is why I asked you to bring specimens of writing in various languages, both modern and ancient. Don't be afraid to test her about extinct languages in particular. Before you ask why, I must first caution you that what will be said here tonight will be considered a military secret. I will thus ask you not to discuss it later with other colleagues."

"You are frankly intriguing me, General." Said Holtz. "If that young officer of yours is so good with ancient languages and history, then it is a pity she is not a professional historian."

"She's actually too busy being a fighter pilot to work in a museum or a university, Professor. Please keep very discreet about this, but this officer pretends to remember her past incarnations, along with the languages she spoke and the skills she practiced in the past. This sounds fantastic, I know, but you are here at my invitation to help prove or disprove her claims. Please be polite with her even if you think at first that she may be a fraud and give her the benefit of the doubt, unless she clearly shows up to be lying." The assembled academics and historians looked at each other with incredulity and surprise before one of them protested to Arnold.

"You can't be serious, General. Many people in past decades pretended to remember past incarnations, but they all were eventually proven to be frauds. The concept of incarnation itself is disputed by most true scientists."

"As I said before, I know that the concept is hard to believe. However, I have a teenage girl that outsmarted in terms of tactics many senior officers that were vastly more experienced than her and also led magnificently in combat a squadron of pilots that were older than her. She also openly showed that she could speak an ungodly number of present languages, including two obscure Filipino dialects. In turn, she said to me that she could speak such languages as Sanskrit, Old Egyptian, Aramaic, Elamite and Norse, among others."

The men sitting around Arnold looked at each other again, now much less dismissive. That was when someone knocked on the door of the lounge. Arnold hurried to the door and opened it, revealing his wife standing in front of a teenage girl in uniform.

"Major Dows is here, Arnold."

"Thank you, dear. You may come in, Major."

Watched with a mix of curiosity and skepticism by the civilian men sitting around the lounge, Ingrid took the chair offered by Arnold and sat, then looked calmly around her before smiling slightly and nodding to Arnold.

"I see that you took me on my offer to be tested about my incarnations, General."

"I hope that you will not be offended by that, Major. There is a lot resting on your shoulders and I prefer to know as well as I can my officers, as well as their true potential."

"I am not offended one bit, General. If anything, I wish to be taken seriously by the men around me. This could be one way to gain respect despite my young physical age. If you decide after tonight to advise other senior commanders about my abilities, then I have no objections to that, General."

Ingrid then returned her attention on the assembled civilians and started speaking in a measured tone.

"Gentlemen, let me present myself. My name is Ingrid Dows, born Weiss in Berlin, Germany, in 1923. I gained the ability to remember my past incarnations only recently, in early 1941. I was then a German prisoner of war held in London and had become very attached to Nancy Laplante, the Canadian time traveler from the year 2012. She had just taken the decision to secretly adopt me when, one night, me and her started simultaneously to remember our past incarnations. It came like an avalanche of images, words and feelings, one past incarnation after the other, always in regressing order. Within two months, we both had reached the point where our mind had gone back to our first incarnations ever on Earth. Mine was as a Semitic nomad woman named Amdirra, who was born and died in the Sumerian basin 7,000 years ago."

One historian, clearly skeptical, then cut in with a question.

"And do you have an explanation for how you and Miss Laplante got to remember your past incarnations, miss?"

"First, you may call me 'Major', not 'miss', sir. Second, I believe that it was a gift from someone very powerful, someone that has no physical form and is pure spiritual energy. Call it 'God' if you want, I and Nancy called it 'The One'. As for why me and Nancy, I could only say that The One must have chosen us for some purpose that is still unclear to me. Now that I am here, you may start testing me, gentlemen."

With Arnold grabbing a notepad and a pen, like most of the assembled historians and linguist in the lounge, Holtz opened the question period by presenting himself.

"Major Dows, I am Professor Richard Holtz, curator at the New York Metropolitan Museum. I am also considered an expert in ancient European languages and history. What European language, both modern and ancient, can you speak?"

With the other men ready to scribble on their notepads, Ingrid concentrated before answering calmly.

"In terms of European languages alone, I can speak and write German, French, English, Yiddish, Ukrainian, Russian, Polish, Romanian, Occitan, Latin, Greek, Castilian, Norse, Attic Greek, Ionian Greek and Celt. I can also speak but not write Old Frankish dialect and Koine. You may test me in any of those languages if you wish so."

Holtz, still skeptical, then asked her a series of questions about her past European incarnations, each asked in a different language. Every time, Ingrid answered him

without hesitation and in the same language. After ten minutes or so, and with General Arnold already quite shaken, Holtz looked up from his notepad, his face pale.

"She was able to speak fluently in Latin, Greek, Castilian, Occitan, Celt and Norse. She also answered correctly my questions about the periods of history her incarnations lived. Professor Weizmann, I will let you the floor concerning Semitic and Middle East languages and history."

"Thank you, Professor Holtz." Said the Middle East specialist, who then eyed Ingrid cautiously before starting to test her languages skills. He took much longer than Holtz, ending up testing Ingrid in more languages and also making her read and even write in a few languages. At the end, Weizmann had to wipe cold sweat from his forehead.

"General, your young major can speak Hebrew, Yiddish, Aramaic, Arabic, Persian and what I believe to be Ancient Egyptian and Phoenician. She was also able to read and write in Ancient Egyptian Hieroglyph, Sumerian cuneiform and Phoenician."

Now getting excited rather than skeptical and seeing Ingrid as a possible source of priceless historical knowledge, the other specialists nearly tripped over each other to question Ingrid. Arnold had to restrict their questions to those proving the ancient language abilities of Ingrid in order to avoid an all-night session. After over two hours of a memorable exchange, the specialists announced to a stunned Arnold that they could certify that Ingrid could speak a minimum of 37 languages and dialects, most of them obscure or extinct. Asking politely Ingrid to leave the lounge for a moment, Arnold then collated the lists from the historians and linguists before asking them one question.

"Gentlemen, in your professional opinion, could anyone know all these languages without the benefit of remembering past incarnations?"

"No, General!" Answered at once Richard Holtz. "Learning one such old language alone is the business of years, if not decades. Your major clearly knows even more languages than we were qualified to test her on. Such knowledge would take centuries to acquire. This girl is truly a treasure trove of historical knowledge, General. You are sure that we could not borrow her services for a while?"

"Uh, unfortunately you can't have her. We have a war to win at the moment. Well, gentlemen, you have been very helpful to me tonight. Thank you for accepting to come."

"It was a true pleasure, General." Replied Weizmann. "This was a fascinating experience indeed. "If I may remark on it, I hope that you realize that, apart from

knowing all those languages, your young major also has the cumulated life experiences of all her past incarnations. She has in fact thousands of years of experience in her. Your oldest general would be a mere young brat in comparison to her.”

Arnold was struck hard by those words, not having realized that by himself.

“I must say that I didn’t think about that, Professor Weizmann. Thank you for pointing it to me.”

Arnold then accompanied his guests to the main door and waved them goodbye. Closing the main door, he turned around and eyed Ingrid, who had been waiting patiently in the reception lounge, standing by a window and looking outside. She in turn looked at him from the corner of her eyes as he approached her, finally pivoting to face him with a sober expression.

“Before you say anything about what you heard tonight, General, please understand that those past memories are just that, memories. There is only one personality controlling me now, and it is that of Ingrid Dows, a young major under your command. I do not deserve any special treatment, nor do I want any. I only want my due for the merit I may earn by my actions, General, no more.”

Arnold nodded at that, pleased by her modesty. Still, it was hard for him not to look at her as a person of exception and to treat her as a subaltern rather than as a superior being.

“Your modesty is refreshing, Major. Many others would not hesitate to use such a talent for their own profit.”

That made a malicious smile appear on Ingrid’s pulpous lips.

“It could have been effectively much worse in others, General. Just imagine General MacArthur having my gift.”

“Oh God!” Could only say Arnold while grimacing.

## **CHAPTER 14 – THE FIFINELLAS**

**08:20 (New York Time)**

**Monday, March 23, 1942 'C'**

**Army recruiting center, New York City**

**State of New York, U.S.A.**

Even after having read the statistics from Jacqueline Cochran on the number of women holding pilot licenses in the United States, Ingrid was surprised by the size of the crowd of women now filling to near capacity one of the halls of the army recruiting center she had reserved for three days. Prominent newspaper ads in bold letters and radio announcements had been running for six days now, offering all women with experience in piloting, aircraft maintenance and other trades of interest to the Army Air Corps to show up at specific locations and dates across the United States. For today and the two next days, female volunteers from the states in the Northeast Coast area of the country could show up in New York to enlist. To ensure a good response, General Arnold had authorized the immediate reimbursement of all travel expenses of the candidates, whether they were accepted or not, with paid return tickets and pocket money for those who would be refused for whatever reason. Captain Ernest Wakefield, whom Ingrid had managed to grab back as her administration officer, had taken care of the arrangements for the recruiting campaign, helped in this by Captain Peter Shmelling, her old logistical officer from the 17<sup>th</sup> Pursuit Squadron, who had also been recuperated by Ingrid. She had not been able to gain back the services of Paul Gunn, who was now part of General MacArthur's staff, but she had found a real pearl in the person of Captain Vance Hemmingsworth, a bear of a man with a jovial character and a long experience in aircraft maintenance. Hemmingsworth would in turn be helped by Master Sergeant Jack Vicenza, the designated chief mechanic of the group, and Master Sergeant Harry Coyle, the chief armorer, in interviewing and selecting the candidates for the positions of aircraft mechanics and other ground support technicians.

Ingrid, wearing an army female uniform with her medal ribbons and pilot wings, decided to start without delay in view of the rapidly filling hall. She thus stepped forward and addressed the more than 500 women present in a strong voice.

"Welcome to this recruiting session of the Army Air Corps, ladies. I am Major Ingrid Dows, the designated commander of the future 99<sup>th</sup> Composite Air Group. As you may already know from the advertising that attracted you here this morning, we have many posts to fill, both flying and non-flying. Whatever the specialty you are seeking, however, once you are accepted you will be wearing the uniform of the United States Army Air Corps and could then be shipped to any number of locations, including frontline airfields. You will then serve at the least until the end of the war, unless you are liberated first for medical or disciplinary reasons. You will most probably suffer through privations, harsh living conditions and lack of sleep. You may fall sick from tropical diseases, be wounded or even be killed, either accidentally or through enemy action. All that will be in the service of your country and that will be your ultimate reward. For those of you who want to serve but are not ready to kill an enemy, either directly or indirectly, for reasons of religion or conscience, know that I will respect your choice and will not think less of you. You will then be registered as conscientious objectors and will be offered positions in the United States connected to training, administrative support or ferrying of new planes. For those who came here with the sole goal of quote killing Japs unquote, then leave now! I want people that will fight to protect and serve the United States, not simply out of hatred or racism. For those of you that will not be accepted, mostly for medical reasons, then you will be given money to pay your way back home. As bitter as this could be if it happens to you, you will still be able to keep your head high, as you showed yourself ready to serve the nation. With all this said, we will now start the selection process. At the end of each row of benches in this hall is a sign showing a list of various specialties, be it as pilot, aircrew, combat support, technical trades or administrative trades. I will ask you once I am finished speaking to take place in the appropriate rows. Lastly, you were all given a form listing all the specialties opened to women in the Army Air Corps and asking you to write down your qualifications, experiences and the type of specialty you want to fill. Make sure to fill that form before me or one of my assistants interviews you. You may now shuffle places, ladies."



It took a good five minutes for the women to sort themselves out in separate files. While there were more than enough candidates sitting in the rows for pilots and aircrews to satisfy Ingrid, they were easily outnumbered by the women wanting to join administrative and logistical trades, while the ones interested in technical support and maintenance were a clear minority. Hemmingsworth, a big man with wide shoulders and a barrel chest, whispered in Ingrid's ear as they watched the women change seats.

"It looks like I will have much less candidates to interview than you, Ingrid."

"Yes, I see that. I'm afraid that we will not have a choice to employ a number of men with our ground crews. Well, let's start!"

Ingrid then walked to the first candidate waiting in line to become a combat pilot and smiled to the pretty woman of about twenty.

"Please follow me, miss."

Entering with the woman in one of the small offices connected to the waiting hall, Ingrid made her sit in front of a small desk, while she sat behind the desk. Taking the recruitment form filled by the woman, she read it quickly while the candidate looked on nervously, prompting Ingrid into giving her a reassuring smile.

"No need to be nervous, Miss Luttrell: everything will be fine."

"I'm sorry, Major. It is just that flying is what I love the most. However, I can't fly rented planes anymore since a flight interdiction was imposed on all private aircraft across the country."

Ingrid nodded while continuing to read the information on the form.

"Hum... 246 hours on light monoplanes, private pilot's license... Are you willing to kill men, Miss Luttrell?"

Ingrid had asked her question in a cold, impersonal tone, to judge Virginia Luttrell's reaction. Instead of being scandalized by it, as many American women would be, she answered in a firm voice while looking Ingrid into her eyes.

"For my country, yes, Major!"

Ingrid then wrote a few words on the form before ripping off one of the carbon copies and putting it in her 'out' basket. She then put the top copy in a green folder that she gave to Luttrell, getting up and shaking her hand as well.

"Welcome in the training program for female fighter pilots, Miss Luttrell. You can now go upstairs to be medically examined. If you are found physically fit, you will then be sent with the other accepted candidates to a basic military training camp."

Virginia Luttrell, who had got up like her, nearly crashed back down on her chair as emotion washed over her.

"My God! I was thinking that you were about to send me back home."

"Sorry to have scared you like that, miss. I am certain that you will do well as a fighter pilot. If, however, you are deemed medically unfit to become a fighter pilot, would you then be ready to accept another type of specialty?"

"I will serve any way I can, Major."

"That's the spirit! You may proceed upstairs now."

"Thank you so much, Major!" Replied happily Luttrell before walking out of the office.

The second woman Ingrid interviewed was close to thirty and dressed elegantly. Ingrid again read quickly the form filled by the candidate.

"Suzanne Humphrey, 27 years old... 390 hours of flying... Private pilot's license and flying instructor's license, plus license for seaplanes... Works as flight instructor in Roosevelt Field... Participation in air races and air shows. Not bad at all, miss!"

"Thank you, Major."

"I see here that you applied with the British Embassy to join the R.A.F.. Why?"

"Because I wanted to contribute as a pilot to the war effort and because the Army Air Corps didn't accept women...until now."

"And why ask to become a fighter pilot rather than a bomber pilot or a transport pilot?"

"Major, I believe that I am good in aerobatics and I want to use my talents to the most in this war."

"And would you be ready to fire on an enemy plane or ship, knowing that your action could kill or hurt men?"

"Yes! I am not a very good shot but I can learn."

"I effectively believe that you can, Miss Humphrey. I approve you as a fighter pilot candidate. Bring this file upstairs, where you will get a medical exam. Good luck, Miss Humphrey."

The third woman to be interviewed by Ingrid was tiny, standing barely 155 centimeters, and was clearly in her thirties, a rather old age for a potential combat pilot. The reading of her form however impressed Ingrid. Betty Huyler Gillies had been flying

for fourteen years, accumulating nearly 1,400 hours of flying. She had also been the president of the 'Ninety-nines' until last year, when she had been replaced by Jacqueline Cochran. Betty was actually applying to become a transport pilot. Ingrid did not hesitate and scribbled on her form, keeping a copy for herself and handing the original to Betty in a green folder while smiling to her.

"I am sure that we will end up serving side by side in the Pacific, Miss Gillies. You may proceed upstairs to pass your medical exam."

"Thank you, Major! I am looking forward to fly with you."

Ingrid continued to interview candidates at a fast rhythm, spending on average less than five minutes per woman. She was thus able to interview 43 women before lunch time, refusing politely in the process two women she found way too fragile physically to support the rigors of combat. Sandwiches and juices were then distributed to the remaining candidates that were still waiting. Ingrid ate with the candidates to support their morale and distract them with tales of combat in the Pacific. After only thirty minutes for lunch, Ingrid then started again to interview candidates. The fourth candidate she saw after lunch was a woman near thirty with curly black hair cut at the neck. She was not really pretty, without being ugly, but she looked resolute and Ingrid liked her instantly. She did a double take on seeing the form filled by Teresa James: she had accumulated a total of 2,254 hours of flying and earned a living as a flying instructor and as an air show pilot. She even had a show nickname: Spin Lady! She was also married to a B-17 bomber pilot. Ingrid smiled to James, both impressed and amused.

"Well, I see why you want to become a fighter pilot, Madam James. Maybe one day you will escort your husband's plane during a mission."

"That would indeed be ironic, Major."

"Indeed! Well, your qualifications would render jealous any male candidate. I will thus not insult you with more questions. You may now go for your medical exam."

A bit before six in the afternoon, Ingrid went to speak with her three captains and two master sergeants assisting her, to see the results to date.

"Well, guys, to date I accepted fourteen fighter pilots, 27 bomber pilots, 19 transport pilots, 22 ferrying pilots, eight navigators and 21 air gunners for bombers and transport planes. How are you doing on your side?"

"I got a total of 33 women already qualified in maintaining aircraft, plus nine potential flight engineers." Answered Vance Hemmingsworth. "I however also have a total of 87 enthusiastic volunteers ready to learn and having at a minimum a high school diploma, plus some mechanical aptitudes."

"I take them!" Replied Ingrid at once. "The way this war is lining up, we can't afford to be choosy. And you, Ernest?"

"Me?" Said with a grin the administrative officer. "I am buried under a mound of secretaries, clerks, telephone operators, archivists, cooks and others, all grossly overqualified by Army standards. I even have a few heavy truck drivers and two taxi drivers in the lot, plus seven female police officers."

Master Sergeant Harry Coyle sighed on hearing that.

"I wished that I had a surplus like you, sir. Up to now, we haven't got a single girl qualified on explosives or munitions."

"Maybe we will find such girls in places like Texas or Oregon, where there are big prospecting and mining industries that employ explosives." Suggested. "Are you ready to continue for a couple more hours after supper, guys?"

"Why not?" Answered Peter Shmelling. "These girls were patient enough to wait all day in this hall. We might as well try to pass all the ones remaining before closing shop for the night."

"Then, we will all go eat, then will return here to continue until we empty this hall. With the type of response we got here today, I suspect that a crowd will be waiting for us in Chicago on Thursday. There are a lot of armament and chemical factories around Chicago. You may just hit the jackpot there, Master Sergeant Coyle."

### **09:48 (California Time)**

**Sunday, April 12, 1942 'C'**

**Manzanar relocation camp**

**370 kilometers Northeast of Los Angeles**

**California**

Vance Hemmingsworth, like Ingrid and Master Sergeant Jack Vicenza, who was driving the military bus they had signed for in March Field, near Los Angeles, looked with dismay at the huge guarded camp sprawled around the arid desert ground. Dozens of long wooden barracks were lined in long rows, surrounded by a barbed wire fence and

eight guard towers. Armed military policemen stood watch in the towers and at the camp's main gate.

"And they forced whole families with children to relocate in this hole?"

"Yes, they did, Vance, thanks to a presidential executive order and to the bigotry of too many Americans." Replied Ingrid in a bitter tone. "All the Japanese-Americans in the West Coast area have been relocated to such camps on orders from Lieutenant General DeWitt, the Army commander for the area. Just this camp is supposed to be holding close to 10,000 civilian men, women and children."

"Ten thousands, in such a small camp?" Exclaimed Jack Vicenza, a big and powerful man who had a heart of gold. "They must be crammed like sardines in there."

"We will soon see by ourselves, Master Sergeant." Said Ingrid. "Drive up to the main gate and stop, to let me speak with the MPs on guard."

"Yes, Major!"

Vicenza rolled to less than four meters from the main gate before stopping, with Ingrid then stepping out of the bus. She was met nearly immediately by a MP sergeant who hesitated before saluting her.

"What is the nature of your visit, Major? We were not informed about any official visit today."

"What do you mean, not informed, Sergeant?" Said Ingrid, feeling her blood boiling up. "I sent an advisory message about our visit over two weeks ago."

"Well, I haven't seen it, Major."

"Well, we are here now, Sergeant. I will go speak with the camp commandant."

"Uh, if it is about transferring some of the internees, Major, then you will need an authorization signed by General DeWitt for that."

Getting quickly pissed, Ingrid stared hard at the MP sergeant, rising her voice.

"I have with me a mission order countersigned by General Marshall, Sergeant. I don't believe that your precious General DeWitt can overrule him. Now, where is the commandant's office?"

"Uh, it is in the second building to the left after you enter, Major."

"Thank you!" Said tersely Ingrid before getting back in the bus and telling Vicenza where to go. They rolled forward as soon as the MPs opened the main gate, stopping again in front of a wooden building with a sign announcing it as the camp's command center. This time, Ingrid grabbed the large briefcase containing her

recruitment forms and office supplies before leaving the bus. Vance Hemmingsworth also grabbed a similar briefcase and followed her inside, where a surprise military clerk and a civilian secretary greeted them. The camp commandant, a major of the California National Guard, came out of his office on hearing Ingrid's voice as she spoke to the secretary. The man proved mild-mannered and polite, shaking hands with Ingrid and Vance as he presented himself.

"Major Ziegler, Camp Commandant. What may I do for you, Major Dows?"

"Two weeks ago, I sent an advisory message directly from the offices of Lieutenant General Arnold in Washington, telling the headquarters of the 6<sup>th</sup> Army to warn you that I would visit your camp on this date, in order to possibly recruit women here for the Army Air Corps."

"But, we never got that message, Major."

"I see! You must have at the least seen or heard the advertising in newspapers and on the radio about our recruiting campaign, Major Ziegler."

"We have, but we never imagined that you would come here to recruit personnel for the Army Air Corps, Major Dows."

"And where do you think that you could find the most women able to read and understand Japanese, Major? We need such linguists for our signals and electronic warfare sections, preferably some that are also familiar with radio procedures. Here is my mission order authorizing me to recruit women anywhere in the United States, irrespective of race or ethnicity. It was signed by General Arnold and countersigned by General Marshall, as you can see. Now, where would it be possible to meet and interview the women who could be interested to join?"

"The camp theatre would probably be the best place for you, Major Dows: it is centrally located and has a large room with plenty of benches."

"That will do. Do you have a public announcement system on which I could be heard from the whole camp?"

"We do! In fact, we use it every day to pass all kinds of general information or directives. There are loudspeakers in every barrack."

"Excellent! Could I use it for a moment?"

"I see no problem with that, Major Dows. This way, please."

Ziegler led Ingrid to a small room that appeared to be used as the communications center of the camp, with two radios and a telephone switchboard in it. He powered on a separate system and presented a microphone to Ingrid.

"You just need to push the button at the base of the microphone and everybody in the camp will hear you."

"Thank you!"

Ingrid then thought over her message for a moment before activating the microphone and speaking into it.

"Attention, everybody! This is Major Ingrid Dows of the Army Air Corps speaking. A meeting will be held in half a hour in the theatre of the camp in order to recruit any female volunteer who would be ready to serve with the Army Air Corps in this war. Any volunteer, with or without usable skills or experience, will be welcome to enlist, as long as she is eighteen years of age or over, is physically fit and is single or without children in her charge."

Ingrid then shocked more than one of the Americans present by repeating her announcement in fluent Japanese. She finally gave back the microphone to Major Ziegler, who was looking at her open-mouthed.

"Thank you for lending me the use of your P.A. system, Major. Could someone please show us where the theatre is?"

"Uh, I will guide you, Major Dows."

Ingrid didn't have big expectations about recruiting crowds of Japanese-American women into the Army Air Corps, especially in terms of women with pilot licenses. She and Vance Hemmingsworth were however agreeably surprised to see about thirty young women starting to file in the theatre. Ingrid distributed recruitment forms at once to them and explained a few things to the internees before going to sit behind a small folding table to receive her first candidate. She was a rather small but very pretty young woman with almond eyes and distinctive oriental traits. Ingrid did a double take on reading the information scribbled on her form.

"You were working as a radio intercept specialist for the Army in San Francisco, helping decrypt Japanese encoded messages? And they let you go?"

"They didn't let me go, Major: they booted me out of the intelligence center I was working in, supposedly as a security risk, then shipped me here with my family." Replied Mary Takahashi with a pure California English accent tainted by bitterness.

"Can you really enlist us and thus allow us to serve the United States with honor, Major?"

Ingrid gave her a resolute look.

"Miss Takahashi, know that I was born in Berlin, Germany, and that until less than one year ago I was a German prisoner of war held by the British in London. Yet, here I am. If that army unit in San Francisco was stupid enough to part with your services, then I will consider that my gain and their loss. What other qualifications do you have that could be useful to the Army Air Corps, Miss Takahashi?"

"Well, I do have a college diploma as a radio repair technician and I worked in my father's radio repair shop...until we were forcibly relocated and he lost both his shop and his house, that is."

Ingrid gave a sober look at Mary Takahashi, who evidently had a lot on her heart, and for good reasons.

"Despite all that, are you still ready to serve the United States faithfully and to the best of your abilities, Miss Takahashi?"

"Yes I am, Major!"

"Then consider yourself enrolled in the Army Air Corps as a signals specialist. You will depart this camp in our bus, once we have finished interviewing all the volunteers here. Go pack your personal belongings and come back here after, with your luggage."

"Thank you, Major. By the way, six other girls here were from my old radio monitoring and decryption center."

"They got rid of seven qualified Japanese linguists and radio listening specialists?" Exclaimed Ingrid, having difficulty in comprehending such stupidity. Mary Takahashi shrugged her shoulders.

"Hey! Who said that racists had to be intelligent, Major?"

Ingrid ended up departing Manzanar Camp in the afternoon with her bus nearly full. That visit in retrospect proved a masterstroke, as it provided her future air group with nearly all the trained radio operators and intelligence specialists Ingrid needed. Topped with Jenny Kawena, a Japanese-Hawaiian young woman who had worked as a cryptanalyst and linguist of officer-level civilian rank at a Navy intelligence center in Honolulu, the girls of Manzanar were going to do just fine. As for the feared lack of women qualified on explosives and ordnance handling, the visit in the Chicago area, with



candidates also streaming in from Detroit, had alleviated much that deficiency. Master Sergeant Harry Coyle had been able to enlist literally dozens of women who had been working for over a year on ammunition assembly lines, putting together shells and bombs, filling them with explosives and also assembling their intricate fuses. More women came from weapons assembly lines, where they had similarly been producing parts for weapons, assembling them and test-firing them. From the eagerness of those women to enlist, Ingrid was able to deduce that they had not been treated with much respect by their male supervisors in most plants. She also found out that most of them had been paid ridiculously low salaries for the work they did, to the point that their army salary as simple privates was at least as much as they had done in their previous workplaces. The visit in San Antonio, Texas, had for its part provided a pearl in the person of Sally Nolan, an adventurous young woman with degrees in civilian engineering and geology that had been working for a mining company, blasting rock faces and drilling tunnels. Ingrid's only disappointment, but not a surprise for her, was the visit to Atlanta. There, the old-fashioned attitudes of the South about traditional roles for women had drastically cut down the number of candidates that showed up. Still, Ingrid could call her recruiting tour a great success.

**15:29 (Washington Time)**

**Monday, April 20, 1942 'C'**

**Office of Lieutenant General Henry Arnold**

**The Pentagon, Arlington**

**Virginia**

Henry 'Hap' Arnold raised his nose from the report he was reading and looked at Ingrid with incredulity.

"You were able to enroll 245 pilot candidates, each with a minimum of 200 hours of flying time, plus another 352 with over 100 hours? That's incredible!"

"I also got a total of 3,681 candidates qualified for the positions of aircrews for bombers or transport aircraft, or for various maintenance, logistical and administrative positions. Even with some attrition that can be expected from the training, we have more than enough women to fill our immediate needs. I however strongly suggest that any surplus candidate not be simply returned home: whether we like it or not, we will suffer casualties in the Pacific and will need periodic reinforcement. As already

suggested by Jacqueline Cochran, we should establish a training base dedicated to the formation of female personnel, General. That would do a lot to cut on the feared sexual abuse and harassment.”

“I agree, Major. In fact, I already have my eyes on a small airfield in Sweetwater, Texas, for that purpose. It can easily be enlarged and the weather there is ideal for flying. By the way, I noticed that you have already presented names for the senior positions in your air group.”

“Yes, General! I based myself on the flight experience of those women, their strength of character and their leadership potential.”

“Very well, Major. I must say that you have done a fantastic job up to now. It is now time to start training your girls and turn them in proper aviators and Army Air Corps specialists. As promised before, we will not waste time by forcing your girls to take basic courses in subjects they are already qualified on. Besides, we cannot afford to waste time now.”

The tone used by Arnold for his last sentence alarmed Ingrid, who stiffened in her chair.

“What do you mean, General? We did weaken the Japanese a lot in the Philippines, no?”

Arnold hesitated before answering her.

“It is true that Japanese losses around the Philippines have been heavy. However, we recently lost a big advantage on them when they completely changed their codes and radio procedures. As a result, we can't anymore decipher their radio traffic or even analyze their pattern. We suspect that this is related to another blow to us in Europe. The Germans managed to recently capture in Norway, before they were forced to retreat back to Germany, documents that showed them that we could decipher their ENIGMA-encoded traffic. They then changed all their codes and encrypting equipment and the whole ULTRA program is now basically useless because of that.”

“My God! Nancy told me that ULTRA was possibly the greatest asset we had in this war against Germany.”

“It actually was, Major. To return to the Pacific, our own successes around the Philippines have led the British to think that they didn't need anymore to reinforce their positions in Asia and India. They even withdrew a few naval units from the Indian Ocean and have greatly cut the shipping of war materiel to Australia, which is now forcing us to try to compensate for these cuts despite our own deficiencies in the area.”

"So, we bleed to help the British in the Pacific and we get spitted in the face in reply, General?" Said Ingrid, anger flaring in her. Arnold nodded his head, seemingly aging in his chair under the worries.

"It gets worse, Major. The Germans, before withdrawing from Norway, were able to capture many examples of the modern weapons introduced in British service and there are indications that they are adapting quickly those new technologies to their own weapons. We seemingly also made a major strategic mistake by refusing to help the Soviets."

"But, General, you know like me the kind of long-term threat Stalin represents for the future of Europe. He is a monster and has proved that he can't be trusted."

"I agree with you, Major, and also think that Stalin got what he deserved. Our problem is that, without our shipments of war materiel, the Red Army found itself short of many types of weapons and equipment at a critical moment. The Russian Winter saved Moscow in January, but the Germans have since pushed back the Red Army on nearly all fronts. Keep this to yourself, Major, but the oilfields of the Caucasus were just taken intact by the Germans, via surprise airborne assaults. Hitler now has all the oil he wants, plus huge resources in iron, coal and non-ferrous metals. The President has ordered that this piece of news be kept confidential, in order not to hurt public morale. As a consequence of all this, the military situation of the British has worsened noticeably in Europe in the last months and Prime Minister Churchill has pleaded with President Roosevelt to get even more help from us. The President agreed and has ordered that shipments of troops, aircraft and materiel to England be increased, with corresponding cuts in our shipments to the Pacific. This leads me directly to the case of your female air group, Major."

Ingrid stared at Arnold, all ears, as the general continued.

"These developments have in a way played a crucial but discreet role in convincing many members of Congress not to fight the President's executive order allowing female enrolment in the Army. The Congress, like the President and the Chiefs of Staff, including me, now realizes that we could be in for a very long and costly war, especially in Europe. Don't take this badly, Major, but sending female units to the Pacific will raise less protests from the British than if we send male units, which are in high demand in Europe. Be reassured, though: I have no intention of simply shipping your women to the Pacific and dump them there as a simple stopgap. You will get our latest planes and equipment and you will be free to fight the way you think, using your own

tactics, as long as you fulfill the basic missions given to you by theater commanders. Your future accomplishments and sacrifices will be recognized and acknowledged publicly, and that is a promise from the President himself, who by the way now knows about your past incarnations. Lastly, I have two pieces of news that will impact on your unit. First, the British are planning for an attack and landing in Denmark, with the support of substantial American forces, for this summer, which means that more of our newly formed units will be sucked into the European Theater. Second, the Navy has convinced the President, against my advice, to launch an amphibious offensive in the South-west Pacific Theater, to ensure the protection of our lines of communication with Australia. This operation is slated for the July or August period and will need all the air support it can get. I fully intend for your air group to be part of that effort. In fact, I promised to General MacArthur, whose forces are in support of the Navy and Marines operation, that he would get your unit in time for that offensive. I have thus ordered that the training of your women be done as speedily as possible, by cutting out most of what you would call the 'chicken shit'."

"General, If I may raise a point about the training of my women, my experience in the Philippines has showed me that, in the Pacific, air units must be ready to defend by themselves their airfields from Japanese ground attacks. I thus insist that all my women get at least some basic training on how to shoot, maintain and operate infantry weapons and that they all receive an individual long arm apart from regulation pistols or revolvers. They should also learn how to dig themselves in and build field fortifications."

Arnold smiled at her words.

"That's funny, Major: General McNair, in charge of training for the Army, visited me three days ago to discuss with me the training program for your women. He then insisted that they get the same basic individual training program than any other Army recruit. I believed that you just validated his point."

Arnold then got up from his chair, imitated by Ingrid, and went to shake her hand.

"My aide has your mission order to go join your pilots on the basic military orientation course for officers in Orlando, Florida. Train your girls well and turn them into tigers, Major."

**10:27 (Midwest Time)**

**Friday, July 17, 1942 'C'**

**Tarmac of Luke Field, Arizona**

General Arnold came to attention and saluted as the graduates from Fighter Pilot Course 42-E marched in parade order past the V.I.P. stand on which he stood. Ingrid, having acted as an instructor on air tactics and aerial gunnery for the course, stood behind him with the other instructors, all male, of the course. Despite her pride at seeing all of her 31 women graduate from the course today, Ingrid's joy was tempered by the bad news that had come from the Pacific during the last two months. Still deprived of precious intelligence information because of the changes to the Japanese codes, the American navy had fought two major sea battles with the Japanese, losing in May in the Coral Sea and ending up in a bloody draw off Midway in June. Midway had been saved from being taken by the Japanese, something that would have been strategically catastrophic for the United States, but at the cost of two precious fleet carriers sunk and a third one damaged. American shipyards were now working overtime to make up those losses, but it would take months to rebuild the strength of the Navy in the Pacific. Despite her grim thoughts, Ingrid still smile to Teresa James, who was leading the parade as the top student of the course. Ingrid could hear some of the whispered remarks and comments from the spectators, a majority of them being parents of the graduating pilots. The fact that six of the top ten students of Course 42-E were women had disturbed quite a few spectators and press photographers and reporters present. In fact, the lowest ranking woman candidate still placed 68<sup>th</sup> out of 96 students that were graduating, a still respectable performance. In truth, the average male candidate, with less than 200 hour of flying time even after five months of training before joining this course, was at a severe disadvantage compared to the average woman from the future 170<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron, 'The Witches', who had around 900 hours of flying time before she arrived in Luke Field.

The official part of the ceremony now completed, General Arnold left the V.I.P. stand with the commandant of the fighter school. He however slowed down while passing in front of Ingrid and whispered to her.

"I must speak to you after this, Major. Go now to my staff car and wait for me there."

As Arnold was walking away, Major Garret Jackson, Commanding Officer of the 544<sup>th</sup> Training Squadron in charge of Course 42-E, looked at Ingrid, intrigued.

"Why would General Arnold want to see you in his car like this?"

Ingrid gave him a cold look: Jackson had been polite but reserved towards her during the course, obviously not approving of women fighter pilots.

“First, it is certainly not for what some would like to imagine, Major Jackson. Second, that’s strictly General Arnold’s business.”

She then walked away from the other instructors, following Arnold from a distance and arriving with him at his parked staff car after a minute. Arnold stayed outside of the car to speak to her, something she appreciated: it would be more difficult like that for others to insinuate things. There were already too many nasty and completely false rumors about Ingrid and her female pilots, rumors circulated by reporters too happy to create supposed scandals in order to boost their newspapers’ copies. Arnold had in fact to get his driver to politely get rid of a photographer that was a bit too insistent in prowling around the staff car with his camera at the ready and his ears up. Arnold then took a large envelope from inside his car and gave it to Ingrid, eyeing her gravely.

“I told you in April that I would probably need your pilots sooner than later, Major. Well, I now have mission orders for you and your air group.”

Ingrid looked back at him with shock.

“But, General, we still have to get our aircraft and qualify on them, then we need to train together as a unit for at least a few weeks before we are ready for combat.”

“You will have two weeks to qualify on P-38N at the Lockheed’ Burbank plant, where you will directly pick up your planes. Then, you will go to Muroc Field, a secluded airfield in the California Desert, where you will discreetly organize, train and finish equipping your air group. Then, by the end of August, your air group will depart for the South Pacific, mostly by sea, and establish itself in Espiritu Santo, in the New Hebrides, from where you will provide air support to our incoming operation in the Solomons.”

“The Solomons...Guadalcanal!” Said softly Ingrid, making Arnold nod his head.

“I see that your adoptive mother has indeed told you much about this war, Major. Yes, you will support our amphibious invasion of Guadalcanal, which is now more than ever in need of all the air support it can get in view of our recent losses in aircraft carriers. For this, your group will truly have the best we can provide, Major. While your fighter squadron will be equipped with the new P-38N LIGHTNING, your 177<sup>th</sup> Medium Bomber Squadron will get a new attack variant of the B-25 MITCHELL, the B-25NG. Your 117<sup>th</sup> Transport Squadron will itself be our first squadron to be equipped with the new Fairchild C-142A GLOBEMASTER heavy transport aircraft, and you will have as well a composite helicopter squadron and a reconnaissance squadron, the 171<sup>st</sup>

Reconnaissance Squadron, with a photo-reconnaissance variant of the P-38N and two pre-series prototypes of the airborne radar variant of the C-142, the EC-142E WAVEMASTER.”

“That will indeed do a lot to help us do our job in the Pacific, General. Now that I know where my group is going, could I request from you a blanket requisition order and a special budget so that I can have some special tropical kit and materiel produced or bought directly from civilian suppliers? My experience in the Philippines has shown me that the standard kit list of the Army Air Corps is poorly adapted to the tropical conditions of the South Pacific.”

Arnold only thought her demand over for a couple of seconds before agreeing to it.

“Keep me informed about that new equipment and how it impacts your operations in the Pacific, Major, so that I could eventually make them standard equipment for our other units in the Pacific. A blanket requisition authorization and a supplementary budget of 300,000 dollars will be awaiting you in Muroc Field. You will also get your individual small arms there: I have given orders to the Quartermaster of the 6<sup>th</sup> Army to let you have about whatever you want, within reasonable limits. By the way, talking of the 6<sup>th</sup> Army: you may be happy to hear that General Marshall was quite displeased on learning that Lieutenant General DeWitt had unilaterally decided to overrule the mission order to you authorizing you to enroll women anywhere in the country. General DeWitt has since been posted to Alaska.”

“Good for him!” Said Ingrid, smiling with contentment before becoming serious again. “Uh, under whose command will I be once in Espiritu Santo, General?”

“You will be under the direct command of Rear Admiral John McCain, Commander of Aircraft South Pacific, designated as Task Force 63 for the operation in Guadalcanal. I will make sure that he understands what you could do with your new planes and will request that he does not keep you in a straightjacket over there. He however seemed like a reasonable, competent man to me, so you should not have problems serving under him.”

“Well, General, I was married to a Marine, after all.” Replied Ingrid with a slight smile.

“True! Tell your girls to pack quickly, Major: a C-142 from the 117<sup>th</sup> Squadron will come at two this afternoon to pick you up and bring you to Burbank. They are waiting for you in the South Pacific.”

At a little before two in the afternoon, as promised by General Arnold, about the biggest aircraft Ingrid had ever seen showed up, landing in a surprisingly short distance on the main runway of Luke Field and then taxiing to the tarmac where the women of the 170<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron were waiting with their personal kit. Ingrid grinned on seeing that Betty Huyler Gillies was at the commands of the giant transport aircraft, waving at her from the cockpit. The four-engine aircraft then pivoted around to present its rear cargo ramp to the waiting women, displaying at the same time the female flying gremlin insignia of the Fifinellas proudly painted on its twin vertical stabilizers. The rear ramp then came down, letting the excited female fighter pilots climb inside the huge cargo bay with their luggage. Ingrid was met inside by Betty, shaking hands with her while looking around the cargo bay.

“That’s quite a plane you got there, Betty.”

“Indeed!” Replied the petite aviatrix in an enthusiastic tone. “The Fairchild C-142A GLOBEMASTER is a truly astounding plane with some tremendous capabilities. It was specifically designed for hauling heavy and outsized loads, like dismantled fighters and light bombers, over the long distances of the Pacific. It can in fact carry twenty tons of cargo over 3,000 miles, or ten tons over 5,000 miles. It has a cruising speed of 310 miles per hour and a top speed of 360 miles per hour at altitude, thanks to its four Pratt & Whitney R-4360-20 WASP MAJOR radial engines, each of which can produce up to 3,500 horsepower. It has a pressurized fuselage and can also take off and land on short, rough runways, thanks to a combination of elaborate blown flaps and low pressure tires. Nancy Laplante helped design it via her recommendations and suggestions, so you can be particularly proud about it.”

“I sure am, Betty. We will be able to do some astounding work with your C-142s in the South Pacific. Well, let’s take off and go to Burbank. I am anxious to see what Lockheed has for us.”

She saw well enough for herself two hours later, after her C-142 had landed on the runway servicing the Lockheed production plant in Burbank, California. She had seen pictures of the Lockheed P-38 LIGHTNING before, shown to her by Nancy Laplante, but the planes she saw lined up in a separate area had some strikingly different features from what she remembered. As a tall and thin test pilot from Lockheed named Tony LeVier was leading her and her group towards the fighter planes assigned to her air group, she could see those differences in more detail. For one thing, the



cockpit, instead of being in the rear half of the nose of the central nacelle and its machineguns, was now completely forward in the nose and had a modern-looking clear bubble canopy. There were eight heavy .50 caliber machineguns instead of four machineguns and one 20mm cannon, and those machineguns were now positioned with their ammunition bins behind the cockpit, with their barrels flanking the pilot on each side. It radically changed the look of the central nacelle on the P-38 but, as far as Ingrid could see, that change provided a much better view forward and down to the pilot, whose side vision was not blocked anymore by the inner wing sections and the two piston engines. The wings themselves were also different, deeper at their roots and with a thinner profile. Ingrid understood that Nancy had probably directed a redesign of the wing profiles, in order to get rid of the severe aerodynamic compressibility problems in speed dives experienced by P-38s in Nancy's history. Those problems had their roots in a poor understanding at the time of airflow dynamics around a wing at speeds approaching mach one. The other visible difference were the larger diameter, four-blade, paddle-like propellers. Overall, the final product looked exciting as hell to her, while her female pilots seemed as well to like what they saw. Once near the first P-38N, Tony LeVier turned to face the 32 female pilots and patted the fuselage of the fighter plane.

"Ladies, I present you the first production batch of the new model of the Lockheed P-38 LIGHTNING, the N model. It has not seen combat yet but it should make quite an impression on the Japanese...and on the Germans. This model has its origin in December of 1940, when the Canadian time traveler, Nancy Laplante, visited us in Burbank and made all kinds of suggestions and propositions. At the time, our original model P-38 was already quite a revolutionary aircraft, but Miss Laplante showed us ways to make it even better...much better in fact. As a result our P-38D model, which had been our standard production model up to now, will give way to the P-38N on our production line. Your new mount has two Packard-Merlin V-1650-3 engines, each rated at a maximum continuous 1,595 horsepower, which gives this baby a top speed of 430 miles per hour at an altitude of 25,000 feet, or 440 miles per hour on emergency power." Tony LeVier then paused as most of the female pilots swooned about how fast their future planes were. After a moment, he moved to the muzzles of the four heavy machineguns visible on the starboard side of the central nacelle.

"You also have a total of eight .50 caliber heavy machineguns, each provisioned with 550 rounds, as your main armament, more than enough to shred any enemy plane

to pieces with a short burst. Added to that, you have four wing pylons for fuel drop tanks or a mix of drop tanks, up to 4,000 pounds of bombs or rocket pods. Those rocket pods can be either for six five-inch rockets in their launch tubes, or sixteen three-inch rockets. These rockets are by the way of a brand new design, thanks again to Miss Laplante.”

Seeing Ingrid smile at that, LeVier in turn smiled at her and spoke softly.

“I was told that Nancy Laplante was your adoptive mother, Major Dows. She was a truly great woman and I regretted very much her passing.”

“Thank you, Mister LeVier. You are most kind.”

“You are welcome, Major. Now, to continue on the P-38N, it has a range on internal fuel and with 4,000 pounds of bombs of 750 miles, or of 2,200 miles with drop tanks and no bombs. This, plus the fact that you have the inherent safety of two engines, makes the P-38N the ideal fighter aircraft for the Pacific, with its long distances over water. The P-38N also incorporates many more new technologies and features, like fully transistorized radios and electronic equipment, forward-looking infrared cameras for night and bad weather flying, powered ailerons, dive airbrakes and a simplified fuel management system.”

“Excuse me, but what are those infrared cameras you just spoke about, sir?”  
Asked one of the pilots, Gertrude Meserve.

“Well, FLIR cameras, as they are also called, are nifty new gadgets that give you a color picture of objects and their backgrounds according to their respective temperatures. You can thus see their heat signatures, even at night and through fog or clouds. You could even see a man in the middle of a forest with your FLIR cameras. I must caution you however that this technology is still highly secret and must not be discussed in public or with reporters. Normally, this FLIR technology would not have appeared for another good thirty years at the least, but we now have it, thanks again to Miss Laplante.”

As her female pilots commented excitedly about that, Ingrid mentally thanked Nancy: she may be gone now, but she had time to truly put her mark on this war.

**16:11 (California Time)**

**Thursday, August 6, 1942 ‘C’**

**Temporary hangar of the 99<sup>th</sup> Composite Air Group**

**Muroc Field test and training center**

**California**

Ingrid was directing a group critique of the latest bombing practice by her fighter and bomber pilots when a convoy of trucks stopped in front of their hangar, with Captain Peter Shmelling and Master Sergeant Harry Coyle climbing down from the two lead trucks. Shmelling and Coyle then presented themselves to Ingrid, saluting her.

“Major, we have the weapons and ammunition sent by train from the Sharpe Arsenal, along with six instructors that will teach our personnel about our new individual weapons.”

Her interest poked at once, Ingrid eyed the six NCOs coming down from the trucks before looking back at Shmelling.

“So, what did we get, Peter, assault rifles?”

Her logistics officer shook his head at that.

“Sorry, Ingrid, but the Browning AR-41 is still reserved in priority to our infantry units. We however got something quite interesting in my opinion: M2 and M2A1 .30 caliber carbines. They were especially designed for second line personnel and are both light and very handy. We also got a large quantity of .45 caliber pistols and revolvers and I was able to convince the personnel of the arsenal to allot us heavy and medium machineguns for our air group ‘airfield defense sections’.”

“Very well! Let’s take a look at those carbines.”

Accompanied by Shmelling and Coyle, Ingrid went to the first truck and had two weapon crates taken down and opened on the tarmac. One of the army weapons instructors took out two small rifles, one with a fixed wooden stock, the other with a folding steel stock.

“These weapons were produced by the Inland Manufacturing Division of General Motors and actually are evolved models of the original M1 carbine design intended initially for production, Major. The carbine with fixed stock is the M2 carbine, while the one with the folding stock, meant for your pilots and aircrews, is the M2A1. Both are selective, semi-automatic and fully automatic fire weapons and are fed by a 30-round box magazine. With its stock folded, the M2A1 has a length overall of only 25.5 inches, or 35.6 inches with the stock extended. The M2 weighs a mere 5.5 pounds, a good four pounds less than the Garand M1 rifle or the Browning AR-41 assault rifle. Both models can also accept bayonets. Those carbines, while having less range than a typical rifle,

still have more range and penetration than submachine guns and should be ideal for your female personnel and particularly for your pilots and aircrews, Major.”

Taking the M2A1 presented by the instructor, Ingrid examined it with interest, liking at once its lightness and short length, especially with its stock folded. With such weapons, and with the aircraft and ground equipment the air group now had, her women would be well equipped for the fighting ahead of them.

## **CHAPTER 15 – TOKYO RUMBLE**

**15:40 (Tokyo Time)**

**Tuesday, October 27, 2015 ‘A’**

**Room 402, Ibis Hotel**

**Roppongi District, Tokyo**

**Japan**

Nancy, quite tired from her long air trip from Los Angeles, where she had met Marvel Studios officials before flying to Japan, put down her suitcases with a sigh of relief and closed the door of her hotel room. She certainly wouldn't mind the couple of days before the coming Friday to recuperate from the change in time zones. A makeup team from Marvel Studios was due to join her in Tokyo on Thursday, in time to prepare her for the Japan premiere of the film AVENGERS 2. As one of the movie characters, albeit not a true primary one, and due to her knowledge of the Japanese language, she had been designated by Marvel Studios to go help spice up the movie's premiere in Japan, which would precede the various North American premieres by a week. The film had been originally due out in May, but an unfortunate accident to one of the main actors had delayed the completion and release of the film by many months. One unexpected result of that was that Nancy's public relations stint would be followed only a few days later by the 5<sup>th</sup> Women's World Open Karate Tournament, itself running concurrently with the 11<sup>th</sup> World Open Karate Tournament, traditionally reserved for men. Nancy had registered herself as part of the Women's Tournament and was firmly resolved to target the top prize. Even without using her supernatural strength, she believed that her karate technique alone amply qualified her for this tournament. After unpacking her suitcases and undressing, Nancy stepped into the bathroom of her hotel room and took a quick shower, then went to bed for some much needed sleep. Her last thought before she fell asleep was for her three young children, Eli, 22 month-old, and Patrick and Suzanne, both eleven month-old, whom she had left under the care of the loyal Diana in her Jerusalem 'B' suite. She had left them two months ago already by her biological clock, to live another period of her life in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, but would actually reappear in her Jerusalem suite a mere ten minutes after her disappearance there. Still, she missed

them a lot, even though her babies wouldn't even be conscious of her short absence from Timeline 'B'.

### **20:33 (Tokyo Time)**

#### **Office of the 'Red Dragon' pachinko parlor**

#### **Shinjuku District, Tokyo**

"You asked for me, Mister Harakawa?" Said Jiro at the same time he bowed to the thin man sitting behind the desk. Harakawa, a feared man in the Shinjuku District, nodded once and slid a large envelope towards Jiro on his desk.

"Hay! A Gaijin<sup>13</sup> customer has contacted our organization with a request to kill a visiting female Gaijin. The contract pays well and should be relatively easy to complete, since the woman in question does not expect trouble here in Tokyo. This envelope contains the information you will need to find and kill this woman."

Stepping forward, Jiro grabbed the envelope before sitting on the chair facing the desk, then took out the few sheets of papers inside the envelope. Harakawa didn't miss the double take that Jiro did on seeing the large picture of a young woman that had been inside the envelope.

"Is there a problem, Jiro?" Asked the Yakuza sub-boss in a dangerous tone. The young mafia enforcer hurriedly shook his head, trying to hide his true feelings.

"Uh, no, Mister Harakawa. It is just that this Nancy Laplante is reputed to be a very tough, dangerous woman."

"A very tough, dangerous and unarmed woman out of her normal element. As I said, the contract pays well and the customer wants her dead before she can leave Tokyo. So, will you do the job or will I need to ask someone else?"

Jiro couldn't help feel cold sweat on his forehead at the tone of Harakawa. If he refused this contract, he could very well be considered a liability and be gotten rid of. Very few people could annoy Mister Harakawa without paying a price for it. Jiro thus bowed low while replacing the papers in the envelope.

"The job will be done, Mister Harakawa."

"Good! Then, you may leave."

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<sup>13</sup> Gaijin : pejorative term used by many Japanese to designate Caucasian foreigners.

Jiro didn't waste time and left as quickly as decency permitted, the envelope still in one hand. Going to a nearby washroom in the pachinko parlor, he locked himself up in a stall and looked again at the picture and papers inside the envelope, his heart sinking. He had loved the movie CROSSROADS and had been fired up by the character of the Shadow Dancer. In truth, he had developed a crush for the actress playing that role, whose real life exploits had also inflamed his imagination. In that, he was not the only young man in Japan to be fascinated by Nancy Laplante. Now, he had to kill her.

### **21:08 (Tokyo Time)**

**Wednesday, October 28, 2015 'A'**

### **Shinjuku District, Tokyo**

Shinjuku District was widely renown as the center of Tokyo's adult entertainment and certainly lived up to its sulfurous reputation. Nancy had already visited it a few times in her past visits to Tokyo and was trying to find back a small bar she had once visited. However, the chaotic layout of Tokyo, with many of its streets unmarked and with door numbers not following any logical sequence, was frustrating her tonight.

As she was following a narrow, poorly lit street connecting two main avenues, two big men suddenly emerged from a dark alleyway, discreetly pointing pistols at her. A car then sped behind her and screeched to a halt across the street, blocking her way back. Looking quickly at the car, she saw that two men inside were also pointing pistols at her through the opened windows. She froze on the spot but didn't raise her hands, instead addressing in Japanese one of the two men facing her from five paces away.

"Who are you and what do you want?"

The man answered her in accented English, his tone harsh.

"Shut up and just get in the car, Miss Laplante."

The accent, along with the mental thoughts of the man and his associates, gave his origin away to Nancy, who replied in a calm voice in Russian, apparently not phased one bit.

"Are you the same ones who tortured and killed Medveyev in Tel Aviv?"

The Russian agent hesitated for a moment then, surprised by how fast she had figured them out.

“So, you do confess to have known that arms dealer. The Russian justice has a few questions for you about a lot of AS Val silenced assault rifles you illegally bought...many years ago.”

Her response was to laugh at him. She then gave him a hard stare.

“Those rifles are just an excuse for you to try stealing something from me instead. However, there is nothing to steal: what you want is powered by my mind and cannot be taken. What I do not excuse, however, is the use of torture, on anyone or for any reason. Poor Victor Medveyev didn't deserve what you did to him and you only earned my eternal contempt by your acts in Tel Aviv. Now, I will give you just one warning: go away now and never bother me again, or you will all die here tonight.”

Despite having three armed agents with him and having pistols pointed at her, the calm assurance of that tall Canadian woman unsettled the Russian secret agent: after all, she was supposed to be a time traveler, not exactly your average customer. He however had a mission to fulfill.

“Enough bullshit, miss. Get in the car, NOW!”

Her response was to look calmly around her. Then, she simply disappeared from where she stood. Stunned, the Russian agent was still starring at the spot where Nancy had been when he and the man besides him stiffened as grips of steel grabbed them by the neck. The grip then tightened and the noise of crushed vertebrae could be heard by the occupants of the car. Nancy then threw violently the dead agents at the car, one after the other in quick succession. The corpses impacted against the vehicle with incredible force, crushing the steel body and leaving imprints in it. The two Russian agents inside the vehicle, suddenly feeling near panic, never had a chance to fire a shot. Their car suddenly jumped in the air and flipped over, falling back on its top with a resounding crash. The fuel tank of the car then exploded, trapping its dazed occupants inside a funeral pyre. Nancy was nowhere to be seen near the scene when the first witnesses showed up at a run.

The first responders on the scene were two fire trucks from the Tokyo Fire Department, which were able to douse the flames before they could spread to the buildings along the narrow street. A number of policemen followed close behind them, along with an ambulance. There were however only bodies to be collected, two of them burned beyond recognition and the two others crushed flat under the car. The presence of pistols on the scene however prompted a call that brought in two members of the



Japanese National Police Homicide Division. Inspector Takashi Kido and Detective Miura Kimi, leaving their car at one end of the street, walked slowly towards the blackened carcass and the bodies, now covered by linen sheets, noting the details of the crime scene. Miura, a young and very pretty woman that was the understudy of Takashi, eyed with incredulity the crushed and burned out car.

"How could a car overturn like this in such a narrow street? It also looked as if it was dropped from a fair height."

"Judging from the state of its bodywork, I would say that it indeed fell from a height...right on top of those two bodies."

Miura then noticed the two pistols lying on the pavement, a good ten meters away from the car and bodies. She went to examine them while Takashi went to search cautiously what was left of the four dead men.

"I have a Colt .45 and a Smith & Wesson 9mm pistol here, both loaded and with bullets in their chambers, Inspector. Their safeties were off, but they were not fired."

"And I have a partially burned Russian passport here." Replied Takashi. Searching further, he found more on the two bodies crushed by the car. "Those two crushed men have spare pistol magazines on them, one with .45 caliber bullets and the other with 9mm bullets. Those are probably the owners of those pistols."

"But, sir, they are over ten meters from their weapons. Why would they have left their weapons behind before stepping forward to be crushed by the car as it fell down?"

"They didn't step forward, Kimi: they were either pushed or thrown, and with great strength. Come and look at this."

Intrigued, Kimi went to the car, where Kido showed her the doors of the left side.

"Look at those imprints in the bodywork, Kimi. Something impacted violently against the car, before it flipped over."

Looking carefully at the crushed and deformed steel panels, Kimi had to agree with her mentor.

"You are right, Inspector, but it would take a truly violent impact to create such imprints."

"Our crime lab technicians will have to determine that with more precision, Kimi. By the way, the two men inside also were armed: I found two blackened pistols inside."

"A fight between two crime gangs, sir?"

"I would rather call it a one-sided massacre, from the looks of this scene. There is however the matter of this Russian passport. I just hope that this is not the start of some war between the Yakuza and the Russian mafia."

Kimi winced at those words.

"Ouch! That could be bloody."

"Indeed! There is however still much that I don't understand about this crime scene. We will have to analyze further the evidence available before we could say more about this. Let's photograph and pick up what we can find, then we will return to the office to study all this."

### **10:49 (Tokyo Time)**

**Thursday, October 29, 2015 'A'**

**Homicide Division, JNP headquarters**

**Tokyo**

Takashi Kido, who was studying the photos taken of last night's crime scene, raised his nose from the prints when his assistant approached his desk, a file folder in her hands.

"What do you have for me, Kimi?"

"Something that could prove unsettling, sir. I ran checks on the identity papers that we were able to retrieve on those bodies yesterday, on top of checking the car registration. All four men are officially Russian citizens, according to their papers, and arrived on the same flight from Vladivostok yesterday morning. As for the car, it was a rental paid for by one of the dead men. All four pistols found on them had their serial numbers filed off and they also had silencers for those pistols. This has all the hallmarks of a professional hit team on a mission. Our theory about the Russian mafia being involved seems to be firming up, sir."

Kido sat back, silent for a moment as he digested that information. Violent crimes involving guns were still relatively rare in Tokyo, compared to the shooting galleries of most American cities. Furthermore, guns themselves were difficult and expensive to acquire, even for the Yakuza, who anyway still preferred the old methods involving knives or fists.

"Kimi, if you were a Russian mafia boss and sent a hit team to Tokyo to eliminate a rival or an embarrassing witness, what would you do if you heard that your men had been killed by the said rival or witness?"

Kimi paled nearly at once as she understood where Kido was getting at.

"If that rival or witness was really worth sending four hit men after him, then that boss wouldn't let this pass. He would most probably send another, even bigger hit team to finish the job."

"Exactly! I think that we should start keeping a watch for the possible arrival from Russia of a number of tough-looking men in the next few days. I believe that I will have to alert the Security Bureau to this case: they have better connections than us concerning international cases."

"Talking about international cases, I took the liberty of emailing our JNP representative in Moscow, so that he could check on the identities of those dead men."

"A good move, Kimi. We..."

Kido's telephone then rang, interrupting him. Picking up the receiver and answering, he heard the voice of one of the forensic lab technicians of the JNP.

"Inspector Takashi, this is Toshiro, in the vehicle forensics garage. I believe that we have something of interest for you concerning that crushed and burned car."

"Very well, Toshiro. I am on my way down."

Putting down the receiver, Kido looked up at his assistant.

"The vehicle forensics men have found something, it seems. Let's go see them."

Riding down together to the level of the vehicle forensics garage, the two police officers soon arrived in one of the four stalls of the garage, where a middle-aged technician greeted them with a quick bow.

"Inspector Takashi, thank you for coming so quickly."

"And what do you have for us, Toshiro?"

The technician then pointed the wrecked car in the middle of the stall, now back on its wheels.

"We analyzed those impact imprints on the bodywork and ran the results through a computer simulation. The shape and size of those imprints correspond to the bodies of the men crushed by the car. Those two men were thus thrown against the car before the vehicle somehow jumped into the air and flipped over, then falling back on the ground and flattening those men."

Both Kido and Kimi looked at the technician with utter incredulity, with Kido objecting nearly at once.

“But, how could a car jump like that in the air? That’s impossible!”

“Unless someone actually threw that car in the air, Inspector.”

“Toshiro, I believe that you read too many mangas<sup>14</sup> lately.”

The technician made a sour smile at that.

“I would agree that this looks like a manga story, Inspector, but the results of our computer simulations were, uh, quite perplexing. Basically, to create the imprints we found in the bodywork with human bodies, whoever or whatever threw those men against the car must have had the strength of four gorillas, at the least.”

Kido exchanged a quick befuddled look with Kimi before looking back at the technician.

“You must be joking, right?”

“Never when concerning a multiple homicide, Inspector. Whoever threw those men against the car was actually strong enough to pick up and throw that car in the air. There is more.”

“More? You just told us that there is some kind of homicidal monster on the loose in Tokyo and you have more?” Said Kimi, seriously shaken by now. The technician grimly nodded and led them to a long counter on one side of the stall, picking up what looked like a sort of metallic badge contained inside a burned out leather case.

“This badge, along with three other similar badges, was found hidden under the rubber carpets of the car. I will let you guess what they are.”

Kido, like Kimi, looked closely at the said badge. He didn’t recognize it at first, noting only that it bore Cyrillic letters.

“This is some kind of Russian badge, but I’m not familiar with its design. What is it, Toshiro?”

“A SVR agent’s badge, Inspector.” Answered gravely the technician. “These men were Russian secret service agents. I believe that this case would interest our Security Bureau to the highest degree, sir.”

“Wait! You are saying that Russian government agents came to Tokyo to confront some sort of hyper muscular monster? If I presented this case now to the Police Superintendent, he would laugh me out of his office, Toshiro.”

“I’m sorry, Inspector, but I am only presenting the facts to you as I found them.”

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<sup>14</sup> Mangas : Japanese cartoon drawings that often depict fantastic or erotic stories.

Kido was about to make a remark when his cellular telephone rang, making him fish it out of its belt holder.

“Inspector Takashi!”

“Inspector, this is Doctor Nomura, at the pathology lab. Do you think that you could come pay me a visit? I have the results of the autopsy on these four men found yesterday night.”

“I’m on my way, Doctor.” Said Kido before nodding to the lab technician. “Thank you for your work, Toshiro. If you find anything else, please call me at once.”

“I will, Inspector.”

As they rode an elevator cabin again, on their way up to the pathology lab, Kimi Miura shook her head in disbelief.

“Decidedly, this is starting to sound seriously like a manga story, sir. Russian secret agents chasing a monster around Tokyo? The tabloids would go positively bonkers if they got hold of that story.”

“Well, let’s hope that the water cooler chatter here doesn’t end up in those tabloids, Kimi. This case is liable to make many people speculate wildly.”

“I wonder if what Doctor Nomura found is in the same vein.”

“We will know soon enough, Kimi.”

Stepping out of the elevator cabin once it stopped at the level of the pathology department, Kido and Kimi then walked to the pathology lab, entering the large, mostly bare room that contained four examination tables in the middle, with refrigerated compartments along one wall. Doctor Nomura, a very experienced forensics doctor in his fifties, was waiting for them near one of the tables, which supported a body covered by a linen sheet.

“Ah, Inspector Takashi, Detective Miura. Good to see you this morning.”

“And it is good to see you as well, Doctor.” Replied Kido. “What do you have for us?”

“Well, apart from the toxicology results, which will take another day to complete, I have mostly finished examining our four dead men found in Shinjuku last night, Inspector. In the case of the two men found inside the car, it is rather straightforward: they were probably stunned by the impact of the car crashing back on the ground, then burned alive when the fuel tank exploded and doused the inside with burning gasoline.

The two men crushed by the car are however another story. They were already dead by the time that the car somehow fell on top of them.”

“Then, how did they died, Doctor?”

“It was actually rather simple to find that out during my autopsy, Inspector: someone crushed their necks, reducing their vertebrae to powder.”

For the second time this morning, Kido and Kimi exchanged looks of disbelief.

“Uh, what kind of strength would that take, Doctor?” Asked Kido, swallowing hard.

“Superhuman strength, Inspector.” Replied Nomura, looking very serious. “Even a gorilla wouldn’t be strong enough to do this.”

Kido inhaled deeply once, while Kimi swiped away cold sweat from her forehead.

“Are you sure about that, Doctor?”

“Positive, Inspector. Do we have some sort of cyborg or terminator robot roaming the streets of Tokyo?”

“Uh, we still don’t know exactly what we are dealing with, Doctor. Right now, the only thing we know for sure is that those four men were Russian government agents.”

“Ah! That would explain the Russian tattoos I found on the two unburned bodies.”

“What kind of tattoos precisely, Doctor?” Asked Kimi, curious.

“Russian special forces tattoos. Those men, apart from being Russian agents, were probably in the past or the present members of Russian elite military forces. Normally, you would expect such men to be quite dangerous and to be rather hard to kill. However, in this case, it seems that they were no match for whatever they confronted last night.”

“Decidedly, this case is looking more and more like it is of concern for the Security Bureau. Thank you for your information, Doctor. It was of great help.”

“Thank you, Inspector. Please tell me if you ever find who or what did this: this case is really intriguing me.”

“Oh, I believe that we are in the same boat, Doctor.” Replied Kido before leaving the lab with Kimi, who muttered to herself on the way to the elevators.

“Russian elite government killers chasing a cyborg around Tokyo... This is decidedly getting more interesting by the minute.”

“Yes! This reminds me somewhat of that old television series called ‘The six million dollar man’.”

"I remember it: they tried to do a rerun with a woman in the main role a few years ago, but the series flopped."

It was then Kimi's cell phone's turn to buzz. Answering it, she recognized the voice of her boyfriend on the line, who sounded all excited.

"Isamu? What do I owe the pleasure of your call?"

"Kimi, I got great news! I was able to obtain two tickets for tomorrow's premiere of the AVENGERS 2. Are you interested?"

"Interested? Hell yes!" Replied happily Kimi, attracting a curious look from Kido. "How did you manage to find them? I thought that all the seats were sold out."

"Let's say that a friend of mine who bought those tickets just found out that his company was sending him without warning to some important business meeting out of country. Since that friend still owed me a favor, he sold me those tickets at rock bottom prices. He also told me something really exciting: the She-Hulk will show up for the premiere here."

"The She-Hulk will be here in Tokyo? That's fantastic! Count me in for tomorrow night, Isamu."

"Excellent! I will pick you up at your place for seven."

As a happy Kimi pocketed back her cell phone, she noticed the strange look on Kido's face.

"Uh, is something wrong, sir?"

"That call, may I ask what it was about, Kimi?"

"That was my boyfriend, calling to tell me that he was able to get a pair of tickets for the premiere of the movie AVENGERS 2, which opens tomorrow night. He said that the actress playing the role of She-Hulk will be present at the premiere."

"That She-Hulk, she's supposed to be very strong, no?"

"Indeed, but..." Said Kimi before realizing what Kido must have been thinking. She eyed him with disbelief.

"Sir, you are not seriously thinking that a real She-Hulk killed those four men? The She-Hulk is a purely fictional character, after all."

"You're right, of course. This case must have put my imagination in overdrive."

The pair didn't talk further in the elevator cabin or while walking towards their respective desks. Kido had barely time to sit down at his desk and place a call to the

Security Bureau to inform it of the case when a policeman escorted a Caucasian man wearing a good suit up to his desk.

“Sir, the gentleman here is from the Russian embassy and has asked to see you.”

His interest up at once, Kido got up to shake hands with the newcomer, who spoke in a fair but accented Japanese.

“I am sorry to importune you like this, Inspector Takashi. I am Victor Leonov, Assistant Consul at the Russian embassy. I believe that you have found yesterday night the bodies of four Russian citizens in the Shinjuku District.”

“That is correct, Mister Leonov. I see that the news have traveled fast about them. But please, sit down.”

The Russian diplomat took place in the chair facing Kido’s desk before speaking again.

“As I said, my embassy has learned of the violent death of four of our citizens yesterday night and has sent me to arrange for the speedy return of their bodies to Russia.”

“I can understand that wish, Mister Leonov, but unfortunately they are the subject of a multiple homicide investigation and not all the autopsy tests have been completed yet on them.”

“I understand that, Inspector, and am ready to wait until those tests are completed. How long could this take?”

“It will depend on a few things, Mister Leonov. For one thing, could you tell me why your four citizens were armed at the time of their deaths?”

“Armed?” Said the diplomat, a surprised expression on his face. “This must be a mistake: these four men were on a business trip for the company GAZPROM. Their company alerted us when they failed to place an arranged call to their head office.”

Kido had to recognize that the diplomat’s explanation would have made sense...if not for the SVR badges found in the car. He however didn’t mention those, wanting to keep a few hidden aces in this case.

“Well, pistols were found either on or close to them, Mister Leonov. This unfortunately makes them suspects as much as victims in this case, thus we may have to hold on their bodies for a while yet.”

“I see!” Said the diplomat, clearly displeased but keeping a polite tone. “Could you at least tell me how they died? Were they attacked or did they die in an accident?”



"Their car caught fire and they were burned alive. We are still investigating the cause of that fire."

"Well, I am afraid that I will have to return to my embassy to inform the Consul of this development. In the meantime, please call me if you find anything new. Here is my calling card."

Kido took his card, then thanked him for his visit, promising to keep him informed while escorting him back to the elevators. By the time that he returned to his desk, he found two Japanese men in suits waiting with Kimi besides it.

"Sir, these are Detectives Morita and Asakura, of the Security Bureau."

"Well, that was fast, I must say." Said Kido, smiling to the two detectives. Morita was of medium height and built but had the body of an athlete, while Asakura was big and massive by Japanese standards, looking like a Sumo wrestler on a weight loss diet. Morita smiled back at him.

"We have little merit in that, as our offices are a mere five floors above yours, Inspector Takashi. So, what do you have here for us, exactly?"

"Four dead Russian SVR agents, all armed, killed yesterday night in a most bizarre fashion in Shinjuku District. By the way, I just had a visit from the Russian Assistant Consul, a Victor Leonov, who came to ask for the bodies of these four men. He says that they were businessmen from the GAZPROM company on a working trip to Tokyo."

Morita and Asakura exchanged knowing looks before Morita spoke to Kido.

"Mister Leonov is actually suspected by our department of being an undercover intelligence officer, Inspector. This case is indeed made to attract our interest. What do you know up to now about these men and their deaths?"

"Well, let's sit down first. You don't mind if my assistant, Detective Miura, listens on?"

"Not at all! After all, this is your case."

Rolling up more chairs around his desk, Kido then resumed in detail to the two Security Bureau men what he knew of the affair, including how the Russians had died. That last part understandably left the two men incredulous and perplex.

"Someone strong enough to lift and flip over a car? We are getting on rather fantastic grounds, no?" Said Morita, making Kido shrug.

"Maybe, but those are the facts we have for the moment. So, do you see any possible explanation to all this?"

"Well, that those men were a SVR hit team sent to either kill or capture someone in Tokyo is a most plausible possibility. As for who they wanted to kill or capture, I frankly can't think of anyone right now. We will need much more than what you have presently to figure that out. The one thing we can rule out is that some kind of monster or creature is roaming the streets of Tokyo."

"Don't say that too quickly, Detective Morita." Said Kimi Miura in a playful tone. "The She-Hulk is supposed to be in town."

Seeing Morita and Asakura look at her with confusion, she quickly explained herself.

"Sorry about that joke, mister. I was referring to the actress playing the role of the She-Hulk in the movie AVENGERS 2, which premieres tomorrow night. She is supposed to be present at the premiere."

That brought a happy smile on Kazuo Asakura's face.

"She is? Hell, I am a fan of hers!"

"Come on, people!" Said Kido. "We are talking about a simple actress there." Morita gave him a funny look then.

"Not that simple an actress actually, Inspector. This Nancy Laplante is a seasoned war correspondent and ex-military officer and has a reputation about being a very tough woman. She also happens to be in the target sights of both the Taliban extremists and of the Israeli government."

"But she couldn't possibly have the kind of strength we are talking about in this case...unless she is really the She-Hulk, which would kind of surprise me."

"You're right, we are getting sidetracked here. Well, if you don't mind, we will go visit your forensics lab to see by ourselves what they found up to now. If you get further visits or calls from the Russian embassy about this case, call us at once. Here is my card."

Kido took the calling card offered by Morita before shaking hands with both Security Bureau men. Once they were gone, he gave a look at Kimi, who blushed and looked down at the floor.

"I'm sorry for my joke about the She-Hulk, Inspector. I was out of step."

"Don't be sorry, Kimi. At least, that told me something I didn't realize about that actress. Since you mentioned her first, I would like you to find out quickly what you can

about her, including if she is here yet in Tokyo. It may be a pointless exercise, but right now we have frankly very little to go about in this case.”

“I’m on it, Inspector.” Replied Kimi, suddenly feeling more cheerful, before returning to her own desk.

Kimi worked for half a hour, gathering information from the Internet and other sources available to the JNP, then went for a quick lunch before continuing her research work. She was in the process of cleaning up and ordering the information she had found when her desk telephone rang. She picked up the receiver while still looking at her computer screen.

“Detective Miura speaking!”

“Miss Miura, this is Toshiro, at the forensics lab. I tried to call Inspector Takashi but he is not responding.”

“That’s because he is presently briefing the Superintendent about our caseloads. He probably shut off his cell phone for that meeting. What’s up?”

“Well, this may be a false trail, but I managed to recover something from a half-burned notepad found on one of the Russian dead men. It is a simple hotel name and room number, but there is no other information besides that.”

“We will take anything that you can find, Toshiro. Shoot!”

“The hotel is the Ibis, in Roppongi District, and the room number is 402. There was no name connected to that room... Miss Miura, are you there?”

Kimi, her eyes fixed on one line she had written previously on her computer, answered hesitantly, sweat breaking out on her forehead.

“Uh, I heard you, Toshiro. I will check that out. Thank you for that information.”

She then put down the receiver and stared for a long moment at the address of the hotel where Nancy Laplante had taken a room last Tuesday, then passed a hand on her face. That last piece of information was purely circumstantial and could simply mean that some of those Russian men had previously stayed in that same hotel room sometimes in the past, but Kimi didn’t think so. This however left her with an explanation that was too fantastic to accept. Saving and printing her report, she then waited for Takashi’s return, going to his desk as soon as he showed back in the wide open office space used by the detectives of the Homicide Division.

"Sir, Toshiro just found something that had been written in a notepad belonging to one of the dead Russians. It was a hotel's address, but without a name. I found out who is the present occupant of that hotel room."

She then put down on his desk her report, which included on the first page a picture of Nancy Laplante. Kido looked in stunned silence at the picture for a moment, then looked up at Kimi, his face pale.

"This is impossible, Kimi. As you said, the She-Hulk is a purely fictional character. This woman can't be that strong. Besides, why would the Russian government be after her?"

"I frankly don't have a clue, sir. I would have expected the Israeli government to be after her, but the Russian government? Should we call her in or pay her a visit, Inspector?"

"Under what pretext? If she is really connected in some way to our case, then we would only alert her that we are on her and make her more cautious. Instead, we will initiate a trail on her."

"A 24-hour trail would eat up a lot of the division's resources in personnel, sir. The division director would probably not authorize that for such flimsy suspicions."

"Hum, you're right, Kimi. He especially would not like the reasons why we suspect Miss Laplante. Let me call Detective Morita, at the Security Bureau: maybe he will be able to help us."

Acting on that thought, Kido called at once Morita and exposed his problem and suspicions about Laplante. To his satisfaction, Morita accepted at once to come help him with a full surveillance team. He was thus all smile when he put down his receiver and looked up at Kimi.

"Done! We will thus have a mixed Homicide-Security Bureau team watching Miss Laplante. You will be able to team up with one of the Bureau men for that job."

Kimi then remembered something and made a horrified face.

"The premiere of AVENGERS 2! I am supposed to go see it with my boyfriend." Kido smiled and waved one hand to reassure her.

"Don't worry, Kimi: you will still be able to go to that premiere. You will simply be putting fun and work together."

The young Japanese woman blew a breath out at those words, relieved that she would not miss such an event.

**18:32 (Tokyo Time)**

**Friday, October 30, 2015 'A'**

**Room 402, Ibis Hotel**

**Roppongi District, Tokyo**

"The paint is now dry, Miss Laplante. You may put on your costume."

Her body now nearly all covered by a special green paint that was both resistant to water and let her body perspire through the pigment, Nancy looked at herself in the full-length mirror of her hotel room. Only her vaginal lips and the inside of her buttocks were not painted over in emerald green color, while dark green lipstick and makeup enhanced the effect of the paint. A wig made of long dark green hair falling to the middle of her back covered her natural hair and was glued securely to her head. She made a pause, still naked, while flexing her muscles, looking even more like her character. One of the two makeup artists, a certified male homosexual, smiled while looking at her reflection in the mirror.

"Just perfect, Miss Laplante. Your fans will go wild tonight."

"It should be good fun indeed." Said Nancy, smiling. "Time to put my superhero outfit."

That outfit, a stretching, form-hugging white and violet one-piece sleeveless bathing suit with a deep and wide cleavage, also included a wide white belt that discreetly included a few zipped compartments for her identity papers, room keys and money. It took her only a few seconds to put it on. Fingerless white and violet gloves and white running shoes went on next. The running shoes were however specially made ones, with extra-thick soles and heels, adding a good seven centimeters in height to her already respectable natural 183 centimeters. With her thick wig, she now appeared like a muscular green woman standing close to two meters in height. A last look at the mirror brought a satisfied smile to her face.

"The She-Hulk is ready to rumble around Tokyo. Is the rest of the studio team already at the cinema, along with our supply of personalized cards and other paraphernalia?"

"They are, Miss Laplante." Answered the other makeup artist, a young woman. "You only need to arrive there at no later than eight O'clock."

"Then, I will see you there." Said Nancy before resolutely walking out of her room and into the main corridor of her floor, painting on a ferocious expression on her face.

She encountered a few of the other customers of the hotel on her way out, making in particular a young boy that Nancy met with his parents in the elevator all excited and happy. The boy in return got from her one of her personalized cards adorned with a hologram picture of the She-Hulk. She caused more sensation once she stepped out of the main entrance and started running on the sidewalk at a good speed towards the nearest subway station. Seiji Morita, who had been sitting and waiting in the front passenger seat of a car parked near the hotel's entrance, smiled to himself before speaking in the microphone of his radio.

"Team 'B', this is Leader. Keep your eyes open: the She-Hulk is now out of the Ibis Hotel and running towards the Roppongi subway station."

"Team 'B', acknowledged!"

The experienced eyes of Morita then spotted another car that was now pulling out of its parking space. It had three men inside it and started rolling slowly, following the female silhouette running on the sidewalk.

"Team 'B', be advised that a suspect car with three men inside is now following the target. The plate number is C24 H880."

Morita then noted down that plate number and car make in his notepad. As his driver followed Nancy from a distance, varying his speed and sometimes stopping temporarily to keep his distance, Morita couldn't help marvel at the speed and endurance shown by the running Nancy.

"That woman is decidedly a true athlete, Reiko. She certainly looks her part as the She-Hulk."

"She's indeed quite a woman, Seiji." Said his driver, smiling.

Once at the entrance of the subway station, Nancy slowed down and went inside, going down the mechanical stairs and using a prepaid card to pass the turnstile and step on the train platform. Morita, who had left his car and also went in to follow her, saw one big Caucasian man come out of the suspect car to also follow Nancy, prompting another discreet radio call from Morita to his team.

“This is leader. A Caucasian man left the suspect car and is following Laplante inside the subway station. Exercise caution if approaching that car.”

Like most early Friday evenings, the subway station was packed with people. Fortunately, the uncommon height and green skin paint worn by Laplante made her easy to spot in the crowd. Morita chose to use a sliding subway car door next to that used by Laplante once the train showed up in the station and stopped, disgorging a crowd of humanity. Morita then was dragged inside, crammed in the car with other travelers pushed inside by the famous Tokyo subway pushers, with their white gloves and service caps. Nancy herself was pushed along others inside the subway car, ending up sandwiched tightly in the middle of a group of men and teenagers. One small young man wearing spectacles ended up with his face firmly buried between her large, firm breasts. Nancy smiled down to him.

“Sorry about that, mister.” She said in Japanese, to which the young man simply replied by grinning like an idiot, attracting more than a few amused comments around him, along with excited exclamations from other travelers as they raised their cell phones to take pictures of Nancy. Morita himself took a few pictures with his cell phone, making sure that the Caucasian man following Nancy was framed in at least one of the pictures. One of the male travelers that raised his cell phone to get a plunging view down the deep cleavage of her outfit got a ferocious growl from Nancy, something that only made other travelers laugh.

Laplante finally left at Ginza Station, exiting in the open air and starting to run again, sprinting along the sidewalk of the Harumi Dori Avenue towards the nearby Mullion Building, a massive glass and steel complex. While the Caucasian man following her started looking for a taxi, Seiji Morita kept a normal pace, as he knew already where Laplante was headed: the Nichigeki Plaza Cinema, situated inside the Mullion Building. Before she could get there, though, Nancy had to stop and wait at a corner and wait for the pedestrians signal to turn green: Japanese bylaws were actually quite severe about jaywalking. That gave her time to distribute to the excited Japanese around her a few of her personalized cards and to autograph them, signing using the name ‘Jennifer Walters’, which was the name of the She-Hulk’s alter ego. Then, with the signal turning green, she resumed her run at Olympic sprint speed, deftly jumping clean over a parked car and heading for the entrance leading to the Nichigeki Plaza Cinema, all the while causing quite a commotion in her wake. Morita’s eyes then saw the suspect

car that had dropped one man at the subway station arrive in an obvious hurry before dropping off a second man and then searching for a parking spot. Morita keyed his radio microphone and spoke in a low voice while walking towards the cinema.

"Leader to Team 'B', the suspect car has dropped a second man near the cinema and is now parking along the Harumi Dori in front of the Mullion Building. Drop off Kazuo so that he can join me, then stay in sight of the suspect car."

"Team 'B', acknowledged!"

Following the man who had just stepped out of the suspect car, Seiji entered the building twenty meters behind him, to find that the lobby leading to the cinema entrance was nearly packed with people waiting to go see the premiere of 'THE AVENGERS 2'. Nancy Laplante, followed by a few television cameramen and a small army of photographers, was going slowly down the line of expectant spectators, distributing cards and autographs and chatting with her fans, while a young woman that must have been hired by the Marvel Studios carried for her a box full of She-Hulk cards. Seiji smiled on spotting Kimi in the lineup, about as excited as the other spectators and holding hands with a young Japanese man. A discreet look told him that the two men following Laplante were sitting on a bench in the lobby, watching discreetly the tall Canadian. Seiji reasoned that they were probably not foolish enough to try something against her with such a crowd and a number of cameras present, but he didn't like the idea of armed foreign agents going around Tokyo and bent on violent acts, and neither would his superintendant. He thus resolved to neutralize that possible threat as soon as practical instead of waiting for things to sour. Since these men were probably carrying illegal weapons, he would have the perfect excuse to arrest them on probable cause. Japanese laws were very severe concerning illegal possession or carry of firearms and their nationality would not do much to help these men in front of a Japanese judge, unless they had diplomatic immunity. In that last case, they still would be kicked out of the country and a stern protest note would be given to the Russian ambassador.

Nancy disappeared inside the cinema a few minutes before the film was due to start, with the crowd in the lobby now inside the cinema. With the hall now fairly empty of people, Seiji decided that it was time to act. Alerting Kazuo and Takashi Kido to back him up, he gave the order by radio to his second team to close in and confront the occupant of the suspect car, then walked calmly towards the two suspected Russians, who were still sitting on their bench. The two men eyed him suspiciously as he got



closer, then became downright nervous on seeing two more men closing on them from separate directions. Thankfully they didn't react stupidly, like going for their weapons. One of them however spoke briefly to himself in Russian, probably alerting his driver. Tense as a steel bar and ready to draw his own pistol in a flash, Seiji stopped squarely in front of the two sitting men, keeping a good three paces from them, and spoke in English to the man who had spoken in his microphone while showing his JNP badge.

"Detective Morita, from the Japanese National Police. I will ask you two gentlemen to slowly get up and keep your hands away from your bodies."

With Kazuo Asakura and Takashi Kido in their back and left side and obviously ready to draw their weapons, the two Russians complied, although they were quite displeased.

"Why are you accosting us like this, Detective?" Asked the Russian who appeared to be the senior agent of the pair. "We did nothing illegal."

"You are actually suspected of carrying illegal weapons. If nothing is found on you, then we will leave you in peace. Kazuo, search them!"

With Kido covering him, Kazuo quickly patted down the two men. He found nearly at once two pistols, spare magazines and two combat knives, plus two miniature radio transceivers with lapel microphones and ear pieces. He also fished out the passports carried by the two men: by Japanese law, all foreigners had to carry their passports at all times, something the two men clearly knew. With the weapons taken away by Kazuo, Seiji looked at the passports, which were Russian, and gave a severe stare at the two men.

"Misters Baranovich and Zaitsev, I am arresting you for carrying illegal firearms on Japanese soil. Further charges may still be brought against you. You have the right to remain silent and to ask for the services of a lawyer. However, anything you will say from now on may be used against you. Do you understand?"

"Yes!" Said the senior Russian agent, clearly pissed but also resigned to what would follow. "We want our embassy to be advised, so that we could get consular assistance."

"That is your right, mister. Kazuo, cuff them!"

Once the two men were cuffed, Seiji contacted his second team and asked for a report, getting an excited answer from the team leader.

"Team 'B' to Leader: we have the driver of the suspect car in custody. He was armed with an unregistered pistol. On searching the car, we found an arsenal of

automatic weapons in the trunk, along with stun guns and what looks like a drug injection kit.”

“Acknowledged! Bring the lot to the headquarters for detailed search and interrogation. We have the two other men in custody here: both had pistols on them.”

Seiji then threw a hard look at the Russians, who were still impassive.

“May I ask you why you were apparently after Miss Laplante, gentlemen?”

“We will talk only in the presence of a lawyer assigned by our embassy.” Was the answer of the senior Russian.

“Very well! Your embassy will have a lot to answer for anyway. Please follow us quietly to our car and don’t force us to become rough.”

The Japanese policemen then dragged out their two prisoners, watched by the few people present in the lobby.

Nearly three hours later, the crowd of spectators started filing out of the cinema, commenting excitedly on the movie they had just enjoyed. Kimi was actually as pleased by the movie as the others around her. Having been especially interested for obvious reasons in Nancy Laplante’s performance in the film, she had to say that she had been impressed. While not a primary role, her character had added quite nicely to the film and her sole fighting scene had been nothing less than spectacular. In fact, her role as the principled lawyer Jennifer Walters had been more important to the plot than her role as the She-Hulk. It also had helped that the rest of the actors and the script had been at least as good as in the first AVENGERS movie. As she was walking out with her boyfriend towards the exit, she saw Nancy Laplante, still in her She-Hulk makeup, being interviewed by a small crowd of reporters and cameramen. The events of last Wednesday then came back to her mind, making her wonder why the Russian government would be after such a woman.

**10:16 (Tokyo Time)**

**Saturday, October 31, 2015 ‘A’**

**Homicide Division, JNP headquarters**

**Tokyo**

“Thank you for coming on such short notice, Miss Laplante. Please have a seat.”

Nancy smiled to Takashi Kido while taking the chair offered by him. She was wearing a very sexy outfit of short skirt, high leather boots and silk blouse with deep cleavage that had made many policemen in the department salivate along her way to Takashi's desk. She also smiled to Kimi Miura and Seiji Morita, who had taken chairs behind the desk, before returning her eyes on Kido.

"So, Inspector, what may I do for you this morning?"

"Miss Laplante, while I am not accusing you of anything, yet, I do have some questions for you. You may however wish to have the services of a lawyer if you wish so, as what you will say to me now may be used against you."

"I have nothing to hide, Inspector. Go ahead!"

Takashi couldn't help admire her aplomb, doing his best as well not to be hypnotized by her fantastic body. He had read carefully what was known about her and had been truly impressed: he was now facing a highly intelligent and brave woman with advanced fighting skills and who was also a certified killer, albeit as a military officer in war zones. Kido then activated the tape recorder on his desk and looked Nancy into the eyes.

"Well, let me resume to you what triggered our interest in you, miss. Last Wednesday night, four Russian men were killed in the Shinjuku District. All of them were carrying illegal weapons, by the way. One of them had a notepad on him that contained the name of your hotel, along with your room number. Then, last evening at the premiere of the movie THE AVENGERS 2, we arrested three other Russian men that had been following you, finding on them an arsenal of firearms, stun guns and an injection kit with vials of a powerful tranquilizer, suggesting that they were planning to kidnap you. Would you by chance know why Russians would be after you, Miss Laplante?"

Nancy gave him a disarming smile while answering him calmly with words that made the Japanese police officers tense at once.

"Well, where to start? Both the Russian mafia and the Russian government hate my guts, for different reasons. At least one family of the Russian mafia hates me because I exposed a few years ago its arms trafficking business with various nasty African warlords. As for the Russian government, you have a choice of reasons. First, I exposed the corruption and incompetence of a couple of Russian generals during the wars in the Caucasus, something that made Moscow look quite bad. By the way, those generals are now serving life sentences in Siberia. I also made rather unflattering comments about the performance of Russian forces during their brief war with Georgia.

I also interviewed a number of anti-Russian warlords hiding around the Caucasus, warlords that the Russians would love to find, possibly through me. More recently, I exposed the full extent of the Russian supply of arms to both the Syrian and Iranian governments, something that really made the Russian leaders blow a gasket. To further spice up my life, the Taliban leadership in Pakistan have decreed that I was the Devil personified and proclaimed a fatwa calling for all Muslim believers to kill me on sight, this after I led a platoon of Afghan policewomen in a battle in 2012 where nearly 400 Taliban extremists were killed, wounded or captured. Then, in 2013, when I went to Israel to cover the Iran-Israel war, the Israeli government put in its head that I was a supporter of terrorists and kidnapped me to secretly interrogate me and then make me disappear. Since I kind of disagreed with that, I killed two of my interrogators and fled Israel via the Lebanese border. That was when the Israeli government tried to have me arrested by Interpol, but the American government objected to that and had the Interpol warrant against me rescinded. Did I tell you also that some French officials in their intelligence and security services dislike me and call me 'l'Emmerdeuse', or 'The Shit Disturber' in French? They do so because I reported on some of the more unsavory and also totally illegal methods they were using to quote further the national interests of France unquote in certain African countries. Am I surprised that armed Russians are after me? Not at all! Am I somewhat expecting Israeli agents to show up next? Anytime! So, does this answer your question, Inspector Takashi?"

Completely taken off balance by her candid answer, Kido didn't know at first what to say. Clearing his throat, he made a point of looking down at a paper on his desk.

"Uh, where were you on Wednesday evening, Miss Laplante?"

"In Shinjuku District, looking for a nice, quiet bar to spend the evening."

Kido, like Kimi, tensed up again at that answer.

"And where exactly did you go in Shinjuku, Miss Laplante?"

"To the 'Kinswomyn Bar'. I found a couple of really nice girls there and spent the night with them."

"You're a lesbian, miss?" Asked Kimi, totally surprised and also a little shocked. Nancy smiled to her and wiggled her index.

"Not a lesbian, miss: just a bisexual woman with a rather ravenous appetite for sex. Heck, you think that I didn't enjoy doing movies besides the likes of Channing Tatum, Chris Evans and Chris Hemsworth? Scarlett Johansson was only the frosting on the cake. On the other hand, nobody objected about having me around the film set...if

you except the wives of those guys. They however had nothing to fear: I don't go after married men...or women."

Seiji Morita blew air out, while Kimi was left wide-eyed and speechless. Kido straightened his tie before continuing his questioning.

"Uh, at what hour did you arrive at the Kinswomyn Bar, miss, and when did you leave it?"

"I entered it at a bit past nine O'clock and stayed there until about midnight, to go to the apartment of the two girls I met there. I spent the night at that apartment. I suppose that you will need the address and names of those two girls as witnesses, Inspector?"

"If you don't mind, Miss Laplante."

Nancy then took a sheet from a notepad on the desk and wrote on it two names, along with an address, before giving it to Kido.

"Here you are, Inspector. Anything else?"

"Only one thing, actually, miss. Did you kill those four Russian men?"

That got him a serious stare from Nancy.

"Inspector, I didn't bring any weapons to Japan and I was unarmed during my visit to the Shinjuku District."

"They were not shot, miss: they were thrown around and crushed like simple puppets, along with their car."

Nancy's stare then became nearly disdainful.

"Inspector, I simply play the role of the She-Hulk in movies: I am not the She-Hulk and you will have a pretty hard time trying to convince a prosecution magistrate to gobble that fable up."

Kido knew that she was right about that last point and decided not to insist further for the moment.

"Very well, Miss Laplante. What are your plans for the next few days?"

"I am going to train physically before participating in the Women's World Open Karate Tournament next Friday, at the Tokyo Metropolitan Gymnasium. I am a sixth Dan black belt Kyokushin karateka."

"I see! Well, I can only wish you luck at that tournament. That will be all for us. You may go."

"Thank you, Inspector." Said Nancy before getting up and walking out, with most police officers in the open office space admiring her legs and butt from their desks as she passed near them. Kido swiveled his chair around to face Kimi and Seiji.

"Well, what do you think?"

"Wow!" Could only say Kimi at first. "She is quite something."

"Indeed!" Said Seiji. "That woman has an incredible aplomb, to say the least. She was however right about any magistrate believing that she could kill those Russians the way they died. Laplante had the motive and opportunity, but not the means to kill them."

"Then, we might as well close the case, sir." Said Kimi. "We will never be able to seriously inculcate someone of those killings...unless we catch the She-Hulk in the act."

Those last words made Kido smile weakly at her.

"Somehow, I don't think that we will be that lucky, Kimi. The one thing that we can do is to continue to discreetly follow her, for her own protection. That woman seems to attract trouble like a magnet."

"Maybe but, on the other hand, she did prove useful to us." Cut in Seiji. "She indirectly helped the Security Bureau in finding and catching armed foreign government agents operating illegally on Japanese soil. The justice and foreign ministers are going to be briefed this morning by my superintendant about these Russian agents and my guess is that the Russian ambassador will be called in for a rather stinging diplomatic rebuke."

"But, the ministers will wonder why they were after Miss Laplante." Objected Kimi. "More, they will be quite unsettled about the way those Russians died. That could launch this investigation again."

"Uh, let's say that my superintendant will not mention the details about their deaths, unless of course the justice minister insists in seeing the whole file. If that happens..."

Seiji didn't have to say more, not wishing to think about the possible fallouts in such a case.

**18:52 (Tokyo Time)**

**Tuesday, November 3, 2015 'A'**

**Roppongi District, Tokyo**

Jiro took a step back in the dark alleyway corner after having a cautious look down the alley. His hunch about his target using this alleyway to get to a restaurant she seemed to favor had been right. Nervously checking again that the safety catch of his silenced pistol was off, he then closed his eyes for a moment, trying to concentrate on his next move. He still didn't want to kill her, but refusing to do the job would be his death warrant at the hands of Mister Harakawa and his other minions, who would probably make an example of him to reaffirm unquestioning obedience within the organization. Taking a deep breath, Jiro then reopened his eyes, ready to jump out of his corner and shoot his prey once she was past him. His heart jumped brutally in his chest when he saw to his utter stupor that Nancy Laplante was now facing him from barely a pace away, looking calmly at him. Her left hand then grabbed his right wrist in a steel grip, preventing him from pointing his pistol at her. When she spoke in Japanese to him, it was in a neutral tone, without a trace of fear or hatred.

"You seem to be conflicted about your job, Jiro. Why?"

Totally overwhelmed and unable at the time to think straight, Jiro answered her in a stuttering voice.

"I...I am a fan of yours, Miss Laplante, but I was given no choice about taking this job."

Those green eyes of her drilled into his eyes, nearly hypnotizing him.

"And who paid for a contract on me, Jiro?"

"I...I don't know, truly. Only Mister Harakawa knows. He did tell me that a Gaijin approached him, paying him to have you killed. Mister Harakawa then assigned me to the job."

"A Gaijin, eh? Interesting! And where could I find your Mister Harakawa, so that I could ask him who his customer is?"

"I can't tell you that! Mister Harakawa would kill me. In fact, he would kill me if he knew that I gave you his name."

"Jiro, very soon, you will not have to worry anymore about Mister Harakawa or his other minions. I am offering you now a way out of your present, dead end life. Give up this occupation and your Yakuza affiliation and start a new, clean life. In exchange, I will not kill you and will take Harakawa off your back...for good. I will even give you a fair sum, so that you could restart your life."

"But, what would I do then? I am only skilled at fighting and killing."

Somehow, that made her smile in amusement.

“Easy, Jiro: join the Japanese Army. Oh, sorry, they still call themselves the Japanese Self-Defense Ground Forces. You would make an excellent recruit for them, I believe. In fact, they may need soon many recruits like you. First, though, you will not need this anymore.”

Taking his pistol out of his hand while still looking him in the eyes, Nancy then bent and twisted it with her hands, appearing to barely strain herself while doing that and making Jiro swallow hard.

“Who...what are you really, miss?”

“A woman who cares, Jiro.”

Throwing the now useless weapon in a nearby trash can after wiping it clean with a handkerchief, Nancy then took out her wallet and extracted 5,000 American dollars from it, giving them to Jiro.

“Use this money to move on to better things, Jiro. And do not worry about Mister Harakawa at the Red Dragon pachinko parlor: I will take care of him. About joining the army, I was serious: you would make an excellent soldier, believe me.”

She then walked out of the dark alley, leaving an overwhelmed Jiro alone, his hands clutching her money.

It took Jiro a long time to calm his mind down, still hiding in the corner. He finally pocketed the dollars and walked out in the open, then slowly started to walk towards the nearest subway station: he badly needed to get back to his cramped apartment in Shinjuku District in order to think over his options. Actually, her suggestion to join the Japanese forces made sense: he was physically fit, was skilled with knives and firearms and had learned obedience and discipline the hard way as a Yakuza soldier. It was just that army pay sucked, compared to what he made as an enforcer and assassin. She had however been too right about his present life being a dead end. Most Yakuza soldiers didn't live up to retirement age and many ended up eventually in jail for long years. Only a very few got up the ranks and made it big, but even those eventually met their demise some way or the other.

Jiro was still wondering how Laplante had guessed where to find Mister Harakawa when he got out of Shinjuku Station. Walking the last 600 meters to his apartment, he had to pass close by the Red Dragon pachinko parlor. Jiro had to slow



down and stop then: a whole fleet of police cars and ambulances were parked in front of the establishment, blocking the street and with their rotating lights on, while dozens of policemen were keeping a growing crowd of curious onlookers away. Thinking to himself that Nancy Laplante could not possibly have acted this quickly, Jiro wiggled his way to the first ranks of the crowd of onlookers and asked a young man taking pictures with his cell phone what had happened. The teenager answered him in an excited tone.

“There was a big shootout in the Red Dragon pachinko parlor only fifteen minutes ago. I was at a bar nearby and heard everything. They say that a group of big Gaijins went in, shot up the owner and a number of his employees, then left.”

Letting the teenager continue to take his pictures, Jiro then watched the policemen going in and out of the pachinko parlor. Medics then got out, pushing four medical gurneys. Bodies covered with bloodied white sheets were on the gurneys. One hand slipped out from under the sheet covering one of the bodies, revealing a gold-plated luxury watch and a ruby and gold ring Jiro had often seen before. The assassin felt relief wash over him then: he now didn't have to worry anymore about Mister Harakawa. His mind now more at peace, Jiro extricated himself from the crowd and resumed his walk towards his apartment, now firmly resolved to pack up his things and disappear before next morning.

### **21:40 (Tokyo Time)**

#### **Underground garage of condominium tower**

#### **Roppongi District, Tokyo**

Eli Cohen was frustrated and also a little worried as he parked his car in his reserved spot of the underground garage of the tower where he lived. He had been having supper at a sushi bar he liked when the television set of the bar had flashed the news of a big shootout at a pachinko parlor in Shinjuku District, with at least four men dead. For the average Tokyo resident, such a shootout was already an unusual incident, but for Eli that meant also that someone was trying to retrace the origin of the contract placed on Nancy Laplante. Since Eli knew about her time traveling abilities and mental powers, he certainly could not underestimate her, especially since the assassin he had paid for didn't seem to have killed her yet. He had argued with Mossad headquarters in Tel Aviv that using the Yakuza was a mistake and that a Mossad team would have done a cleaner job, but Tel Aviv had insisted, saying that it would help cover

Israel's tracks. With these thoughts in his mind, he stepped out of his car and locked it, then started walking towards the elevator cabins of the garage. His keen eyes then saw that the security camera covering this part of the underground garage didn't seem to work, its red light being unlit. He frowned at that and promised himself to ask the building superintendant to have this camera repaired quickly. As he was closing in on the elevators, a big man wearing a trench coat stepped out from behind a parked van and blocked his path, a pointed pistol with silencer in his right hand. The man was huge, at least 190 centimeters in height and was as large as a refrigerator. He also sported a long scar on his left cheek. Eli, who knew well modern history and had been involved years ago in the organized hunt for Nazi war criminals, opened his eyes wide and froze with both stupor and incredulity as he recognized the man.

"Otto Skorzeni! But, that's impossible!"

The beefy man's face stayed impassive as he replied to Eli's exclamation.

"Denying reality is bad for your health."

His pistol then coughed twice, the first bullet hitting Eli in the heart and the second one drilling him in the forehead. The Mossad resident for Tokyo fell back on the concrete floor, dead before he touched the ground. Skorzeni looked down at him for a second, then disappeared from where he stood in a brief flash of white light.

**17:09 (Tokyo Time)**

**Friday, November 6, 2015 'A'**

**Tokyo Metropolitan Gymnasium**

**Sendagaya District, Shibuya-ku, Tokyo**

Kimi couldn't help jump up and shout enthusiastically as the main judge on the competition floor declared Nancy Laplante the winner of her last fight, which made her now the World female champion, all categories, in Kyokushin karate. Takashi Kido, sitting next to Kimi in one of the spectators sections of the Tokyo Metropolitan Gymnasium, where both the Men and the Women's World tournaments were being held but in separate arenas, showed less excitement but was still smiling at the outcome of the fight. This was supposed to be part of their work in trailing Nancy Laplante but, to be truthful, the tremendous fighting abilities and unorthodox but legal style of the tall Canadian had won him over as a fan. Laplante had shown incredible speed and agility in her movements which, allied to her superior reach due to her height for a woman and

her expert karate technique, had brought grief to her seven successive opponents, even though those opponents had been no slouches. The rest of the spectators cheered as well as Laplante saluted first her opponent, who was still wobbly on her legs after a lightning kick to the head, then the judges. The head of the International Karate Organization next showed up on the competition floor and handed to Laplante the trophy for the Women's World Champion, to the applause of the crowd. Seeing that Laplante was going to retire afterwards to the women's locker room to shower and change, Kido patted Kimi's shoulder.

"Well, enough with the entertainment, Kimi. Now is the time to do our work. Let's wait for Laplante in the lobby of the gymnasium."

Kimi followed him out of the sports hall, which could house up to 3,000 people, still feeling excited.

"Wow! I wish I could one day become as good as her in karate. My own brown belt feels puny compared to her level of skills."

"Don't sell yourself short, Kimi: you are plenty skilled for me. However, I have to agree that Laplante is a true fighting machine, with or without weapons. She certainly earned the right to gloat today."

Once in the large lobby of the sports center, they took a discreet position in a corner near a sales booth and waited for Laplante to come out. However, when she did so twenty minutes later, her big trophy in one hand and her gym bag in her other hand, a small army of news cameramen, reporters and press photographers rushed her, their cameras pointed and clicking, to interview her about her new title of Women's World Karate Champion. Kido and Kimi thus had to be patient as the reporters and cameramen took turns at her. As the excitement was still on, a big, beefy man with a crooked nose and a shaved head purposely made a detour to pass near the group, stopping behind Laplante and speaking loudly enough for everyone nearby to hear him.

"Don't waste your time on her or other female karateka: the title of World Karate Champion will always belong to a man."

Kimi, like Laplante and all the women within earshot, instantly stared at the man with an insulted look.

"Who the hell is that asshole?" She asked in a low voice as Laplante turned around to face the man.

"Sergei Borisov, the incumbent Men's World Karate Champion, here to defend his title." Answered Kido, now following with interest the confrontation. If Laplante was intimidated by Borisov, she didn't show it one bit, shooting back a reply to the Russian.

"One of the goals of karate is to teach humility and respect towards others, Borisov. Obviously, you missed something during your training."

With the reporters and cameramen gleefully recording the verbal clash, Borisov gave a mean smile to Nancy.

"Why should I care about what you think, Laplante? For a female karateka, you're good, but you still are second class."

Many people around them held their breath, as the chairman of the International Karate Organization hurried up to prevent a possible scuffle. Nancy took one disdainful look up and down Borisov before speaking in a strong, firm tone, making sure that all around her could hear her.

"We will see who is second class, Borisov, unless you are too scared to back your words with action. I formally challenge you to a public, full contact match right after this tournament. Or do you prefer to wait for later, after you can treat the lumps you will get during the men's tournament?"

The big Russian laughed derisively as the I.K.O. chairman froze, realizing at once that this could be a golden opportunity to attract a lot of extra publicity...and rake in more revenues.

"I won't need even to rest after I win my last match and keep my title, Laplante. I can take you on right after the official end of the men's tournament."

As reporters wrote down notes frantically, the I.K.O. chairman then stepped forward, inserting himself between Laplante and Borisov and facing the cameras.

"A formal challenge has been issued and, in the true spirit of Kyokushin karate, has been accepted. I, as chairman of the International Karate Organization and the manager of both the women's and the men's tournament, thus authorizes a match between Mister Borisov and Miss Laplante, to be held half a hour after the award of the top prize in the men's tournament. The match will be a regular, three-minute full contact round following standard I.K.O. tournament rules. You are thus invited back here for Sunday afternoon, Miss Laplante."

"I will be there, sir." Replied Nancy before saluting the chairman and turning around, followed by a few persistent reporters and photographers. On her part, Takashi Kido blew air out, both amused and excited.

“By the spirits, this match is going to go viral on the sports networks, and not only here in Japan. Imagine, Kimi: a challenge by the female champion to the current male champion. I admire Laplante’s balls, but I’m afraid that she may have bitten in something too tough for her.”

He then had Kimi stare hard at him.

“And what tells you that Laplante will lose? I bet you 10,000 yen that she wins.”

“Sold! This is going to cost you, my dear Kimi.”

The news of the challenge and of the match to ensue took less than half a hour to make it on not only the sports news but also on the prime evening news, first in Japan, then around the World. Bookmakers in and around Tokyo immediately started taking bets on the match, bets that came in fast and furious. While Borisov was widely favored to win, the bookmakers quickly noticed that most if not all the women that placed bets did so in favor of Laplante. A reporter caught on that and the match soon was called by many as being the ultimate confrontation between machismo and feminism. The fact that Nancy Laplante was a hardened combat veteran who had often killed men in wars was also used by some reporters and commentators to spice up the debate about the oncoming match. At CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia, Dean Price, himself an accomplished karateka, listened on with a smirk to the animated discussions and predictions around him about the match and quietly placed a sizeable bet in favor of Nancy. In Tel Aviv, a disillusioned Mossad agent named Bennie Kellerman also went against the flow and bet for Nancy, imitated in Teheran by Lieutenant Farah Qalibaf, of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps Intelligence Bureau.

**17:41 (Tokyo Time)**

**Sunday, November 8, 2015 ‘A’**

**Main arena, Tokyo Metropolitan Gymnasium**

Nancy could feel the excitement and expectation around the main arena as she stepped barefoot on the competition floor. The seats were all sold out, while twice the number of television cameras that had covered the men’s tournament was pointed at her and Sergei Borisov, who was waiting on the other side of the mat-covered fighting area. This match was in fact going to be retransmitted live around most of the World, but that didn’t make her nervous one bit. It was not that she was overconfident, or that she

underestimated her adversary, on the contrary. Borisov was known to be an extremely tough man who was also very strong and hard-hitting, while still being quick for his size. However, Nancy was much quicker than him and had developed over the last few years her own fighting style, of which she had not demonstrated yet in public all of its techniques. She was resolved not to use deliberately her super strength, wanting to win fairly, but even her natural strength was far from negligible. She would however have to be cautious about avoiding Borisov's blows: one well-placed hit from the powerful Russian could send her to the carpet and cost her the match.

With her and Borisov waiting on the sidelines, the main judge announced the opening of the match, reviewing quickly the base rules in both Japanese and English, then presented each opponent in turn, starting with Borisov. Then, with a veil of tense, excited silence falling on the arena, the two fighters saluted each other the Japanese way by bowing before adopting combat stances and approaching each other cautiously at first. Borisov decided to take the initiative, taking one step forward to deliver a powerful punch aimed at Nancy's plexus. Most karate fighters would block such a blow, then deliver a counter-punch or strike. However, Nancy's personal style, which she called Juko, called for many simultaneous moves that were both defensive and offensive at the same time. She avoided Borisov's fist by jumping high above his extended right arm while at the same time delivering a straight kick to his head, hitting him in the forehead. Seriously shaken and half knocked out, the Russian staggered backward a few paces while Nancy landed back on her feet and waited for him to come back. There were gasps of surprise and shock around the spectators as Borisov shook his head to regain his wits: Nancy could have easily delivered a second, potentially match-ending blow then but was instead calmly letting her adversary recover. Furious at having been hit so quickly, Borisov stepped forward more cautiously this time, dancing around Nancy and searching for an opening while feinting repeatedly. He then delivered a straight kick towards Nancy's chest, ready to follow up with a swept kick to the head. Stepping aside while pivoting on one heel to the outside of his raised leg in one lightning-quick move, Nancy again avoided the blow and hit Borisov hard in the ribs with a chop of the hand while pushing a piercing scream. Continuing her swirling move while crouching down, she then swept one leg around, sending the Russian, who was grimacing with pain from the blow to his ribs, down to the mat. She finished her move, done all in less than a second, by putting down one knee on top of her opponent's right arm, immobilizing it,

and then delivering a hard vertical punch to his plexus. His breath completely taken away, Borisov rolled slowly on his stomach, grimacing with pain while Nancy stood up, clearly able to strike again at will to finish him. With Borisov clearly unable to get up and fight for at least many more crucial seconds, the main judge stepped forward and signaled to stop the fight while shouting out loud in Japanese.

“STOP! LAPLANTE WINS BY T.K.O.!”

After a second of stunned silence, most of the crowd of spectators erupted in cheers and applauses, while the rest sat silent, unable to believe the outcome.

At the Kinswomyn Bar, in Shinjuku District, the exclusively female patrons and staff watching the match on television exploded in wild cheers as the judge was shown raising Nancy’s right arm high to designate her the winner of the fight. Hoshi, a young Japanese woman who had spent a couple of fun nights with Nancy and two female friends the previous week, was part of the celebrating crowd and ordered a fresh round of drinks for her friends at her table. They then watched and listened intently to the replay of the fight, commented by experts, as Nancy stepped off the mat and as two paramedics examined Borisov, who seemed to have a broken rib. Nancy’s novel combination of moves and strikes was particularly analyzed in depth, being pointed as a truly new technique that was however completely legal under the present Kyokushin karate rules. Nancy was then shown again, surrounded by reporters and cameramen who wanted her comments about her win. One American network reporter then asked her a question while the camera was zoomed on her face.

“Miss Laplante, how do you explain that you, a woman, could defeat the Men’s World Karate Champion?”

She responded in a calm but firm voice while looking directly at the camera.

“He was forged in the dojo. I was forged on the battlefield.”

## **CHAPTER 16 – GUADALCANAL**

**16: 35 (Solomons Time)**

**Wednesday, September 9, 1942 ‘C’**

**Aft aircraft deck of the plane transport USS KITTY HAWK (APV-1)**

**Quay of the harbor of Lungaville , Espiritu Santo**

**New Hebrides, South Pacific**

Ingrid was on the aircraft stowage deck of the USS KITTY HAWK, watching with Helen Richey as one of the two powerful UH-3 SKYCRANE heavy helicopters of her air group pulled up from its hover, lifting off the deck of the ship a B-25NG medium bomber. Both women followed for a moment with their eyes the giant twin-rotor helicopter and its slung load as it flew towards the Turtle Bay Airfield, the primitive airstrip that had been cut out of the jungle of Espiritu Santo.

“What a waste of time for such machines.” Growled Ingrid as she looked down at the single dingy wharf of what passed as a port for the island of Espiritu Santo. On the other side of the wharf was the USS LANGLEY, which was busy unloading through a side ramp the vehicles of Ingrid’s air group. There was not a single lifting crane available in the port to help unload the dozens of ships waiting in the harbor, loaded with precious supplies but having to make do with the muscles of their own crews to unload their cargo as best they could. There were also no lighter service barges and only a few stevedores to help unload the ships waiting their turn at the wharf. Worse, there weren’t even proper storage warehouses near the shore to protect the unloaded equipment and supplies from the seemingly daily rains. As a result, the shore area was an unsightly spectacle of haphazardly piled crates, boxes and drums rotting in the mud. In Ingrid’s mind, whoever in Washington had planned the logistical effort in support of the South Pacific campaign should have been shot for gross incompetence. At least she could count herself lucky in having her two UH-3 flying crane helicopters to help unload her fighters, medium bombers and helicopters from the decks of the USS KITTY HAWK and USS LANGLEY. In fact, the logistics officers from the Marine Corps, Navy and Army units represented in Espiritu Santo were all jealous of her and had repeatedly tried to convince her to let them borrow the services of her UH-3 heavy helicopters in order to



unload their own cargo. A remark from Helen Richey then made her look up the road leading to the wharf.

"Heads up! I think that we have some V.I.P. coming in."

Ingrid then saw the small convoy of four jeeps, two of them escorted by two jeeps armed with machineguns, that was about to get on the wharf.

Vice Admiral Richmond Kelly Turner, Commander of South Pacific Amphibious Forces, growled as he watched the giant helicopter and the bomber slung under it fly away to the North.

"Such marvelous new equipment, wasted on women!"

Rear Admiral John McCain, Commander, Aircraft South Pacific, sitting in the back of Turner's jeep, gave a cautious look to his irascible superior: Turner had the look of a severe school teacher and was a man of great intellect, but he was also a man with a difficult character and an acid tongue.

"Admiral, I would urge you to not judge these women too quickly: their leader has already proved herself as a top combat aviator and leader in the Philippines. She is highly recommended by both General Arnold and General MacArthur."

"MacArthur!" Spat out Turner. "That gas bag! As for Arnold, he can't be trusted to keep his promises to send us more aircraft and men."

"But, he just did send us a reinforced air group, Admiral." Protested McCain, a tall and thin elderly aviator with a character that was a lot friendlier than that of Turner. The latter sneered in disdain.

"I said more aircraft and men, John, not women."

McCain gave up on changing Turner's mind, instead concentrating on the two auxiliary aircraft transport ships docked at the single wharf of Lungaville. A steady stream of vehicles of all kinds, from simple cargo trucks to earth graders, was rolling off the USS LANGLEY's side ramp, while only two helicopters, their rotor blades still folded, were left on its flight deck. As for the USS KITTY HAWK, only one B-25 medium bomber was left on its storage deck. Their jeep then stopped besides the foot of the access ramp leading up to the main deck of the USS KITTY HAWK. McCain got out of the jeep with Turner and his personal aide, a navy lieutenant commander, and started going up the access ramp. They were met at the top of the ramp by the ship's captain and a sailor that blew the traditional whistle welcome due to admirals. Turner returned the salute of the captain, imitated by McCain.

"Permission to come aboard, Captain."

"Permission granted, Admiral." Replied the ship captain, still at attention. "What may I do for you, sir?"

"We are here to see a Major Dows: we were told that she is presently on your ship."

"She is effectively on the storage deck, Admiral, supervising the unloading of her planes with one of her squadron commanders."

"That squadron commander, is it a woman?"

"Yes, Admiral!" Answered the captain, noting the sarcastic tone of the admiral's question but not remarking on it. "If you may follow me, I will lead you to them."

"Thank you, Captain."

The two admirals and the aide then followed the ship's captain up a series of ladders and passageways, to finally emerge on the top storage deck. The group then stopped for a moment to stare at a mean-looking helicopter that was taking off the USS LANGLEY. As they were looking up at the helicopter, two young women in army combat uniforms approached their group, stopping at attention near them and saluting Turner and McCain. The youngest woman, who actually looked like a college teenager and was a truly beautiful girl with reddish-brown eyes and large blue eyes, presented herself.

"Major Ingrid Dows, Commander of the 99<sup>th</sup> Composite Air Group, at your service, sir!"

Turner gave her a jaundiced look as he returned her salute: her youth was obscene in his mind in view of her rank of major and he secretly wondered if MacArthur had not promoted her for reasons other than her combat performance.

"Major Dows, I was coming with Rear Admiral McCain to discuss with you the employment of your air group. Let's go to the aft portion of the deck."

Turner then looked at the ship's captain.

"Thank you for guiding us, Captain. You are dismissed."

"Yes sir!" Replied the captain, saluting again before pivoting on his heels and walking away, leaving Turner, McCain and the lieutenant commander alone with the two women. The group then walked to the aft structure at the end of the storage deck, where they stopped under an overhanging anti-aircraft gun tub. Ingrid then presented Helen to the two admirals.

"Sirs, may I present to you Captain Helen Richey, Commander of the 177<sup>th</sup> Bomber Squadron, The Hell Raisers."

"And how many bombers do you have, Captain Richey?" Asked Turner as he shook hands with the small aviatrix.

"I have a total of sixteen B-25NG medium bombers, sir. The B-25NG is a new attack variant of the MITCHELL, with a fixed forward armament of eight heavy machineguns and one 75mm gun. It also has more powerful engines than the standard B-25C and more internal fuel as well, plus a surface search radar. It has a combat range of 1500 miles with a 4,000 pound bomb load."

"Uh, did you say a 75mm gun, Captain?" Asked Turner, surprised. Helen Richey smiled with pride as she answered him.

"Yes, Admiral. With it, my bombers can pepper Japanese ships and barges while staying out of range of light anti-aircraft guns. Against bigger warships, we use our 75mm gun and forward machineguns, as well as five-inch rockets, to soften up the enemy anti-aircraft defenses before dropping our bombs."

Turner didn't comment on his doubts about the aggressiveness of female crews, instead looking at the young major besides Richey.

"Rear Admiral McCain, who will be your commander in the South Pacific, was told by General Arnold that your unit was an experimental one. Could you explain to me what that means exactly, Major?"

"With pleasure, Admiral." Replied Ingrid, who had detected from the start the hidden antipathy and skepticism of Turner towards her. "Following the Presidential executive order permitting the enrolment of women in the Army, General Arnold tasked me to form a female air combat unit that would explore the capabilities of such a unit. He also tasked me to try in combat a number of tactics and doctrines imported from the future by Nancy Laplante. Those tactics and doctrines deal especially with joint operations, in which our present forces are weak."

"Who says that we are weak in joint operations?" Interrupted Turner, his tone clearly aggressive. Ingrid didn't let him intimidate her, replying at once while looking straight into his eyes.

"History did, Admiral! We won over the Japanese in the Philippines because the Army and Navy units there coordinated their actions and fought as one, instead of practicing their usual inter-service squabbles. Unfortunately, the American armed forces elsewhere still have a lot to do before they could say that they truly practice joint operations."

"And you would be a master at those joint operations, Major?" Replied Turner in a sarcastic tone. Ingrid stared at him resolutely.

"Admiral, what kind of uniform am I wearing?"

"An army uniform, of course! What kind of stupid question is that?"

"Wrong, Admiral! I am wearing an American uniform, like you do. Too many people unfortunately choose to forget that. Admiral, I became a fighter pilot in the Philippines to help defend our servicemen and the Filipino population from the Japanese, not to gain some meaningless glory in the air. I am now here with my air group with a single, simple goal: to support to the maximum our men fighting the Japanese on the ground and at sea by providing them effective air cover and air support. To accomplish that, I intend to use joint tactics as understood in Nancy's time, in the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century. My female aviators may be green in terms of combat experience, but I taught them all I learned from my fighting in the Philippines and they are all dedicated and resolved to fight and put their lives on the line in order to protect and support our young fighting men. Give us a mission and we will accomplish it, Admiral."

Before Turner could reply with his proverbial harshness, McCain hurried to jump in the conversation.

"I have no doubt about the dedication of your female crews, Major Dows. As for the mission for your air group, it is straightforward indeed. Our Marines on Guadalcanal are under nearly constant air attacks, plus periodic naval bombardment by the Japanese, while our naval units around Guadalcanal often come under Japanese air and sea attack. Unfortunately, what we had up to now in terms of planes has been shot nearly to pieces, apart from having been in insufficient numbers from the beginning. So, what exactly is your composite air group bringing us?"

"My air group counts a total of twenty Lockheed P-38N long range fighter-bombers, sixteen North American B-25NG medium bombers, twelve Fairchild C-142 heavy transport aircraft, six photo-reconnaissance RP-38N aircraft, two Fairchild EC-142E electronic reconnaissance and command aircraft, a composite helicopter squadron with a mix of liaison, attack, transport and heavy lift types totaling 26 helicopters and, finally, a number of ground servicing and support units. If I may suggest, Admiral, I could give you a detailed visit of my air group, so that you could have a better idea of its capabilities."

"I would like that, Major." Replied McCain before looking at Turner. "I am sure that you would like as well to visit that unit, Admiral?"

"Why not?" Said Turner reluctantly, his hot reply to Dows disarmed by McCain's intervention. "Let's go back to our jeeps, so that Major Dows could guide us to her air group."

"How about a faster ride in one of my helicopters, Admiral?" Suggested Ingrid, pointing at the lone helicopter left on the flight deck of the USS LANGLEY, which was about to lift off. Turner and McCain looked at the twin rotor machine before the former nodded his head.

"I never flew in a helicopter, actually. This may be an interesting experience." Ingrid then grabbed the compact UHF radio hanging from a leather strap slung across her chest and spoke in it.

"Lady Hawk to Black Widow Blue Three, take off and land on the KITTY HAWK to pick me and other passengers."

"Understood, Lady Hawk." Replied a female voice on the radio. "Lifting off in one minute."

Her group then watched the UH-2 medium transport helicopter as it started its two engines, with the rotors soon starting to turn. Rear Admiral McCain noticed how nimble the machine seemed to be when it lifted off from the LANGLEY's deck.

"What kind of payload can that helicopter lift, Major Dows?"

"It can carry up to 24 fully equipped soldiers, or a jeep with trailer, or up to three tons of cargo either inside its cabin or as a slung load, Admiral. With my twelve UH-2 PELICAN medium transport helicopters, my helicopter squadron could carry most of two Marine companies to any point within a combat radius of 250 miles. That is a capability I fully intend to propose to our Marines on Guadalcanal, as developing their employment tactics is one of the tasks I got from General Arnold."

"Let's make something clear right now, Major." Then said caustically Vice Admiral Turner. "You are now under my command, and not under that of General Arnold anymore."

If Turner had expected to intimidate her, he was then quickly but politely rebuffed by Ingrid.

"I am sorry to have to contradict you on that, Admiral, but my orders from Washington have some specific clauses attached to them. While I will take on the missions given by you or Admiral McCain and execute them to the best of my air group's abilities, I am also tasked formally to test in combat my new planes and new tactics and to develop their employment doctrine according to concepts imported from the future by

Nancy Laplante. Both General Arnold and General Marshall are highly interested in seeing the results of my air group in the Pacific and the lessons we will learn in combat, as they are planning to then develop formal doctrines for the rest of the Army Air Forces. Also, as a female air unit, we are by law segregated by sex, with only a minimal cadre of male specialists and officers to supplement our female personnel. We cannot be broken up and parceled out, something that could attract objections and political interference from Congress, which is closely watching how my unit will behave in the Pacific. I am just asking you to have confidence in my tactical judgment, Admiral, and to let me fight my unit within the confines of the missions you will give me. I promise that you will not be disappointed.”

For a moment, McCain thought that Turner would explode and simply relieve that young female major on the spot. Somehow, Turner managed to control himself and he simply stared hard at Dows.

“Very well, Major. I will abide by those rules from Washington, but I will expect your air group to justify the confidence given in you. If it doesn't, then I will send you and your women back to the United States without hesitation.”

“Fair enough, Admiral.” Replied Dows in a calm way that amazed McCain: few officers had dared up to now to stand up to the abrasive character of Vice Admiral Turner, one of the exceptions being Major General Vandegrift, the commander of the First Marine Division on Guadalcanal. That young woman was either supremely confident, or supremely arrogant. McCain definitely could predict more future sparks between her and Turner, and he didn't mean sexual ones.

The landing of the UH-2 nearby on the KITTY HAWK's deck, with the wind from its rotors forcing them all to hold on to their hats, then thankfully put a pause to this personality clash. Going to the opening rear ramp, the five of them entered a fuselage cabin wide enough to accommodate a jeep and lined up on both sides with folding jump seats. Curiosity helped keep Turner mostly quiet during the following short flight to the Turtle Bay airfield, a few kilometers away. On his part, McCain could already see many wonderful things that such helicopters could do for both the Marines and the fleet here in the South Pacific. He didn't remark on the female door gunners of the helicopter, who were dressed similarly to any male aircraft gunner and were manning two medium machineguns sticking out of windows near the two forward side doors. There was also what Dows confirmed to be a twin heavy machinegun turret in a chin position just behind

and under the pilot and copilot seats. Overall, flying in an aircraft crewed exclusively by women felt definitely strange to McCain. Those women however seemed to know their jobs and showed a proper military deportment, to McCain's satisfaction. The sight of two particular aircraft parked among other aircraft at Turtle Bay airfield then caught McCain's and Turner's curiosity, with the former pointing them to Dows.

"I know about your new Fairchild C-142 heavy transport aircraft, Major, but these two planes seems to be quite different."

"That's because they are, Admiral." Shouted Dows above the din of the rotors. "They are the only existing pre-series prototypes of the EC-142E WAVEMASTER electronic reconnaissance and command aircraft and I was tasked to develop their employment doctrine and tactics here in the South Pacific. Their former cargo deck has been reconfigured into a two-deck arrangement housing numerous radar and radio workstations and electronic equipment cabinets, plus command and control facilities. The EC-142E is equipped with a retractable belly dome for a long range surface surveillance radar that uses our latest technology brought by Nancy Laplante. It also has long range air surveillance radar antennas in the nose and the tail, a high-definition surface mapping radar in the belly, some highly advanced electronic warfare equipment and also infrared night vision cameras and an inertial navigation system. I am expecting great things from those two aircraft and they should prove to be priceless to our forces...if we use them correctly. They correspond to a concept that appeared in the 1970s in Nancy's history and are perfect to help coordinate and control joint operations. One of them will fly its first combat mission this evening, when it will go take a surveillance station to the Northwest of Guadalcanal. With its extra-large fuel tanks, the EC-142E can loiter around on station at economical cruise speed for up to twelve hours. For that reason, it has crew facilities to accommodate two full crews that fly it in relays during such long missions."

"My God!" Said McCain, truly fascinated. "I must see it in operation."

"Then, how about catching a ride on that first patrol mission, Admiral? This would be a perfect opportunity for you to become familiar with its true capabilities."

"By God, I think that I will just do that, Major. I am happy to see that you have not waited for orders before starting to put your air group to good use."

"Well, Admiral, in truth some of my planes have been active for over three days already. My photo-reconnaissance RP-38N fighters have been busy flying over the Solomons since our arrival in Espiritu Santo, taking complete sets of stereoscopic

photos of Guadalcanal and of the surrounding islands, as weather permitted. My photo and mapping specialists are now well advanced on mounting detailed photo-maps of Guadalcanal that we should be able to put into production in the next few days.”

Instead of getting angry for such an uncoordinated initiative, McCain felt satisfaction, as his own photo-reconnaissance capabilities had been limited and as the existing maps of Guadalcanal had proved crude and inaccurate.

“Decidedly, Major, you are proving to be a true go-getter.”

“Thank you, Admiral.”

They then kept silent until their helicopter landed near a line of similar machines. McCain nearly felt as if he was visiting some foreign airfield full of secret prototypes as Ingrid led him, Turner and his aide towards the large tent complex housing the headquarters of her air group. He then saw the large, colorful sign at the entrance of the tent complex that showed a sort of cute winged female figure in aviatrix garb, with words in bold pink and black letters above and below the drawing.

## 99<sup>th</sup> COMPOSITE AIR GROUP

### THE FIFINELLAS

YOUR ONE-STOP SHOPPING POINT FOR AIR SUPPORT

WITH A FEMININE TOUCH

Both McCain and Turner’s aide broke out laughing on reading the sign, while Turner simply sneered, watched by Ingrid Dows.

“You must be getting quite a few comments about that sign, Major Dows.”

“Indeed, Admiral. Many Marine aviators, like press correspondents, stop by it to take pictures of it, ideally with some of my women in the background.”

As she was speaking, a group of young women walked out of the tent complex, stiffening and saluting as they saw the two admirals. Turner and McCain returned their salutes but ended staring hard at two of the women, who definitely had Asian traits. Turner waited for the women to walk away before nearly growling to Ingrid.

“Major, I’ll be damned if two of those girls were not Japanese! Who are they?”

“Two American women who volunteered to serve their country in combat, Admiral.” Replied Ingrid in a non-apologetic tone. “First Lieutenant Jenny Kawena is



from Hawaii and is my assistant intelligence officer, while Sergeant Mary Takahashi is one of my radio operators and is a native of California. They are part of a group of second generation Japanese-American women I was able to enlist and that provide me with precious radio monitoring and translation capabilities against Japanese radio traffic. If it may interest you to know, I was myself born in Berlin, Germany, and was once part of the German Luftwaffe. I am however totally loyal to the United States, like all my personnel, Admiral.”

McCain was nearly shocked at the tone of voice of Ingrid, who seemed not to be intimidated one bit by the irascible Turner, but there was something in her, some sort of supreme assurance and inner strength, that somehow stopped the surly vice admiral from dressing her down on the spot. The latter simply grumbled something unintelligible before entering the tent complex with Dows to start a tour of her unit.

### **06:20 (Solomons Time)**

**Thursday, September 10, 1942 ‘C’**

**Officers Mess, Turtle Bay Airfield**

**Espiritu Santo, New Hebrides**

Vice Admiral Turner, having breakfast with his aide at the hut housing the airfield's officers mess, raised his nose from his plate of ham and scrambled eggs when a smiling John McCain entered the mess and went to his table. He waited for the old naval aviator to be seated and having given his order to a black navy steward before asking a question.

“So, how was that night patrol of yours aboard that new EC-142E, John?”

“It was an absolute eye opener, Admiral.” Replied McCain without hesitation. “The technology aboard that aircraft is simply fantastic, while the women crewing the plane proved capable and professional. That plane was able to maintain constant and accurate air and sea watch out to a radius of at least 120 miles around it, while it could also detect, record and find the bearing of about every Japanese radio transmitter within at least 800 miles. You should see the pictures that those infrared cameras could get at night. We were able to detect by radar and then to identify visually at night the Japanese light cruiser SENDAI and three destroyers that are heading for Guadalcanal with troops and supplies on their decks. On their part, the Japanese probably heard us but never saw us in the dark, as we flew over the cloud overcast. I already alerted by

radio our forces about that Japanese flotilla while I was still in the air. We must get a few EC-142s of our own for the South Pacific, Admiral.”

“Hum, I would tend to agree with you, John, but Washington keeps cutting us for the benefit of the European Theatre instead of sending us reinforcements. So, those women know their jobs?”

“Definitely, Admiral. They may be new in the service, but they were nearly all practicing some equivalent civilian trade before they joined. I was particularly shocked to learn that most of those Japanese-American girls had been employed as translators or crypto experts by either the Army or the Navy before the war, but were then summarily fired because of their ethnicity, without specific cause. That was an incredible waste of precious talent in view of our present needs, if you ask me.”

“And that Ingrid Dows? What do you think of her?”

McCain then became quite somber indeed and he looked straight in Turner’s eyes.

“Admiral, if I would have a good counsel for you, it would be to never underestimate that girl. She positively is a tactical and organizational genius, apart from being a first class combat pilot. Contrary to the vast majority of our officers, she can think outside of the box and imagine all kinds of new ways to screw the Japanese. Hell, she lives outside of the box, Admiral.”

“Alright,” said Turner reluctantly, “I will try to cut her some slack. How are you going to employ her air group in the days to come, John?”

“We had ample time to discuss that together during our long flight, Admiral. At about seven this morning, she will depart for Henderson Field with a total of six P-38 fighters and with her twelve heavy transport aircraft loaded with ground support equipment and personnel. She intends to start building a camp for parts of her air group besides the new grass airstrip just opened near Henderson Field. She will then stay in Guadalcanal with her P-38s to provide air cover there, while her C-142s return here with wounded Marines, to load more equipment and supplies for a second run to Guadalcanal this afternoon. More P-38s will escort that second run and will also stay afterwards in Guadalcanal. Sir, I believe that her heavy transports could finally give us a practical and fairly safe mean to get the 7<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment to Henderson Field and to supply our First Marine Division over there as well. Those twelve giant transport aircraft of hers can transport in one shot to Guadalcanal a total of 240 tons, and they could do two such runs per day.”

"Mother of Christ! That much?" Exclaimed Turner, making a few heads turn around him in the crowded hut. McCain nodded once his head.

"Yes, Admiral. Dows intends as well to move her helicopters to Guadalcanal tomorrow, while her medium bombers and transport aircraft will continue to operate from here until Henderson Field can be considered safe enough to risk them there. Overall, I didn't need to nudge her or give her directions, truly: she already had a complete operational plan in mind about how to use her air group. Since that plan fitted nicely with my own air needs, I gave her my blessing to act as she sees fit...within reasonable limits."

"I don't know about that, John. A female air combat unit? How do we know how they will perform in real combat?"

"Well, we should know that in a few days at most, Admiral." Replied McCain before attacking the plate of food just brought to him.

### **09:17 (Solomons Time)**

#### **Fighter One grass airstrip**

#### **Henderson Field, Guadalcanal**

Brigadier General Roy Geiger, a Marine aviator and the commander of the 'Cactus Air Force', as the American flyers in Guadalcanal called themselves, watched wide-eyed as the huge four-engine transport aircraft leading a long line of its brethren was on final approach to the grass strip ceremoniously called 'Fighter One Airfield'.

"My God! I have never seen such a big bugger like this in my life. And look at the number of wheels of the main carriage. It probably could land on snow if it wanted to."

"But it is approaching too slowly, General." Objected Major Henry Buse Junior, the assistant operations officer of the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division, who was sitting in Geiger's jeep. "It is going to stall if the pilot doesn't pick more speed."

"I don't think so, Major Buse. Look at the wing flaps on that thing: that is probably its normal approach speed."

"Well, it is certainly big, General. There should be plenty of space aboard those twelve transports for all of our wounded."

Geiger nodded his head, looking for a moment down the long line of wounded and sick waiting on stretchers along the tree line facing the southwest extremity of the grass strip.

One month of fighting on Guadalcanal to keep possession of Henderson Field had produced many casualties, but what was really starting to hurt the division was the growing number of malaria and dengue fever cases that were debilitating the men. With the Navy still staying mostly away from Guadalcanal after losing a number of naval engagements, only occasional visits by a C-47 DAKOTA transport allowed the evacuation of the most grievously wounded or sick. Now, the near miraculous arrival of this heavy transport squadron was going to do much to relieve the overworked doctors and nurses of the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division. This sense of relief was however counterbalanced in Geiger's mind with the worries about having hundreds of women about to arrive and stay in this tropical hell hole full of Japanese soldiers.

As predicted by Geiger, the first heavy transport touched down smoothly and actually managed to slow to human walking speed within 400 meters, an impressive performance for such a big plane. It was already rolling towards the tree line where the wounded were waiting as the second transport landed. Geiger could now physically feel the power of the four big radial engines of the C-142 as it was about to pivot on the spot to present its rear ramp to him. He shouted over the din of the engines at the stretcher bearers and medics waiting with him as the ramp was coming down.

"AS SOON AS THE CONTENT OF THAT PLANE IS OUT, PICK UP OUR CASUALTIES AND BRING THEM INSIDE IN SINGLE FILE!"

Not knowing much about what the cargo planes were bringing in, except for the fact that they were supposed to be carrying ground support equipment and supplies for a squadron of fighters that would soon reinforce his depleted air force, Geiger was nearly floored, like Major Buse, when two M3 halftracks mounting a quad heavy anti-aircraft machineguns mount rolled one after the other out of the first C-142, each M3 also towing a loaded trailer.

"Holy Christ!" Swore Buse, incredulous. "This thing can carry TWO halftracks?" His astonishment was reinforced by the fact that those self-propelled anti-aircraft pieces were manned strictly by young women wearing steel helmets. The dozens of other vehicles and trailers of all types that came out of the other C-142s as each one landed and rolled to a stop were also manned by women, attracting admiring whistles, blown kisses and hand waves from the Marines waiting along the tree line. The women responded in kind, their faces and voices making the Marines feel a strange mix of relief and worry: relief for this female presence that they had missed for so long; worry for the

fate of the same women, who were now stuck with them on this island. Geiger however quickly returned his men to reality, urging them to hurry to carry the wounded and sick aboard the waiting planes. With their cavernous holds and with special stretcher racks available inside, the twelve cargo planes quickly swallowed all of the Marine wounded and sick, to Geiger's relief. As soon as they were loaded up with their precious human cargo, the transports then rolled back to the landing strip and took off, taking less than 600 meters to do so. Once they were gone, it was the turn of six P-38 twin-engine fighters to land on the soggy grass strip. This time, Geiger had to get his jeep rolling, as the newly arrived fighters were rolling towards the patch of jungle to the south of the strip that had been attributed to the planes and personnel of the 99<sup>th</sup> Composite Air Group. There was already some furious activity there, with the women landed by the transports working quickly to prepare their bivouac area and to stockpile their materiel and supplies. To Geiger's and Buse's astonishment, some of those women were handling portable chainsaws, a type of equipment the Marines of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division would have killed to have with them on Guadalcanal, and were busy cutting down coconut trees from a few chosen patches. Geiger could also see a number of bulldozers, graders and front-end loaders/backhoes that had come with the transports and were already at work.

"Damn! These women are well equipped indeed. They also seem to know what they are doing, contrary to what many would expect."

"And they are all armed as well, General." Added Buse, looking around him. He then yelled to a passing woman.

"HEY, SOLDIER! COULD YOU COME HERE FOR A SECOND?"

The woman, who was about twenty years old and was quite pretty, approached quickly enough but didn't salute Buse, instead speaking up in an apologetic tone.

"Excuse me if I don't salute you, sir, but our orders from our group commander are to not salute officers while on Guadalcanal, in order not to tempt Japanese snipers."

"Well, well, it seems that your commander possesses some good common sense, Soldier. Could I see that rifle you are carrying? I never saw the like of it before."

"Certainly, sir." Replied the girl, taking off her slung weapon and handing it to Buse. "It is a M2 .30 caliber carbine, a fully-automatic weapon with a 30-round box magazine. It is very handy and light, sir."

"Indeed!" Said Buse as he examined the compact carbine. "When I think that our Marines still have to fight with Springfield 1903 bolt-action rifles. This is quite a nifty weapon."

He then passed it to Geiger, who looked at it for a moment before giving it back to the young woman.

“Here, Private! Would you know where I could meet your most senior officer here?”

In response, the girl pointed at the first approaching P-38, which was slowly rolling towards the tree line, coming from the landing strip.

“Major Dows is in fact about to arrive, sir.”

“Ah, excellent! Thank you, Private: you are dismissed.”

Geiger then waited for the P-38 to come to a stop and cut off its engines, truly anxious to meet the famous female fighter pilot from the Philippines. He had met a few Marines who had been evacuated from the Philippines for treatment: all had given him glowing tales about the exploits of Ingrid Dows...and about her youthful beauty. Major Buse opened his mouth wide in amazement when the P-38 pivoted around before stopping, showing at the same time the 68 miniature Japanese flags painted on the side of its nose, under the bubble canopy.

“Holy cow! That’s what I call an air ace! Uh, sorry about that, General.”

“Don’t be, Major! Major Dows has effectively proved herself in the Philippines and we can only be happy to have her here, to help us deal with those incessant Japanese air raids. Her P-38s certainly look like nasty, powerful machines compared to our own WILDCATs. I would love to try one, as a matter of fact. Well, let’s go welcome her to Guadalcanal.”

“Yeah, before the Japanese do.” Replied Buse before going out of the jeep with Geiger and walk towards the P-38. The fighter was indeed much bigger than Geiger’s Grumman F-4F WILDCATs, which formed with a few Douglas SBD dive bombers the backbone of the Cactus Air Force. It also had an unprecedented total of eight heavy machineguns as its main armament, a firepower that should be enough to shred to pieces about any Japanese aircraft. Stopping with Buse besides the nose of the P-38, he watched with interest as a tall, svelte young woman got up in the cockpit and climbed down to the ground, using a ladder integrated to the side of the nose nacelle. He was surprised to see that she had with her a compact carbine with folding stock that she had extracted from her cockpit before coming down. She also wore an impressive pistol on her right upper leg. What truly hit him however was her youth and beauty. Still visibly a teenager, she had an angelic face with big blue eyes and reddish-brown hair cut to neck-

length. She had also long, slender legs, pronounced hips and a small but firm chest. Stepping forward, she came to Geiger to shake hands with him.

“Good morning, General! Major Ingrid Dows, Commander of the 99<sup>th</sup> Composite Air Group.”

“Brigadier General Roy Geiger, Commander of all air units in Guadalcanal. Welcome to Henderson Field, Major. How many planes are you planning to base here?”

“I intend to base my 170<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron and its 20 P-38s here, plus two more P-38s from my group’s command flight. I will also bring in my 777<sup>th</sup> Helicopter Squadron, which should prove quite useful to the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division in fighting the Japanese soldiers on this island.”

“Helicopters? I have seen some pictures of helicopters but never got close to one.”

“Well, if used correctly, they could do many things for our Marines here, General. Weather permitting, they will fly in tomorrow morning. Be advised as well that my transport squadron will be back here by the end of this afternoon, to drop more loads. In two days, once my initial equipment and supplies are in, you will have access to most of its lift capacity, which is 240 tons maximum per trip for the whole squadron.”

“Damn! That would take care of most of the division’s supply problems, Major. Just with that, your group would prove a godsend to us. Well, I am sure that Major General Vandegrift, the commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division, is anxious to discuss with you and me the capabilities of your air group. My jeep is nearby.”

“Then just let me time to put my flight gear in my cockpit and to take out my personal kit and I will be with you, General.”

Three minutes later, with her personal kit left in the care of a subaltern and with brief orders to refuel and check her P-38s at once, Ingrid jumped in Geiger’s jeep, which then rolled westward along the tree line. Geiger, sitting in the front passenger seat, pointed at a large sealed plastic tube Ingrid held in one hand.

“What’s in that tube, Major?”

“Some of the first print run of a photomap my group just produced of Henderson Field and of its immediate surrounding area. It was made on a 1:10,000 scale. I figured that General Vandegrift and his staff could be interested to get some of them.”

“Indeed! The maps we have are either incomplete or are old, rough maps dating from decades ago.”

“Well, my photo and map section is in the process of completing a full set of maps of Guadalcanal and of its surrounding islands, based on photo-reconnaissance runs made by my reconnaissance squadron. As soon as they are ready for production, the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division and your pilots will get first pick on it with my aviatrix.”

Geiger nodded at those words but kept silent. His initial misgivings and prejudices about having a bunch of young women coming to Guadalcanal were starting to evaporate as he could watch that female unit at work around him and as he spoke with their leader. All the women he could see moved with a purpose, working quickly to establish a livable bivouac area for their unit and to improve the aircraft parking area in front of the tree line. All the women went around armed and Geiger could see a number of jeeps mounting medium machineguns posted around their perimeter and even inside the jungle, with women manning the machineguns and watching for possible Japanese infiltrators. More women wielding chainsaws were systematically cutting down dozens of coconut trees to clear deep, wide lanes in the jungle, while other women wearing masks and backpack tanks went around, spraying insecticide all over the place. Geiger had to recognize that his own Marine aviators had been less organized when they first arrived in Henderson Field, before his own arrival a week ago.

After rolling for about 600 meters, the jeep stopped in front of the entrance of a sandbagged dugout guarded by two armed Marines. Geiger jumped out with Buse and Dows and led them inside, not missing how the two sentries eyed Dows with near lust. Keeping discipline among his men while a few hundred women lived and worked nearby already promised to be tricky, to say the least. Shaking away that thought, Geiger went to a big, square-jawed man sitting at a work table in one corner of the dugout, reading messages while a number of staff officers and radio operators worked around him.

“General, I brought with me Major Ingrid Dows, who just landed with six of her P-38 fighters. I can report as well that our wounded and sick are now safely on their way to Espiritu Santo aboard the transport planes of the 99<sup>th</sup> CAG.”

“Excellent!” Replied Vandegrift, getting up and facing Geiger’s trio. He then returned the salute from Ingrid as she presented herself in her juvenile voice.

“Major Ingrid Dows, Commander of the 99<sup>th</sup> Composite Air Group, reporting, General!”

“At ease, Major. I must thank your group for evacuating our casualties, Major: you just took a heavy weight off my shoulders.”



"Me and my group came here with one goal in mind, General: to support your Marines and protect them from air and sea attack as best as humanly possible. I was married to a Marine officer who was killed in the Philippines and I have only respect and admiration for the Marine Corps."

Vandegrift nodded and smiled, already starting to like her.

"You certainly built a reputation for yourself in the Philippines, Major. By the way, please accept my sincere condolences for the loss of your husband."

"Thank you, General. I brought a little gift from my photo and map section for you and your staff."

Vandegrift took the plastic tube offered by Ingrid and opened one of the end caps, extracting a rolled stack of maps from the tube. Opening one of the photomaps and laying it on top of a map table in the center of the dugout, he and his staff officers present studied it with growing glee.

"Now, this is what I call a detailed map, Major! You even have accurate elevation points on them."

"This photomap was produced using both high definition air photos taken by my RP-38s and mapping radar pictures taken by my EC-142Es, General. I have a reconnaissance squadron as part of my unit. My group also includes one fighter squadron, which will be based here along with my helicopter squadron, plus a medium bomber squadron equipped with B-25s and a transport squadron equipped with C-142s that will stay for the moment in Espiritu Santo. Be advised that, as part of the ground support and service units that will be based here, I have one air defense battery equipped with eight halftrack-mounted quad .50 caliber machineguns and eight towed 40mm Bofors guns. I also have an airfield security platoon equipped with twelve jeep-mounted medium machineguns."

"These weapons, are they manned by men or women, Major?"

Ingrid didn't take exception to Vandegrift's question, realizing how unorthodox the organization of her air group was.

"All my air group personnel, save for a few cadre officers and NCOs, are women, General. They all followed the full Army basic training course and qualified on small arms and on defensive tactics and works. Further, all my machine gunners went to the Air Corps gunnery school and I had them get as well some extra instruction given by Marine Corps machinegun instructors I invited so they could teach to my girls how to employ machineguns on the ground. We may not be qualified infantrymen and do not

pretend to be, General, but we are ready, willing and able to defend ourselves from Japanese ground attacks.”

Vandegrift nodded his head again, suitably impressed. He then pointed the carbine slung across Ingrid’s chest.

“You have an interesting weapon there, Major. May I see it?”

“Sure, General!” Replied Ingrid, emptying first and then handing her M2A1 to Vandegrift and describing it to him as he examined it.

“The ground personnel of my air group is equipped with the M2 carbine, while my flying personnel have a folding stock variant designated M2A1. Both are selective fire weapons and use .30 caliber ammunition with a muzzle velocity of 600 feet per second. They have a shorter range than full power .30 caliber rifles and have less penetration power, but they were designed as defensive weapons for second line troops and Air Corps personnel. They are very handy and light and, with their 30-round box magazines, have plenty of firepower. As you can see, the M2A1 is compact enough when its stock is folded to be carried inside a plane cockpit. As for my airfield security platoon, it is equipped with standard M1919 .30 caliber medium machineguns.”

Vandegrift then gave back the carbine to Ingrid.

“I wouldn’t mind test-firing one of those carbines one day, Major. Now, let’s discuss in detail how your unit will be deployed here on the ground. We are expecting a major Japanese ground assault in the next few days and our perimeter must be ready to deal with it.”

Vandegrift then let his assistant operations officer describe to Ingrid how the division was deployed around the airfield. Buse also recounted the few Japanese attempts at assaulting the perimeter during the past month, giving as well a rough estimate of the Japanese forces still believed to be around Henderson Field. Vandegrift then took over, discussing with Ingrid how best to protect her assigned unit perimeter. They were on the subject of how she was planning to defend Guadalcanal from the air when a radio operator shouted a warning to the Marine general.

“Sir, the surveillance plane from the 99<sup>th</sup> Composite Air Group is signaling the approach of about forty Japanese aircraft coming from Rabaul. They are still 240 miles away at the moment but are heading directly towards us at a speed of 200 miles per hour and an altitude of 23, 000 feet. They will be over Henderson Field in about seventy minutes.”

Looking at his watch, Vandegrift smiled grimly.

"It is close to 'Tojo Time'<sup>15</sup>, indeed. The Japanese have a habit of coming around noon from Rabaul, when the weather permits, of course. Normally, our single radar here and the British Coast Watchers dispersed around the Solomons can give us a warning when they are still about a hundred miles out, but your surveillance plane seems to have some very good radar onboard, Major. General Geiger, alert your pilots and tell them to be ready to scramble."

"Yes, General!"

Before Geiger could leave, Ingrid touched his arm, making him stop and look at her.

"General, my P-38s have a lot more range and speed than your F4Fs. I thus request permission to scramble my fighters immediately in order to start to cut down this enemy force before it gets close to Guadalcanal. My EC-142E on watch will be able to guide my pilots in for the interception."

Geiger only hesitated for a second before nodding his head once.

"Very well, Major. Take off as soon as you are ready."

"Thank you, General."

Ingrid then walked out quickly of the dugout and grabbed the small portable radio hooked to her belt.

"Witch One, this is Lady Hawk. Prepare to scramble and send me a jeep at the division's command post to pick me up. We have a Japanese air raid inbound from Rabaul, at a distance of 240 miles and an altitude of 23,000 feet."

"Understood, Lady Hawk. I am sending a jeep right now." Answered the voice of Teresa James on the radio. Geiger gave an envious look at Ingrid's pocket, transistorized UHF radio, which made his own radios look like Stone Age tools.

"Decidedly, your unit has only the best and latest equipment, Major. I'm jealous!"

That made Ingrid smile with malice.

"We will try to placate your pilots later, sir. Wish them good luck on my behalf."

"I will, Major. I wish the same for your girls."

"Thank you, sir."

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<sup>15</sup> Tojo Time : An expression used by Marines on Guadalcanal to describe the regular noon hour air raid by Japanese planes from Rabaul.

Only one minute later, a machinegun jeep with three women aboard screeched to a halt in front of Ingrid. Jumping in the back, she patted the shoulder of the driver.

“Go to my fighter, Corporal, and step on it.”

“Yes, Major!”

Driving like a madman, the woman managed to drop Ingrid by the side of her fighter less than two minutes later. As the jeep drove away to take back its defensive position around the perimeter, Ingrid saw that her five pilots were already in their cockpits, their engines turning, while a mechanic had already started one of her two engines. Putting on quickly her parachute, life vest and flying helmet presented by a female mechanic, Ingrid then climbed in her cockpit and strapped herself in, plugging the jack of her helmet’s headset in the radio box of her P-38N. She then started her second engine and made a sign for her pilots to follow her before starting to roll on the cut grass. Brigadier General Roy Geiger, in the process of briefing quickly his assembled fighter pilots, watched the P-38s take off and then climb at a rate that a WILDCAT pilot could only dream about.

“Damn, I wish we could have P-38s too.”

“Such nice planes, wasted on female pilots.” Muttered one of the Marine pilots, attracting a warning look from Geiger.

“Those female pilots include our top air ace, with 68 kills to her credit, so think twice before pooh-poohing them, Lieutenant. We will see after this fight how everybody behaved and performed, so concentrate on your own flying for the moment.”

“Uh, understood, sir.” Said the chastised pilot, having expected Geiger to agree with him. There had been in fact a lot of negative comments around his squadron after they had learned yesterday evening that a female fighter unit would join them in Guadalcanal, along with more than a few lewd ideas and suggestions on how to welcome those women pilots.

As her P-38N climbed quickly towards an altitude of 25,000 feet, Ingrid contacted her EC-142E, orbiting a good 100 miles away from Guadalcanal.

“Oracle One, this is Lady Hawk. I intend to go around the left flank of the inbound bandits and then take them in the ass by surprise. Give me a vector that will let me pass them out of visual range, over.”

“Lady Hawk, this is Oracle One.” Replied on the radio the female radar officer onboard the big electronic reconnaissance and command plane. “Come to heading 305

and continue climbing. We will contact you when it will be time to change heading again, over.”

“I copy that, Oracle One.”

Ingrid then looked around her to make sure that her five pilots were following her at proper intervals. After seven minutes of climbing, she leveled her plane at the altitude of 25,000 feet, receiving shortly afterwards a call.

“Lady Hawk, this is Oracle One. Change heading to 275, I says again heading 275. The enemy aircraft are now sixty miles to your port side and still flying towards Henderson Field, over.”

“Turning on heading 275 now, Oracle One.”

While her group of six fighters were in the process of performing the first ever interception directed by an airborne radar station, Ingrid knew that the Japanese were already at a severe disadvantage because of the common lack of radios aboard their fighters. The Japanese fighter pilots would be unable to quickly warn the bombers they were escorting because of that crucial shortcoming. She thus quickly decided on her initial attack tactic and spoke on the radio to her pilots.

“To all Witches, from Lady Hawk: we will do our first attack from the rear on the escorting ZEROs. Attack individually and while on a slight dive at top speed, give a good spray to your targeted ZERO and then continue your dive on the bombers below. Again, attack each a separate target before speeding past them. We will take some distance, then turn around for frontal passes against the remaining fighters. Once that is done, form back in pairs and go after what’s left. If you need to adjust your fire by using your tracers, that is fine with me. Just make sure that you keep your speed up so that the ZEROs can’t catch you. Lady Hawk out!”

Five minutes later, Ingrid got the signal from her EC-142E to turn again to get behind the enemy planes, followed by another change of heading two minutes later. Soon, she was able to see far ahead and a bit below her two large groups of dots. The excitement she had felt in air combat over the Philippines returned to her as she took the safeties off her heavy machineguns.

“Lady Hawk to Witches: enemy dead ahead and slightly below. Deploy in line, select a target and start your attack dives. PAUKE, PAUKE, PAUKE!”

On that signal, used by Luftwaffe fighter pilots to launch their attacks, Ingrid lowered a bit the nose of her aircraft, pointing it at one of the fifteen still unsuspecting Japanese ZERO

fighters. As she had told many times her pilots to do during initial surprise attacks, she waited until she was less than 200 meters from her target before opening fire. With a total of 105 bullets per second being spitted out by her eight heavy machineguns, her target was literally shred to pieces and disintegrated in the air after a mere second of firing. Four of her five pilots were equally successful, although they used a lot more ammunition than Ingrid for the same result, while young Marge Hurlburt only managed to damage seriously her target. The six P-38s then continued on their dives, zooming by the stunned surviving Japanese fighter pilots and already putting each a Mitsubishi G4M BETTY in their gun sight. As Ingrid had hoped for, the lack of radios in all but the leading Japanese fighter plane, which was now falling in flames, prevented the ZERO pilots from warning the twin-engine bombers. Only the shout of alarm from a dorsal gunner in one of the BETTYs finally told the leader of the bomber group that he was under attack. That warning however came too late. Hit by sustained, dense bursts of big .50 caliber slugs, six of the bombers either exploded or turned into flying torches. Following Ingrid in extended line, Teresa James and her four pilots sped past the bombers and flew away for a minute, taking an advance of two kilometers before turning around on Ingrid's signal for frontal passes. As expected by Ingrid, the surviving Japanese fighters rushed past the bombers to meet the P-38s' charges. Normally, Ingrid would have concentrated on the bombers, but she was worried about the slow, ungainly WILDCATs that were also going to intercept this raid soon.

"Remember, Witches: get another ZERO on that frontal pass, then reform in pairs and go for the bombers."

This time, her pilots opened fire from much farther, in order to fire before the ZEROs and to be able to use their tracers to correct their aims. That was wasteful of ammunition but Ingrid knew too well that her female pilots were new to combat and still had a lot to learn about air gunnery. Besides, the P-38 had an uncommonly generous reserve of ammunition for its machineguns compared to the other American fighters in service and they could afford the expenditure. Even Marge Hurlburt shot down her ZERO on that pass, but then nearly forgot to get out of the way, the engine from the ZERO she had exploded barely missing her plane as she zoomed past the surviving Japanese planes. The copilot of one of the bombers, who had survived the Philippines campaign, shouted with horror as one of the dirty gray-painted P-38s sped past him.

"THE GRAY GHOSTS! THEY ARE HERE IN GUADALCANAL!"

His pilot didn't waste time asking him what he was talking about, shouting instead in the intercom to order his gunners to return fire. By that time, however, the P-38s, speeding around at over 420 miles per hour, were already out of range. The three ZERO fighters of the escort that were still intact tried to pursue the American fighters but they were a good ninety miles per hour slower and were hopelessly outpaced by the P-38s, while the other surviving ZERO, its left wing full of holes and its controls vibrating, had no choice but to turn around to return to Rabaul.

Ingrid's P-38s were performing their fourth attack pass, downing in the process three more bombers and damaging three other ones, when the Marine and Navy F4F WILDCATs arrived on the scene. Captain Robert Galer, from the Marine squadron VMF-224, looked on incredulously at the Japanese planes dropping in flames left and right, with the P-38s turning around the surviving bombers like angry bees.

"Christ! Those girls could at least leave us something to do."

As if they had heard him, the three surviving Japanese fighter pilots, seeing new targets that they knew they could catch, gave up on the P-38s and turned towards the incoming WILDCATs, which were still huffing and puffing to get to their altitude. Galer at once ordered his four pilots to engage the ZEROs, telling the six pilots of VMF-223 and the ten Navy fighters of VF-5, newly arrived from Espiritu Santo, to go for the bombers. Galer's pilots soon had their hands full, the enraged Japanese fighter pilots bent on avenging their lost comrades. Slower, much less agile and climbing slower than the ZEROs, the Marine F4Fs mostly survived through their sturdiness. Galer still lost two of his WILDCATs to the ZEROs, with only one pilot parachuting out, while shooting down himself one of the Japanese, with one of his pilots destroying a second ZERO. Galer suddenly found the last ZERO hard on his tail. Despite all his skills, he found it impossible to shake off the Japanese and was getting hits on his plane, when the ZERO suddenly exploded. A P-38 then flew past him and he had time to see the pink and black letters 'LADY HAWK' painted on its nose before the heavy fighter returned into the fray, making quick work of a BETTY bomber with a single, surprisingly short burst that demonstrated a mastery of air gunnery that Galer could only envy. By then, five of the six P-38s were breaking off combat, probably out of ammunition, while only nine bombers were now left intact, four others having turned away because of damage. With nineteen WILDCAT and one P-38 left pounding on them and with all their escort fighters shot down, the surviving Japanese bomber crews decided that the game was not worth

the candle and turned around. The Marine and Navy pilots still went after them, downing five more BETTYS, while the lone P-38 put on an air gunnery show and shot down two more bombers before running out of ammunition and turning around to return to Henderson Field. That left a lone bomber to flee in utter panic, while the F4Fs had to let it go because of their low fuel state. Galer looked around him as his surviving pilots formed up on him for the return trip. This was the first time that they had succeeded in turning around a Japanese raid before it got over Henderson Field.

“Wow! And these girls are supposed to be the newcomers here.”

### **15:48 (Solomons Time)**

#### **Headquarters of the 4<sup>th</sup> Air Group, 25<sup>th</sup> Air Flotilla**

#### **Rabaul, Island of New Britain**

The seven dejected-looking aviators drinking slowly from their cups of tea jumped on their feet at once when a senior officer with lots of gold braid on his uniform walked in the lounge they were in, let in by another senior officer with nearly as much gold braid and followed by five more officers.

“At ease!” Said Vice Admiral Tsukahara, Commander of the 11<sup>th</sup> Air Fleet, as the airmen bowed low for him. “Rear Admiral Yamada, the commander of your air flotilla, has reported to me a most unsettling piece of news. I want to hear directly from you what you saw over Guadalcanal.”

The pilot of the surviving bomber to have returned from the noon raid on Henderson Field bowed again before starting to speak.

“Sir! Lieutenant Shimada Kenji. I was the pilot of the sole G4M to return from this morning’s raid on Guadalcanal. While we were still well out of visual range of Guadalcanal, six American fighters of unknown design attacked us from behind, taking our escort fighters by surprise and shooting down a dozen of them, plus over half of our bombers, in mere minutes. American WILDCAT fighters then showed up, but by that time there was already little left of our group, sir. My copilot, Second Lieutenant Nishino, recognized the paint scheme of the new American fighters, an unusual one, as having been seen previously during the campaign to take the Philippines. There, that paint scheme was worn by a squadron of P-40s known to our aircrews as the ‘Gray Ghosts’, an elite unit that caused us grievous losses. That American squadron was led then by their top ace, a girl who was nicknamed ‘Lady Hawk’. I saw that nickname today,



painted on one of the new American fighters, along with dozens of miniature Japanese flags denoting air kills.”

“Describe to me those new American fighters, Lieutenant.”

“Yes sir! It has a most unusual design, with two engines and a double tail. The cockpit sits in a nacelle flanked by both engines and all its armament seems to be concentrated in that central nacelle, rather than in the wings. It was incredibly fast, going around at well over 600 kilometers per hour, and our fighters could not catch up with it.”

One of the officers that had come in with Tsukahara then whispered something to him before sifting through a thick book and opening it to a specific page, then presenting the book to the vice admiral. The latter looked at the page for a moment before turning it around to show a picture to Shimada.

“Is this the type of fighter that attacked your group, Lieutenant?”

The young bomber pilot examined carefully the picture before nodding.

“Hay! There are however a few slight differences between that picture and the planes we saw, Admiral. The cockpit of the new fighter was much more forward and was right in the nose, while the wing roots seemed deeper to me.”

“A new variant of the Lockheed P-38 LIGHTNING, Admiral.” Pronounced the intelligence officer that had given the book to Vice Admiral Tsukahara. “The P-38 was already in development before the start of the war, but its series production was kept limited, for reasons unknown to us. Now, we may surmise that this delay in mass production was probably due to major modifications being made to its basic design.”

“What do we know about that P-38, Commander Sugiyami?”

“That, in its basic variant, it was already very fast, with a maximum speed of about 640 kilometers per hour, and had a significant combat range that could be further increased with the help of drop tanks. Its armament was quite heavy as well, with four heavy machineguns and one cannon in the nose. This new variant of the P-38 should thus be considered very dangerous, much more so than the usual American WILDCAT or P-40.”

“I see! And this...female ace, what do you know about her?”

“I believe that I have something about her here, Admiral. One moment, please.”

The intelligence officer searched for a moment in his briefcase, finally taking out a dossier that he opened at a specific page before handing it to Tsukahara.

"This is Major Ingrid Dows, formerly of the Filipino Air Corps and now a regular officer of the American Air Corps. She was claimed to have 68 air victories by the time she left the Philippines for the United States. The last report we got on her, thanks to American newspapers and radio stations, was that she had been tasked to form an all-female air unit, following the edict from their president authorizing the enlistment of women in their army."

The vice admiral gave a disdainful look at his intelligence officer.

"Female combat pilots? Really? Are the Americans this desperate?"

"I know that this sounds ludicrous, Admiral, but even in the United States, this concept drew a lot of skepticism and objections. That it was adopted by the American president may mean that he attached a lot of importance to that Ingrid Dows."

Tsukahara looked again at the picture of Ingrid Dows, taken from an American magazine, and chuckled.

"Maybe their president wanted her in his bed."

He then laughed at his own joke, imitated by most of his staff officers. Lieutenant Shimada and Commander Sugiyami however didn't laugh, keeping straight faces. Losing a whole bomber group was no laughing matter to them, even when it was at the hands of one or more female pilots.

## **20:14 (Solomons Time)**

### **'The Pagoda' (air operation building of the Cactus Air Force)**

#### **Henderson Field, Guadalcanal**

"AW, COME ON!" Exclaimed in frustration one of the pilots of VMF-223 after consulting the official kill board showing the air victories that had been officially accepted. "I got that damn bomber, I swear!"

A Navy pilot from VF-5 Squadron then pointed at a new column that had been added to the board.

"Look at the kills credited to this female fighter outfit: I bet that one of those girls got credited with your bomber, pal."

"WHAT? Let me see!"

The Marine pilot, along with a dozen other male pilots, then crowded around that part of the board, with exclamations of disbelief quickly coming out.

"Look at that shit! The lowest of those six girls has been credited with two kills and one damaged aircraft, while three others got three kills each and another one got five kills. Then, they gave eight kills to that teenager. This is bullshit!"

"It must be their new P-38s that do the job for them. Let those girls try some combat on our old WILDCATs, to see how they do then."

Many pilots voiced their agreement with that declaration. Brigadier General Geiger, who had been in the adjacent room and had overheard the comments from the pilots, then came out of the operations room and looked severely at his aviators, who came to attention as one as he addressed them in a warning tone.

"Listen up, all of you, and listen well! I reviewed personally all the gun camera films from today's air battle and approved the scores now on that board, so if you have some objections to those scores, then come and tell them to my face. Yes, those female pilots did benefit from flying a better machine than yours, but it was not the whole picture, far from it. They achieved high results because they were well led, used good tactics and shot straight. They also had enough guts to go one on one against ZEROs in frontal passes. They played chicken with the Japanese and won. For those who don't know, Major Dows got her two first kills in the Philippines while flying a P-26 PEASHOOTER and did her 66 subsequent kills on a P-40, a plane comparable to our F4Fs. Instead of bad-mouthing those girls, just think that they saved this airfield from getting more bombs on it, bombs that could have killed quite a few of our Marines. I visited Major Dows and her pilots one hour ago, to give them the final credited scores. You know what their reaction was? That they were most happy, not for getting credited for those air kills, but for having prevented a bombing of Henderson Field. Not one of them bragged about their exploits in the air, least of all Major Dows. So, you better be polite to these ladies, gentlemen, because they deserve it. Now, you better go to bed: God knows what tomorrow will bring us."

The next day, Friday, September 11, brought enough as it was. First, the twelve giant cargo planes of the 117<sup>th</sup> Transport Squadron came in on their third round trip to Guadalcanal at 08:21, unloading close to 250 tons of equipment and supplies and bringing even more women on the embattled island. As soon as they took off for Espiritu Santo, nine P-38Ns led by 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant Elizabeth Whitlow landed on Fighter One, to reinforce the fighter element there. One hour later, the Marines on the island, as well as the Japanese who had a view of the airfield, saw the arrival of 24 of the strangest flying

machines they had ever seen, when the helicopters of the 777<sup>th</sup> Helicopter Squadron, The Black Widows, arrived as well at Fighter One, minus the two heavy lift UH-3 SKYCRANES that stayed in Espiritu Santo. Ingrid Dows then promptly gave a helicopter tour to the curious Major General Vandegrift and a few of his officers, telling him at the same time about what her helicopters could do for the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division. Vandegrift proved an early believer in the usefulness of helicopters and spent a good hour discussing with Ingrid their employment tactics and capabilities, until a warning from the EC-142E on patrol station sent Ingrid and her fourteen female fighter pilots scrambling to their P-38Ns to intercept an incoming Japanese air raid. Again, due to the short range, slower speed and slow climbing rate of their F4F WILDCATs, the Marine and Navy pilots at Henderson Field ended entering the action last, finding out on arrival at the scene of the battle that the Witches and Ingrid had already shot down nearly all of the 32 enemy escort fighters, plus seven of the 25 G4M bombers. That result had however come at the cost of young Mary Lou Neale, who lost her frontal duel against a ZERO ace, and of one more P-38N that had to crash-land on return due to battle damage. With the Japanese escort neutralized, the Marine and Navy aviators were free to engage at will the remaining bombers, but still lost three of their WILDCATs to the powerful defensive armament of the Mitsubishi G4Ms, each armed with a total of four 20mm cannons and two 7.7mm machineguns. The poor radio discipline of the male pilots, who kept shouting excitedly on the radio for about any reason, kept clogging the fighter control radio frequency during the battle and nearly attracted a remonstrance from Ingrid, who however decided to let it fly in order not to sour the already shaky relation between her female pilots and the male pilots on Guadalcanal. Nine of the bombers, plus two ZERO fighters out of ammunition, were able to make it back to Rabaul, but without having been able to drop their bombs on Henderson Field. Some of the more hot-headed Marine and Navy pilots however managed to take umbrage of the fact that the P-38Ns of the Witches flew back in formation with them for the return trip, imagining that the female pilots were making a show of 'escorting' them home. More bad-mouthing followed once on the ground, with a distinctive coldness growing between the male and female fighter pilots. In contrast, the ground-pounding Marines around Henderson Field felt no animosity towards the newly-arrived women of the 99<sup>th</sup> CAG, on the contrary. For the first time in weeks, they had been spared from enemy air bombardment on two consecutive days of fair to good weather, and this since the arrival of the first female fighter pilots and their P-38s. That friendly feeling only grew after the field bakery

section of the 99<sup>th</sup> CAG, which had arrived in the morning, made a distribution of freshly baked bread around the fighting positions of the division. The Marines, who had been surviving on half rations of canned food and cooked rice for a month, happily grabbed the still warm bread buns and devoured them in mere seconds. Then, two high-ranking visitors and a press correspondent dropped in in the middle of that rather mixed atmosphere.

### **16:03 (Solomons Time)**

**Friday, September 11, 1942 'C'**

**Command Post of the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division**

**Henderson Field, Guadalcanal**

"ROOM!"

"At ease, gentlemen!" Said at once Vice Admiral Richmond Turner as he entered the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division command post with Rear Admiral John McCain. Turner then shook hands with Major General Alexander Vandegrift before looking around the crudely made dugout.

"Well, this isn't exactly the Ritz Carlton, I must say."

"We do have some spectacular light and sound shows from time to time, Admiral." Replied with humor Vandegrift, making the two visiting admirals smile with amusement.

"I bet you do, General." Said Turner. "So, how are things around the airfield at the moment?"

"Fairly quiet, Admiral, but I am expecting some heavy ground action soon, possibly during the next few days. Let me show you on the tactical map."

Leading his two visitors to his map table, Vandegrift took a minute to describe the deployment of his troops, then started talking about the enemy.

"Because of the heavy jungle foliage around Henderson Field and the lack of intelligence from Japanese radio traffic, our picture of the enemy ground deployment is unfortunately quite vague. What we know is that at least one enemy infantry brigade is poised to the West of our perimeter, along the Matanikau River, and may attempt a pincer attack, with one thrust from possibly the South of the airfield. To counter that possibility, Colonel Edson's Raider and Para Battalion has been digging in and preparing defensive positions along the ridgeline to the South of this command post.

Unfortunately, I am getting mighty short of available troops to more solidly hold our perimeter. In truth, malaria, dengue fever and a number of other tropical diseases are costing me more casualties than Japanese actions. My men have also been at half rations for a month now and are physically exhausted. I urgently need more troops and more supplies, Admiral.”

Turner nodded in understanding, thinking about the shameful debacle started in August by the premature withdrawal by Vice Admiral Fletcher of his carrier group. That had left the Marines without air cover and had forced Turner’s transports to leave as well, after the disastrous Battle of Savo Island had eviscerated the allied force of heavy cruisers and destroyers guarding Guadalcanal. The transports’ withdrawal had in turn cut the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division from most of its supplies and much of its equipment, something that had left a bitter taste in the Marines’ mouths about Navy support, or lack of it.

“I have been petitioning Admiral Ghormley about transferring the 7<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment to Guadalcanal but, unfortunately, he still insists on mounting an amphibious operation to take the island of Ndeni, in order to further protect our supply route to Australia. Admiral King also insists on that Ndeni operation and I unfortunately am unable to convince him or Ghormley of dropping that operation.”

“But that is nonsense, Admiral! Ndeni is worthless! On the other hand, if we don’t reinforce seriously our positions here, we may just lose Guadalcanal, in which case all the sacrifices and losses we endured up to now would have been in vain. What about Army troops, then?”

“They are also in short supply at the moment, General. What little is sent by Washington to the Pacific has to be parceled out between us, General MacArthur’s offensive in Papua-New Guinea and the reinforcement of the Philippines.”

Rear Admiral McCain then jumped in, asking cautiously a question to Vandegrift.

“Has that new female air group helped your situation, General?”

Vandegrift nodded, a semblance of smile returning to his face.

“Very much so, Admiral McCain. They have already helped intercept two Japanese air raids, causing them heavy casualties and making them turn around before they could bomb the airfield. As for their transport squadron, it will start this afternoon to ferry to Guadalcanal our supplies and equipment that could not be landed originally in August. Brigadier General Geiger would however be better qualified to give you an appraisal of the performance of these women. Know however that I am personally very satisfied by that air group’s services.”

"I am happy to hear that, General. To speak frankly, many people, both in the Pacific and in the United States, had doubts about the wisdom of using women as combat aviators. I will certainly discuss them with General Geiger later on. How about your Marine and Navy squadrons? How are they holding out in terms of planes and aircrews?"

"They are unfortunately mostly threadbare by now, Admiral. Both malaria and combat losses have cut big swaths in the ranks of our aviators. These squadrons will need to be rotated out and replaced in a few weeks at most. However, the Japanese pressure, both from the air and the sea, is relentless, while we are still very vulnerable on the ground. I would like to invite you and Admiral Turner on a quick tour of the airfield and of the perimeter, so that you could see the local conditions by yourselves."

"That sounds like an interesting idea, General." Replied Turner at once.

"Then, we should go now, before the Sun sets. My jeep is parked nearby."

## **16:40 (Solomons Time)**

### **Air operations building of Henderson Field**

Hanson Baldwin, of the New York Times newspaper, opened his eyes wide when he examined with war correspondent Richard Tregaskis the air combat scoreboard in the pilots' ready room of the air operations building.

"Holy Jesus! Is that really the statistics column for that new female fighter squadron?"

"It is." Replied Tregaskis, who had been in Guadalcanal since the first day of the operation. Baldwin looked at him, disbelief on his face.

"But, their air kill scores are unreal!"

"That's because they are crap, mister." Said a passing Navy pilot, jumping in on the conversation. "Nobody here believes their air claims. As for what they actually did, they can thank their P-38 wonder toy for it."

As the pilot walked away, watched by a confused Baldwin, Tregaskis touched the arm of his press colleague to attract his attention, then spoke to him in a low voice.

"Let's go outside for a minute: we need to talk in private."

"Uh, sure."

Following Tregaskis outside and walking with him until they were a few yards away from the 'Pagoda', Baldwin then gave a hard look at the correspondent.

"Okay, what the hell is going on here?"

"Put simply, big egos and jealousy: that's what this is all about. The girls from the 170<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron have basically murdered the Japanese in the air since their arrival yesterday. Their new planes probably have a big part in that, but their novel tactics and the leadership of their Major Dows also have a lot to do with it, in my opinion. Those kill scores on the board inside were vetted by Brigadier General Geiger himself and I believe that they reflect reality. The problem is that some of our male fighter pilots can't stomach that women are outperforming them in the air and have been bad-mouthing those women, spreading all kinds of nasty rumors about them. If you want to avoid doing a gross injustice, then I would urge you to be careful about what you will hear from our male pilots about the women of the 99<sup>th</sup> CAG. I know that some reporters would readily jump on those rumors in order to produce a juicy article, but I know that you are not that kind of journalist."

"Uh, thanks for the vote of confidence, Rick. And those girls, how are they taking this? Have they been bragging about their exploits, to piss off these guys so bad?"

"Not at all! They have been pretty quiet in their corner of the airfield, doing their jobs and improving steadily their facilities. After the latest round of male snubbing following today's noon air battle, they have started avoiding altogether their male pilot counterparts, and I can't really blame them for doing that."

"What about their relations with the Marine foot soldiers around the airfield?"

"It is actually the complete opposite. Because of those women, there has been no Japanese air bombardment of the airfield in two days, and the soldiers around know that. Don't get me wrong, though: our male pilots have done the impossible to stop the Japanese air raids, but their planes are outclassed by the Japanese machines and they were heavily outnumbered. They have done a terrific job up to now, but I believe that they are starting to squander their achievements with their petty jealousy."

"Wow! This sounds like I will have to walk on eggs around here."

"That is always a good thing to do around Guadalcanal, for whatever reason."  
Pronounced Tregaskis with a half smile.

**05:45 (Solomons Time)**

**Saturday, September 12, 1942 'C'**

**Open ocean southeast of Bougainville Island**

**550 kilometers away from Henderson Field**



"Oracle Two to Hell Raiser Leader, turn to compass heading 275 now!"

"I copy, Oracle Two. Turning now to heading 275." Said Captain Helen Richey in her microphone. "All Hell Raisers, follow me on turn to compass heading 275."

Piloting mostly on instruments in the darkness of the early morning, the small aviatrix made her North American B-25NG MITCHELL perform a wide turn over the ocean, imitated by the other fifteen medium bombers of her squadron. The combination of darkness and low cloud ceiling this morning would normally make flying too dangerous for most types of aircraft, but Helen's attack plan was in fact partly based on that, since surprise was going to count for a lot in her mission. The EC-142E flying over the area had helped guide her bombers from Espiritu Santo up to this point and represented another big factor in Helen's plan. Another call soon came from the airborne reconnaissance and command aircraft.

"Hell Raiser Leader, all your call signs are now on the correct heading. Pinball is now 35 miles away and continuing on southeast course. Reduce speed to 200 miles per hour and go down to the altitude of 300 feet."

"I copy, Oracle Two. All Hell Raisers, slow down and drop down with me."

Giving alternate quick glances at her instrument panels and at her heads up display, which projected the view from the fixed forward FLIR camera in the nose of her aircraft, Helen pulled down carefully her engine throttles while entering a shallow dive towards the ocean. She soon was back on level flight at an altitude of 300 feet and at a speed of 200 miles per hour. Her radio/radar operator, who also manned the dorsal gun turret in combat, then shouted a warning on the intercom.

"I have our targets on our surface search radar, distance 29 miles. After our final heading turn, we will be in perfect position for our attack run."

"That's the way I like it." Said Helen, grinning. Her squadron was going to be well placed to deliver a low-level attack from the East just after sunrise. With the blinding light of the Sun directly in the back of the bombers and with the long shadows of dawn, the Japanese watchmen on their targets were going to have a hard time indeed in seeing her planes come in. As Ingrid had told them many times, gaining surprise is already half of success. The trick now was not to squander that element of surprise by some sloppy bomb aiming. However, Helen and her bomber aircrews had practiced a number of innovative attack profiles while in California and they were confident of both

their abilities and precision. A few more minutes later, and with the Sun now half above the horizon, Helen's radar operator shouted again.

"Targets now to our ten O'clock, distance twelve miles."

"Very well! All Hell Raisers, turn in succession of flights to heading 255 and drop down to one hundred feet. Execute!"

The veteran flyers of her squadron, each with over 1,000 hours of flying time to their credit, performed that maneuver smoothly, each flight of four bombers turning to the left in succession once past the preceding flight. Then, as briefed in advance, each flight split in two pairs, with one of the pairs then dropping back some distance from the leading pair in order to act as a second wave. Helen had four ships to sink, one of them a light cruiser, and she wanted to make sure not to waste bombs on any already sinking ship. Then, far away on the horizon ahead, she saw the silhouettes of her four targets.

"Targets in sight! Hug the sea and open your bomb bay doors. All gunners, arm your weapons. Load armor piercing rounds in the nose cannons."

With eight fixed .50 caliber machineguns and one 75mm cannon in the nose of her B-25NG and four 1000-pound armor-piercing bombs in her ventral bay, Helen Richey lined up the light cruiser SENDAI in her sight and pushed her engine throttles to maximum.

On the open port bridge wing of the SENDAI, one of the sailors on watch duty thought for a moment that he had seen a dot move over the surface of the sea. He however was unable to point his powerful binoculars towards it, as the rising Sun blinded him as soon as he looked in that direction. The sailor then reasoned that no enemy aircraft could be this far out at sea at dawn and continued to scan visually another portion of the horizon. A few seconds later, the sailor again saw a moving dot in the direction of the Sun. Squinting his eyes, he finally saw what must be an aircraft as it climbed rapidly from its previous sea-hugging altitude. The aircraft, less than two kilometers away now, quickly stopped climbing, instead dropping its nose to point it at the cruiser and entering a shallow dive. A second dot was close behind the first one.

"ALARM! INCOMING AIRCRAFT FROM PORT SIDE, LOW!"

The shouted warning from the sentry immediately attracted an officer, who took the time to raise his binoculars and check before giving any order. While normal, that procedure cost seconds that the light cruiser didn't have anymore. The officer barely had time to shout orders to go to battle stations before a 75mm shell struck the side of the hull and penetrated before exploding. A rain of .50 caliber slugs followed, bowling over many

sailors and officers on the open decks and in the superstructures. That was however only a prelude to something much worse. None of the guns of the ship had time to be manned and pointed before two twin-engine bombers painted a sort of dirty gray zoomed over the cruiser one after the other. Of the eight 1,000-pound armor-piercing bombs they released from mast height, two hit the water just short of the ship and exploded, buckling badly underwater hull plates, one missed the ship by mere feet and flew across the forward deck, while the five remaining bombs hit squarely the cruiser. Those five heavy bombs penetrated inside the hull before exploding, two inside the machinery spaces, one in a crew mess and two inside the forward 5.5 inch gun ammunition magazine. Before the second pair of B-25s following Helen Richey's plane and its wingman could start their own pop-up and dive maneuver to attack the SENDAI, the unlucky light cruiser was suddenly cut in two by a mighty explosion as its 5.5 inch ammunition ignited and detonated. The two B-25s only had time to get out of the way as complete gun turrets flew in the air, along with pieces of deck and hull plating. The explosion also swept through the superstructures, killing everyone on the bridge and in the fire control tower. Then, its two halves fully opened to water, what was left of the SENDAI started sinking at once.

The attacks on the three destroyers accompanying the SENDAI, while not having such spectacular results, were still deadly accurate, with at least half of the bombs hitting their targets. Built much more lightly than the cruiser, the three destroyers suffered at once grievous damage that all but doomed them. Seeing the success of her first wave, Helen Richey quickly ordered her second wave to hold on to their bombs, then performed a wide circle over the stricken ships, like a vulture flying over a dying man. Ordering her navigator/bombardier to take pictures of the mangled Japanese ships, Helen then decided that two of the three destroyers needed further attention and launched two pairs of bombers against them. Those extra bombs proved enough to finish the job and give the coup de grace to the Japanese ships. Taking another series of pictures of the clearly sinking ships, Helen then gave on the radio the codeword for her planes to go to Guadalcanal to land at Henderson Field and refuel there. As she turned her bomber around, Helen felt pride and satisfaction: her squadron had now started to do its part in this war, sinking four ships that were on their way to deliver precious supplies to the Japanese garrison of Guadalcanal. Something that she couldn't know but that would have satisfied her even more was the fact that her squadron attack

had been so sudden and devastating that none of the Japanese ships had time to send a radio message before sinking. Thus, for the Japanese Navy, the SENDAI flotilla simply vanished from the surface of the sea that morning. Only four days later, when a searching seaplane spotted and rescued the few survivors, did the Japanese high command learn about the fate of its four ships.

Vice Admiral Turner and Rear Admiral McCain were inspecting the living area of the Marine aviators, spread throughout a large patch of coconut trees to the northwest of the main landing strip, when the sixteen B-25NGs of the Hell Raisers started landing, coming from the Northwest, thus from the direction of the enemy territory. Brigadier General Geiger, who was escorting the two admirals around, promptly went to the field telephone linking the pilots' lines with the air operations center.

"Hello, air ops? This is General Geiger. What's the poop about the sixteen B-25s that are now landing?... They did? Very well, I will pass the word to Admiral Turner. Thanks!"

Putting down the receiver, Geiger smiled to Turner and McCain.

"Good news, Admiral! Those bombers are from the 177<sup>th</sup> Bomber Squadron of the 99<sup>th</sup> CAG. They just completed a strike near Bougainville against the light cruiser SENDAI and three Japanese destroyers, as they were apparently heading for Guadalcanal on a resupply run. All four ships were sunk, with no losses to our planes."

"Hot damn!" Exclaimed McCain, grinning. "That's what I call some good news." One of the Marine aviators nearby, a SBD dive bomber pilot, then made a remark in a low voice to a comrade.

"Yeah, sure! Another bullshit claim by those girls."

Geiger, who had a good ear and saw the man's lips move, felt instant irritation: he had heard already too many gripes and back-handed accusations of dishonesty against the women of the 99<sup>th</sup> CAG in the last two days and was getting quite fed up. He thus gave an apologetic look to Turner, noticing at the same time that McCain seemed to have heard as well the SBD pilot.

"If you will excuse me for a moment, Admiral."

He then walked to the dive bomber pilot and signaled him to follow him to a deserted patch of tree. As he was giving a low voice but caustic dressing down to the pilot, Turner looked questioningly at McCain.

"What is going on here, John?"

The old naval aviator replied loudly enough for the pilots around him to hear and understand.

“Nothing that some good old fashioned butt kicking could not take care of, Admiral.”

The medium bombers of the Hell Raisers stayed in Henderson Field only long enough to be refueled and quickly checked out, then took off to return to Espiritu Santo. The twelve cargo planes of the Angels were next to show up, dropping off over 230 tons of cargo at Fighter One, most of it supplies and equipment for the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division. By then, Vice Admiral Turner, Rear Admiral McCain and Brigadier General Geiger were inside the lines of the 99<sup>th</sup> CAG, inspecting their setup and marveling at the abundance and quality of its equipment, which made the Marine and Navy squadrons look rickety by contrast. The V.I.P.'s eyes however didn't miss the fact that the unit was also well organized and run, with some unusual but undoubtedly very useful additions to the normal tables of organization of an air group. Ingrid Dows was showing them the kind of picture a FLIR camera gave up, with their group bent over the cockpit of one P-38N, when a loudspeaker blared out.

“INCOMING ENEMY AIR RAID TO HEADING 280, DISTANCE 210 MILES. MAN THE AIRCRAFT!”

Ingrid gave an apologetic look to her visitors, who had stiffened on hearing the alert.

“I am sorry, Admirals, but I am afraid that I will have to go take care of other visitors.”

“By all means, Major.” Said Turner before climbing down from his stepladder, imitated by McCain and Geiger. Of a common accord, the three commanders decided to stay inside the 99<sup>th</sup> CAG lines during the alert, in order to observe how the women of the unit behaved during an attack. The twelve C-142s of the Angels, although now unloaded, didn't take off then, letting the grass strip free for the scrambling P-38N fighters. Only once all twenty fighters were off the ground did the big cargo planes, their gunners at their stations, rolled to the end of the grass strip and took off. McCain, watching with Turner and Geiger the quickly disappearing P-38Ns, couldn't help marvel at their acceleration and climbing rate.

“My God, these new P-38Ns make our WILDCATs look downright geriatric. We definitely need more of them in the Pacific.”

"I agree, Admiral," said Geiger, "but unfortunately the Army Air Corps is reserving most of its new airplanes for the European Theater. We got lucky to get this female air group, but I suspect that some in Washington didn't want to see women serve in Europe, or that our European Theatre commanders didn't want them. Personally, I am damn happy to have them, even if some of my pilots are griping about them."

McCain then gave him a worried look.

"How deep is this resentment, General? Could it hurt our operational effectiveness?"

"Up to now, it hasn't really hurt us, Admiral, but I am getting to the point where I will have to have a very serious group chat with my male aviators. The worst part is that I can't blame those women at all for this: they have been doing their jobs well and quietly and have proved on the whole more mature than many of my pilots. It must have something to do with the level of testosterone in my male squadrons."

Vice Admiral Turner, who was now looking at women running to man the eight 40mm Bofors anti-aircraft guns posted around Fighter One, nodded his head grudgingly.

"I never thought that I would have said this, but I have to agree with you about those women, General. As unorthodox and perturbing as their presence here are, they have proved up to now to be of great benefit to us in Guadalcanal. If they continue to do as well as now, I will then send a progress report to Admiral Nimitz, recommending strongly that they continue on here and praising their novel tactics. As for their new aircraft, we definitely need more of them. Their airborne radar aircraft in particular is proving to be a very successful concept and we should get more of them. As this young Major Dows said, they indeed represent a precious force multiplier."

"I agree." Said McCain. "My trip in one of those EC-142Es was a real eye opener. Take this present air raid alert: the enemy was spotted with precision while still 210 miles away, something our ground radar stations can't do. I also suspect that this morning's anti-shipping raid was made possible by information and guidance from one of those EC-142Es."

"Most probably." Replied Turner. "I will certainly put an emphasis on these EC-142Es in my report to Admiral Nimitz. Imagine what we could have done at Midway with one or two of them, instead of ending in a costly draw and near defeat."

Geiger and McCain nodded at that, reflecting on that nasty battle that had nearly seen the loss of Midway, a most important asset the capture of which would have put the Japanese within easy striking range of Hawaii.

Now already forty kilometers away from Henderson Field and flying at 9,000 meters of altitude, Ingrid received another radio message from her EC-142E on patrol.

"Lady Hawk, this is Oracle One. We can now plot two distinct enemy aircraft formation. The one closest to you, now 150 miles dead ahead of you, comprises approximately forty aircraft. The second group, 26 miles behind the first group, has forty plus aircraft, over."

"I copy, Oracle One. This is probably a fighter sweep preceding a bomber wave, in order to get rid of us before bombarding Henderson Field. Give me a heading for a wide flanking hook to the North against the first group. We can't let a mass of Japanese fighters fall on top of our WILDCAT fighters, over."

"Understood, Lady Hawk. Turn to compass heading 325, now."

"I copy, Oracle One. All Witches, turn now to compass heading 325 and follow me."

In the field command post of the 170<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron, where they were monitoring the battle on the fighter radio frequency, Turner, McCain and Geiger looked at each other on hearing the last few transmissions.

"Isn't Dows a bit too contemptuous of our Marine and Navy pilots?" Said Turner, making Geiger shake his head while his jaws tightened.

"If that first group is really made up of forty or more ZEROs, then leaving it intact to duke it out with our WILDCATs could cost us heavily, Admiral. Up to now, when facing only ZEROs, my WILDCATs can manage on a good day an average one to one kill rate, if we are not too outnumbered. Against forty ZEROs, my present fourteen WILDCATs that are now in the air would be butchered. Dows' doctrine is to normally go in priority at the bombers, but this time she is choosing to engage the enemy fighters in order to give our aviators a chance to survive and get at the bombers afterwards."

McCain looked down gravely at the map of the Solomons laid down on a table in the center of the command post, on which a female plotter was updating the respective positions of the Japanese and American aircraft.

"I hate to say this, but many squadron commanders would have instead gone for the easier targets. That young girl is a true professional, with her mind solidly on the end state of the game."

They then followed with increasing anxiety the progress of the various planes while listening to the radio chatter. Another thing that struck McCain was how terse the radio talk by the women was. Even when the Witches completed their flanking maneuver and fell from behind on the unsuspecting Japanese fighters, their radio chatter was kept nearly to nil, with only Ingrid Dows giving terse orders after each attack pass to direct the next attack. None of her female pilots shouted out on the radio when they shot down Japanese planes or commented on the action, in stark contrast to what McCain had grown accustomed to expect from male fighter pilots. Either Dows had pounded strict radio discipline into her pilots, or those were more mature and quiet than their male counterparts. The result of such discipline and methodical tactics was soon evident, with the group of Japanese fighters being literally eviscerated by the P-38s, who kept zooming by them at such high speeds that they could never really chase after them, with even less chance to engage into turning dogfights, of which the Japanese pilots were so fond of. The fourteen Marine and Navy then arrived on the scene, like the proverbial late Carabinieri. In order to prevent a possibly costly misunderstanding, General Geiger then went on the radio, ordering his pilots to keep on and strike the second group of Japanese planes. To his fury and to the evident displeasure of both Turner and McCain, one of the Navy pilots then asked his squadron leader why they could not engage instead the ZEROs in visual range. Things didn't get better when the WILDCATs finally dove on the Japanese bombers of the second wave, which were protected by only six ZERO fighters, as the fighter control frequency then exploded into voluminous and endless chatter, exclamations and shouts, rendering nearly impossible any command control of the battle. The women in the command post didn't make remarks at the time and kept straight faces, but Turner blew his fuse, banging a fist on the map table and then pointing an index at Geiger.

"General, after our pilots have returned, I want you to give them a speech about not to chat around on the air like a bunch of neighborhood busybodies. This is unacceptable!"

"It will be done, Admiral." Replied Geiger, more than a little embarrassed. They then concentrated back on the progress of the battle.

On the whole, the battle of the Witches against the first wave of Japanese fighters went very well, but the ZEROs being still dangerous customers, most of the P-38s ended up being out of ammunition by the time that all 41 Japanese planes in that



first wave were shot down. Only eight of the P-38s, including the one of Ingrid Dows, were then able to go assist the WILDCATs. While the latter had done more than a fair job of cutting down to size the bomber wave, many Japanese planes were still steadily approaching Henderson Field when the eight P-38s joined up with the WILDCATs. Sheer numbers and a shortage of ammunition on the American side, allied with stubborn persistence by the surviving Japanese pilots, resulted in a total of thirteen G4M BETTY medium bombers and five VAL dive bombers succeeding in arriving over Henderson Field to attack it. Despite the risks from falling Japanese bombs, the trio of senior visitors went out of the strongly built and protected command post of the Witches to watch the attack outside. While the G4Ms flew too high for the defending 40mm Bofors guns, the VAL dive bombers soon attracted a dense fire from the eight guns of the 996<sup>th</sup> Air Defense Battery of the 99<sup>th</sup> CAG, with the eight halftrack-mounted quad heavy machineguns of the battery adding their dense streams of tracers at the dive bombers as they were coming out of their bombing dives on Henderson Field. Peppered by shrapnel from exploding 40mm shells and by .50 caliber slugs, two of the five dive bombers were destroyed before they could release their bombs, while two more were shot down as they leveled out of their dives. Only one VAL made its way back to Rabaul, while four of the thirteen BETTYs were shot down by the 90mm guns of the Marine battery defending Henderson Field. A total of 36 bombs still fell on Henderson Field, thankfully causing only minor damage and a handful of casualties. As the last surviving Japanese planes fled towards Rabaul and as the American fighters started landing back on their respective strips, Turner faced McCain and Geiger, his expression guarded.

“Well, this has certainly been instructive in many ways, gentlemen. After such heavy losses in the air in the last few days, I doubt that the Japanese will persist much in trying to bomb this airfield, at least until they could get some serious reinforcements in terms of aircraft and aircrews. This however still leaves the Japanese threat from the sea and from the ground. Such a massive air effort in fact points to a probable incoming land offensive by the enemy.”

“I agree, Admiral. However, I am sure that the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division will be up to the challenge.” Said Geiger, making Turner nod.

“I also have confidence in General Vandegrift and his men, General. What I want from you by tonight is a balanced account of the results of this air battle, so that we could assess the damage to the enemy and also distribute both kudos and criticisms where they are due.”

Turner didn't have to be more specific for Geiger to understand him.

As Vice Admiral Turner had predicted, the Japanese did launch a ground attack at a bit past midnight that night against the southern part of the Marines' perimeter. However, that attack proved to be disorganized and badly coordinated and it fizzled out into a series of small scale fights, with the Marines succeeding in holding tight to their perimeter. The night fighting however prevented many from sleeping and kept nerves on edge around the airfield. In the morning of the thirteenth, another cargo run by the 117<sup>th</sup> Transport Squadron finished bringing in the equipment and supplies of the 170<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron, plus over a hundred tons of fuel, bombs, ammunition and rations for the Marines. Vice Admiral Turner and Rear Admiral McCain used that opportunity to return to Espiritu Santo on the return trip of the C-142s. Then, significant numbers of Navy planes arrived as reinforcements for Guadalcanal. Eighteen WILDCAT fighters, twelve SBD dive bombers and six TBF torpedo bombers did a lot to revitalize General Geiger's anemic male squadrons. To everyone's relief on the American side, the usual Japanese noon air raid didn't show up, something that sparked many comments and theories among the Marines defending the perimeter of the airfield. Isolated instances of sniper fire and patrol skirmishes, plus the occasional mortar fire, however kept nerves raw, further exhausting the Marine defenders. Then, just after supper time, with darkness having fallen, a renewed fusillade along the southern portions of the perimeter announced a fresh push by the Japanese Army.

## **02:54 (Solomons Time)**

**Monday, September 14, 1942 'C'**

**Command post of 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division**

**Henderson Field, Guadalcanal**

"You wanted to see me, General?" Asked Ingrid as soon as she entered the dugout used as the divisional command post, situated at the northern tip of the series of low hills baptized 'Edson's Ridge'. Alexander Vandegrift, looking dead tired, gave her a weak smile.

"I certainly did, Major. The situation around the Raiders and Para Battalion of Colonel Edson is becoming critical. I want to review with you what your helicopters could do to relieve the pressure on Edson's men as soon as daylight comes."

"We will do our best to help, General. What is the exact situation around Edson's lines?"

"Come to the map table and I will show you, Major."

Ingrid obliged and bent with Vandegrift over his tactical map of Henderson Field. The Marine major general then pointed a series of locations on the map.

"The Japanese have launched since last evening a series of poorly coordinated attacks against our southern perimeter, with the main push against the southern base of Edson's Ridge. We have been pounding the enemy with our mortars and howitzers but, with the thick jungle foliage and the cover of the night, the situation is confused as hell right now and the Japanese have started infiltrating our lines by small groups, both to the East and West of Edson's Ridge. The first defensive line of Edson's men has been breached and pushed back by the enemy, although at the cost of very high casualties, and our men have had to withdraw and regroup around this knoll mid-way up the ridge. What I am hoping from your helicopters is to hit the enemy in the rear and from the air in the morning, thus relieving the pressure on Edson. Unfortunately, I have next to no reserves left, so if the enemy pierces through Edson, the Japanese just may enter the airfield and cause all kind of mayhem."

Ingrid nodded grimly, seeing too well what Vandegrift meant. There was a scant kilometer separating Edson's frontal positions from the divisional command post, which was itself only 600 meters from Ingrid's unit lines and the open plain constituting Fighter One strip. The CP was also less than 1,200 meters from the dispersal area of the Marine and Navy squadrons in Henderson Field. She was about to propose a plan when there was a commotion at the entrance of the dugout, with a Marine sergeant with bloodshot eyes nearly running in and presenting himself at attention in front of Vandegrift.

"General, urgent request from Colonel Edson: he needs medium machinegun ammunition and grenades at once. We are nearly out of them and the enemy is dangerously close to be able to break through. Without our machineguns, we will not be able to stop them, General."

"Did you bring men with you to carry back that ammunition, Sergeant?"

"No, General: we were too short of men on the firing line to spare more than me."

Seeing that Vandegrift hesitated for a moment, visibly trying to figure out where he would find the men for that task, Ingrid boldly spoke up.

"General, my airfield defense platoon has plenty of machinegun ammunition and grenades and can be here very fast, thanks to its jeeps. I volunteer to lead an ammunition party, with this sergeant to guide me. Forget the fact that we are women, sir: we are Americans wearing combat uniforms and this must be done...now!"

Vandegrift evidently didn't like that, but he finally nodded after a few seconds, making many heads around the command post turn, including that of war correspondents Richard Tregaskis and Robert Miller.

"Very well, Major. Bring forward that ammo and get it to Colonel Edson as fast as you can, but no heroics! You are a lot more valuable alive in the air than dead on the ground."

"Sir, if the enemy manages to break inside the airfield, then we may just end up all dead anyway. However, I have no plans to die tonight. If you will excuse me, I will go out now to call in my defense platoon."

As Ingrid left the dugout with the sergeant from the Raiders Battalion, Vandegrift's chief of staff, Colonel Caper James, approached his commander and spoke to him in a low but indignant voice.

"Sir, we can't send women to ground front lines like this! What if any of them are captured alive by the Japanese?"

"And what about our own men that could be captured by the Japanese if we lose this battle, Colonel?" Replied caustically Vandegrift. "Major Dows was certainly right about one point: if the Japanese break through, then we may all be screwed, men and women together."

Running to her jeep, Ingrid grabbed the headset of the VHF radio inside, a modern transistorized model much more powerful and dependable than the old vacuum tube models used by the Marines.

"Sierra Fifteen, this is Lady Hawk, urgent message, over!"

The answer came quickly, as her defense platoon was presently on full alert because of the not so far gun battle raging on to the South.

"Sierra Fifteen listening, Lady Hawk."

"Sierra Fifteen, I want all of your call sign, plus extra volunteers and as much medium machinegun ammo and crates of grenades as you can quickly gather, to get to

the divisional command post as fast as you can. We need to do an ammunition resupply run to our forward trenches, over.”

“Sierra Fifteen understood! We will be there in fifteen minutes, out.”

The Marine sergeant from the Raiders Battalion, who had listened on to the radio exchange, smiled in the dark to Ingrid.

“Gee, Major, your girl seemed pretty eager to go. Are they all this gung-ho?”

Ingrid returned his smile. She was however very serious in her answer.

“Sergeant, we all volunteered for this, contrary to most Army conscripts. We will do this in order for all of us to stay alive tonight, not to gain some imaginary glory for ourselves.”

The Marine sergeant nodded at that, able to understand her pragmatic point of view.

“You sure understand the bottom line, Major.”

“I have understood the bottom line for quite a few millenniums already.”

Muttered Ingrid, too low for the sergeant to understand her.

To Ingrid’s pride and satisfaction, the twelve jeeps belonging to her defense platoon arrived within the promised fifteen minutes, followed by ten more jeeps and a 2 ½ ton truck full of women, all wearing steel helmets and combat web gear and carrying their M2 carbines. Ingrid’s unit security officer, who also was the head of her military police section, a tall and athletic blonde with very feminine curves, then presented herself to Ingrid.

“Lieutenant Angie Dickinson, reporting with a total of 94 volunteers, sixteen medium machineguns and plenty of ammunition, Major. The volunteer carriers brought their empty backpacks in order to carry more ammunition.”

“I am truly glad to see you and your women, Lieutenant. Keep four armed jeeps here to protect the western flank of our lines from infiltrators. You and I will lead eight machinegun crews and your volunteers as ammo carriers forward. We will need to move quickly, so don’t let the women overload themselves. Put your sergeant in charge of the four stay-behind machineguns. Execution!”

“Yes, Major!” Replied the 180 centimeter-tall ex roller-skate professional brawler before running to the jeeps and shouting orders. The Marine sergeant was shocked to see the women dismount eight machineguns from their jeep mounts and load them on their shoulders, along with ground tripod mounts and spare barrels. Over forty more women grabbed ammunition boxes and crates from the truck and jeeps and stuffed them

in their backpacks, then formed a long foot column. The whole thing took less than a minute, with Ingrid then passing out loud some last minute instructions.

"Ladies, we are going to bring this ammunition to our Marine brothers, who need it fast. Bullets and shrapnel of all kinds may fly low and dense, so stay bent over once close to the front lines. There will be no talking or smoking during the march and we will all grab the belt of the person ahead of us in order not to get separated in this dark jungle. Once close to the fighting, we will spread out at combat intervals and continue our advance. Any questions? No? Then let's go!"

Going to the head of the column, Ingrid placed the Marine sergeant in front of her, then grabbed the back of his belt.

"We are ready, Sergeant. Lead on!"

"Yes, Major!"

Maybe because they were physical fit, or more probably because of his own poor physical shape following a month at half rations in this tropical hell hole, the Marine sergeant found out that the women apparently had no problem following his hurried pace, even once inside the jungle. The jungle however was soon replaced by a mostly denuded ridgeline, allowing for a faster pace. The night was however very dark, with no moonlight, which obliged the column of women to keep hanging to each other's belt. During all that time, flashes of light from exploding shells and lines of tracer bullets illuminated the night ahead of the column, while the constant noise of gunfire and artillery made talking difficult. After about forty minutes of hurried walking, the column approached a knoll on top of the ridgeline that appeared to be the center of a savage firefight. Ingrid stopped her column for a moment and crouched, imitated by her volunteers, then passed short orders down the line in a low voice.

"Load a round in the chamber of your weapons and take off your safety. Fire only in self-defense for the moment: there are lots of friends ahead."

The Marine sergeant in front of her smiled to her, apparently impressed.

"You sure don't sound like a flatfooted greenhorn, Major."

"Because I ain't, Sergeant. How far still are the lines of your unit?"

"They now should be less than 300 yards to our front, Major."

Ingrid didn't reply to that at once, instead inspecting the terrain ahead with her acute eyesight. They were following a relatively flat ridgeline that was naked of nearly all

vegetation on an average width of maybe sixty meters at most. The ridgeline snaked on in a generally southward direction, rising gently towards the low knoll.

"Let's continue as we are for about 200 yards, then you and me will go forward alone, to warn your Marine sentries that we are coming and thus avoid fratricidal fire." The sergeant nodded, again impressed by her tactical savvy. Ingrid then gave the signal to resume the advance.

As Ingrid was about to stop her column again and go forward alone with the sergeant, stray machinegun fire passed barely two meters overhead, making her and her women bend even more. That decided Ingrid, who signaled to stop, then deployed her eight machineguns in extended line, ready to fire. Leaving Lieutenant Dickinson in charge of the waiting machineguns, Ingrid started cautiously walking forward at a crouch just behind the Marine sergeant, who obviously knew this piece of ground well and soon led her close to a shallow foxhole occupied by two Marines, who nervously called out in the night.

"Who goes there?"

"Calm down! It's me, Sergeant Meade. I am leading an ammo party from the airfield. Where is Major Bailey?"

A mortar bomb exploding nearby made all of them go down before Meade could get an answer. Sticking his head just above ground level, the Marine soldier pointed at the top of the nearby knoll.

"On top of the knoll, with Colonel Edson."

"Thanks! Be advised that we have close to a hundred of our own people nearby, carrying ammo."

"Then let me advise the boss, Sarge!" Said the soldier before grabbing his walkie-talkie radio and speaking into it.

"Papa Romeo Six, this is Outpost North One, over!... Papa Romeo Six, be advised that an ammo carrying party from the airfield is here, over!... Understood, Papa Romeo Six, out!"

The soldier then looked back at Meade, still not catching on that the dark shape besides the sergeant was a woman.

"The boss is giving orders to temporarily hold fire along the northern part of the knoll's perimeter, Sergeant. Your ammunition carriers can now proceed forward. Just be careful about the machinegun and mortar fire beating up on the knoll, though."

"Got that!" Said Meade before turning towards Ingrid. "You may bring your people forward, Major. I will be waiting here with my flashlight lit on red filter lens, to guide you."

"Excellent! I won't be long, Sergeant."

As Ingrid disappeared into the night, the shocked corporal looked at his sergeant.

"That was a girl, Sarge?"

"Yep!" Said the NCO, smiling in the dark. "Got myself close to a hundred women while at the airfield and decided to bring them back to add some fun here."

The two Marines in the foxhole just didn't know what to say to that or how to react.

Less than four minutes later, a long double parallel column of dark shapes started walking past the foxhole, watched with curiosity by the two Marine sentries as Sergeant Meade continued forward with Ingrid.

"I can't see any difference at night between these guys and ours." Said one of the Marines to his comrade. "The sergeant must have joked about them being girls."

"You wanna see my tits to make sure, Marine?" Replied a female voice out of the dark, followed by a chorus of giggles.

"Well, fuck me!" Said the shocked Marine.

"Don't have time for that now, Marine." Said the same smart-ass woman, causing more female giggles, which were actually sounding quite nervous, and for good reasons. The corporal in the foxhole looked at his comrade with disbelief.

"Wait till Major Bailey sees these girls: I think that he will then run out of profanities."

"What the fuck do you guys think that you are doing? Going out on a picnic? Keep your heads down and hurry up with that ammo!"

As if to stress his point, a bullet then whistled by Major Kenneth Bailey's ear. He hurriedly crouched down as more bullets with the message 'to whom it may concern' attached to them flew over his head, also prompting the approaching shapes in getting even lower than they already were. The first shape then stopped in front of Bailey and a teenage girl's voice sounded off in the night.

"Where do you want the machinegun ammunition and the grenades?"

"Wha..." Could only say Bailey at first. "Who the fuck are you?"



“Major Ingrid Dows, Commander of the 99<sup>th</sup> Composite Air Group.” Replied the girl’s voice. “And who the fuck are you?”

“Major Kenneth Bailey, Marine Raider Battalion. What the hell are you doing here, Dows?”

“Delivering ammo, I believe.” Responded Ingrid, sarcastic. “So, where do you want it?”

“Right at the machinegun positions, but we must hurry: I believe that those Japs are about to make another of their banzai charges. Get on your hands and knees, you and your ammo bearers, and follow me: I will lead you to each position.”

“Very well, Major.” Said Ingrid before yelling towards the double column of shapes behind her.

“Get on your hands and knees and follow me! I want one machinegun crew, two bullet carriers and two grenade carriers to stop besides each Marine machinegun we will encounter.”

“You brought machineguns with you?” Asked Bailey, surprised but also pleased.

“Yes! Since you were running out of belted ammunition, I figured that you were also in the process of burning up your gun barrels through overheating, which also meant that you could do with more machineguns. I brought eight M1919 air-cooled guns, along with their crews. Don’t worry about my girls: they know their weapons well. So, we’re going or not?”

“Uh, right!” Said Bailey, totally taken off balance by this. He thus started crawling towards the ridgeline of the knoll on all fours, followed by Ingrid and her close to one hundred women loaded with guns and ammunition. Bullets kept flying by and mortar bombs and howitzer shells exploded one after the other around the knoll, while the noise of machineguns firing nearly constantly was deafening. One woman behind Ingrid couldn’t keep in a whimper of terror when a shell exploded close by but, to her credit, she kept crawling forward with her load of machinegun ammunition on her back. The column finally arrived behind the western-most machinegun of the horseshoe-shaped Marine lines on the knoll. Ingrid then gave orders to her nearest machinegun crew.

“Set up your machinegun five yards apart from that machinegun and give them a cold barrel. You will cover them while they change barrels. The two first belted ammo carriers will empty their backpacks here. I want two grenade carriers to start distributing

grenades to the riflemen left and right of this gun, then stay in position until ordered to withdraw by me. Execute! The rest, continue behind me.”

As two women crawled out of the line and then put down their backpack to empty them of the ammunition boxes in them, three more women quickly took position in a shallow foxhole after pulling out the dead Marine in it, setting their Browning M1919A4 .30 caliber machinegun on its ground mount and then inserting a 250-round belt in it. The woman at the trigger then shouted at the Marine gun crew nearby.

“GIVE ME A BURST TO WHERE THE ENEMY IS, SO I CAN LOCATE THEM!”

The Marines were left stunned for a second on realizing these were women, then the shooter obliged, sweeping the base of the vegetation encroaching on the sides of the knoll.

“THE JAPS HAVE AT LEAST TWO MACHINEGUNS IN THERE. WAIT FOR THEIR MUZZLE FLASHES.”

That didn't take long, as the Japanese gunners then replied to the Marine fire, making the Americans atop the knoll lower their heads for a couple of seconds. The female gunner then pointed her machinegun at the muzzle flash of one of the Japanese guns and started firing short, aimed bursts. In the meantime, the third woman of the gun crew crawled to the Marine crew and handed them a cold gun barrel.

“HERE! I WILL COVER YOU WHILE YOU CHANGE YOUR BARREL.”

The woman then took a prone position along the ridgeline and pointed her M2 carbine. The Marine gunners, knowing that their original barrel was already probably damaged from overheating, thus losing precision, didn't waste time in unloading, then disassembling their weapon, pulling out the breach block, then the hot barrel to replace it. This procedure however took time, even for trained crews. The Marine gunners were still adjusting the barrel spacing of their weapon, a crucial step that could not be jumped over, when about forty Japanese soldiers ran out of the bushes less than sixty meters away and charged towards the knoll's top while screaming ferociously. The women facing this felt instant fear at seeing this army of dark shapes running towards them, bayonets glistening in the night, but survival instinct and training then took over, while a rush of adrenaline gave them the fortitude to stay and fight. The female machine gunner started sweeping bursts left to right and then back, close to the ground, while the other women fired their M2 carbines in semi-automatic mode. The Marines, who were still mostly armed with old bolt-action Springfield 1903 rifles, also fired at the Japanese but their volume of fire was much lower than that of the women of the 99<sup>th</sup> CAG. Now

having a fresh supply of grenades, the Marines in that section of the perimeter started as well throwing grenades down the gentle slope of the knoll. All this happened as American mortar bombs and shells kept falling around and the Japanese replied with mortar and light grenade launcher fire on the knoll top, while bullets flew both ways in the night.

Ingrid, still following Major Bailey at a crawl, was halfway through her distribution of machineguns and ammunition when the Japanese launched an all-out attack against the knoll, which was the critical point of the American defensive line. Looking back at the five machinegun crews and 26 ammo-carrying women still behind her, she shouted out as loud as she could over the din of the battle.

“TWO MACHINEGUNS AND HALF THE AMMO CARRIERS WILL STAY HERE AND HELP HOLD THE LINE. THE REST, FOLLOW ME AT A RUN! WE ARE GOING TO REINFORCE THE LEFT FLANK. LIEUTENANT DICKINSON, YOU STAY HERE TO LEAD OUR GIRLS.”

Bailey did not have time to object to that before Ingrid and 25 women got up and started running towards the eastern portion of the perimeter, disappearing into the night. Angie Dickinson, staying near Bailey, made sure that one woman in two stayed with her and hurriedly distributed them along the firing line, then got on a prone position and started firing her own M2 carbine. With the surviving rushing Japanese soldiers now less than forty meters away, Bailey didn't have much choice but himself taking a firing position with his Thompson submachine gun. The extra volume of fire brought by the women then made itself felt quickly, bowling down the Japanese soldiers by the dozen. The last surviving Japanese of that attack wave was shot down less than five meters from the Marine positions, a burst of automatic fire from Dickinson's M2 carbine hitting him in the guts. Bailey and more than a few Marines looked jealously at Dickinson's carbine as a relative calm fell on the knoll.

“This thing can fire on full automatic as well?” Asked Bailey, making the tall blonde nod.

“It can, Major. It fires a less powerful cartridge than the standard .30 caliber rifle round and has less range and penetration, but it is very handy and light. Here, have a look at it.”

Taking the M2 offered by Dickinson, Bailey examined it with intense interest for a few seconds, then gave it back.

"When I think that those assholes in the States said that we were too low on the priority list to get the new AR-41 assault rifles."

Lieutenant Colonel Merritt 'Red Mike' Edson chose that time to show up near Bailey, kneeling besides him to inspect the corpse-strewn slopes of the knoll.

"How are we holding here, Major?"

"The line held, Colonel, partly thanks to the machineguns and ammunition brought by the girls of the 99<sup>th</sup> CAG. Major Dows led them in just before the last attack." Edson gave a sharp look at Angie Dickinson, still prone nearby.

"You brought machineguns, Major?"

"Uh, sorry, Colonel, but I'm not Major Dows. Lieutenant Angie Dickinson, in command of the airfield defense platoon of the 99<sup>th</sup> CAG. Major Dows ran down to the left flank with extra machineguns and ammo. I can get her on my radio, though."

"Please do, Lieutenant. I will need to have a serious chat with her."

Angie eyed Edson with misgiving, not sure how to take that. She however didn't comment and grabbed her portable UHF radio, calling Ingrid and passing the message for her to show up in the center of the line. Once she was finished, Edson asked her another question.

"How many machineguns did you bring, Lieutenant?"

"Eight, Colonel, along with their regular crews and 46 ammo-carrying women."

Somehow, that didn't seem to please the Marine lieutenant colonel. Edson was known as an incredibly brave leader of men, but he also had the reputation of having an inner coldness to him. Right now, Angie could bet that Edson, an obviously old-fashioned Marine officer, probably resented having women mixed with his Marines in the frontlines. It would however be up to Ingrid to deal with that.

Ingrid showed up three minutes later, running out of the darkness before dropping on one knee besides Edson. She however didn't salute him as she presented herself.

"Major Ingrid Dows, 99<sup>th</sup> CAG, reporting in, Colonel."

"Follow me, Major!" Said coldly Edson before leading her to a shell crater twenty meters behind the forward positions. There, he pointed an index at Ingrid, nearly growling at her.

"I asked for extra ammunition, not for wannabe female infantrymen, Major Dows. What the hell were you thinking?"

Ingrid returned his stare, not intimidated one bit by the Marine officer.

“Colonel Edson, I brought my machineguns forward so that they could help temporarily take over as your own gunners took the time to put fresh barrels in their machineguns. As for my women firing at the Japanese, would you have preferred for me and my girls to run away just as the Japanese assaulted your positions? You may not care about what others think of my women, but I do and I was not going to have them pass as cowards when they were most needed. I was planning to stay here and use my portable radio to direct airstrikes on the Japanese in the morning, but if you really are taking offense at our presence here, then say it to my face and I will leave, Colonel.”

Edson, not having expected a teenage girl to talk back to him, was speechless for a moment before he spoke again, his tone a bit less rough this time.

“Very well, Major Dows. I accept your reasons for showing up with your machinegun crews, but this is not the place for women to stay. I however thank you for bringing that ammunition.”

“You’re welcome, Colonel. My women could carry back to the airfield your wounded men on our return trip, if that is agreeable to you.”

“That would be appreciated, Major.”

“Then, permission to dismiss and withdraw, Colonel.”

“Permission granted, Major.”

Many Marines, including Major Bailey, wondered what had been said between Ingrid and Lieutenant Colonel Edson when Ingrid started gathering back her machineguns and their crews, plus her ammunition carriers, and led them out of the position. Still guided by Sergeant Meade, Ingrid made a stop at the forward aid station of the Marine Raiders, with her now unencumbered ammunition carriers picking up the wounded Marines there that could be moved, carrying them either on stretchers or on top of ponchos held by their four corners. The column, carrying as well the two women killed during the battle and the four others that had been wounded, then disappeared into the night, heading North towards the airfield. Many of the Marines on the knoll watched the women go with a pang of the heart, their short presence having broken, even if only for a moment, their infernal cycle of stress, exhaustion and moments of sheer terror. The word soon went around the Marines of the division during the next days that the girls of the 99<sup>th</sup> CAG truly could be counted on when needed.

Alerted by Ingrid via radio, medical teams and ambulances were ready near the divisional command post to pick up the wounded when the column finally arrived there at close to four in the morning, as rain started to pour down again. Noting down the names of her four wounded women before they were carried away, Ingrid then did the sad job of breaking off one half of the identification tags worn by her two women killed in combat. With the two fighter pilots of the Witches killed in air combat in the preceding days, that made four women of her air group killed in action, plus four women wounded, and this in only four days on Guadalcanal. Ingrid fervently prayed that this was not an average rate that would prove steady here. Richard Tregaskis, the war correspondent, caught up with her as she was making her women get in the jeeps and truck that had brought them near the divisional command post before the start of their march.

“MAJOR! MAJOR! Could I have a word with you?”

Ingrid gave a tired look at the reporter.

“Mister, I am quite tired and need still to take care of a few things. Get in my jeep and we will talk on the way to my air group command post.”

The reporter gladly took her offer and jumped in the back of her jeep, then started to ask questions at once as the jeep started rolling.

“Were you able to deliver your ammunition to Colonel Edson’s men, Major?”

“We did, just in time as a matter of fact. The Japanese launched a fresh assault just after we arrived at the frontlines.”

“Did you and your women have to defend themselves then?”

“Yes!” Simply said Ingrid, obviously reluctant to tell much about that. “Look, Mister Tregaskis. We did our part tonight, but I have no desire to steal glory from our Marines, who are the real heroes here in Guadalcanal. I suggest that you ask the Marines of Colonel Edson about the fight, if you want the complete picture.”

“But you sustained casualties during that ammunition run, Major. Were they suffered at the frontlines or during the march?”

“At the frontlines. The amount of bullets and shells flying around was very heavy and Japanese fire was relentless. We however had to deliver that ammunition directly to the Marines in their foxholes, along with fresh machinegun barrels that were sorely needed.”

“Do you mind if I interview some of your women afterwards, Major?”

"Feel free to do so, but please understand that they badly need to rest after this, mister, so cut them some slack."

They soon arrive at the advanced command post of the 99<sup>th</sup> Air Group, a bunker-like affair solidly built out of coconut tree logs and covered with a thick layer of dirt. The moment she was inside, with Tregaskis behind her, Ingrid intercepted her air group's operations officer, Captain Evelyn Hudson.

"Evelyn, I want our attack helicopters ready to lift off at dawn to go lend support to Colonel Edson and his men. Have also two UH-2 ready to lift extra water, ammunition and rations and to pick up any wounded Marines on the ridge, under escort of our AH-4s. Are our women still on stand to around our lines?"

"Yes, Ingrid." Replied the veteran aviatrix, looking up from a map. "Be advised that our patrol EC-142 has detected a large group of probable Japanese warships apparently coming from Truk<sup>16</sup>. Anne Armstrong is presently cautiously getting closer to these ships to positively identify them visually with her long range telescopes, but the Japanese ships are heading this way and should arrive close to Guadalcanal after nightfall."

"Hum, either a resupply convoy or a bombardment force, or both. Has General Geiger been advised of this?"

"He got Anne's in-flight report at the same time as us. However, we can't really react until we know more about that force."

"Maybe, but I would prefer to be ready in advance for anything. Contact Espiritu Santo and tell Helen Richey to fly in here temporarily with her squadron, along with six of our C-142s loaded with reserves of armor-piercing bombs for multiple strikes, fuel and some of the ground crews of the Hell Raisers. I want our bombers to be ready to strike from Guadalcanal while that Japanese naval force is still well away. Teresa's squadron will also escort our bombers once we launch our strike package. I will go coordinate all this with General Geiger once we know more about the Japanese ships. We..."

The noise of a sudden firefight some distance away on the airfield then cut her off, prompting Ingrid in rushing out of the bunker to look outside. With Richard Tregaskis and Evelyn Hudson, she was then able to see an exchange of tracer bullets in the early

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<sup>16</sup> Truk : Main Japanese anchorage and naval base in the Central Pacific, East of the Philippines.

dawn, coming from a zone just west of Fighter One airstrip, well within the defensive perimeter of Henderson Field.

"SHIT! The Japanese have managed to infiltrate inside the airfield. If we don't eliminate those Japanese quickly, then we could pay a hell of a price for this. Evelyn, have our halftracks and our air defense platoon report here at the double, along with the volunteers who went with me on the ammunition run. We will try to contain and counter-attack those infiltrators."

"I'm on it!" Said quickly Hudson, disappearing inside the bunker. Tregaskis, who had his camera hanging from his neck, then tried his luck.

"Major, could I accompany you and your women on that counter-attack?"

"You can, mister, but please don't get in the way and try to stay low. COME ON GIRLS, GRAB SOME EXTRA AMMUNITION AND ASSEMBLE HERE AT ONCE!"

The eight halftracks mounting quad heavy machinegun mounts soon rumbled in, lining up in front of the command bunker, along with the twelve armed jeeps of the defense platoon and about fifty extra women on foot, all armed and wearing steel helmets and web gear. Tregaskis, feeling excitement grow in him, took a few pictures as Ingrid gave a few quick orders.

"LISTEN UP, GIRLS! THE MARINE ENGINEERS TO THE WEST OF OUR LINES ARE UNDER ATTACK BY JAPANESE INFILTRATORS. MY INTENTION IS TO LEAD A TWO-Pincer counter attack, with our armored halftracks in the front and our jeeps following closely behind them with some dismounted women. I want at least three extra women per halftrack who will fire their carbines from over the driver's cabin. The rest will ride our halftracks and jeeps at first until we are in position, then will dismount and use the halftracks as cover as we close in on the Japanese. Now, I want all of you to fix bayonets before we go."

That last order made Tregaskis stiffen with both surprise and skepticism: women on a bayonet assault against Japanese soldiers? That sounded totally preposterous, but the women present didn't seem unsettled by that, taking out their bayonets and fixing them without hesitation to their carbines, their expressions resolute. Tregaskis took a few more pictures of that scene, then boarded a jeep with Ingrid. The latter had the column split evenly in two before giving the order to roll towards the firefight still going on about



400 meters away. The war correspondent could also see in the light of dawn that more women were taking defensive positions between the firefight and the installations of the 99<sup>th</sup> Air Group, something that Tregaskis also photographed.

Ingrid gave on the radio the order for her two parallel columns to split as they approached the firefight, with one column then accelerating and doing a wide hook to the right, passing behind the defending Marine engineers, who seemed to have their hands full, in order to form a pincer opposite the column still led by Ingrid. With her force now deployed on both sides of a pocket about 500 meters wide and deep, Ingrid made her vehicles temporarily stop and most of her women, save the drivers and machine gunners, dismount and gather closely behind the four halftracks of her column, with the armed jeeps following a bit behind and between the halftracks. Ingrid herself dismounted, followed by Tregaskis, and took command of one of the squads of dismounted women hugging the rear of the armored vehicles.

“LISTEN UP, GIRLS! DON'T FORGET THAT WE HAVE FRIENDLIES ALL AROUND US AND IN FRONT OF US, ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THIS POCKET. BE CAREFUL ABOUT WHERE YOU SHOOT. ALSO, DO NOT ATTEMPT TO APPROACH A WOUNDED JAPANESE THAT STILL MOVES: HE WOULD PROBABLY GREET YOU WITH A GRENADE. IF A JAPANESE MOVES STILL, SHOOT HIM, THEN POKE HIM WITH YOUR BAYONET TO MAKE SURE THAT HE IS DEAD. THE QUAD MOUNT GUNNERS WILL FIRE ONLY FROM SHORT DISTANCES, TO AVOID SPREADING LOST BULLETS AROUND THE AIRFIELD. NOW, MOVE FORWARD AT A MARCH AND KEEP A STRAIGHT LINE!”

Seeing the opposite lines of halftracks and jeeps advance towards each other at a slow march speed, with squads of armed women in steel helmets following the halftracks as if they were trained infantrymen, was a surreal scene for Richard Tregaskis. He wondered how this would be viewed back in the United States afterwards, all the while taking picture after picture of the battle. Some bullets were starting to ricochet against the armor of the halftracks, while the women standing over the drivers' cabs returned slow, aimed fire. The group of Japanese infiltrators, who seemed quite numerous, quickly found itself being squeezed by the opposite lines of halftracks, with the Marine engineers blocking the east side of their box and with men from the Marine divisional elements closing the western side. Seeing that they were trapped, the Japanese, led by a saber-wielding officer, lay down in the long grass and poured rifle fire and some machinegun

fire at the Americans surrounding them. They were however heavily outnumbered, now that the women of the 99<sup>th</sup> CAG had closed their box, and their bolt-action rifles provided much less firepower than the automatic carbines and medium machineguns of the women. With the pincers soon only 200 meters distant from each other and with their numbers dwindling steadily under the deluge of bullets, the Japanese finally decided to launch an ultimate suicide charge on the pincer commanded by Ingrid, rising from the tall grass and yelling savagely while rushing forward with their bayonets fixed on their long ARISAKA rifles. Ingrid then shouted out an order that Tregaskis didn't understand.

“BUZZSAW! FIRE AT WILL!”

Still staying behind the protection of their halftracks, the dismounted women then started firing their carbines, but not directly at their front, instead shooting up the Japanese rushing the halftracks on each side of their own vehicle. That created murderous, supporting cross fires while leaving the women protected from fire coming from the enemy rushing their own vehicle. Only a very few Japanese soldiers managed to get close to the halftracks, but they could only throw a couple of grenades before being gunned down mercilessly. By now, Tregaskis knew that he had the materiel for a truly sensational article and he photographed Ingrid Dows' women as they finally spread out and deployed in extended line on each side of the halftracks, to then advance and finish the Japanese soldiers, shooting from point blank and then poking with their bayonets each Japanese they encountered in the long grass. Ingrid Dows herself took part in the action, finishing off the Japanese officer that had led the sixty or so infiltrators and then picking up the saber and scabbard of the officer as trophies. Once the two pincers had joined up in the middle of the field, Ingrid had her force redeploy in a long extended line before slowly walking towards the divisional command post to flush out any remaining Japanese survivors. They actually encountered a couple of hidden snipers that cost them three women killed or wounded, but their return fire quickly flushed out and killed those snipers. The line of women finally arrived at the Marine divisional command post, where Major General Vandegrift greeted Ingrid with a handshake and a grim smile.

“That was a great job, Major. Those infiltrators could have caused us a lot of damage, especially to our aircraft, if not quickly eliminated.”

“Thank you, General. How are the Marines of Colonel Edson doing?”

“They sustained a few more attacks and are utterly exhausted but I just pushed forward the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 5<sup>th</sup> Marines, to relieve them. This was however a very close call.”

"Indeed, General! We definitely need some reinforcements here, and quickly."

"Well, we may get some soon, Major: Admiral Turner has promised me to send today by sea the 7<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment from Espiritu Santo. If all goes well, it will arrive here tomorrow."

"And what about that Japanese naval force detected by my patrol plane, General?"

"We still have no confirmation of its composition, Major. Once we know more, then General Geiger will call a command meeting to decide how to deal with it."

"Then, know that I already ordered my medium bomber squadron to fly in with extra reserves of bombs and fuel, so that we could attack that force well before it gets here. This is not meant to disparage your Marine and Navy flyers, but my planes have a much greater range than their SBDs and WILDCATs and we should fully use that advantage."

"Only an idiot would oppose the use of that advantage, Major. I can only applaud your sense of initiative. You better get your women to take some rest now: the rest of the day may be no picnic and you will need them to be fresh for this afternoon and evening."

"Yes, General!" Simply said Ingrid, careful not to salute before leaving and leading her women back to her lines. Vandegrift watched the women go, Richard Tregaskis at his side.

"Decidedly, this group of women keeps beating down my preconceptions about girls in wars. That counter-attack of theirs was textbook tactics, both in plan and execution."

### **13:38 (Solomons Time)**

#### **Air operations building ('The Pagoda')**

#### **Henderson Field**

Brigadier General Geiger nodded once as Helen Richey was dropped off with Ingrid Dows at 'The Pagoda' by a jeep, her medium bomber squadron having arrived ten minutes earlier with six RP-38Ns and six C-142s loaded with stocks of bombs and fuel.

"I am happy to be able to finally meet you, Captain Richey. Let's go inside and start this command meeting."

Entering behind Geiger and Ingrid, the petite Helen Richey found ten other officers, all of the rank of major or above except for Captains Teresa James and Dorothy Avery, waiting in the operations center of the building. The male officers present eyed her for a moment, she being a newcomer on Guadalcanal, then returned their attention to Brigadier General Geiger as he spoke up.

“Ladies and gentlemen, we received one hour ago a report from the patrol EC-142E of the 99<sup>th</sup> Composite Air Group confirming the composition of the Japanese armada heading this way. Unfortunately, the news are not good, as that armada is proving to be a bombardment force, rather than simply a resupply force of destroyers and transports. Our patrol plane was able to visually identify the battleships NAGATO, HIEI, KONGO and HARUNA, escorted by the heavy cruisers CHOKAI and TAKAO and by sixteen destroyers. A second Japanese force of eight unidentified ships is following that armada from ninety miles behind, too far to permit visual recognition. However, the presence of six aircraft flying around that formation indicates that it probably includes an aircraft carrier. That carrier may in turn be tasked to provide air cover to the forward enemy armada.”

“Uh, General, how could this EC-142 patrol plane detect those planes from such a distance?” Asked Lieutenant Commander Harold Larsen, the boss of the Navy VT-8 torpedo plane squadron.

“Since you just arrived yesterday in Guadalcanal, I can understand that you never heard about the EC-142E, Commander Larsen: that type of plane is still considered secret. I will let Major Dows give you the characteristics of that plane.” Taking over temporarily from Geiger, Ingrid spoke up while looking at Larsen, a solidly-built naval aviator.

“The two Fairchild EC-142E WAVEMASTER electronic reconnaissance aircraft of my air group are in fact the first two pre-series planes of their type and are basically flying radar and radio stations with extensive command and coordination facilities and equipment. They have both surface and air search radars, plus radio intercept and direction-finding equipment and infrared night vision equipment. They have a very large autonomy and can stay on station for over ten hours or more. Their electronic equipment is extremely advanced and still highly classified. Unfortunately, these two planes are the only ones of their type in the whole Pacific and we may not get more of them for many more months. I will ask you and your pilots to refrain from mentioning the

existence of those planes to others outside of Guadalcanal: they are truly one of our hidden aces against the Japanese right now.”

“Uh, I understand.”

Geiger then took over from Ingrid, pointing at the map of the Solomons behind him.

“The enemy forward armada is presently 370 miles to the Northwest of Guadalcanal, heading straight for us, and will thus arrive within the combat radius of our SBD dive bombers only after nightfall. The intentions of the Japanese are obviously to sail to Henderson Field and bombard it under the cover of the night, then withdraw out of range before dawn. If those four battleships manage to arrive here and use their heavy guns against us, then this airfield will be as good as destroyed, along with all the planes we have here on the ground. We thus can’t afford to wait before trying to stop them.”

“But, sir,” cut in Lieutenant Commander Louis Kern, of the Navy VS-3 dive bomber squadron, “you just said that they are beyond the combat range of our dive bombers. You are not planning for one-way missions, are you?”

Geiger gave Kern a critical look before answering him.

“I am not the type of commander to sacrifice his men and planes like that, Commander. What I intend to do is to use the planes of the 99<sup>th</sup> CAG, which have superior combat range, for the first attack waves, along with the TBF torpedo bombers of the VT-8.”

Geiger, like Ingrid, frowned on seeing a number of the male officers present apparently react negatively to that decision.

“If any of you resent this decision because it will give the 99<sup>th</sup> CAG the opportunity to hit first, then I have this to say: I intend to use these female aviators simply so that we can strike these enemy ships before darkness falls, not because of some favoritism towards them. If you still disagree with that decision, then feel free to ask to be relieved of command right now. This is not the time for ego trips, gentlemen: our airfield and the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division are at risk of being obliterated by these big naval guns if they ever come close to our shores. Now, for our attack plan.”

Geiger then pointed at a location at sea well to the North of Guadalcanal.

“Our electronic reconnaissance plane is presently flying orbits around that point, far enough away from Guadalcanal to stay out of range of the enemy while being able to keep the Japanese ships and planes inside radar range. It will help guide our planes to the best position possible prior to attack and will also warn us if that possible carrier launches fighters at our planes. Our first air attack will be in two waves: first, most of the

P-38 fighters of Captain James will execute strafing passes against the Japanese ships, both to take out as many of their anti-aircraft guns as possible and to keep the Japanese attention at low level. Following shortly behind them will be the B-25 medium bombers of Captain Richey, which will execute dive bombing attacks. Following in third wave, and with the enemy ships hopefully damaged and slowed down by then, will be the six TBFs of Commander Larsen, which will execute torpedo attack runs. The six reconnaissance P-38s of Captain Avery, which will be armed with two bombs each for this occasion, will precede closely the TBFs to draw enemy fire away from our torpedo planes. Once all ordnance is expended, then our planes will come back to Henderson Field, rearm and refuel as quickly as possible and launch a second strike. With luck, we could launch a total of three attacks before nightfall. In view of the nature of the enemy ships, we may just need that many attacks to sink them or damage them enough to force them to turn around. If the battleships are still on course after dark, then our patrol plane will launch flares to illuminate them for night attacks by our SBDs. Our WILDCATs will be held in reserve but will launch if any Japanese plane shows up within 300 miles of Henderson Field. Since the planes of the 99<sup>th</sup> CAG are already fueled up and armed, they will depart right after this meeting is over, along with Commander Larsen's torpedo planes. Does anyone have any questions? No? Then either go to your planes or prepare yourselves for night missions. The first wave will take off at two O'clock. Good luck to all!"

As the gathering broke up, Lieutenant Commander Larsen went to Captain Dorothy Avery, touching her shoulder to attract her attention. A rather plain-looking woman in her mid to late twenties, she looked professional enough to Larsen as she was noting down the day's air radio frequencies and call signs.

"Excuse me, Captain, but since you are going to work closely with my planes, I would like to know a bit more about your own planes. I know that they are reconnaissance variants of the P-38, but what exactly can you carry as armament?"

Avery nodded once while eyeing him cautiously: she had not liked the general feeling coming up to now from the male pilots of Henderson Field.

"Well, apart from a complete battery of high resolution cameras, my RP-38Ns are armed with two fixed heavy machineguns as defensive armament. They also have four under-wing pylons that can accommodate either bombs, fuel drop tanks or rocket pods.

Today, my six planes will each carry two 1000-pound armor piercing bombs, plus two rocket pods with a total of twelve five-inch rockets.”

“That is quite a combat load for a fighter-bomber, Captain.” Said Larsen, truly impressed. “How are you planning to make your attack?”

“My planes will first precede yours by a mere hundred yards. Then, when we will be in sight of the enemy ships and flying near the sea, I will accelerate to take some distance with your planes and will execute what we call a pop-up and dive attack, two planes at a time. We will fire our rockets first, then drop our bombs from mast-level. Hopefully, the anti-aircraft gunners on the battleship we will target will concentrate on my RP-38s and will forget your TBFs.”

Larsen felt a pang as the woman said that matter-of-factly, as if she spoke about a routine training mission. She must however have known about what kind of firepower her planes were going to face.

“That sounds like a fair plan, Captain. I intend to concentrate all my torpedoes on the leading battleship: dividing six torpedo bombers on two targets may only results in misses.”

“I agree! The lead battleship it will be, Commander. I will see you back on our return from mission.”

They then parted with a handshake, with Larsen going to brief his pilots.

At two O'clock, both Henderson Field and Fighter One strips came alive, with planes after planes taking off and then circling overhead while waiting for others to join them. Once in formation in the cloud-covered sky, the 49 aircraft then headed Northwest at medium altitude towards the approaching Japanese armada, followed by the eyes of the Marines on the ground. General Vandegrift was part of the onlookers, standing besides Geiger.

“May God help them. If those battleships succeed in breaking through, then this airfield will be as good as toast. What is precisely the maximum combat radius of your dive bombers, Roy?”

“About 260 miles if we limit their bomb load to a single 1000-pound bomb, or 200 miles with a full bomb load. I have ordered my men to keep to a single bomb per plane: we may need our SBDs to deliver at least one attack before sunset.”

“A good move indeed.” Said Vandegrift before turning to face Geiger and lowering his voice. “Roy, I was able to watch the women of the 99<sup>th</sup> CAG as they were

loading bombs on Dows' planes. They were competent and professional and are on average quite strong for women, but they may need to rearm and refuel those planes two times or more in the next four hours. Dows was too proud of her women to admit it, but those women are not as strong as your own male armorers and mechanics and may end up totally exhausted by sunset. Could your men lend them a hand when needed, and that without rubbing those women's noses in the mud?"

Geiger nodded in understanding, as he had been able to watch the ground crews of the 170<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron at work for a few days now. Putting in place under the wing of a fighter a 500-pound bomb normally took four strong mechanics to pick up and raise such a bomb, but it took at least six women to raise the same load, and that while straining. To the credit of the female armorers of the 99<sup>th</sup> CAG, they had developed a technique using a special bomb cradle that allowed up to ten women to gang up for that work, but loading 1000-pound bombs repeatedly was certainly going to quickly drain physically those women, however proud or resolute they were.

"I will speak with the chief-armorer of my dive bomber squadrons, General. They will anyway be mostly inactive until sunset, if our SBDs ever get a chance to take off today. Besides, it is high time that all of our people learn to work as one team, be they Marine Corps, Navy or Army."

"You know, Roy, this may sound impossible, but that young Dows showed me more tricks about joint operations during a mere four days than what I learned before about them in my whole career. That Nancy Laplante must have been a first class tactician and strategist and certainly taught Dows well."

"She certainly had quite a reputation, General. From the little I heard, it seems that the British are doing fairly well with their own female aviators. These women of the 99<sup>th</sup> CAG have on their part more than proved themselves worthy, both in the air and on the ground."

"My Marines are certainly in awe of them, at least among the junior ranks. I had expected quite a lot of disciplinary problems with these women here on Guadalcanal, but I have been agreeably surprised up to now. If anything, my average Marine has become better-behaved since the coming of these women."

Vandegrift was then silent for a moment before speaking further.

"Roy, just between you and me, what do you think of that young Ingrid Dows, I mean professionally?"



“Well, she certainly has proved up to now to be very competent as a unit commander, apart from being an absolutely first class fighter pilot. While outrageously young for her present rank, she showed herself more mature than most of my own officers. However, what truly puts her apart is her way of thinking. She constantly keeps the whole picture in mind and acts accordingly, contrary to most officers, who can only think in terms of their own service or unit. She also seems to understand well the enemy, another valuable point that helps her in planning successful operations. Overall, I would say that she is more than worthy of her present rank and command level.”

“Worthy enough to be promoted to the rank of lieutenant colonel?”

That got Geiger to stare in shock and surprise at his superior.

“Sir, you do realize that Dows is only nineteen years old. Our other senior officers, who all have many years or even decades of seniority over her, would go bonkers if she gets promoted.”

That got him a resolute stare from Vandegrift.

“Let’s be frank for a moment, Roy. You know as well as me that simple seniority means nothing in terms of true competence as a combat leader. Just last night, Edson had to relieve of command one of his company commanders, a major with over twenty years of service, because the man proved to be a dud when the going got rough. You and I also know plenty of senior officers, even of general or admiral rank, with decades of service time, who have proved to be duds in this war. Hell, some of those duds are still in the chain of command above us!”

Vandegrift didn’t have to mention the said duds by name, as Geiger knew who he was thinking about. Vice Admiral Fletcher, until his departure from the theatre at the end of August with his damaged SARATOGA, had proved totally opaque to joint operations, being fixated solely on the safety of his ships and caring not one minute about the fate of Vandegrift’s Marines, despite the fact that he was supposed to be in overall charge of the amphibious operation to take Guadalcanal. Another dud was Admiral Ghormley, the overall commander in the South Pacific theatre, who had never set foot yet on Guadalcanal and who in fact never left his shipboard office in Noumea. Worse, Ghormley had proven to be a defeatist, lacking aggressiveness and constantly worrying about the enemy’s moves instead of devising strategies to take the initiative. The succession of humiliating naval defeats at the hands of the Japanese around Guadalcanal had also revealed quite a few more duds in command at sea, while

Vandegrift had on his part to get rid of a few duds in his division at the start of the campaign.

“Well, I can see your point, General, but promoting Dows would still raise quite a stink.”

“But you would not personally object to her promotion, if considering only her merit and competence in combat, right? You know as well as me that an air group is normally commanded by no less than a lieutenant colonel, and often by a full colonel. Your own squadrons are all commanded by majors or lieutenant commanders, while the commander of your Marine Air Group 23 is a full colonel.”

Geiger couldn't find anything to reply to that and simply shrugged his shoulders.

“General, you may be right, but that point is quite moot: we both lack the authority to promote Dows, even if we wanted to.”

“But we certainly can recommend such a promotion, Roy. If the 99<sup>th</sup> CAG manages to turn around that enemy armada today, then it will become hard indeed for anyone to deny the merits of that girl and of her women.”

On that last declaration, Vandegrift returned in his command dugout, leaving Geiger alone to ponder his words.

### **15:47 (Solomons Time)**

#### **Torpedo Squadron 8**

#### **332 miles northwest of Guadalcanal**

Lieutenant Commander Harold Larsen felt both a mix of excitement and fear as he pushed his Grumman TBF-1 AVENGER torpedo bomber into a shallow dive, following the six RP-38Ns of Captain Avery. They were now in sight of the main Japanese armada, less than twelve kilometers away, and were going down to sea level for their final approach. From the smoke rising from the four battleships and the multitude of small black clouds marking the explosion of hundreds of anti-aircraft shells in the sky above the Japanese ships, it was evident to Larsen that the battle was already quite heated. Yet, contrary to his past experience in prior naval battles, the radio frequency of their air armada was nearly empty, denoting an impressive level of radio discipline by the women of the 99<sup>th</sup> CAG that would have put to shame most naval aviators he knew. Most of the talking was in fact done by the female air controller aboard the EC-140E orbiting about thirty kilometers away and directing the various

elements of the armada from Guadalcanal. Captain Avery had herself simply acknowledged the message from the EC-140 giving her a final attack heading and distance to the enemy ships before leading her planes towards the surface of the sea.

As Larsen and his pilots leveled their torpedo bombers at an altitude of less than fifty meters, the squadron commander saw with a pinch of the heart a long flame appear in the sky, denoting a plane that had been hit. That plane, too far to be identified by type, fell down in a steep dive but, to Larsen's shock, its pilot chose not to parachute out and instead directed its doomed plane into crashing in the superstructures of the battleship NAGATO. Still shaken by that vision, Larsen then concentrated on lining up his plane on a torpedo run against the starboard side of the NAGATO. Up to now, their plan seems to be succeeding in distracting the Japanese gunners away from his torpedo bombers and from the RP-38Ns of Captain Avery. The attacks by the P-38s and B-25s also seemed to have hit hard the four battleships, with thick black smoke denoting fires onboard all four and also on the two heavy cruisers of the Japanese armada. A bomb dropped by a diving B-25 struck and exploded on the NAGATO as the six RP-38Ns and six TBF-1s were coming within five kilometers of the battleship while still skimming the sea. Avery then gave a short radio message as she accelerated with her planes away from Larsen's torpedo bombers.

“Fox Two, boosting now on final approach.”

Much faster than the AVENGERS and accelerating like dragsters, the RP-38Ns quickly put hundreds of meters between them and the TBFs, heading directly towards the NAGATO. In the process, they also split into three pairs that then fell behind one another, each pair 200 meters behind the other and with Larsen's planes a full kilometer behind the last pair. The Japanese gunners on the battleship finally spotted the approaching planes at a distance of three kilometers and started targeting them with light automatic cannon fire. The leading pair of RP-38 then abruptly pulled up when two kilometers away from its target, to dive back down nearly immediately at a shallow angle, the NAGATO in its sights. Tracer 25mm shells flew all around them as the two RP-38Ns launched their five-inch rockets from a range of 1,300 meters. Most of the 24 rockets hit their target, either in the superstructures or against the hull, exploding with a firepower equivalent to the main armament salvo from six destroyers and chewing up the already damaged superstructures, killing a number of the anti-aircraft gunners. The RP-38Ns then released their pairs of 1000-pound bombs from less than 600 meters before

starting to pull up, still pursued by cannon fire. Larsen nearly applauded when three of the four bombs hit and exploded, projecting metal debris and even a twin five-inch gun turret in the air. Before the Japanese could recover from that strike, the second pair of RP-38Ns launched its rockets, then its bombs. As two of the bombs exploded inside the battleship, one of the RP-38Ns received at least one direct hit from a 25mm cannon and broke up in pieces that then crashed into the superstructures of its target. Larsen clenched his teeth as the third pair of RP-38Ns launched its rockets: he was now less than one kilometer away from the NAGATO and had not been targeted yet by the Japanese gunners. The RP-38Ns of Captain Avery had thus done their job splendidly up to now, opening the way for his own torpedo bombers.

“Tango Leader to all Tango call signs: push forward and release your fish from no more than 600 yards away.”

Giving the example, Larsen resolutely kept his sight on the NAGATO while opening his bomb bay and arming his torpedo. Ignoring the tracer shells now starting to fly past him, he waited until he was less than 500 yards away before pushing the release button, pulling his plane up as soon as he felt his torpedo being released. As his plane sped away after overflying the forward decks of the NAGATO, Larsen’s ventral gunner screamed triumphantly in the intercom.

“A HIT! OUR FISH HIT AT THE LEVEL OF THE SECOND FORWARD MAIN TURRET!”

Larsen yelled his own joy at that, with his ventral gunner soon giving him even more reasons to cheer.

“TWO...THREE...FOUR...WE GOT FOUR TORPEDOES IN THAT SUCKER!”

Overjoyed, Larsen made sure that all of his planes were in one piece and following him, then activated his radio.

“Home plate, this is Tango Leader. I confirm four torpedo hits on the NAGATO, on top of multiple bomb and rocket hits. Am now returning to base, over.”

“We acknowledge, Tango Leader. Good job!” Was the answer from Henderson Field. Elated by his success, Larsen then looked around him as the planes of the armada flew back with him towards Guadalcanal, counting them. He felt a pang of the heart when he realized that one B-25, one P-38N and one RP-38N were missing, while another B-25 was flying on one engine. The enemy however seemed to be in a much worse shape, with all four battleships clearly hit hard and with the NAGATO listing

already heavily and about to sink. Still, there was a lot more left to do before this day was over.

### **19:18 (Solomons Time)**

#### **Aviators lines, Henderson Field**

#### **Guadalcanal**

Utterly exhausted by the nervous tension of the day and positively starving, Harold Larsen sat down with his five surviving aircrews in the tent that served as their squadron mess, ready to eat his supper of corned beef and rice. They had flown a total of two missions before the Sun had set, but the enemy armada had now turned back, limping away from Guadalcanal and making a night attack mission unnecessary. The battleships NAGATO, HIEI and HARUNA had now been confirmed as sunk by the patrol EC-142E, along with the heavy cruiser TAKAO. The battleship KONGO and the heavy cruiser CHOKAI, heavily damaged, were now slowly returning towards Truk Atoll, escorted by their destroyers. At their present speed, they would still be within air strike range by next morning, and Larsen was firmly resolved in being part of that next mission. Even now, the Cactus Air Force, as the air units of Guadalcanal called themselves, could already claim a very significant victory. That victory had however come at a price. Two B-25s, one P-38, one RP-38 and one TBF had been lost, with a further three B-25s and two P-38s also damaged. Fifteen women and three men were dead and another five aviators had been wounded in the course of the two attacks. While the WILDCATS of the Cactus Air Force had not participated in the anti-shipping missions, they had their piece of the action today when a mixed force of Japanese seaplane fighters had brazenly attacked Henderson Field at twilight, with the WILDCATS shooting down six of the seaplane fighters while the anti-aircraft gunners of the 99<sup>th</sup> CAG had destroyed another five aircraft. More importantly, the threat of naval bombardment against Henderson Field had been beaten back, potentially preventing heavy losses in both lives and equipment and preserving the airfield's capacity as a frontline air base. Those news had already been sent by coded radio messages up the chain of command to Noumea, Brisbane and Pearl Harbor.

Larsen was eating quietly from his canteen when Richard Tregaskis showed up in the tent with his ubiquitous camera and notebook. Larsen nodded in welcome and showed him one of the empty, overturned crates that served as chairs.

“Good evening, Mister Tregaskis. Please, have a seat.”

“Thank you, Commander Larsen. Do you mind if I ask you and your crews a few questions about the missions you flew today?”

“Not at all! Shoot!”

The war correspondent then started asking a series of questions about the actions of the day, to which Larsen answered as honestly as he could. He however didn't mention the presence or role of the EC-142E, which was still a sensitive military secret. Tregaskis then asked one question that made Larsen hesitate.

“So, Commander Larsen, which of those sunken ships will your squadron claim?... Commander?”

“We did it as one fighting unit, mister. We will share those claims with the 99<sup>th</sup> CAG.”

With the Japanese stunned and shocked by their heavy losses of the last few days, at sea, in the air and on the ground, the next couple of weeks were relatively quiet for the Americans on Guadalcanal. The euphoria of the naval defeat of the Japanese, completed by the sinking of the KONGO and CHOKAI the next morning, was however quickly tempered one day later by the sinking of the carrier USS WASP, torpedoed by a Japanese submarine. That same submarine also managed to torpedo and damage the new battleship SOUTH DAKOTA and one destroyer, the latter sinking during its return trip to Hawaii for repairs. The women of the 99<sup>th</sup> CAG could rightly celebrate after their successes obtained since their arrival on Guadalcanal, but the mood was not in it: the price they had to pay for those successes stung too much.

### **10:14 (Solomons Time)**

**Wednesday, September 30, 1942 'C'**

**Cactus Air Force air operations building ('The Pagoda')**

**Henderson Field, Guadalcanal**

Admiral Chester Nimitz, like Lieutenant General Henry Arnold, took his service cap off and shook it to try to remove some of the rainwater soaking it.

"Well, I see that the tales about the marvelous local weather were not exaggerated, General Vandegrift."

Vandegrift, who had greeted Nimitz and Arnold with Brigadier General Geiger and most of the senior staff of the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division, smiled at that.

"Let's say that we are not in danger of suffering a drought, Admiral. I have assembled my pilots and my unit commanders in the pilots' ready room. Would you like to meet them now?"

"I will, later on, but me and General Arnold need first to speak with you and General Geiger in private."

Vandegrift, like Geiger, tensed up at those words: this could only mean some kind of bad news.

"As you wish, Admiral. We can go in General Geiger's office for that. Please follow me."

The office in question turned out to be a nearly claustrophobic room sparsely furnished with a small table and a few rickety chairs, with only maps on the walls providing some décor. Once all four had sit, Nimitz thought over his words first before speaking in a cautious tone.

"General Vandegrift, let me first say that your Marines and the aviators here have been doing a bang-up job in Guadalcanal and that everyone in Washington knows and appreciates that. I know that not everything has gone well on the part of the Navy in the last two months, but be assured that I am working on improving that aspect of our operations in the Solomons. This said, I am pained to have to tell you that you can't expect significant reinforcements here, be it in terms of manpower or new aircraft, for the foreseeable future. The best you can expect is individual replacements in men and aircraft as needed to keep up your present strength."

"But, why, Admiral?" Asked Vandegrift, both shocked and angry. "My men did more already than anything that could be expected of them. Surely, the country could spare at least a couple more regiments and squadrons to help us consolidate our hold on Guadalcanal."

"Unfortunately, it can't, not now at the least." Replied Nimitz, sounding and looking most dejected. "News of what I am going to tell you have been severely censored, both in Great Britain and in the United States, but our forces have recently suffered a disastrous setback in Europe. The combined Allied forces in Europe, mostly spurred on by Prime Minister Churchill, had been secretly preparing for an invasion of

Denmark for months, in order to gain a firm toehold in Continental Europe. That invasion, using liberated Norway as a launch platform, was initiated two weeks ago under strict secrecy. Unfortunately, due to a number of reasons I was told little about, that invasion turned into a disastrous failure, with our forces pushed back into the sea with heavy losses following a ferocious German counter-attack. The remains of our invasion force then retreated back to Norway and Great Britain, where it is now licking its wounds. The news of that defeat have not been published yet, so I would appreciate if you made sure that none of your men write home about that.”

As Vandegrift and Geiger looked at Nimitz with shock, Henry Arnold cut in, somber.

“If I may add on that, I was told in more detail in Washington about that failed invasion. It seems that the main causes of our defeat include a more powerful than expected German air and ground reaction, poor top leadership on the American ground side and the utter greenness of the American troops involved. I am thus sad to say that our own forces didn’t shine in Denmark. I have however started to study the lessons of that defeat with General Marshall and we are resolved in correcting the deficiencies identified in that campaign. Unfortunately, Europe is still more than ever considered a priority theater and we are presently scrapping together all the units and equipment available in the United States in order to replace our losses in Europe. This means that no sizeable units will reinforce the Pacific in the coming months...at the least.”

“So, we are going to reinforce a failure rather than a success.” Said bitterly Vandegrift, making Arnold nod his head.

“You are unfortunately right about that, General. However, nothing can be done at our level to change that: political decisions have been taken and we received our marching orders from the President.”

“But,” objected Roy Geiger forcefully, “half of the aviators I led to this island five weeks ago are already dead or were evacuated for wounds or diseases. The remainder is exhausted, raked by malaria and other tropical diseases and fly planes that are nearly falling apart. My freshest air unit, the 99<sup>th</sup> CAG, has already lost in its first twenty days in Guadalcanal over thirty women killed or wounded, along with seven of its planes. We will need relief units here before the end of the year, or you may find nothing left of us by then.”

Arnold eyed Geiger at once with interest.



"And how would you characterize the performance of the 99<sup>th</sup> CAG up to now, General Geiger? I did receive a number of reports on these women, but I would like your honest opinion directly from you."

Geiger looked directly Arnold into the eyes as he answered him without hesitation.

"The performance in combat of these women have been nothing short of outstanding, General. By themselves, they have been credited with destroying close to a hundred enemy aircraft in the air and sank directly or helped sink a total of four battleships, two heavy cruisers, one light cruiser and seven destroyers, plus a collection of coastal barges and transport ships. They also did their part in defending the perimeter of this airfield, engaging in ground combat and giving a surprising account of themselves on two occasions. Apart from Major Dows, who has proved to be a true tactical genius concerning air and joint operations, six of her women have become aces and the rest of her pilots are at least on par with my Marine pilots. However, like my other air units, the 99<sup>th</sup> CAG has suffered its share of losses and will need at the least some individual reinforcements in order to plug the holes in its ranks."

"That at least can be done, General Geiger." Replied Arnold in an accommodating tone. "So, you still stand by your last report recommending that Dows and at least her squadron commanders be promoted to better reflect their command level and performances?"

"I do, General!"

Arnold and Nimitz then exchanged a knowing look before the head of the Army Air Corps looked back at Geiger and Vandegriff.

"I do agree with your assessment of Dows and of her women, but you have no idea of the stink your recommendation for promoting Dows raised in Washington. Many of my senior staff officers and other officers in the Army are positively fuming at the thought of a nineteen year-old lieutenant colonel. I won't even talk about the sneers it raised among the Navy staff in Washington, but Admiral Nimitz could probably tell you more about that. However, contrary to all these naysayers, General Marshall, Admiral King, Admiral Nimitz and the President now know something that me and General MacArthur have known now for months, something that decided me to promote Dows, with the President's approval."

"And what could that be, General Arnold?" Asked Vandegriff, intrigued. Arnold looked at him in the eyes while responding in a sober tone.

"While physically very young, Dows was endowed in 1941, at the same time as her adoptive mother, Nancy Laplante, with the ability of remembering her past incarnations, which cover 7,000 years and 72 lives. She is in fact more mature than all of us put together. I did test her about that, to make sure that she was not making this up. Experts historians and linguists interviewed her in front of me and certified that she was proficient in over thirty languages they knew, including Ancient Egyptian, Phoenician, Aramaic, Celt, Persian, Mandarin Chinese, plus many other languages they themselves couldn't speak or decipher, just identify. When I asked Dows about how she got that fantastic ability, she said that it came from a higher spiritual entity...in essence, God. I will however ask you and General Geiger to keep this secret to yourselves, as only the highest members of the armed services and of the national leadership now know about this."

Vandegrift and Geiger were left speechless for a moment before the former could say something.

"That...that is positively incredible, General Arnold. It however explains many things about this young Dows that had left me perplex. This certainly supports my opinion that she should be promoted."

"And she will be, along with her squadron commanders and many of her other women and male staff members." Replied Arnold, smiling for the first time during their conversation. "Me and Admiral Nimitz have also brought a few medals for these women and for your men, which we will distribute once we are finished here."

While happy at that announcement, Vandegrift was still deeply resentful of the news about the lack of significant reinforcements to come and said so.

"This is all nice, General Arnold, but without some reinforcements and relief units, my division and our air units here will soon fall apart. This notion of giving everything to the European theater at the expense of the Pacific is both myopic and a strategic nonsense."

Nimitz then took on him to reply to Vandegrift.

"I more than agree with you, General, believe me, but Washington decided otherwise. What I intend to do about this, though, is to move some units from within this theatre and send them here to relieve your division in the coming months. I will do the same with Marine and Navy squadrons presently dispersed around the South Pacific. I intend to speak with Admiral Ghormley in the next days to discuss those unit transfers."

"If I may say so, Admiral, we have asked for such unit transfers many times in the recent past but Admiral Ghormley wouldn't listen to us, instead insisting on the need to occupy Ndeni with the few reserve forces left to us."

"Well, this time he will listen, General, as I have the backing of Admiral King on this. The need to reinforce Guadalcanal is now too evident, even in Washington." As Vandegrift nodded in satisfaction, Arnold spoke up again.

"In terms of Army aviation units, I unfortunately cannot send new units now because of the calls to plug the holes in Europe. However, I have another option left to me: to expand the existing 99<sup>th</sup> CAG. Believe it or not, but my air commanders in Europe refused to contemplate integrating female aviation units to their formations. I thus now have a relative surplus of well trained, experienced female flyers in the United States presently being wasted away on simple airplane ferrying. Well, my mind is made to use those surplus women to turn the 99<sup>th</sup> CAG into an air wing. I can thus ship to Guadalcanal within two months one extra fighter squadron with P-38Ns, one extra B-25NG bomber squadron, two more EC-142E electronic reconnaissance aircraft and four more helicopter squadrons. I understand from your reports that Dows' helicopters have more than proven their worth in supporting your Marines in Guadalcanal."

"Proven their worth? Hell, they squarely changed the whole ball game here, General Arnold!" Shot back Vandegrift. "I can now move company-size units by air to any location at a moment's notice and evacuate wounded quickly, while Dows' attack helicopters have proved to be the terror of the Japanese soldiers. It is not only the machines, however: Dows' new tactics and doctrines have as much or more to do with our success in employing them than the helicopters themselves."

"Hum, maybe I should bring Dows back to Washington with me: it sounds like she could help me greatly in writing official new doctrines for our helicopters."

"Please don't, General!" Said at once Geiger. "We badly need her here, where she can do the most good. If you want her ideas, then simply ask her for her draft paper on close air support tactics and doctrines that she has been working on in the last few weeks."

"She has? Hell, then I will get a copy of that draft. In the meantime, you should receive some individual replacements for the 99<sup>th</sup> CAG, along with a handful of planes, in the next couple of weeks at the most."

"That will be appreciated, General."

After discussing a few more points concerning the logistics of supplying Guadalcanal, the group of senior commanders moved out of the small office and into the pilots' ready lounge, where Colonel Wallace called the pilots to attention on their entrance. Nimitz looked around him quickly, noting the presence of 28 women in the crowd.

"Ladies and gentlemen of the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division and of the Cactus Air Force, I am happy to be able to meet a group of brave and dedicated men and women such as you. You have literally accomplished miracles since your arrival in Guadalcanal, something the whole nation knows and appreciates. I will however keep my speech short and will acknowledge your valor in the most proper way: by distributing medals and promotions. General Arnold will also distribute medals and promotions to the Army members present afterwards, but I would like first to honor someone who has done more than anyone else to further cooperation between our various services and who proved to have only the common good in mind. Major Ingrid Dows, please step forward!"

Her face impassive, Ingrid came out of the crowd and stopped at attention in front of Nimitz, saluting him. He saluted back, then took out of a pocket a small box, opening it and taking out of it a small medal.

"Major Dows, your courage, leadership and innovative tactics have saved many Marine and Navy lives in the last few weeks, apart from inflicting painful losses to the enemy, both at sea and in the air. It is thus only just that your outstanding performance in combat in support of Marine and Navy units be rewarded appropriately by the Navy. Thus, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations in the face of opposing armed forces, and in support of the Navy, I am honored to award you the Navy Cross. Congratulation, Major Dows."

The other officers present applauded as Nimitz pinned the Navy Cross medal on her chest. Nimitz then took one step back before speaking again.

"Since Major Dows has already stepped forward, I will let General Arnold give her a few more things before I continue with awards for Marine and Navy officers."

Henry Arnold smiled benevolently at Ingrid as he came in front of her, speaking to her first in a near whisper.

"First, I must thank you for fulfilling all the hopes I had in you, Major. I am very proud of you."

"Thank you, sir!"

Arnold then rose the volume of his voice, to be heard by all.

"I, as Commander of the Army Air Corps, would like first to acknowledge the actions in combat and outstanding courage shown by Major Dows, by awarding her both the fourth leaf to her Silver Star, won during ground combat with Japanese Army units on September 14, and the third leaf to her Distinguished Flying Cross, won in air combat on September 12. Next, I wish to acknowledge the outstanding services as a combat unit leader of Major Dows, by awarding her the new Legion of Merit, with 'V' denoting valor in combat."

There were a few gasps around as male officers who didn't know well her combat record heard those words. That was however nothing compared to the stunned silence that greeted the pinning of the rank insignias of lieutenant colonel on Ingrid's shirt collar by Arnold, who shook firmly hands with her.

"Congratulations, Lieutenant Colonel Dows. The nation is truly proud of you. At your newly promoted rank, you now have the authority to promote your unit members up to the rank of captain. Don't worry about your squadron leaders: I will promote them all to the rank of major after this."

"Thank you, General, for having believed in me and my women."

"It was the best judgment call I ever made, Colonel Dows." Said Arnold, meaning it.

## **CHAPTER 17 – TIMELINES AWARENESS**

**19:50 (London Time)**

**Friday, June 14, 3388 'C'**

**Royal Office, Imperium Royal Palace**

**London, British Isles Governorate**

**Imperium**

King Stan the Sixth, of the House of Cardiff and Master of the Imperium, had just finished eating supper with his family and was returning to his office to finish some work before departing on a long-due weekend vacation with his six mistresses when his wrist communicator vibrated. Sighing with exasperation, he raised his wrist to face level and checked who was calling, then activated the miniature screen of the communicator, making the face of his chief of royal intelligence services appear.

"Yes, Mersant! What do you have for me?"

"Something that can't be said on a simple communicator link, Your Majesty. Where could I meet you in person?"

"Make it my personal office, at the palace."

"I will be there in fifteen minutes, Your Majesty."

Stan then closed the link and resumed his walk, wondering what Mersant would have for him this time. Jan Mersant was an extremely competent and efficient man and he generally never disturbed Stan with details that he could take care of himself. What Mersant wanted to speak about was thus certainly of importance...and were probably bad news.

Walking in his private office, Stan took place behind his work desk and activated his computer, taking the time to review his latest emails while waiting for Mersant. As promised, the head of Royal Intelligence showed up less than fifteen minutes after calling, dressed in a rather low quality suit that made Stan frown.

"I gather by your clothes that you were just doing some undercover work, Mister Mersant. You shouldn't risk yourself so often in simple field work."

"I know, Your Majesty, but one is always better served by himself, if I may say so. In this case, I found out that my level of personal involvement was amply justified."

"Very well! What did you find out? A new plot against me? The stars know I already have plenty of enemies."

"Actually, this may be even more serious than a simple plot against you, Your Majesty. My services found out that two rogue physicists had been conducting unauthorized research work on time travel for some months now. The word is that they have actually succeeded in building a working time travel machine. Worse, they offered their machine to the Black Hand crime syndicate, in exchange of course for lots of money and girls."

Stan jumped at once to his feet, both furious and worried. The Black Hand was the most powerful crime syndicate in the Imperium and dealt in about everything, from prostitution to weapons smuggling and assassinations.

"The Black Hand, with a working time travel machine?"

"It actually gets worst, Your Majesty. My agents were able to capture one of the two scientists involved in this and interrogated him at length. In the course of their research, these two physicists discovered that there actually exists two other parallel timelines well separate from ours. They also found out that we are not the original timeline, but only one of two branches out of the main historical timeline."

"WHAT?" Shouted Stan, shocked. Mersant flinched, not having delivered yet all the bad news.

"It seems that our own history started only in the year 1941, when our timeline split from a timeline, called Timeline 'B', that was itself a branch of the main historical timeline, from which it split in 1940. Those two scientists cautiously explored that Timeline 'B' from which our history split, finding there indications of what caused all those splits in time."

Mersant then took an old-style paperback book from his briefcase and put it on Stan's desk.

"This is a book that was picked up in London by those scientists in the year 1943 'B', Your Majesty. I quickly read through it and what I found in it was positively mind-boggling."

Grabbing the book and looking at its front cover, Stan saw the picture of a beautiful woman of ancient times, with long black hair and fascinating green eyes. She however wore a sort of gray uniform that was of very modern cut. The title of the book was

'NANCY LAPLANTE – TIME TRAVELER AND QUEEN', by a Peter O'Neil. As Stan looked back at Mersant with apprehension, the latter spoke in a somber voice.

“In short, Your Majesty, we are not alone. Worse, we were created by the actions of persons from other timelines and that Nancy Laplante started it all.”



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