

# **RAISING NANCY**



A FICTION NOVEL

BY

**Michel Poulin**

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## **WARNING TO POTENTIAL READERS**

**THIS FICTION NOVEL CONTAINS GRAPHIC DESCRIPTIONS OF VIOLENCE AND SEX, AS WELL AS COARSE LANGUAGE AND CONTROVERSIAL SUBJECTS WHICH ARE UNSUITABLE FOR CHILDREN. ALSO, THIS IS A WORK OF FICTION. WHILE MANY PERSONS MENTIONED IN THIS NOVEL EITHER EXIST OR EXISTED, THE WORDS AND ACTIONS ATTRIBUTED TO THEM IN THIS NOVEL DO NOT CORRESPOND TO REALITY OR TO PAST HISTORY.**

### **ABOUT THIS NOVEL**

This novel is a sequel to my science-fiction novel UNITED STATES SPACE CORPS and is the tenth novel of the Nancy Laplante Series. This novel can be best described simply as a fiction novel with a touch of fantasy rather than being a pure science-fiction work, as the story happens in the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, but in a much different World context than the history that we now recall. It is centered on the efforts of the recently retired commander of the United States Space Command, General Ingrid Dows, who still looks to be in her twenties despite her actual age of 59, to raise her young daughter Nancy while teaching her the human values she herself believes in and practices. Please note that the letter 'C' following the dates of the subchapter headings means that the action is happening in Timeline 'C', one of the three parallel historical timelines described in this series of novels, with Timeline 'A' being our actual timeline as we know historically and Timeline 'B' being a parallel branch which split from Timeline 'A' in 1940. Similarly, Timeline 'C' then split from Timeline 'B' in 1941, due to attempts at temporal manipulations by enemies of Nancy Laplante. However, this story stays nearly solely in Timeline 'C' and follows the continued adventures of Ingrid Dows 'C', the adopted daughter of the late Nancy Laplante.

**Other novels by this author**

(Available for free at Free-Ebooks.net, or can be requested directly to me via email at  
[natai@videotron.ca](mailto:natai@videotron.ca))

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## **CHAPTER 1 – LEAVING THE SERVICE**

**09:49 (California Time)**

**Thursday, April 18, 1985 'C'**

**Base parade square, Vandenberg Space Base  
California's Pacific coast, U.S.A.**



There was a large crowd of spectators assembled and sitting in the bleachers on one side of the large parade square, waiting for the passage of command ceremony to start. Thankfully, it was a sunny day and a refreshing breeze blew in from the nearby sea, making it a nearly perfect weather for a military parade. Over 800 men and women of the United States Space Corps were already in attendance, lined up three-deep in unit formations on the vast parade square and standing at ease while facing the V.I.P. dais where the old and the new commanders of the Space Corps were to officiate the ceremony. The crowd of waiting spectators included family members, friends and relatives of the servicemembers, plus a sizeable number of press representatives, both American and foreign ones, including full television camera crews from all the main American TV networks. Civilian employees of the Space Corps, which actually made up a sizeable portion of the Corps as members of its Civilian Space Exploration Division, were also present in force among the spectators. Finally, in a bleacher section close to the V.I.P. dais, sat dozens of men and women wearing foreign uniforms. Those foreign military members, many of them astronauts, were actually officers who were temporarily attached to the U.S. Space Corps as either liaison or exchange officers. The United States Space Corps, pushed in this by its present commander and founder, General Ingrid Dows, had in fact been already welcoming for years such foreign officers, along with foreign scientists and experts, as part of its space exploration missions. Those foreign officers and scientists included a few Soviet citizens, something that had at first created some dismay among certain American political circles. However, the recent triumphal return into Earth orbit of the spaceship U.S.S. PROMETHEUS, back from a five-year mission to the Jupiter and Saturn Systems, had shown the real value of such international cooperation, with nearly fifteen percent of its crew having been foreign members.

At about five to ten, a black military staff car rolled to a stop in front of the V.I.P. dais, with two general officers stepping out of the vehicle and prompting the military band waiting on the parade square to start playing the United States Space Corps hymn, while the men and women on parade were called to attention. The two general officers, one man and one woman, then climbed the stairs leading up to the dais' platform. The man, who looked close to sixty and wore the rank insignias of a lieutenant general, also wore an astronaut's wings, along with an impressive collection of medals. Since the Space Corps was formed of members who had belonged previously to one of the other armed services of the country, Ingrid Dows had at first let her members wear the rank insignias of their old service. However, in view of the unnecessary confusion this occasionally caused, she had recently decided that all her personnel would use the U.S. Air Force ranks equivalent to that of their old service. As for the woman climbing on the platform, she was none other than Ingrid Dows herself, her Space Corps uniform's chest covered with dozens of medals and decorations, including the Congressional Medal of Honor with cluster hanging from her neck and the long and large orange and white sash of the Order of Vietnam First Class worn across her torso. The reporters and cameramen present at once zoomed on her to film her impressive collection of medals and decorations and also to capture her beauty, incredible youth and sexiness, the last point being reinforced by her closely fitting dark blue and black, futuristic-looking Space Corps uniform. One of the press photographers present whispered a comment to a nearby colleague between two snapshots.

"Look at that girl! She is presently officially 59 years old, yet she looks to be only about 22 or 23 years old. What a babe!"

"Well, she also happens to be known to possess a few supernatural powers, supposedly received as some kind of divine gift. The important thing is that my newspaper's readers simply can't get enough of her."

"Yeah, the same here!"

Walking to the dais' lectern and microphone, Ingrid briefly scanned with her eyes the men and women in uniform assembled on the parade square as emotion filled her. She had been serving the United States for 43 years now, fighting in six wars in the process and being wounded twice in battle, once mortally. Only the intervention of the powerful spiritual entity she called 'The One' had saved her then on Guadalcanal in



1942, when she had briefly died on a field hospital' operating table before The One had resurrected and healed her. That incident had also resulted in her becoming a Chosen of The One, with many paranormal and physical powers, including prolonged youth. Even now, at the actual age of 59, she still had the body and face of a young woman in her early twenties. Quite tall for a woman, at a height of 175 centimeters, her angelic face and blue eyes, framed by reddish-brown hair cut at the neck, plus her long legs, firm chest and sexy curves, attracted legions of men to her, something that she enjoyed quite a lot. However, she also knew how to separate pleasure from work and was a highly responsible and mature woman. Her maturity was greatly boosted by the fact that, thanks to The One, she remembered all the lives she had lived as past incarnations along seven millenniums. The fact that she could remember her past incarnations had been public knowledge for over thirty years now, but her other paranormal powers had only become public in the last few months, while she was aboard the U.S.S. PROMETHEUS and on her way to Saturn. That was mostly thanks to an incident aboard the spaceship when she had healed via the touch of her hands a severely burned crewmember following a kitchen fire. Since then, things had noticeably changed for her, with her notoriety growing even more in the United States and around the World. A further, primordial change to her life had come a few months after that kitchen fire, when she had given birth aboard the ship to her daughter Nancy, now nearly two and a half years-old. Little Nancy was here today, in the arms of her nanny, Sarah Ur. However, unbeknown to all but a very few people, Sarah was in reality an angel of The One in human form named Natai. Natai's essence had inhabited persons along 9,000 years of successive incarnations, being last the soul within Nancy Laplante, Ingrid's adoptive mother and time traveler. When Nancy Laplante had died years ago in her own timeline, Timeline 'A', which was the original, unchanged historical timeline of Humanity, her soul had become an angel in the service of The One. In turn, Natai had been sent a number of times by The One to assist his Chosen, Ingrid. Now, she helped Ingrid by taking care and protecting little Nancy when Ingrid was away on duty. As for Ingrid, this was going to be her next to last day in uniform and on active duty. In two days, she was going to become a civilian, although she would still serve the United States in the capacity of Director of National Space Programs and as Special Presidential Advisor.

Looking at the men and women she had led and who had fought under her for so many years, Ingrid then spoke in a firm, deliberate voice in the dais' microphone.

“PARADE, AT EASE! Ladies and gentlemen of the United States Space Corps, I am here for the last time as your commander before passing my command to my successor, Lieutenant General Eugene Cernan. Commanding you was both a privilege and a pleasure for me. Your courage, dedication and professionalism were and are still an inspiration to our whole country, while your work helped to greatly advance science and our knowledge of Space. I would like in passing to thank as well for their service all our members who could not be here on Earth today: the crew of the U.S.S. CONSTITUTION, presently on its way to Mars for its second mission to the Red Planet; the crew of our lunar base, Moon Base Alpha; and the crew of our AURORA orbital space station. Be assured that your service will continue to be primordial for the development and the exploration of Space by our country, and this for the decades to come. Equally important is your contribution to World peace via our international space missions, missions which have enhanced international cooperation and goodwill. That contribution to peace is in my mind as important and rewarding as our work to defend the United States and to develop its space capabilities. You can all be proud of your work, as I am proud of having you under my command. Now, as you know me, I am no parade beast and do not wish to force you to wait for hours via a lengthy ranks’ inspection or long speeches. Instead, I am now going to present to you your new commander, Lieutenant General Eugene Cernan, a fellow astronaut and a great officer. I will also mark this ceremony by promoting Lieutenant General Cernan to his new rank of full general as he becomes Commandant of the United States Space Corps. Afterwards, we will watch you as you parade in front of this dais, then will break up the parade to go celebrate in our combined base mess. General Cernan, please step forward!”

Cernan made three steps, ending next to Ingrid, who then added a fourth star to his shoulder rank insignias.

“Lieutenant General Eugene Cernan, under the authority of the President of the United States, of the Secretary of Defense and of the Congress, I am now promoting you to the rank of full general and name thee Commandant of the United States Space Corps.”

Cernan, flush with emotions as Ingrid pinned the stars on him, was then invited by her to speak to the assembled troops. Like her, he kept his own speech brief, concluding it with an order to the troops to start marching in succession of units past the dais. The march pass itself, led by the military band, actually took much longer than the speeches

from the two generals. As units were still walking in cadence past the dais, a growing roar in the sky marked the approach of three successive waves of aircraft. The first wave to overfly the parade square was made of seven F-83E supersonic fighter-bombers of the Space Corps, flying in 'V' formation, followed by a second wave made up of three big ASP-100 space interceptors, each of them the size of a large civilian airliner. Finally, three huge C-2000 ultra-heavy transporters, used to carry up to the upper atmosphere a variety of space vehicles of the earlier generations, overflew the parade square, their eight high-bypass turbofan engines per plane creating a mighty roar on their passage as the reporters and camera crews filmed them from the bleachers.

After marching past the dais, the units on parade then directly exited the parade square, marching back to their respective assembly areas, where they were dismissed and told to prepare for the celebratory lunch buffet waiting at the combined base mess. On his part, General Cernan shook again Ingrid's hand as they were preparing to leave the platform to go to the combined mess.

"Ingrid, I must thank you again for having confidence in me and for having nominated me as the new commandant of the Corps. Being worthy of replacing you will be a hard job indeed."

"I am certain that you will be up to the task, Eugene. Be assured that, as the Director of National Space Programs, I will do the utmost to continue to promote the interests of the Space Corps and support it politically and technologically."

"I must say that I was a bit surprised to see that you are not going to seek a job as a top aerospace designer and engineer with one of our big aerospace companies, Ingrid. You could have made a lot more money than what you will earn as a simple presidential advisor."

"You know me, Eugene: I was never interested by money. Money for me is only a means to help accomplish personal goals, not to live in luxury, although my combined military pension and salary as a presidential cabinet member is nothing to spit at. Besides, nothing prevents me from providing some counsels to the aerospace companies who will seek my advice. First, however, I will want to take some well-deserved vacation time with my little daughter."

"A vacation you richly deserved, Ingrid. Where are you planning to go for your vacation?"

"I have a few places I have wanted to go to for some time already, Eugene. First, I want to go visit the site of Berlin, my city of birth. Apparently, the levels of radiations among the ruins is now down to safe levels, some 41 years after its destruction by a British hydrogen bomb during World War Two. Then, I may go visit Vietnam, where I met and adopted my eldest daughter Hien. Finally, I will tour parts of Europe to expose my little Nancy to new sights."

"That sounds like a judicious itinerary, Ingrid. I wish you a good time while on vacation."

"Thank you, Eugene! Well, I will now go collect Nancy and her nanny, so that we could go for lunch together at the combined mess."

"Before we leave for the mess, know that, if you want to fly from time to time to keep your pilot certifications, you always will be welcome at any of our bases for training flights on the various plane types we have in the Corps. I will also make sure that those flight hours will be properly compiled together, so that your aircraft type certifications don't lapse. General Grayson, the boss of the Air Force, told me that his bases and planes will be similarly open to you for training flights. You will just need to book a plane a week in advance. He also said that, if you want to play 'Red Airforce' opponent during one of his fighter units' training missions, he would be delighted to have you to, quote, wipe the asses of his more pretentious young pilots, unquote."

Ingrid laughed briefly at that, both amused and pleased.

"That was the best gift General Grayson could have given me for my retirement, Eugene. Tell him that I will take him at his word on this and ask him to send me a notice in advance when he will plan such fighter pilot training. You know my home address in Arlington, near the Pentagon?"

"Of course I do, Ingrid! I will make sure that Grayson knows it."

"Good! Let me collect my daughter and her nanny and I will follow you to the mess."

The mention of the nanny sobered up Cernan, who then looked questioningly at Ingrid.

"That nanny, is she..."

"The angel who appeared aboard the U.S.S PROMETHEUS while the ship was halfway between Jupiter and Saturn, and this to help me take care of Nancy? Yes, Sarah Ur is that angel, but please treat her like a normal nanny: I don't want all those reporters to realize who she is in reality."

"Uh, I understand. I'll wait for you here while you go get them."

Ingrid didn't have to walk for more than a few steps before she met Sarah, who was walking to meet her while carrying little Nancy in her arms. Ingrid was not surprised by that, as Sarah was a powerful telepath and probably had read her intention to get her and Nancy.

"You are just in time, Sarah: it is time to go to the combined mess for lunch."

"Excellent!" replied the small but very beautiful young Semitic woman. "I believe that Nancy is getting quite hungry."

That made Ingrid smile tenderly at her little daughter: at the age of two and a half, Nancy was already a most beautiful little girl, with dark blond hair, big blue eyes and an angelic face.

"We will be at the combined mess very shortly, my sweet Nancy. You just need to be patient a bit more."

"Yes, Mommy!" replied Nancy in her little voice. Ingrid then took her in her arms and started carrying her towards the waiting staff car, with Sarah following her closely. The reporters and cameramen still present took that chance to film and photograph the trio but, thankfully, did not deluge her with questions. The fact that she had Nancy while aboard the U.S.S. PROMETHEUS was well known publicly but this was one of the rare occasions when Ingrid exposed Nancy to public sight, so the cameramen filmed her until the trio entered the staff car with General Cernan. A photographer who had some gray hair and was a grandfather smiled to himself as he watched the car roll away, then spoke to a more junior reporter near him.

"General Dows' little daughter is really as cute as a candy, don't you think?"

"She definitely is. Does anybody know who is the father? Was it an officer aboard the PROMETHEUS?"

"Nobody knows! General Dows is still very secretive about that. Well, let's get to the base mess: I am getting really hungry."

Five minutes later, the staff car rolled to a stop in front of the large building complex housing the various military messes of the base. Since it had been transferred from the U.S. Army to the U.S. Air Force Military Space Command over three decades ago, the base, already quite old at that time, had been extensively rebuilt under the directives of Ingrid Dows, who had introduced a few quite revolutionary concepts in its redesign. One such concept had been to assemble together around a central kitchen

and common lounge the Junior Ranks, Senior NCOs and Officers' Messes. Each mess still had separate lounges and clubs, but everybody ate the same quality of food and officers could mingle with junior ranks for meals if they wished so, something in which Ingrid had often shown the example. She had done so in order to push down on the notion that officers were above their subalterns in social terms and thus should not mix with them, a notion she despised as being both elitist and snobbish. As she had often said to her officers, 'a leader whose subalterns do not follow willingly is no leader'.

Stepping out of the staff car with Nancy in her arms, Ingrid then climbed the few steps of the main entrance to the combined mess, with Eugene Cernan and Sarah Ur at her side. Following the main hallway, on which the various messes connected, the group finally arrived at the huge reception hall forming the core of the complex, where hundreds of the parade's attendants and participants were already in, discussing in small groups at dining tables while going from time to time to the service counters set along one wall and offering a variety of hot and cold food items. As per a rule long established by Ingrid, nobody shouted 'ROOM!' when she entered, as would usually happen on other bases. Ingrid's first move was then to go to the service counters, to collect some food for her little Nancy. A small plate of macaroni and cheese, something Nancy liked a lot, and a glass of cold milk were enough for Nancy, so Ingrid then brought her to a free table, with Sarah staying with her as Ingrid returned to the counters to serve herself. She was filling a tray at the counters when she bumped in one of her old comrades, Gertrude Meserve, who was now 65 years old and had retired from the service some three years ago. Temporarily putting down her tray, Ingrid then shared a happy hug with Gertrude.

"It is so nice to see you again, Gertrude. How is life treating you these days?"

"Reasonably well, Ingrid. However, I cruelly miss flying. Unfortunately, my eyesight is gradually deteriorating and I now must wear glasses in order to read."

Ingrid took one step back and eyed soberly her old comrade, who had fought at her side in four wars, including World War Two. Gertrude certainly looked her age and her face and hands were starting to show wrinkles, while her hair had a lot of silver in it.

"When I remember how we both were when we first met in 1942, when you enrolled in the 'Fifinellas'."

"Yet, you still look to be about as young as you were then, Ingrid. I am jealous."

That triggered a thought in Ingrid's mind, a thought that was suddenly drowned by a powerful mental voice.

***'YOU HAVE MY BENEDICTION AND SUPPORT FOR THIS, AMDIRA. GO SEE YOUR OLD COMRADES AND GRACE THEM.'***

Shaken by what had obviously been a mental message from The One in person, Ingrid pressed Gertrude's hands in her hands while looking directly in her eyes.

"Gertrude, are there other veterans from the Fifinellas present here in this hall?"

"Yes! There are six more of us sitting at or near my table."

"Then, lets fill our food trays before leading me to your table."

Ingrid was about to add a telepathic message to warn Sarah of this but was preempted by a mental message from her angel.

*'Go ahead, Ingrid: I will take care of Nancy in the meantime.'*

*'Thank you, Sarah!'*

Filling quickly their plates, the two women then walked to two tables set next to each other in one corner of the hall, where eight aging women were already sitting. Ingrid's heart jumped in her chest, while tears filled her eyes at the sight of her old war comrades. All of them were visibly in their sixties, with three of them being even older. Putting down her tray of food at one empty spot on one of the tables, she then hugged emotionally in succession her old comrades, starting with Shirley Slade, who had been her wingman in 1942, during the brutal fight for Guadalcanal.

"Shirley, my God! I missed you since you retired two years ago. I wish that I could have been present at your retirement ceremony, but I was then in the Saturn System, aboard the PROMETHEUS."

"No need to excuse yourself for that, Ingrid. I can understand why your duties kept you away."

"And what about your private life, Shirley? Have you married since leaving the service?"

Shirley's smile faded at that question and she answered Ingrid in a soft, sober tone.

"No! In that, I am like the others here: we are now too old to attract most men and none of us married, because the men we courted got cold feet when told that we wanted to continue on with our military careers, instead of leaving the service and following them around their own careers. As for Theresa, her husband James died of cancer four years ago."

Ingrid looked sadly at Shirley, then at Theresa James, who had long been her second in command in past wars. Theresa actually looked to be the second oldest of the group, after Helen Richey.

"I am sorry about Georges, Theresa. Please accept my most sincere condolences."

"Thank you, Ingrid." replied the stoutly-built woman with curly hair. "And you, will you ever get married? What about the man who fathered your little Nancy on the PROMETHEUS?"

That attracted a sardonic smirk on Ingrid's lips.

"Well, to be truthful, I could never hope to marry him: he is way above me as a being, and he would not fit in this life of mine."

"Above you as a being?" said Denise Bateman, who had retired after the return of the PROMETHEUS into Earth orbit. "How could that be? You are the most exceptional individual I ever met in my life."

"Well, I will explain that to you all, once in private. First, I would like you to accompany me as a group towards the executive offices of the mess: I have something to show you there. Leave your trays where they are, so that nobody else takes those tables."

"You are decidedly quite mysterious today, Ingrid." said 76-year-old Helen Richey while getting up with some effort from her chair. Ingrid eyed with sadness her friend, whose general health had clearly declined since the last time she had seen her, some twelve years ago.

"Believe me, Helen: it will be worth it. Follow me, all of you."

Crossing the large dining hall, Ingrid and her friends left it and walked to the hallway along which the offices of the various mess managers were situated. None of them were occupied at this time and she was able to enter one of them, inviting her comrades in after checking that the office was empty. She then closed and locked the door behind them and faced her now intrigued friends.

"We are here for two reasons, my friends: first, to tell you who was the father of my little Nancy; second, to give you a gift to all of you. About the father of Nancy..."

"No need to present me, Ingrid." Said a male voice from one corner of the room, making the women jump up in surprise. "I am here and I will also help you pass your gift to your friends."



Except for Ingrid, the women in the room all sucked air in at the sight of the 192 centimeter-tall, incredibly handsome man now standing near the work desk of the office. The man, who was wearing a simple robe and sandals, then walked to them and stopped in the middle of the wide circle formed by them before speaking again, a benevolent smile on his face.

“My name is Michael, and I was the one who fathered little Nancy.”

“My God, Ingrid, why didn’t you marry him at once! He is gorgeous!” exclaimed 64-year-old Elisabeth Gardner. “I could marry him in an instant!”

Elisabeth’s declaration made the smile on the man’s face change to an amused grin.

“I should be flattered by your comment, Elisabeth Gardner, but I could not realistically marry you or any of your comrades, for a simple reason: I am not from this world.”

“What do you mean, not from this world?”

Elisabeth, like the others at the exception of Ingrid, then opened wide her eyes and took a step back as the man became a brilliant, translucent being with a humanoid shape. A strong mental message was then heard by all of them.

*‘My name is Michael, Archangel of The One. I fathered Nancy with Ingrid because any human male on the PROMETHEUS who would have slept with her would have then been hounded by unending rumors and insinuations. I came here today to help Ingrid gift you with something you richly deserve through your dedication and human qualities. Do not fear what is now going to happen.’*

Michael’s shape then quickly became much brighter, to the point where the women could not look at him directly. That brightness then diminished after some fifteen seconds, as Michael returned to normal human form. Looking around him at the women, he made a large mirror appear in his hands, a mirror that he then slowly turned around so that it would face each woman in succession. Gasps and strangled exclamations went around as he spoke further.

“You are now physically thirty years younger, while your various ailments have disappeared. You are now in perfect health and will be able to enjoy your next decades the way you richly deserved. May you live happily for the rest of your lives.”

Michael then faded away into nothingness, leaving behind Ingrid and nine shocked and awed women, all of whom now appeared to be in their early forties at the most. Ingrid quickly gathered them in her arms for a group hug, as moved as her friends were.

"You will now be able to enjoy fully your years of retirement, my friends. I wish you all the best in life and plenty of happiness. If you wish so, I can now go present to you my little Nancy, the joy of my life."

"We would indeed love to see her, Ingrid." said the small Faith Buchner, who had been the fiery commander of Ingrid's helicopter units during World War Two, the Korean War and the Indochina War. "Thank you for the precious gift you brought to us: I will never forget it."

Ingrid, who was in tears at seeing the joy on her friends' faces, nodded once and swallowed the lump in her throat.

"Believe me when I say that this is as much a gift for me than it is for you. If you will follow me back into the hall, I will present you to my little Nancy."

Leaving the office and walking down the executive hallway, the group soon reentered the dining hall and went to Ingrid's table, where little Nancy was still eating her macaroni and cheese. Ingrid's comrades swooned while admiring the little blond girl.

"My God, Ingrid: she is as cute as a candy!" exclaimed Jenny Kawena, attracting a proud smile on Ingrid's face.

"Thank you, Jenny! I am indeed very proud of having her."

"I already can see her attract men like bees to honey once she will have grown up." remarked Sally Nolan. Ingrid made a face at that.

"Don't say that too loud, Sally. I can already guess how many white hairs this will cause me as my house gets assaulted by an army of young men."

"To date her or to date you?" asked maliciously Gertrude Meserve, to which Ingrid replied in a nonchalant tone.

"Pah! I will let Nancy take the first pick, then I will serve myself."

She and her comrades then burst out in laughter at that joke, as all of her friends knew about her sexual appetite.

With Sarah and Nancy accompanying the group to their two tables, so that they could all finish eating, Ingrid then spent a good hour conversing with her friends while slowly eating her food. Before finally leaving on their own way, Ingrid made sure to collect their updated addresses and telephone numbers, while giving them her own address and phone number. Ingrid was the happiest she had been in weeks when they parted and left the combined mess complex, with her friends leaving either in their own

cars or taking one of the taxis waiting at the taxi stand next to the mess. On her part, Ingrid started walking with Sarah and Nancy, in order to return to the suite temporarily reserved for her at the Officers' Mess, where she would be able to change and pack up her suitcases. Tomorrow was also going to be a busy day for her, on top of being her last day in uniform, but she now needed to fly back to Washington, where she would be expected at the White House.

**15:02 (Washington Time)  
Friday, April 19, 1985 'C'  
East Wing of the White House  
Washington, D.C.**



"Well, this is your last day in uniform, girl." said Ingrid to herself as she waited with a number of people, the majority of which were reporters, inside the large lobby of the White House's East Wing. Just the presence of those reporters made her suspect that the President had laid an ambush for her with his request for her to come to the White House in full uniform. She had been bombarded with questions by those reporters the moment she had arrived in the lobby some twenty minutes ago, with those reporters finally leaving her alone only a few minutes ago. Now, everybody was waiting for the President to arrive, which finally allowed her to think quietly about her future. Her top priority was however clearly towards Nancy and had been so since she had been born. Ingrid was looking forward to a long vacation with Nancy and to visiting old familiar places. Nancy had spent nearly all of her young life in Space, aboard the U.S.S. PROMETHEUS, except for the last month, so she had a lot to see and learn about, something Ingrid was eager to teach her.

An announcement by one of the Marine guards present at the top of the stairs of the lobby then returned her mind to the present.

"LADIES AND GENTLEMEN: THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES!" Ingrid came to attention and saluted as President George Herbert Walker Bush appeared at the top of the stairs and started climbing them down. Bush then went to a microphone which had been set in advance for him and spoke in it.

"Ladies and gentlemen, you were all invited here this afternoon to say goodbye to a genuine American hero, a hero who is leaving our military after 43 years of loyal and

exemplary service. That hero fought six wars for our country, was wounded twice in the process and won more medals and decorations than any other American military member in the history of our nation. Those medals included the Medal of Honor, which she won twice, a rare feat indeed in our military annals. She also served the United States in spectacular ways while advancing our Space program, notably by being the first human ever to fly in Space. Thanks to her genius, vision and courage, our nation now has spaceships able to reach the farthest corners of our Solar System and also has both a lunar base and an orbital space station. Ladies and gentlemen, I thus present you General Ingrid Dows. General, if you may please step forward.”

Walking at a military pace, Ingrid went towards the President and stopped three paces in front of him, then saluted him crisply. That was when Bush started speaking again.

“General Dows, it is with a heavy heart that I will see you leave our military, as you will leave mighty big shoes for us to fill afterwards. However, after 43 years of exemplary service, you have more than earned a chance to rest a bit and take care of your little family. But you won’t leave today before I could personally show you the proper appreciation you deserve. Captain Nielsen!”

A Marine officer then stepped forward and, stopping next to the President, presented to him a blue velvet cushion on which a medal lay. Bush took that medal in his hands and raised it a bit, so that the reporters could photograph it.

“General Dows, for the immense services you rendered to this nation by initiating and developing its Space exploration program, I am most proud to give you today the Medal of Freedom.”

With Ingrid staying at rigid attention, Bush then went into her back and, passing the white and blue neck ribbon of the medal around her neck, clipped it in place before returning in front of her and shaking hands with her.

“Congratulations, General Dows. The nation and I are proud of you.”

“Thank you, Mister President.” replied Ingrid, more moved than she was ready to admit. Her emotions rose further when thunderous applauses rose from the crowd of spectators and reporters.

## **CHAPTER 2 – REMEMBERING BERLIN**

**19:37 (Washington Time)  
Sunday, April 21, 1985 'C'  
Pan Am ticket counter  
Washington International Airport  
Washington, D.C., U.S.A.**



The female Pan Am employee smiled on seeing the little girl carried in the arms of a young woman who had just stepped in front of her section of ticketing counter.

“Oooh, she is so cute! How old is she, miss?”

“She is two and a half years old, miss.” replied Ingrid before presenting two passports to the employee. “I have reserved two seats on this evening flight to Hamburg and prepaid them via credit card. Here are our passports. Would it be possible to get seats in the kindergarten section of the aircraft?”

“One moment, please... Yes, you are in luck, miss. Let me register you in, then I will weigh your luggage.”

The employee started typing Ingrid’s personal information written in her passport into the Pan Am’s computer databank but soon hesitated and looked up at Ingrid.

“Uh, there must be a mistake in your passport, miss: it says that you were born in 1925.”

“It is not a mistake, miss: I was born in 1925. I am retired General Ingrid Dows and you must have heard many stories about me.”

The Pan Am clerk, not being a news addict, took a few seconds to remember some of those stories she had watched on television and to realize who was facing her. With a smile returning to her face, she finished entering Ingrid’s data into her computer, assigning her a seat in the kindergarten section of the Boeing 717-300 which was due to fly to Hamburg in two hours. She however hesitated again when she opened the passport of the little girl and saw her official place of birth.

“The U.S.S. PROMETHEUS... Your daughter was born on a ship, miss?”

“On a spaceship, miss.” corrected Ingrid, making the employee look closely at Nancy. Only then did she notice the three embroidered round patches sewn on her

coat, all of them connected to the epic voyage to Jupiter and Saturn by the U.S.S. PROMETHEUS.

“My! She is already quite an accomplished traveler, miss. You will have seats 33A and B. Here are your tickets. If you could now put your suitcases one by one on this luggage scale.”

Ingrid executed herself, lifting with one hand and without apparent effort each of her two large suitcases and putting them in succession on the scale, while keeping with her one travel bag. She had no purses, contrary to most other women in the airport, as she was wearing one of the adjusted female suits with slightly flared trouser bottoms which she favored, suits which included a number of pockets that precluded the need for a purse. For a young woman like her to be routinely wearing a suit rather than a dress still disturbed or even irked many old-fashioned people around the United States, something that she in turn studiously ignored. In truth, Ingrid thought that the American society was still quite conservative and prudish, not to say hypocritical, on top of still harboring racism in many regions. While she had fought for decades to protect her country of adoption, she was the first to recognize that it was not perfect, by a long shot. Now, she was going to visit her country of birth, Germany, and, with luck, was going to be able to visit what remained of her old family house in Berlin.

With her two suitcases now tagged and on their way to her assigned aircraft, Ingrid walked away from the Pan Am counter, heading towards the departure gates while still carrying Nancy in her arms. Little Nancy was more than capable of walking that distance, but Ingrid liked to feel her daughter close to her and to thus communicate her love for her, something that Nancy returned in spades. Passing first the security checks at the entrance of the departures section, Ingrid then carried Nancy to the boarding lounge assigned to the departure gate of her aircraft. That aircraft, a Pan American Airlines Boeing 717-300, was already parked in front of the gate, so Ingrid went to a seat near the large windows of the lounge and put down Nancy before examining the airliner. The Boeing 717-300 was actually an improved, slightly larger and more powerful variant of the basic Boeing 717, itself a civilian variant of the C-200 military troop transport, whose design she had directed some 35 years ago. In fact, she had either directed or inspired the designs of nearly all the main aircraft types presently in service in the United States and could brag justifiably that she had revolutionized air transport in the United States and around the World and had brought it firmly into the jet

age. Even compared to the modern jet airliners Nancy Laplante had known in her own timeline, the Boeing 717 had a decided futuristic, unusual look to it. Ingrid had made its basic design with the help of the technical data files her adoptive mother had with her when she had been involuntarily transported through time from the year 2012 back to 1940. Those data files had in turn allowed Ingrid to avoid wasting a lot of time and resources exploring many dead-end technologies and to learn about phenomenons and concepts without the need for years of experimentations, trials and errors, like how to pass more quickly and safely through the sound barrier. While today's electronics, particularly concerning computer technology, were still crude compared to what Nancy Laplante had known, in terms of aerodynamics and aircraft design context the Boeing 717-300 Ingrid was now looking at would have impressed the people of the year 2012 'A'. A large, wide-bodied airliner with four large turbofan jet engines installed in pairs attached near the tail of its fuselage, the Boeing 717 featured two pairs of wings with their tips attached to large external fuel tanks, thus forming a closed-box-like, diamond-shaped wing, a design feature of many of her aircraft projects. Such diamond wings, with the forward pair swept back and the aft pair swept forward, brought many advantages to their aircraft: a more compact design; more rigid and solid construction; lighter overall weight and high resistance to both aerodynamic spinning and stalling. Ingrid had further added to that concept by inventing what was now known and patented worldwide as the 'Adaptive Wing Profile' concept, or AWP in short. Ingrid had developed that concept in 1948, while studying at the Boston's M.I.T. to obtain her degree in aeronautical engineering. That concept, inspired by limited studies done in Nancy Laplante's time, studies which had not been pushed to full fruition, replaced the classic leading-edge slats and trailing edge flaps used as hyper sustentation devices on planes, which were in essence a number of separate surfaces extended out from the main wing structure. That, while greatly increasing the area and aerodynamic lift of the wing, also created a lot of aerodynamic drag, which cost extra in both fuel and speed. Ingrid's AWP concept used instead thin, metallic flexible surfaces sliding in and out of the main wing structure, using a system of internal rails and electrical jacks to form a smooth, curved and continuous surface along both leading and trailing edges. Apart from resulting in much enhanced extra lift while cutting down drastically on drag, the AWP concept also allowed the pilot to vary the wing profile nearly at will in order to adapt it continuously to various flight speeds and conditions. The U.S. Air Force had benefited from that concept at very little cost as Ingrid, as the patent holder, had charged one

symbolic dollar for the right of the Air Force to use her patent. Things were however different when it came to commercial aircraft using either or both of her patented diamond wing and AWP concepts. While she could have made a fortune personally by charging what would have been a more typical patent royalty to the civilian aircraft builders using her proprietary concepts, Ingrid had only charged an amount considered by many as ridiculously low for every commercial aircraft built using her patents, including the commercial variants of the military aircraft designed by her. That small amount had however been multiplied tens of thousands of times as the American commercial aircraft industry had basically become dominant around the World. While very few people were aware of this, Ingrid was in reality a millionaire and had been so for over a decade. However, that had not been reflected in any ways by her lifestyle, as she was by nature a truly frugal person. She instead often contributed anonymously to many charities, while of course keeping the receipts of those donations for tax purposes. Now that she was officially retired from the military and thus free to fully take care of Nancy, maybe her spending habits would change, but definitely not to live in luxury and enjoy excesses.

Nancy's little voice then returned Ingrid to the reality of the boarding lounge.

"Mommy, why didn't Sarah come with us on this trip?"

Ingrid smiled down to her little daughter while gently taking hold of one of her tiny hands.

"Sarah went to take care of other things while we are traveling, Nancy. Sarah is actually quite busy all the time and is helping many other people on top of us."

"Did she have to travel away, Mommy?"

"In a way, my little treasure." said Ingrid, not wanting to go into details on that subject. In truth, Sarah, or Natai as per her primordial name, was now probably in the Jerusalem of Timeline 'B', where she had replaced the defunct Nancy Laplante 'A' as Queen of Jerusalem and Overseer of Palestine, using Nancy Laplante's physical form to continue her reign there. Nancy then surprised her by asking her another question.

"Sarah is a queen, Mommy?"

Throwing a bemused look down at her daughter, Ingrid then understood that Nancy had just read her thoughts, something she had believed would be possible in only a few more years. She then reminded herself that Nancy was of half celestial essence, thanks to having been fathered by Archangel Michael. Who could know how much that could



influence her speed of mental growth? She thus answered her via telepathy, as there were over 200 other persons crowding the lounge around them.

*'She is a queen in another parallel world separate from our own world, Nancy. How much of my thoughts can you read?'*

*'All of them, Mommy!'* replied proudly Nancy via telepathy, alarming a bit Ingrid.

*'Nancy, you will have to control your ability to read the thoughts around you, both to hide your special talent and to stay safe. It is impolite to read the thoughts of others without their permission. Also, some people could try to find out how you can read minds and could also try to exploit your talent to their profit by forcing you to work for them. I am very serious about this, Nancy. Hide your talent and do not let it appear that you can read minds. The same goes for your talent to make objects fly.'*

*'Would they torture me, like they tortured poor Andrée?'*

*'Who?'* asked mentally Ingrid, both shocked and horrified. Nancy's young face became sober as she answered her mother.

*'Andrée Raymonde Borrel, Mommy. She was once me. She died 41 years ago.'* Ingrid could only fix her daughter with unmitigated surprise for long seconds, speechless. She had been planning to open Nancy's mind to the souvenirs of her past incarnations with the help of Sarah, but only when Nancy would have been more mature and past the age of at least ten or eleven. Also, at two and a half years of age, Nancy was not supposed to know already how to count, yet alone up to the number 41.

*'How many of your past lives do you remember, Nancy?'*

*'Just one, Mommy. However, I feel that more souvenirs are going to come to me soon.'*

*'Please tell me about this Andrée Raymonde Borrel, Nancy.'*

The way Nancy then answered her told Ingrid that the old Borrel, or at least its souvenirs, truly resided inside her daughter.

*'I was born on November 18, 1919, in Bécon-les-Bruyères, near Paris. When the Germans invaded France, I joined the French Résistance to fight them. Then, I joined the British S.O.E.<sup>1</sup>, who sent me back to France as a clandestine agent in 1942. The Germans captured me in 1943, tortured me and then sent me to the concentration camp of Natzweiler-Struthof, in Alsace. I was killed there on July 6 of 1944.'*

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<sup>1</sup> S.O.E. : Special Operations Executive. The British secret organization charged in World War 2 to conduct espionage and acts of sabotage inside Occupied Europe. The S.O.E. often used female agents as radio operators and couriers.

*'And how much of Andrée's life do you remember, Nancy?'*

*'Everything, Mommy!'* answered mentally Nancy, sadness showing on her face. *'The Germans were very cruel with me.'*

That left Ingrid both alarmed and deeply worried: the implications of this could have profound repercussions on how Nancy would grow and also how fast she would grow. Even the souvenirs from a single past life would be enough to put her completely apart from the other children of the same age. What would happen once Nancy started remembering more past incarnations? She thus decided to test her on a limited but potentially crucial subject.

*'Did Andrée do things with boys, things that you remember?'*

The way Nancy broke into a smile confirmed at once Ingrid's fears.

*'Yes, I slept with a number of men, if it's what you meant, Mommy.'*

Ingrid hid her face with one hand, suddenly feeling discouraged: the task of raising Nancy, which she had expected to be a pure joy, now could turn into a nightmare full of anxiety and fears, not for what could happen between the two of them but rather because of how others around Nancy could react to her. Some could think of Nancy as a sort of young witch, while older boys and men could be tempted to abuse her because of her past souvenirs about sex.

*'Nancy, listen to me carefully: this is extremely important. You cannot let others, either children or adults, realize that you have special powers and past souvenirs. If they do, they could then either attack and harm you, or try to abuse you and use your body for their own selfish goals. Do you understand me, Nancy?'*

*'I do, Mommy! Andrée knew how to keep secrets and I will do the same.'*

Ingrid, only half-reassured, then patted gently the head of her little daughter, who had just proved in essence to basically be an adult mind inside a child's body. One thing then came to her mind and she quickly got out a pen and a small notepad from the pockets of her suit's jacket, presenting them to Nancy.

*'Here, Nancy! Please write your name on this notepad, plus Andrée's name if you can.'*

Nancy took at once the pen and notepad and, without any apparent difficulty, quickly wrote both names on the pad before giving it back to Ingrid, along with the pen.

*'Here you go, Mommy!'*

Ingrid heart jumped when she looked at the two names, which had been written clearly and without a single mistake: her job as a mother and educator for Nancy had just

become a lot more complicated and trickier. In contrast to that, Ingrid had remembered her own past incarnations only after she had been fifteen and had already experienced a lot about life, including sex and war.

*‘And what language can you speak now, Nancy?’*

*‘English, French and German.’* was the immediate mental answer. Ingrid felt more discouragement then: how did you explain to others that a two and a half years-old girl could speak three languages, could write and also could count?

Ingrid was still mentally analyzing her new problem when a Pan Am stewardess announced the start of the passenger boarding for her flight, starting with the handicapped passengers and the parents with babies or small children. Apparently able to sense her disarray, Nancy, being carried in her arms as they went down the jetway’s narrow corridor, touched Ingrid’s face while speaking softly to her.

*“Don’t worry, Mommy: I promise you that I will behave.”*

That brought tears to Ingrid’s eyes, and she kissed her little daughter on the cheek in response.

*“Thank you, my sweet Nancy: you can’t know how I appreciate that.”*

*‘Yes, I do, Mommy!’* replied mentally her daughter. Ingrid kept it at that and presented her two boarding passes to the Pan Am stewardess waiting at the door of the Boeing 717-300. The young woman looked briefly at them before pointing the entrance to the main passenger cabin.

*“The kindergarten cabin is situated on the lower deck, at the rear, miss. Cross the length of the main cabin, then go down via the aft spiral staircase. Another stewardess will be there to guide you to your seat.”*

*“Thank you, miss!”*

As Ingrid and Nancy walked down the main cabin, the pilot of the airliner, who had been standing with his copilot behind the stewardess in order to also greet his passengers, whispered excitedly to his copilot.

*“Hey, isn’t that the famous General Dows, the commander of the Space Corps who just retired?”*

*“Uh, I was not daring to think so, in truth, Mack: she looked impossibly young for a full general.”*

*“That’s the point, John! She is supposed to be close to sixty! I will make a point to talk briefly with her when she will deplane in Hamburg.”*

After going down the long main passenger cabin, with its two aisles and rows of eight-abreast economy-class seats, Ingrid arrived at the aft lobby, which lodged a kitchenette and stewardesses' station, five toilet stalls, two side exit doors and a spiral staircase going down towards the lower deck of the aircraft. In the C-200, the original military troop transport variant of the B-717, that spiral staircase led down to an armory room where the traveling soldiers could secure their individual weapons in locked weapons racks during the trip, in order to avoid possible accidental discharges. In the civilian B-717 airliner, that armory room had been converted into what had been designated the 'Kindergarten Room'. That space in the lower tail section of the aircraft was reserved for parents with infants or young toddlers and offered seats facing a playroom where young children could feel less boxed-in, plus a special, extra-large toilet stall where one could comfortably change a baby's diaper. That kindergarten room was also a strictly non-smoking compartment, another reason for Ingrid to like it, as she was a non-smoker and hated tobacco smoke. Yes, a section of the main passenger cabin was also designated as a non-smoking area, but that notion was more an illusion than a reality, as the majority of Americans still smoked, with no indications that they were about to stop that disastrous habit.

A young stewardess checked again Ingrid's boarding passes and then pointed the spiral staircase to her.

"The seats 33A and B are to the right side of the last row, right next to the playground, miss. I will ask you to keep your little daughter strapped into her seat until we will have taken off and climbed to our cruising altitude."

"I will, miss."

Climbing down the steps of the spiral staircase, Ingrid soon stepped into a compartment that measured a good sixteen meters in length, with a floor width of four meters. Due to being on the lower deck of the round fuselage section, the width at the ceiling was of six meters, making the compartment look even more spacious. First passing by two toilet stalls and a locker for strollers, Ingrid walked through a section reserved for parents with babies and infants, which counted a total of fifteen seats split by a central aisle. Those seats were in turn flanked by padded baby parks with mesh barriers, where babies could be laid during the flight. The next section was separated from the infants' section by a noise-cutting curtain and counted twenty adult-sized seats in four rows, again split by a

central aisle, plus a total of ten smaller, toddler-size seats in elevated positions along the sides. Beyond the last row of seats was a playing area with a length of six meters and a width at the floor of four meters. That playing area contained a full-sized cubic module inside which children could crawl and climb, a long and high slide forming a curve and a large and deep, four meters by two meters colored plastic balls bath with protective rope mesh cage. When Boeing engineers had approached Ingrid in 1953 to ask for her counsels about turning the C-200 military troop transport into a civilian airliner, Ingrid had strongly enjoined them to think of the future passengers as human beings rather than as paying cattle heads and to plan the interior layout of the future B-717 accordingly. One of her recommendations had been to reserve a separate space reserved solely to parents with very young children and babies and to make that space a non-smoking area. Ingrid had been motivated to make her recommendations by her own experience at traveling with her then young daughter Hien in civilian airliners where there were no restrictions against smoking and where the other passengers tended to be irked by the wails of babies and the excess of energy of young children. A few years later, as the B-717 was entering service in a growing number of commercial airlines, the executives of many of those airlines had decided to ignore her counsels and had configured their new aircraft for maximum capacity, keeping seat width and pitch to a minimum in order to pack as many paying passenger as they could inside their B-717s and thus make bigger profits. One company that had followed Ingrid's counsels and still did was Pan American, whose then boss Juan Trippe had been a good friend of Ingrid. While other airlines mocked what they called the 'uneconomical policies of Pan Am', Pan Am had replied that its customers, pleased by the comfort of its planes and the good service offered to them, traveled by preference aboard Pan Am aircraft. One of those loyal customers was Ingrid. As for little Nancy, she got excited at the sight of the play modules and slide and tried to wiggle out of Ingrid's arms, earning a chiding from her mother.

"You heard what the nice stewardess said, Nancy: you will have to wait until we have taken off and climbed to our cruising altitude before you could play."

Putting the disappointed Nancy down into her seat, a toddler-sized one with a width of forty centimeters instead of the sixty centimeters of standard Pan Am adult seats, Ingrid then buckled her daughter's safety belt before taking place herself in the adult seat next to Nancy's seat. She was far from alone in using the Kindergarten Room of the Boeing 717-300, as it nearly filled quickly with parents, toddlers and babies. One young couple

and their toddler son sat in the same row as Ingrid. From listening to them, it quickly became evident to Ingrid that they were German citizens returning home after a visit to Washington. The little boy, who was maybe five years old, attracted the attention of Nancy, who playfully waved hello at him and spoke to him in German.

“Hello! I’m Nancy!”

“I’m Karl!” replied the boy, also in German, while returning her salute. The father, a tall and handsome man in his late twenties, then smiled to Ingrid and spoke to her in German.

“You are German, miss?”

“I was born in Germany, mister, but I am an American citizen. My name is Ingrid, Ingrid Dows.”

Not realizing who she was, the man presented his hand for a shake, which she pressed.

“And I am Frederick Schenk. This is my wife Anna and my son Karl and we just visited relatives who live in the Washington area. And you? Are you going to Hamburg as a tourist?”

“I have old friends in Northern Germany, but the main goal of my trip is to go visit Berlin.”

Both surprise and confusion showed then on the man’s face.

“Berlin? But the city was destroyed by a British nuclear bomb in 1944 and is still in ruins. I believe that its region is still out of bounds to the public because of lingering radiations.”

“You are mostly correct, mister, but the radiations have greatly subsided in the last four decades and the German government has started to slowly clear the debris in prevision of a long-term rehabilitation plan.”

“Uh, why then do you want to visit it, miss? The place is still nothing but rubble. Besides, the police will not let you enter the Berlin Zone.”

“I have obtained a written permission from your minister of interior to visit the zone. As for why I want to visit it, the reason is simple: my old family home was in Berlin.”

Her explanation seemed to only confuse further the man.

“Your family home, in Berlin? But Berlin was destroyed 41 years ago.”

“I know, mister: I was nineteen at the time. I am now 59 years-old. I should have presented myself properly: General Ingrid Dows, recently retired from the United States Space Corps.”

From confusion, the German man went to excitement and enthusiasm.

"THE General Dows? Wow! It is a true honor to be able to meet you, General." Anna Schenk, while also excited at realizing who Ingrid was, then looked at her and Nancy.

"Your little daughter, wasn't she born in Space, as you were travelling to Jupiter and Saturn?"

"She was born halfway between Jupiter and Saturn, Misses Schenk, and lived all her life on a spaceship, except for the last month."

"Mein Gott! Such a fantastic experience for such a small girl! Did she like it?"

"She adored it! She particularly enjoyed playing around and floating in the zero gravity sections of the ship and she also took part in a mass spacewalk outside the ship while we were flying back to Earth. Before that, I took her and other kids on a surface rover trip on Titan, one of the moons of Saturn."

Anna Schenk sucked air in on hearing that.

"Oh, the lucky girl! I envy her!"

Ingrid grinned at the woman's reaction.

"I do agree that the PROMETHEUS' mission to Jupiter and Saturn was the experience of a lifetime, even for an old Space hand like me. Hopefully, there will be more trips to the outer planets in the years to come."

"And what about Mars? I understand that an American ship is presently heading for Mars, on the third mission to that planet."

"You are correct, Misses Schenk: the U.S.S. CONSTITUTION should arrive at Mars in about fifty days, where it will conduct a year-long scientific study mission."

"That was an incredible life you lived through, General." said softly Frederick Schenk, attracting a smile on Ingrid's lips.

"Yes, and it was also a most adventurous one. I hope that my little Nancy will have as exciting a life as I did, but with less dangers. She is so precious to me."

"All the children in the World are precious." pronounced Anna Schenk, to which Ingrid nodded her head.

Some 25 minutes later, the pilot announced on the cabin's speakers that the boarding was now completed and that the plane was about to roll away from the gate. Nancy, who had never experienced a commercial airliner flight, watched and listened on as the plane's engines started to whine, with the Boeing 717 starting to be pushed away

from the gate a moment later. Looking through the nearest window, she followed the whole process of rolling down a taxiway and then pivoting and stopping at one end of a runway. The takeoff itself excited her and she clapped her hands together as the airliner climbed steeply towards its cruising altitude. The moment that the sign for the seats' safety belts went off, she started wiggling in her chair.

"Mommy, can I go play now?"

"Yes, you can, my little treasure!" replied verbally Ingrid before continuing with a mental message to Nancy. *'Remember: do not use your special powers and communicate only verbally. That's very important.'*

*'I know, Mommy!'*

The moment that her belt was undone and Ingrid had lifted her down from her chair, she ran into the playground, triggering a mad rush by the other nine toddlers in the compartment, including little Karl Schenk. Entering the play cube module by a round mesh entrance, Nancy started crawling and climbing inside it while screaming with joy, pursued by other children. Once she had gone through the whole module and had exited it on an elevated platform, she promptly slid down the curved plastic slide of the room, landing on a thick padded mattress. She followed that by diving into the pool of plastic balls, little Karl behind her. Ingrid and the Schenks happily watched on before resuming their conversation together. At first, the subjects covered were banal ones, until Frederick Schenk raised a new subject.

"So, what are you going to do during your retirement, General? With such a young body like yours, you are liable to live for many more decades, no?"

"You are correct about me having many decades left to me, but I am not really fully retired. While I left the military service, I am still a presidential special advisor and the National Director of the United States Space Programs. I will thus continue to work as a civilian for many more years, until the President decides that he doesn't need my services anymore."

"And then?"

"Then? The big American aerospace companies will most probably fight to hire me as a design engineer and program manager. Without bragging, I can say that my reputation in the aerospace domain is quite high. However, whatever may happen, my little Nancy will come first."

Both Frederick and Anna Schenk nodded approvingly at her words.



**10:46 (Germany Time)**

**Monday, April 22, 1985 'C'**

**International Arrivals Hall of the Hamburg-Fuhlsbüttel Airport**

**Hamburg, German Federal Republic**

Frederick and Anna Schenk laughed when their son Karl opened wide his eyes as little Nancy kissed him on his lips just before they were going to part with Ingrid after debarkation.

"Mein Gott! Your cute Nancy is going to ravage the ranks of the boys around her." exclaimed Anna, amused, bringing a sardonic smile on Ingrid's lips.

"Yes: I am afraid of that. I can already see my future white hairs caused by that. You know what they say about boys versus girls? While raising a boy, you have only one dick to worry about."

Frederick Schenk laughed again and gently patted Nancy's head.

"That's so true! It was really nice to see you, little Nancy. Thank you for playing with my son Karl."

"You're welcome!" replied Nancy, grinning. The Schenks then walked away to join the lines of passengers reserved for German citizens and waiting to pass the immigration controls. As for Ingrid, she led Nancy by the hand and joined one of the lines reserved for foreign citizens and prepared in advance her passport and that of Nancy. Their turn at the immigration check booth came after a few minutes of waiting and Ingrid took Nancy in her arms before walking to the booth, where a German immigration officer with a thick moustache looked at both of them from behind his transparent wicket window.

"Passports, please!"

"Here you are, sir!" replied Ingrid in her accent-less German. The officer raised an eyebrow on seeing that Ingrid's passport was a diplomatic one. He further raised his eyebrows on seeing the mention 'United State Special Presidential Advisor' in the passport. Typing quickly her passport information in his computer terminal, he had to wait a few seconds before he got a response from its central data computer, a rather slow and limited machine. He used those seconds to ask a few questions to her.

"What is the purpose of your visit to Germany, miss?"

“Personal trip!” she replied at once. “I want to visit my old city of birth and show it to my little daughter.”

The officer nodded his head and didn't ask her in which city she had been born: that reason she had given was actually a very common one when coming from American visitors, many of whom had German family roots. Some data finally showed on his computer terminal and he read it quickly, stiffening when he realized who Ingrid was. General Ingrid Dows was a near legend in Germany, thanks to her space exploits and to her pivotal role in saving Europe from a Soviet invasion launched by Stalin in 1953. Some Germans however, those who had been supporters of Hitler and of his Nazis, hated her and considered her a traitor, for having fought on the Allies side after 1941, after serving for a few months as a female auxiliary of the Luftwaffe. However, Helmut Schomberg wasn't such a Nazi sympathizer. Stamping both stamps, he then gave them back to Ingrid with a smile.

“Here you are, General. Welcome to Germany and have a good stay.”

“Thank you, sir! You are most kind.”

Schonberg followed Ingrid with his eyes for a short moment as she walked away towards the baggage carrousel hall.

“Fifty-nine years old... Yet, she looks like she could be my daughter.”

The passage through the customs checkpoints with her luggage went smoothly, thanks to Ingrid's diplomatic passport. With the telescopic handles of her two rigid, rollers-equipped suitcases extended and with Nancy playfully riding the smallest suitcase, Ingrid walked to the small train station which linked the airport with downtown Hamburg and bought tickets for the Line One of the S-Bahn system, which provided a 25 minute ride to the heart of the city. That trip allowed Ingrid to reacquaint herself visually with the city, which had obviously changed a lot in the nearly twenty years since she had last visited Germany. However, she soon grew worried when she noticed that Nancy was unusually quiet and absent-minded. Opening a mental link with her as delicately as she could, she then sensed an avalanche of images and sounds cascading at incredible speed through the mind of her daughter. Ingrid recognized at once what was happening, as she had herself experienced the exact same thing dozens of times in her past, when she had gained access to the memories of her past incarnations in 1941: new incarnation souvenirs were now coming back to Nancy. Knowing that the best thing to do now was to let her in peace, she gently passed an arm around her and made her

lean against her, as if she was sleeping. That at least avoided questions from her neighboring travelers until their train stopped in Hamburg's central train station. Leaving their wagon and going to a quiet corner behind a pillar, Ingrid took out of one of her suitcases a belly pack designed to carry a baby or a toddler against one's chest and put it on, then slid Nancy down in it, facing her. With Nancy still absent-minded and appearing to be half-asleep, that allowed Ingrid to be able to pull her two suitcases behind her, making them roll on their wheels. Walking out of the train station, she went to the line of waiting taxis parked in front of it and commandeered a taxi to go to the hotel where she had reserved a room in advance. The taxi ride was not a long one, as Ingrid had chosen a hotel in the downtown area, less than a kilometer from the central train station. Some 22 minutes later, she was able to put down Nancy on the large bed of their room, where she lay in a near trance-like sleep. Unpacking her suitcases as quietly as she could, Ingrid then joined her daughter on the bed, lying next to her and mentally monitoring the progress of Nancy's recall process. She was thus able to identify those past memories as having belonged to an Iranian man named Ali Pasravi, born in Isfahan in the year 1822 and who had died there from a cancer in 1873. Ingrid was pleased to see that Ali Pasravi had been a professional musician, rather than a soldier or adventurer: she truly wished for Nancy to have a quieter, less violent life than what she had experienced herself.

Nancy woke up from her trance a good hour later, her eyes fluttering before she looked soberly at Ingrid.

"Mommy, I have new souvenirs from the past."

"I know, my sweet Nancy: I monitored the process as it happened. What do you think of those new souvenirs?"

"Ali seemed to be a nice, kind man. Him being a musician was also nice. I think that I would like very much to become a musician as well when I grow up."

"And I too would like that very much, Nancy. What instrument or instruments did Ali play, mostly?"

"He was good with both drums and string instruments, but his favorite instruments were the Tombak goblet drum, the Barbat Persian lute and, particularly, the Qanun, a large zither. Ali was especially fond of the Qanun and his Qanun playing was very popular in Isfahan."

Ingrid smiled at the obvious enthusiasm shown by Nancy as she spoke about Ali's instrument playing.

"Do you think that you could play those instruments, Nancy?"

"I don't know, Mommy: my hands are still very small, but I would like to try."

That immediately brought an idea to Ingrid's mind. She had told President Bush that she would take at least four weeks of vacation before starting work again as his special advisor and her planned use of those weeks was still very much a work in progress. It took her only a few seconds to thus take a decision.

"I tell you what, Nancy. Sometimes during our vacation, we will go to Iran to visit Isfahan and see if I could find for you a few traditional musical instruments."

Her daughter exploded at once with joy, jumping on the bed while shouting.

"YES! THANK YOU, MOMMY!"

Ingrid let Nancy calm down a bit before taking her hand.

"Well, it is nearly noon now. Are you getting hungry?"

"I am, Mommy!"

"Then, we will walk out of the hotel and see if we can find a good restaurant to have lunch."

As both were about to leave their hotel room, something came to Ingrid's mind and she looked down at her little daughter.

"By the way, did you learn new languages thanks to your new souvenirs?"

"Yes, Mommy: Arabic and Farsi."

"Excellent!" said Ingrid, truly pleased. With Nancy now knowing in depth five languages, with most probably a lot more to come in the near future, this would further accelerate her education and greatly broaden her culture and her understanding of this World, all good things in her opinion.

### **09:13 (Germany Time)**

**Tuesday, April 23, 1985 'C'**

**Hamburg regional heliport**

**District of Rothenburg, Hamburg**

Ingrid smiled with anticipated pleasure as she stepped out of her taxi with Nancy and looked at the collection of private helicopters lined up along the tarmac of the small heliport, situated in an eastern district of Hamburg. She knew well and was qualified as

pilot on many of the models she could see on the tarmac. The prospect of doing some flying brought happiness to her: flying had always been her life and would always be. Helping Nancy out of the taxi and recuperating her backpack, she generously paid the taxi driver before leading her daughter by the hand towards the small heliport terminal. She found about a dozen persons mulling around inside the reception lounge, plus two employees standing behind the service counter. Watched by the curious onlookers, who were mostly men in their thirties and forties, she walked to the service counter and spoke in German to the mature man standing behind it.

“Good morning, sir! My name is Ingrid Dows and I called yesterday to rent the use of one of your helicopters.”

The man, not clicking on who she was in reality, nodded his head and consulted a register before looking back at her.

“Your reservation is indeed in our books, Misses Dows. Now, what type of helicopter would you prefer to use and what will be your itinerary or destination?”

“I would like to rent one of your Sikorsky UH-1T light helicopters: I am qualified on the type. As for my itinerary, I intend to fly to Berlin and land there for a few hours before returning here.”

The heliport clerk, like the other persons present in the lounge, looked sharply at her when she mentioned ‘Berlin’.

“Uh, you should be aware that the Berlin Zone is still out of bounds to the public and that you could be arrested for trespassing if you land inside the zone, miss.”

“I don’t think so, mister. Here is an authorization permit to visit the Berlin Zone, signed by your Minister of Interior, which I obtained via the German ambassador in Washington.”

The surprised clerk took the document handed to him by Ingrid and examined it for a couple of seconds before looking up at her with awe on his face.

“You...you are...”

“General Ingrid Dows, retired, ex-Commander of the United States Space Corps.” completed Ingrid in a calm voice, quite accustomed by now to the kinds of reactions her name brought. “Now, you do have a UH-1T available and ready to fly, right?”

“Uh, of course, General! We in fact have two of them which were not scheduled for other flights today. Which one would you prefer?”

“Can I see their maintenance dossiers first before answering you, mister?”

"Right away, General! Just give me a minute to get them."

As the man walked away towards a line of file cabinets, Nancy tugged on Ingrid's right trouser leg before speaking in a near whisper, using English.

"Mommy, those men are thinking about your ass."

Ingrid strangled with difficulty her laughter and smiled down to her daughter.

"Of course they are, Nancy. They always do. They will probably think the same about your ass once you have grown up."

"Is that good or bad, Mommy?"

Ingrid's smile changed to a serious expression.

"It depends if you want them to do so, Nancy. However, be careful about the men and boy who would ignore a 'no' from you: that could mean that they would be ready to hurt you if you refuse their advances. In that case, you better walk away from them."

"What if they follow me, Mommy?"

"Then, you either seek help or defend yourself. Did your Andrée Borrel encounter a similar situation in her life?"

"Many times, Mommy."

"And what did she do then?"

"She punched them, Mommy." answered soberly her little daughter, making Ingrid nod.

"A correct reaction. However, don't be that rough with the little boys you will meet in the next few years: they are still too young to truly have bad ideas about how to treat girls. Do you understand me?"

"Yes, Mommy!"

The heliport clerk then returned to his counter, putting down two thick ring binders on the counter.

"Here you are, General."

"Thank you!"

It took Ingrid no more than two minutes to make her choice and tap an index on top of one of the binders.

"I will take this one, mister: it has the least number of flying hours and has a good maintenance record. I will also need to fill a flight plan, once I will have paid for the rental."

"No problems, General: we have flight plan forms right here."

Paying for the renting of the helicopter and filling a VFR<sup>2</sup> flight plan took her less than twenty minutes, after which the clerk walked out with her and Nancy to lead her to her helicopter, which he proudly pointed to her the royal blue and silver aircraft.

"Here you go, General: a fine, dependable bird, ready to fly."

"It indeed looks nice, mister. Let me just do a walk-around inspection of it, then I will fly off."

The clerk, himself a qualified pilot, nodded his head at that: she definitely sounded like a responsible, conscientious pilot, unlike some of the clients who showed up at the heliport with deep pockets but shallow flying experience. Returning inside the terminal, he filed away the paperwork he had just done, then went to the windows when a whine signaled the starting up of the UH-1T's turbine. The light helicopter soon took off, handled with assurance and finesse, then turned towards the Southeast and sped away, also watched by the other men in the lounge.

### **13:20 (Germany Time)**

#### **Berlin Forbidden Zone**

"This is it, Nancy: we are now overflying Berlin, my city of birth."

The toddler girl looked down and around, aghast at what she was seeing.

"But everything is destroyed, Mommy! Is anybody living here?"

Ingrid sadly shook her head at that question while continuing to fly at low altitude over the vast field of ruins.

"Nobody has lived here since that awful day of June 11, 1944, some 41 years ago. When the British dropped a thermonuclear bomb on the city in order to put an end to the war, over a million inhabitants died that day. Hundreds of thousands more died in the days and weeks to come, while the survivors fled to other cities. After that, the whole area was cordoned off and became a forbidden zone to everybody, be they military or civilian, because of the dangers from the radiations. By now, the radiation levels have greatly diminished, to the point of permitting short, intermittent visits to the zone, but it is still too dangerous to stay here on a long-term basis. The only activity you

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<sup>2</sup> VFR: Visual Flight Rules.

may see is heavy construction teams which have started to clear out the rubble and debris in the less contaminated districts.”

“And your old home, Mommy?”

“It was situated in the Tempelhof District, where the city’s airfield lay. That part is one of the least touched, which makes it possible for us to go visit briefly. Unfortunately, my old family home was destroyed and my family killed even earlier than in 1944. A British bomb fell on our house in 1940, as I was out on an errand, and killed my whole extended family, which had gathered to celebrate my grandfather’s birthday.”

Her daughter looked at her with incomprehension and incredulity.

“Your whole family?”

“Yes! I was then a fifteen-year-old grieving teenager, turned into an orphan in an instant.”

“What did you do then, Mommy?”

“I decided to help defend my country against more British bombings and I enlisted in the Luftwaffe, the German Air Force of that day. That started the chain of events that brought me to the point I am at today.”

Nancy then fell silent and resumed her observation of the ruins below and around.

About twelve minutes later, the flat expanse of the old Tempelhof Airfield appeared on the horizon. However, it was far from being a clear area that would allow an aircraft to land on it: debris of all kinds, including chunks of concrete or bricks, lay all over the place, along with the burned down carcasses of dozens of propeller-driven planes. Seeing zero human activity at the airfield, Ingrid chose to land in the western corner of the main tarmac, on the northern side of the airfield. That area happened to be the nearest from the district where her family home had been. Landing smoothly near the northwest limits of the airfield, Ingrid then switched off her engine and grabbed a screwdriver before starting to fidget with something behind her instruments panel.

“What are you doing, Mommy?”

“I am temporarily removing the main switch box of our helicopter. That way, nobody will be able to steal our helicopter while we are walking around.”

“But you said that nobody lived here, Mommy!”

“I did, but where there are abandoned ruins, there could be looters. That lesson was proved right again after a Chinese bomb destroyed Honolulu, in Hawaii. Despite of the still strong radiations, many looters tried their luck in the abandoned cities and



villages around Honolulu. Those bastards were however caught by our soldiers and then executed by firing squad.”

“And where are we going now, Mommy?”

“We are going to visit my family’s tomb, Nancy. It is not far from here. Let me put on your transport harness and my backpack, then we will star walking.”

With little Nancy now carried on her chest, facing outwards, and with her backpack on her back, Ingrid started walking at a fast, steady step across the concrete expanse of the airfield’s crescent-shaped main tarmac, heading northeast. She had to zigzag around innumerable obstacles and pieces of debris, including old aircraft carcasses. She stopped for a moment near what was left of a Messerschmidt Bf 109 fighter, its large Nazi swastika still clearly visible on its flanks, contemplating it with some bitterness.

“When I think that I fought for the Nazis for a few months.”

She however quickly corrected herself mentally: she had in reality fought to protect Germany from Allied bombings like the one that had killed her family. Contrary to many other Luftwaffe female auxiliaries, she had never been a hardcore Nazi. In fact, she could not have been, since she and her family were secretly Jews and would have been arrested at once if that had become known. Since they had been widely believed by their neighbors to be Lutherans, like many Germans, they had been buried in a nearby Christian cemetery. Ingrid had been able to visit their tomb before starting her training as a Luftwaffe auxiliary, so knew where to find it. However, that proved to be more difficult than she had expected: the nuclear blast which had destroyed the city, while centered nearly three kilometers away, had projected around a huge amount of debris that had then fallen and buried many of the features around the city.

It took her a good hour of hard slog on grounds covered by chunks of debris, on which she could easily sprain an ankle if not careful, before finally arriving at the cemetery. Another half hour was needed for her to then find her family’s tomb. Unfortunately, like many others around, the headstone was now lying on the ground, half covered with dust, dirt and debris. That sight saddened Ingrid, who lowered her head for a moment before grabbing Nancy and pulling her out of her transport harness, putting her down on the ground a couple of meters away.

“Stay there for a moment, Nancy: I’m going to try to put that headstone back up.”

She then approached the headstone and studied its state for a moment before deciding how to proceed. Grabbing the top of the headstone with both hands, Ingrid then pulled with all her strength. Normally, no man or woman would have succeeded into moving alone the big headstone, but Ingrid was no normal person: she was a Chosen of The One, with the physical and mental abilities that went with it. One of her physical abilities was superhuman strength, giving her a strength equivalent to that of at least four gorillas. That superhuman strength was enough to allow her after a mighty effort to redress the headstone into a roughly vertical position, following which she looked at Nancy while holding the headstone.

“Nancy, grab the biggest pieces of stone or concrete you can lift up and bring them here, so that I could secure this headstone in place.”

Any normal person hearing her would have either opposed her or would have mocked her for expecting a toddler girl to be able to carry anything but a pebble. However, Nancy was half-human and half-celestial, something Ingrid was keenly aware of, and she knew that Nancy could carry a lot more than a normal child. Still, this was also an experiment on her part to see what her daughter was capable of. However, what Nancy achieved went beyond anything Ingrid had expected. Instead of using her small arms and tiny hands, Nancy chose to use her talent of telekinesis to mentally lift from the ground chunks of debris that had to weigh at least fifty kilos each. Walking slowly behind the pieces of levitating rock, she brought them to the headstone and let them drop at the spots designated by Ingrid. In less than five minutes, a pile of rocks and chunks of concrete surrounded the base of the headstone, securing it in a vertical position and with its inscription now clearly visible. Thoroughly impressed, Ingrid crouched in front of her daughter and gently caressed her face with both hands.

“You did great, Nancy! I am very proud of you.”

“Will your family’s grave be okay now, Mommy?”

“It will, Nancy: we can now easily read the inscriptions on it. Come! Let’s contemplate it in silence for a moment and pay respect to my old family.”

Standing in front of the headstone, Ingrid lowered her head and closed her eyes to meditate for a moment, watched by Nancy. She finally opened her eyes again and looked at her daughter.

“I will now put you into your transport harness, so that we could walk to the site of my old family house.”

“Will we be able to see parts of it, Mommy?”

Ingrid shook sadly her head in response.

“Unfortunately, no! The ruins of my house were fairly quickly cleared away after the bombing that destroyed it and others in 1940. Then, a new building was built on its lot. The nuclear bomb that blew in 1944 destroyed in turn that new building. However, I want to be able to get a sense of how the place is now. Come!”

With Nancy back on her chest, Ingrid walked out of the cemetery and headed West. She had to climb over a big pile of rubble that had been a large residential building in order to leave the cemetery grounds and get to her old street, Arndt Strasse. While standing on top of the rubble pile, Ingrid was able to see that the street she had lived in some 45 years ago was so strewn with debris and rubble that it was difficult to recognize it as having been a street. Realizing the futility of her efforts, she chose not to push further on and instead pointed to Nancy the spot where her home had been.

“Unfortunately, my old street is now blocked by debris and we would risk injuries if we tried to get to the lot of my old home. If you follow my arm, you will see the lot, about halfway down that street block.”

“I see it, Mommy. Were you happy there, as a child?”

“Yes, I was. Times were not as hard then as they eventually became. However, I promise you that your future is what counts over anything else now. Let’s return to the helicopter: I saw what I wanted to see here.”

“What will we do after that, Mommy?”

“We will go visit another place with heavy significance for me, my little darling.” replied Ingrid, her expression solemn.

## **CHAPTER 3 – UNWELCOME**

**17:04 (London Time)**

**Friday, April 26, 1985 'C'**

**International arrival hall, Terminal 1**

**Heathrow International Airport, west of London**

**England, United Kingdom**

As they were about to emerge from the jetway and into the international arrival hall of Heathrow's Terminal 1, Nancy, who was walking beside Ingrid and holding her hand, looked up at her and spoke mentally to her.

*'Why were the people in the plane unhappy with us, Mommy?'*

*'Unhappy would be a kind word for the coldness I got, Nancy. The sad truth is that, until recently, I was officially considered as a war criminal by the government of this country. It is a long, complicated story, but the one thing that you have to remember is that not all the people in this country hate me. Most of the British people are decent folks and are normally quite welcoming and generous. However, their government propaganda and national medias have painted me in a bad way for over 32 years now and many British citizens believe what was said about me. That still doesn't forcibly make them bad people, by a long shot, and I doubt very much that they will show meanness towards you. So, if a situation occurs, let me handle it and don't get angry. Do you understand me?'*

*'Yes, Mommy!'*

Ingrid then concentrated on how she would handle the next few minutes and hours. If the cold, nearly hostile attitude shown towards her by the cabin crew of the British Airways airliner said anything, it was that she could expect more cold treatment from the various British officials she will have to meet or deal with. In contrast, the British passengers who had not been aware of who she was had been most friendly and polite with her, many of them complimenting her about Nancy. However, the little optimism left in her evaporated when she emerged inside the arrivals hall and saw a sign enjoining all arriving American citizens to join a dedicated lineup set at one extremity of the hall. That also angered Ingrid: even the Soviets reserved a less discriminatory welcome to visiting

Americans in Moscow. Resigning herself to incoming trouble, she walked with her daughter to that line, joining five more persons, including what appeared to be a young couple with two small children. The man waiting just ahead of Ingrid gave her a pinched smile while speaking in a low voice to her.

“What game are the British playing here? This is the first time anywhere in the World where I see American travelers singled out like this.”

“Do you travel a lot, mister?”

“I certainly do, miss! I am an archaeologist and historian and travel extensively to visit or work on various sites around the World. Oh, by the way: Doctor Aaron Foster, at your service.”

Ingrid shook the hand offered by Foster while replying to him.

“Ingrid Dows, retired General. I am sorry to say that, but this is probably due to me: the British have hated my guts since I sank one of their cruisers off Israel in 1953. Since then, they also committed a number of stupidities which earned them the ire of many American presidents. I believe that their old imperial grandeur is still getting to their heads.”

“Imperial grandeur... Pff! Their economy is pretty much in the dumpster...has been for quite a few years already. They can't even design really good commercial airliners anymore. That VC-20 we flew in couldn't even start to compare with the Boeing 717 I used on my previous trip.”

“I know!” said Ingrid, smiling at the man's remark. “I helped design the military variant of the Boeing 717. Let's hope that the British still have some of their legendary sense of fair play.”

“Well, I wouldn't count too much on that, General: look at that bunch of policemen gathered beyond our line's immigration booth. There are more of them there than in the rest of the whole hall. If they wanted to intimidate arriving American visitors, then they succeeded in it. I swear that this is the last time I will come to visit the British Museum.”

Looking sharply past the immigration booth, Ingrid effectively saw a group of six uniformed British policemen waiting in a corner while eyeing the Americans waiting to pass at the booth.

“Be sure that I will report this vexation to President Bush on my return to the United States, Doctor Foster. Apparently, the British government is still in need of a lesson.”

The young family of four was then called forward to the immigration booth. While their time there seemed inordinately long to Ingrid, with the British immigration officer asking many questions to the family, that family was finally able to walk away towards the luggage carrousel hall without further ado. Doctor Foster was next and also faced many questions before being allowed to proceed. Ingrid then took a deep breath and took Nancy in her arms, speaking in a low voice to her.

“Remember, Nancy: whatever happens, don’t get angry and let me handle this.”

“Alright, but I won’t let them hurt you, Mommy.”

Ingrid knew at once that Nancy meant what she had just said. During the last three days since their visit to Berlin, Nancy had remembered three more of her past incarnations and had thus matured well beyond her physical age, on top of learning how to defend herself thanks to her new souvenirs. Walking resolutely to the immigration booth, Ingrid stopped in front of the British officer’s wicket and slid her passport and that of Nancy through the slot in the Plexiglas pane separating her from the British.

“Good afternoon, sir! I came with my daughter to visit the tomb of my adoptive mother, in London.”

Those words seemed to soften a bit the man’s expression but that changed when he examined her passport. Looking up sharply at her, he also pressed a hidden button under his desk, something Ingrid didn’t miss.

“Do you have other reasons to visit the United Kingdom, Miss Dows?”

“No! I haven’t been able to visit Nancy Laplante’s tomb in over 34 years and I wanted my young daughter to be able to see it as well.”

The mention of ‘Nancy Laplante’ did succeed in again softening the man’s attitude. Stamping both passports without further ado, he then gave them back to Ingrid via the wicket’s slot.

“Brigadier Laplante is still respected as the true heroine she was, Miss Dows. Have a good stay in London.”

“Thank you, sir!”

Only half reassured, Ingrid then walked away towards the luggage carrousel hall, situated one level down. While no policemen came forward to arrest or grab her, she didn’t miss the fact that four of them started to follow her.

Retrieving her two suitcases went without an itch but Ingrid knew that the worst could come as she approached the customs checkpoint. The two customs officers manning the counter she approached were staring at her with rather cold expressions, while a group of no less than four policemen waited a few meters away, also staring at her. Despite their attitude, the senior customs officer did use a polite tone when she stopped in front of him.

"Please put your luggage on the counter and open them, Miss Dows. Are you carrying any weapon, drugs or other illegal items, either on you or in your luggage?"

"None, mister! I only have with me items of clothing and personal hygiene, plus a 35mm still camera."

The customs officer nodded in response, then turned the two suitcases around and fully opened them and Ingrid's travel bag. He was searching the first suitcase as she asked her another question.

"And what is the purpose of your visit to the United Kingdom, miss?"

"I came to visit the tomb of my adoptive mother, which is in London."

The customs officer did not respond to that, continuing to search her suitcase while the second officer checked the other suitcase, which contained Nancy's clothes and personal items. While their search was very thorough, the two customs officers didn't make a mess of her things and finally closed back her suitcases and bag after about two minutes, with the senior officer nodding to Ingrid.

"Everything is in order, Miss Dows. Have a good stay in England."

Ingrid discretely let out a sigh of relief while retrieving her luggage and putting it back on her luggage cart.

"Thank you very much, sir! Have a good day yourself."

As she walked away, little Nancy sitting in the luggage cart, the police officer in charge of the group that had been waiting nearby went to the senior customs officer and spoke to him, irritation in his voice.

"Why did you let her pass so easily?"

That earned him a hard stare from the customs officer.

"I let her pass because she had no illegal or suspicious items with her. She acted within the law and I did the same on my part, period!"

The police officer tightened his jaws in anger but didn't reply to that and walked away, furious. However, he knew that this Ingrid Dows was not in the clear yet: other government officials would now keep an eye on her.

Ingrid could have used the subway station situated under the airport terminal for a quick and easy ride to downtown London, but she wanted Nancy to be able to see the countryside on their way into the city. She thus chose to go to the nearest taxi station to take a cab ride to her hotel. While allowing Nancy to have a good view around during their trip, it would also make it easier to spot any eventual followers. She nearly immediately corrected herself on that: she was now certain that British government agents, most probably from the M.I.5, the British counter-intelligence service, would follow her around during her visit to London. Walking to the first cab in the line, Ingrid bent down and smiled to its driver.

“Hello! I would like to go to the Travelodge London Hotel, on St-Swithin’s Lane, in the City.”

The driver immediately stepped out of his taxi to come open the rear left door of his vehicle and also opening his trunk. He loaded her suitcases and travel bag in the trunk after Ingrid and Nancy had taken place on the rear bench seat, then returned behind the driver’s wheel and smiled to Ingrid.

“We should be at your hotel in about forty minutes, miss.”

“Thank you!” simply replied Ingrid, who knew London well enough to judge that the taxi driver’s time estimate was a realistic one, in view of the heavy traffic inside the city. As the taxi driver started his engine, Ingrid spoke to her daughter, who was sitting next to her on the rear bench.

“Come stand on my legs and face the rear, Nancy: you will be able to better see around that way.”

“Yes, Mommy!” replied Nancy, who then promptly stepped on the bench, then climbed on Ingrid’s legs, with her mother passing an arm around her torso in order to help steady her. Ingrid then spoke to her in a low voice, using German.

“Nancy, use Andrée’s experience and keep watching behind us, to check if others will try to follow us. Check in particular those who will start rolling just after us, then watch to see if they continue to stay behind us even once we are inside the city.”

“I will be watchful, Mommy.”

The taxi driver rolled out of his parking spot a second later, with little Nancy watching its back like a hawk.



A dark blue sedan rolled out of its temporary parking spot a mere two seconds later, then adjusted its speed to that of the taxi. The three British M.I.5 agents inside the sedan all kept their eyes on the cab, with the agent in the front passenger seat using from time to time a pair of small binoculars to look inside the taxi.

"Dows is in the rear left position, with her little girl in her arms and looking outside. I must say that she is quite cute."

The senior agent then grabbed the microphone of the car's radio transceiver and spoke in it.

"Fox Two from Fox One: the target is in a cab with plate number GKN 099. It just left Terminal One of the airport and is heading towards the access ramp to the M4 Highway. Be ready to take the relay from me once it will enter the city."

"Fox Two, understood!"

The senior agent then hooked back the microphone on its support and made a mean smile.

"If she gives us the slightest excuse to arrest her, then we will fall like a ton of bricks on top of that bitch."

Some twelve minutes later, Ingrid's taxi arrived at the point where the M4 Highway became the Great West Road and continued on it, rolling through the district of Chiswick and soon arriving in sight of the Thames River. A few more minutes and the Great West Road became the West Cromwell Road, with the cab rolling successively through West Kensington, Earl's Court, South Kensington, Knightsbridge and Belgravia. That was when the taxi driver spoke for the first time since their departure from the airport, smiling to Ingrid via his rear-view mirror.

"We are about to roll on Piccadilly, miss. If you look to your right front, you will see Buckingham Palace and its gardens."

"Thank you!" replied Ingrid before whispering to Nancy in German.

"Did you see suspect cars, Nancy?"

"Two, Mommy: one dark blue car and one gray car, each with three men inside. They keep switching positions behind us."

"Nice work, Nancy! Keep an eye on them."

The taxi entered the St-James district a few minutes later, continuing on Piccadilly, then turning right on Haymarket and rolling towards the Thames River before

turning again, this time on Pall Mall and heading east. That was when the taxi driver spoke again.

“Trafalgar Square, miss! You will see to your right the column dedicated to Admiral Nelson.”

That made Nancy look for a moment at the tall monument, then ask a question in English to her mother.

“Mommy, is that Admiral Nelson more famous than Francis Drake?”

“Uh, I am not sure. Let me ask our driver. Sir, is Admiral Nelson more famous than Sir Francis Drake in England?”

“That is a good question, miss.” replied the driver, being honest. “Sir Francis Drake saved us from the Spanish Armada, while Admiral Nelson saved us from Napoleon’s fleet. Both are considered as national heroes in England but I suppose that Admiral Nelson is the better known one around the World.”

“Thank you very much, sir.” said before smiling to her daughter. “You have your answer, Nancy.”

That seemed to frustrate the little girl, who frowned while returning her attention to the cars following their taxi.

“I bet that this Nelson was not as good as a sailor.”

Pall Mall Street soon merged with the Strand, which in turn became Fleet Street, the main artery of The City, the financial district of London. Soon after Fleet Street turned into Ludgate Hill Street, the taxi driver spoke yet again.

“Here is the St-Paul’s Cathedral on our left, miss. We will soon arrive at your hotel.”

“Thank you, sir. Is the Cathedral’s crypt still open to visitors?”

“Yes, miss, but there are specific visiting hours for it. I don’t remember them but you can get that information at the reception of your hotel.”

Ingrid nodded her head, then spoke softly to her daughter while pointing the old cathedral to her.

“That is where we are going to visit the tomb of my adoptive mother, Nancy. We will go there tomorrow, if it is open then.”

Three minutes later, their taxi finally stopped in front of the entrance of a hotel opening on a narrow side street.

"Here we are, miss: the Travelodge London Central Bank Hotel! Let me take your luggage out of the trunk."

"You are too kind, sir."



Stepping quickly out of his car, the driver opened the trunk and took out of it Ingrid's two suitcases and one travel bag before facing Ingrid, who handed him the money for the fare, plus a generous tip.

"Here you go, my good man: I was able to see the amount of the fare on your meter. Keep everything."

"Why, thank you, miss!" said the happy taxi driver while accepting the money. "I wish you a nice stay in London."

"And I wish you a good evening, sir."

Ingrid then watched the taxi driver return into his cab and then drive away, before grabbing her suitcases and bag. One discrete glance told her that a dark blue sedan with three men inside had turned into the narrow street but had then parked nearly immediately.

"Nancy, is that one of the pursuing cars?"

"Yes, Mommy!"

"Good! Let's go take our room."

Entering the hotel lobby, which proved to be comparatively small, Ingrid dropped her suitcases in front of the reception desk and smiled to the receptionist while putting her two passports on the reception counter.

"Good evening, sir! My name is Ingrid Dows and I reserved a room a few days ago."

"Ah yes! I remember booking your reservation, Misses Dows. It was for a single room with large bed, correct?"

"Correct! I will occupy it for the next three days at a minimum and will pay in advance for those three days."

"Excellent! Let me register you, then I will be able to give you your key, Misses Dows."

Consulting her passport and that of Nancy, the clerk quickly registered her in, then handed her a room key.

"Here you are, Misses Dows: Room 216."

"Thank you very much!"

The receptionist then rang the small bell on his counter, making a young bellboy come forward.

"Richard, please help carry the lady's suitcases up to Room 216."

"Right away, sir! If you will please follow me, miss."

"With pleasure, young man."

Ingrid, holding Nancy's hand and carrying her travel bag, followed the bellboy to a rather ancient elevator and entered it. The elevator proved nearly as slow as it was old but at least the ride was smooth. Going out on the second floor, the trio then walked to a door bearing the number '216', which the bellboy unlocked with his master key and then pushed open before stepping aside.

"After you, miss."

"Thank you, young man!"

The room Ingrid then entered may not have been very large, but it was clean and the large bed looked comfortable. Ingrid nodded with satisfaction then: in truth, she had seen a lot worse than this in the past. She then gave a two-pound banknote as a tip to the bellboy, who bowed to her at once.

"Thank you, miss. Have a good evening, miss."

The bellboy then left, closing the door behind him and leaving Ingrid with her daughter.

"What do you say to go out and find a good restaurant for supper after unpacking our suitcases, Nancy? Are you hungry?"

"I am, Mommy! What kind of restaurants do they have in London?"

Her question made Ingrid giggle briefly.

"All kinds! London is a very cosmopolitan city, contrary to Washington. Now, let's unpack!"

Some ten minutes later, both of them went back down to the reception lobby, where Ingrid approached the counter to ask a question to the clerk.

"Would you know by chance the visiting hours for the crypt in St-Paul's Cathedral, sir?"

“Uh, I believe that it is opened from eleven in the morning to three in the afternoon, but I wouldn’t want to induce you in error. Let me check quickly, miss.”

It took less than a minute to the receptionist to consult his documentation and smile back at Ingrid.

“I was slightly off, miss: it is opened to visitors between eleven and 3:15. However, it is closed on Sundays. I must warn you that the charge for visitors who are not parishioners is a bit stiff: twenty pounds.”

“Ouch! That IS stiff! Why so?”

“Because the cathedral gets little to no financial support from either the Crown, the Anglican Church or The City, miss. It wholly depends on the revenues from visitors and donations from the faithful to pay for its maintenance and renovations.”

“I see! I have another question for you, sir: do you know a few good restaurants near here?”

The receptionist grinned in response.

“It depends on the kind of restaurant you would like, miss: there are dozens of good restaurants within easy walking distance of this hotel. Would you prefer traditional British cuisine, European cuisine, French, Indian, Italian, Chinese, Japanese?”

“Uh, let me ask my boss, mister. Nancy, what would you like to eat?”

“Fish and chips, Mommy!” replied at once Nancy, making both Ingrid and the clerk smile, with the latter nodding his head in approval.

“Then, you must go to the ‘George and Vulture’. It is an old pub nearby, on Castle Court. I will show you on a map.”

**18:51 (London Time)**

**The George and Vulture Pub**

**3 Castle Court, the City**

**London**



“Here we are, Nancy: the George and Vulture Pub! It looks like quite an old place. It should be an interesting experience to eat here. Let’s go in!”

Opening the black door of the pub and entering with Nancy, Ingrid found herself inside what one would expect of a traditional old British pub: lacquered wood furniture, varnished wood beam structures...and lots of customers drinking beer from big mugs.

Thankfully, she was able to find a vacant small table set against one of the walls and sat Nancy in one of the chairs before sitting herself and signaling to a waitress, who came at once with a menu in her hands.

"Yes, miss?"

"We came for supper and my daughter said she wanted to eat some fish and chips. I was told at my hotel that fish and chips is on your menu."

"That is correct, miss. Here is the menu. Would you like something to drink first?"

"I will take a draft beer, blond type, for me and a glass of fresh milk for my daughter."

"I'll be right back, miss. Would you like a booster chair for your cute daughter?"

"That would be nice, thank you."

The waitress then hurried away, to return a minute later with a child's booster chair which she placed on Nancy's chair, allowing her to be at the correct height to be able to eat.

"Here you go, sweetie! I'll be back in a second with your drinks, miss."

As the waitress was again walking away, Ingrid saw a man wearing a suit enter the pub and go sit on one of the stools of the bar. Scanning him telepathically, she hid a frown and spoke softly to Nancy in German.

"One of our followers is here, sitting at the bar. Please don't look in that direction, Nancy: I will keep an eye on him."

As Nancy nodded in understanding, Ingrid noted that the man's jacket was unbuttoned and was fairly loose around his torso, one possible sign that he was wearing a handgun rig. Putting the man aside in her mind, she then examined the menu, taking only a few seconds to make her choice, which she gave when the waitress came back with her beer and Nancy's glass of milk.

"Thank you, miss! We will both take the fish and chips. Would it be possible to make a smaller portion for my daughter?"

"Of course, miss: we are accustomed to serve families with children. It won't be very long before you are served."

As promised, the waitress was back in less than ten minutes with their plates of fish and chips, putting them down on their table with a big smile.

"Here you go, sweetie, miss. Enjoy!"

"Thank you!" replied Ingrid, also smiling. Nancy immediately dived into her plate, cutting and picking a first piece of fried cod fish, then eating it with obvious delight.

"The fish is very good, Mommy."

"I am glad to hear that, my love." replied Ingrid before taking her first bite. She had to agree with her daughter about the fish: it was excellent and as good as the best fried fish she had ever tasted in the past. The fried potatoes were also very good, crispy and not too greasy.

They were halfway through their meals when a loud, raucous group of five British Royal Navy sailors in uniform entered the pub, visibly off duty. Ingrid tensed up on seeing them: the last time she had met British sailors, inside a restaurant in Taiwan a few years ago, she had collected a few punches to her face from an enraged sailor blaming her for the death of his father aboard the H.M.S. TIGER, which she had sunk off the coast of Palestine in 1953. Thankfully, the five sailors headed straight for the bar, where they sat and ordered beers. Feeling partly relieved, Ingrid continued eating, but kept her telepathic vigil up.

At the bar, the M.I.5 agent saw in the arrival of the Royal Navy sailors an opportunity to possibly bring trouble to Ingrid Dows. Waiting for the sailors to have started to drink their first beer, he then spoke to the nearest one, a tough-looking petty officer in his mid-forties.

"I don't know if you and your comrades noticed, but there is an enemy of the Royal Navy present in the pub this evening."

The petty officer threw a confused look at him in response, not really understanding what the agent had meant. What the agent did not notice was the frown that appeared on the face of the pub owner, who was helping serve the customers at the bar. Before he could approach the M.I.5 agent to tell him to mind his own business and not create trouble, the agent discreetly pointed at Ingrid, still eating at a corner table.

"That woman is ex-General Ingrid Dows, the American who sank the H.M.S. TIGER in 1953."

"Her? But she looks to be only about 23. Are you sure?"

"Very! Remember that she is partly famous because of her apparent eternal youth."

Those words made the petty officer look sharply at Ingrid while stepping down from his stool. However, before he could start walking towards Ingrid's table, a loud thud made him look down at the floor next to the agent's stool. What he saw was a snub-nosed revolver lying on the wooden floor. He was also not the only one to see it, as a female customer at a nearby table shouted out loud.

"HEY! THAT MAN HAD A GUN!"

The M.I.5 agent then realized with a pang of panic that his service revolver had somehow fallen from its shoulder holster and was now lying on the floor, in plain sight of everybody. What he couldn't know was that Ingrid had used her telekinesis powers to snap open the holster's retaining strap and to then make the revolver fall off. The pub owner, now truly incensed, grabbed the agent's right shoulder and stared hard into his eyes.

"You better explain yourself about this gun, mister, or I will call the police on you. Why were you trying to incite trouble in my pub?"

The panicked agent suddenly found himself facing a near impossible situation: if he publicly announced himself to be a government agent, then his cover and tailing assignment would be blown sky high. On the other hand, illegal firearm carry was looked upon very severely in Great Britain, where even most police officers did not carry service weapons. He thus had the choice of either showing his badge or having to flee the pub to avoid trouble. He finally decided to show his badge, extracting it from one pocket of his jacket and showing it discretely to the pub owner.

"Please lower your voice, mister: I am a government agent and I am trailing a potentially dangerous person."

"You mean that young mother eating with her little daughter? She has been eating quietly at her table while you, on the other hand, were trying to incite this sailor to go attack or harass her. I don't care who you are: I don't want to see trouble inside my pub. Pick up your gun and get the hell out of here, now, or I will call the police."

The M.I.5 agent, mortified, could only obey and bent down to pick up his revolver, slipping it back into its holster and leaving the pub after throwing a dark look at Ingrid, who now had a sarcastic smile on her lips. As for the petty officer, he gave a reassuring look to the pub owner.

"Don't worry about me, sir: I will simply go talk to that young woman. I am not the kind to attack a mother in front of her child."

"Fine, but please don't start an argument with her."



Closely watched by the pub owner and by the other Royal Navy sailors, the petty officer approached Ingrid's table, prompting her into standing up from her chair, in order not to be possibly caught sitting and near defenseless. However, the petty officer stopped well short of her table, keeping over a meter of distance before speaking to her, his tone neutral.

"Are you General Dows, miss?"

"Yes, I am, Petty Officer. However, I have retired from military service. Why are you asking?"

"For two reasons, miss: first, why did you sink the cruiser H.M.S. TIGER 32 years ago?"

"Because I had no other choice at the time. My airbase in Palestine was under a massive Arab air attack and the TIGER then started jamming electronically my radars and communications. I had to sink it if I wanted to save my peacekeeping force. Also, the night before that, British commandos wearing anonymous uniforms with no markings attacked my base, trying to destroy my aircraft on the ground. My soldiers were able to stop them but it cost me 34 dead and many wounded. That made for a total of two treacherous, undeclared acts of war committed by your government against an American force engaged in a peacekeeping mission. Don't blame me for the loss of the TIGER, Petty Officer: blame your government of that day. What is your other question?"

"Why are you visiting England now, knowing that many people here hate you?"

"I came to visit the tomb of my adoptive mother, Nancy Laplante. As for those who hate me, maybe they should take off their blinders and recognize the multiple wrongs committed by their own government, including shooting down my spaceplane as I was returning to Earth after rescuing two Soviet astronauts in distress in orbit. Now, can I continue my meal with my daughter, Petty Officer?"

The British sailor stared at her for a moment before nodding his head.

"I am ready to believe you, General. I will not incommode you further. By the way, your daughter is really cute. Have a good evening, General."

The sailor then turned around and returned to the bar. However, that left many of the other customers of the pub looking or glancing at Ingrid while whispering comments between them, having realized only belatedly who she really was. Ingrid sighed and did her best to ignore them and continued eating with Nancy. She finally left the pub with her daughter some half hour later to walk back to her hotel, often watching behind her to look for followers.

**11:03 (London Time)**

**Saturday, April 27, 1985 'C'**

**Underground crypt of St-Paul's Cathedral**

**The City, London**

Ingrid and Nancy were the first ones in the waiting line of visitors and tourists when their guide for the tour of the crypt undid the chain blocking the stairs leading down to the crypt of St-Paul's Cathedral. Ingrid took Nancy in her arms before going down the stairs, in order to avoid seeing her daughter being trampled by impatient visitors. Once all the visitors were down at the foot of the stairs, their guide addressed them in English first, then repeating himself in French for the benefit of continental tourists.

"Good morning and welcome to the crypt of St-Paul's Cathedral. We are now in the south aisle of the crypt. This stone vaulted basement under the cathedral is the final resting place of the greatest men in the history of England and Great Britain and... Yes, miss?"

"What about the women, sir?" asked Ingrid, to the barely hidden annoyance of the guide, who flashed a smile in return.

"Excuse me, my mistake. As I meant to say, this is the final resting place of some of the greatest persons in the history of England, Great Britain and of the Commonwealth, be they military heroes, politicians, artists and scientists. We will now start our tour with what is known as 'Artists' Corner'."

Ingrid, still holding Nancy in her arms, followed the guide with the rest of the group as they started looking in succession at various tombs, statues, busts and commemorative plaques. The group soon arrived at the Cornish porphyry sarcophagus containing the coffin of the Duke of Wellington, where the guide took some time to recount the military exploits of Wellington during the Napoleonic Wars of the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The group then slowly continued its tour, arriving a few minutes later at a large circle formed by Tuscan columns and situated under the big dome of the cathedral. The place was of a solemn beauty, with its white mosaic marble floor and large white marble sarcophagus in its center.

"This, ladies and gentlemen, is the tomb of Admiral Horatio Nelson, the Victor of Trafalgar and possibly the greatest admiral in the history of the British Royal Navy."

The guide was then interrupted again by a raised hand, but this time it was that of little Nancy.

“Yes, little lady?”

“What about Sir Francis Drake? Wasn’t he considered a great admiral as well?”

“Well,” replied the guide, a bit miffed, “while Sir Francis Drake was indeed a great British sailor, he is not buried here, little lady.”

“And where would he be buried, mister?” asked a Spanish tourist, to the annoyance of the guide at being sidetracked again.

“To be frank, I don’t know, sir.”

“He was buried at sea off the coast of Panama, near Portobello.” Said Nancy, answering the Spanish tourist and making quite a few tourists giggle or smile in amusement.

“Ahem! Well, let’s continue our tour, will we? The next tomb we will examine is of decidedly more modern origin. If you will follow me, we will now visit the sarcophagus containing the tomb of Brigadier Nancy Laplante, triple recipient of the Victoria Cross and a major military hero of World War Two.”

Ingrid felt a wave of emotions as the group walked a few steps and stopped near a pink marble sarcophagus. A polished brass plaque fixed to one side of the sarcophagus bore the name ‘Nancy Laplante’ and a few lines of inscriptions, which the guide described.

“Brigadier Nancy Laplante, apart from being a true hero of the Commonwealth, was also the sole known time traveler in history, having involuntarily traveled from the year 2012 back to the year 1940. Her knowledge tremendously helped Great Britain in its war against the Nazis, while her courage and exceptional military leadership brought many stinging defeats to the Germans. Unfortunately, she was captured in 1941 by the Germans after the aircraft transporting her crashed at sea. She was then tortured and killed by the Nazis. She was afforded national funerals, including a funeral parade down The Mall, before being buried here. If we now move further along the recesses, we will view the tombs of three great British admirals and that of Sir Lawrence of Arabia...”

This time, Ingrid didn’t follow the other visitors and stayed next to the pink sarcophagus, approaching it close enough to let little Nancy caress the marble of the sarcophagus with her tiny hand.

“She was my adoptive mother and I miss her a lot, Nancy. However, her spirit continues to live within Sarah. Don’t hesitate to ask Sarah to tell stories about her whenever you wish, as you will learn a lot from her.”

"I will, Mommy. What are we going to do after this visit?"

"This afternoon, we will go prepare our next trip and book plane tickets for our next destination: Isfahan, in Iran."

## **CHAPTER 4 – A CHILD PRODIGY IN ISFAHAN**

**16:25 (Middle East Time)**

**Monday, April 29, 1985 ‘C’**

**Isfahan International Airport**

**Isfahan, Central Iran**



The temperature on Ingrid's arrival in Isfahan was a very comfortable nineteen degrees Celsius, with a manageable humidity level and bright sunshine. When Ingrid and Nancy stepped out of the Iran AirTour Convair MERCURY medium-range airliner, which had flown them from Tehran after a flight from London aboard an Iran Air Boeing 717, they did so by using a mobile staircase rather than a jetway and walked on the tarmac to get to the airport domestic terminal building. Nancy Laplante 'A' definitely would have found the political and social climate of 1985 'C' Iran drastically different from that of 2012 'A' Iran and also a much better one. For one thing, Iran in this timeline was still a parliamentary democracy while the Shah of Iran, even though he was the official head of state, was only a figurehead with limited powers. As for the religious establishment in Iran, it was being kept firmly in its place by the government with the help of the Iranian Army. All that was mostly due to the interventions and counsels given along the years by Ingrid to the various American Presidents since 1948. In the case of Iran, Ingrid had blown in the open and then had President Dewey block the plans by the CIA to help the British assassinate then Iranian Prime Minister Mossadegh in 1956 and install into power Shah Reza Pahlavi, something that would have created decades of Iranian public resentment towards the United States and would have eventually resulted in the kind of Islamic revolution the history of Timeline 'A' had experienced in 1979. That was in fact far from the only time when Ingrid had thwarted some pea-brained schemes cooked up by past CIA directors, especially during the 1950s, when Allen Dulles had been at the head of the agency. Another big reason for Iran being what it was now was the mysterious death of the Iraqi dictator, Saddam Hussein, in December of 1976, thanks to the secret and forceful actions of Natai the Angel. His death had actually helped prevent a long, bloody and destructive war between Iraq and Iran and had allowed Iran to develop itself and advance to the point it was at now. As a result of all

that, Islamic fundamentalism had not had a chance to strangle individual liberties inside Iran and women could still walk around while wearing the latest Western fashion. As for Ingrid, she was wearing one of her signature female suits, with an adjusted cut which enhanced her body curves and with trousers with slightly flared bottoms. As for Nancy, she wore a simple short dress and a pair of running shoes.

Having already gone through Iranian customs when she had arrived in Tehran from London, Ingrid was able to proceed with Nancy to the luggage carousels of the terminal, where she recuperated her two big suitcases before heading to the taxi stands outside of the terminal. She smiled to the driver of the first taxi in the lineup, who had been standing outside of his cab while smoking a cigarette, and spoke to him in her quaint 7<sup>th</sup> Century Farsi.

“Good afternoon, sir! I would like to go to the Isfahan Traditional Hotel, on Hakim Avenue, near the Hakim Mosque.”

“I know that hotel, miss. We should be there in half an hour at the most. Please let me load your bags in my trunk.”

“You are too kind, sir.”

As the driver put her two suitcases and one travel bag in the trunk, Ingrid sat Nancy on the rear bench seat, then sat inside herself. Soon, they were rolling away from the terminal and heading towards the highway connecting the airport with the city of Isfahan, to the West. Ingrid smiled down to Nancy and spoke to her in German, so that the driver would not understand her.

“Are you excited about seeing Iran again after over a century?”

“I am, Mommy! We should have fun here.”

“Oh, I intend to, for the both of us.”

After crossing a semi-desertic area, the taxi entered the outlying suburbs of Isfahan, one of the oldest cities in a country that had seen millenniums of history and civilization. The sight of so many old structures that Ali Pasravi had seen during his own lifetime brought happiness to Nancy, who clapped her hands with enthusiasm while looking around her.

“I already love this part of our vacation, Mommy.”

“And that makes me truly happy, Nancy. The hotel we are going to is supposed to be an old house from the 17<sup>th</sup> Century which was converted into a hotel decades ago. Hopefully, that hotel will help you to revive further your souvenirs of Isfahan.”

“That would be nice, Mommy.”

Their taxi finally stopped in front of an arched doorway typical of old Persian architecture, complete with white and blue mosaic wall decorations.

“The Isfahan Traditional Hotel, miss!” announced with a smile the taxi driver. “I will get your bags out of the trunk.”

“You are very kind, sir.”

Stepping out with Nancy, Ingrid paid generously the driver and grabbed her suitcases, then entered the hotel via its large wooden double doors, walking into a long and rather narrow lobby whose floor was covered with Persian carpets. She then went to the reception desk, where a man in his fifties greeted her with a smile while speaking to her in English.

“Good evening, miss! Do you have a reservation?”

“Yes, I do! I placed a reservation from London yesterday for a room with one large bed. My name is Ingrid Dows.”

“Aah yes: we were expecting you, miss. If I may, it happens that our Royal Room is presently available. Would you like to upgrade to it? It is not that much more expensive than our standard rooms and is much larger. Like all our rooms, it also gives on our internal courtyard.”

“Hmm...” said Ingrid while glancing down at Nancy. “I do happen to be with a little princess. Can you show your royal room to me first?”

“Of course, miss! HAKIM, PLEASE GO SHOW OUR ROYAL ROOM TO THE LADY!”

A male servant in his early thirties bowed down on being called from the corner where he had stood and showed the nearby entrance to a winding hallway covered with carpets.

“If the lady will follow me...”



With Ingrid leaving temporarily her suitcases in the lobby, she and Nancy followed the servant down the hallway until he stopped in front of an old wooden door and unlocked it, then pushed it open to invited Ingrid in.

“Our Royal Room, miss.”

While Ingrid merely smiled at the sight of the colorful but a bit gaudy decoration of the high-ceiling room, little Nancy sucked air in, while her eyes popped wide open.

“Mommy, I love it! Please, take it!”



Ingrid’s smile turned into a grin and she looked at the waiting servant.

“My boss has spoken! We will take this room.”

“Then, may I show you the alcove patio of this room, which gives to our internal courtyard, before returning to the reception, miss?”

“Please, do!”

Going to a set of wooden double doors with windows and opening it, the servant walked out on a small patio set inside a small external alcove. Walking out of the room as well and onto the patio, Ingrid was at once captured by the view of the courtyard on which the patio connected: the inner courtyard of the hotel was by itself of quite respectable size and included in its center a shallow rectangular pond with three fountain heads. Small plants were planted in stone-lined earth basins, while a number of large traditional Persian sofas made of wood and covered with large pillows were set around the central pond. A large roof



terrace was visible on one side of the courtyard, overlooking both the courtyard and the neighboring street. Ingrid nodded her head in approval as she embraced that scene, so reminiscent of an old Persian traditional residence.

“This is perfect for our stay! I will definitely take your Royal Room, mister.” said Ingrid, who then gave a ten-dollar bill to the happy servant.



"You will not regret it, miss." promised the servant before leading her and Nancy back inside, then into the hallway and back to the lobby, where she smiled to the expectant receptionist.

"I will take your Royal Room for the next five days, with departure on the coming Sunday, sir. Do you accept American dollars?"

"Of course, we do, miss? Who doesn't?"

Ingrid grinned at the man's reply and took out her wallet.

"A good question! How much will it be for a double occupancy stay until Sunday morning?"

"It will be 105 dollars, miss: the price includes breakfast, served in our hotel's restaurant, where you can also have lunch and supper. Our restaurant specializes in traditional Persian cuisine."

"Excellent!" said Ingrid while taking dollar bills out of her wallet. "I have another question for you: where could we find a shop selling traditional Persian musical instruments? I know that the Isfahan Grand Bazaar is located nearby, along with a number of other bazaars."

Taking first the money offered by Ingrid and giving in turn a room key, the receptionist then caressed with one hand his carefully trimmed short beard while thinking.

"Well, to be frank, I never was interested personally in musical instruments and I thus can't answer you now, but I do have a nephew who is an avid musician and who may tell me where to find such a shop. I will call him right after this and will keep you apprised of any information he may pass to me."

"I would be most grateful, mister. At what time does your restaurant opens?"

"It is already open and ready for supper, miss."

"Excellent! I will go unpack my suitcases and then will go for supper. Have a good evening, sir."

"And you too, miss, along with your cute daughter."

"Thank you!"

Letting the servant carry her two suitcases, Ingrid then returned with Nancy to the royal room, where they quickly unpacked their things and put them in the dresser and clothes locker of the room. From there, they went to the hotel's restaurant, asking their way to it to an old cleaning lady they met in the hallway. The restaurant turned out to be a long but also relatively narrow room well lit by a series of overhead windows and

decorated in the Persian style, with a small fountain in the center. Only a handful of other guests were present at this time, so Ingrid took one of the small tables lining one of the walls, with a waiter immediately coming to give her a menu. Ingrid surprised him by asking for a second menu for Nancy, with the servant glancing at the latter.



“Your little daughter can already read, miss? How old is she, if I may ask?”

“She is two and a half, mister.”

Going over his surprise, the waiter left two menus and the wine card with Ingrid, then filled two glasses with cold water before leaving them free to study the menu. Both Ingrid and Nancy were quite satisfied with the choice offered by the menu.

“Definitely traditional Persian cuisine.” said Ingrid. “Do you see something tempting, Nancy?”

“Ali loved lamb kebabs with rice. I think that I will go for it.”

“Good choice! I will go for the shrimps with saffron rice.”

Ingrid ended up also ordering a half bottle of good rosé wine to go with her shrimps, while Nancy had a glass of milk. Their meal was actually served quite fast and proved excellent, with Ingrid having to restrain her daughter from eating too much, as she loved her plate of lamb kebabs and ate more than half of her adult portion.

“I think that we better go have a long walk after this to digest all that good food, Nancy.”

“Then, could we go visit the Grand Bazaar, Mommy?” asked enthusiastically Nancy.

“That would effectively be a good place to go have a long walk, my love.”

Ingrid then called for her bill and was paying it when a servant came to her table and presented her a small note written in English and also bearing a name and address in Farsi.

“Excuse me, miss, but the receptionist was able to find the information you requested. He wrote down the name, address and how to get to the musical shop on this note and added the same info in Farsi, in case you have to ask someone for directions.”

Ingrid looked briefly at the note, then smiled to the servant.

“Thank the receptionist on my behalf, mister. This is much appreciated.”

The servant bowed once, then walked away. Ingrid passed the note to Nancy, so that she could read it.

“Do you know how to get there, Nancy?”

“Of course I do, Mommy! It’s in the Bazar-e-Bozorg, the oldest market in Isfahan and possibly in the whole Middle East. Ali visited it many times: it is close to here, only a few minutes’ walk away.”

“Then, let’s go!”

First going out of the hotel and into the adjacent street, Ingrid then lifted Nancy in her arms while bending forward, making her sit across her neck and shoulders, with her daughter facing forward. She then straightened up as the passersby smiled in amusement at little Nancy now riding on Ingrid’s shoulders, with her feet held by her mother.

“Okay, Nancy! You know where to go? You show the way.”

“Then, go right, horsy! GIDIAP!”

As amused as Nancy was by this, Ingrid then started walking, following the directions given by her daughter. They ended up following a series of narrow streets and a few wider ones for about fifteen minutes, arriving at the entrance of the Bazar-e-Bozorg as darkness was starting to set in. To the disappointment of both, while the bazaar’s entrance was still open, most shops inside had either closed for the night or were in the process of closing. Despite that, Ingrid decided to go quickly to the musical instruments shop they were interested in. However, that shop also proved to be closed. Little Nancy sighed with frustration and envy as she examined through the shop front windows the collection of instruments displayed inside the shop.



“Oooh, I see a really nice qanun<sup>3</sup> inside, Mommy. They also have an assortment of barbats<sup>4</sup> and tombaks<sup>5</sup>. We must come back here tomorrow, Mommy.”

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<sup>3</sup> Qanun: Sort of board-like string instrument resembling a zither, typically 95-100 centimeters in length and 38-40 centimeters, with up to 24 strings.

<sup>4</sup> Barbat: Short-necked, pear-shaped Persian Lute.

<sup>5</sup> Tombak: Persian goblet drum.

“We will, sweetie, I promise! Let’s go back to the hotel: I think that we need a good bath and some sleep after all our traveling today.”

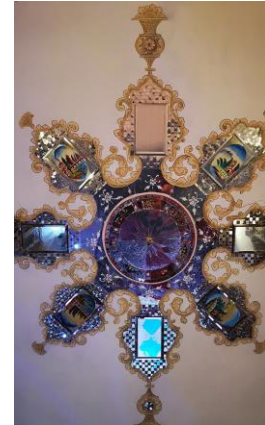
Turning back and walking out of the bazaar, they returned to their hotel via the narrow streets of the old city and went to their room. There, Ingrid filled a bath of warm water while Nancy removed her clothes, then sat her daughter in the bathtub. Removing her own clothes, Ingrid joined Nancy in the tub and helped her wash with soap, letting Nancy playfully soaping her own back. Stepping out of the tub after twenty minutes and emptying it, Ingrid toweled her daughter dry before drying herself. Being both tired by their long trip, they went to bed nearly at once, with both of them staying naked: Ingrid had always preferred to sleep naked, as she found that more relaxing, and had accustomed her daughter to do the same. Little Nancy smiled while lying on her back in their bed and admiring the intricate, snowflake-like large decorative artwork hooked to the ceiling of their room.

“I really like this room, Mommy. Seeing Isfahan is also nice. It wakes up even more souvenirs in me.”

“I am glad to hear that, my little darling. Sweet dreams!”

“You too, Mommy.”

Both fell asleep quickly, the warm bath having relaxed them.



Sometime in the middle of the night, Ingrid was awakened by what sounded like moans coming from her daughter. A bit worried at first by that, she gently explored telepathically Nancy’s mind and found out that she was in the process of remembering yet another one of her past incarnations. Sensing that Nancy seemed to assimilate correctly those old souvenirs, Ingrid glued herself to her daughter, spoon-fashioned, and put a protective arm around her torso, then fell back asleep.

**09:06 (Middle East Time)**

**Tuesday, April 30, 1985 ‘C’**

**Bazar-e-Bozorg market, old city quarter**

**Isfahan, Iran**

Nancy was jumping up and down with anticipation and trepidation as an employee unlocked the entrance to the musical instruments boutique they had found

yesterday. The employee, a mature man with a thin body and a long graying beard, was amused by Nancy's apparent impatience and smiled to her while speaking in Farsi.

"My! You are really impatient to see my wares, little one."

The man then looked at Ingrid, who was holding one of Nancy's hands.

"Please, come in! What kind of instrument are you looking for, miss?"

"We are intent on getting one qanun, plus two barbats, one small and one of standard size, and two tombaks, again in small and medium size. They are actually for my daughter, so I wanted to find smaller instruments for her to play while she is growing up, on top of regular-sized instruments for when she will be an adult."

The shop owner couldn't help glance at Nancy and then throw a worried look at Ingrid.

"But she is still very young. What assures you that she will want to learn to play those instruments, miss?"

Ingrid nodded approvingly at the honesty and common sense shown by the shop owner: he could have simply gone with the flow and sold her everything she wanted, but was concerned for good reasons that those instruments could be wasted if Nancy didn't show real interest in them. For Ingrid, that counted as a big plus in the man's favor, so she was frank with him. Nancy's unusual and multiple talents would eventually become common knowledge anyway.

"As hard as it is to believe, she already knows how to play many instruments, mister. My daughter seems to have an innate talent for music."

"And how old is she, miss?"

"Two and a half!"

The shop owner nearly recoiled in surprise but didn't comment further, letting them in his tiny boutique, whose walls were covered with various musical instruments either lying on shelves or suspended from the ceiling.

"For your information, miss, I sell both new and used instruments. However, those used instruments I sell are all in good state and play as well as new ones. If you find the price of a new instrument beyond your means, then you can always look at a used model."

"Mister, your honesty is most commendable. Could we see first your qanuns? I suspect that it will be the most expensive of the instruments we want to buy."

"Indeed, miss! The qanun is an incredible instrument and, in the hands of a good musician, can produce a wide tonality and truly beautiful music. I happen to have presently two new qanuns and one used one in my boutique. Here they are, miss."

From the reactions from Nancy, Ingrid knew at once that one of the new qanuns had caught the eyes of her daughter, so she pointed at that instrument, which was resting on a high shelf.

“Can we examine that one, mister?”

“Aah, a judicious choice indeed, miss: this instrument was made here in Isfahan by one of our most renown artisans and instrument maker.”



Gently grabbing the large, flat instrument, the shop owner then put it down flat on a low table, so that both Ingrid and Nancy could admire it. However, Ingrid had not expected what followed then. Stepping next to the table, Nancy admired for a moment the instrument, gently caressing it, then put both of her hands on the strings and started playing the qanun. While a bit hesitant at first, her play improved in seconds, to soon switch to a beautiful piece of music, as if she had been practicing for decades, which was actually the case for Ali Pasravi. While Ingrid felt mounting joy at listening to Nancy playing, the shop owner could only stare with both awe and disbelief at the toddler girl now playing the qanun like a professional musician. A few other shoppers passing by the boutique braked to a halt and started gathering in front of the shop to watch with amazement as Nancy continued playing an old but still popular piece of Persian music. There were over twenty persons crowded in front of the shop by the time Nancy finished playing her piece, happiness and pride showing on her face. Her pride grew exponentially when the crowd of onlookers broke out into wild applauses. Bowing to thank the spectators, Nancy then looked up at Ingrid.

“Can we take this qanun, Mommy? It plays really well.”

“How could I refuse that to you, my sweet Nancy?”

“That was incredible, miss!” exclaimed the shop owner, still in disbelief. “Your daughter is a true musical prodigy!”

“Which is why we came to Isfahan: to find the best in Persian instruments. How much are you asking for this qanun, mister?”

“Uh, it is advertised for 7,000 Rials, miss.”

“Hum, at the present exchange rate, that makes 97 American dollars. I’ll take it! Do you have a protective carrying case for it?”

The shop owner, who was accustomed to haggle the prices of his wares with his customers, as was traditional in the region, rarely sold his instruments at the full price

advertised and more than often had to cut the price significantly to ensure a sale. Ingrid's acceptance of the starting price thus represented a very nice profit for him.

"I do, miss! I will let you take it for another 300 Rials."

"Sold! Now, for your barbats: do you have a small model made for children, plus a standard-sized one?"

"I do have one barbat made so that children could learn to play, but it is of markedly inferior quality compared to my bigger barbats, miss."



"That is actually not really important, as that smaller barbat will be a training instrument for my daughter."

Nodding his head, the boutique owner unhooked a barbat which was markedly smaller than the others in his shop and handed it with a smile to Nancy.

"Maybe you would like to try it a bit, little one?"

Nancy eagerly took the instrument and, with the crowd of onlookers still assembled in front of the shop and watching, started playing it, again showing quickly mastery in its use. More applause greeted the end of Nancy's practice play, with Nancy again bowing to her admiring onlookers. As for the shop owner, he was simply blown away by Nancy's virtuosity.

"By Allah! Your daughter is positively incredible, miss! Let me get the bigger barbat, along with transport cases for both instruments. What else did you want, miss?"

"Two tombaks: one small and one medium."

"I happen to have a wide assortment of tombaks, miss: the tombak is a popular instrument here in Isfahan and in the whole of Iran. Let's see!"



The boutique owner quickly unearthed two goblet-shaped drums from his shelves, along with their cylindrical carrying case. Being by now fully immersed in the game, Nancy playfully did a few taps on the drums, to the delight of the onlookers, which now numbered over fifty.

When Ingrid and Nancy finally left the boutique, its ecstatic owner was now 17,000 Rials richer, while Nancy was as happy as Ingrid had ever seen her be. Just her smile was for Ingrid worth the sum she had just spent. Loaded down with instruments carrying cases, Ingrid walked back with Nancy to the hotel, so that they could drop off their new acquisitions in their room. Next during the few days to come would be some

serious visiting to be done to the countless historical treasures and monuments the city of Isfahan had to show to its visitors, so that Nancy could remember even more clearly her souvenirs from a century ago.



## **CHAPTER 5 – A LONG-DELAYED PROJECT**

**10:11 (Washington Time)**

**Monday, May 6, 1985 ‘C’**

**326 South Grove Street, Aurora Hills**

**Arlington, Virginia, U.S.A.**

Ingrid had to carry her daughter inside their home after their taxi had parked in its driveway, as Nancy was fast asleep, dead tired after their long air trip back to the United States. Letting the taxi driver bring their luggage inside their house in Arlington, which was within sight of the huge structure of the Pentagon, Ingrid went up to Nancy's bedroom and gently put her down in her bed, taking off her shoes and covering her. Going back down to ground level, Ingrid then helped the taxi driver finish to carry inside the five large musical instrument cases they had brought from Isfahan, then generously paid the driver and thanked him. Ingrid's next action was to go ring at the door of their neighbors, the Loomis. Carolyn Loomis answered the ring after a few seconds, smiling on seeing that it was Ingrid at her door.

“Ingrid! You are back from overseas! How did it go?”

“It was great, Carolyn! Iran in particular was really nice and very interesting. Did I get a lot of mail during my two-week trip?”

“Quite a few envelopes actually, plus your daily newspapers. But come in, while I go get your mail.”

“Thank you!”

Stepping inside and closing the door behind her, Ingrid then followed her 59-year-old neighbor to her lounge, where she waited while Carolyn went inside her kitchen. Ingrid had first met the Loomis some thirty years ago, when she had bought her house in Aurora Hills after a two-year posting in Germany. At that time, the Loomis had two young children, Jimmy and Annie, who had quickly become good friends of a then young Hien, Ingrid's adopted Vietnamese daughter. Now, both Jimmy and Annie had grown up to adulthood and had moved out of their family home, like Hien. However, Carolyn and

Greg Loomis still lived next door to Ingrid's house, with Greg now only years away from retirement as a federal justice prosecutor.

Carolyn Loomis soon returned with a plastic bag half full with envelopes, magazines and newspapers, giving the bag to Ingrid.

"Here you go, Ingrid. Are you still on vacation, or are you due to go back to work soon?"

"I am still technically on vacation for four more weeks, although I am ready to answer the call if the White House would need me for some kind of emergency. I accumulated a lot of paid vacation time during my five-year trip in Space aboard the PROMETHEUS."

"So, what are you planning to do during those remaining four weeks of vacation?"

"Well, Nancy and I just visited Germany, Great Britain and Iran. I think that it is high time that I show the United States to my daughter: right now, she is more familiar with the Saturn System than with her own country."

That quip made Carolyn smile in amusement.

"Now, that is an unusual statement. Your cute little Nancy has had quite a remarkable life up to now."

"And it is only the beginning of it, Carolyn." replied proudly Ingrid. "Thanks for collecting my mail."

"My pleasure, Ingrid. And don't hesitate to bring in Nancy if you ever need a temporary babysitter: now that Jimmy and Annie have grown up and have families of their own, I have little to do, except maintain the house and cook for Greg. By the way, Jimmy and Annie are due to visit us with their own kids this coming Sunday, to celebrate Greg's birthday. You and Nancy are of course invited."

Ingrid instantly beamed at that offer.

"Count us in, Carolyn! We will be most happy to attend that party and to meet again with Jimmy and Annie. At what time will the party start?"

"Jimmie and Annie are due to arrive on Saturday evening with their kids, so that we would have plenty of family time together, while the official party will start in late Sunday afternoon, at around four, followed by a family supper. As for you and Nancy, you are welcome at any time on Sunday. Uh, about that party, could I ask you a little favor?"

"Anything, Carolyn! Ask and you will get!"

"Well, as you know already, both Jimmy and Annie have kids, quite a few of them, in fact. Jimmy has two boys and one girl, aged between thirteen and seven, while Annie has three daughters and one son, aged between twelve and four. Even when tightening up and improvising extra beds, Greg and I can accommodate at most four adult visitors and maybe two to three kids for a sleep-in on Saturday night. That would leave out at least four of the kids and we really want to avoid forcing Jimmy and Annie to have to rent hotel rooms. Annie's husband in particular, who is an insurance clerk in Boston and who has four kids to raise, is not exactly wealthy and..."

"Stop it right there, Carolyn! My little Nancy will be most happy to greet Annie's children for a sleep-in at my house on Saturday."

"Ooh, thank you so much, Ingrid!" said Carolyn Loomis, ecstatic. "This will help us tremendously. Will they be able to play in your outside play modules in your courtyard?"

"Of course they will! Nancy will be delighted to play with them. Well, I believe that I have to go unpack now and wash our accumulated dirty clothes from our two last days of travel. We will see each other again on Saturday. Bye!"

"Kiss your little Nancy for me, Ingrid!" said Carolyn before Ingrid walked out of her house.

Returning to her own house, a large, two-story bungalow with attached garage and private driveway, Ingrid went up to her private study and emptied her bag of mail on her large work desk, which she often used for technical design work when at home. Leaving aside for the moment the newspapers and two magazines in the lot, she then concentrated on the six envelopes in the bag. One was an electricity bill, which she put aside for the moment, while two were official letters, one from the Space Corps and the other from the U.S. Air Force. Her interest raised, she opened in succession those two official letters and read them quickly. She smiled with happiness on seeing that they were listing for her various dates and places where military flying exercises or training time had been scheduled for the months of May, June and July, with her being invited to participate as a pilot, so that she could fly a few hours and thus maintain her pilot's type certifications. Powering up her personal computer and also opening her paper calendar notebook, she took a few minutes to register the various planned events, underlining those she was either interested in, meaning about all of them, and which she would be

available for, which was a bit more limited. Next, she typed response letters for both the Air Force and the Space Corps to tell them which exercises she would attend and participate to, then printed those letters and prepared envelopes for them. Mailing those envelopes would follow in the afternoon, when she will go out to replenish her kitchen refrigerator and pantry with fresh food and beverages.

With that done, Ingrid then concentrated on the three other letters she had received. All three of them turned out to be offers from different aerospace companies. She rejected nearly at once two of the offers, one from the Lockheed Corporation and one from Boeing, which were offering her a permanent position as a senior design engineer on the staff of the companies. While they were interesting in their own right, Ingrid had promised President Bush that she would serve his administration as its National Director of Space Programs and Special Presidential Advisor, a promise she was not going to break. The third letter however both intrigued her and tempted her: it was not an offer for a permanent job but rather what amounted to a cry for help for her technical advice from the Hiller Helicopters Corporation, a modest helicopter manufacturing company based near Fresno, California. Basically, the Hiller Helicopters Corporation was finding itself marginalized by other, bigger and more powerful companies and had missed out on various government contracts offered during the last couple of years.

“Hum, so Hiller is asking me for advice on how to recapture a part of the helicopter market, hey?”

Ingrid felt attracted at once to that request, as it meant only a short period of time involved with Hiller and had the potential to see something really new and innovative being realized and built for the aerospace market. What made that request for help even more attractive to her was the fact that Stanley Hiller, the founder of Hiller Helicopters, was a true pioneer of American aviation. Grabbing her telephone receiver, she composed the number for the Hiller Helicopters Corporation in Firebaugh, California, then waited for an answer. A female voice, probably that of a secretary, answered her call after two rings.

“Hiller Helicopters Corporation! May I help you?”

“Yes, miss! This is retired General Ingrid Dows, calling from Washington, D.C. I have received a letter from your company, signed by your president, Mister Stanley

Hiller, asking for my technical advice. I would like to discuss that letter with Mister Hiller, if he is available.”

“He is, General!” replied the woman, sudden excitement showing in her voice. “Hold on: I am transferring your call.”

It took only a few seconds before a male voice came on the line.

“General Dows? This is Stanley Hiller. You can’t know how happy I am to see you respond to our letter.”

“I am sorry if I didn’t contact you earlier, Mister Hiller, but I just came back from a two-week trip overseas. So, you would like to get some suggestions and advice from me in order to help your company recapture a larger part of the market, is that it?”

“That is essentially it, General Dows. I know that you have a job at the White House but even only a few days of discussions between you and my engineering and design teams would do us a lot of good. I promise to make that time worth it for you.”

“Mister Hiller, do not worry too much about me asking you for big consulting fees. What I have in mind is more like a small share of your eventual success in any venture initiated by me. Essentially: zero success in any joint venture will mean zero fees or payment for me. In case of success and good profitability for your future new product, then my fee will be quite simple: ownership for me of your first series production model. What do you think about that, Mister Hiller?”

It took only a second of reflection for Stanley Hiller to make his mind.

“That sounds like a most fair deal, General. Knowing your reputation as a pilot, I certainly can understand you wanting to be paid with a personal aircraft. So, do you have a specific idea in mind for us?”

“Uh, I would prefer not to discuss this on the phone, Mister Hiller: there are a lot of stories of industrial espionage going around as is. Rather, I propose to come visit you in California and discuss in person with your design engineers. Suffice to say that, during my later years of service, I spent long years on interplanetary space missions, the latest one being my five-year-long trip to Jupiter and Saturn aboard the U.S.S. PROMETHEUS. During those space trips, I had lots of time to think and fantasize about various aerospace projects which I could not develop further at the time, me being quite busy planning our national space systems. One of those projects I fantasized about would, I believe, be a perfect fit for your company: it is about an aircraft that would be fairly inexpensive, easy to build, maintain and operate and which would be able to fill a multitude of roles, both military and civilian. If that project gives birth to something

concrete, then it should bring you a huge market, a market big enough to force you to sub-contract production in order to keep up with the demand.

“You are already making my mouth water, General. You are talking about a light helicopter, I suppose?”

“Actually, it is something a bit different, but enough said on the phone. Expect me sometime tomorrow afternoon at your company’s site at the Firebaugh Airport. I will bring with me a few sketches and notes about what I have in mind, along with my little daughter.”

“Your daughter, General? I am afraid that I don’t understand.”

“Simply said, Mister Hiller, I will use my trip to the West Coast to show more of our country to my little Nancy. She is now two and a half years-old and has spent all but six weeks of her life aboard the U.S.S. PROMETHEUS. She thus has seen very little of the United States up to now.”

“Wow! She could rightly claim to be an authentic Space girl. I will have somebody ready to act as a babysitter while we discuss together and tour my production plant tomorrow.”

“Sounds like a plan, Mister Hiller. I will call your secretary back today or tomorrow morning, once I will have finalized my trip to the West Coast. Until then, have a good day, Mister Hiller.”

“And the same to you, General. Thank you again for calling me.”

Both then hung up, with Ingrid thinking for a long moment while sitting behind her desk. That project she had in mind for the Hiller Helicopters Corporation, while being most feasible and desirable in her mind, had been kept by her on a slow burner for years, as much higher priority projects on aerospace systems had kept her quite busy. However, as she had said to Stanley Hiller, it was a really low technology project that should be easy and quick to develop. On the other hand, if it turned into a commercial success, it would have the potential to truly change many things in the United States and around the World.

**14:32 (California Time)**

**Tuesday, May 7, 1985 ‘C’**

**Firebaugh Airport, Fresno County**

**California, U.S.A.**

The airport of Firebaugh was what you could only call a 'local general aviation airport' and was on the same scale than the town of Firebaugh itself, which could have easily been called a simple village, with its population of barely 3,000 inhabitants. Ingrid and Nancy arrived there from San Francisco aboard a small, twin-engine regional commuter aircraft, with a grand total of seven other passengers aboard her flight. She was able at once to locate visually the Hiller Helicopters Corporation buildings, situated next to the airport and on the other side of a canal, as her commuter aircraft was taxiing towards the small airport terminal. Right away, it was obvious that the company was not exactly what you would call an aerospace giant, far from it. However, Hiller had a long history of innovative designs, both in the domain of helicopters and that of experimental VTOL<sup>6</sup> aircraft, something that made it worthy of help in Ingrid's mind.

With their Cessna commuter finally stopping on the small tarmac area next to the terminal, Ingrid then left the plane with Nancy and the other passengers and waited beside the aircraft while an airport employee took their bags out of its small baggage compartment. She then walked with Nancy inside the terminal building's small passenger lounge and went to the woman sitting on the other side of a service counter.

"Excuse me, miss. Is there a taxi stand here at the airport or do we have to call for a taxi?"

"Unfortunately, the passenger traffic here is too small to attract a taxi on a permanent basis, miss. I will however call for a cab right away. What is your name, please, and where are you going?"

"My name is Ingrid Dows and I am going to the Hiller Helicopters Corporation. I would have walked there, if it would not have been for the canal."

The receptionist smiled at that while picking up his telephone receiver.

"The canal does complicate a bit the east-west movements in the town, I must say."

She then made a quick call, at the end of which she again smiled to Ingrid.

"A cab will be here in a few minutes, miss."

"Thank you!"

Ingrid then walked to a row of seats and placed Nancy in one of them, while putting down their suitcases next to her.

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<sup>6</sup> VTOL: Vertical Takeoff and Landing.

"The woman called a taxi for us. It should be here shortly. Just wait here with me."

"Yes, Mommy! Can I play my barbat while waiting?"

"Let's wait for that, sweetie: the wind here carries a lot of sand and dust and taking your barbat out of its carrying case now would risk exposing it to damage."

"Oh!" simply said Nancy, obviously not liking the idea that her precious practice barbat could end up being damaged in any way. In truth, Nancy had been playing her musical instruments every time she was able to do so and loved in particular to play her barbat while on the move, with her qanun being her favorite instrument when at home. Some six minutes later, Ingrid saw a taxi stop in front of the terminal and grabbed their three pieces of luggage.

"The taxi is here, Nancy: time to move!"

The taxi driver proved to be on the lazy side, simply popping open his trunk from the inside rather than stepping out to help Ingrid with her luggage. Refraining from commenting on that, Ingrid sat in the back with Nancy and spoke a few terse words.

"To the Hiller Helicopters Corporation, please."

Again, the driver simply nodded before putting his taxi in reverse and turning it around to take the airport's service road. The drive was actually short, being less than one kilometer, and the taxi arrived at the Hiller buildings in less than four minutes. The driver again didn't step out to help, earning himself a very meager tip that made him look up at Ingrid from his seat.

"That's it?"

"Yes, that's it, mister." Replied coldly Ingrid. "You should step out of your cab from time to time: the exercise would do you good."

Ingrid then ignored the incensed taxi driver's look and grabbed her bags, walking inside the Hiller office building with Nancy. Both of them found themselves inside a small, modestly furnished reception lobby.

*'Hum, not exactly your typical New York or Washington big company offices.'* thought Ingrid to herself before going to the woman manning the reception desk.

"Good afternoon, miss. My name is Ingrid Dows and I have a planned meeting with Mister Hiller."

"Mister Hiller is effectively expecting you, miss. I will show you to his office."

"Thank you!"



Following the receptionist down a corridor connecting with the reception lobby, Ingrid and Nancy were introduced into a room where a secretary was busy typing some kind of document.

"Misses Miller, General Dows is here for Mister Hiller." announced the receptionist to the secretary, who smiled at once to Ingrid while getting up from her chair.

"Welcome to the Hiller Helicopters Corporation, General. Let me just warn Mister Hiller that you are here. I can take care of your cute daughter while you speak with him."

"Thank you for that, Misses Miller." replied Ingrid before looking down at Nancy. "Please stay here with the woman while I discuss with Mister Hiller, Nancy."

"Yes, Mommy!"

Ingrid took the time to extract from one of her suitcases a large envelope and a rolled set of blueprints, then entered Stanley Hiller's office, where he found a man in his early sixties already walking around his desk with his right hand extended for a shake.

"General Dows, I am so happy to see you here. I had dreamed of meeting you for decades already: you are such an icon and hero of American aviation."

"You are too kind, Mister Hiller."

"But please, let's sit and discuss on this sofa. Would you like something to drink first?"

"Thank you but no: we had drinks on the plane."

Going to the sofa designated by Hiller, Ingrid sat at one end, while the helicopter designer sat at the other end. Hiller examined her for a second before speaking again.

"I must say that, in view of your known official age, your youth and beauty are stunning, General. My wife would be jealous of you."

"Most women are jealous of me, Mister Hiller." replied Ingrid, grinning. "But let's talk about your corporation and what you are expecting from me. First off, I must warn you that I won't be able to consecrate more than a few days to your company at this time. However, I am ready to come back periodically on weekends, when I am off from my job at the White House, to follow the progress of our project and to discuss any problems with you and your engineers."

"That would already represent a lot to me and my company, General. As for this present visit and any future visit by you, I will be happy to foot the bill for your hotel stays and flights from Washington. Since you are not asking for hourly fees, that is the least I could do for you."

"And I accept your offer with pleasure, Mister Hiller."

"Please, call me simply 'Stanley', General."

"Only if you call me 'Ingrid', Stanley."

"Deal! Now, what is that old project of yours that you want to propose to me?"

Ingrid answered while taking out of her large envelope a series of documents that she then offered to Hiller.

"The key to our future project will be to keep it as inexpensive as possible while still producing a safe, dependable and performing machine. That will allow the maximum of people to be able to afford buying it. Another important point will be to keep that machine as easy as possible to fly and maintain. For that reason, I believe that it should be powered by a gasoline engine able to use standard commercial gasoline, with an octane grade of no more than 91, rather than aviation gasoline with octane grades of 100 or higher. This will allow the users of our future aircraft to be able to refill at any rural or city gas station, instead of having to refuel at local airports, making our future aircraft a lot more practical for many people. I realize that this will limit the power available and the maximum takeoff weight, but a turbine engine, while potentially much more powerful and lighter, would represent some serious risks of burns to users, due to its super-hot exhaust gases. It would also necessitate to use kerosene as fuel."

"I agree with you on that, Ingrid. It will also have the advantage of allowing normal car mechanics to effect repairs or inspections on that piston engine. So, you have in mind a light helicopter powered by a piston engine burning automotive-grade gasoline, right?"

"Not exactly!" replied Ingrid with a devilish smile. "What I have in mind is an aircar."

"An aircar?!" exclaimed Hiller, stunned. He then had his first look at the documents handed to him by Ingrid as the latter continued to speak.

"Yes! This project, which has been cooking in the back of my mind for many years already, is about creating a compact VTOL aircraft not much bigger than a large automobile and also much safer to use than a light helicopter, whose large rotating rotor blades would represent high risks of injuries to bystanders and passengers if it was to operate from within a city. In contrast, my aircar project will be as safe to approach as a normal car, allowing it to land and park right in the driveway of a private resident. That, plus the fact that it uses standard automotive gasoline, would liberate its users from the necessity to operate from an airport. Being a VTOL aircraft would also allow it to land

and take off from anywhere, be it a private driveway or a flat building roof. Those two capabilities should attract buyers like a magnet. However, I do not wish to see about anybody pilot such an aircraft: the air traffic control chaos that would represent thousands of such aircars piloted by neophytes would be nightmarish. Rather, I see my aircar as a more polyvalent and more practical alternative machine to those who are qualified single engine aircraft or helicopter pilots and who are certified for at least VFR<sup>7</sup> conditions.”

Stanley Hiller nodded slowly his head at those words.

“That makes a lot of sense, Ingrid. Your criterias would make our future aircar very attractive to tens of thousands of general aviation pilots in the United States. The market for that kind of machine would be huge.”

“Indeed! However, the market for our aircar would not be limited strictly to private pilots presently flying small piston-powered aircraft. With adequate variants produced, our aircar could be turned into an air ambulance, a police patrol aircraft, a search and rescue aircraft or even a military light liaison and reconnaissance aircraft, all roles in which a compact and safe to use machine would excel. Now, if you look at the planned design and specifications I came at after all those years of thinking, you will see that I am envisioning a large car-sized machine able to carry four to six people, plus a limited amount of luggage, and capable of rolling on short distances along streets in order to enter a crowded parking lot or private garage. The main body of the aircar will espouse the section profile of a low-speed aircraft wing and will provide aerodynamic lift sufficient to make it fly horizontally at speeds over sixty miles per hour, without the need to use part of the power from the propellers to keep the machine in the air. That will allow its four ducted, variable-pitch propellers to pivot ninety degrees to act like conventional aircraft propellers, in contrast to the rotors of a helicopter, which have to always use most of their power simply to keep the helicopter in the air, thus severely limiting its maximum speed and range. On the blueprints I brought for you, you will see that those ducted propellers, while mounted on pivots to effect transitions between vertical and horizontal flight, are also equipped with vectoring flaps downstream of the propellers’ wash. Those flaps will allow our aircar to be able to maneuver like a helicopter when hovering or flying at very low speed close to the ground. Also, those

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<sup>7</sup> VFR: Visual Flight Rules. A flying condition when the use of instruments is not necessary to fly safely an aircraft. In contrast, flying at night or in bad weather calls for IFR conditions, or Instruments Flight Rules.

ducted propellers, which are all connected by light driveshafts to a single engine, can be pivoted to vertical stowage positions alongside the aircar's body, making the design a garage-compatible machine. You could thus take your aircar out of your garage, then take off from your city home driveway, fly up to 900 miles or more and land vertically in another city or location. If done right, this aircar design could revolutionize short to medium range travel across the United States."

By then, Stanley Hiller had a mesmerized look on his face as he pictured such an aircar in his mind.

"My God! Your aircar would indeed revolutionize air transportation in the country, Ingrid. Also, your idea of building specialized variants for medical, police or military use could attract thousands of extra orders from various levels of governments. Imagine if an aircar ambulance could go pick up a wounded person somewhere on the slopes of a mountain, something the rotors of a helicopter would make nearly impossible to do safely."

"And another nice thing about it would be the top speed it could attain, Stanley. Presently, the fastest and most powerful helicopters can barely attain a top speed of 190 miles per hour, at the cost of a humongous expenditure in fuel. In contrast, our aircar could easily attain and maintain speeds of 250 miles per hour or more while flying at economical speed, using its body profile to provide it with sufficient aerodynamic lift, thus increasing greatly its range. That air ambulance aircar would be able to get to that wounded much faster than a helicopter."

"Damn, you're right! Ingrid, you are a genius!"

"Pah!" replied Ingrid, making a dismissive gesture. "I have been designing military aircraft and various spacecraft and spaceships for nearly forty years now. In comparison, designing this aircar will be as simple as building a kid's toy. The real challenge will be to keep it as light as possible, in order to maximize its performances, to make it as inexpensive as possible to build and thus make it as affordable as possible for customers to buy. We will also have another big challenge: to keep this project as secret as possible. You can imagine how the company executives at Beechcraft, Bell, Cessna and Sikorsky would react on learning about our aircar project and its possible impact on their future share of the light aviation business."

Hiller's enthusiasm was suddenly replaced by a concerned look.

"Damn! I wouldn't consider them above either spying on the project and stealing the design or even trying to sabotage it: hundreds of millions of dollars of light aircraft

market would be at play. We will have to truly keep a tight ship on this, Ingrid. Well, let's talk about the details of your design while I have you with us. First, let me call in my senior engineers on this."

"Please do, Stanley!"

In the anteroom, little Nancy appeared to the secretary to be in the midst of an agitated sleep on the visitors' sofa sitting in one corner of her office. She would have been shocked if she would have known that Nancy was actually in the process of remembering yet another of her past incarnations. The cadence at which those old souvenirs were coming back to her was accelerating constantly, as if her mind was getting accustomed to digesting them. Right now, she was remembering the life of a Huron girl named Mistibis, born in the 12<sup>th</sup> Century along the shores of the St-Lawrence River, in present-day Canada. Mistibis had married one of the hunters and warriors from her tribe and had born him three children before dying at the age of 36, during her fourth labor. Of course, Nancy could not know the exact year of birth or death of Mistibis, as the Hurons did not know about or followed the Christian calendar, but she could guess the approximate years thanks to the incarnation that had followed that of Mistibis. Amalia Kupinski had been a devout Christian born in 1216 in Radom, Poland. Amalia, the daughter of a well-to-do local merchant, had eventually married a Polish knight named Sir Vladimir and had five children from him. A well-educated woman who could speak, read and write in Old Polish, Latin and Saxon, Amalia had lived through the devastating Mongol Invasion of 1241, only to die of pneumonia in the year 1270. The secretary glanced at Nancy with some concern when she heard Nancy whisper a few words in a language she did not recognized or understood, but didn't wake her up, putting this on account of her dreaming.

Nancy had time to finish absorbing the souvenirs concerning Mistibis and to wake up well before Ingrid came out of Hiller's office after more than three hours of technical discussions with him and his senior engineers. Going straight to her daughter, Ingrid crouched in front of her and gave her an apologetic smile.

"I am sorry if I left you alone for so long, Nancy."

"That's alright, Mommy: I had time to remember someone else and slept a bit."

Understanding at once what she meant, Ingrid gently explored Nancy's most recent souvenirs, nodding after a few seconds.

"It is all going well, Nancy. Now, I have discussed my project with Mister Hiller and have agreed to stay in Firebaugh for the next two days, time for us to draw the preliminary plans for my aircar. Then, we will go back home on Friday morning, in order to prepare to receive the grandchildren of the Loomis. Do you mind staying here for another two days, sweetie?"

"Do what you must, Mommy: I can always sleep more and continue to remember past souvenirs."

Ingrid nodded slowly her head while looking soberly at her daughter: if she had needed a proof that Nancy's level of intellectual maturity was far superior to the level more typical of a two and a half year-old, that response was clearly it.

"Nancy, you are the best child I could hope for and I am immensely proud of you. Mister Hiller is now going to drive us to a nearby motel, where we will be able to take a room and then go to a restaurant to eat. We will return here tomorrow morning and you will be able to play your barbat while I work with Mister Hiller and his engineers."

"YAY!" shouted in response Nancy, overjoyed.

### **16:14 (Washington Time)**

**Friday, May 10, 1985 'C'**

**326 South Grove Street, Aurora Hills**

**Arlington, Virginia**

At the sound of the doorbell, Nancy jumped off the sofa she was sitting on in the lounge and ran like a rocket to the door. While she was still too short to reach the door handle, she used her power of telekinesis to twist it and open the door. Peter and Annie Mattingly, standing on the porch with their four young children, looked down with surprise at the small toddler girl now clapping her hands with joy at the sight of their three daughters and one son, ranging in age from four to twelve.

"How did she manage to open the door?" asked in a whispering voice Peter Mattingly, who worked as an insurance clerk in Boston, to his wife Annie, born Annie Loomis. Annie also replied in a whisper.

"I told you before that Ingrid Dows had contacts of a divine nature: she had her guardian angel living here when I was young. Don't be surprised by anything that you could see or hear in this house, but be careful to keep it to yourself afterwards."

"Are you sure that bringing our kids here for a sleep-in is a safe idea, Annie?"

*'Of course they will be safe with me!'* replied a tiny voice that resonated inside their heads, making them stare down in shock at the toddler girl. Before they could say anything to her, Ingrid arrived at the door at a near run and smiled to the Mattingly family.

"Hello everybody! Welcome to my house! You do remember me, Annie?"

"Of course I do, General." replied Annie, nearly mesmerized by the apparent youth of the woman she had first known thirty years ago and who still looked exactly the same. "My God! I knew from multiple media reports and articles that you benefit from prolonged youth, but I must say that I am jealous on seeing you this young-looking. And how old are you supposed to be?"

"I am 59, and you can call me 'Ingrid' rather than 'General'. But please, enter!" Encouraged by Nancy, the four small visitors ran inside the house, leaving Ingrid free to greet Peter and Annie with hugs and kisses.

"I am truly happy to be able to have your cute kids for the night. I suppose that you will have supper at Greg's house?"

"We will, Ingrid." replied Annie. "However, we brought the kids in advance so that we could bring their suitcases of clothes for the night and also to let them play with your Nancy. By the way, my second oldest daughter, who is nine years-old, is also named Nancy. We will have to find a way to differentiate the two when calling them aloud."

"Easy: let's call them by their full names when they are not facing us."

"Oh, that could work!" recognized Annie. "Uh, you are sure that this is not imposing a burden on you, Ingrid. My kids can be quite rowdy at times." Ingrid giggled in response to that.

"And you think that my Nancy is always an angel? All kids can be rowdy! Well, let me show you where they will sleep. The bedrooms are upstairs but I arranged something special for this sleep-in. Follow me!"

Peter and Annie Mattingly, now intrigued, climbed the main staircase opening on the entrance lobby and leading to the upper floor. Once on that level, Ingrid led them to a wooden ladder with wide steps and hand rails which led further up into the attic. Ingrid smiled to Peter and Annie as she started climbing the ladder.

"I do have a guest bedroom, but it would have been a bit tight to accommodate five kids. So, I decided to use one of the spaces in the house that my Nancy loves to play into: the attic. You will see."

Annie, who had played many times in that same attic with a then young Hien, beamed with happiness as she climbed the ladder behind Ingrid. As for Peter, he smiled in appreciation once he was up in the attic and could look around him: it was a truly big place, over fifteen meters long by nine meters wide, with a height clearance of three meters along the centerline axis of the house and a minimum of one meter along the sides. Contrary to most houses, that attic space had been fully finished, apparently decades ago, and was no spiderweb trap. It also was well lit by four dormer windows which let lots of sunshine in. Lined up along one side of the access trap, whose opening was surrounded by a protective wooden railing, were a total of eight mattresses assembled together to form one vast sleeping surface, while a large storage chest sat in a nearby corner. There were also a number of electrical bed lamps on low stands near the beds, to supplement the overhead ceiling lights.

"I love this!" said Peter enthusiastically. "More importantly, the kids will love this!"

"Small children should have everything that they could have during their growth, along with all the love that we can dish to them." pronounced Ingrid, making Annie nod in approval.

"Ingrid, you are super! Uh, why eight mattresses? Six mattresses would have been enough, no?"

"That's because the two Wilson kids were also invited by me to participate in the sleep-in."

"Aah, yes!" replied Annie, understanding Ingrid. "I met the Wilsons a couple of time while coming to visit my parents. They are a nice couple, with a charming little boy and a daughter. They moved four years ago into the Rodmans' house after the Rodmans left the neighborhood to go to New York, where John Rodman had a new and higher paying job he had just been promoted into."

"And what kind of job does this Mister Wilson do?" asked Peter, out of curiosity.

"Jonathan Wilson is a construction foreman." answered Ingrid. "He is quite a big, beefy man, the way you would imagine a construction worker. His son Billy is four years-old, while his daughter Jenna is six years-old. Nancy likes a lot to play with them, either inside the house or outside, in my courtyard."

"Talking about your courtyard," said Annie, "I saw that you still have those colored plastic play modules in which I played with Hien."



"I actually have to correct you on that, Annie: those modules you saw today are recent ones, similar to the previous ones you played into. The old ones were simply too old and weather-damaged. Still, I am sure that my Nancy already led your kids to the courtyard, so that they all could play in those modules."

"That will be fine with me, Ingrid. Well, we will leave you with the kids now and go have some family talk with my parents. We will come and get the kids when supper will be ready for them."

"That's fine with me, Annie."

The trio then climbed down from the attic, returning to the ground floor. The Mattingly smiled when they saw that their children were effectively busy playing with little Nancy in the play modules outside. Peter then pointed at a small boy and a girl, both African-Americans, who were playing as well with his own children.

"Those are the Wilson's kids, I presume?"

"Correct!" replied Ingrid. Thankfully, she did not detect any negative tone in Peter's question, so she deduced that he probably was not a racist, a kind of person that Ingrid loathed and which was still way too common to her taste in the United States. She then accompanied the couple to the door and watched them walk next door to the Loomis' house. She next went to her kitchen, from where she could watch the kids through a window, in order to start preparing her supper and that of Nancy. To watch her little daughter play, the way all other children of her age played, warmed her hearth: despite remembering by now eleven of her past incarnations, Nancy was still physically and socially a young child.

Annie came back some fifty minutes later to get her four children and bring them to the family supper at the Loomis house, with a promise to return them afterwards for the sleep-in. The young Wilsons also returned home for supper at that time. That gave a chance to Ingrid to feed supper to Nancy and then give her a good bath. By the time that all her little guests were back for the sleep-in, it was already close to eight at night. Annie Mattingly and Jennifer Wilson stayed a bit after bringing back their children to Ingrid's house, in order to prepare them for the sleep-in and to tuck them in. Annie smiled in amusement when she saw that Ingrid let Nancy stay naked when she slept.

"My! She does like freedom, isn't she?"

"Like I do! That is our natural state, isn't it?"

"True! As long as your Nancy doesn't play 'doctor' with my little Paul, I don't mind."

"And if she does?" asked sneakily Ingrid, making Annie and Jennifer giggle, with the latter replying to Ingrid.

"Well, if a proper perverted girl, your Nancy could well end up comparing the size of the respective artillery between my Billy and Annie's Paul."

"Shhh! Don't give her ideas!" replied Ingrid, triggering more female giggles. "And what about your Lynda, Annie? Boys should have started buzzing around her by now."

Annie rolled her eyes at that.

"Flash news! Boys are already buzzing around Lynda. I should be proud of the fact that Lynda is a beautiful young girl, but I can already see all the white hairs I will get while watching over her."

"Such is life!" said philosophically Jennifer Wilson. "Well, let's tuck them in!"

The three women soon left the attic, leaving a couple of dim sleeper lights on in order to reassure the children if they woke up during the night or had to go to the bathroom. Ingrid hugged and kissed Annie and Jennifer before they left, then went to her living room to go watch the latest news on television. Ingrid had always been a news freak, as she believed in staying well informed, especially about international news. In fact, there were continuing signs that the geriatric Soviet political leadership was in the process of progressively fracturing, while the Soviet economy was starting to crumble under decades of excessive military and Space program spending and widespread government corruption and institutional incompetence. Ingrid knew that, in Nancy Laplante's timeline, the Soviet system had also been approaching breaking point in the 1980s, to then crumble and split by the early 1990s. In her own timeline's case, the Soviet Union had been reducing significantly its military expenditures for a decade or so, but had in turn tried to compete in Space with the United States, an equally ruinous proposition for the Soviets, who by now realized that the edge provided to the United States' Space program by Ingrid's leadership and management was now all but insurmountable. Ingrid mentally patted herself in the back as she went up to bed: knowing that you made a difference in the World sure brought a nice feeling.

## **CHAPTER 6 – AN UGLY BEAST REARS ITS HEAD**

**01:50 (Washington Time)**

**Monday, June 10, 1985 'C'**

**326 South Grove Street, Aurora Hills**

**Arlington, Virginia, U.S.A.**

Ingrid was deeply asleep when vigorous shakes and a tiny voice woke her up.

"MOMMY! MOMMY! WAKE UP! QUICK!"

Still groggy, she turned around in her bed to face her daughter Nancy, who had been sleeping beside her, as she did every night.

"Uh? What is it, Nancy?"

Even in the dark, Ingrid could see the deadly worry on Nancy's face as she shouted her response.

"THERE ARE BAD MEN AROUND THE WILSONS' HOUSE! WE NEED TO HELP THE WILSONS!"

That answer finished waking up Ingrid in a hurry, as she understood in a flash what could be happening now. Aurora Hills was a fairly affluent district of the city of Arlington, which also happened to be within the state of Virginia. Unfortunately, Virginia, an ex-member state of the Confederacy, still harbored plenty of racists and white supremacists and, despite all the federal laws passed and efforts at promoting racial equality, a strong undercurrent of racism still existed in Virginia. Carolyn Loomis had told Ingrid that, when the Wilsons had moved in after buying the Rodmans' house next door to that of Ingrid, a number of other neighbors and residents of Aurora Hills had looked at that with reprobation, with some even protesting it loudly, as they believed that black people had no business living in their district. Even recently, Ingrid herself had seen and heard such racist attitudes and comments about the Wilsons, to which she had replied rather bluntly to the persons concerned, getting in response more than a few times the epithet of 'nigger lover'.

Waking up in a hurry, Ingrid jumped out of bed and ran to her nearest window, which gave her a view of the street and of the neighboring houses. Looking in the direction of the Wilsons' house, located to the right of her own house, Ingrid felt both

dread and rage when she saw that two pickup trucks and one car had stopped in front of the Wilsons' property, with at least seven men having then come out of them. She could see that at least three of them were armed with either shotguns or rifles but what truly worried her was when she saw that three of the other men were splashing liquid from jerrycans on the external walls of the house.

"Shit! Those bastards came to burn down the Wilsons' house, with the Wilsons sleeping inside. Nancy, you stay here and you don't move from the bedroom under any pretext: those men are armed and would be dangerous for you."

Ingrid, who had been sleeping in the nude as per her usual custom, quickly slipped a long T-shirt down her head, then opened the drawer of her night table, grabbing the Glock 41 pistol she kept there, along with two magazines, each containing thirteen .45 caliber rounds. Inserting one magazine in her pistol and chambering a round, she grabbed the second magazine in her left hand and ran out of the bedroom while shouting a last warning to her daughter.

"YOU STAY HERE, NANCY!"

Ignoring the protests from her daughter, Ingrid ran down the stairs, then unlocked her front door and exited her home, closing the door behind her before running towards the Wilsons' house while shouting out loud.

"STOP WHAT YOU ARE DOING! NOW!"

Her shouted warning had at least the effect of stopping the men from splashing gasoline against the walls of the house, but it also made them all turn towards her, with five of them pointing firearms at her, two of them being handguns. They apparently didn't see in the dark that she was armed, with one of the men shouting back at her while pointing a double-barreled shotgun.

"MIND YOUR OWN BUSINESS, GIRL, OR YOU WILL REGRET IT!"

Despite being heavily outnumbered and outgunned, Ingrid was not the type to scare easily or back away. Abruptly stopping her run just short of the line of low bushes separating her property from that of the Wilsons, she put one knee down on the grass and dropped her spare magazine close to her, so that she could use a two-handed grip on her pistol. With multiple weapons already pointed at her, shouting a second warning now would be both stupid and counter-productive, so she used the laser dot sight attached to her pistol to point it first at the man with the shotgun and opened fire.

**POW POW POW POW POW**

The man pointing a shotgun at her was the first to fall, hit squarely in the chest by an expanding hollow-tipped .45 caliber bullet. A second man then fell as well before the surviving men started returning fire. Their fire was however mostly wild and inaccurate, them not having sights on their weapons which were visible in the dark, contrary to Ingrid's laser dot sight. The two men wielding handguns were the third and fourth ones to drop, their own bullets simply zipping past Ingrid's head. Ingrid was shifting her aim towards one of the pickup trucks, in which stood two men pointing long guns at her, when she felt multiple impacts on her body, along with sharp pain. Ignoring the pain, she fired four more bullets, dropping both the man who had just fired his shotgun at her and two other men standing in the back of the pickup trucks. Five more shots from her pistol took down the drivers of the three vehicles, who had stepped out in order to fire their weapons or had extended one arm out of their driver's window to point handguns at her. Ejecting her now empty magazine while grabbing at the same time her spare magazine lying in the grass next to her left foot, she reloaded her pistol in less than three seconds and chambered a fresh round in it, then pointed it back at the vehicles, looking for any surviving men who could be a threat to her or the Wilsons. One of the men lying on the grass of the Wilsons' front yard, wounded, then raised himself on one elbow and attempted to point his revolver at her. That earned him a bullet in the head that dropped him down for good.

As Ingrid continued to scan the Wilsons' front yard and the three parked vehicles in the street, a concert of dogs barking wildly and of shouts coming from the neighboring houses reverberated around the street. Looking at the Wilsons' house, where an upper floor window had just been opened, Ingrid shouted as loud as possible at the head and torso visible in it.

"LEAVE YOUR HOUSE BY THE BACK DOOR, NOW! THOSE BASTARDS SPLASHED GASOLINE ON YOUR FRONT AND SIDE WALLS. MAKE IT QUICK BEFORE A SPARK COULD LIGHT UP A FIRE!"

To her satisfaction, the person at the window did not waste time by asking for explanations and disappeared from sight. Burning pain from her torso then reminded Ingrid that she had been hit. Putting her left hand on her left side and then looking at it, Ingrid saw that it was now covered with blood.

"Dammit! My legendary luck didn't hold this time."

She was debating whether to heal herself now when someone ran towards her, coming from her left. She however refrained from pointing her pistol at that person, as an attacker would have simply fired at her from a distance rather than run towards her. That person was thus probably someone coming in to help her. The voice of Greg Loomis then rang out, tainted with worry.

“INGRID! INGRID! ARE YOU OKAY?”

As Greg Loomis got close to her, Ingrid was able to see that he was holding a revolver. That did not surprise her: as a federal prosecutor who had been in the past the target of threats by mobsters, Greg Loomis had taken the wise precaution of acquiring a handgun for self-defense, with Ingrid having helped train him in shooting some 25 years ago. Her head then started swimming as she answered her neighbor.

“I...I was hit, but not seriously, Greg. Those bastards were splashing gasoline over the Wilsons’ house in an attempt to burn it down. We need to spray water on its façade, quickly, before a fire could ignite.”

Greg Loomis first reaction was to then turn around and shout towards his own house.

“CAROLYN! CAROLYN! CALL AN AMBULANCE, QUICKLY, ALONG WITH THE POLICE AND THE FIRE DEPARTMENT!”

He then knelt next to Ingrid to examine her wounds in the limited light provided by nearby street lamp posts.

“Damn! Your left side is covered with blood. You better lay down on the grass, Ingrid.”

“Okay, but be careful about those bastards I fought with: some could still be alive and dangerous.”

She then slowly lay down on her right side, grimacing with the pain caused by her movements. To her shock and dismay, little Nancy, still naked, ran out of her house and knelt next to her, mad with worry.

“MOMMY, MOMMY, YOU ARE HURT!”

Before Nancy could do anything, Ingrid sent her a telepathic message.

*‘Don’t try to heal me or do something else that could reveal your powers to others, Nancy. The public must not know about your powers.’*

*‘But you are wounded, Mommy!’*

*‘Those wounds are superficial and I will survive them, Nancy. However, if the public, and particularly the medias, learn about your powers, they will hound you for the rest of your days. Please do as I say.’*

Her daughter, frustrated and fearful for her, did obey her but took Ingrid's head in her little arms and kissed her forehead while crying.

"Please, Mommy, don't die!"

Jonathan Wilson, holding a revolver, next approached Ingrid and Greg at a run while shouting.

"INGRID, ARE YOU OKAY?"

"No, I am not, but I will survive, Jonathan. However, your house is in danger of burning down, with all that gasoline splashed against it. Go get a gardening hose and spray water over your house in order to avoid a fire. In the meantime, have your family run inside my house and use it as a shelter. Nancy will accompany your kids there. Nancy, you go and protect Billy and Jenna inside our house."

Thankfully, that call by Ingrid to Nancy's sense of caring for others worked and she ran away to go guide their neighbors inside her house. Jonathan Wilson also ran away, to return a couple of minutes later with a long garden hose, which he used to start spraying the front of his house, making a strong smell of gasoline rise in the air and making Greg Loomis sniff and frown.

"Damn! The Wilsons' house could have lit up like a match, with so much gasoline over it."

"And with the Wilsons still sleeping inside." added Ingrid with some effort. "Those bastards are most probably a group of racists who resented the fact that a black family resided in this neighborhood. Look, Greg, I am not in danger of dying and you can't do much for me until the ambulance is here. Do a service to me and pick up both my pistol and my empty magazine lying in the grass and bring them inside my house, then go check if any of those bastards is still alive. Be careful about not disturbing the evidence around them."

Despite the circumstances, Ingrid's last remark made Greg Loomis smile.

"Ingrid, I have been a federal prosecutor for over 36 years now. I know about criminal evidence. Stay there and don't move: I will be back in a few minutes."

Greg then picked up her pistol and empty magazine before running towards Ingrid's house. Less than a minute later, he was back out and started walking around the front lawn of the Wilsons and the parked vehicles on the street, checking the bodies lying around. He was shaking his head when he returned by Ingrid's side.

"They are all dead, the ten of them. They also all had weapons. If not for your timely and heroic intervention, the Wilsons would not have stood a chance."

"Well, heroic interventions are my specialty, Greg, remember?"

"I know, and I deeply admire you for that. Damn, where is the police? CAROLYN! CAROLYN! DID YOU CALL THE COPS AND AN AMBULANCE?"

"I DID, GREG! THEY SHOULD BE HERE SOON!" shouted back Carolyn Loomis from her front porch.

"THEN, BRING ME OUR FIRST AID KIT! INGRID IS WOUNDED!"

"COMING!"

Carolyn had time to bring to her husband a first aid kit and Greg had started to put bandages on Ingrid's wounds when they heard the sound of an approaching siren.

"At last!" said Greg. "They took their sweet time to react."

To his dismay, the siren soon turned out to be a single ambulance approaching at top speed.

"What? No police cars yet? With the noise from such a fire, we should be seeing an army of police cruisers rushing in."

"Don't forget that we are in the state of Virginia, Greg."

"So?"

"So, maybe the local police station already knew in advance about this and is deliberately making its response slow." suggest Ingrid. That made Greg positively furious, but he clenched his teeth and refrained from swearing loudly.

"If that's the case, heads will roll, I promise you. This is obviously a hate crime, thus the business of the F.B.I., and I will make sure that it investigates this in depth."

"Then, do something for me, Greg: go note the gun models and serial numbers of the weapons used by those bastards, and this before the first local policeman arrives. If you can also identify each gun owner without leaving evidence that you touched them, then do it as well. If what I am afraid of turns out to be reality, some of that evidence may disappear once in the hands of the local cops."

Greg made a grimace, not liking at all what she was implying. He however conceded to himself that her fears were grounded in a sad reality. Turning his head to look up at his wife, who was still standing next to him and Ingrid, he spoke urgently to her.

"Carolyn, stay with Ingrid for the moment: I have to go back to the house to get something to write notes on and also to place an urgent phone call. I will make it quick, I promise."



Greg then ran to his house, not leaving time to Carolyn to object. A few seconds later, an ambulance screeched to a halt on the curbside, some six meters away from Ingrid and Carolyn. Two medics then ran out of their ambulance, with one carrying a large medical bag. The two medics however hesitated for a moment at the sight of the numerous bodies lying around, prompting an angry shout from Carolyn Loomis.

"HEY, YOU HAVE A WOUNDED WOMAN HERE, GUYS!"

"But we were told to expect only one wounded person." replied one medic, looking confused. "What happened here?"

"What happened is that a bunch of bastards came to try burning down the house of one of our neighbors and Ingrid here intervene. Didn't the emergency dispatcher tell you that there had been a gunfight?"

"Uh, the dispatcher didn't mention a gunfight to us, miss. He only told us that one person needed an ambulance at this address."

Carolyn exchanged a knowing glance with Ingrid, then pointed her to the medics.

"Well, you are here, so please take care of my friend."

The medic carrying the first aid bag went to Ingrid quickly enough, but his partner went on his own way to step on the Wilsons' front lawn. Ingrid patted gently the hand of Carolyn to prevent her to scream at the medic.

"Let him be, Carolyn: he is technically obliged to go see if any of these men are still alive."

Doing a quick examination of Ingrid, the medic with the first aid kit nodded his head soberly.

"You are lucky, miss: you were hit by multiple shotgun pellets but none penetrated deeply or hit vital organs. You will still need to go to the hospital but you should fully recover from this rather quickly. I will go get our gurney out of our ambulance."

Walking back quickly to the ambulance, he was starting to take out his medical gurney when his partner joined him, looking a bit shaken.

"There are ten men lying around, all dead from gunshot wounds and all with weapons near their bodies. Why didn't the despatcher warn us to expect more than one patient?"

"I don't know, Fred! Frankly, I would rather not speculate about that right now. Let's pick that young woman up and bring her to the hospital."

"Right!" said his colleague, who then helped him unload and unfold their gurney. Rolling it on the grass up to where Ingrid lay, they cautiously placed her on the gurney and covered her with a blanket, then rolled her to the ambulance, where they loaded Ingrid in the back, with one medic staying with her while the other one returned behind the wheel. The ambulance was rolling away, its siren on, when Greg Loomis showed up at a run and spoke to his wife, who noticed that he was now wearing gloves and holding both a flashlight and a notepad and pen.

"I'm going to go quickly take notes about the evidence left around. If the local police arrive, distract them by telling them what you saw."

"I will have something for you too afterwards, Greg, but go!"

To the anger of the Loomis, Greg had time to tour the bodies on the grass and in the three parked vehicles before two Arlington Police Department patrol cars belatedly arrived, sirens blaring. Greg put a hand on his wife's shoulder to prevent her from shouting at the four policemen who stepped out of their cruisers.

"Don't say a word and, if they ask, don't mention the fact that I examined in detail the crime scene. We only went out to give aid to Ingrid, that's all."

Carolyn in turn gave him a bitter look.

"Have things come this low, despite all these years, Greg?"

"I'm afraid so, Carolyn. At least I see the car of Senior Agent Jenkins approaching: I called him to tell him to show here at a run. He should be able to keep those four cops honest."

The four local cops then dispersed as Sam Jenkins parked his car in Ingrid's driveway and stepped out of it. One local cop went to check the three vehicles parked in front of the Wilsons, while two more went to examine the bodies lying on the front lawn and with the last one, who wore the ranks of a police sergeant, coming to see the Loomis, his hand on the handle of his holstered revolver."

"Alright, what happened here?"

"I was the one who called the police on this, at the demand of my husband, Officer." volunteered Carolyn. "Those dead men came to burn down the house of one of our neighbors and another neighbor, Ingrid Dows, intervened to stop them. Unfortunately, she was wounded in the exchange of fire and she just left in an ambulance."

"And who shot all those men, miss?"

"Ingrid Dows did. She shouted at them to leave but they fired back in response, starting a firefight."

"And what tells you that those men wanted to burn down that house over there, miss?" asked a bit too aggressively to Greg's taste the police sergeant, an overweight man with rough manners.

"Unless your nose is clogged, Sergeant, the odor of gasoline can still be easily smelled around that house. I am Greg Loomis, chief federal prosecutor for the greater Washington area. Can you explain to me why you took so long to react to our call? My wife called over twenty minutes ago."

"Mister, I don't have to explain that to you and..."

"Oh yes you do, Sergeant!" said Sam Jenkins, who had approached quietly from behind the policeman while listening to the exchange. He then flashed his badge to the fat cop. "Special Agent Samuel Jenkins, FBI. I was called about an incident of racially-motivated crime, which makes it a federal case. I will thus ask you and your men to leave. I will take care of this."

"But ten men are dead and their shooter is no more on the scene! This is a multiple murder case that happened inside the state of Virginia."

"Oh, really? One woman confronted just outside of her home ten armed men and she is now a murderer? Sergeant, leave now before I investigate you and your police department for complicity in a case of racially-motivated attempted arson and homicide."

Greg Loomis then saw one of the other local cops picking up one of the handguns on the Wilsons' lawn and about to put it in his belt.

"OFFICER, PUT THAT WEAPON BACK WHERE IT WAS, OR I WILL HAVE ACCUSATIONS OF EVIDENCE TAMPERING MADE AGAINST YOU!"

Samuel Jenkins, now quite angry, then rose the tone of his voice at the local police sergeant.

"That's it! Leave now with your goons, Sergeant, before you get yourselves deeper in shit."

For a moment, the police sergeant looked like he was going to draw his weapon on Jenkins but, realizing that it would be the stupidest thing he could do now, restrained himself and shouted at his men.

"GET BACK IN THE CARS, MEN! THE FEDS JUST TOOK CHARGE OF THE CRIME SCENE."

Both the Loomis and Jenkins watched with dark looks the local cops sit back in their cars and drive off before Jenkins looked at Greg.

"It looks like it was a really good idea for you to call me, Greg. This whole thing stinks to high hell. Where is General Dows?"

"She left by ambulance for the Arlington Memorial Hospital." answered Carolyn. "She suffered multiple hits from shotgun pellets but the medic said that none of the wounds were life-threatening."

"Thank God for that! Let me call some reinforcements her, then I will be able to take your depositions and gather the evidence."

#### **04:09 (Washington Time)**

#### **Emergency Care Unit, Arlington Memorial Hospital**

#### **Arlington, Virginia**

Ingrid was conscious but still half-groggy from the painkillers which had been administered to her when Samuel Jenkins and Greg Loomis came to visit her, little Nancy in Greg's arms. Greg approached Nancy next to Ingrid's bed's right side to let the girl hug and kiss her mother. Ingrid had tears in her eyes as she kissed Nancy profusely.

"It is so nice to see you now, my sweet Nancy."

"Mommy, I was so scared for you." said Nancy in a reproachful tone.

"We were all scared for you, Ingrid." Added Greg Loomis, making Ingrid nod her head soberly.

"And it is nice to have good friends and neighbors like you and your wife, Greg."

"Thanks! Let me present you FBI Senior Agent Samuel Jenkins: he is now in charge of this case."

"The Arlington PD is not in charge of it?"

"No!" answered Jenkins. "This is clearly a racially-motivated crime, which makes it a federal crime. Furthermore, the preliminary findings of my investigation have already shed a bad light on the Arlington PD in this affair, such as intentionally delaying its response to Misses Loomis' call for help and failing to advise the fire department about that attempted arson. You will also be interested to learn that all the ten men you

killed were card-carrying members of the Ku-Klux-Klan<sup>8</sup>, and so is the Arlington 911 night dispatcher who handled Misses Loomis' call."

"And what about their motives to attack the Wilsons? Or did they try to burn down their house just because they are blacks?"

"There actually seems to be a specific reason for their attack on the Wilsons, General. One of the men you killed was recently fired from the construction firm where he was working, following complaints about the quality of his work and his frequent absenteeism. I will let you guess who was the foreman who complained about that man and got him fired."

"Jonathan Wilson, of course! A black man who has a white man fired is something looked at badly by many in Virginia. I wish that the United States could finally cure itself from this damn racism and bigotry."

"Well, don't hold your breath on that, Ingrid." replied Greg with a bitter smirk. "That will take many more decades to disappear."

"I am afraid that you are right about that, Greg." said Ingrid, sounding discouraged, before looking at Samuel Jenkins. "What's next now, Agent Jenkins?"

"The FBI will continue its investigation into this case, General. I have a full crime scene crew presently at the Wilsons' house and a number of FBI agents are also busy obtaining from the telephone company the recordings of the last 72 hours of calls made to or from the Arlington PD, to see if someone arranged something in advance with your attackers. I can tell you already that the Arlington Chief of Police will find himself in a hot seat, with lots of explanations to give. Unfortunately, all this will also mark you as a target for the KKK. I will thus advise you to exercise extreme caution from now on."

"If they attack my mommy again, I will vaporize them!" then pronounced little Nancy, looking dead serious. While Jenkins didn't pay credence to that, Greg Loomis eyed her with some concern: he was not ready to swear that little Nancy could not do what she had just promised to do.

**08:23 (Washington Time)**

**Wednesday, June 12, 1985 'C'**

**The Oval Office, the White House**

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<sup>8</sup> Ku-Klux-Klan, or KKK: Old and powerful racist organisation in the U.S.A. which promotes the supremacy of the Caucasian race and encourages racial discrimination against non-whites.

President George Herbert Walker Bush got up from his chair and walked around his presidential work desk to meet with a smile and a handshake Ingrid, who had just been introduced in the Oval Office.

"Ingrid, I am really happy to see you in one piece after this despicable KKK attack."

"Not as happy as my daughter, Mister President. Thankfully, I was only hit by small caliber pellets fired from some distance, so they did not penetrate deeply and I should be fully up to snuff in a week or two, at the most. At least that's the official story I serve to the medias. In reality, I fully healed myself yesterday at home, after I was released from the hospital, so I am now fully functional and at your disposal, Mister President."

"That's good to hear, Ingrid. But let's sit down before continuing. Would you like coffee or tea?"

"Thank you but no, Mister President. I already had a strong cup of coffee before leaving home."

A hint of worry then showed up on Bush's face.

"And your little daughter, who is watching over her? The KKK does have a serious grudge against you now."

"My guardian angel is watching over my Nancy, Mister President, so the KKK is welcome to try...at their own expense. But thank you for caring for my little Nancy, Mister President."

"Who wouldn't care for such a cute little girl? My wife positively adores her." Ingrid smiled with pride at that compliment as she sat in one of the sofas set in one corner of the Oval Office, with the President sitting at the other end of the sofa, keeping a chaste distance between them.

"Thank you, Mister President. Nancy makes me very proud indeed."

"And you are justified to be so, Ingrid. Now, switching to business. I called you in this morning to give you your marching orders for the next few months. Apart from counseling me as needed about problems that could emerge from time to time around the World and at home in the United States, I would like you, as my National Director of Space Programs, to write a long-term Space exploration plan covering at least the next five to ten years. We already have been exploring systematically Mars and have visited Jupiter and Saturn, plus have an orbital space station and a Moon base, on top of

dozens of satellites in Earth orbit. What do you see next for our Space program, Ingrid?"

"Mister President, I believe that we should continue the detailed exploration of Mars. In particular, I would like to see our present semi-permanent underground base situated in a cave of the Valles Marineris eventually become a permanently manned base, with periodic base crew relief every year or two. This will mean in turn dedicated use of the U.S.S. LIBERTY and U.S.S. CONSTITUTION for the continued resupply, building up and crew relief of that base. We could also design and build smaller, less expensive automated ships which could take care of the resupply runs. As for our Moon base, it certainly could be enlarged and improved over the next years. As an astronomy observatory, it has proved to be without equal, with the fact that it is located on the far side of the Moon saving it from the radio and light pollution from Earth. I believe in particular that better living quarters, including large artificial gravity carousels, should be built on the Moon in order to improve the lot of the astronomers and radio-astronomers working there."

"That certainly makes sense to me, Ingrid. What about Earth itself? How could we improve our orbital facilities and satellites around our planet?"

"Well, believe it or not but our AURORA orbital station has broken even in financial terms last month, with the rents paid by the Sheraton Aurora Hotel, the user fares for its astronomical observatories and the orbital passenger fares covering the operating costs of the station. As for the Sheraton Aurora, it has turned a small profit for the third month in a row. In fact, it is so popular that all its rooms are presently booked solid for the next six months. I thus believe that our space station would easily justify an enlargement to it, especially to its hotel."

That obviously made Bush happy and nodding his head.

"I say 'go' to that space station and hotel enlargement, Ingrid. The national prestige that it is bringing to our country is positively priceless."

"Then I will give that project top priority, Mister President."

"Excellent! What are your plans for the future use of our U.S.S. PROMETHEUS? I understand that is presently being refurbished in preparation for an eventual second deep Space trip."

"What I have in mind for it is an exploration voyage to the Uranus and Neptune Systems, Mister President. When it will arrive around Neptune, it could launch a large automated exploration probe towards Pluto, something that would be much faster and

cheaper than launching that probe directly from Earth. With such a voyage, we will then have visited much of our Solar System.”

“Much of our Solar System? But Pluto is the last planet of our system, no?”

“Officially, yes, Mister President. However, we have presently gone through the Main Asteroid Belt once, without exploring it. There are thousands of asteroids of all kinds of sizes in it, some quite large, like Ceres. The Athena Files also signaled to us that there are a number of small planets situated beyond Pluto, like Eris, Makemake, Haumea and Sedna. However, as interesting for scientists as it would be to explore those distant worlds, the cost of such deep exploration trips would be huge, for little concrete returns for our nation. Besides, we badly need to develop better, more economical propulsion systems for our spaceships in order to cut our expenses as much as possible. As long as we haven’t developed and produced such advanced propulsion systems, we should concentrate on the targets that are more easily accessible to us, meaning the Moon, Mars, the Asteroid Belt and, maybe, Jupiter and Saturn. As for Venus and Mercury, both are too hot for manned landings on their surfaces.”

Bush nodded his head, impressed by the depth of her knowledge and her clarity of view.

“I see that I chose the right person to advise me about our Space programs. Now, about international affairs. I realize that you returned from a five-year-long deep Space trip less than three months ago and were thus cut off from normal information sources for a long time, but I need to know how confident you are about advising me on World developments, particularly concerning China and the Soviet Union.”

Ingrid took her time to respond, as President Bush was right in raising this question.

“Mister President, it is true that I did not have access to all but a few of the classified intelligence reports I would have normally read while here in Washington, but I will make it my goal to read through the backlog of executive summaries during the next couple of weeks. However, even while I was in Space, the crew of the PROMETHEUS and I received daily unclassified news bulletins, in order to keep up to date with World events and preserve our contacts with our normal lives on Earth. Since my return on Earth, I have been reading newspapers and specialized magazines and watching the news on television on a daily basis. I thus am confident that I have a good grasp of the present geopolitical situation on Earth. Also, human nature has not changed during my five years in Space and neither have the way that Soviet and Communist Chinese leaders gain or lose power. Right now, the U.S.S.R. is close to crumbling economically, while its leadership is geriatric and out of touch with the majority of its people. Those



Soviet leaders fully realize that they will never be able to approach parity with us in any domain except maybe the military. However, their efforts to be our military equals have basically bankrupted the Soviet Union and Soviet citizens are clamoring for less tanks and more food and consumer products. Something is going to give up, probably during the next few years, and we should make sure to be ready to face the results of that outcome. Right now, our relations with the Soviet Union and China are relatively correct, even though not exactly friendly, and I hope that they will say so in the future. I believe that, while we pursue our Space exploration programs and maintain our present military posture and capabilities, that we should avoid any unnecessary provocative moves against the Soviets or the Communist Chinese, and this as long as they in return keep their peace with us and the World. I believe that some of the emerging leaders in the Soviet Union are reasonable, moderate men who don't believe anymore in the old dreams of Soviet World domination. Let's talk with these men openly once they will hold the reins of power in the Kremlin. In short, let's be patient, moderate and understanding in our approach to the Soviet Union and China and let's be ready to hold talks with them when they will be ready for such talks. As Winston Churchill said, it is better to 'Jaw Jaw' than to 'War War'."

President Bush surprised her by smiling at the end of her diatribe.

"What? Did I say something funny, Mister President?"

"Not at all, Ingrid! In fact, you made a lot of sense. It is just that I was contrasting in my mind what you just said with the usual, rabidly anti-communist rants I often get from members of the Congress or even from some members of my own White House staff."

"You want my frank advice on this, Mister President? Those White House staffers who rant against communists, especially if working with your National Security Advisor's office, have no place in counseling you. They are too dogmatic and closed-minded to be able to present to you a balanced, realistic advice. Your primary job is to keep the United States both secure and prosperous, not to crush communism at all cost."

Bush nodded his head slowly at those words, obviously convinced.

"Ingrid, you have by now been counseling American presidents for over 37 years and your advice always proved to be judicious. While your main job will still be to direct our Space programs in the long term, I want to profit from your experience in geopolitical affairs, particularly when it comes to dealing with Communist China and the Soviet

Union. Thus, as of today, consider yourself as part of my National Security Council, with access to all the classified intelligence used by my NSC staff and with a seat at its weekly meetings, in the quality of Special Presidential Advisor. That is of course if you accept such a responsibility. I know that you now spend a lot of your time and effort raising your cute little Nancy.”

“Mister President, I accept those responsibilities and I promise you that you will always get balanced, frank and realistic advice from me.”

“Thank you, Ingrid! I feel a lot better now that I have you close by to counsel me. Now, there is one last point I wanted to discuss with you: that incident with KKK members on Sunday night.”

“What about it, Mister President?” asked Ingrid, redoubling attention.

“I spoke with FBI Director Jamieson about it. While those KKK members you killed were acting without the knowledge or direction of the higher KKK hierarchy, the national leadership of the KKK has now designated you as a legitimate target to its members, because of your killing of ten of its members. Also, as you suspected, elements in the local Arlington police force sympathized with those KKK members. You thus can expect little protection or support from the Arlington PD in case that the KKK attacks you. Finally, some members of Congress, particularly a few Representatives from the State of Virginia and from other southern states, are attempting to publicly paint you as the attacker in this affair. I know, Ingrid: any sensible person would find such a notion ridiculous but, unfortunately, too many people in this country are ready to swallow anything that fits with their bigoted points of view. All this is to say that, while the FBI will do its best to prevent other attacks against you, you may still face hostilities and even violence against you in the future. One fear that Director Jamieson told me about is that the KKK could try to get at you by attacking your little daughter.”

Ingrid’s expression immediately hardened then.

“Mister President, if the KKK is ever stupid enough to attack my daughter, then it will bitterly regret it. Let me tell you a secret about my daughter, Mister President: she already possesses a number of supernatural powers and those powers will rapidly grow in the coming years, to the point where her powers will surpass my own powers. Also, Nancy already remembers over a dozen of her past incarnations and can think like an adult, rather than like a simple toddler. Anyone trying to kidnap or hurt her will be in for some nasty surprise.”

Bush sat back in his sofa, not having expected that.

"But, how could your daughter end up being more powerful than you, Ingrid? You said yourself that you are a 'Chosen' of the spiritual being you call 'The One', someone I personally equate with God."

"How, Mister President? You remember that I refused to divulge the identity of the one who fathered Nancy with me? Well, the father of Nancy was an envoy of The One. My daughter is in essence half human and half celestial. However, I will ask you to keep this strictly to yourself, Mister President. I have no wish to see Nancy being hounded by a bunch of cult-like worshippers."

President Bush, his face now pale, took some time before he could speak again.

"That...that is stunning news, Ingrid. Your daughter's father was an angel?"

"An archangel, actually, Mister President. Do I have your word that you will keep this to yourself?"

"I promise, Ingrid! Wow! Decidedly, there is little that is common about you."

"Wrong, Mister President!" replied Ingrid, a devilish smile on her face. "I can be a bad girl when I want to, like many other girls."

## **CHAPTER 7 – A NICE PUBLICITY STUNT**

**10:09 (California Time)**

**Saturday, October 5, 1985 ‘C’**

**Assembly hall, Hiller Helicopters Corporation**

**Firebaugh, west of Fresno, California**

**U.S.A.**

“My God, it is truly beautiful! I can’t wait to test fly it.” said Ingrid as she admired the first prototype of the Hiller AIRCAR, sitting inside the assembly hall of the Hiller Helicopters Corporation. The machine had been painted a fiery, high-visibility orange-red, with its aircraft number painted in white over its flanks and belly. However, as she had specified in her initial design notes, the prototype’s four propeller ducts had been left unpainted, to keep their molded polymer shrouds transparent in order to provide better all-around visibility to the pilot. Overall, the machine had a length of a bit over seven meters, with a total span of six meters with the ducted propellers in horizontal position, while the cabin itself, shaped like a wing section profile, had a maximum width of 2.4 meters. Stanley Hiller, standing next to her and Nancy, smiled with pride as he pointed at his latest aircraft.

“I must say that I am immensely proud of our machine, Ingrid. We did a few test flights at night, in order to keep its existence a secret, and it proved to be very easy to fly. Your recommendation about equipping it with a gyro-stabilization system also made it quite stable in flight, with transitions from vertical to level flight done smoothly, simply and safely. I believe that we have a winner on our hands.”

“Do you still restrict your test flights to dark hours, or could I take a spin in it now?”

“I believe that it is time to show our baby to the World, Ingrid. Come: I will show you the inside.”

Ingrid was nearly jumping up and down with excitement as Stanley Hiller led her next to the prototype and opened its forward left side door, which opened upward gullwing-style, like on a number of European sports cars. What Ingrid saw inside made

her nod her head in appreciation. The cabin was quite spacious, with a total of three individual bucket seats and one four-place bench seat, set in two rows. The machine had dual controls for the pilot and the forward right-side passenger cum copilot. Stanley then spoke, describing a few points of the prototype.

"We were lucky in that the Thunder Company, which produces an excellent and powerful turbo-charged V-8 engine, designed a variant of its TE495-TC700 piston engine with a new electronic fuel injection system that turned the engine into a multi-fuel one. It can now burn equally well standard automotive gasoline and high-octane aviation gasoline. You just need to select the type of fuel you use with this dial on the dash. The engine has a maximum continuous rating of 700 horsepower, which is transmitted via lightweight shafts to the four ducted propellers. Each propeller has four blades of the variable pitch type. You can thus easily control the lifting force of the machine just by playing with the blades pitch. Vectoring flaps downwash of the propellers in turn allow you to maneuver our aircar like a helicopter when in the hover mode. For level flight, an onboard computer manages the transition from hover to level flight mode simply by monitoring your forward speed. Past a speed of ninety miles per hour, the computer automatically switches the machine from hover to level mode while directing the pivoting of the ducted propellers and the engine power, and that until you are in pure level flight mode. The same will happen, but in reverse order, when you slow down under the speed of 85 miles per hour. During all that time, the gyro-stabilization system will keep the machine straight and horizontal, and this without the need for the pilot to constantly adjust his flight attitude."

"Excellent! And what kind of maximum speed were you able to attain in level mode?"

Her question brought a wide smile on the face of Stanley Hiller.

"A nice 285 miles per hour<sup>9</sup> at the altitude of 12,000 feet, with two pilots on board. You will leave all the existing helicopters and most private piston-powered aircraft in your dust, on top of being able to land in tight places unsuited to helicopters. As for its payload capacity and range, our AIRCAR can carry a maximum of about 1,320 pounds, or 600 kilos if you prefer, over a range of about one thousand miles at a cruising speed of 250 miles per hour, or 400 kilometers per hour. Americans will fight to get one of our aircars, Ingrid."

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<sup>9</sup> 285 miles per hour : Equals 456 kilometers per hour.

“Starting with me!” replied Ingrid, a glint in her eyes. “How large is it once folded for parking?”

“Unfortunately, with its ducted propellers folded alongside at the vertical, the AIRCAR is still a bit too large and too high to fit in a standard bungalow single-car garage, but not by much. It will definitely fit inside a small barn or under a roofed drive-through parking spot.”

“That’s already quite an achievement, Stanley. Can it roll on the ground with its ducted propellers folded?”

“Yes it can! It has four small car wheels with small electric motors married to them. You won’t be zipping along at high speed on the highway but you will be able to roll and maneuver over a few kilometers on battery power when inside a town. So, are you ready to fly it?”

“Hell yes!”

“Then, let’s get in!”

Before sitting inside the prototype, Ingrid took a moment to speak softly to Nancy.

“I am sorry, Nancy, but I don’t think that it would be a good idea for you to come with me on a test flight of a prototype. However, I won’t be long, I promise.”

To Ingrid’s relief, Nancy proved reasonable then and didn’t throw a tantrum, so she was able to sit in the pilot’s seat of the machine, while Stanley Hiller sat in the forward right seat, which had a set of flight controls. He then took a few minutes to describe the various instruments and controls of the prototype and also gave her a few tips about how to pilot it. Once he was done, Ingrid switched the prototype to ‘ground roll’ mode and drove it slowly out of the assembly hall, to emerge into the bright California Sun. Next, she started her big V-8 engine and lowered her four ducted propellers into flight position, then switched on the machine’s aviation radio communication set, adjusting its frequency to that of the local air control network. Since the nearby airport had no air control tower of its own, she did not need to get permission to take off and she soon vertically flew off the ground, watched by Nancy and a group of Hiller employees.

Staying in hover mode at first, Ingrid tried in succession a few maneuvers, gradually increasing their difficulty as she got a feeling for the AIRCAR, making Stanley Hiller say a remark.

“You certainly act like an experienced test pilot, Ingrid.”

"Hell, I can't count anymore the number of different types of aircraft and spacecraft I test-flew, Stanley. I even landed a 10,000-ton spaceship on the surface of Titan, the biggest moon of Saturn."

"Damn! You will make me jealous of you, Ingrid."

"Well, that's the fun of bragging rights, Stanley." she replied, a grin on her face. "Time to pick up speed and see how this toy behaves in level flight mode."

Increasing her engine power to near maximum, she then pushed forward her control wheel, making her ducted propellers pivot by some thirty degrees in order to pick up speed. She nodded with satisfaction when the flight control system of the prototype automatically and gradually pivoted the ducted propellers to full vertical and made the machine smoothly transition to level flight mode, and this without the need for her to make manual adjustments to her controls.

"I really like this automated flight control system, Stanley: it makes piloting the AIRCAR a near child's play."

"I added an extra safety feature in order to make our AIRCAR even safer, Ingrid. In case of an engine failure or flight control system failure, the pilot can decide to do an emergency landing, and this by pressing this red button covered by a safety panel. That button will then deploy two large parachutes and will also inflate four large airbags under the vehicle. You will then float down to a safe and soft landing, either on land or on water. It cost us a few extra pounds in terms of payload, but I decided that it was worth it."

"And I wholly agree with you on that. It could in fact prove to be a crucial selling argument for many prospective customers... And here we are, flying at 275 miles per hour at an altitude of 200 feet. Stanley, we are going to get rich!"

"Uh, correction, Ingrid: I am going to get rich. You asked to be paid with the gift of our first series model AIRCAR, remember?"

"You're right!" recognized Ingrid before smiling to Hiller. "So, when do I get paid?"

"In a month, once our second AIRCAR will be completed and flight-tested. What color would you like it to be painted?"

"This orange-red color is just fine with me, Stanley."

"One orange-red AIRCAR coming!" replied the happy helicopter designer, already imagining inside his head thousands of Hiller AIRCARs flying around the American skies.

**07:51 (Washington Time)**

**Monday, November 18, 1985 'C'**

**Northwest access gate to the White House Grounds**

**Pennsylvania Avenue, Washington D.C.**

Marine Corps Lieutenant Peter Keating was the officer on duty at the Northwest access gate of the White House grounds this morning, with a contingent of nine Marines and two Secret Service agents with him. Normally, the White House was a restricted flight zone for all aircraft except the presidential helicopter, so he looked up with some surprise and also alarm on hearing what appeared to be either a helicopter or a private plane approach. As he looked around the cloud-covered sky, he asked a question to the Secret Service agent standing next to him near the gate.

"Were we expecting Air Force One<sup>10</sup> this morning, Mister Harrison?"

"Uh, not that I know of, Lieutenant. The President is not scheduled to fly anywhere today. Maybe you better put your men on alert while I inform myself about any possible last-minute change in plans by the President."

"Right! SERGEANT BIGELOW, STAND BY WITH YOUR MEN: AN UNIDENTIFIED AIRCRAFT IS APPROACHING!"

"YES, LIEUTENANT!"

With his Marines scrambling out of the gate guardhouse with their rifles, Lieutenant Keating kept scanning the sky for the unknown aircraft. He finally spotted a dot in the sky, coming from the Southeast at low altitude and fairly high speed. The dot then turned to align its course with Pennsylvania Avenue while losing both speed and altitude. That dot then grew into an orange-red machine of the sort he had never seen before.

"What the hell is that? It looks like it wants to land on Pennsylvania Avenue."

"Well, it certainly is no presidential aircraft." replied Agent Harrison. "I just checked with the White House security command post. That pilot is thus technically in violation of the local flight regulations. You better have your men ready in case it tries to crash into the White House."

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<sup>10</sup> Air Force One: Designation given to any aircraft transporting the President of the United States, and this while he is aboard.



Keating nodded and shouted a few more orders as the few dozens of pedestrians circulating along the sidewalks of this portion of the avenue also looked up at the incoming machine. This portion of the avenue being blocked to vehicular traffic for security reasons, the orange-red machine, bearing the words 'LADY HAWK' in black letters on its twin vertical rudders, had plenty of space to land at the vertical on it, near the access gate. Keating and Harrison let their jaws drop wide open when the four ducted propellers of the machine started folding up to the vertical along the sides of the sleek vehicle, while the latter started rolling silently on four wheels while heading towards the entrance of the side street leading to the Old Executive Building, next to the White House.

"What the fuck is that?" asked crudely Sergeant Bigelow, as stunned as everybody else.

"I don't know but I am going to find out." Replied his officer, who then started running to arrive at the street corner before the machine. The pilot of the machine, a woman, then saw him and slowed down while opening her side window. She braked to a stop just short of the entrance to the Old Executive Building's street and waited for him. Keating was shocked when he arrived close enough to identify positively the woman.

"General Dows?! What is this thing you are piloting?"

The sixty-year-old retired general flashed a big grin on her youthful face.

"It is a Hiller AIRCAR, my new personal vehicle. I am sorry about creating a bit of a sensation, Lieutenant."

"Uh, that's okay...I think, General. However, you better have your...aircar registered this morning with the White House security command post. Where are you going exactly, General?"

"I am going to park in my usual spot in front of the Old Executive Building, Lieutenant. Is that okay with you?"

"Uh, yes, General. I think that I will post one of my Marines near your aircar once it is parked: it is liable to attract a lot of curious onlookers."

"Oh, I am sure of that, Lieutenant. I will be walking through your gate after I will have parked my new toy."

The strange vehicle then resumed rolling, entering the side street and parking in one of the spots along it. General Ingrid Dows, dressed in her customary adjusted female suit with trousers, then opened her door, which pivoted up like a gullwing, and stepped out,

retrieving a briefcase inside before closing back and locking her driver's door. Keating, who had approached the aircar, was able to look inside it. What he saw of the inside was quite impressive.

"You are going to make a lot of people jealous today, General."

"I'm counting on it, Lieutenant." replied Ingrid, grinning.

Within one hour, the buzz about Ingrid's aircar had gone through the whole White House, while dozens of government employees working in the Old Executive Building went out to go avidly examine the Hiller AIRCAR. Dozens of press photographers and journalists, along with a few camera crews, then descended on the parked vehicle, taking pictures and filming it from all possible angles. Two hours later, it was the turn of President Bush himself to show up in the parking lot with Ingrid and an army of Secret Service bodyguards, with Ingrid then showing him the inside and inviting him to sit in her aircar. An Air Force officer attached to the Presidential staff listened on to Ingrid's description of her aircar to the President, taking notes at the same time and promising himself to call the Air Force Chief of Staff after this. President Bush, an ex-naval aviator who had fought in the Pacific during World War Two, then shocked his head of security detail when he asked for a ride aboard the aircar. Bush looked at him with a bit of a frown.

"You are not going to deny to an old aviator like me such an incredible opportunity, right, Jake?"

"There is plenty of seats available inside, Agent Nielsen." said in turn Ingrid.

"Why don't you come with us, along with one more agent?"

"Uh, I think that I will do that, General. Fleming, you come with us!"

With the remaining Secret Service agents making the bystanders step away to let the aircar roll out of its parking spot, Ingrid let President Bush drive it, helping him by describing the controls to him and telling him what to do. The demon of flying repossessed the ex-naval aviator as he performed under Ingrid's supervision a vertical takeoff in front of the Northwest access gate of the White House. Then pushing forward the engine throttle and pushing on his control wheel, he sent the aircar in a smooth transition to level flight that left him ecstatic.

"This aircar is positively fantastic! It is so easy to pilot. How fast can it go, Ingrid?"

"It can top 285 miles per hour, Mister President. It has a maximum payload, meaning passengers plus baggage, of 1,320 pounds and a maximum range at a cruising speed of 250 miles per hour of one thousand miles. The fun part is that you could land vertically at any gas station in the country and refill there, as the Hiller AIRCAR can burn standard gasoline, as well as aviation gasoline."

George H.W. Bush looked at her as if she was a witch.

"But, your aircar is faster than the Grumman Avenger torpedo-bomber I flew in World War Two! And it is much faster and has more range than my presidential helicopter. How did you manage that?"

"Well, I did give some counsels to Mister Stanley Hiller, the founder of Hiller Helicopters Corporation, which produces this aircar, but much of the merit should go to Mister Hiller himself. The engine, which sits between us in the nose section, is a turbo-charged V-8 Thunder TE495-TC700 piston engine developing 700 horsepower. It has an electronic fuel injection system that allows it to burn various fuels, including standard gasoline and aviation gasoline. The four ducted propellers each have four blades with variable pitch systems and vectoring flaps downwash from the propellers."

"And how many of these aircars has Hiller produced to date, Ingrid?"

"This is the second one produced by Hiller, Mister President. It constitutes my fees for helping Hiller design it. Presently, Hiller is working hard to start a dedicated production line for the AIRCAR and is also working on developing a number of variants of it specialized in various roles, like air ambulance, police patrol, search and rescue and military liaison. This variant I got as payment is the standard commuter variant, with a few optional extras added in."

"My God!" said softly Bush while eyeing the instrument panel in front of him. "I must get one of those babies. How are you in the back, Jake?"

"I'm very comfortable, Mister President. Those padded bucket seats sure beat your usual economy-class seats on regular airlines. Also, those curved door windows give us an excellent view around and below."

"I will certainly agree with you on those points. This idea of using molded, transparent shrouds for the propellers does a lot to improve forward visibility. I honestly think that the presidential fleet could use some of these Hiller AIRCARs, Ingrid."

"I am sure that Mister Stanley Hiller would love to hear that, Mister President." said Ingrid, a wide grin on her face.

**18:04 (California Time)**

**Living lounge of Stanley Hiller's residence**

**Firebaugh, California**

Stanley Hiller, sitting on his favorite sofa and watching the televised evening news, was positively drooling as a video reporting showed Ingrid's aircar, piloted by the President himself, landing on the White House South Lawn while filmed by dozens of cameras. A newscaster then followed on the screen, talking from behind his studio desk and quoting the performance figures for the Hiller AIRCAR obtained from Ingrid Dows. The newscaster was still speaking when Stanley's wife shouted at him from the kitchen.

"STANLEY, SOMEBODY IS ON THE PHONE FOR YOU! HE SAYS THAT HE IS THE CHIEF OF STAFF OF THE U.S. AIR FORCE."

"Christ! I'M COMING!" exclaimed Stanley while jumping on his feet to then run to the kitchen.

## **CHAPTER 8 – TO SCHOOL OR NOT TO SCHOOL**

**17:07 (Washington Time)**

**Tuesday, November 4, 1986 'C'**

**326 South Grove Street, Aurora Hills**

**Arlington, Virginia, U.S.A.**



Ingrid felt a bit conflicted as she watched little Nancy play outside in the courtyard with little neighbors and friends, including Billy and Jenna Wilson. Today was Nancy's fourth birthday and Ingrid had bought a big chocolate cake especially for that occasion, to be eaten at the end of the party and group supper. Ingrid was truly happy to celebrate that event and was also most pleased to see that Nancy presently was having lots of fun with her friends. However, Ingrid also felt unsure concerning her daughter's education. That dilemma had been reinforced by past complaints from Nancy that her best friend Billy Wilson, now five, had started to go to kindergarten school, while she was still staying home, where Ingrid schooled her after returning from work at the White House. Since Nancy was being babysat during work hours by Jennifer Wilson, Billy's mother, that had made Nancy even more conscious of the fact that most of her little friends were now going to school, while she was not. What made this such a dilemma for Ingrid was the fact that her daughter was no ordinary toddler girl. Rather, she could be best described as an educated adult mind with a childish temperament inside a toddler's body, the result of Nancy now remembering all of her past twenty incarnations, lived over a period of 21 centuries. By American law, every child was entitled to publicly-provided education from age five, starting with kindergarten and going up to the completion of high school. The accepted, legal alternatives were private schools, private tutors and home schooling. Ingrid had taken some advance in that domain, giving at least one hour of home schooling to Nancy nearly every day during the past year. Since her past incarnations had already made Nancy proficient in reading, writing and counting, plus made her fluent in multiple languages, Ingrid had thus been able to concentrate on the kind of modern knowledge that her past incarnations could not have made her knowledgeable into, like modern history, modern sciences, modern literature and American history and contemporary studies. She had however been careful not to

forget that her daughter was still a toddler in terms of temper and interests and needed to grow in maturity at her own rhythm while getting the kind of parental love that was so vital to a small child. Nancy also needed to continue to play and interact with other children in order to develop her social skills. Without telling Nancy about it, Ingrid had discretely studied her options about the future education of her daughter during the last few days, making inquiries and seeking information and counsel on the subject from knowledgeable persons. One thing had quickly become clear to her: Nancy was definitely not cut for a standard public school. In terms of sheer knowledge and skills levels, she would simply not fit with average children of her age. Except for the knowledge concerning modern subjects, like 20<sup>th</sup> Century history and sciences, Nancy's educational level and reading and writing skills were basically those of a teenager of late high school age, while some of her practical skills attained mastery level by today's standards. Even when concerning modern subjects, Nancy knew a lot more than elementary school level kids thanks to Ingrid's home schooling, who had not needed to take time to teach her to read, write and count. Using a private tutor would have been a possibility but Ingrid had rejected that quickly: it would not have dealt with Nancy's need to interact with other children. As for home schooling, the time Ingrid could consecrate in educating Nancy was finite, unless she quit work completely, something she was not ready for yet. That had left private schools, some of which specialized in catering to the needs of gifted children. That last option had quickly won over Ingrid and she had then contacted a few of them to get extra information about their curriculums, elective courses and activities. One such school had finally appeared to be the ideal one for Nancy and, as a result, Ingrid had booked an appointment at that school to go speak to an education counselor. Now, the only thing left to do was to ask Nancy's opinion about it.

The opportunity for Ingrid to touch that subject with Nancy came after the birthday party and supper, when the last little visitor had left the house, leaving Ingrid alone with her daughter. Sitting in a sofa of their lounge, Ingrid then sat Nancy across her lap, with her daughter facing her.

"Did you like your birthday party, Nancy?"

"A lot, Mommy! It was fun to play with all my friends."

"I am glad to hear that. Look, Nancy, I have been thinking about your wish to go to school, like your friends, and I did a few inquiries about it. I think that I found a special school where you could fit and be happy. If you agree to it, we can go see an education

counselor at that school next Monday, to discuss with her the kind of program that would be the best for you.”

“What kind of school is it, Mommy?”

“A school that specializes in teaching gifted kids like you. They have a lot of extra-curricular activities which you would like, like music and horse riding, and its quality of teaching is among the best in the United States.”

Nancy’s eyes lit up as soon as Ingrid mentioned the words ‘music’ and ‘horse riding’.

“That school already sounds fun to me, Mommy. Will I start in kindergarten?”

“I doubt it and I would personally won’t accept that, Nancy: your general knowledge and reading and writing skills are simply too advanced for kindergarten level education. I believe that they will first make you pass a number of proficiency tests, in order to ascertain your level of knowledge and skills, before assigning you to a specific grade. So, are you ready to go visit that school on Monday?”

“YES!” was Nancy’s enthusiastic answer.

### **09:15 (Washington Time)**

**Monday, November 10, 1986 ‘C’**

**Education counselor’s office, Congressional School**

**3229 Sleepy Hollow Road, Falls Church, Virginia**

The school counselor who received Ingrid and Nancy in her office was a woman in her fifties who wore spectacles and was a bit overweight. She was conservatively dressed, as one expected from an employee of a private school, but was far from the stiff school matron image often seen in comedy movies about schools and wild partying students.

“Please, sit down, Misses Dows. May I ask how old is your cute daughter?”

“Nancy celebrated her fourth birthday last week, Misses Shaw. Her birth day is on the Fourth of November. Here is her birth certificate, along with her vaccination booklet.”

The woman took the certificate and the booklet and examined them quickly as Ingrid and Nancy took place in the chairs set in front of her work desk. The counselor did a doubletake on reading the place of birth of Nancy and gave her a disbelieving look.

“She was born on a spaceship?”

“Correct, Misses Shaw: Nancy was born in deep Space, halfway between Jupiter and Saturn, aboard the U.S.S. PROMETHEUS. She then lived her first two and a half years on the spaceship, performing a space walk with the other kids on the ship and doing a rover tour on Titan, Saturn’s largest moon. She is a certified member of the Zero-G Club, made up of the people of all ages who experienced zero gravity conditions in Space.”

“Wow! I am jealous of her, Misses Dows. So, you want to enlist your daughter in our school for the next Fall session?”

“Yes, but things are not as simple as you would think, Misses Shaw. Nancy is a very special girl, like me. You do know who I am, do you?”

The counselor stared at Ingrid with incomprehension mixed with caution.

“What do you mean, Misses Dows?”

In a way, Ingrid was relieved to see that her reputation had not preceded her... this time.

“To put it simply, Misses Shaw, I am sixty years old and hold a number of paranormal powers. I am retired General Ingrid Dows, ex-Commander of the United States Space Corps, Special Presidential Advisor to American Presidents since 1948 and Chosen of The One. I remember all of my past 71 incarnations, spread over seven millenniums, along with my past experiences, skills and languages. As for Nancy, she now remembers her past twenty incarnations and can speak a total of 31 languages, most of them extinct. If you doubt me, feel free to test her in spoken and written English, French, German, Farsi, Arabic, Mandarin Chinese, Latin and Classical Greek, which are the languages that she knows and that are still in usage today. This is to say that, with all the knowledge and skills she already has, simply placing her in a kindergarten class would be grossly inappropriate. What she lacked in terms of modern era knowledge, like 20<sup>th</sup> Century history and sciences, I already home-schooled her in them during the past year. In my opinion, she could easily fit in a fourth-grade classroom in terms of educational level. However, I believe that the best way to proceed would probably be to make her pass a few scholastic assessment tests at various grade levels. By the way, she loves music and already plays very well a number of old instruments.”

Marylin Shaw stared for a moment at little Nancy, obviously overwhelmed, then looked at Ingrid.

“Has she ever passed an intelligence quota test?”

“Yes! Aboard the PROMETHEUS, just before our arrival back in Earth orbit in March of last year. It gave an I.Q. of 159.”



"My God! That's well into genius level. Do you mind if I speak a bit to her in a few languages I know?"

"Go right ahead, Misses Shaw."

Marylin Shaw then proved her culture to Ingrid by speaking to Nancy in French, Spanish, Italian and Latin. Nancy replied in fluent French and Latin, but used Castilian, an older form of Spanish, along with Lombard, an old dialect from Northern Italy. Both shaken and impressed, the counselor then asked Nancy to write a short paragraph about where she was born and to do a few simple calculations. Nancy in turn produced six lines of hand-written English of good quality, plus answered correctly the mathematical questions. Marylin Shaw contemplated for long seconds the clear and concise text written by Nancy, finally giving Ingrid a near-haggard look.

"Would you mind if I took a few minutes to go speak with the school's director, miss?"

"Not at all, Misses Shaw."

Just after Shaw left her office, Nancy looked up at Ingrid and spoke in a low voice.

"Did I pass her tests, Mommy?"

"I believe that you did, with flying colors, sweetie."

Some six minutes later, Misses Shaw came back to her office, accompanied by a thin, mature man wearing thick glasses. The man then presented himself to Ingrid, who had risen from her chair at his arrival.

"General Dows? I am William Devers, Director of the Congressional School. It is a true honor for me to see that you came to visit us. From what Misses Shaw told and showed me, your daughter appears to be a truly exceptional little girl and I would agree with you that the best way to proceed would be to make your daughter pass a series of scholastic assessment tests, to determine where she would best fit in our school. However, independent of what those tests will say, be assured that we are committed to an inspirational, high-level of education in a diversified and respectful environment. First off, could I ask you to describe those, uh, past life experiences which your daughter remembers?"

"How about asking her directly, Mister Devers? That way, you will also be able to judge at the same time her level of elocution."

"That sounds like an excellent idea, General." said Devers, smiling, before sitting down on a chair set next to Shaw's desk. He then grabbed a large notepad and a pen and smiled at Nancy.

"Alright, Nancy: would you mind telling me about your past lives?"

"With pleasure, sir." she replied in her tiny toddler's voice. "First, I will start by saying that this is the 21<sup>st</sup> body my soul is tied to and that my twenty previous incarnations spanned a length of 21 centuries through history. My first ever name, which is also the name of my soul, is 'Hypsicratea'. I was then a Sarmatian horsewoman and warrior, born north of the Black Sea in the plains of the Caucasus at the start of the First Century B.C. The Greeks actually called us Sarmatian horsewomen 'Amazons' and kept telling tales of how they defeated Amazons in combat but, in reality, they were full of shit: we kicked their asses more times than they could count."

"Wait! That name, Hypsicratea, it sounds familiar to me. Was she a historically-known person?"

Nancy grinned at his question.

"Probably! She was the longtime companion and lover of King Mithridates of Pontus, who fought three wars against the Romans during the First Century B.C."

Devers, who knew in depth the history of Antiquity, slowly shook his head in disbelief.

"Wow! And how much do you remember of that life as a Sarmatian woman, Nancy?"

"Everything, sir! I still can ride horses, shoot a bow, hunt, throw a war axe, skin and butcher an animal and milk a mare. I can also speak Roxolani, a Sarmat dialect, along with Thracian, Armenian, Classical Greek and Latin."

At that point, Ingrid politely cut in to suggest something to the school director.

"If I may, Mister Devers, we saw as we parked that you have both a horse's stables and an archery range on your campus, among many other exciting facilities. Maybe Nancy could give you a demonstration of her riding and archery skills. That would be one way for her to prove to you what she just said, apart from making her happy: she loves horse riding."

Devers and Shaw exchanged glances then, with Devers smiling as he looked back at Ingrid.

"That could actually prove fun for all of us, on top of helping to prove her words. But first, let's continue to hear about her past lives. You may continue, Nancy."

“Thank you, sir! I will now review my past lives from most recent to oldest, if you don’t mind. Before becoming who I am now, I was a French woman who was born near Paris in 1919. My name was Andrée Raymonde Borrel. I was a simple farm girl, until the Germans invaded France in 1939. When that happened, I joined the French Resistance. A few months later, I crossed into Great Britain and became a British S.O.E. agent and was parachuted back in France to act as a clandestine courier.”

“And what happened to her then?” couldn’t help ask Marilyn Shaw, captivated by her story. Nancy looked at her and replied with an impassive face and a neutral voice.

“The Germans captured me a year later, tortured me, then sent me to the Natzweiler-Struthof concentration camp, in Alsace, where I was executed in 1944. Before you become too horrified by this, don’t! Most of our past lives were harsh and filled with violence. Don’t be afraid either about the psychological impacts on me of my past lives: they are now only souvenirs, nothing more. I prefer instead to use the skills learned during those past lives, rather than delve at length in them.”

Devers was by now looking at Nancy in a completely different way. If he would have listened to all this while keeping his eyes shut, he could have believed that it had been an adult talking, save for the tiny voice. There was no childishness in the way Nancy had told her story.

“Very well, Nancy. Tell us about your other past lives.”

Devers ended listening to Nancy for nearly one hour while taking a few notes about each of her past incarnations. At the end of it, he looked at his watch and nodded his head.

“Well, it is nearly time for the mid-morning recreation. This could be a good time for your little Nancy to go ride a pony and shoot a few arrows. In the meantime, Misses Shaw could start preparing a Third-Grade final assessment test which Nancy could then pass today.”

“I concur with you, Mister Devers. Let’s go get a pony for you, Nancy.”

Nancy shouted in joy then and nearly jumped out of her chair. Devers did take the time before they left the office to make a couple of calls, so that a pony could be prepared for a ride and a set of children’s practice bow and arrows could be brought to the archery range. He then led Ingrid and Nancy out of the main school building and walked with them towards the stables and its fenced-out corral. Dozens of children of various ages, all wearing the regulation red polo shirts of the school, were already out in the courtyard

and in the playgrounds for the mid-morning recreation. Nancy clapped her hands in joy when she saw a horse-riding instructor lead a pony out of the stables, holding his bridles.

“Ooh, he looks beautiful, Mommy!”

“He sure is, Nancy. Now, no show-boating while you ride, please.”

Nancy surprised the riding instructor and Devers by jumping by herself and without help atop the pony, which was much taller than her. The instructor grinned when he saw how Nancy was already controlling her pony with her bridles and with pressure from her knees and feet against the animal’s flanks.

“Now, there goes a born rider! How old is your kid, miss?”

“Four!” replied Ingrid, both proud and happy at seeing the joy evident on her daughter’s face. “She loves horses, like I do. Just let her do a tour by herself around the corral: she is an experienced rider.”

The riding instructor had to quickly concede that Ingrid had not been bragging, as Nancy trotted and then galloped around the fenced corral with the assurance of a professional rodeo cowboy. William Devers, on his part, had a big grin as he watched little Nancy ride around.

“I must say that your little Nancy is the youngest kid I ever saw to be this good on a horse, General.”

“Wait until she does a Parthian Shot<sup>11</sup> from horseback. Sarmatian children learned to ride nearly at the same time as they learned to walk.”

“A Parthian Shot?” exclaimed Devers while looking at Ingrid. “Your daughter could really do one of those?”

“Of course she can! A Sarmatian unable to do a Parthian Shot and hit the target would have been the laughing stock of his or her tribe. Do you mind if she stays on her pony and ride to the archery range?”

The riding instructor scratched his head at that question.

“Uh, normally that would not be permitted, miss, but...”

“I am ready to allow it, Fred, this one time.” cut in Devers. “Just follow us to the archery range.”

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<sup>11</sup> Parthian Shot: Ancient mounted archery technique developed by Caucasus riders, in which a galloping mounted archer would twist his torso around while staying in the saddle and fire an arrow towards a pursuing enemy.

Walking beside Nancy and her pony, the group left the corral by its gate, then followed the corral's fence, passing by the softball field, then the soccer field, before arriving at the fenced archery range, where a sports instructor was waiting with a small bow and five practice arrows. Nancy nearly frowned on seeing that the maximum range to the targets was only 25 meters when shooting from inside the range.

"Mommy, could I shoot from outside the fence? The range is very short."

Ingrid looked at Devers, who in turn looked at the archery instructor.

"Jerry, would you mind letting that girl shoot from outside the fenced area, from horseback?"

"Uh, if she does, then that could void our insurance on accidents, Mister Devers."

"I will assume full responsibility and costs if an accident happens." said at once Ingrid. "Let's just all stay well out of the firing line of sight."

After a few seconds of reflection, Devers nodded his head and looked at the instructor.

"I will permit it, with Misses Dows assuming full responsibility. Give the bow and quiver of arrows to the girl, Jerry."

"As you wish, sir." replied the instructor, not fully convinced. Walking to the pony, now stopped on the outer side of the fence, he then gave the bow and arrows to Nancy. "Here you go, kid!"

"Thank you! I will first fire three arrows, to get accustomed to the pull of this bow. Then, you can bring back those arrows to me before I do a grouping."

"Got it!"

The archery instructor then stepped well out of the way, joining Ingrid, Devers and the riding instructor. Watched intently by them and by a growing group of students attracted to the sight of Nancy on her pony, Nancy set a first arrow on her bow, then progressively pulled its string while aiming. To the amazement of the archery instructor, little Nancy had the strength to pull the string all the way, something only grown teenagers and adults managed to do. The first arrow was then released from 35 meters and burrowed itself in the target, only twenty centimeters below the bullseye. The second arrow hit the bullseye, with the third hitting mere centimeters from the second arrow, right in the center.

"Jesus! That's some nice shooting, miss!"

The spectators present around applauded Nancy as the instructor went to retrieve the three arrows from the target, to then bring them back to Nancy. Still on top of her pony and controlling it with her knees and feet, Nancy aimed carefully her bow three times, making three tightly-grouped hits dead center. As enthusiastic applauses went up, Nancy suddenly made her pony pivot around and start at a gallop, surprising all but Ingrid. Then, at a distance to the target that was no less than sixty meters, she twisted around in the saddle and released one arrow at full gallop. A second arrow followed a mere five seconds later, from a distance of eighty meters. There was a concert of stunned exclamations and many jaws dropping open when the spectators saw that both arrows had hit the target. The archery instructor took his head in his hands, unable to believe his eyes.

“How did she do that? That’s incredible shooting!”

“That, gentlemen, were Parthian Shots in the purest tradition of the steppes.” said Ingrid, grinning with pride. On his part, William Devers watched with renewed respect Nancy as she was calmly trotting back towards the range, applauded by the students who had watched her performance. She soon stopped beside the archery instructor and gave back to him the bow and empty quiver.

“Here you go, sir. Thank you for lending me their use.”

“And what is your name, little one? I would love to have you on my archery team.”

“I’m Nancy Dows, sir, and I am certainly looking forward to be with your team.” she replied, beaming.

Ingrid and Nancy ended up leaving the Congressional School only in the late afternoon, after having lunch at the school’s cafeteria and after signing the enrolment forms for Nancy to start classes in Grade Four next September. Nancy had top results in most areas of the Third-Grade final assessment test used by the school, with only slightly lower but still strong notes in the domains concerning pure sciences, in which she had lacked in actual laboratory practice, especially in chemistry and biology. Nancy was especially enthusiastic about the fact that Ingrid had enrolled her as well in a number of elective or extra-curricular courses and activities, including music, performing arts, horse riding, fencing and archery. In return, Nancy had promised to her mother that she was going to work at home to improve in those matters in which she had proved

weakest in her tests. She did have a question for Ingrid as they rolled away in her red Firebird Trans Am 1974.

“Mommy, why didn’t we come here in your aircar? Don’t you like it?”

“Of course I like it! In fact, I love it! It is just that I didn’t want to do some show-boating on the first time we came to the school. That’s all!”

“Oh, okay!” said Nancy before closing her eyes and dreaming back to that happy moment when she was riding and shooting a bow.

## **CHAPTER 9 – STILL FIT TO FLY**

**19:20 (Washington Time)**

**Thursday, May 7, 1987 'C'**

**27<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron's briefing room**

**Operations building, Langley Air Force Base**

**Langley, Virginia, U.S.A.**

The 28 pilots and radar officers of the 27<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron, nicknamed 'Fighting Eagles', straightened up in their chairs when their commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Gregory Martin, entered the briefing room, a number of documents in his hands. Martin walked to the lectern next to the big map of the American East Coast plastered on one wall and put down his documents before looking at his aviators.

"At ease, gentlemen...and lady!"

Lieutenant Ann McAllister rolled her eyes when a number of male pilots snickered at the word 'lady'. Despite the fact that women had been combat pilots since 1942 and despite the fact that sexual segregation of air units had been abolished in 1953, a lot of male combat pilots, particularly fighter pilots, still considered female pilots as inherently inferior to them. That was mostly due to the culture one found in fighter squadrons, which was positively drenching in machismo. Still, Ann loved flying fighter aircraft, particularly her present Lockheed F-83E EAGLE, and she felt in no way inferior to the other pilots of her squadron. The one man in the room who truly respected her as a fighter pilot was her radar officer, Second Lieutenant John Bainbridge, a young but very competent and promising aviator who was her best friend in the unit. Ann then concentrated back on the briefing as Lieutenant Colonel Martin spoke up.

"We are now continuing air operations as part of Exercise Red Wind, which is meant to exercise and test our ability to defend the American East Coast area from a surprise enemy air attack. The last two days saw enemy attempts at penetrating our airspace in daytime in order to get at our vital military installations in the Northeast region of our country. Those attempts, with elements of the New York and Massachusetts Air National Guard playing the enemy, have failed to date, being



intercepted by us and by the two other squadrons of our fighter group before they could get to their objectives.”

“That’s what happens when a bunch of old part-timers try their luck against real pros!” said a pilot, making the others laugh. On his part, Martin smiled slightly but he then felt the need to caution his pilots.

“While those old part-timers, as you called them, Captain Winchester, did fail in their attempts to date, we should not dismiss them out of hand, as some of them have a lot of actual combat experience. Remember that none of you have actual war kills in the air, so do not underestimate the enemy and don’t beat your chest too quickly. Remember also what happened on December 7, 1941: our pilots then thought of the Japanese pilots as a bunch of myopic, buck-toothed morons flying old kites. Well, our pilots learned fast enough that day that they had been flat wrong. So, I expect you to be on your toes tonight and to keep your eyes open. We will operate in succession three flights of four aircraft each, in order to keep a combat patrol in the air during the whole night, from eight tonight to eight in the morning. Here are the assignments and times...” To Ann’s annoyance, she ended up as part of Captain Charles Winchester’s flight but thankfully not as his wingman, with their patrol scheduled for the infamous ‘O Dark Thirty’ time slot, from midnight to four in the morning, when the human mind was at its lowest. As they walked out of the briefing room once Martin had passed all the relevant information and meteorological data, Winchester approached Ann and her radar officer to throw a barb at her.

“Try not to get lost in the dark tonight, McAllister.”

Ann did not reply to that, instead glaring at Winchester as he walked away and whispering to John Bainbridge.

“His pilot’s nickname should be ‘Dickhead’ instead of ‘Thunderbolt’.”

“Don’t worry about him, Ann: one fine day, someone will make him eat his boots.”

“Well, the faster that happens, the better.”

Ann took off in her F-83E supersonic fighter-bomber at 23:41, behind Captain Winchester’s aircraft and that of his wingman, then joined up in a four-aircraft formation to fly towards the Northeast, in order to get to their assigned patrol areas. Winchester and his wingman, Lieutenant Tony Fornelli, split up from Ann and her own wingman once off Philadelphia, while she continued towards her own patrol station off Boston. On

their way, John Bainbridge was able to detect and track with his radar over a dozen other aircraft flying in the area. All of them turned out to be regular transatlantic commercial flights but Ann made sure that John coordinated with the regional air defense control center, to ensure that those contacts were legitimate airliners rather than enemy aircraft trying to pass off as commercial aircraft. Once she got to her patrol zone and had taken over from the pair of pilots from the 71<sup>st</sup> Fighter Squadron assigned to the eight to midnight shift, Ann methodically checked out each radar contact approaching the coast, flying to within visual range of them to positively identify them as being authentic airliners. To her frustration and disgust, Captain Winchester seemed not to be as diligent, judging from his radio transmissions, apparently letting the ground air controller confirm that a radar transponder appeared legitimate and not approaching the airliners to identify visually the aircraft in question, the way Ann was doing. In that he was not technically at fault, as visual recognition of all the incoming air traffic had not been formally requested by Lieutenant Colonel Martin, but that proved once again to Ann that Winchester liked to take the easy way. Still, she promised herself to talk to her squadron commander once back at base, to suggest that visual recognition be made mandatory.

**01:48 (Washington Time)**

**Friday, May 8, 1987 'C'**

**Massachusetts Air National Guard F-83C fighter-bomber**

**Flying over the Atlantic and heading towards Washington**

"I wonder what the passengers aboard this Pan Am Boeing 717 would think if they saw us now." asked aloud Major Mary Atkinson, of the Massachusetts Air National Guard, who was sitting in the rear seat assigned to the radar officer of the F-83C.

"They would probably freak out and think that we are some kind of nefarious Soviet bomber bent on launching a surprise attack against the United States." answered Ingrid, who was at the commands of the F-83C and using this air defense exercise to fly a few hours in order to maintain her flight proficiency on the F-83. She had chosen Mary Atkinson as her radar officer tonight because Mary was the best rated radar officer in her air group and because top notch radar work was going to be crucial in order to be successful tonight. Of course, it helped that Mary Atkinson was also a veteran of the famed 99<sup>th</sup> Air Wing, the Fifinellas, which Ingrid had created and formed in 1942 as the

first ever female air combat unit in American history. While Mary Atkinson had been too young to fight in either World War 2 or in the three wars of the 1950s, she was a combat veteran of the Second Korean War, with two confirmed kills to her air score. Ingrid thus had full confidence in her abilities tonight. She had added to her chances for success tonight by having the six 'aggressor' F-83Cs painted matte black, making them this much difficult to spot them in the night sky. Finally, she was using an old trick in her near-bottomless bag by flying just above and to one side of another aircraft, in this case the Pan Am Boeing 717 flight from Paris, in order to hide her own aircraft from American air defense and civilian air control radars by flying in the radar shadow of the airliner. In this present case, Mary Atkinson's job was to monitor their electronic warfare sensors and warn Ingrid from which direction came radar waves from either ground stations or interceptor aircraft. As for Ingrid herself, she was quite busy flying as close as possible to the airliner and in the correct angle to hide from radar waves, and this without getting too close and being thrown violently around by the strong air turbulences created by the airliner.

"We are now 190 miles from Washington, D.C., Ingrid, and our target is at heading 260." announced Mary Atkinson. "The regional air traffic controller just authorized our Boeing 717 to start its descent to 12,000 feet."

"Then, let's follow our mother stork down." replied Ingrid, who then copied exactly the movements of the airliner while staying as close to it as it was safely possible. Mary, despite being an experienced aviator, felt a knot in her stomach as she eyed the big airliner, just below and to one side of their F-83C: what Ingrid was doing now took nerves of steel and a master touch on the controls. However, Ingrid still clearly had those. Their big fighter-bomber kept its position close to the Boeing 717 during the latter's descent, with no indication that the civilian air control radars had detected them.

"Any hint that one of our interceptors or ground military radars sniffed us up, Mary?"

"Negative! The airborne intercept radars I am detecting are too far to pick us up and the military radio traffic gives no hint that they are suspecting something... Wait! I have a radio transmission of interest... One of the interceptors was apparently able to detect one of the two penetration aircraft near Boston and is passing the alert. What do we do now, Ingrid?"

"Nothing! We will continue to follow this Pan Am flight from real close, Mary. Let them think that we were all in the Boston area."

## **02:06 (Washington Time)**

### **Lieutenant McAllister's F-83E**

#### **Ninety miles east of Boston, at 15,000 meters**

Ann had approached the latest aircraft detected approaching the American coast, intent on verifying its identity. According to the civilian air traffic controller, it was supposed to be an American Airlines Boeing 717-300. While approaching it from one side, Ann could see the blinking navigational lights of the airliner and its general shape in the dark sky. Half reassured, she was about to perform a wide 'S' turn in order to end behind the airliner when John Bainbridge shouted in alarm.

"NEW RADAR CONTACT JUST BEHIND AND ABOVE THE AIRLINER!"

Shocked, Ann looked in that direction but did not see anything there at first. However, as she performed her 'S' turn, she started to see a pair of blue-white jet engine exhaust, some forty meters above the Boeing 717. As for the new aircraft itself, it was a barely visible black mass.

"THE RATS! THEY WERE FLYING IN THE RADAR SHADOW OF THAT AIRLINER! QUICK, JOHN! ALERT OUR GROUND CONTROLLER AND THE OTHER AIRCRAFT OF OUR FLIGHT! THERE MAY BE MORE OF THEM USING THE SAME TACTIC."

"ON IT, ANN!"

Then, the intruder went to full afterburner power and abruptly broke away from the airliner, diving towards the sea. Ann, sudden excitement sending her heart racing, dove after it, intent on marking the intruder with her tracking radar, something that would signify a theoretical kill in Ann's advantage. However, her opponent proved no slouch and started wiggling around while continuing to dive at a steep angle. That steep diving angle, by making Ann's radar waves bounce on the surface of the sea below, made a radar lock nearly impossible. To make things worse for her, the pilot of the intruder then released a series of radar decoys, filling her radar screen with false echoes.

"SHIT! I CAN'T DISTINGUISH WHICH RADAR DOT IS THE CORRECT ONE!" shouted John from his back seat.

"THEN, LET'S DO IT THE OLD WAY: I'M GOING FOR A GUN KILL!"

Ann was of course not going to fire her 30mm guns, which were empty anyway for this mission, but filming the intruder with her gun camera was going to be as good a proof of victory as a radar lock. Approaching gradually, she finally pressed her trigger when she was aligned and close enough for a gun pass.

“GUNS, GUNS, GUNS! I GOT YOU, YOU BASTARD!”

“Time to level off, Ann, if you don’t want us to dive into the Atlantic.”

“Got it!”

Pulling hard on her stick, Ann returned to level flight at the cost of enduring a few brutal Gs of centrifugal force. As she avidly breathed oxygen through her mask, she saw that the intruder was now flying level with her to her right, apparently acknowledging defeat. Ann gave that pilot a thumb’s up sign and spoke to John by intercom.

“Take note of his aircraft number, John, so that we can prove our claim of intercepting him. I wonder how many of those guys tried the same trick tonight.”

Back in Langley AFB, there was now near chaos at the air operations center, where the night duty officer in charge of detection and fighter directing was pulling his air out while frantically looking at the radar screens of his air defense controllers.

“DAMN! DAMN! DAMN! QUICK, FIND OUT IF THERE ARE OTHER TRANSATLANTIC AIRLINERS ON THE WAY TO OUR EAST COAST OR WHO ALREADY CROSSED THE COASTLINE. IF THERE ARE, TELL OUR PILOTS IN THE AIR TO GO CHECK VISUALLY EACH OF THOSE AIRLINERS.”

The operations duty officer then did something he wished he didn’t need to do: raising a safety cover first, he punched a large red button, starting the loud blaring of an alert siren across the whole base and also sending an air attack signal to the Pentagon.

“Dammit, I may just end up in a hot seat tomorrow and I probably won’t be alone to face the music.”

His morale then took a further hit when one of his radar controllers shouted a warning.

“NEW RADAR CONTACT NORTH OF WASHINGTON, D.C.! IT IS FLYING LOW AND SUPERSONIC AND IS HEADING STRAIGHT TO DOWNTOWN WASHINGTON.”

“Fuck! We’re cooked!”

**02:12 (Washington Time)****Massachusetts Air National Guard F-83C fighter-bomber****Flying over Washington at an altitude of 400 meters**

"I have the White House dead ahead, two miles away. Prepare our cameras and strobe lights, Mary."

"With pleasure, Ingrid." replied Ingrid's radar officer, who then eyed the electro-optical visor of their photo-reconnaissance pod, which filled the large belly bomb bay of their aircraft. That pod was actually a fairly old model that was mostly out of use these days. The reason for that was that it used a bank of very powerful strobe lights which allowed to take very high definition pictures at night, using high-speed special films. Ingrid could have used a more modern type of photo-reconnaissance pod which used sensitive infrared film and no strobe lights, but the overhead blinding flash of light of the strobe lights was the nearest in terms of psychological effect to that of being blinded by the flash of a nuclear explosion.

"Three seconds to the White House, then six more seconds to the Pentagon, Mary!"

"Ready... Top!... And top!"

The Secret Service agents posted on the roof of the White House and doing their night watch duty suddenly had to close their eyes as they were bathed in a blinding flash of white light, at about the same time as a thundering roar passed overhead. Their night vision gone for long seconds and seeing stars in their eyes, the agents were basically rendered useless for over a minute, as surprised shouts and exclamations went around the building. In the Presidential Suite, President Bush woke up with a startle at the roar of the F-83 passing low overhead. Looking at his alarm clock, he patted his wife's shoulder to reassure her.

"Don't worry, honey: that was just Ingrid Dows pulling a swifty on our air defense units. She warned me yesterday to expect something like this at about this hour."

The President then listened for nearly a minute, to see if anybody was in hot pursuit behind Ingrid Dows. Hearing nothing, he frowned and promised himself to ask a few pointed questions to the Air Force Chief of Staff in the morning, then got back to sleep.

Six seconds later, it was the turn of the soldiers on guard duty at the various entrances to the Pentagon to be blinded by a sudden flash of white light. Ingrid's F-83C then continued on at very low altitude, actually passing close to her own house and basically waking up the whole neighborhood before turning to follow the meanders of the Potomac River at an altitude barely above the various bridges and high voltage power lines crossing the river. None of the interceptors scrambled to catch her were even able to see her fly out to the Atlantic after flashing the main naval base at Norfolk, near Newport News. In the Wilsons' house, where Nancy was being babysat during Ingrid's absence on exercise, Nancy and Billy, sleeping in the same bed, woke up like the rest of the neighborhood. Billy, now six years-old, exclaimed himself on abruptly waking up.

"WHAT WAS THAT?"

Nancy, also ruffled up at first, then smiled to herself.

"That was Mommy having some fun."

## **CHAPTER 10 – BEGINNING SCHOOL**

**07:22 (Washington Time)**

**Monday, August 31, 1987 ‘C’**

**Parking lot of the Congressional School**

**3229 Sleepy Hollow Road, Falls Church**

**Virginia, U.S.A.**

There were already quite a few cars in the parking lot of the Little School, the low, brown brick building which housed the classrooms for the children from kindergarten age to grade four, when Ingrid landed in front of it in her aircar. The few parents and children still outside stared at once at the Hiller AIRCAR which, while not as rare as a few months ago, was still not a common sight. Shutting down the engine, Ingrid then smiled to her daughter, who was sitting in the front passenger seat.

“Ready for your first day of school, Nancy?”

“Yesss!” nearly shouted Nancy, all excited.

“Then, let’s get in: I will accompany you inside. Don’t forget your school bag and lunch box. And also don’t forget about what I said concerning not bragging to other children.”

“Yes, Mommy!” replied Nancy in a nearly exasperated tone: Ingrid had been hammering for days already that notion of staying modest and discrete with other children and not to brag about all her knowledge and skills. Both then stepped out of the aircar as curious young children and a few adults congregated around the aircraft. One man who was accompanying a handsome young boy attracted the attention of Ingrid at once: he appeared to be carrying a holstered handgun under his buttoned vest. However, Ingrid didn’t stare at him and instead discretely glanced at him a few times as she helped Nancy take out her school backpack and her lunch box. If she went by her first impressions and instincts, she would say that the man was a mobster. However, the way he deferred to the young boy he was accompanying made him either a driver or a bodyguard, rather than a parent. She also heard the boy and the man speak in Italian. Putting that data aside for the moment, Ingrid accompanied Nancy inside the brick building, where a mature woman greeted her and the other parents escorting in children.



“Good morning and welcome to the Congressional School for this first day of the school year. The waiting and study lounge for the Extended Hours Program students is down this hallway, second door to the right. Your children will be able to wait there for the start of classes.”

“Thank you, miss!” replied Ingrid while smiling to the woman. One feature of the Congressional School she particularly appreciated was its Extended Hours Program, or EHP, which allowed parents to safely drop off their children earlier than at normal hours, meaning that she could bring in Nancy as early as seven in the morning instead of the standard arrival time between 07:45 and 08:00. The EHP also permitted her to pick up Nancy anytime between 15:30 and 18:00, instead of at the usual classes closing time of 15:30. For a single parent like her, this was a lifesaver and prevented a lot of headaches for her as she could not afford to constantly arrive late for work at the White House: you simply did not make the President of the United States wait for you.

The EHP lounge proved to be a large room, well lit by a number of windows, and containing a number of sofas, long tables and chairs, plus a number of refrigerators where the young students could put their lunch boxes. There were also two adjacent bathrooms for the children, a water fountain and a row of six microwave ovens on a long counter with sink. Putting Nancy’s lunch box in one of the refrigerators, Ingrid then led her to one of the tables, where three more children aged between nine and ten already sat. The boy accompanied by the armed man was one of those three children. Ingrid gave a last kiss to her daughter while caressing her hair.

“I will be back to pick you up before six, sweetie. Have a nice day at school.”

“I am already impatient to start classes, Mommy.” replied Nancy before kissing Ingrid on the cheek. Walking out of the lounge, Ingrid let the armed man, who was also leaving, pass by her before whispering to him.

“Is there a particular reason why you needed to come to this school with a weapon, mister?”

The man hesitated and slowed down while tensing up and looking at her sideways.

“Who are you to ask, miss, and how did you know that I am armed?”

“Long practice and experience, mister. My name is Ingrid Dows, ex-General Ingrid Dows, of the United States Space Corps. So, why are you armed and should I be worried about you?”

The man, a tall and beefy one as befitted a bodyguard, sucked air in before answering her.

"I am the driver and bodyguard for my employer's son, miss. Mister Bocelli happens to have a lot of business competitors who could potentially try to hurt him via his son Leonardo. You won't have to worry about me in this school: I am here to defend, not to hurt."

"That I can understand and accept, mister. Forget that I asked."

"By the way, miss, your helicopter, or whatever it is, is a truly fascinating machine."

"Thank you! It is a Hiller AIRCAR, built in California. However, one needs to hold an aircraft or helicopter piloting license to be allowed to fly it around."

"So, you are a military pilot, right?"

Ingrid gently smiled at the man's question.

"I am retired now. Just look for my name in newspaper archives and you will see who I am. By the way, how should I call you, mister?"

"Nick! Nick Donatello, Misses Dows. How could you be retired already? You look to be no more than 25 years-old."

"I will be 62 years-old in a week, Nick. As I said, just look for my name and you will understand. Have a good day, Nick."

"Uh, you too, Misses Dows."

Ingrid then returned to her aircar, went in it and took off, flying towards the East and the White House, watched by a fascinated Nick.

"Wow! Talk about an interesting woman!" said to himself the bodyguard before returning to his Cadillac and leaving as well.

In the EHP lounge, Nancy quickly started conversing with the other three children sitting at her table. She then found out that they were all going to be part of the same fourth-grade class. They were in turn astonished to learn that she would be in their class.

"But, how old are you? You can't be nine or ten?" asked a pretty Asian girl named Lucy Wong. Nancy grinned in response.

"Nope! I am four and a half years-old. I am starting in fourth-grade because my admission test results were too high for me to simply start in kindergarten."

"So, you can already read, write and count, right?" asked a blond boy with soft manners name Karl Wienermeyer.

"Of course I can! I wouldn't be in fourth-grade if not!"

The third child at her table, a handsome but shy boy with shiny black hair cut short, then spoke for the first time, offering his right hand for a shake.

"Hello, Nancy! My name is Leonardo Bocelli. You nearly speak like a big person, I must say."

"Maybe I am!" replied maliciously Nancy. Is this your first year at this school, like in my case?"

"Oh no! My father enrolled me here three years ago. Lucy and Karl are also in their third or fourth years here."

"And how is this place, guys?"

"It is wonderful!" answered at once with enthusiasm Lucy Wong. The teachers are all very nice and I get to practice and play my violin in class three times a week."

"You like music? I also love music!"

"Oh? What instrument do you play?"

"Quite a few, but my favorites are the qanun and the barbat."

"Qanun? Barbat? Uh, I don't know those instruments."

"They are old Persian musical instruments, Lucy. The qanun is a sort of zither, a plank-like string instrument, while the barbat is a variant of the lute."

"Oh, I see! Do you plan to bring your instruments to the school?"

"I sure do! Do they have a safe place to store our instruments here at school?"

"Yes, they do: they have individual lockers in the music room which you can lock by using your own padlock."

"Great! Then I will bring my qanun and barbat with me tomorrow. I hope that the music teacher is a nice person. I have seen plenty of stern music teachers."

Lucy Wong sighed on hearing that.

"Me too! My old music teacher in Hong Kong was not a very nice one and was very severe when I made mistakes."

"Oh!" simply said Nancy, not insisting on that, before looking at Karl and Leonardo. "And you guys? Do you play music too?"

"Uh, I prefer poetry, drawing and pottery making." answered Karl Wienermeyer.

"I like cars." said in turn Leonardo Bocelli. "One day, I will be a car designer and I will make fast cars, like Enzo Ferrari."

"Hey, my mother is an engineer." replied Nancy, warming up. "She in fact helped design the aircar I came in. Maybe I could convince her to give you a ride in it."

"Really?" said Leonardo, a big grin appearing at once on his face. "That would be great!"

"Could I come too?" asked timidly Lucy Wong.

"Why not? Maybe I should ask my mother to arrange for a group tour for our class. Her aircar should easily accommodate five more children in addition to me. I will talk to her tonight about that."

"Yes! I would love to fly!" nearly shouted Leonardo.

A few minutes before eight o'clock, teachers walked into the lounge and called a list of their assigned students before leading them to their classrooms. Nancy ended up with twelve other students, including Leonardo, Lucy and Karl, in a classroom and facing a jovial woman in her early forties who beamed while eyeing her pupils.

"Welcome to my fourth-grade class, children! For those who don't know me, I am Kerry Welsh and I have been teaching here at the Congressional School for eight years. We will now start this first day of the school year with a morning meeting circle, where you will all be able to present yourselves to your comrades. Let's go sit at that large work table, kids."

Welsh, who had been briefed carefully by Director Devers about Nancy, watched her discretely as she scrambled with the twelve other, much bigger children, to sit around the meeting table. Once they were all sitting around the table, Welsh looked at her list of students.

"I will now call you up in alphabetical order. You will then get up and present yourselves in a few words. No need to make it lengthy but at least give your name, age, place of birth and your main interests in life. Thomas Blackburn, I believe that you are first."

An African-American boy with coffee-color skin then got up from his chair and started speaking in a timid voice.

"Hello! My name is Thomas Blackburn and I am ten years-old. I was born in Chicago. I like mathematics but, most of all, I like sports, especially football. My father works at the State Department."

"Very good, Thomas!" said the teacher. "Leonardo, you are next."

"Yes, Misses Welsh!" replied the boy before getting up and looking around the table at the other students before starting to speak.

"My name is Leonardo Bocelli and I am nine. I was born here in Washington and my father is a businessman. I like cars a lot, along with cooking. My mother shows me her Italian recipes. I dream of one day becoming a car designer."

Leonardo then sat down, applauded by a few of the students, including Nancy. A thin redhead with freckles and wearing glasses was called up next and spoke in a tiny, timid voice.

"Hello everybody! My name is Cynthia Breckenridge and I am ten. I was born in Arlington and my father is a bank manager. I like sciences in general, but am especially interested in chemistry and biology. I hope one day to become a chemist."

"Excellent! Annie, you're next!"

An average-looking girl wearing glasses got up next.

"Hi! I am Annie Crossfield and I am ten years old. I was born in Philadelphia and my father is the owner of the Capitol Skyline Hotel in Washington. I am interested in biology and want to become a doctor."

"A fine goal, Annie. Nancy, you are next."

Nancy actually got up and climbed on her chair in order to be visible to all, due to her small height. The other students were especially attentive to her presentation, as many wondered how such a young girl could be in a fourth-grade class. However, Nancy still had in mind the warning from her mother not to brag around. Still, the little she said was quite enough.

"Hello! My name is Nancy Dows and I am four and a half. I was born on a spaceship, the U.S.S. PROMETHEUS, while it was halfway between Jupiter and Saturn and heading towards Saturn. I spent the first two years and four months of my life in Space, until the PROMETHEUS arrived back in Earth orbit. My mother was the ship commander and the commander of the United States Space Corps but she has since retired from the military and now works in the White House as a special advisor for President Bush. I love music and I play a number of instruments. I also like boys a lot." Her last words started a concert of giggles and of falsely offended gasps and exclamations as she sat down, while Kerry Welsh eyed her with a smirk.

"Now, that's quite a declaration, Nancy, especially for your age. Yes, Kim?"

"Can I ask a question to Nancy, Misses Welsh?" asked an Asian girl.

"Certainly, Kim! Go ahead!"

The girl, who wore long, silky black hair going down her back, then smiled to Nancy.

"Hello! I am Kimi Park and am interested in astronomy. Did you have to wear a spacesuit during your time in Space?"

"Only when I went for spacewalks with the other children of the ship and when I went for a rover excursion on the surface of Titan, the biggest moon of Saturn."

"Ooh, you lucky you! Do you have pictures of your trip?"

"Yes, I do! Misses Welsh, could I bring pictures tomorrow, to show them to the class."

"That would actually make for an excellent first class presentation, Nancy. You are most welcome to do so."

"Thank you, Misses Welsh." Happily replied Nancy, with a redhead girl named Elizabeth Holloway called next to present herself.

### **15:30 (Washington Time)**

#### **Fourth-grade classroom**

The ringing of the bell announcing the end of the classes for the day started just after Kerry Welsh had finished giving her instructions for the next day.

"Alright, children! Classes are over for today. You can go out to take your buses or go to the Extended Hours Lounge to wait there for your ride home. Have a good evening!"

"You too, Misses Welsh!" said in unison the boys and girls before they grabbed their things and left the classroom. However, Nancy stayed behind for a moment and went to her teacher.

"Misses Welsh, could I bring one of my musical instruments tomorrow? I would like to practice with it while I wait in the Extended Hours Lounge before and after school."

"I don't see a problem with that, Nancy. You can lock it in your classroom's individual locker when not using it."

"Thank you, Misses Welsh!"

Nancy was about to turn around when her teacher spoke again.

"Please wait a moment, Nancy: I have something to say to you. Mister Devers told me about your very special abilities, including the fact that you tend to think like an adult."

"If you want to tell me about not playing sexual games with the boys of this school, then don't worry, Misses Welsh: my mother already warned me about that."

Kerry Welsh was left speechless for a moment by Nancy's declaration.

"How did you know that this was what I wanted to say?"

"I cheated and read your mind, Misses Walsh. Sorry! Can I go now?"

"Uh, yes, you may go, Nancy."

"Thank you, Misses Walsh." replied Nancy before walking out of the classroom with her school bag, leaving behind a disturbed Kerry Walsh, who however reassured herself quickly: Nancy had stayed perfectly polite all the time today and, while unusually mature for her age, had interacted and played with the other children without a problem. If Nancy truly proved to be able to control her special abilities, then things should go smoothly.

Going to the Extended Hours Lounge, Nancy joined up with four other students of her class with which she had quickly become friends. Sitting at the table occupied by Leonardo Bocelli, Lucy Wong, Karl Wienermeyer and Kimi Park, she looked first at Leonardo.

"At what time is your driver supposed to come and get you, Leo?"

"He should be here at around five, Nancy: he usually has some errands to run for my father before he can come and pick me up. And you? When is your mother due here?"

"At about the same time. She often has to work past normal hours, because she has to serve the President when he needs her advice, but she promised me that she would find a way to free herself and get me here no later than six and preferably at around five."

"That sounds like my father." said with a sigh Kimi Park. "He works at the State Department and he also often has to work late."

"He works at the State Department?! My older sister Hien also works for the State Department, but she got a promotion about three years ago and now works at the American embassy in Vietnam. My mother and I went to visit her in Hanoi last year, during her annual vacation period."

"Uh, how old is your sister, if she works at an embassy?" asked Kimi, a bit confused. Nancy gave her a disarming smile as she answered her.

"She is forty now. My mommy adopted her at the age of five, while Mommy was serving on a mission in Vietnam. You do know about my mommy, right?"

"Uh, not really."

"Then, let me tell you her story." said Nancy before launching in a long discourse, while her new friends listened on, fascinated.

Ingrid actually showed up at the lounge at close to five o'clock. Lucy Wong looked with disbelief at Ingrid before whispering to Nancy.

"Your mother is really 61 years-old?"

"Yes, I swear! She will probably stay like this for many more years."

"Wow! My mother would be jealous of her."

"Most of the other women ARE jealous of me, girl." said Ingrid, smiling, before looking down at Nancy. "Won't you present to me your new friends?"

"Of course, Mommy! They are Lucy Wong, Leonardo Bocelli, Karl Wienermeyer and Kimi Park. I already told them about you."

"Really? I hope that they are not thinking now that I am a sort of witch."

"You are a national heroine, not a witch, madam." replied with assurance Karl Wienermeyer, making Ingrid's smile widen.

"You have a way with words, Karl."

"I like poetry, madam."

"And you seem to have a talent for it, Karl. Ready to go, Nancy?"

"Yes, Mommy!"

As Nancy was picking up her school bag, Nick Donatello showed up as well in the lounge, prompting Leonardo in jumping off his chair and pick up his own bag. He and Nancy waved goodbye to Kimi and Lucy before walking out of the lounge. When the two children came out of the school building with Ingrid and Nick, they saw that a small crowd had formed around the Hiller AIRCAR. That reminded Nancy about something.

"Uh, Mommy, I told my friends that maybe you could give them a tour in your aircar."

"I would be pleased to do that, Nancy, but first I will have to obtain permission from their parents to let them ride in my aircar. Doing otherwise would be showing disrespect to your friends' parents."

Nick Donatello, who strongly believe in family traditions and parental authority, nodded his head in appreciation.



"Thank you for saying that, Misses Dows. Mister Bocelli would have appreciated your words."

"Then, could you pass to him this request? Does he authorize his son to have a short trip in my aircar?"

"I will certainly pass your request to him, Misses Dows. Come, Leonardo! Time to go home!"

"Bye, Nancy! See you tomorrow!" said Leonardo while waving at Nancy as he accompanied the driver to his parked Cadillac. Ingrid then sat Nancy in her aircar and strapped her in, then sat in the pilot's seat after asking the crowd of children and adults to step away. Starting her engine, she then rolled on the ground for some fifty meters, time to be well clear of any bystander, then made the aircar jump in the air, watched by the fascinated onlookers. Since the school was no more than ten kilometers from their home, Ingrid stayed in helicopter mode instead of transiting to the faster level flying mode.

"So, how was your first day of school, Nancy?"

"It was really nice, Mommy. My classmates are nice and so is our teacher, Misses Welsh. Uh, I promised them that I would bring them some pictures of our trip in Space. Could you help me tonight to choose which photos I should bring to school tomorrow?"

"Sure! In fact, I think that we will be able to add a few things to bring as well, Nancy. Your comrades should find them all very interesting."

### **07:10 (Washington Time)**

**Tuesday, September 1, 1987 'C'**

**Parking lot of the 'Little School' building**

**Congressional School, 3229 Sleepy Hollow Road**

**Falls Church, Virginia**

When Ingrid and Nancy stepped out of their aircar in the parking lot facing the 'Little School' building, both had their hands quite full, with Ingrid carrying the kind of large but thin case of the kind used by artists to carry paintings and sketches around, plus a large rigid suitcase, while Nancy carried both her school backpack and her carrying case for her practice barbat. Instead of going straight to the waiting lounge, Ingrid intercepted one of the school supervisors near the entrance of the school.

"Excuse me, miss. Could you please unlock Misses Welsh's fourth-grade classroom for us? We need to put these things inside it and secure them there: they are parts of a presentation this morning."

"No problem, miss. Follow me!"

"Thank you!"

They then followed the female supervisor to Nancy's classroom, where they were able to leave their items under lock. With Nancy keeping her practice barbat with her, Ingrid kissed her on the head before leaving for the White House.

"Have a nice day, sweetie. I should be back by five this afternoon. Then, I will be able to give a short ride to your friends."

"They should love it, Mommy!"

"I believe so. Be nice with them, Nancy."

On that, Ingrid walked out and returned to her aircar. Nancy watched her leave with a pinch in her heart, then went to the waiting lounge with her barbat. There, she found that only Leonardo and Lucy were already there.

"Hello Leo! Hello Lucy! I brought my practice barbat with me today. Would you like to see me play it?"

"Yes!" said enthusiastically Lucy Wong, herself an apprentice musician. "Show us your barbat!"

Nancy executed herself at once, opening her carrying case and taking out her barbat to show it to her friends. Lucy Wong's eyes gleamed as she examined the barbat.

"Wow! It is a really beautiful instrument. Where did you buy it?"

"My mother bought it for me, along with other musical instruments, while we were visiting Isfahan, in Iran." answered Nancy, pride in her voice. Karl Wienermeyer looked at her with envious eyes.

"You visited Iran? You lucky you!"

"It was definitely a very nice place to visit. But let me show you how my barbat sounds."

Sitting down and putting her barbat in her lap, Nancy then thought for a moment about what to play, finally deciding on an old Persian soft ballad. The moment she started to play, the other children in the lounge, along with the adult supervisor present, stopped whatever they were doing and stared at her. Nancy then surprised and impressed her friends by also singing softly in Farsi to accompany her music. The lounge supervisor listened on for a moment, then quickly walked out of the lounge, returning after a minute

with Jennifer Kirkpatrick, the music teacher for third and fourth grade students. Kirkpatrick applauded with the young students in the lounge when Nancy finished playing and singing her first piece. Lucy Wong, on her part, enthusiastically clapped her hands and urged her on.

“That was beautiful! Please play another song, Nancy!”

“Okay! This time, I will play and sing a very old Polish medieval love ballad which was played around by the traveling musicians of the time.”

Concentrating for a moment in order to remember souvenirs from her past life as Amalia Kupinski, a 13<sup>th</sup> Century Polish woman aristocrat, Nancy then started playing her barbat while singing in Old Polish, listened on by the other students and by a fascinated Jennifer Kirkpatrick, who whispered to the lounge supervisor.

“That little girl has an incredible musical talent. And to be able to sing in two foreign languages... She definitely deserves some special attention as a musician.”

Nancy beamed with pride and joy at the end of her last performance as the students and the adults applauded her: for her, music was truly what she loved the most to do and, contrary to what some would think, she had not played and sung just to show off. Jennifer Kirkpatrick then approached her as she was replacing her barbat in its carrying case.

“That was really wonderful playing and singing, Nancy. In what languages did you sing?”

“In Farsi, Old Polish and Hindi, Misses Kirkpatrick.”

That left the music teacher stunned: those three languages came from widely separated foreign cultures with no connections between them. How could a toddler girl know three such languages? She however had not been briefed about Nancy by Director Devers, contrary to Kelly Welsh.

“Uh, that’s quite a feat, Nancy. Are you able to sing in other languages as well?” Nancy, realizing that Kirkpatrick did not know about her abilities, then restrained herself.

“A couple, Missed Kirkpatrick. I have an ability for both languages and music.”

“I could see that, Nancy. Both your playing and singing were beautiful. I can’t wait to have you in our first music class of the year, on Thursday.”

“Thank you, Misses Kirkpatrick. I am also looking forward to that class.”

“Then, see you on Thursday, little Nancy.” replied Kirkpatrick before walking out of the lounge. Once out in the hallway, she accelerated to a near run, in a hurry to report this to Director Devers.

A bit before eight, Kerry Welsh came to the lounge and collected her students there, then led them to their fourth-grade classroom to start the day of schooling. Their first activity was a morning meeting circle, where they discussed what they were going to do during the day. During that meeting, Nancy’s display of Space photos and souvenirs was enthusiastically voted as their next activity. Helped by her teacher and a few of the students, Nancy then took out of their carrying cases a collection of sixteen large, poster-sized high-quality color photos taken during the U.S.S. PROMETHEUS’ five-year mission to the Outer Solar System, plus a collection of smaller photos of that mission. Next out of their case were nine plastic toy models of the PROMETHEUS, its rovers, the AURORA space station and of a number of other spaceship models. Not surprisingly, the boys concentrated their interest on the toy models, while the girls went for the photos and posters. Nancy took a good hour to describe and explain the photos and posters and answer the myriad of questions thrown at her. What she said at the end made Kerry Welsh most happy.

“Those were all obtained or bought by my mother after the PROMETHEUS returned to Earth. Misses Welsh, my mother would wish to donate those posters and toy models to the school, to stimulate the interest of the students in Space exploration. She will take back only the smaller, personal photos I brought today.”

“My! That is mighty generous and kind of her, Nancy. Won’t you be missing those yourself, though?”

A malicious grin then came on Nancy’s face.

“Not really, Misses Welsh: she promised me to bring me to the AURORA space station for my next birthday, in November. There, they sell tons of models and posters like these.”

“Wow! I am jealous already!”

“That’s alright with me, Misses Welsh.” replied Nancy, malice in her voice.

## **CHAPTER 11 – BAD MEN CAME**

**07:34 (Washington Time)**

**Wednesday, May 25, 1988 ‘C’**

**Extended Hours Lounge, ‘Little School’ building  
Congressional School, 3229 Sleepy Hollow Road  
Falls Church, Virginia, U.S.A.**

“Anybody saw Leo this morning?” asked Nancy to her friends and classmates after returning in the Extended Hours Lounge, back from a trip to the washroom. Kimi Park was the one who answered her.

“I believe that Leo has not arrived yet, Nancy.”

Kenneth Partridge, a big, eleven-year-old boy who was lining up to become a typical football college jock, then made a sarcastic joke.

“What’s the matter, Nancy? Missing your boyfriend already?”

Nancy pulled her tongue at Partridge in response, making other students laugh. She then went to the large windows of the lounge, which gave a view of the adjacent parking lot, and started looking for Nick Donatello’s black Cadillac.

Less than 400 meters from the school, on the school’s access road connecting with Sleepy Hollow Road, Nick Donatello was starting to worry, as the same two cars which had been behind him for over five minutes also turned on the school’s access road. The big problem with those two cars is that Nick could only see adults in them, and no children. He debated for a moment what to do, fearing that those two cars could be a threat to him and to his young passenger, Leonardo. Unfortunately, the road he was on ended at the school, with no other way to go unless he reversed course. He finally decided that nobody would be dumb enough to attack him and Leonardo inside the school grounds, where there would be plenty of witnesses. Nick did hesitate then, as driving all the way to the school could put in danger numerous children. Unfortunately, he was pretty much out of options right now, so he continued on. Leonardo, an intelligent and perceptive boy, then spoke to him from the back seat of the Cadillac.

"Is there something wrong, Nick? You keep watching your rear-view mirror."

"I am not sure, Leo. The same two cars have been following us for at least five minutes. Just in case, I will ask you to keep your head down."

"Uh, okay!" replied Leo, becoming scared. He knew perfectly well in what kind of 'business' his father was and was against it but his father, while loving him, simply ignored Leo's objections and went on being the main Italian Mafia boss in the Washington D.C. area. Leo's big brother and sister, as well as his mother, were unfortunately much more forgiving of his father's activities and had told many times Leo to drop the subject. In fact, Leo strongly suspected that his big brother Angelo, who was now sixteen, aspired to one day succeed his father at the head of his crime family. The problem was that Leo was convinced that all this would one day finish very badly. That day may just have come for him.

Nick suddenly saw in his rear-view mirror that both of the cars behind him were now accelerating and gaining on him fast. He understood at once what these men had in mind: to corner him and force him to stop before he could get to the school. Now having no other choice left to him, Nick also floored his accelerator, making his big but also powerful Cadillac leap forward. With the entrance gate of the school now less than a hundred meters ahead, Nick kept accelerating, then pushed on the brake pedal as strongly as he could at the last moment, then turned abruptly and passed through the open gate. His heart sank when he saw that the drivers of the two cars, far from being deterred, kept after him. Taking his Colt 1911 .45 caliber pistol out of its holster and then sticking it between his legs, he shouted a warning to Leonardo while speeding past the 'Big School' building as he lowered his door's window.

"STAY DOWN AND HANG ON, LEO!"

Abruptly turning his steering wheel while stepping hard on his brake pedal, Nick made his Cadillac perform a half turn in a noise of screeching tires, ending facing the two pursuing cars. The two cars, also braking hard, split up, one stopping in front of the Cadillac and blocking its path and the other passing close on Nick's side before stopping at an angle behind his rear bumper, boxing him in. However, as the first man stepped out of the car blocking his rear, a pistol in his hand, he found himself facing the muzzle of Nick's pistol, less than three meters from him. Nick's Colt barked three times, making the gunman jerk and then collapse like a broken puppet. However, no less than four handguns replied to his fire a mere second later. Fired in haste and under stress, most

of the bullets missed Nick, whistling past his head or simply piercing holes in his windshield and door. Unfortunately for him, two bullets did find their mark, perforating his torso's left side and his right shoulder, making him lose his grip on his pistol. With Nick now unarmed and slumped inert against his steering wheel, two of the attackers pulled the rear doors of the Cadillac open, with one man then brutally pulling a screaming Leonardo out of the car. Leonardo was then thrown in the back of one of the cars, while the dead gunman killed by Nick was dragged and loaded inside the other car.

Inside the Extended Hours Lounge, the children and the supervisor in it were able to see everything as it unfolded. Nancy, thanks to her past life experience as a French Resistance fighter, understood at once what was happening and shouted in horror.

"THOSE BAD MEN ARE KIDNAPPING LEO!"

Jumping off her chair, she ran to the exit door of the lounge, only to find the young male supervisor blocking it.

"DON'T LEAVE THE LOUNGE, NANCY! IT IS DANGEROUS OUTSIDE."

"I DON'T CARE! GET OUT OF THE WAY!"

When the supervisor showed no sign of stepping aside, Nancy became angry and shouted again.

"I SAID, GET OUT OF THE WAY!"

The 74-kilo young man suddenly flew backward as pushed by an invisible hand, pedaling hard to regain his balance before crashing violently against the opposite wall of the corridor. Half knocked out, he then slid down against the wall, ending with his bum on the floor as Nancy ran past him, heading for the main frontal entrance door. Despite her short legs, she ran about as fast as an Olympic athlete would and was out of the building as the two attacking cars started speeding away. Deathly worried about Leo, Nancy ran to the Cadillac and looked inside it, only to find the back seat empty. She then went to Nick, still slumped against the steering wheel, and shook him.

"NICK! NICK! SAY SOMETHING! DON'T DIE NOW!"

She then got a cough and a weak voice.

"Took Leo... Must warn fath..."

Understanding that Nick was about to die, Nancy then acted as her conscience told her to: applying both of her hands over the visible wounds of the driver, she then concentrated the way Ingrid had shown her to do. Her hands, then her whole body,

along with that of Nick, gradually started to glow, to the point of being too bright to look directly at. They glowed like this for a good half minute, watched by the disbelieving children inside the waiting lounge and by a few other children and adults present around the school grounds. When she returned to normal and took her hands off the driver, Nick opened his eyes and took a deep breath, still feeling weak.

“What did just happen, Nancy?”

“I healed you, Nick. I’m sorry but I must go now and chase after those bad men.”

Nancy further shocked Nick by taking out of his shoulder rig one of his spare magazines and picking up his colt 1911. Before Nick could protest about that, Nancy silently flew off the ground like a bird, drawing a concert of astonished exclamations from the onlookers around.

Nancy was quite conscious of what her open demonstration of supernatural powers could cause later on but, frankly, she couldn’t care less about that at this moment. With Nick’s pistol and spare magazine in her hands and accelerating quickly while gaining altitude, she went after the two attacking cars while concentrating to send a powerful telepathic message.

*‘INGRID, I NEED YOUR HELP! LEONARDO JUST GOT KIDNAPPED ON ARRIVING AT THE SCHOOL. I AM NOW IN PURSUIT OF TWO CARS, IN WHICH LEONARDO IS.’*

An answer was not long in coming, with a powerful mental message replying to her.

*‘I will leave the White House at once, Nancy. How are you pursuing those cars?’*

*‘I am flying after them. I’m sorry, Mommy, but I had no choice.’*

*‘I understand, sweetie. Which way are those cars going now?’*

*‘They just turned Northeast on Road 613, apparently heading towards Seven Corners.’*

*‘Good! Can you keep up with them?’*

*‘I think so, Mommy! I will contact you again if they change directions.’*

Nancy then concentrated back on keeping the two cars in sight and not lose them while flying at an altitude of about eighty meters.

Back at the Congressional School, after an understandable moment of panic and confusion, a few adult staffers ran to the immobile Cadillac to go check on Nick. Seeing



the blood soaking his left side and right shoulder, one of the staffers shouted towards the nearby Little School.

“SOMEONE CALL AN AMBULANCE AND THE POLICE, QUICK!”

Helped by a male teacher, he then cautiously took Nick, who was still weak, out of his car, laying him on the asphalt. Inspecting quickly Nick and expecting to find bullet holes in his body, he was surprised to find no visible wound, despite the amount of blood soaking his shirt and vest. He exchanged a confused look with the teacher helping him.

“I...I don't understand! I can't find any wound, yet this man obviously lost a lot of blood.”

“Yeah! And did you see how that little girl flew off, like a sort of witch? How could that be possible?”

“It was General Dows' five-year-old daughter. Did you see the way she glowed brightly for a moment?”

“I did! However, the important thing now is that one of our pupils has just been kidnapped on the School grounds. We will have to find out who it was.”

“His name...Leonardo Bocelli... He is in fourth-grade... Must warn his father.”  
Managed to say Nick before losing consciousness.

Inside the Little School building, Kerry Welsh was arriving at a run at the waiting lounge, deadly worried about her young pupils. She nearly collided with ten-year-old Kimi Park, who was running out of the lounge, a piece of paper in her hands.

“MISSES WELSH, BANDITS JUST KIDNAPPED LEONARDO AND SHOT HIS DRIVER. WE SAW EVERYTHING AND WE WERE ABLE TO NOTE DOWN THE PLATE NUMBERS OF THEIR TWO CARS. WE NEED TO CALL THE POLICE AND AN AMBULANCE!”

“My God! Was any of the children hurt?”

The embarrassed look she got then from Kimi alarmed the teacher at once, who insisted.

“Speak, Kimi! Was anybody else hurt?”

“I don't think so, Misses Welsh, but Nancy ran outside and went after the bandits.”

“SHE WENT AFTER THE BANDITS? HOW? WHERE IS SHE NOW?”

"She...she flew off in pursuit of the two cars, Misses Welsh. Please, we have to call the police and pass to them those car plate numbers, so that they could catch those bandits and save Leonardo... MISSES WELSH!"

Frozen by stupor for a moment, the teacher was then returned to reality by Kimi's shout.

"Uh, of course, Kimi. Come with me: I will need you in case the police ask for more details about what happened. But promise me to explain to me what you saw after we make that call."

"Yes, Misses Welsh."

Still flying at low altitude along Road 613 and following the kidnappers' cars, Nancy found out that she was able to keep up with them, thanks to the numerous intersections with stop signs or signal lights which slowed them down. However, a few people on the ground had already spotted her in the sky and pointed her to others, something that made Nancy sigh heavily.

"There is going to be Hell to pay after this. Ingrid won't be happy with me."

She however dismissed that thought nearly at once and started thinking about what she should do next. It could take a while before Ingrid could arrive in her aircar. It could take even more time for the local police to react in an effective manner and stop those bandits. One option she had would be to go down and use Nick's pistol to confront the kidnappers. She however forgot that option almost at once: any gunfight could end up wounding or killing Leonardo. She thus had to find a less risky way to slow down or stop those kidnappers without endangering Leonardo. An idea then came to her mind, making her smile ferociously. Using a moment when the two cars had stopped at a red light in the small town of Seven Corners, she dove quickly towards the cars and landed right behind the second car. Being too small to be easily visible from the inside of that car if she stayed close to its rear bumper, Nancy crouched on the asphalt and stared at the right rear tire. With its rubber quickly heated up to a boil via her mental powers, that tire then blew up in a loud BANG, with the car then leaning to the right. Nancy smiled on hearing swearing coming from the men inside and put her spare magazine in her mouth, so that she could use both of her small hands to handle the big .45 caliber pistol. It didn't take long before a man stepped out through the rear right door in order to check on the tire. The moment he was out, with his door still wide open, Nancy quickly got up and stepped to the right to face him. The man froze for a moment with surprise at her sight, but he never had time to react before Nancy shot him once right through the heart.

As he was falling down, Nancy ran to the open back door and pointed her pistol inside, hoping that Leonardo would be in it. To her disappointment, she saw only a dead man on the back seat, plus two men in the front seats. Aiming her pistol, she shot in quick succession the driver and the passenger before they could react, then ran at a crouch to the leading car, which was still stuck behind a truck stopped at the red light. As she ran, she quickly ejected her now nearly empty magazine and loaded the fresh magazine she had been biting on, using the small arms training experience of Andrée Borrel as both a French Resistance fighter and as a British S.O.E. agent in World War 2. Alerted by the gunshots, two men sitting on the right side of the lead car stuck their heads and right arms out by their opened window, trying to aim their pistols at her. Nancy shot each of them twice before they could fire a single shot. Running to the rear right door and pulling it open, Nancy saw with a pang of joy Leonardo, apparently unhurt but with a gag in his mouth and with his hands tied. She also saw another bandit, sitting to the left of Leonardo, who was pointing a revolver at her. Stepping sideways at the speed of lightning, she managed to dodge the bullet of the gunman, then returned fire, killing him with a bullet in his forehead. Stepping on top of the dead gangster sprawled out of the rear right door, she entered the back of the car and stuck the muzzle of her pistol against the neck of the disbelieving driver.

“One false move and you are dead! Put your car in ‘park’ and shut down your engine, NOW!”

“Jesus! I can’t believe this!” replied the driver, who however obeyed her and shut down his engine. Still, Nancy kept her gun against his neck and stepped past Leonardo, getting behind the driver’s seat so that she could search him for a weapon. She effectively found a revolver holstered against the driver’s left side and took it before speaking again.

“Now, put both of your hands on top of the steering wheel and leave them there. Don’t move until the police arrives. That shouldn’t take too long.”

Effectively, the noise of the gunfight and the sight of dead men sprawled on the pavement next to an intersection made a number of passersby and local residents call the police, with a squad car arriving with sirens blaring seven minutes later. As she waited for the police to show up, Nancy glanced and smiled at Leonardo.

“You are going to be alright now, Leo. Let me ungag you.”  
The boy looked at her with wide eyes and spoke as soon as he was able to.

“How did you do all this, Nancy? You were fantastic!”

"I will tell you later, once I am rid of that piece of trash. Try not to distract me in the meantime, please."

Next, she searched quickly the dead man sitting next to Leo on the bench seat. Finding a stiletto knife on him, she used it to cut the ropes tying Leo's hands together. Her next move was to send a telepathic message to her mother.

*'Mommy, we are now in Seven Corners, at the intersection of Road 613 and Leesburg Pike. All but one of the bandits are dead, with the last one disarmed and with both cars immobilized. Leonardo is alright and I am waiting for the police to arrive.'*

*'Well done, sweetie! Hang on: I will be at your location in a couple of minutes.'*

Cutting her mental link with Ingrid, Nancy concentrated back her attention on the driver, who was not exactly doing too well.

"Alright, asshole! How about telling me who sent your bunch of clowns to kidnap Leo?"

"Jesus, girl! Who are you really?"

"Your worst nightmare. Now, about answering my question."

"But, but, I can't tell you! My boss would kill me for that!"

"Blah, blah, blah! Maybe I should kill you now, then." Said Nancy in a cold voice, then cocking the revolver she had taken from the driver and gluing its muzzle against the man's neck. "I could always say later that you tried to grab my pistol."

"WAIT!" shouted the now terrorized man, completely unsettled by this demonic-like little girl. "SEAN MACMANUS SENT US! PLEASE, DON'T REVEAL THAT TO THE PUBLIC, OR I WILL BE A DEAD MAN."

"Now, that's better! That sounds like an Irish name, am I right, Leo?"

"It is, Nancy. I heard my father swear a number of times about a Sean MacManus giving him problems."

"Well, we now have a motive to go with the crime. Aah, the cops are here at last."

The two policemen who nervously approached the two cars with their revolvers drawn could not believe their eyes at first when they saw Nancy, sitting with Leo in the back of the first car and pointing two guns at the driver. The more senior policeman then spoke firmly to Nancy while keeping his revolver pointed.

"You can hand me your two guns now, girl. Who is the boy with you?"

Leonardo then took on him to answer while holding both of his hands high and visible.

"My name is Leonardo Bocelli and those men kidnapped me at the Congressional School after shooting my driver and bodyguard. Nancy is one of my classmates at the school."

The policeman nodded once at that, then briefly looked at his partner.

"Go look at the plates on those two cars. See if they correspond to the ones we just got via a radio alert."

"Got it!" said his partner, who then walked quickly around the cars, to then shout to the senior officer.

"THEY ARE THE ONES WE WERE LOOKING FOR ALRIGHT."

The senior officer relaxed a bit then but kept his revolver pointed at Nancy.

"Now, could you please hand me your guns, girl?"

"No problem, Officer!" replied Nancy, who then slowly uncocked her revolver and grabbed it by its barrel before passing it through the open window, along with her pistol.

"Be careful about the driver, Officer: he is one of the gangsters who kidnapped my friend Leonardo. That Colt 1911 belongs to Leonardo's driver and bodyguard. I took it after he got shot by those men."

"Uh, how old are you girl? Are you a dwarf?"

Nancy threw an insulted look at the cop at those words.

"A dwarf? Please! I'm five years old! My mother could testify to that. In fact, she is now arriving in her aircar."

Now completely befuddled, the poor local cop glanced at the arriving aircar but had the presence of mind of then taking care of the driver, making him step out with his hands in the air and then handcuffing him.

Ingrid, while overjoyed to see that both Nancy and Leonardo were alright, still didn't rush towards the two immobile cars, not wanting to spoof the two nervous cops who still had their revolvers drawn out. Instead she walked calmly towards them while holding in front of her her White House security pass.

"Officers, I am the mother of this five-year-old girl. My name is Ingrid Dows and I work at the White House. I came here to make sure that my daughter is alright."

"Go ahead and approach, miss." said the senior policeman. He then examined her security pass for a moment before nodding his head.

"You look legit, Misses Dows. However, we are facing quite an incredible situation here. Apparently, your sweet little girl killed by herself five gangsters and

captured this last one. I also saw her handle two handguns like a pro, even though her hands are still too small to grip them properly.”

“I am afraid that there are elements here that are highly classified at the national level, officer. Also, know that the boy that was kidnapped is the son of a reputed mobster boss and that those kidnapers were sent by a rival mobster boss. All this thus makes this a crime under the jurisdiction of the FBI. I counsel that your police station should contact the FBI quickly.”

The policeman made a grimace at those words, obviously not liking the idea of relinquishing a case to the FBI. However, he could not deny the exactitude of Ingrid’s claim, as both organized crime and kidnapping of children under the age of twelve were two crimes which were expressly the domain of the FBI.

“I believe that you are right, miss. I will call my police station right away. You are free to join up with your daughter, miss.”

“Thank you, Officer!”

Walking past the policeman, Ingrid went to grab Nancy, who literally jumped into her arms and hugged her, with Ingrid covering her with frantic kisses.

“Nancy, if you knew how scared I was for you.”

“You didn’t need to worry about me, Mommy: those bandits were not much of a challenge.”

“Please don’t say that too loud, Nancy: we will already have enough of a hard time to explain all this and I certainly don’t want to see a media storm rise on account of you.”

“Then, why not simply say the truth, Mommy?”

“Uh, that could prove complicated, sweetie.”

### **11:09 (Washington Time)**

#### **FBI’s Lorton field offices, 8540 Terminal Road Lorton, Fairfax County, Virginia**

Special Agent-In-Charge Allen Cumberland sat down with a sigh at the head of the long table inside the secure conference room of the FBI’s Lorton field offices. His assistant, Assistant Special Agent-In-Charge Rick Hamilton, along with six other agents, also took place around the table, putting files and documents in front of them. Cumberland looked around at his agents before speaking up:

“Well, this investigation is lining up to be a real doozie<sup>12</sup>. Okay, let’s review the facts first. Rick, what have you got so far?”

“First, for the facts that are legally firm. It is now established beyond a doubt via witnesses’ testimonies and crime scene evidence that eight armed men in two cars first followed a car in which ten-year-old Leonardo Bocelli and his driver cum bodyguard were, then attacked those two inside the grounds of the Congressional School, near Falls Church. They shot the driver in an exchange of gunfire that also resulted in the death of one of the attackers, killed by the driver while he was defending his young charge. The seven remaining attackers then kidnapped young Leonardo and threw him inside one of their cars while also putting the body of their dead comrade in the other car, then took off, leaving the school grounds and driving towards Seven Corners. Also legally binding is the fact that all of the eight attackers had lengthy criminal records and were carrying unlicensed weapons. As for the boy’s driver cum bodyguard, a Nick Donatello, his pistol was a legal, licensed one and he had a valid security guard permit. The boy himself is the younger son of one Tony Bocelli, a suspected organized crime boss established and operating in the Washington D.C. area. I said ‘suspected’ because, while accused many times of racketeering, the charges against him along the years never stuck, thanks to his big-money lawyers and also thanks to the fact that the witnesses against him were either too scared to talk or ended up dead.”

Cumberland nodded his head at that, being quite familiar with the name ‘Tony Bocelli’.

“So, for once, Tony Bocelli found himself to be a victim rather than an abuser or criminal. How ironic! What else, Rick?”

“Well, that’s where things become a lot fuzzier. Again according to multiple witnesses, both at the Congressional School and in the town of Seven Corners, one of the young pupils of the school, five-year-old Nancy Dows, ran out to rescue Leonardo Bocelli, who was one of her best friends at the school. She arrived too late on the scene of the shootout in the parking lot to stop his kidnapping, but then magically healed the driver, Nick Donatello, who had been mortally wounded by two bullet strikes. I say ‘magically’ because there is frankly no other way to describe what happened. Again according to multiple witnesses, little Nancy Dows applied her hands on the dying Nick Donatello and then started glowing brightly for about a minute or less. She then picked up his pistol, which had fallen on the pavement next to his Cadillac, and also grabbed

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<sup>12</sup> Doozie: Popular American expression and short for ‘Duesenberg’, a past brand of luxury car. Meant to mean that something is truly standing out or exceptional.

one of his spare magazines before flying off 'à la Marie Poppins', supposedly in pursuit of the kidnapers. She apparently caught up with them inside the town of Seven Corners and landed behind their cars as they were stuck at a red light. According to local witnesses, that little girl then shot one after the other six of the gunmen, leaving alive only the driver of the car where Leonardo Bocelli had been put in. Two local cops arrived on the scene shortly afterward and arrested the driver. Little Nancy Dows didn't cause them problems and gave them the two guns she had with her at the time, including the Colt 1911 which belonged to Nick Donatello and a revolver she took from the gunman driving the lead car."

The agents around the table exchanged glances before Cumberland spoke again.

"You are certainly right about that part of the story being fuzzy, Rick. If brought up in front of a judge, we would be laughed out of court."

"Not necessarily, Allen." replied Annette Benning, the lawyer and prosecutor from the Federal Justice Department attached to Cumberland's field office. "There are actually known precedents to at least parts of this. Those precedents are by the way all connected to the girl's mother, ex-General Ingrid Dows."

"Please do tell us about them, Annette." said Cumberland, his curiosity pricked. Benning then opened a file in front of her and flipped to one of its pages before speaking again.

"As you all must know, General Ingrid Dows has been known for decades already to hold a number of supernatural powers and is also reputed to be able to remember the souvenirs from her past incarnations, spread over 7,000 years. This became public as early as 1953. However, classified information at the 'Top Secret' level also tells us that she had revealed at least part of her powers to successive Presidents, starting with President Martin in 1948, and this on a confidential basis. As you all know as well, she still looks to be about 25 years-old, despite being in reality 62. She attributed her powers to the fact that she is what she calls a 'Chosen' of a powerful spiritual entity named 'The One'. Mind you, she doesn't act like some typical past prophets and is not pushing for anyone to pray or worship this 'One', on the contrary. Returning on facts connected to this case, General Dows, then in command of the spaceship U.S.S. PROMETHEUS, healed by touch a member of her crew who had been severely burned in a kitchen fire, in a way identical to the way her little daughter healed Leonardo's bodyguard. That incident was officially recorded then. Please note also that



little Nancy was born aboard that same ship, while it was halfway between Jupiter and Saturn.”

“And who was the father of Nancy Dows? One of the ship’s officers?” asked one of the investigative agents, making Annette shake her head.

“To date, the father remains unknown, with Ingrid Dows having steadfastly refused to reveal his identity, officially because she didn’t want to create a sense of favoritism among her crew. In another incident during that same Space mission, Ingrid Dows showed that she could levitate and fly at will, plus could communicate via telepathy. My guess is that her little daughter inherited her various powers, possibly via her genetics, including touch-healing and levitation. In view of her uncommon mental maturity, I would also surmise that she remembers her past incarnations, which would basically make her an adult mind inside a toddler’s body.”

“Damn! How should we treat her then? Like an adult or like a child?”

“Legally, we must treat her like a child, Allen. Doing otherwise could easily bring the wrath of a federal judge on us and accusations of child abuse. This means that we cannot interrogate her when her mother is not present and that we cannot hold her without some very good and solid reasons.”

“And how cooperative have either little Nancy or her mother been to date with our investigation, Marilyn?” asked Cumberland to the female FBI agent who had been tasked to question Nancy. Marilyn Turnbull couldn’t help smile slightly as she reminded herself of parts of the girl’s testimony.

“First off, I want to say that little Nancy Dows is an extremely cute and attractive toddler girl and that she was fully open in her answers, within the limits set by her mother, herself a truly formidable person and a national heroine worthy of the utter respect. You only need to review the service history of General Dows to see what I mean. To return to little Nancy, she openly admitted to both possessing and using a number of incredible powers, including touch healing, flying through levitation, telepathy and telekinesis. She also told me that she remembers all of her twenty past incarnations. The one preceding her present life as Nancy Dows was a World War 2 era female French Resistance fighter and British S.O.E. agent who fought the Germans who had invaded France in 1939. I searched the historical files concerning that female Resistance fighter, who was named Andrée Borrel, and what I found was quite impressive. Borrel was a very brave and determined woman who was extensively trained by the British before being parachuted back in France in 1942, where she served

as a clandestine courier. Unfortunately, she was captured by the Germans in 1943, tortured and then sent to a concentration camp, where she was executed in 1944. For one thing, Borrel's training as a S.O.E. agent would explain Nancy's proficiency with firearms."

"My God! Did she remember everything about that Borrel, including being tortured by the Germans?" asked Annette Benning, who had paled slightly. Marilyn Turnbull nodded her head somberly.

"Yes, she did! By the way, little Nancy can speak, read and write a good twenty languages, many of them extinct, plus can speak but not read another eleven languages which were used by her past incarnations who were illiterate."

Allen Cumberland did a facepalm then, a bit overwhelmed.

"Damn! All this means that there is no way that the full story about this could be disclosed publicly. I thus order a firm publication ban on any of the facts and information concerning this affair. Any public declaration from either this office or from the Justice Department will thus have to be vetted by me or by Director Jamieson. Now, to return to those kidnapers, do we know who sent them? Are they from a rival gang opposed to Bocelli?"

"They are, sir!" answered his assistant, Rich Hamilton. "All of them work for Sean MacManus, the boss of the Irish Mafia in the Washington area and in Boston. MacManus and Bocelli have been at loggerheads for years already. MacManus probably wanted to blackmail Bocelli by kidnapping his son. We thus have a pretty strong motive for this crime."

"That's a good start! Annette, do we have enough to execute a search and arrest warrant against this Sean MacManus?"

"I would say yes to that, in view of all the material evidence we have."

"Then, let's do so! I want that bastard behind bars before the end of the day. Rick, I am putting you in charge of getting MacManus and of searching his property and businesses. Use as many agents as you deem necessary: that guy is obviously not shy about using violence."

"Understood, sir!"

"Uh, what do we do about little Nancy and her mother, sir?" asked Marilyn Turnbull, making Cumberland think for a moment before he answered her.

"We will let them go without ado, Marilyn. That girl acted like a heroine, not like a criminal. I will however go talk with them in your company before they leave."

"Yes sir!"

"Then, let's wait and see what the warrants on MacManus will give us before deciding on our next steps. Let's get back to work, people!"

A few minutes later, Allen Cumberland and Marilyn Turnbull met with Ingrid and Nancy in the cafeteria of the FBI's field office building, where they had been waiting after their initial questioning and depositions. Cumberland couldn't help stare for a moment at the beautiful little girl sitting besides her mother and sipping on a hot chocolate: that such a small child could hold such incredible powers was truly mind boggling. He then shook hands with Ingrid Dows, who had risen from her chair at his approach.

"Misses Dows, I am truly honored to meet you. I am Special Agent-In-Charge Allen Cumberland, directing the investigation in this kidnapping incident. Let me tell you first that your daughter acted like a true heroine today. You can be proud of her."

"Oh, I am very proud of her, Special Agent Cumberland. May I ask how is young Leonardo Bocelli doing? He is about the best friend Nancy has at the Congressional School."

"He was picked up about one hour ago by her mother, to whom we provided an escort back to their family home in Washington D.C."

"What about his driver, Nick Donatello? He risked his life and nearly died while defending Leonardo."

This time, it was Marilyn who answered.

"He is presently in the Dominion Hospital, in Seven Corners, where he has received a much-needed blood transfusion. He is still there, recovering, but I am told that he will fully recover."

"Excellent! He was always nice and friendly with my Nancy and with the other children."

"Uh, talking about the other children at Congressional School," said Cumberland, "don't you foresee some problems in explaining to them and to the teaching staff what happened today? Have you wondered how they will greet your little Nancy when she returns there?"

"They are my friends!" protested at once Nancy. "They will be happy to see me again."

On this, Ingrid felt much less sure and was frank about it with the FBI agents.

"I am still thinking about how to handle her return to school, but you are right about wondering about that, Mister Cumberland. It may prove complicated."

"What do you mean, Mommy? I only have friends at the school." objected Nancy.

"Yes, but I expect an army of reporters and photographers to be there tomorrow, not to mention any yahoos who could be inflamed by the stories the medias will come up today. Whether you like it or not, you are now a public celebrity and I can assure you that being so is not always fun. The school director will also probably want to speak at length with us about the consequences of this incident to the school."

"But I want to stay at the school, Mommy!" said Nancy, bordering on tears. Ingrid, sad for her, did her best to reassure her and gently caressed her head.

"Don't worry, sweetie: I will do my best to assuage Mister Devers' fears about your continued stay in the school."

Ingrid then looked at Cumberland, her expression sober.

"What will be the legal consequences of this on Nancy? Will she have to testify in court about this?"

"I'm afraid so, Misses Dows. Too much of this affair is centered directly around her actions today. At best, the judge will allow her to present a written testimony but, in view of the fact that mobsters typically use high-priced lawyers, I doubt that your daughter will escape the need to testify in person."

"Damn! I wish that I could avoid that to Nancy. Well, we will comply with whatever legal requirement is made of us and I pledge to you our full cooperation in your investigation."

"That is much appreciated, Misses Dows. You and your cute daughter are now free to go."

"Thank you, Special Agent Cumberland. Nice to have met you, Agent Turnbull." Ingrid then left the cafeteria with little Nancy, watched by Cumberland and Turnbull. The latter spoke softly as the mother and daughter went out of direct line of sight.

"Did you see how that poor girl reacted when she understood that she may not be able to stay at the Congressional School? She nearly cried then. That broke my heart. She may hold superpowers, but she is still a young child in my eyes."

"Quite right, Agent Turnbull. Let's hope that we will soon have our hands on the bastard who started all this."

**15:18 (Washington Time)****FBI Lorton field office**

Allen Cumberland was reviewing the list of evidence collected in the Leonardo Bocelli's kidnapping affair when his telephone rang, making him pick up the receiver.

"Special Agent-In-Charge Allen Cumberland!"

"Sir, this is Rick Hamilton, at the Washington National Airport. Sean MacManus flew out of the country on a private plane one hour ago. His pilot filed a flight plan for the airport of George Town, in the Grand Cayman Island."

Cumberland couldn't help slam one fist on his desk, suddenly angry.

"The bastard! We can't touch him there! The Cayman Islands are a British colony and a certified fiscal paradise for hundreds of tin-pot dictators, corrupt politicians and criminals. He probably had most of his illegal gains stashed there."

"I concur, sir. What do we do next about him, sir?"

"Continue your searches and seizures! Let's dismantle as much as we can of his criminal organization and let's round up his close associates and gang members. He may now be safe in the Cayman Islands but let's make sure that, if he ever returns to the United States, he will then have nothing left of his organization here to restart his so-called 'business'."

"Got it, sir! I will also ask our representative on the Grand Cayman Island to confirm MacManus' arrival in there and to find where he will lodge."

"Excellent idea! Do it!"

Cumberland then put down his receiver, still frustrated by the news of MacManus' escape.

**19:46 (Washington Time)****326 South Grove Street, Aurora Hills****Arlington, Virginia**

The noise of a car stopping in front of their house immediately brought Nancy to the front window of their living room, where she however stayed behind the wall and cautiously peered outside through the window, showing only part of her head. What she saw made her shout out with joy.

"MOMMY, LEONARDO IS HERE! I BELIEVE THAT HIS FATHER IS HERE TOO!"

Ingrid, who was cleaning up the dishes in her kitchen and was wearing a T-shirt and a pair of shorts, hurried to the lounge to look outside. She effectively saw young Leonardo walking up to the main entrance, accompanied by two men: one relatively short but solidly built man in his mid-forties wearing a suit and a bigger man carrying both a travel bag and a school bag. Going to the main door, she unlocked it and opened it in time to greet Leonardo, who was about to knock on it.

"Come in, Leonardo! Nancy is already happy to see you here."

She then gave a guarded look at the man in a suit but kept a polite tone.

"You must be Leonardo's father, Tony Bocelli, correct?"

"Correct, Misses Dows. May I enter?"

"Of course, Mister Bocelli. Your employee is also welcomed."

"Angelo only stepped out of the car in order to bring Leonardo's thing inside. He is going to return in our car after dropping those bags. I came to ask a favor of you, Misses Dows."

"Then please come in, so that we can discuss in comfort inside."

"Thank you!"

Ingrid closed back the door behind the two men, then led them to her living room, where Leonardo and Nancy were happily hugging each other. That sight made Tony Bocelli smile.

"Your daughter really seems to like my son, Misses Dows."

"She does, Mister Bocelli. They are truly best friends. Please, come and sit in this sofa. Would you like something to drink? I have a red Italian Vermouth, or I can serve you an old scotch."

"A red Italian Vermouth sounds perfect, Misses Dows."

"Good! Nancy, how about you go play outside in the modules with Leonardo?"

"Oh yes! Good idea, Mommy!"

Both Ingrid and Tony watched with amusement their children run at once to the rear door of the house, while Angelo left the house after putting down his two bags in a corner of the lobby. Excusing herself for a moment, Ingrid went into her kitchen and prepared a glass of chilled red Vermouth, then returned to the lounge and gave the glass to Tony before sitting in an easy chair.

"To be brutally frank, Mister Bocelli, I am not exactly a fan of mobsters and criminals. However, you came this evening as the father of a young boy who lived a traumatic event today and whom my daughter loves a lot. So, let's talk like parents."

Tony Bocelli nodded his head once, his expression sober.

"I truly can't blame you for your feelings about my line of work, Misses Dows. While I make a good buck out of it, I am fully conscious that it is not exactly the most honorable profession on Earth and that I am pretty well condemned to an eternity in Hell after my death. However, where my old family came, the Mafia was pretty much a mode of living. Hell, I believe that it still is! Now, to return to my son Leonardo. While I know that the FBI is presently hitting hard at Sean MacManus' organization, I am not sure that the threat to my family has completely gone, so I have decided to take, uh, some family vacation in a place I will keep confidential. The problem is that Leonardo insisted that he wanted to continue at the Congressional School and also that he wanted to be able to stay close to his friends and, particularly, to your daughter Nancy. He was so insistent about it that I finally relented. I am thus here to ask you if you would be ready to shelter Leonardo for a few days or weeks and to bring him to and from school along with your daughter. I am ready to pay for his lodging, if that is needed."

Ingrid contemplated Tony Bocelli's request for a moment. In her long military career, she had often shown either leniency or comprehension to enemies who proved ready to become moderate and reasonable and showed themselves ready to make peace, like in the case of the Vietminh at the end of the Indochina War. While she despised Bocelli's occupation, he had come to her house only with concerns as a father for his son. Besides, it was none of Leonardo's fault if his father was a mobster.

"Forget about paying me for sheltering your son, Mister Bocelli. I would do it any time, without conditions. Your son is a good boy and my Nancy loves him a lot, as she showed today by risking her life in order to save him. Having Leonardo in my house would make me and Nancy most happy. I will also be happy to transport him to and from the school and I guarantee you that he will be safe with us."

Tony nodded his head while smiling happily at her words.

"I will never be able to thank you enough for this, Misses Dows. Are you sure that you don't want me to reimburse you for the lodging and transportation costs of Leonardo?"

"Absolutely sure, Mister Bocelli! Nancy's joy at having Leonardo near will be enough of a payment for me."

Tony nodded again once, then got up and offered his hand for a shake, which Ingrid took.

“You are a most honorable and compassionate woman, Misses Dows. If you don’t mind, I will go say goodbye to my son before leaving.”

“Take your time for that, Mister Bocelli: I am sure that he will miss you.”

Tony felt a ball form in his throat as Ingrid led him to the rear door, so that he could go see Leonardo in the courtyard. The ball became even bigger as he hugged his son.

“Be safe and enjoy your time with your friend Nancy, Leonardo. I should be back with the rest of the family in a few weeks. I love you, Son!”

“I love you too, Dad!”

Tony then surprised Ingrid by crouching in front of Nancy and hugging her.

“You are the bravest little girl I ever met, Nancy. Take good care of my Leo.”

“I will, Mister Bocelli.” she replied in her little voice. Straightening up, Tony looked at Ingrid, who saw that he was near tears.

“Be safe, you and the rest of your family, Tony.”

“Thank you, Misses Dows. I will be in your debt.”

The mobster then left the courtyard by the gate in its perimeter fence leading to the street. Going to Leonardo, Ingrid crouched in front of him and gently wiped the tears on the boy’s cheeks.

“Don’t worry, Leo: your family will return to take you back once things have calmed down. In the meantime, consider us as your second family.”

Nancy emphasized that message by pressing herself against Leo and hugging him.

“I love you, Leo.”

Leonardo returned her hug and kissed her on her forehead while speaking softly, watched by a melting Ingrid.

“I love you too, Nancy.”

## **20:38 (Washington Time)**

### **Ingrid’s main bathroom**

“Come on, kids: time for your bath! The water is ready and I put lots of bubble soap in it.”

While Nancy did not hesitate a second to undress and step into the bathtub, Leonardo hesitated for a moment, prompting a smile from Ingrid.



"Don't be shy, Leo: I saw plenty of naked boys and men before."

"Uh, what about Nancy?" said the ten-year-old boy, reddening a bit with embarrassment.

"Don't worry about her, Leo: she also saw lots of naked boys before."

"She did?" exclaimed Leonardo, shocked. Ingrid's smile then turned into a sober look as she gently put her hands on each side of his face.

"Leo, since you are going to live with us for a while, I believe that you are entitled to know the following: Nancy, like me, remembers her past incarnations. You know about my incarnations, right?"

When she saw the blank look on Leonardo's face, Ingrid took on her to spend a few minutes to explain her very special talent, making the boy look at her with a mix of shock and wonderment.

"Wow! And Nancy also remembers her past incarnations?"

"All twenty of them, many as a boy, so the male anatomy has no secrets for her. You don't have to be embarrassed at ending naked in front of her: that would be nothing new to her."

Glancing at Nancy, sitting and soaking up in the bathtub while grinning to him, Leonardo then armed himself with courage and undressed, then stepped inside the bathtub and sat opposite Nancy, sinking to mid-chest into the warm, bubble-covered water. Ingrid then proceeded into soaping up and scrubbing their backs and applying shampoo to their hair, working the shampoo in with her fingers. She had time to rinse the shampoo off their heads before she heard the ringing of her telephone inside her adjacent bedroom.

"Oops! This could be an important call. Be careful not to slip inside the bathtub while I go answer it."

She then got up from her kneeling position and ran out of the bathroom and in her bedroom, leaving Leonardo alone with Nancy. The boy looked at the little girl smiling to him from across the bathtub, still mentally processing what Ingrid had said about past incarnations.

"Nancy, is it because you remember your past incarnations that you know so many things and can speak so many languages?"

"Yes! While those souvenirs don't control my own personality, my twenty past life experiences make me a more cultured and versatile person. As a result, I can play

music like a pro, sing, dance, hunt, fight and do many other things, on top of being able to read and write in many languages.”

“Wow! I would love to be able to remember my own past incarnations like you do. Uh, I should have past incarnations, would I?”

“Of course you have! Everybody has at least a few, except for those born with brand new souls.”

“But, why don’t I remember them? Why are you and Ingrid the only ones to remember your incarnations?”

Nancy then sobered up and looked straight into his eyes.

“Because she is a Chosen of The One, while I am a Half-Envoy of The One, Leo.”

“Uh, what is a half-envoy, Nancy?”

“An Envoy of The One would be commonly equaled to an angel by most people. While Ingrid is my mother, my father is an angel, but please keep that secret and don’t repeat that to anybody, including your family. Being half-angel made it possible for me to fly and pursue your kidnappers.”

As Leonardo stared at her with disbelief, Nancy got closer to him and sat on top of his upper legs, her own legs spread open.

“Forget about this half-angel stuff, Leo, and just look at me as being your friend.”

Ingrid’s expression was clearly somber when she returned to the bathroom after spending a good six minutes on the telephone.

“That was the FBI, kids. Unfortunately, the one who sent those bad men to kidnap you, Leo, has fled the country and is now out of reach of the American justice system.”

“Can’t the FBI ask for his extradition, Ingrid?” asked Leonardo, making Ingrid shake her head.

“Unlikely! Sean MacManus is now in the Cayman Islands, a British colony and fiscal paradise in the Caribbean, just West of Cuba. As long as he stays there, he will be able to escape justice.”

“Can’t we bring justice to him, Mommy?” asked Nancy, making Ingrid look down at her.

“You know what, Nancy? I am quite tempted to do just that. As for MacManus’ criminal organization, the FBI is striking hard at it, but many of its members have gone

into hiding and should still be considered dangerous. We will thus have to exercise caution during the coming weeks and months. Now, I believe that it is time to rinse and dry you, my two angels.”

Another ten minutes and Ingrid was bringing the two children to Nancy’s bedroom, which had a large, two-person bed. While Leo was wearing his pajamas, Nancy had stayed naked, as was her custom when sleeping. Tucking both children in bed, Ingrid then kissed them on their forehead.

“Have a good sleep, my sweeties. We will have to be at the Congressional School first thing in the morning, as I strongly suspect that the director will want to speak with us before the start of the classes.”

“Good night, Mommy!”

“Good night, Misses Dows!” said Leonardo, prompting a gentle rebuff from Ingrid.

“It is ‘Ingrid’ for you while you stay with us, Leo.”

“Alright, Ingrid!”

“That’s better! I will leave a small night light on, in case that you have to go to the bathroom during the night.”

Ingrid then left the bedroom, closing the door behind her. Looking in the dark at Nancy, lying in bed next to him, Leo spoke in a near whisper.

“Do you think that I could ever end up being able to remember my past incarnations, Nancy?”

“That’s always possible, Leo.” replied Nancy, who then glued herself to him. “Do you mind if I get closer to you?”

“Uh, not at all.” said Leonardo, remembering the playing they had engaged into while in the bathtub.

**07:02 (Washington Time)**

**Thursday, May 26, 1988 ‘C’**

**Parking lot of the Congressional School**

**3229 Sleepy Hollow Road, Falls Church**

Ingrid felt some relief on seeing from the air that a police cruiser was parked near the entrance to the school grounds, with two policemen standing guard at the school’s

gate. While she guessed that this was only a temporary measure, it did a lot to improve the security of the children and staff at the school. However, what didn't please her was the line of cars and television vans parked along the school's access road and the crowd of reporters and cameramen which had been stopped at the gate by the policemen on guard. Being in helicopter flying mode, she gradually lowered both her speed and altitude, heading down to a landing in front of the Little School. However, instead of simply dropping off Nancy and Leonardo, she folded up the four ducted rotors of her aircar and parked it in one of the parking spaces painted on the asphalt, then shut down her engine and stepped out, helping the two children with their bags and lunch boxes. The few parents, students and staff in sight at this early hour all stared at them from a distance while whispering between themselves. That 'busybody' attitude was exactly one of the things she was afraid of encountering this morning. With the sensationalist way all of the medias had painted yesterday's events in their evening and then morning news, she was understandably expecting some shrill reactions about the return of Nancy and Leonardo to class. Hopefully, Director Devers would prove immune to all that busybody talk and reactions.

As she had hoped for, Doctor William Devers was already in his office when she arrived at its door with Nancy and Leonardo. Devers offered them seats at once, then closed the door of his office behind them before sitting back behind his desk. However, it was Ingrid who spoke first.

"Doctor Devers, I came to speak with you for reasons which are probably obvious to you this morning. My Nancy, along with Leonardo, are anxious to continue studying at your school and I would implore you to let them stay in your establishment in order to continue their education."

"Misses Dows, is Mister Bocelli planning to come here this morning to discuss his son's situation?"

"No, Doctor Devers! Mister Bocelli and the rest of his family have elected to go on temporary vacation in order to avoid any possible continuing threat from those who ordered Leonardo's attempted kidnapping. Mister Tony Bocelli came to my house with Leonardo yesterday evening and asked me to shelter his son for the time being and to carry him to and from the school. I am thus talking for both my Nancy and for Leonardo Bocelli."

"I see! You do realize the kind of sustained media attention the presence of your daughter Nancy would bring to this school by their mere continued presence."

"And I hope that you will resist that media attention and pass the privacy and well-being of your students first, Doctor Devers. Despite whatever those reporters and cameramen could say about the rights of a free press, I believe that the fundamental rights to privacy and protection from undue harassment of young children should have primacy. If they want to speak to me or my daughter, then let them wait for properly arranged interviews, which I am ready to give at the time and place of my own choosing."

"I would say that your concerns and arguments are most reasonable and valid, Misses Dows. I will also say to you that I agree with you completely. While some parents contacted me yesterday to ask that your daughter not be allowed back here, supposedly because she would pose some kind of risk to their own children, I told those same parents that I was not ready to discriminate against a little girl who acted heroically in defense of one of her classmates. Some of those parents then argued that little Nancy was some sort of young witch and..."

"Nancy is an angel, not a witch!" angrily cut in Leonardo, making Devers smile to him.

"I know, Leonardo. From what I have observed of Nancy during the past eight months, I would describe her as an exceptional little girl with not an ounce of meanness or evil in her. I thus told those parents in question, politely of course, that they were full of B.S. Both you and Nancy are thus welcomed to continue studying at this school and the hell with naysayers!"

Ingrid blew air out in relief before smiling to the director.

"Thank you very much, Doctor Devers. Your school just proved again that it stood for diversity, equality and excellence in education."

"It is my pleasure to be able to continue to accommodate your fantastic little daughter, along with young Leonardo, Misses Dows. Know that Misses Welsh, their teacher, has already been advised by me that Nancy and Leonardo will continue to attend her class."

At that point, Ingrid got up from her chair and walked to Devers' desk, bending over it to shake his hand.

"Thank you so much, Doctor! You are a good man indeed."

“Pah! I am simply being just and reasonable, Misses Dows. Have a good day, you and your two little charges.”

Ingrid felt like a big weight had been lifted off her shoulders as she walked out of Devers’ office, while Nancy and Leonardo were positively overjoyed at being free to return to their class. Walking with them out of the ‘Big School’ building, which lodged the administrative offices, they went to the ‘Little School’ building, entering it and going to the waiting lounge, where a good twenty students were already sitting or milling around. The moment that Leonardo and Nancy entered the lounge, the young students present erupted in applause and cheers, with Kimi Park shouting at the top of her lungs.

“WELCOME BACK, NANCY! YOU ARE OUR SUPERHEROINE!”

Kimi then grabbed a sort of small, colorful cape and ran to Nancy, kissing her on the cheek before clipping the cape over her shoulders.

“This is the cape I used as part of my last Halloween disguise, Nancy. Wear it as our own Supergirl.”

Tears instantly came down Nancy’s cheeks as the other students continued to acclaim her.

Ingrid felt on top of the World when she left the ‘Little School’ building to return to her aircar and fly to work at the White House. At the least, she now knew what Halloween disguise to buy next for Nancy. However, a thought then crossed her mind and she walked instead towards the main access gate, where a crowd of waiting reporters and cameramen were still waiting on either sides of the gate, kept out by the policemen present. Those reporters and cameramen became excited at once as she approached them on foot but Ingrid signaled them to stay back, then spoke out as loudly as she could.

“LISTEN TO ME WELL BUT STAY BACK, ALL OF YOU! I AM INGRID DOWS AND I AM THE MOTHER OF NANCY DOWS. I KNOW THAT SHE PERFORMED SOME INCREDIBLE AND HEROIC FEATS YESTERDAY WHILE SAVING A CLASSMATE FRIEND FROM KIDNAPPERS. HOWEVER, THAT DOESN’T GIVE YOU THE RIGHT TO HARASS HER OR HER CLASSMATES, EITHER HERE AT SCHOOL OR AT HOME. AND DON’T GIVE ME YOUR ‘FREE PRESS’ ARGUMENTS! CHILDREN HAVE THE RIGHT TO THEIR PRIVACY AND TO NOT BEING HARASSED BY A BUNCH OF JACKALS ARMED WITH CAMERAS. IF YOU WANT TO TALK TO

ME OR TO MY DAUGHTER, THEN YOUR EDITORS WILL HAVE TO CONTACT ME IN ADVANCE BY MAIL AND ASK TO SCHEDULE AN INTERVIEW. IF YOU COME AND INVADE MY PROPERTY, THEN I WILL CHASE YOU AWAY AND CALL THE POLICE. IF YOU PARK IN FRONT OF MY HOUSE TO SPY ON IT WITH ZOOM LENSES, THEN YOU WILL SEE YOUR COSTLY CAMERA EQUIPMENT FRIED TO JUNK BY ME. YOU KNOW THAT I HAVE THE KIND OF POWERS TO BE ABLE TO DO THAT. HOWEVER, IF YOU RESPECT OUR PRIVACY AND SHOW YOURSELVES TO BE REASONABLE, THEN YOU WILL GET INTERVIEWS...WHEN WE WILL BE READY TO GIVE THEM. THIS WILL BE MY ONLY WARNING. DO NOT IGNORE IT!"

She then turned around, ignoring the barrage of questions coming from the flustered reporters, and walked back towards her parked aircar, some 300 meters away. One of the policemen on guard at the gate, who had little sympathy for noseey reporters, smiled to his colleague.

"Now, that's what I call the right way to treat the Press."

## **CHAPTER 12 – ROAMING JACKALS**

**20:44 (Washington Time)**

**Sunday, June 26, 1988 'C'**

**Passenger Terminal, Washington International Airport**

**Forty kilometers west of downtown Washington D.C.**

**Virginia, U.S.A.**

Tony Bocelli smiled on spotting Nick Donatello, who was waiting beside his Cadillac, parked along the access road servicing the airport's passenger terminal.

"Aah, Nick! It is nice to see that you have fully recovered. How are things around Washington?"

"Relatively quiet, Boss. The men did as you told them and made themselves discreet, to give time to the police to hit at those Winter Hill Gang bastards. And how was your vacation in Italy, Boss?"

"Just fine, Nick." lied Tony, who was accompanied by his wife, older son and daughter. While the relaxing activities per say had gone well, his efforts at convincing other Mafia leaders in Italy to support him against the Boston-based, Irish-Italian so-called 'Winter Hill Gang' had gone nowhere. The sad truth was that those Italy-based mob bosses were afraid of the highly violent and brutal Boston gang, even though the Winter Hill Gang was attempting to expand their operations and to grab control of the Washington area, where the drug dealing business was bringing in millions of dollars, from the Gambino Family, to whom Tony belonged.

"Do you have news about Leonardo, Nick?"

"I do, Boss! He still lives with Misses Dows and successfully completed Fourth-Grade with top notes. He and little Nancy Dows just returned today from a school summer camp trip."

"Excellent! Well, let's get going!"

While Nick loaded the family's suitcases in the large trunk of the Cadillac, Tony, his wife Maria, son Gino and daughter Livia took place aboard the luxury car. Soon, the big Cadillac rolled away from the airport terminal and headed East on Highway 267 and



crossing the Potomac River on the Francis Scott Key Bridge and then heading towards the district of Woodley Park, where the Bocelli residence was located. Tony felt good at seeing again his house, a big mansion surrounded from the other nearby houses by curtains of trees and situated along Woodland Drive Northwest. Driving off the street and on the crescent-shaped driveway of the mansion, Nick stopped his Cadillac in front of the main entrance and was about to step out to take the family's suitcases out of the trunk when eighteen-year-old Livia suddenly spoke, alarm in her voice.

"Hey! Somebody is approaching our car from the rear."

Before their driver could react to that, dense gunfire erupted and bullets started hitting the Cadillac, piercing the steel body of the vehicle, shattering the windows and then hitting its occupants. Nick had only time to half-open his door and put his hand around his holstered pistol before being hit in the chest by a .12-gauge shotgun slug that killed him instantly. Both Maria and Livia Bocelli were struck multiple times in the head and upper torso, while Gino Bocelli was peppered by a submachine gun burst. Tony had time to see his family die before he was repeatedly hit by bullets coming from three different directions. There was a short respite in the gunfire as four armed men ran out of the bushes in which they had been hiding and towards the Cadillac before they delivered ultimate coup-de-grâce shots to the heads of each of the Bocelli and of their driver. Their deed now done, the attackers retreated and disappeared as quickly as they had struck.

### **23:16 (Washington Time)**

#### **The Loomis Residence**

**324 South Grove Street, Aurora Hills**

**Arlington, Virginia**

Greg Loomis, wearing a robe over his pajamas, had just switched off his lounge's television set after watching the late-night news and was about to go upstairs to go to sleep when his lounge's telephone rang. The federal chief prosecutor for the Washington D.C. area sighed before walking quickly to his telephone: that had to be a call about work. When such calls came in this late, it generally meant some bad news. Picking up the receiver, he spoke in it at once.

"Greg Loomis speaking!"

"Mister Loomis, this is Special Agent Markus, at the FBI watch center. We have a serious situation developing around Washington."

"Speak!" said tersely Greg, steeling himself for anything.

"First, Tony Bocelli and his family, who had just arrived back from Italy, were assassinated as they were arriving at their residence in Woodley Park. Tony Bocelli, his wife Maria, son Gino and daughter Livia were all killed by multiple bullets, along with Nick Donatello, Bocelli's driver and bodyguard. This happened around nine forty this evening. Shortly after that, we started getting reports about more killings, this time of mobsters who were members of the Bocelli Clan. At the latest news, six of Bocelli's subordinates have been gunned down, some alongside their families. We believe that someone is trying to grab Bocelli's territory by brute force."

"Do we have any indication who could be implicated in this?"

"We don't have anything that could tell us that, sir, but my bet is that the Winter Hill Gang is doing this. The utter brutality and violence are their style and they have been trying for years to take parcels of Bocelli's territory. Further, the wholesale killing of family members, including children, just doesn't jive with traditional Italian Mafia ethics. However, the Irish mob never showed such restraint."

"I would tend to agree with you on that, Special Agent Markus. I... OH SHIT!"

"SIR, ARE YOU OKAY? WHAT IS GOING ON?" asked the FBI agent, alarmed by Greg's sudden exclamation.

"Leonardo Bocelli, Tony Bocelli's younger son: he is presently living next door to me, at the residence of General Ingrid Dows. He may just be next in line on the hit list of those Irish mobsters. The Winter Hill Gang already tried once to kidnap him in order to blackmail Tony Bocelli."

"I remember that incident, sir. Do you want some of our agents to come and protect the Dows' house?"

"Yes, and make it quick! I'm going to warn General Dows in person right now. Call again if you get more news or information: I have to run out now."

Putting down his telephone receiver, Greg Loomis then grabbed his set of house keys before running out of his house and go next door to Ingrid's house, where he banged loudly on the door while shouting.

"INGRID! INGRID! IT'S ME, GREG LOOMIS! OPEN UP, QUICKLY!"

Greg nervously looked around behind him to see if any car was approaching along South Grove Street. Thankfully, he saw none. As he banged again on the door, it

suddenly opened and he found himself facing a naked Ingrid Dows who was holding a pistol.

“What’s happening, Greg?”

“I just got a call from the FBI: Tony Bocelli and his family have been assassinated tonight as they were arriving at their residence, back from a vacation in Italy. The FBI is also getting reports of men from the Bocelli Clan being assassinated around Washington, some alongside their families. Young Leonardo may be in grave danger now.”

“Shit! It must be those damn Irish mobsters from Boston again. Can I expect some police protection to show up soon?”

“Yes! I asked the FBI for such a protective detail for your house. With you being a cabinet-level presidential advisor, I don’t expect the FBI to refuse to send you protection. Uh, by the way, sorry to have awakened you like this.”

“That’s alright, Greg: I always sleep in the buff. Thank you for warning me.”

“Are you going to tell Leonardo about his family, Ingrid?”

Ingrid had to think for long seconds before answering.

“Not now! I will wait until in the morning. For the moment, I will only tell him that the FBI thinks that there is a possible threat against him. You better return to your house now and arm yourself, Greg.”

“I will certainly do that, Ingrid. Be careful!” said Greg before running back to his house, where his next action was to go grab his revolver from his bedroom’s night stand.

Closing and locking her front door, Ingrid then climbed the staircase to the upper floor at a run, then entered the bedroom where Nancy and Leonardo were sleeping. She ignored the fact that she found Nancy, naked, nearly sprawled over an equally naked Leonardo, instead closing back the door of the bedroom as quietly as she could and then going to her own bedroom in order to get dressed. As she did so, she tried to figure out which way would be the least brutal one to tell Leonardo about the death of his whole family. Despite long minutes of thinking, she finally concluded that there simply was no gentle way to announce such awful news to a young boy. Lying and trying to hide this to Leonardo would be even worse. Still, she left him sleep for the time being: tomorrow was going to a rough enough day for him. With her decision taken and now fully dressed, she posted herself at a corner of her lounge’s front window, her Glock pistol and two full spare magazines inside a gun belt rig.

Some thirteen minutes later, two black cars stopped in front of her house, disgorging a total of six men in dark suits and hats.

"That was fast!" said Ingrid to herself. "Maybe too fast."

She then concentrated and telepathically probed the thoughts of the men now walking calmly towards her front door. What she sensed made her furious.

"The bastards!" she spat out before pointing her pistol through the opened lower window section of her lounge and shouting out loud.

"STOP AND RAISE YOUR HANDS, ALL OF YOU! I KNOW WHO YOU ARE!"

The reactions of the men then proved her right: instead of flashing badges and continuing to pretend to be police officers, all six of them pulled out handguns and started pointing them at the lounge's window. However, Ingrid did not give them the opportunity to fire first and started firing her Glock 41 pistol. Two of the men fell down on the grass or pavement before they fired their first shots, peppering the lounge's windows and shattering them in hundreds of pieces. Despite the hail of bullets directed at her, Ingrid stood her ground and, using a wall corner as partial protection, kept up her fire, emptying the thirteen .45 caliber rounds in her inserted magazine before stepping back behind the protection of her house's external wall while hurrying to put in a fresh magazine in her pistol. The two surviving mobsters, one of whom had been wounded to his left arm, used that chance to retreat towards the two parked cars. However, before Ingrid could resume fire, a hail of automatic fire finished shattering what was left of her front windows, while the furniture and artworks in her lounge were chewed up by dozens of bullets: the drivers of the cars, on seeing their comrades fall under fire, had stepped out and were now showering her with submachine gun fire. As soon as the drivers found themselves in need of changing magazines on their weapons, Ingrid took that chance to pop out from behind the wall corner and fired five quick shots, downing the two mobsters trying to retreat to the cars. Ingrid then had to step back again to avoid another burst of automatic fire.

Inside his house, Greg Loomis had stayed up to wait for the promised FBI backup team and had felt relief on seeing the arrival of the two cars. That relief however turned into dismay when he heard Ingrid shout a warning to the six men approaching her house. His dismay turned to confusion, then fury, when he saw the supposed FBI agents pull their guns out instead of showing their badges.

"The bastards! They're mobsters, not FBI agents!"

Things went very fast from there, with an intense gun battle ensuing between the mobsters and what had to be Ingrid Dows. While Greg was able to see that the attackers were suffering heavy losses at the hand of Ingrid's expert shooting, the bursts of automatic fire from at least two submachine guns shocked him: from his experience with mobsters, Italian mafiosos would typically withdraw to avoid too heavy casualties. What he was now seeing was more typical of the brutal and extremely violent ways of Irish mobsters. Running to his telephone, he urgently composed the number for the FBI watch center and shouted in the receiver as soon as someone answered the phone.

"THIS IS FEDERAL PROSECUTOR GREG LOOMIS, AT 324 SOUTH GROVE IN AURORA HILLS. MOBSTERS ARE ATTACKING GENERAL DOWS' RESIDENCE RIGHT NOW. TELL YOUR BACKUP TEAM TO HURRY!"

Some 500 meters away, on Fort Scott Drive, the FBI team of agents sent to protect Ingrid's house clearly heard the heavy gun battle even before their watch center could advise them by radio. The senior agent, who was leading a team of five male and two female agents, swore to himself.

"Fuck! This sounds like war has broken over there. Press on the pedal, Pete!" As his driver obeyed him and accelerated to the maximum practicable without causing an accident, the senior agent grabbed the microphone of their car's radio and nearly shouted in it.

"Central, this is Car 23! We are hearing heavy gunfire coming from the direction of General Dows' residence on South Grove Street. We should be there in less than one minute."

Not waiting for a reply, the senior agent took out his standard service handgun, a snub-nosed .38 Special, six-shot revolver, while shouting to his agents in the back seat of the car.

"Get ready to jump out of the car as soon as we have stopped. That includes you, Pete: those bastards will probably try to pepper us on arrival. Once stopped, go grab a shotgun out of the trunk and cover us."

Some thirty seconds later, thanks to some virtuoso driving by Pete, their car came within sight of the house at 326 South Grove Street and they saw at once the men firing automatic weapons at the house from behind the protection of their two cars. Before the senior agent could give more orders, he and his agents saw two lightning-fast small but

very bright blue balls shoot down from an upper floor window of Dows' house. Those two balls then hit the cars parked in front of the house and exploded into blinding balls which expanded nearly instantly to diameters of about four meters each while producing a sound similar to a lightning strike.

"JESUS! WHAT WAS THAT?" shouted from the back seat Agent Rhonda Fleming. Then, as soon as the balls had exploded, the firefight stopped. The FBI agents quickly understood why once their cars screeched to a halt near the scene of the fight: the two mobster cars were now little more than burning, partially melted wrecks sitting inside freshly made, fuming craters in the asphalt of the street. As for the mobsters who had been firing from behind the cars, they were now reduced mostly to charcoal-black pieces of human bodies blown away from the car wrecks. Stepping out of their cars and approaching cautiously, the eight FBI could only stare with disbelief at the carnage. Rhonda Fleming then passed a shaking hand on her face.

"Dear God! I have never seen anything like this before. What the hell happened?"

"I don't know, Rhonda, but we will probably know soon." said the team leader. "I see the door of Dows' house opening. That must be General Dows now coming out. Stay here while I go speak with her."

Putting his revolver back in his holster, the senior agent met Ingrid halfway to her house and produced his FBI badge.

"Special Agent Michael Murdoch. I was sent with a team of agents to protect your house. Unfortunately, it seems that those mobsters got here before us. Are you and the children in the house alright, General?"

"We are, but I can't say the same about my poor living room: the inside is now all chewed up by bullets."

"Can you tell me quickly what exactly happened, General?"

"Of course, Special Agent Murdoch."

Ingrid then spent about a minute to describe what had happened after Greg Loomis had come to warn her. The latter was in fact arriving at a walk, still dressed in his robe and pajamas, as Ingrid was finishing her description. However, Murdoch still had one question for her, which he asked cautiously.

"General Dows, could you tell me what were those two bright balls which vaporized those cars and the mobsters?"

"I certainly can, mister: my daughter Nancy threw them from her upper floor window when she saw that I was being heavily outgunned."

"Pardon me?" could only say Murdoch, stunned. In response, Ingrid looked up at an upper floor window of her house and shouted out loud.

"NANCY, COULD YOU COME DOWN HERE, PLEASE. IT IS NOW SAFE TO DO SO."

"Uh, are you talking about some kind of secret military weapon, General?"

"No, I am talking about my five-year-old daughter Nancy: she is the weapon." Michael Murdoch suddenly started sweating on hearing that and had to wipe his forehead dry. A moment later, a very cute and also very naked little girl came out of the house and joined up with Ingrid, Loomis and Murdoch, then looked up at her mother.

"You needed me, Mommy?"

"Yes, sweetie, although you have already proven quite useful tonight. Could you show to Special Agent Murdock how you produce an energy ball?"

"Yes, Mommy!" the little girl said before raising her right hand level and palm upward. Then, a small, crackling ball of intense blue light appeared in the palm of her hand, making both Loomis and Murdoch step back in alarm.

"Don't worry about it, mister." she said in her small voice. "I have control of it and can also make it disappear, like now."

The blue ball then effectively disappeared, leaving Murdoch unsteady on his feet.

"Je..Jesus! How can you do that, girl?"

"Easy, mister: I am half angel." replied Nancy in a most innocent voice. "If more bad men come, then I will vaporize them too."

"Damn! I still can't believe this!"

"You better be, mister: at school they call me 'Supergirl'."

### **00:12 (Washington Time)**

**Monday, June 27, 1988 'C'**

#### **Ingrid's private study**

With her house and front lawn now swarming with FBI crime scene specialists and armed agents and having answered all their questions, Ingrid took the time to bring Leonardo and Nancy inside her upper floor private study, closing the door behind them. She then sat with them on a sofa and looked down somberly at the ten-year-old boy.

"Leonardo, I suppose that what just happened must have told you that something was wrong, right?"

The boy nodded once his head in acknowledgement, so Ingrid took a deep breath and spoke gently to him.

"Leo, we were not the only ones those bad men and others like them wanted to kill. What they were trying to do was to take over the businesses of your father. I didn't know either about it before our neighbor warned me, but your family returned yesterday evening from Italy. Unfortunately, enemies of your father were waiting for him at his home. They killed your father, mother, brother and sister, plus Nick Donatello. I am sorry, Leonardo."

It took a moment to the boy for reality to hit him fully. Then he broke down and started crying, prompting both Ingrid and Nancy to hug him in an effort to comfort him. Ingrid let the boy cry himself dry and also let him speak first.

"What am I going to do now, Ingrid? I have no parents and no family left."

"Do you have uncles or aunts, grand-parents who would still be alive?"

Leonardo shook his head vehemently in response.

"My grand-parents are old and sick and live in Italy. I had two uncles, both of whom were mobsters like my father. One was killed years ago in a gang dispute. The other is in jail for life for murder. Even if they were still around, I would refuse to live with them: this Mafia business ruined everything in my life, apart from bringing dishonor to my family. I truly loved my father, but not how he made his money. I never want to deal with crime again, ever!"

"Still, you will need someone to support and help you grow, Leonardo."

The boy then looked up at her with imploring eyes full of tears.

"Ingrid, I want to stay with you and Nancy. You are the best thing I have known for years. Will you be my new mother?"

"Please, Mommy! Say yes!" exclaimed Nancy at once. Ingrid then felt a big ball form in her throat.

"Leonardo, know that I very much want to say 'yes' to you. However, adopting you may not be that easy. If any relative still alive claims the right to become your tutor, or if your father entered a request about you in his last will, then this could end up in a long, complicated legal fight."

"Can't I choose myself with whom I want to live?" replied Leonardo, becoming angry, but not directly at Ingrid. The latter sighed in response.



"The problem is that you are still a minor, Leonardo. What you want could have little weight indeed against the terms of a signed last will. However, I promise you that I will do everything to make your wish become reality. Now, I believe that you and Nancy better go back to bed: the coming day may be a long and rough one."

### **10:17 (Washington Time)**

#### **Front porch of Ingrid's house**

"I will start my evaluation of the damages right away, Misses Dows. Be assured that my insurance company will treat your claim most favorably."

"Thank you very much, Mister Mayweather. Unfortunately, you may find that all those bullets went deep into my interior walls, apart from making most of my lounge furniture good only for the scrap heap."

"I was able to see that right away, Misses Dows, but I promise you that we will process your damage claim as expeditiously as possible."

"Thank you again, Mister Mayweather."

Letting the insurance evaluator start his job in earnest, Ingrid looked with sadness at the front of her house: all the windows of the ground floor and much of the wooden elements of the façade were going to have to be replaced. The same went for the interior partition walls, where bullets had ricocheted around and through the dry plaster panels, cutting or damaging many electrical wires in the process. The noise of approaching rotors overhead then made her look up with frustration: an army of reporters had descended on her neighborhood in the morning, while quite a few helicopters carrying television camera crews or photographers had buzzed her house, taking pictures of what had become a battleground. Only a strong police presence at kept those reporters at bay, forcing them to film from a distance. Her frustration then turned to surprise at the sight of the mate black Hiller AIRCAR now on approach to land in the street in front of her house.

"President Bush? Here?"

Ever since Ingrid had given him a joy ride in her new aircar, President Bush had pestered his staff to get at least one such aircar for the presidential fleet, with the Air Force ending up buying a dozen machines to serve the needs of White House staffers and cabinet members, on top of those of the President. Those aircars had then proved extremely popular, greatly cutting the commuting time and travel costs over short and

medium distances. Now, if the President decided to, say, go to New York to attend a meeting at the United Nations, he could then jump in his aircar, which he always insisted in piloting himself, along with up to five bodyguards and aides, with the rest of his party taking place in one or more other aircars. Flying straight out from the White House Grounds, with no need to order one of the big helicopters of the presidential fleet and thus to wait for its arrival from Andrews Air Force Base, he could then go to New York and land directly in front of the United States Building, and this in less than half an hour after taking the decision to leave the White House. If he needed to go see someone in another part of the city afterwards, he only had to jump back in his aircar instead of having to get a convoy of limousines. His personal example had in turn made about every high-level politician, big company C.E.O. and millionaire want to get their own private aircars. As a result, Stanley Hiller's problem now was to be able to satisfy all the orders he now had in his books.

The presidential aircar, closely followed by a second White House aircar, soon landed in the part of the street cordoned off by the police, filmed and photographed by the reporters standing behind the police cordon. By the time President Bush came out of his aircar with four Secret Service bodyguards and with Attorney General Richard Thornburg, Ingrid was able to go get Nancy and Leonardo, so that they could all be together to greet the President. President Bush grinned when little Nancy gave him a military salute while flashing a big grin. He playfully returned her salute, then crouched in front of her.

"You must be Nancy, right?"

"Yes, Mister President! It was really nice to come and visit us."

"The pleasure is mine, Nancy. I am told that you are a real hero."

"Not as much as Mommy, Mister President."

Bush smiled at that, then straightened up and shook hands with Ingrid, his expression now sober.

"Are you okay, Ingrid?"

"Yes, Mister President! I was not hurt and neither were Nancy or Leonardo. However, my house took quite a beating during that firefight."

Bush glanced at Ingrid's house, with its shattered windows and walls pockmarked by bullets, then looked down at Leonardo, who was standing next to Ingrid.

“So, all this basically happened because the Irish mob wanted to kill this boy, on top of having already killed the rest of his family?”

“That’s correct, Mister President. I am afraid that they may try again in the future, unless we drastically work to eliminate that threat for good.”

“I would tend to agree with you on that, Ingrid. Those mobsters went way too far and they must pay the price for it.”

Bush then turned to speak with his attorney general.

“Dick, I want the FBI and all the other law enforcement resources under your control to hammer at those mobsters on a top priority basis. Let’s arrest them and stop their activities, at once! And forget legal niceties and pussyfooting: get them arrested and investigated, even if we don’t have solid proofs against them. I am tired of seeing these bastards evade justice thanks to their high-priced lawyers. I am in fact in mind of possibly declaring those mobsters as being a clear and present danger to the United States, if this will give more tools for the FBI to work with. This cancer has been eating at our country for far too long.”

“Understood, Mister President! I will get the U.S. Marshalls Service to help the FBI in executing search and seizure warrants and track suspects. We could also have the IRS<sup>13</sup> do full audits of their supposedly legitimate businesses.”

Bush nodded approvingly at that, then got close to Thornburg and whispered another order to him.

“I understand that the leader of this Irish mob gang fled to the Grand Cayman Islands, where we can’t legally touch him. Well, I am now declaring him to be a clear and present danger to the United States. I thus want the CIA to get rid of him...anonymously.”

“I will pass the word to Director Webster, Mister President.”

Bush then returned his attention to Ingrid.

“Ingrid, I understand that you may be busy properly taking care and protecting those two children in the next few days, time for us to eradicate these rats. Feel free to take a few weeks of leave from your job at the White House.”

Ingrid, who had ample time during the night to think about what she would do next to protect and support Leonardo and to manage the increasingly complicated job of

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<sup>13</sup> IRS: Internal Revenue Service. The American federal department in charge of collecting taxes and investigating tax frauds.

managing Nancy's growing process, took a deep breath before replying to Bush in a polite, respectful tone.

"Mister President, it pains me to tell you this, but the events of this night confirmed to me that I must concentrate all of my abilities and time into protecting, supporting and raising both Nancy and Leonardo. Leonardo is now an orphan at age ten and wants to stay away from anything touching the Mafia or organized crime. He asked me to be his tutor and I intend to officially adopt him as soon as possible, to avoid some distant relative with connections to the Mafia to claim guardianship over him. I don't know if his father left a last will or what could be written in it concerning Leonardo, but I would appreciate the support of the Department of Justice in this adoption request. Also, concerning my daughter Nancy, now that her powers have become public knowledge, I will have to manage very closely her education while protecting her from media harassment and from various undue influences. For all those reasons, I thus would like to present my resignation as your advisor and as National Director of Space Programs, effective immediately. I am of course ready to properly brief the one who will succeed me at the head of our Space program."

Bush was silent for a long moment while staring somberly at Ingrid. He then nodded his head once.

"Ingrid, I fully understand your reasons for wanting to quit your White House jobs. I will sorely miss you, but those kids must have top priority. I thus accept your resignation and will make sure that you will get all the benefits due to you, which you earned during so many decades of loyal and faithful government service."

"Thank you, Mister President!"

As young Leonardo and Nancy looked up at Ingrid, stunned by the huge sacrifice she had just made in their favor, President Bush asked her one question.

"Do you intend to find some other work, maybe on a part-time basis, Ingrid?"

"I am thinking about becoming a part-time, work-at-home technical consultant in aerospace engineering, Mister President. That way, I will be able to fully take care of Nancy and Leo while earning some occasional consulting fees. I am sure that my reputation will attract lots of potential customers to me. I would have one favor to ask you, Mister President."

"Anything, Ingrid!" was Bush's immediate answer. "What is it?"

"Mister President, as you know well, flying is everything to me, second only to my children, and has been for 48 years. I also wish to still be able to defend our nation if a

future emergency or war ever shows up. What I wish to be able to do is to keep a reserve officer status, but on an inactive basis except for the right to train and fly regularly in order to keep officially current in terms of flying certifications. For this, I am not asking to get any pay as such a reserve officer, nor to have command authority over military units unless a war occurs and you decide that you need me again as a military leader. I am just asking for being able to continue flying regularly and thus stay able to defend our country, Mister President.”

Ingrid’s declaration raised a wave of emotions inside George H. W. Bush, who himself had never lost his love of flying and knew fully how much the United States owed to Ingrid thanks to her loyal and heroic services. He then replied in a soft, sympathetic tone.

“Ingrid, I will talk with the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff about your request. I am sure that we can come up with something that will both satisfy your wishes while also serving the interests of the United States. As for your intention to adopt young Leonardo here, I will ask my Attorney General to lend to you the legal support of his best lawyer in this matter.”

“Thank you, Mister President. This means a lot to me.” Said Ingrid in a voice half-strangled by emotion, as she was basically saying goodbye to over 46 years of her life.

“Ingrid, you have fought for and defended our country since 1942, then opened Space for the United States. We will never be able to properly pay you back for all that. I wish you good luck in your future career, as well as the best in life for your daughter and for this boy. Stay safe, my friend.”

Bush then hugged in succession Ingrid, Nancy and Leonardo, bending down in the two latter cases. With that done, the President returned to his aircar with his followers, soon taking off and flying away, with the escort aircar behind him. Ingrid, still in the middle of her front lawn, crouched down to emotionally press Nancy and Leonardo in her arms.

“Last night was a scary and rough one, my child, but today is the first day of a new life for the three of us.”

## **CHAPTER 13 – A NEW LIFE**

**13:26 (Washington Time)**

**Friday, July 01, 1988 ‘C’**

**Ingrid’s private study**

**326 South Grove Street, Aurora Hills**

**Arlington, Virginia, U.S.A.**



Ingrid was working on her personal computer, using its computer-aided-design software to work on a new model of aircar which Stanley Hiller had asked her to develop. Stanley had confessed to her during his last telephone call that he and his few engineers were now so busy expanding as quickly as they could the company’s production capacity, while preserving the quality of the final product, that they had no time left for designing new models of aircars. He had thus asked Ingrid to start thinking about an enlarged model of aircar, in effect a sort of small flying bus, a project Ingrid had taken to with enthusiasm. A light knock on her private study’s door and Nancy’s voice then made her twist her head.

“Mommy, I’m afraid that you will need to buy new clothes for me.”

“Why? Your wardrobe is... OH MY GOD! WHAT DID YOU DO TO YOURSELF?”

Nancy was actually wearing the same clothes that she had on this morning, but those clothes were now stretched to the limit, as Nancy was now of a height and size more typical of a nine or ten-year-old girl rather than of a five-year-old child, what she was still supposed to be. Ingrid’s daughter made an apologetic smile in response.

“I’m sorry, Mommy, but I was tired of being called the ‘baby of the class’ at school. I also wanted to look more like what my level of education and maturity truly are at now. So, I used my powers of shape-shifting to accelerate my growth until I ended the way I was going to look at nine. Leo likes a lot my new look, by the way.”

“I bet he does! Thankfully, he didn’t ask you to grow tits at the same time.”

“He did, Mommy, and I could have done it, but I told him that it was still too early for that and that he would have to wait until I reach puberty.”

Ingrid let out a breath while sitting back in her swiveling chair as she stared at Nancy. From a cute and very pretty five-year-old girl, her daughter was now a positively beautiful, some would have said 'stunning', early teenager. The neighborhood boys were probably going to swarm around her like a bunch of bees attracted to honey.

"Well, judging by how tight those shorts and T-shirt looks like, I guess that we should go on a shopping spree right now, while the stores are open. Where is Leonardo?"

"In the lounge, watching TV, Mommy."

"Then, tell him to get ready to go out. We will use my Firebird Trans Am."

"We are not going to use your aircar?" asked Nancy, a bit disappointed.

"Not today! My aircar still attracts a lot of attention, and we have already attracted too much of that lately. Let me get out some extra cash money first: I suspect that this shopping spree will be a memorable one. As a penance, you will have on our return from the stores to gather all your old clothes, wash those which are dirty and then pack them in boxes, so that we could then go give them to the Salvation Army."

"Yes, Mommy!" replied Nancy, sounding less than enthusiastic.

As Ingrid had predicted, their shopping trip to find new clothes for Nancy indeed qualified as 'memorable', with sets of new clothes also bought for Leonardo. The last item Ingrid had to buy at the express demand of her excited daughter was a Halloween disguise Nancy saw while passing in front of a toy store: it was a 'Supergirl' costume of the right size to fit her. Leo applauded enthusiastically when Nancy put the still wrapped costume against her chest.

"YAYE! I can't wait to see you wear it while flying around, Nancy."

**09:10 (Washington Time)**

**Saturday, July 02, 1988 'C'**

**Ingrid's kitchen**

Ingrid was cleaning the dishes from the breakfast she had prepared for herself and for Nancy and Leonardo when the telephone in her kitchen rang, making her walk to it and pick up the receiver.

"Hello?"

She then heard the voice of a man talking in a calm, paused manner.

"I would like to speak with Misses Ingrid Dows, please."

"Speaking!"

"Good morning, Misses Dows. My name is Rinaldo Carboneti and I am a solicitor who was employed by Mister Tony Bocelli. Before you hang up on me because of that, know that I hold the last will of Mister Bocelli and that it directly concerns his son Leonardo, which I was told now resides with you."

Ingrid immediately made an imperative sign for Nancy and Leonardo to cut down their voices, then spoke in her receiver, her attention sharpened.

"You are interesting me, Mister Carboneti. Please continue."

"Thank you, Misses Dows. Basically, when I read the awful news about the assassination of Mister Bocelli and of his family, I reviewed my certified copy of his last will, which he had my office produced, to see who the beneficiary or beneficiaries of his estate would be and if any would be still alive. I completed my legal inquiries yesterday and found that only one legal beneficiary is still alive and legally able to inherit Tony Bocelli's estate: his son Leonardo."

Ingrid did not respond at once to that, taking the time to mentally review the possible consequences of this.

"Mister Carboneti, you must be aware that Tony Bocelli was an organized crime figure and that his assassination, along with his links to the Mafia are presently under investigation by the FBI. I am not sure that any of his estate is not or will not be frozen or confiscated for being the product of criminal activities. His bank accounts are also probably being kept frozen by the IRS while they review his tax history."

"You are quite right about this, Misses Dows. However, there are certain things and assets that could still be legally accessible to young Leonardo Bocelli. After all, he is a child of minor age and is to be considered purely as a victim in all this. On the other hand, I know that you have been attacked a number of times in the recent past and that you could justifiably be suspicious about any invitation to go meet someone with young Leonardo. I thus propose to come and visit you at your home, with only my secretary accompanying me, so that we could discuss at your place, with Leonardo present. I would just ask you not to blaze away the moment I show up."

"Don't worry, Mister Carboneti: I will hold my fire if you will arrive at a preset hour. When would it be convenient to come visit me?"



"How about this afternoon, at around two o'clock, Misses Dows? That will give me the time to assemble all the relevant legal documents, along with my official stamps and my secretary's typewriter. Would that do?"

"It would, Mister Carboneti. Do you mind if I also have present with me a federal law representative who is connected to the FBI investigation on the murder of the Bocelli family? That representative could help us by telling us which parts of Tony Bocelli's estate could still be inherited by Leonardo despite of the said investigation."

"That actually sounds like a good idea, Misses Dows, as it would indeed clarify important points about the succession of Mister Tony Bocelli. You can expect me at around two this afternoon, along with my secretary. I won't mind if you decide to frisk us for weapons on arrival: the recent events gave you the right to be ultra-cautious."

"They certainly did, Mister Carboneti. I will be waiting. Just be aware that the ground level of my house presently looks like a construction site, as it sustained a lot of damage from gunfire five days ago."

"That won't bother me, Misses Dows," replied Carboneti, sounding amused, "as long as you have a private setting with four walls still standing."

"That setting will be my upper floor private study, Mister Carboneti. See you at around two o'clock then."

Ingrid then hung up and looked at Leonardo, who had listened on while eating his breakfast.

"Your father's solicitor will come and visit us, along with his secretary, at two this afternoon, in order to discuss your father's last will concerning you. By the way, do you have with you a key to your family house, Leo?"

"I do, Ingrid! When my father brought me here, he included in my bags my passport and various identity cards, plus a full set of keys to our house, in case I would need to visit it while he was in Italy."

"Did he include anything else, apart from clothing and hygiene items?"  
Leonardo had to think for a few seconds before answering her.

"Uh, there was an envelope containing my birth certificate, a few family photos and a short list of telephone numbers linked to the house's domestic staff, so that I could contact them about house maintenance. It also contained my bank account booklet."

"Bank account booklet? You have a personal bank account in your name, Leo?"

"Yes! My father gave me a small monthly stipend for pocket money. Do you want to see it?"

"Yes, get it, Leo! Bring down at the same time the other documents and I.D. cards he left you."

"Okay!"

As Leonardo left the kitchen to go to his bedroom, Ingrid grabbed again the receiver of her telephone and formed a number, getting an answer after two rings.

"Loomis residence!" said a female voice, making Ingrid smile.

"Hello Carolyn! I hope that I am not disturbing you at this hour?"

"Not at all! What can I do for you, Ingrid?"

"I would like to speak with Greg, if he is available."

"He is still barfing down his eggs and bacon right in front of me, Ingrid. One moment, please."

Ingrid had to wait only a few seconds before Greg Loomis' voice came on the line.

"Yes, Ingrid?"

"Greg, I just got a call from Tony Bocelli's private solicitor, who wants to discuss with me his last will as it pertains to Leonardo. How close or involved are you with the FBI investigation on the murder of the Bocelli family and the attack on my house?" Somehow, Greg then answered with some amusement detectable in his tone.

"How close I am to that investigation? Did you forget that I am the Washington District Attorney? This case is presently my biggest one and has number one priority, especially since President Bush ordered that the Justice Department put maximum pressure on those mobsters. Look, I would prefer not to discuss this on the phone, so expect me at your house in a few minutes. Uh, could you make sure that you are wearing some clothes when you will receive me?"

"What's the matter, Greg? You don't like it when naked women open their door to you?"

"Oh, I do, Ingrid, especially when they are as appetizing as you. However, Carolyn may not appreciate that as much as me. Well, see you in a few minutes and thank you for warning me about that visit."

Ingrid was hanging up when Leonardo returned to the kitchen, a legal-sized envelope and a set of keys in his hands.

"Here they are, Ingrid!"

"Good! Let's spread these things on the kitchen counter, so that I could examine them. Just remove those bread crumbs first, though."

Leonardo quickly did so, with Ingrid ending up looking at the content of the envelope. She quickly put aside the family photos as of no immediate interest and also examined the passport, birth certificate and various identity cards belonging to Leonardo, then opened his bank booklet, which bore his name. One look at its balance prompted Ingrid into glancing at Leonardo.

“How much per month did your father give you as pocket money, Leo?”

“A hundred dollars a month, Ingrid. Why do you ask?”

“And you regularly spent most of that money?”

“Yes! I should have maybe forty or fifty dollars left in my account. Again, why do you ask?”

“Uh, because there is a little bit more than fifty dollars in your account, according to this booklet, Leo. I suppose that your father had equal access to your account?”

“Yes, he did! He also often borrowed my booklet, so that he could update it at the same time he put funds in it.”

“Well, according to this booklet, it was updated the same day your family left for Italy. Its balance now is 100,043 dollars and sixty cents.”

“ONE HUNDRED THOUSAND DOLLARS?!” exclaimed Leonardo, shocked. Ingrid somberly nodded her head in response.

“You heard right, Leo. It seems that your father was anticipating trouble for his family and for you and thus decided to ensure that you would have the means to survive if he got assassinated. Your father may have been a mobster, but he evidently cared for you, Leo. Now, Greg Loomis is about to come visit me at my request, in order to discuss legalities concerning the FBI investigation into the mob. I will then check with him to see if your bank account is safe from judiciary seizure. Since it is in your name and not in your father’s name and since you are a minor, I am hoping that you will be able to keep that money, which would come handy to pay for your education.”

Leonardo could not answer that, instead starting to cry silently, prompting Nancy to pass an arm around him to console him.

“Leo, whatever happens, you have me and Ingrid.”

“I...I know and I am most grateful for that. I don’t know anymore how to deal with all this.”

“Let me take care of your interests, Leo.” replied Ingrid. “You may not have the legal right to manage your affairs but I intend to make sure that you don’t get trampled

by that FBI investigation. If need be, I will personally intercede with President Bush if some justice official becomes too inflexible or vindictive at your expense.”

“Thank you, Ingrid!”

“You’re welcome, Leo. You may put back your documents and photos in that envelope, but leave me the bank booklet for the time being. I will give it back to you after talking with Greg Loomis.”

“Okay!”

Some six minutes later, Greg Loomis showed up at Ingrid’s front door while holding a briefcase. He smiled to her while showing her the briefcase.

“It contains my legal briefs and papers concerning the FBI investigation. I may not allow you to read them, but I will use them to confirm things, so that I could better counsel you.”

“A good idea, Greg. Thanks for coming on a Saturday morning.”

“Ingrid, I am happy to meet with you at any time, no underhanded meaning intended, of course.”

“Of course! Let’s go up to my private study.”

As he was about to follow Ingrid up the stairs, Greg saw Nancy, who had come out of the kitchen to wave hello to him. He froze at once and spoke in a strangled voice to Ingrid.

“What the Hell happened to Nancy? She looks much older than yesterday morning.”

Ingrid, stopping in mid-stride in the staircase, sighed.

“She decided that she wanted to look like a Fourth-Grade girl instead of like a Kindergarten kid and used her powers to accelerate her growth to attain her nine-year-old stage.”

“She has that kind of power, really?” said Greg, stunned, making Ingrid smirk.

“Does that sound so fantastic, when you compare it to her ability to fly and to throw energy balls, Greg? She now feels better about her body and that is what I consider the most important. Come up and forget about that!”

Still shaking his head at this, Greg nonetheless followed Nancy upstairs and went into her private study, closing the door behind him before taking the chair offered by Ingrid.

“So, Tony Bocelli’s solicitor contacted you about his client’s last will and Leonardo. What would you like to know from me?”

“What I would like to know, if that’s possible or permitted for you, would be to what extent Tony Bocelli’s activities as a mobster could block Leonardo from inheriting from his father’s estate? For one, could the Bocelli family house be inherited by Leonardo, or is it going to be seized as a presumed fruit of illegal activities? And what about Tony’s bank accounts? What is the legal status of Tony Bocelli’s material and financial assets?”

“Those are indeed judicious questions...and complicated ones as well, Ingrid. First, let me precise that the present FBI investigation is centered on the Winter Hill Gang from Boston and the recent wave of violence they committed in the Washington area as they tried to wrestle control from Tony Bocelli and from the Gambino crime family. In that investigation, Tony Bocelli is treated mostly as a victim, along with his family and associates. We tried in the past to indict Tony Bocelli under charges of racketeering, but nothing stuck. While definitely a mobster, Tony Bocelli used his head a lot more than his muscles, contrary to those murderous bastards from Boston, and was uncommonly cautious about the way he covered up his illegal activities and earnings. Also, he was not by far the most violence-prone criminal in this region, although he was always ready to respond when pushed around. Tony was engaged mostly in prostitution, drug trafficking, loansharking and corruption of officials. He also owned a couple of perfectly legitimate businesses, including a large transportation company and a food processing plant, in which we suspect he laundered much of his illegal gains. More of his illegal gains went into offshore accounts which are out of range of American jurisdiction. The money he used for his everyday living and expenses was actually the profits from his legitimate enterprises, which are doing quite well thank you, so the IRS will have a hard time catching him at tax evasion or fraud. Now, to answer specifically your questions: while the Bocelli family house is presently treated as a crime scene, I am not aware of plans by the Justice Department to confiscate or seize it. The department just does not have enough legal evidence to justify such a move. As for his bank accounts, at least those which we know about, I suspect that the IRS will freeze them while they examine Tony’s tax history. As for his other assets, including his legitimate enterprises and his beachside cottage in Atlantic City, I believe that they are presently safe from seizure, again thanks to the lack of proof of criminal activity by Tony Bocelli. Technically, young Leonardo could inherit all of that without fear of being hounded by federal investigators...unless some really mean and vindictive Justice Department official decides the contrary. As you know, Ingrid, I am no such guy.”

"You do reassure me a lot, Greg. I can tell you in exchange that Leonardo wants nothing more to do with the Mafia and wants to cut all his father's links with organized crime. I now have one last question for you, Greg. I just found out, along with Leonardo, who was as surprised as me on realizing it, that Tony Bocelli transferred 100,000 dollars into Leonardo's pocket money bank account, and this the same day he left with the rest of his family to Italy. Here is the bank account booklet, which is in Leonardo's name. It seems that Tony feared that something bad could happen to him and that he then made sure that, whatever happened, his son Leonardo would have something to help support himself. My question is this: is that money safe from seizure by the authorities? Can Leonardo use that account without fear of seeing it be frozen by the IRS?"

Greg examined carefully the content of the booklet before shaking his head.

"I doubt very much that anyone will want to freeze or confiscate the content of this bank account, Ingrid. It is in the name of a minor with no criminal history or links, apart from being the son of a mobster. Keep this to yourself but, when we investigated Tony Bocelli for racketeering in the past and found nothing that stuck, young Leonardo was also investigated, but only to ascertain to which level he knew about the criminal activities of his father. The picture we got was that of a young boy who knew that his father did illegal things but who also despised those same activities and had often verbally objected to them with him and with the rest of his family. In one reported instance, Leonardo was beaten up by his older brother Gino, who was said to be hoping to inherit one day his father's criminal organization, for protesting once too often about it. The story is that Tony then slapped around his older son, telling him never to touch his younger brother again. While he was no angel, Tony Bocelli seemed to believe in a few moral principles and to follow them, like never touching the families of those he extorted and never hurting children. In that, he was a very traditional kind of Italian mobster."

Ingrid scratched her head at that.

"Well, I have met some true human monsters in the past and I must say that, the one time I met Tony Bocelli, he didn't strike me as the most despicable man around. I have in fact seen some so-called respectable businessmen and politicians who did as badly as him in terms of fraud, embezzlement and theft. One last thing, Greg. Could I ask you to be present as a witness when I will meet with that solicitor at two this afternoon?"

"I will be happy to help Leonardo in any way I can, Ingrid. I will come in advance, at fifteen to two, if that is okay with you."

"I am fine with that, Greg. Thank you for helping me in this."

"Hey, I have been owning you a big one since 1955, when you saved my two kids from abduction at the hands of Big Joe Bolsano. See you after lunch!"

Now alone in her private study, Ingrid rehashed in her head what Greg had told him, then went down to the lounge, where she found Leonardo and told him what Greg had said to her, concluding with one question to the boy.

"Leo, if you inherit all this, will you want to keep all or parts of it? Think well before answering, as your financial future may hinge on those assets."

Leonardo lowered his head, obviously at a loss on how to answer. He finally looked up questioningly at Ingrid.

"Ingrid, you are much more experienced and mature than me. What would you do in my place?"

"I would say: sell your family house, since you are now living here with me and Nancy, and reinvest the money from that sale into your father's two legitimate businesses, meaning his transportation company and his food processing plant. Those two companies employ many people who do hard, honest work, often at low salaries. If you want to, you can then lower the profit margin of those companies to the minimum while at the same time increasing substantially the salaries of the lowest paid workers. As for that cottage in Atlantic City, did you like it?"

Leo nodded his head in response.

"It is a nice one, Ingrid. It has its own private access to a section of beach and is in a good state. I spent some good days there in the past Summers."

"Then I say: keep it!"

"Hey!" exclaimed Nancy, who had been listening on while sitting on the same sofa as Leo. "What if we invite our old classmates for a beach party weekend there? We could even loan its use to the Congressional School and turn it into a seaside school Summer Camp house."

Those words fired up Leonardo at once.

"That's a great idea, Nancy! I love it! If I inherit it today, maybe we could invite our friends to spend the Fourth of July there, on the beach."

"Well, technically, it still belongs to your father, who in turn is not going to stop you from using it now. You can thus use that cottage as long as it is in your family's name, Leo. However, before we start inviting your friends, we better inspect it first to make sure that it is still in good state and equipped properly for a kids' beach party."

"Can we do that today, Mommy, once that man will have visited us this afternoon? We could get there quickly via aircar."

Ingrid smiled at her daughter's suggestion: this idea of turning Leo's family cottage into a beachside school Summer camp truly appealed to her.

"A fine idea, Nancy. However, let's not sell the bear's fur before killing it: we still need to see what is in Leo's father's last will."

### **13:51 (Washington Time)**

#### **Front door of 326 South Grove Street**

Rinaldo Carboneti turned out to be a polite and distinguished man in his fifties who was accompanied by his secretary, a portly woman in her forties who carried with her a typewriter case and a leather briefcase. On their arrival, Ingrid invited them at once to go up to her private study.

"Sorry for the mess at ground level. Thankfully, this gunfight happened in the Summer, rather than in Winter. If not, our house would be simply unlivable until repaired. However, we will make do as best as we can until the repair works are completed."

The secretary, a Miss Fontanelli, eyed with dismay the multiple bullet impacts which had ripped the walls and the furniture of the lounge.

"My God! You were lucky not to get killed then, Misses Dows."

"Pah! They shot like pigs. Well, let's go up."

As they were climbing the stairs, Ingrid twisted her head to speak at the solicitor.

"Mister Carboneti, I want to tell you that I invited as a witness and legal counselor an official from the Justice Department. He however is a certified lawyer and promised me that all that we will say today will be covered by professional confidentiality."

Carboneti did hesitate for a fraction of a second, but then nodded his head.

"Then, I will have no objections to his presence, Misses Dows. I am in fact here to ensure that the succession for Mister Bocelli's estate is done correctly and legally."

"Well said, Mister Carboneti. This way, please!"



The trio then entered Ingrid's private study, where both Leonardo and Greg Loomis were waiting for them, sitting in a sofa.

"Mister Carboneti, Miss Fontanelli, let me present you first Leonardo Bocelli, the younger son of Tony Bocelli, along with Mister Greg Loomis, federal District Attorney for the Washington area."

Carboneti's eyes widened on hearing Greg's title but shook hands with him and Leo nonetheless.

"Nice to meet you, Mister Loomis. Leonardo, please allow me to present you my most sincere condolences for the death of your family."

"You are too kind, sir."

"Miss Fontanelli, you are welcome to set your typewriter and other office supplies on top of my work desk over there. Mister Carboneti, if you will take this easy chair."

"Thank you, Misses Dows."

Once he had sat down, the solicitor opened at once his own briefcase and took out a number of documents, handing two of them to Ingrid and Leonardo.

"I made an extra copy of the last will, so that both of you could read it at the same time. This should simplify and accelerate our discussion."

"A good idea, Mister Carboneti," replied Ingrid while taking the copy offered to him. As for Leonardo, he let Greg read his own copy over his shoulder as Carboneti spoke again.

"As you will see in this last will recently updated by Mister Tony Bocelli, young Leonardo is now the only beneficiary named in it and still alive, thus there should not be any legal objections possible to him inheriting the properties and financial assets of his father. The same applies to the last wills of his mother Maria, of his brother Gino and of his sister Livia. While the assets held in the name of his mother, brother and sister are actually limited when compared to the assets of his father, both Maria, Gino and Livia were covered by life insurance policies, as was his father. The premiums from those three life insurance policies thus will go to Leonardo, as everything that belonged to Tony Bocelli is now his."

Leonardo's head suddenly felt light as he digested those words.

"And how much do those policies represent, Mister Carboneti?"

"Your father's life insurance policy, written with your mother as its first beneficiary but with you succeeding her, was worth by itself 300,000 dollars. Your mother's life insurance coverage was worth 50,000 dollars, while those of your brother and sister

were each worth 10,000 dollars. I will ensure that the insurance company delivers you cheques for those sums in your name within the next few days. Since Monday will be an official holiday, that may however delay these cheques by an extra day or two.”

“I...I will get 370,000 dollars in life insurance money?” said with difficulty Leonardo. “What am I going to do with that much money?”

“Whatever you wish to do with it, Leonardo.” Replied with a gentle smile the solicitor. “I could say that many people I know would have no problems in burning that money quite quickly. However, from what your father told me in the past, you are reportedly a young man who cares more for others than for himself. If you really feel embarrassed by all that money, then you could always donate it to a charity of your choice or, better in my opinion, reinvest that money in the food processing plant and truck company that you will now own after this last will is executed. Those two companies employ a total of close to 700 people, so you will now constitute a significant economical factor in this region, Leonardo. That represents quite a business responsibility but also gives you an opportunity to help a lot of people by keeping those companies working and making them prosper under your direction.”

Both Ingrid and Greg liked the way Carboneti was speaking and nodded their heads before resuming their reading, along with Leonardo. At the end of it, the boy gave his copy to Greg, so that the latter could reread it in detail, and looked at the solicitor.

“Mister Carboneti, do you have a complete list of what my family owned?”

“I certainly do, Leonardo.” replied the solicitor while extracting two new documents from his file folder and handing one to Leonardo and the other to Ingrid. “Here you are! Any other questions before we officialize the execution of your father’s last will?”

“I have one, sir. I am now a minor and I understand that, in a legal point of view, I need an adult authorized to act as my legal tutor. I want Ingrid Dows, who is ready to adopt me, to be my legal tutor. I can’t imagine anybody more honest and selfless than her and I want to live with her and her daughter Nancy, both of whom have protected me from mobsters twice already and took care of me while my family was in Italy. Do you see any problem with that, Mister Carboneti?”

The solicitor slowly nodded his head, having somewhat anticipated that demand in view of what had been said recently in the medias concerning Leo, Nancy and Ingrid.

“I can tell you that, at this time, nobody came forward to claim tutelage over you, Leonardo, and I doubt that anyone will do so and challenge Misses Dows’ candidacy as

a tutor. I can prepare a legal brief to that effect within days, but the final decision on this matter will depend on the Washington Federal District Court's Family Division. That could unfortunately take some time, as you know how slow the courts system can be."

"I can take care of greasing the wheels about this, Mister Carboneti." cut in Greg Loomis. "However, I believe that Ingrid Dows could act as an interim tutor until the courts make it official. After all, poor Leonardo cannot be left with no effective tutor and no access to his financial assets for months."

"You are correct about that, Mister Loomis. The courts do allow some leeway in the present circumstances. Well, if you have no other questions, then me and Miss Fontanelli will start producing the various legal documents needed for your signature. I will just need Leonardo's birth certificate and at least one identity piece with photo in order to prepare those documents."

"Here is my passport, my birth certificate, my social insurance card and my student's card, sir." replied Leonardo while grabbing and then carrying to Carboneti the said items.

"Excellent! We should have everything ready for your signature in a couple of hours at the most."

"Do you mind if I stay with you in the meantime, Mister Carboneti?" asked Ingrid.

"I see no problem with that, Misses Dows."

"Thank you! Nancy, Leo, I will ask you to go back down to the lounge, so that Mister Carboneti and Miss Fontanelli can work in peace. Would you like something to drink in the meantime, Mister Carboneti? Tea, coffee or a cold drink?"

"If you have strong coffee, I would then appreciate one, Misses Dows. Miss Fontanelli?"

"I will also take a cup of coffee, Misses Dows."

"Excellent! I have everything to make some good Espresso coffee."

Ingrid then went down with Leonardo and Nancy, heading for the kitchen. The boy was still shaking his head in disbelief as they got down to the ground floor level.

"I still can't believe that I will have that much money, plus all those properties and companies. I am only a ten-year-old boy with no real business experience, after all."

"Well, you got me to counsel you, Leo." replied Ingrid with a gentle smile. "I may be a pilot in this life, but I was a merchant during a number of my past lives. I can do business and make deals with the best of them."

Faithful to his word, Carboneti had everything done for Leonardo's and Ingrid's signatures by four o'clock, with everything produced in three legal copies. Ingrid gladly paid the notary fees asked for by Carboneti before accompanying him and Miss Fontanelli to the front door and thanking them for coming. Once the solicitor and his secretary were gone, Ingrid exchanged looks with Greg Loomis and young Leonardo.

"Well, it is now a bit late for us to fly to Atlantic City today. We could however go shop for some food and drinks before the stores close for the weekend, so that we could bring some supplies to the cottage tomorrow. We could also go buy a bottle or two of champagne to celebrate this event. You and Carolyn are of course invited to share those bottles with us."

"That sounds like a marvelous idea, Ingrid. In fact, both Carolyn and I will accompany you to the store: Carolyn really needs to get out of the house."

**09:42 (Washington Time)**  
**Sunday, July 03, 1988 'C'**  
**Bocelli family's beachside cottage**  
**Brigantine Beach**  
**Atlantic City, New Jersey**



"There it is, Ingrid: that light blue two-story house beside the pedestrian trail leading to the beach."

"I see it, Leo! I'm going to land in the courtyard between the house and the road."

Masterfully piloted by Ingrid, her Hiller AIRCAR soon landed smoothly on the grass surface of the courtyard next to the Bocelli family's big beach cottage. She however did not bother to fold up the four ducted propellers of her machine, since she would not need to roll along on the ground here. As she and the others stepped out of the aircar, Ingrid examined with interest the big house, with its light blue wooden sides, covered patios and upper balcony facing the nearby sea.

"It's not the flashiest house I have ever seen but it is quite big and it appears to be in good shape."

"My father didn't like flashy things." Replied Leonardo, who had ridden on the rear bench seat with Nancy and with Carolyn Loomis. "He thought that flashing one's

wealth only attracted trouble by making others jealous. He always had fairly modest tastes...for a mobster.”

“Your father decidedly used his head a lot more than many other mobsters I knew of, Leo.” added Greg Loomis as he started to take out the bags and one ice box stored in the central luggage bin of the aircar. “Okay, someone is going to help me carry all this or should I do it alone?”

“I will carry the ice box!” said at once Nancy, bending down and fetching the ice box from inside the aircar before Greg could protest. Then, to Carolyn Loomis’ dismay, she started carrying the heavy box, full of ice cubes, fresh meat and cans of either beer or Coca-Cola, and this without apparent effort. She followed Leo, who had taken his own sports bag and was walking towards the front door of the house while fishing out of a pocket the keys to the house. As for Ingrid, she took care of the two last bags inside the aircar and followed the others towards the entrance. Once close to it, she noticed as Leo was unlocking the door that there were no less than three high quality locks on the door. The ground-level windows which were visible on this side sported discrete but strong-looking steel grills, supplemented by thick wooden panels mounted on outside hinges and apparently meant to be closed prior to the arrival of strong storms, which were frequent in this area.

“Your father was definitely the cautious type, Leo. Apart from appearing to be well-maintained, this cottage looks very robust and also quite secure against attempted break-ins. Are house break-ins frequent here in Atlantic City?”

“That has unfortunately become more frequent with the years, Ingrid. The local economy is not doing great and crime has been rising steadily in the past years. The main local problems are drugs and street gangs, mostly black and Hispanic. Quite a few beach houses which are not frequently used end up with drug addicts using them to shoot themselves with heroine or sniff cocaine. When he acquired this house a few years ago, my father took preventive measures against those things by going around with a number of his men, visiting the local gang leaders and drug pushers and warning them to stay away from this house, or else. It worked!”

Greg nodded in appreciation at that. He nodded again once the group entered the lobby, which was flanked by a large lounge on its left and an equally large dining room on its right, plus a large staircase leading upstairs. Leonardo then pointed at the staircase.

"There are four large bedrooms upstairs, plus two complete bathrooms and a private study with access to the seaside balcony. Under the staircase itself is another staircase, but that one goes down to the basement, which has a storage room, a furnace room, a cellar and a small room with a small emergency generator. Father had that last item installed because of the frequent storms on this coast which often cause power outages. In the back of the house, facing the sea and beach area, you will find the kitchen, a bar-lounge and the door to the patio, which has a barbecue grill. This place is not big on luxury but it is a very convenient and well-equipped house. Further, at the back of the house, there is a locked storage shed for life vests, canoes and various sports and outdoors equipment. Since we came here only a few times, we didn't keep perishable stuff in the refrigerator but the pantry is well-stocked with canned and dry, non-perishable items. Do you want to visit the house with me?"

"Certainly, Leo! Just let us transfer first the content of our ice box into the refrigerator in the kitchen."

With that taking only a couple of minutes, the group then followed Leo in a complete visit of the house and of its back area facing the nearby beach and the sea. There, they saw that a sort of sandy trail had been cut across the rocky, bush-strewn band of ground separating the wide beach of white sand from the houses built along the coast. Ingrid grinned, most satisfied, as she examined the surrounding terrain and the large beach some fifty meters away.

"This is going to be perfect as a Summer camp house for your school, Leo. Your classmates should love this place. I think that you should start calling a few of them this morning, to see if they would like to spend Independence Day here with us. Just remember that my aircar can only accommodate five passengers, plus the pilot."

"Then, I will first call Kimi and Lucy to invite them!" replied Leo enthusiastically before going to the nearest telephone. Greg Loomis then passed a loving arm around his wife's shoulders.

"Spending a couple of days here will be really nice. It should do great to forget about the pressure of work in Washington. Maybe we should invite Jimmy and Annie here one fine day, along with their families."

"Then, they will have to come in their own cars, Greg. I have an aircar, not an air bus, remember?" said Ingrid.

“Didn’t you tell me that you were working of a project for an air bus design, Ingrid?”

“Yeah: on paper! That air bus first prototype is not about to fly for another good year or more.”

“You know, that projected air bus would be ideal to transport quickly complete teams of FBI agents or policemen on quick response calls.” suggest Greg, making Ingrid smile.

“That is one of the planned purposes of that project, Greg. Another one is to use it as a downtown-to-downtown or downtown-to-airport eighteen-seater commuter. It could also be used by the Navy to transport personnel between ships and shore. Overall, the market for such an air bus could be big.”

“And how is the Hiller Corporation doing these days?”

“Swamped with orders!” replied Ingrid. “In response, Stanley Hiller has adopted the smartest solution to his production capacity problem: he sub-contracted nearly all the parts for his aircars, reserving his Firebaugh plant for the final assembly and testing of aircars. As a result, many small companies in California are also benefiting from the popularity of aircars, making a lot of people happy...and rich.”

“And you only got one aircar and no paycheck out of all that? That’s not really fair to you, no?”

“Don’t forget that I was the one who proposed that way to be paid. It was after all a risky project for a small company, a project which could have sunk if it had turned into a failure. However, now that Stanley Hiller’s cash machine is ringing constantly, I plan to be greedier when I will present him my proposed air bus design.”

“At last! You were always too generous and selfless for your own good, Ingrid.”

Some fifteen minutes later, a happy Leo announced to them that both Kimi Park and Lucy Wong had accepted to come, each with either one or two parents. Ingrid thus flew back to Washington to go pick them up, leaving Greg and Carolyn in charge with Leo and Nancy. As the aircar was disappearing on the horizon, Leo guided Greg Loomis to what appeared to be a simple storage locker in a corner of the bar-lounge. However, once the wooden door of the locker was opened, it revealed a tall, solid-looking steel cabinet with a high-quality lock. Using one of the keys on the cottage’s key ring, Leonardo opened the cabinet, revealing inside an assortment of rifles, shotguns

and handguns, along with cleaning equipment and plenty of ammunition. Leo then smiled apologetically to Greg.

“I wanted you to know that my father kept guns in this house purely for self-protection against drug dealers, thieves and gang members, Mister Loomis. With all that happened around me lately, I would like to keep these weapons in this house, if you don’t mind.”

In response, Greg patted one of Leonardo’s shoulders.

“Don’t worry, Leo: I never saw those guns.”

“Thank you for your comprehension, Mister Loomis.”

“My pleasure, Leo. I must confess on my part that I am presently carrying my own revolver. We still don’t know if those Irish mob maniacs will try again to kill you but, if they try, they will have to go over me first. Well, how about we all change into swimsuits and go look at that fine beach?”

“YES!” happily exclaimed Leo before Greg shook an index at Nancy, who was standing nearby.

“And no nude bathing for you, young girl!”

Her response was to pull her tongue at him, making Leo laugh.



## **CHAPTER 14 – A CLEAR AND PRESENT DANGER**

**01:50 (Caribbean Basin Time)**

**Thursday, July 7, 1988 'C'**

**Shores of Old Man Bay**

**Grand Cayman Island**

**Caribbean Sea, west of Cuba**



The two men watching the side of the house facing the nearby beach and ocean didn't see in the darkness of the night the nine black shapes which cautiously emerged from the waves some 300 meters to the left of the residence. Those shapes then ran across the white sand of the beach, conscious that they could become visible if they stayed on the sandy surface. Entering the tropical vegetation growing along the shoreline, the nine men wearing wetsuits and diving gear stopped and regrouped at the foot of a large tree.

"Alright, let's take off our air bottles, masks and flippers and leave them here, guys." Said in a low voice their team leader, a tall and solidly built man in his late twenties. "Then we will go accomplish our job. Remember: our main target is Sean MacManus. We will also kill anybody who will resist or threaten us, but we are not here to massacre everyone on sight, so don't play happy trigger without reason."

Taking the time first to take off their diving gear, but keeping on their black neoprene wet suits, the eight men under the command of John Price then followed their leader through the jungle, heading towards the beachside house marked by a couple of light shining inside it. Each CIA Action Division man was armed with a silencer-equipped submachine gun, a silencer-equipped pistol and a combat knife, plus carried a number of either grenades or explosive charges. After some twenty minutes of cautious advance, the American agents arrived at the western limit of the property, marked by the end of the forest. Using a night vision scope, John Price took the time to locate the mobsters placed on night sentry duty to protect the house in which their boss, Sean MacManus, aka 'The Mad Irishman', was sleeping.

"I see two sentries watching the beach and sea, posted at corners of the veranda, plus two more men watching the side facing the access road. They don't seem

to be using either night vision scopes or binoculars and none of them is looking persistently at our patch of jungle. We will cross the band of open ground one by one and as silently as possible: noise will be our biggest enemy here. Once at the house, we will eliminate the outside sentries, then will enter the house. Mack, Steve, Mike, Tony, you will take care of the seaside sentries. John, Jake, Dick and Alan, you will take care of the roadside sentries. I will stay between your two groups, ready to support if someone pops up unexpectedly. I will go first.”

Not wasting time, John Price then left the cover of the vegetation and, with his black diver's suit making him a dark shape in the dark night, walked at a crouch across the twenty meters or so of open grass area before arriving at the foot of the wooden veranda surrounding the house itself. Crouching under the veranda, he signaled for the next man to come, his submachine gun at the ready. All eight of his men were able to cross the open ground without being detected by the mobsters playing sentry, something that did not surprise John: mobsters, while capable of great violence against their victims, were not trained soldiers and were not equipped for night fighting, contrary to CIA Action Division field agents. Also, this was about the hour at which the human mind was at its lowest in terms of alertness and speed of thinking. All this meant one thing: those mobsters were going to die in the next few minutes. His team then split in two groups of four men, with John staying in position while rising his head high enough to be able to watch the sentries and point his submachine gun at them. The two sentries nearest to the CIA team were the first to die, their throats cut open while their mouths were covered. For the two mobsters posted at the far corners of the house, the CIA agents used silenced pistols equipped with oversize silencers and firing subsonic ammunition, in order to produce as little noise as possible. Contrary to what people normally saw in action movies, a silenced pistol still makes quite a loud noise when fired. In that case, what the silencer did was to cut down but not eliminate the detonation from the shot and also made it more difficult to locate the shooter. However, when using subsonic ammunition, meaning bullets fired at a muzzle velocity of less than 300 meters per second, silencers became a lot more efficient in their job of noise reduction. While someone on the alert inside the house could possibly have heard the two shots that killed the remaining sentries, someone actually sleeping was very unlikely to wake up because of them. Waiting a few seconds to see if anybody reacted to the muffled shots,

the CIA field agents then moved silently into the house, entering it via the rear and front doors while holding their weapons at the ready and pointed.

They found two men sitting in the kitchen and playing cards, submachine guns laying on top of the table on which they played. Those two were the next to die from shots to the head or neck. A silent but quick search showed that nobody else occupied the ground floor. That left the bedrooms on the upper floor. John Price took the lead in climbing cautiously the stairs leading to the upper level, followed by his men. Once in the main hallway, which was deserted, he again split his men, this time in four pairs, with each pair standing by next to the door of one of the four bedrooms. On his part, John posted himself next to the pair due to break into the main bedroom, where Sean MacManus was supposed to sleep. Raising his left hand high, he then suddenly lowered it, giving the signal for the assault. As they had expected, none of the doors proved to have been locked from the inside. The only surprise was when John erupted into Sean MacManus' bedroom and found that the mobster was sleeping with a young black woman, probably a local prostitute he had picked up for the night. John again didn't waste time and shot MacManus once in the head and once in the chest without saying a word: he had been sent to kill the mobster, not to start a conversation with him. That quick shooting on his part actually proved its worth, as MacManus reacted with uncommon speed once the noise of the door being busted open awoke him with a startle: he had time to plunge his right hand under his pillow before being killed by John Price's two bullets. John's next move was to rapidly walk to the black woman in the bed, who had also awakened, and then knock her out with a powerful punch to the jaw: he didn't want her to possibly scream in horror and thus wake up any mobster his team may have missed up to now. It may not have been a gentlemanly move, but it was better for her than a bullet in the head. Going to the inert body of Sean MacManus, John doublechecked that he was truly dead, then looked under his pillow. As he could have bet, he found a loaded revolver there, ready to be used in an instant.

The next thing John did was to order his men to carefully search the house for any documents or notes that could give up information on MacManus' criminal organization and activities. Since this house had been rented by MacManus rather than having been built to his specification, John didn't expect to find some kind of hidden, built-in safe. What he did find inside the closet of MacManus' bedroom was a solid steel

foot locker locked with a padlock. One bullet took care of the padlock, letting John look inside the foot locker. What he found was a collection of a few small gold ingots, thick wads of American dollars and British pounds, three fake passports bearing the picture of MacManus, a loaded revolver and a few documents. Ignoring the cash money and the gold, John examined carefully the document and soon felt triumph fill him: one of the documents was a bank account booklet from a local Grand Cayman bank showing a balance of over 450,000 dollars. That booklet had been put inside a waterproof plastic bag, along with a piece of paper bearing what had to be the personal bank access number of MacManus and his account password. The United States was now going to be able to repatriate all that dirty money accumulated over years of criminal activities by the mobster. Another document John found proved at least as interesting as the bank booklet: it was a ledger book full of numbers, names, telephone numbers, addresses and annotations. With that ledger, the FBI was now going to be able to take down MacManus associates and accomplices in the United States.

Quickly putting the precious ledger, bank booklet and fake passports inside a large waterproof bag he was carrying with him, John then debated what to do with all the cash money and gold ingots, finally deciding to take them. Not that he wanted to take that money and use it for himself: he was proud to be able to say that he was absolutely incorruptible. Rather, that money could help compensate and support the numerous victims of the crimes committed by MacManus. On second thought, he took the British Sterling pounds banknotes, of which there was for 4,000 pounds worth, and went to the purse of the unconscious prostitute, in which he stuffed the banknotes: that woman was going to wake up with a painful jaw but was also going to find out that she had just made the most lucrative pass of her career as a prostitute. Looking at two of his men, he pointed the woman, her purse and her clothes, which were spread on the floor near the bed, while giving them orders.

"Jack, Mike, carry that girl and her things out of the house and on the veranda facing the road and quickly put at least some of her clothes on her. Let her keep her purse. She should wake up in less than half an hour and will then be able to walk away before somebody comes and alert the local police. As for us, our job here is finished. Let's go retrieve our diving equipment, then we will swim back to our yacht."

The last thing John Price did before leaving the house with his men was to take multiple photographs of MacManus' body. They then disappeared into the jungle, leaving behind fourteen dead Irish-American mobsters and one slowly awakening local prostitute.

## **CHAPTER 15 – ON THE EDGE OF ARMAGEDDON**

**09:34 (Moscow Time)**

**Tuesday, May 9, 1989 ‘C’**

**V.I.P. gallery, Red Square**

**Moscow, Soviet Union**



Mikhail Gorbachev sighed in exasperation when Boris Yeltsin finally arrived by limousine at the foot of the staircase leading up to the V.I.P. gallery facing the huge expanse of Red Square: the President of the Soviet Union was again late...and drunk, and this on one of the two most important annual events in the U.S.S.R. He however kept his tongue as Yeltsin, assisted by an army officer, slowly climbed the stairs on unsteady legs: However much of a drunkard and incompetent he was, Yeltsin's support was crucial for Gorbachev in order to keep his position of General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and thus stay in power. Too many high and mid-level Party officials were criticizing him lately, finding his reforms program too liberal and clamoring for the 'good old days' of Stalinist-style Communism. What was especially troubling him was the fact that more and more generals and admirals were gradually joining up with those conservative politicians, as those senior officers lamented the steady decline of military budgets under Gorbachev. They of course didn't care about the fact that those past astronomical military budgets had effectively been strangling the economic growth of the country and blocking the renewal and modernization of the various infrastructures in the Soviet Union, which were often in a dilapidated state.

With Yeltsin finally getting to his place on the V.I.P. gallery, Gorbachev gave the signal to the parade commander to start the parade meant to celebrate the Soviet victory over the Nazis in 1945. Ten minutes later, the first units of marching soldiers started goose-stepping past the gallery, bayonets fixed and flags flying as a military band played. Gorbachev, Yeltsin and the other Party leaders present on the gallery saluted in return the marching troops as multiple columns of tanks were forming up at one end of the Red Square, getting ready to roll past the dignitaries. As Gorbachev was waving one hand at the spectators, a tremendous blast projected him, the other dignitaries and

broken pieces of the gallery high in the air, while the pressure wave of the explosion bowled over the nearest ranks of marching soldiers. The state television Soviet cameramen, along with quite a few foreign ones who were filming the parade from some distance away, were able to capture the explosion which disintegrated the V.I.P. gallery before the blast wave made their cameras tumble to the ground. The thousands of Soviet citizens assembled on the sidelines and watching the parade could only look on with disbelief as the smoke from the explosion was blown away by the wind, revealing the now ruined gallery, strewn with the broken bodies of their political leaders. Utter pandemonium then broke out.

**06:35 (Washington Time) /14:35 (Moscow Time)**

**Ingrid's kitchen, 326 South Grove Street**

**Aurora Hills, Arlington, Virginia**

**U.S.A.**

Ingrid was absently listening to her radio while preparing breakfast for Leonardo and Nancy, prior to driving them to their fifth-grade classes at the Congressional School. In a bit over two years, Leo and Nancy would have completed their eight-grade and were then going to have to change to another school to attend high school, as the Congressional School did not offer high school-level education. Then, Ingrid was going to have to select carefully what type of school and which establishment to choose for Nancy and Leonardo. Since their personal interests and abilities were very different from each other, that meant that they probably wouldn't study at the same place. That alone promised to complicate life for all three of them.

Ingrid's ear was twitched when the meteorological forecast on the radio was suddenly cut and replaced by the voice of the news anchorman.

"We have to interrupt this meteorological bulletin in order to pass an important breaking news. Eight hours ago, a powerful bomb exploded under the V.I.P. dais occupied by the Soviet leadership at Moscow's Red Square, and this as the Soviet leaders were reviewing the May Victory Parade. Reported dead are a number of high-level Soviet leaders, including President Boris Yeltsin and General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev. A number of the parading troops were also hurt by the explosion. The Soviet authorities have launched an intensive investigation of what they call a terrorist

attack on the Soviet Union. We will keep you informed of the developments as more information becomes available...”

Turning down the volume of her radio, Ingrid then sat down heavily on one of the high stools lined along the kitchen’s counter, a dismayed expression on her face. That attracted a worried question from Leonardo.

“Is this bad news, Ingrid?”

“Very, Leo! The consequences of this could be incalculable and could easily lead to war, depending on who the surviving Soviet leaders will blame for this terrorist attack.”

“And who could have done that, Mommy?” asked Nancy. Ingrid thought for a moment before answering her.

“Actually, very few people would be able to hide a large bomb in such a place, Nancy. I have seen that V.I.P. dais and it sits directly against the perimeter wall of the Kremlin, one of the best guarded places in the Soviet Union. That dais also touches on the Red Square, which is a vast open square with nowhere to hide. Whoever did this had to have accomplices within the Soviet government, military or police. It would be like someone would place a bomb inside the White House. I just can’t see how a foreign group or organization could pull such an attack.”

“Are you saying that the Soviets themselves did it, Ingrid?” asked Leonardo, making Ingrid shake her head.

“Not THE Soviets but rather some Soviets, Leo. Soviet power politics are a cut-throat business and many Soviet leaders in history were either purged, sent to Siberia, killed, jailed or simply disappeared when they fell out of favor or lost a battle for power. However, if this turns out to be an internal struggle for power, then you can expect the new leaders to blame some foreign scapegoat for this, as Soviets hate to wash their private laundry in public.”

Ingrid then sighed heavily.

“Hopefully, the consequences of this won’t be as severe as I expect, but I am not very optimistic about that. Well, let’s finish your breakfast, kids: you have school to attend this morning.”

Ingrid then mentally asked herself if she should contact the White House about this, to ask the officials there if they wanted her to help deal with whatever will happen next, but decided not to. If they really wanted her help, then they would call her.



**16:15 (Washington Time)**  
**Friday, May 12, 1989 'C'**  
**The Oval Office, the White House**  
**Washington, D.C.**

"The CIA? THE CIA?! THAT'S NUTS! WHO WOULD BELIEVE SUCH A CRAZY NOTION?"

"Those new Soviet leaders would only need the Soviet citizenry to believe that, Mister President. This was obviously made up mostly for internal consumption within the U.S.S.R. And as much as this could sound crazy, we do have more than a few conspiracy theorists here in the United States who would be ready to gobble up this Soviet fable. Unfortunately, there is enough dirty secrets in the past history of the CIA to lend at least a bit of credence to such a theory."

President George Herbert Walker Bush, serving his second term as President of the United States, was tempted to reply to his National Security Advisor, Brent Scowcroft, but instead looked at his director of the CIA, William Webster.

"Please tell me that nobody within your staff was stupid enough to pull such a stunt, Bill."

"Of course we didn't do this, Mister President!" replied Webster in an indignant tone. "The consequences and fallout of this for the United States could only be negative. This is Soviet propaganda in its purest hypocrisy, Mister President."

Bush was about to ask a question to his Secretary of State, James Baker, when his secretary stuck her head into the Oval Office after knocking urgently on the door.

"Excuse me, Mister President, but the chief of staff of Secretary Baker is asking to speak urgently with him. He said that it was extremely important and urgent."

"Then, transfer that call to my line, Misses Pringle: Secretary Baker will take it from here."

"Understood, Mister President."

Bush had time to look around at his advisers and principal cabinet members before the telephone on the presidential desk rang, to be picked up by a waiting James Baker.

"James Baker here! What is going up, Don?... THEY WHAT?!"

President Bush and the other officials in the room watched on with growing unease as the Secretary of State became increasingly agitated on the telephone.

"Twelve hours, you said?... I see! Tell Ambassador Matlock to comply as best he can with the Soviet demands. I will pass all of this to the President at once." Baker then put down the receiver before looking with discouragement at Bush.

"The Soviets just ordered all of our embassy and consular staff to leave the Soviet Union within the next twelve hours. Ambassador Matlock was also told that the U.S.S.R. is cutting all diplomatic relations with the United States and is closing its airspace and territorial waters to all American aircraft and ships. The American private citizens presently in the Soviet Union will have on their part 24 hours to leave the country. Similarly, all the Soviet citizens presently in the United States are ordered to return to the U.S.S.R. within the next 24 hours."

"But all those things amount to something just short of a declaration of war!" objected Bush, flabbergasted. "Why would they do all this, especially in view of how flimsy and laughable their accusations against the CIA are?"

"When you have serious internal problems, then create an external one, as the popular saying goes, Mister President." replied glumly William Webster. "Those new Soviet leaders who just took over from Gorbachev and Yeltsin obviously don't care for the truth one bit and only care about consolidating their new power, in this case by inventing an imaginary external threat. This actually reinforces my initial opinion that those new leaders are the ones who had that bomb planted in Red Square, Mister President."

"Well, we still have to react to their actions, and quickly." replied Bush, still fuming. "We have to ensure that all our citizens presently inside the Soviet Union get out of there within 24 hours, in order not to become hostages in the hands of this new Soviet government. Also, I want all our ships and aircraft to leave Soviet airspace and waters at once and then stay away. Those are our top priorities right now. I want the National Security Council to meet tomorrow in the Situation Room at nine in the morning, to review our options on how to respond to those Soviet accusations and moves. In the meantime, I am ordering our armed forces to go to DEFCON 3, with particular attention paid to any Soviet military moves or deployments around the World. I want preliminary briefing notes about those new leaders prepared and ready for tomorrow's morning meeting: we need to know what kind of people we are facing now."

"I will have my best specialist on Soviet affairs, Condoleezza Rice, work on that, Mister President." replied Brent Scowcroft. Bush nodded his head at that.

"Then, let's get to it, gentlemen! We have a lot to do and little time to do it."

The officials assembled inside the Oval Office then left to return to their respective offices or departments, leaving President Bush alone to rehash in his mind what he had just learned and discussed. The relations with the Soviet Union had been relatively cordial during the last twenty years or so, but this bomb in Moscow and the advent of those new leaders were now abruptly changing everything and could even cause a war, where the use of nuclear weapons was likely. Bush couldn't help feel discouragement as he contemplated that prospect. An idea then came to his mind, prompting him to pick up his telephone while consulting his rolodex, then punching in a number and waiting for an answer. He couldn't help smile when a young girl's voice answered the call after two rings.

"Hello?"

"This is the President speaking. I need to speak urgently to your mother."

"Oh! One moment, please!"

Bush then heard the girl run away from the telephone. Some twelve seconds later, a woman's voice came on the line.

"Yes, Mister President?"

"Ingrid, I need your advice, badly..."

**08:43 (Washington Time)**

**Saturday, May 13, 1989 'C'**

**White House Situation Room**

**Washington, D.C.**

Ingrid had just entered the Situation Room when Brent Scowcroft also came in, accompanied by a small, thin black woman. Ingrid went at once to shake hands with her friend and presidential national security advisor.

"Brent, it is nice to see you again."

"And it is nice to see you again as well, Ingrid. Let me present you to one of my protégées who is my top expert on Soviet affairs, Condoleezza Rice."

"Pleased to meet you, Miss Rice," said Ingrid while shaking hands with the black woman, who was looking up at her with open admiration.

"And I am honored to meet you, General. You are a true living legend."

"Pah! Those stories about me are so misleading."

"Yeah! because they undervalue you, Ingrid." replied Scowcroft, tongue in cheek. "Every time I think that I know everything about you, then you do something new and extraordinary. And how is your flying daughter doing?"

Ingrid rolled her eyes at that question. Since that episode when Nancy had flown to the rescue of Leonardo a year ago, her superpowers had frequently been making the front pages of the tabloids. Her vaporizing of mobsters with energy balls and her flying around in a Supergirl costume during last Halloween had not helped in that aspect.

"Doing well and growing very fast, thank you. I should be about to have my first gray hair soon."

"Gray hair? You, a young 63-year-old widow?" replied a smiling Scowcroft. "You will never grow old, at least in my eyes."

"Flattery will get you nowhere, Brent. Well, we better sit down and switch to more serious business. What do we have on that bunch of assholes now in charge in the Kremlin?"

"That they are ruthless, Stalinist assholes, General. I have prepared briefing notes on them and made copies for everyone here. Here is a copy for you, General."

"Thank you!" said Ingrid, taking the offered document before going to sit at her assigned place around the conference table. She then read quickly the four-page document, increasingly frowning as she went.

"Those are indeed old-guard Stalinists, Miss Rice, something that does not augur well for the present situation. Those men care little for the wellbeing or even the lives of others: they only care about their personal power. They would be capable of the most horrible crimes in order to stay in power. Believe me: I had to deal with Stalin while he was still alive and his megalomania cost millions of lives. He in fact was the one who said once that quote the death of one person is a tragedy, but the death of millions is a statistic unquote."

"I know that one, General." replied Rice in a sober tone. "That men with similar thinking could now be in power in Moscow is a truly frightening notion. Unfortunately, the Soviets' nuclear arsenal, while not as sophisticated as ours, is now at least equal in quantity to our own nuclear arsenal. That will severely cut our range of options when dealing with this present crisis."

"I fully concur, Miss Rice. This is no time to play a Curtiss LeMay moment." said Ingrid, referring to a past U.S. Air Force general who had pushed for a preventive nuclear strike against the U.S.S.R. during the 1950s and 1960s.

President Bush then arrived in the Situation Room, making those already present rise from their chairs, with the uniformed military officers in the lot also saluting.

"At ease, ladies and gentlemen! Do we have everybody?"

"We are still missing CIA Director Webster, Mister President." answered his chief of staff, John Sununu. "However, he should be here very shortly."

"Then, we will wait for him: he will be crucial for this meeting."

Instead of sitting, Bush then walked to Ingrid, shaking hands with her while smiling.

"Ingrid, it is nice to see you again at the White House. Any chance that you could return to work here?"

"None, Mister President: my daughter is proving quite complicated to handle and I now have a boy to take care off on top of that."

"Too bad! Do you have any ideas on how we could respond to this crisis, Ingrid?"

"Quite a few, actually, Mister President. However, one thing that I am sure is that we should avoid war as much as possible: the risks of escalating to a full-blown nuclear war are too high."

"Agreed!" replied Bush, who then saw William Webster enter the Situation Room at a hurried pace. "Aah, here is Webster! We will now be able to start this meeting."

With everybody sitting down, Bush then looked at the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Crowe.

"Admiral, have all American ships and aircraft pulled away by now from Soviet territorial waters and airspace?"

"Yes, Mister President! I ordered our ships to stay at least 250 nautical miles from Soviet coasts, in order to prevent any misunderstanding or attempt by the Soviets to falsely accuse us of violating their waters."

"Excellent! How about our citizens presently inside the U.S.S.R., James?"

The Secretary of State, James Baker, had a glum expression as he answered his president.

"I am actually worried about that, Mister president. The delay that the Soviets gave us for our citizens to leave Soviet territory was unusually short and I am afraid that quite a few of our citizens won't be able to get out in time. I am in fact wondering if the shortness of that delay could have been intentional."

"I would say yes to that, Mister President." Said Condoleezza Rice after raising one hand. "Since the new Soviet leaders are accusing our CIA of placing that bomb on Red Square, I suspect that they would like to be able to arrest some of our citizens presently inside the U.S.S.R. and then make them confess to be CIA saboteurs before putting them through show trials."

"I concur with Miss Rice, Mister President." added Ingrid. "That would be a typical Stalinist tactic to invent scapegoats and justify their own actions in the Kremlin."

"And what could be the ultimate goals of those new Soviet leaders in your opinion, Ingrid?"

"To deflect the Soviet public opinion from the possibility that they were the ones who placed that bomb that killed the more moderate Soviet leaders, Mister President, and to justify ruling the country under harsh dictatorial measures under the pretext of taking emergency measures to defend against an imminent attack by us. Here, I must emphasize that what the rest of the World thinks of their actions is of no importance to these new leaders. The only thing important for them is to gain and keep the loyalty and support of the Soviet military and citizenry. For that, they will be ready to serve us the worse lies possible, as long as their own citizens gobble up those lies...or don't dare contradicting them."

"I see!" said Bush glumly. "So, we can't expect any rationality in the Soviets' actions to come, nor any honesty or decency, right?"

"Especially no honesty and decency, Mister President."

"Great! So, who are those new Soviet leaders?"

That was when Brent Scowcroft spoke up for the first time.

"Mister President, my expert on Soviet affairs, Miss Condoleezza Rice, has prepared an information brief about those leaders and has made copies of it for all of us."

"Then she may distribute them around this table."

"Thank you, Mister President!"

There were then a few minutes of relative silence as copies of the brief were distributed around and as the members of the National Security Council read it. At the end of his own reading, President Bush looked up at the members of his NSC, looking a bit discouraged.

"A fine bunch of old, dogmatic bastards indeed! Could we reason with such men?"

"I would answer 'no' to that, Mister President," answered Brent Scowcroft. "The only thing that these men respect and understand is strength. Unfortunately, with both of our countries possessing large nuclear arsenals, any use of force by us could well trigger a catastrophic nuclear exchange, in which everybody would lose."

"Are you telling me that we are powerless in bringing sense back to these men, Brent? What if, as Miss Rice and General Dows suggest, some of our citizens inside the U.S.S.R. are arrested, forced to confess to be CIA agents and then put on public trial? I am sorry, but I am not ready to let the whole of the United States be publicly humiliated and falsely accused in front of the whole World, even if that costs us a few dozen citizens. If we bend on that, then those Soviet leaders will feel free to do about everything they want after that."

"Mister President," then said Ingrid, "you are both right and wrong here. Let me explain. First, you are right in my opinion about not bending to any Soviet blackmail involving American citizens wrongly jailed in the U.S.S.R. The United States cannot be seen to capitulate to such barbaric tactics. However, you are wrong in us being powerless in pressuring those Soviet leaders, Mister President. Those leaders depend on the loyalty of the rank and file of the Soviet military, without which it would be impossible for them to stay in power. While Soviet public opposition will be much less critical for them, as they would not hesitate to react brutally to any public protests, they still would need to be cautious about not inflaming Soviet public opinion against them. After all, the members of the Soviet police and military forces are still human beings, with family members and friends composing the Soviet public, something reinforced by the fact that the huge majority of Soviet soldiers are conscripts. Excessive government brutality against unarmed protestors may well turn those conscripts into opponents of this new regime. If you are truly willing to risk losing those American citizens trapped inside the U.S.S.R., then I would suggest that we reply to any Soviet blackmail attempt by a complete embargo against the U.S.S.R. By this, I mean shutting down all the international borders around the Soviet Union and completely cutting the international traffic of both people and goods in and out of the U.S.S.R. If we manage to enroll all our allies in this, it would quickly strangle the Soviet economy, which is already in a rather bad shape, and in turn cause resentment within the U.S.S.R."

"Convincing all the neighbors of the Soviet Union to enforce such an economic blockade won't be easy, Ingrid." replied the Secretary of State, James Baker. "Some of those neighbors are officially neutral countries, like Finland and Sweden, while I doubt that China would be ready to backstab a fellow Communist country."

"Then, we will have to be persuasive, Secretary Baker." said Ingrid, her expression dead serious. "This is a make or break moment and we will have to show resolve if we don't want to become the puppets in this game of Soviet blackmail."

"What about our citizens who could end up in Soviet jails, tortured into confessing crimes they didn't commit? You said yourself that using military force would be too dangerous?" protested Vice-President Dan Quayle. "Are you really ready to abandon them?"

That earned him a sharp stare from Ingrid, who replied in a cold, warning tone.

"I never abandoned American citizens during my decades of service, Mister Vice-President, and I am not about to start now. What I said was that direct military action would be too dangerous, while we will need to apply pressure on the Soviets via an economic blockade. That doesn't mean that we can't use other means to save our citizens from becoming hostages and victims of the Soviets."

"And what kind of means does that leave us, General Dows?"

"I would prefer to discuss this in private with the President, if you don't mind, Mister Vice-President. Utter secrecy will be needed in this. Let's see first what the Soviets will do. Then we will be able to take firm decisions."

"Let it go, Dan!" then said Bush, understanding what Ingrid had in mind. He then looked around the table at the members of the NSC. "I believe that what General Dows said is most reasonable and logical. Let's first see what the Soviets will do, while we do everything possible to warn our citizens to get out of the U.S.S.R. within the next few hours. Then, we will reconvene and examine our response to whatever the Soviets did. I thus declare this meeting over. Ingrid, I will need to speak with you in the Oval Office."

As the participants to the meeting left the Situation Room, Dan Quayle went to see Brent Scowcroft, who was about to leave with Condoleezza Rice, and spoke to him in a near whisper.

"What kind of means does Dows have in mind, in your opinion, Brent?"

In response, Scowcroft gave him a no-nonsense look.



"It should be quite obvious, in view of her past history, Mister Vice-President. Remember when she was sent on a diplomatic mission to the Middle East years ago, to prevent an imminent Arab-Israeli war? Then, the Israeli nuclear research complex in Dimona literally vanished into thin air, while the Iraqi dictator, Saddam Hussein, was found dead in his palace, dead from a brain aneurism. We are talking about a woman who has basically stopped aging in the last four decades and who is known to be able to fly by herself and to heal via the touch of her hands. Whatever she has in mind is probably not some conventional means."

**16:53 (Moscow Time) / 08:53 (Washington Time)**

**Taxi, rolling towards the Moscow Sheremetyevo Airport**

**U.S.S.R.**

"Driver, could you please go faster?" asked in good but accented Russian the man in his late forties sitting in the back of the taxi rolling on the highway leading from downtown Moscow to the Sheremetyevo Airport. The driver looked at him through his rear-view mirror.

"I'm sorry, sir, but I am already at the speed limit. If I go faster, I will get a ticket." Arthur Woolworth, while exasperated and anxious, did not insist, as the man really was going as fast as he legally could. To his relief, he soon was able to see the terminals and hangars of the airport after a few more minutes. Another seven minutes and his taxi stopped in front of the main entrance to the international passenger terminal. Stepping out of the taxi, the travel agency manager paid the driver, leaving him a good tip, then grabbed his two suitcases and started walking towards the glass doors of the entrance. He was still some ten meters away from them when four burly men in cheap suits jumped on him, forcing him face down on the concrete surface while handcuffing his hands in his back.

"OW! WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS?"

"SHUT UP!" shouted one of his attackers, punctuating his order with a brutal punch to his head. Half knocked out, Woolworth was roughly put back on his feet, with a dark bag slipped over his head, then was marched to a waiting car, where he was unceremoniously stuffed into the trunk. The car, with the four bullies in it, then rolled out of its parking spot and took the highway leading back to Moscow.

The travel agency manager had plenty of time to worry about his fate while the car drove along. When it finally stopped and its engine was shut down, Arthur Woolworth was already deathly afraid of what would happen to him next. His four years in Moscow had told him plenty about the brutality and the complete lack of regards towards individual human rights shown by the Soviet police, as he had no doubt that his kidnappers were not simply criminals. The trunk of the car was then opened and two men grabbed him, pulling him out of the trunk and then forcing him to walk while still blinded by the hood. He heard at least two steel doors or grills open on his path, then was made to go down a long staircase made of either stone or concrete. Shortly after another steel door was opened for him and his escorts, a horrible scream of pain made him stiffen. His horror was compounded by the fact that the scream had been that of a woman.

“What are your bastards doing? How could you treat people like this?”

A vicious punch to the gut then made him both shut up and bend in two, while one of his kidnappers shouted at him.

“SILENCE! YOU WILL GET THE SAME TREATMENT AS THAT TRAITOR SOON ENOUGH.”

He was then dragged down a corridor, then into a room with a steel entrance door. What followed utterly panicked him: his kidnappers then proceeded in removing all his clothes, including his underwear, ripping or cutting away his shirt, since his hands were still tied in his back. Next, he was roughly backed to a cold concrete wall and a chain was attached to his hands and then pulled up, passing through an overhead pulley and painfully stretching his shoulder muscles and articulations. Another horrible female scream then made him jerk and he realized that he was now in the same room as the one in which the poor woman was being tortured. Worse, he soon realized that there were other prisoners in the room in addition to the woman and himself: he could hear the moans and crying of a number of men and women present in this room. Woolworth understood with horror that he and the other prisoners were kept here so that they could hear what happened to each of them as they would be tortured. From the questions shouted at the woman being tortured, he quickly understood that she was being asked to confess to be a traitor to the Soviet Union. The travel agency manager couldn't help start shaking with uncontrolled fear and he started whispering a prayer.

“Please, God, help me! Help us out of this Hell!”

**19:44 (Washington Time)**  
**326 South Grove Street, Aurora Hills**  
**Arlington, Virginia, U.S.A.**

"Ingrid, a taxi has stopped in front of a house and three persons are coming out of it and taking suitcases out of the trunk."

Intrigued by the warning from Leonardo, Ingrid walked quickly out of her kitchen and looked through the front windows of the lounge, effectively seeing a man and two women, all dressed in casual civilian clothes, who were now walking up her driveway while carrying suitcases. The identity of those three visitors then left her speechless for a second, before she ran to the front door and unlocked it, then ran to meet her visitors.

"LILYA! SASHA! NATALIA! WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?"

She then happily hugged in turn Lilya Litvak, Sasha Smirnov and his wife Natalia.

"My God, it is so good to see you again. But you could have called me before coming: I would then have been better prepared for your visit. What? You all look so glum. What is it?"

It was Major General Lilya Litvak, Commander of the Soviet Cosmonaut Corps and now 67-years-old, who answered her, sadness in her voice.

"We came to ask you for a refuge, Ingrid: we intend to ask for political asylum in the United States."

"Political asylum? But, Lilya, you must have been one of the most patriotic Soviet persons I ever met and you are a national heroine in the U.S.S.R."

"Not anymore it seems, Ingrid."

"Please, let's go all inside, instead of staying here in the open and exposed. We will be able to talk at will once in my house."

Inviting her three visitors inside and locking the front door behind them, Ingrid asked them to leave their suitcases in the lobby and led them into the adjacent living room, where Nancy and Leonardo looked with curiosity at the three Soviet visitors. The first thing that Ingrid did then was to present her children.

"Here are my children, Nancy and Leonardo. While I gave birth to Nancy on the PROMETHEUS, I adopted Leonardo less than a year ago, after he was orphaned. Kids, my I present to you Major General Lilya Litvak, Commander of the Soviet Cosmonaut

Corps, and Sasha and Natalia Smirnov. Sasha is a Soviet astronomer, while Natalia is a bio-chemist.”

“My God! Your daughter is positively beautiful, while your son is most handsome.” said Lilya, making Ingrid beam with pride.

“Thanks, Lilya! Please, sit down, all of you.”

Ingrid waited until her three visitors were sitting in her largest sofa before speaking again, with Nancy and Leonardo listening on.

“Now, tell me: what is pushing you to ask for political asylum, you, Sasha and Natalia?”

“We arrived three days ago in the United States in order to attend an international symposium on astronomy and Space exploration. Then came the news of the bombing in Moscow, followed quickly by an order for all Soviet citizens present in the United States to return at once to the U.S.S.R. I was in the process of booking a flight back to the U.S.S.R. when I got an anonymous phone call at my hotel room. My caller, without naming himself, said that he worked at the Soviet embassy in Washington and was calling me to warn me not to go back to the Soviet Union, because I would then be arrested and probably sent to a Siberian camp or executed the moment I would step back into the country. He further told me that anyone who had been part of a joint American-Soviet Space mission was now considered by Moscow to be of doubtful loyalty and would be treated like a potential traitor. I lived before under the rule of Stalin and knows that such an arbitrary treatment is quite possible, especially in view of the fact that the new leaders in the Kremlin are known as pro-Stalinists. I thus warned the Smirnovs, who were staying at the same hotel as me, and we collectively decided to stay in the United States. We chose to come to your house because I know that you have a lot of political influence in Washington and that we could fully count on your friendship and support.”

“And you will have my full support, my friends.” assured Ingrid. “Do you know if other visiting Soviet scientists or cosmonauts intend to ask for asylum?”

“Possibly! Me and Sasha then made a few quick phone calls to warn other Soviet participants to our symposium. We however don’t know how many of those other Soviets took our warning to heart.”

“Well, the important thing is that all three of you are now safe and out of possible danger. I propose that we now go install you for the night and help unpack before we talk further. Nancy, Leo, would you mind moving to the attic for the time being, so that

Sasha and Natalia could use your bedroom? As for you, Lilya, you will share my bedroom.”

“But...we can't ask your children to go sleep in an attic space just to accommodate us, Ingrid.” objected Natalia Smirnova, making Ingrid smile.

“Wait till you see how that attic space looks like, Natalia: Nancy and Leo routinely have slumber parties in there with young friends.”

“We don't mind at all, Misses Smirnova.” Cut in Nancy, grinning. “Our attic is a really fun place.”

“Then, we accept your kind offer, Ingrid.” said Sasha Smirnov.

“Excellent! Follow me upstairs with your suitcases. You come up too, kids!”

Half an hour was enough to have the three Soviet guests installed. Ingrid then showed them around her house, including the attic, which drew an impressed exclamation from both Lilya and Natalia.

“My God! It is true that this place looks like a fun one to sleep in. There even are complete beds, along with dressers, desks and sofas.”

“And you have no ideas how many kids' parties were held here, Natalia. Being moved to the attic is a near reward for Nancy and Leo. Well, time to go back down to the lounge. Once there, I will call the White House to warn President Bush to expect a wave of Soviet political asylum seekers.”

## **22:32 (Washington Time)**

### **Ingrid's lounge**

Having tucked both Nancy and Leo to bed in the attic and having returned to her lounge, Ingrid sat in an easy chair facing the sofa in which her new visitors sat and stared thoughtfully at them.

“My friends, I am afraid that the problem you are facing now will not disappear overnight, or even ever. After this, the Soviet Union will never be fully safe for you to return there.”

“We know and fully realize that, Ingrid.” said Sasha Smirnov, near tears. “I love Russia, but I can't risk my Natalia by returning there and trust again our government.”

“I'm afraid that my own case is even more precarious, Ingrid.” added Lilya Litvak. “My deep friendship with you is too well known in the U.S.S.R. I would also be

considered too dangerous by this new Moscow regime because of my popularity around the Soviet Union. Remember what happened to Marshal Zhukov after the end of the Great Patriotic War<sup>14</sup>: he was by then a national hero, but Stalin exiled him to a secondary command far away from Moscow, just because he was afraid that Zhukov's popularity would erode his own authority."

"Yes, I remember that quite well, Lilya. I met in private with Marshal Zhukov in Finland, while we participated to the peace talks which eventually put an end to the Eastern Europe War in 1955. We were able to discuss a bit about Stalin then. Now, if you are going to live and work in the United States from now on, I may be able to offer you a way to both keep you safer and to help you start a new life here."

"What do you have in mind, Ingrid?" asked Lilya.

"Please, take me seriously on this, all three of you. What I am proposing to you is to rejuvenate you, so that you are both harder to recognize and in top health before starting your new lives. I do have that power. Sasha, you were present when I healed that burned woman aboard the PROMETHEUS. You must know that I can do what I just said."

The astronomer soberly nodded his head while answering her.

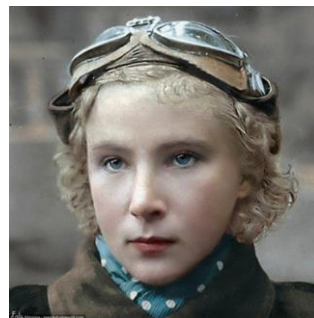
"I certainly remember that incident, Ingrid. If you say that you can rejuvenate us, then I believe you. On my part, I happily accept your offer."

"Me too!" added at once Natalia without hesitation.

"To what point can you rejuvenate us, Ingrid?" asked Lilya, attracting a gentle smile on Ingrid's lips.

"To as young an age as you would wish, Lilya. However, I already know what age you would want to return to. Please stand up, my friend."

Watched anxiously by the Smirnov, Ingrid also got up and glued her front to Lilya's front, passing her arms around the small Soviet woman and resting her forehead on top of her head. Ingrid then started glowing from the inside, with the glow enveloping Lilya as well and intensifying, to a point where Sasha and Natalia couldn't look directly at them due to the intensity of the glow. Both women glowed for about a minute before the halo enveloping them gradually diminished, then faded away. Both Smirnov gasped




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<sup>14</sup> Great Patriotic War: Name used by Russian citizens to designate World War Two.

when they were able to examine Lilya's face: from that of a 67-year-old woman, the veteran cosmonaut now had the look of a beautiful woman of about twenty.

Ingrid then spoke softly to her longtime Soviet friend.

"You are now again as you were in your days of glory as the 'White Rose of Stalingrad'. Here, come close to this mirror."

Following Ingrid to the said mirror, Lilya couldn't help open her mouth wide as she contemplated her young, wrinkle-free face and her long, curly blond hair. She also looked at her hands, whose skin was about as smooth as that of a baby, before happily hugging Ingrid.

"This is extraordinary, Ingrid! It's the best gift you could have possibly given me."

"And I was most happy to give it to such an exceptional woman as you, Lilya. Natalia, it's your turn."

The bio-chemist did not have to be told twice and hurried to Ingrid, gluing herself to her the way Lilya had been. Ingrid then started glowing for a second time, enveloping Natalia in the process. Her husband Sasha watched on with both anticipation and fascination, his heart racing. He was not disappointed when the two women stopped glowing: Natalia now had the look of a late teenage girl of maybe eighteen. Ingrid was however not finished with Natalia, cupping her breasts with her hands.

"Wait, Natalia: I am not finished with you. Time for an extra improvement for you."

Before Natalia could protest or ask her what she was doing, Ingrid made her hands glow for maybe twenty seconds. Sasha, who was watching very closely, opened his mouth in wonderment when he saw Natalia's breasts, already of fair size, visibly grow to an appreciable degree. He was nearly salivating as he eyed his wife in detail as she stepped away from Ingrid to go contemplate herself in the mirror. Both he and Lilya then realized something with a shock: Ingrid had also visibly rejuvenated and now looked like a late teenager of haunting beauty rather than like her previous 25-years-old looks as a beautiful woman.

"Ingrid, you also look younger now. In fact you are now even more gorgeous than before. How did that happen?"

"Simple! Whenever I use my powers to rejuvenate or heal someone, part of the effects spill on me. By the way, my daughter Nancy, who looked to you to be ten or eleven, is in



reality six and a half years-old. She has even more powers than me and accelerated herself her own physical growth, as she was tired of being called the baby of her class. I believe that it's your turn now, Sasha. Natalia, would you like some particular improvement in him which would please you?"

The bio-chemist liked her lips as she eyed her husband, a man in his late fifties.

"Let your perverted imagination loose, Ingrid."

"One stud, coming up!" replied Ingrid, grinning, before starting to glow again. At the end of the process, Natalia slowly walked with a sexy gait to her husband, now a handsome late teenage boy, then glued herself to him for a long kiss.

"Hello, husband!"

As she kissed him, her left hand discretely slipped inside his trousers for some exploration. What she felt was apparently to her satisfaction.

"That was a first-class job you just did, Ingrid. We can now really start a brand-new life together, Sasha and me."

Smiling at that, Ingrid then looked at Lilya.

"And you, Lilya? Do you have a man in your life? If you do, you never told me."

"I didn't tell you because I am like you: I was married to my aircraft...or spacecraft. Also, in Russia, when a woman marries, she can basically say goodbye to her professional independence. Very rare are the Soviet men who will pass their own careers behind that of their wives."

Ingrid sighed heavily at those words from her friend.

"Where did I hear that before? Oh, yes: everywhere!"

The three women in the room then giggled together, watched by a smiling Sasha.

"Damn! If I was in a night club with three girls which looked like you right now, I would go full party-mode."

Ingrid threw a knowing look at Natalia.

"I think that your husband is in need of a test drive, Natalia. Do you need a co-driver?"

"Naah! I will drive by myself, thank you. And you, Ingrid? You have the reputation of a one-guy-a-night girl."

"Sorry! I was too busy lately to find time to go through my rolodex. However, with this new look of mine, finding candidates shouldn't be too hard."

She then became serious again and spoke to her three guests.

"I think that we better go to bed now: tomorrow could be a long, difficult day."



**14:02 (Washington Time)**  
**Sunday, May 14, 1989 'C'**  
**Situation Room, the White House**  
**Washington, D.C.**

Ingrid was growing increasingly frustrated as this meeting of the NSC was entering its second hour, with nothing of substance having been decided yet. Instead, dozens of suggestions on how to react to the new Soviet leadership had been presented and debated, while nearly no new information had been circulated. The State Department couldn't even confirm how many Americans had been reported missing in the U.S.S.R., while only a handful of those confirmed missing had been properly identified. At this point, the meeting was basically going on with only 'maybes' to go on. Ingrid was about to comment on that out loud when a White House staffer rushed in to announce something.

"Excuse me for interrupting like this, Mister President, but we just got a call from our embassy in Finland. The Soviet television state news channel has just announced that fifteen Americans and four Soviet nationals will be judged for espionage and terrorism tomorrow in Moscow. That Soviet news bulletin also said that diplomatic representatives from friendly and neutral countries have been invited to attend the trial at the Central Moscow Court House, to quote show to the World Soviet justice at work against American state terrorism unquote."

"And we still don't even know who those Americans are?" asked President Bush, getting angry. "How could the Soviets be putting those poor people on trial so quickly?"

"Easy, Mister President." cut in Ingrid. "They have probably extracted via torture fake confessions from our arrested citizens and from those Soviets, who are probably local acquaintances or employees of those Americans. Tomorrow's trial will thus be the kind of 'show trial' so typical of Stalin's era, with the verdict and sentence basically decided in advance."

John Sununu, Bush's chief of staff, paled on hearing her pronouncement.

"My God! Then, what kind of sentence can our poor citizens expect?"

"In view of the gravity of the crimes they are accused of, then they will most probably be condemned to death, with the most lenient sentence they could hope for being life internment in some Siberian work camp. Let's not forget that this whole thing

was organized by those new Soviet leaders in order to deflect their citizens' attention from who really placed that bomb in Red Square and to humiliate the United States on the World stage while keeping the risks of a war with us as low as possible. The invitation to friendly and neutral diplomats to attend tomorrow's trial would tend to support my predictions."

"I am afraid that General Dows is correct about this, Mister President." said Condoleezza Rice, who nearly looked sick. "The worst part is that we can do very little to prevent this. Replying with military threats could very well escalate things to the level of a possible nuclear exchange. The Soviets know that we won't risk such an outcome just to save fifteen innocent Americans. This calculation can sound callous and even monstrous, but that's the way Soviets think."

In response, President Bush slammed a fist on the table.

"It will not be said that we will watch this outrage and insult to the United States while doing nothing. We may not react with military action to this, but we have other means to make those damn bastards pay. James, I want you to urgently contact our European allies and ask for their support in establishing an economic blockade of the U.S.S.R.: no Soviet goods out and no European goods in. The same will apply to banking operations. I want all Soviet bank accounts, market portfolios and properties in the United States to be frozen and seized. Tell our European allies that we would greatly appreciate if they would do the same on their side."

"I will get on it right away, Mister President." replied James Baker, the Secretary of State. "What about the neutral states bordering the Soviet Union, like Finland?"

"If you can convince them to help us, then the better. Admiral Crowe, as of now, I am ordering our forces to pass to DEFCON 2 and to be prepared to counter any Soviet military move against us or Europe."

"Yes, Mister President!"

"Well, I think that it is time to conclude this meeting, ladies and gentlemen. We won't accomplish anything more by staying here. I thus declare this meeting adjourned."

As the other members of the NSC and the President left the room, Ingrid stayed in her chair for a while, completely discouraged. Whatever the United States did now, fifteen innocent Americans who had already endured torture were going to be unjustly put to death or sentence to life to the frozen hells of Siberia and there was about nothing she could do to prevent that. Even worse, this could easily degenerate into a

catastrophic nuclear war was between the United States and the Soviet Union, something that the new Soviet leaders had obviously taken into account while planning their actions. While thinking desperately about a possible solution to this, an idea came to her mind, an idea that involved help from a quarter she had not approached for decades now. It was a most unorthodox one, but desperate times called for desperate measures.

Leaving the White House and walking to the parking lot where her aircar was, she got into it and flew off, heading towards her house in Arlington, on the other side of the Potomac River. She landed in her driveway some six minutes later and shut down her engine, then entered her house, to find her two children and three Soviet guests waiting expectantly for her.

"So, anything new happened, Ingrid?" asked Lilya Litvak, noticing her glum expression.

"Yes, but it is not good news."

Ingrid then resumed what had happened at the NSC meeting to the three Soviets. However, the strongest reaction to her words came from her daughter Nancy, who appeared to be positively scandalized by the situation.

"Fifteen innocent people were probably tortured into confessing crimes they did not commit and we are going to do nothing to save them? That sucks, Mommy!"

"Yes, it truly sucks, Nancy, but we can't risk war with the U.S.S.R. in order to try to save them. If we do go to war, they will still die, along with tens of thousands, possibly tens of millions more people on both sides. I refuse to contemplate that as a supposed solution."

"You are right, Ingrid." said Sasha Smirnov. "War is no solution to this. So, we are basically left powerless to prevent this, correct?"

"Not yet! I have one solution left: to call in help from higher. Nancy, you stay here and protect our guests. I should be back no later than tomorrow afternoon."

"Can I..." started to say Nancy, wanting to go with her. Ingrid then vanished suddenly into thin air, leaving all of them aghast.

## **CHAPTER 16 – SEEKING HELP**

**08:00 (New Zealand Time)**

**Monday, May 13, 2960 B.C.E. 'A'**

**Time Patrol mobile base, future site of Auckland**

**North Island, New Zealand**

Ingrid let out a sigh of relief when she found herself where she had wanted to be: she had not been sure that her special Time Patrol implants were still fully functional after all these years spent out of contact with the Time Patrol, an organization co-founded by her late adoptive mother, Nancy Laplante 'A', and dedicated to protecting known history from illegal time travel tampering. Ingrid had been a field agent of the Time Patrol for close to thirty years now, acting as a 'resident agent' for Timeline 'C', with the main task of watching for and countering any interference in that timeline by the now defunct Imperium. With the disappearance of the Imperium 'C', which had been erased from future history some sixteen years ago in her own biological time, her main mission as a resident agent had come to an end. While she was still officially a resident agent of the organization and still had her special field agent implants, which allowed her to travel through time and to manipulate time to her advantage, she had not come here or met other Time Patrol members for a good fifteen years. However, she now needed their help if she was going to save nineteen innocent lives and prevent a possible nuclear war in her timeline.

Walking up the sandy beach on which she had appeared and heading towards the huge metallic sphere constituting the mobile base of the Time Patrol, Ingrid exchanged greetings in passing with members of the Time Patrol and their family members who were sunbathing on the beach and who were probably mistaking her for one of her two timeline twins, Ingrid 'A' and Ingrid 'B', who had both been saved by Nancy Laplante during World War 2 and who had become field agents of the organization. Ingrid 'C' couldn't help hesitate and then change course when she saw Ken Dows 'B', the timeline twin of her late and only husband, Ken Dows 'C', who had been killed in the Philippines in 1941 'C' while fighting the Japanese. Her husband may

have been dead for 56 years of her biological time but she still cherished his memory and visited his grave every year at the Arlington National Cemetery. Stopping next to Ken 'B' and kneeling near his head, she bent down and kissed him on the lips with a passion that surprised him, although it also pleased him.

"Wow! What did I do to merit such a nice kiss, Ingrid? Uh, how come you look so young now?"

"It's because I am Ingrid 'C' and because I am now a Chosen of The One, with powers as great as those of Nancy 'A'. I came to seek the help of the Time Patrol to avoid a possible nuclear war in 1989 'C' between the United States and the Soviet Union and also to save innocent lives from imminent death."

Ken's smile faded at once, replaced by a somber expression as he stared into Ingrid's eyes. He then got up from his beach towel and picked it up while speaking.

"Then I will accompany you to Mike's office."

"Mike is still the Chief of Operations of the Time Patrol?"

"He still is, while Farah Tolkonen has accepted to become again our Chief Administrator some ten years ago, after first quitting her post following Nancy 'B's revolt."

Ingrid nodded her head at that, having been briefed in the past about those events. Nancy 'B', the timeline twin of her adoptive mother, had revolted and became an independent agent after her unwanted pregnancy from King Louis XIV had been poorly handled by Farah Tolkonen, who had accused Nancy 'B' of violating Time Patrol rules. As far as Ingrid knew, Nancy 'B' was still an independent agent living twin lives in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries.

Using an elevator cage to enter the huge, 600 meter-diameter sphere which constituted the mobile base of the Time Patrol, a base able to fly by itself and jump space-time at will in order to evade possible attackers, Ingrid and Ken went up to the level containing the executive offices of the organization, then walked down a wide circular corridor before stopping in front of a sliding door, where Ken rang a buzzer before entering. Both then found themselves in a comfortable but not overly luxurious office, where the sight of the big, handsome man sitting behind a work desk made Ingrid's heart race. Mike Crawford 'B' was her adoptive father and had been Nancy 'A's husband until her death in Kurdistan in Timeline 'A', when she had been killed by a

mortar bomb while she was doing her job as a war reporter. Mike, on his part, looked with surprise at her teenage face.

"Ingrid, how come you look so young? And are you Ingrid 'A' or Ingrid 'B'?"

"Neither, Mike! I am Ingrid 'C' and I came to ask for the help of the Time Patrol."

"Ingrid 'C'? Don't tell me that some lost Imperium 'C' warship has appeared in your time."

"No, not that, Mike. The trouble in my timeline is purely of local making. But first, I must do something."

Walking quickly around his desk, Ingrid then kissed Mike Crawford 'B', who did nothing to stop her. At the end of it, Ingrid unglued herself from him and looked at him with a somber expression.

"Mike, I just came from the year 1989 'C', from May 14 to be more exact, and there is a very real risk that a nuclear war could happen between the United States and the Soviet Union. I came to ask for the help of the Time Patrol to prevent such a war and also save some innocent lives at imminent risk of death."

Mike nodded his head and pointed at a set of two sofas and one low table in one corner of his office.

"Then, let's sit down and tell me about your problem, Ingrid."

With the three of them going to sit on the sofas, Ingrid then spent a few minutes to relate and explain what had been happening in her timeline, plus what was now at stake. At the end, Mike nodded once his head while staring into Ingrid's eyes.

"The Time Patrol will never allow a new nuclear war to happen, in whatever timeline. The Holocaust of 2035 'A' very nearly marked the end of Humanity and another similar war cannot be allowed. Besides, I suspect that The One will not allow that either. One of his goals when he empowered Nancy to become his Chosen was exactly to avoid such new nuclear war. You thus can count on the active help of the Time Patrol in this. Do you already have a plan on how to deal with this, Ingrid?"

"Yes, I do!" replied Ingrid before starting to explain what she had in mind.

**10:04 (Moscow Time) / 02:04 (Washington Time)**

**Monday, May 15, 1989 'C'**

**Courtroom Number One, Moscow Central Courthouse**

**Moscow, U.S.S.R.**

Chief Judge Anatoly Spasschuk harbored a dignified air as he and his two associate judges entered the courtroom via a back door and then walked behind the elevated bench to take their seats. He could see the various diplomats invited to watch the trial, sitting in the front spectators' benches. He had been told that they represented China, Cuba, Finland, France and Sweden. After knocking his gavel twice and calling the court to order, Spasschuk gave his first look at the nineteen accused, sixteen men and three women, held in large steel cages to one side of the courtroom, as was the standard in Soviet courtrooms. He had to hide his reaction on seeing the poor physical shape of all of them: he had expected them to have been roughed up by the KGB during their detention, but what he was seeing now was a collection of physically and mentally broken men and women, some of them moaning in pain and others crying quietly while sitting on their bench. Even for a Soviet courtroom, this already made this trial to look like what it really was: a politically-motivated show trial. Spasschuk, who had been a prosecutor in his younger years, some of them under the rule of Stalin, had seen or participated in plenty of such trials in the past. Still, he threw a severe look at the state prosecutor, a man he deeply loathed as someone with zero regard to true justice and who was a total sycophant of the Kremlin.

"The prosecution will now read the charges against the accused."

"Thank you, Your Honor! The charges against all nineteen defendants, fifteen of whom are American citizens, are terrorism, mass murder of Soviet officials, espionage and sabotage. Added to these charges in the case of the four Soviet defendants is the charge of high treason. All the accused have already signed confessions concerning their crimes."

*'Which means the death penalty for all of them.'* thought Spasschuk. Grabbing the list of names of the accused, which had small pictures attached next to each name, so that he could easily identify to whom he was speaking, he spoke in his microphone, with his voice coming from the loud speakers of the tribunal.

"The defendants will now rise in order to register their pleas in front of the court." What followed deeply shocked Spasschuk. While most of the accused rose to their feet, although with some difficulty, one young woman, an American reporter for the CBS network, stayed sitting and broke out crying after one attempt at getting up, prompting a question on a severe tone from Spasschuk.

"Why won't you stand up to give your plea, Miss Kasparova?"

"I...I can't, Your Honor! They drilled my kneecaps."

A wave of exclamations and gasps went around the courtroom, forcing Spasschuk into banging repeatedly his gavel.

"SILENCE! SILENCE IN THE COURTROOM, OR I WILL BE FORCED TO HAVE THE SPECTATORS REMOVED."

As relative silence slowly came back into the courtroom, Spasschuk discretely examined the expressions of the attending foreign diplomats. The French, Finnish and Swedish representatives looked both shocked and upset, while even the Cuban diplomat seemed disturbed. If those idiots in the Kremlin had hoped to gain some good propaganda out of this trial, then their scheme had just backfired on them. One of the MVD guards near the prisoners' cages then tried to force the American female reporter to stand up, succeeding only in making her let out a cry of pain that moved Spasschuk.

"GUARD, LEAVE THE WOMAN ALONE!"

As the woman bent down in pain, sobbing, something broke inside Spasschuk. When a newly licensed lawyer, he had been an idealistic young man full of patriotic elan. However, working within the Stalinist justice system had quickly disillusioned him in his dreams of equal justice for all. Realizing that his chances of bringing any significant changes by himself to the Soviet justice system were exactly zero, he had then chosen to go with the flow while doing his best to concentrate on criminal cases with no political overtones. In that he had succeeded brilliantly, rising steadily up the judicial ladder. Now, however, as Chief Judge of the Moscow District, he had been unable to avoid presiding this case. His own wife had died some five years ago, while their only son had been killed in 1953, in the failed attempt by Stalin to invade Poland. Then, one month ago, he had been diagnosed with incurable cancer, with less than a few months left to live, something only he and his doctor knew about. This was thus most probably the only chance left to him to preside over true justice. Using a sympathetic tone of voice, he spoke in his microphone, addressing the American female reporter.

"Miss Kasparov... Miss Kasparov, please look at me."

Surprised by his change of tone, the American woman strangled her sobbing as best she could and looked at him with eyes full of tears. Spasschuk then committed himself.

"Miss Kasparova, were you tortured into signing your confession?"

"Y...yes, Your Honor."

Before the state prosecutor, stunned, could react to that, Spasschuk then asked her another question.



"Do you honestly plea innocent or guilty, Miss Kasparova?"

"Innocent, Your Honor."

The state prosecutor then jumped to his feet, enraged and shouting out loud.

"I PROTEST, YOUR HONOR! THIS IS MOST IRREGULAR!"

"SIT DOWN, MISTER CHERNIKOV: YOU ARE OUT OF ORDER!" replied Spasschuk while banging repeatedly his gavel. Knowing that he now had very little time left to do what he wanted to do, he ignored the exclamations running around his courtroom and looked at another American defendant.

"Mister Woolworth, were you tortured into signing your confession and do you plea 'innocent' or 'guilty'?"

"I was tortured and I plea 'innocent', Your Honor."

Chernikov then had enough by now and shouted an order to two of the KGB guards who had brought the prisoners from their KGB prison.

"THE CHIEF JUDGE IS IN LEAGUE WITH THOSE AMERICAN TERRORISTS. ARREST HIM!"

A second man inside the courtroom then showed the kind of bravery which was near certain to bring him very big trouble, at least from the KGB. The MVD Starchina<sup>15</sup> standing next to the main entrance of the courtroom and who acted as the Sergeant at Arms raised and pointed his AK-74 assault rifle at the two KGB soldiers now running towards Spasschuk's high bench and fired twice, hitting both soldiers in the back and dropping them like broken puppets. His third bullet was for the state prosecutor, who was now producing a pistol with the clear intent to shoot Spasschuk, hitting him in the forehead and killing him. The two state television cameramen present in opposite corners of the courtroom, frozen with stupor and disbelief, took time to react to all that and involuntarily ended up transmitting live across the U.S.S.R. the first seconds of the drama. While one of them got cold feet and stopped filming, the other cameraman gathered his courage and continued filming as Spasschuk repeatedly banged his gavel and shouted for silence, succeeding after long seconds to return the courtroom to relative calm. He then looked at the accused while speaking forcefully in his microphone.

"IN VIEW OF THE IRREGULARITIES WHICH HAVE JUST BEEN UNMASKED AND IN VIEW OF THE GROSS VIOLATION OF THE INDIVIDUAL LEGAL RIGHTS OF

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<sup>15</sup> Starchina : Soviet senior NCO rank equivalent to that of a warrant officer.

THE ACCUSED, I DECLARE THEIR SIGNED CONFESSIONS TO BE NUL AND VOID AND FIND THE ACCUSATIONS AGAINST THEM WITHOUT MERIT. THE GUARDS WILL NOW FREE THE PRISONERS. SERGEANT AT ARMS, GET A DOCTOR TO LOOK AT THEIR WOUNDS.”

High above Moscow, inside a Time Patrol scoutship hiding behind an invisibility cloak, both Ingrid ‘C’ and Mike Crawford ‘B’ had been watching the trial via tiny spy probes which had positioned themselves in high corners of the courtroom, where they were practically impossible to spot. They had been waiting for the right moment to act but the totally unpredictable actions of Spasschuk and of his Sergeant at Arms had caught them completely off guard.

“Holy shit!” exclaimed Mike, as stunned as Ingrid was. “This judge has some huge balls! However, he probably just signed his own death warrant: those new leaders in the Kremlin will never pardon him for this.”

“Then, lets cut the head of the serpent right now, Mike. Get me into the Kremlin and I will put an end to this sorry episode.”

“I concur!” replied Mike before looking at Frida Winterer ‘B’, who was manning one of the surveillance stations inside the scoutship’s ground operations center.

“Frida, where are the new Kremlin masters right now?”

“The eight of them are assembled inside the Politburo conference room, where they had been watching live the TV coverage of the trial. Right now, they look more like a bunch of headless chickens than anything else.”

Approaching quickly Frida’s station, Ingrid read the space-time coordinates of that Politburo room, storing them in her micro-computer implanted at the base of her skull, then sent a mental command to her time distorter implant, fixed against the inside face of one of her dorsal spine’s vertebrae. She then disappeared in the blink of an eye from the deck of the operations center.

In the Politburo conference room inside the Kremlin’s Senate Building, rebuilt after the 1955 destruction of the original building by bombs dropped from Ingrid Dows’ plane, the unofficial head of the coup and new General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Valentin Pavlov, was literally mad with rage as the state television channel was continuing to show live images from the courtroom.

“WHAT ARE THOSE IDIOT CAMERAMEN WAITING TO STOP FILMING? THIS COULD INCITE PUBLIC PROTESTS AND EVEN MUTINIES AGAINST US. BORIS, EXPLAIN TO ME WHY YOUR MVD SOLDIERS TOOK THE SIDE OF THIS DAMN JUDGE IN THIS DEBACLE.”

“I...I just don't know, Valentin.” Stuttered the Minister of Interior, Boris Pougo, who was in charge of the MVD. Before Pavlov could shout again at him, a female voice then made all eight men present in the room turn abruptly to look towards one corner of the big room, where a teenage girl now stood.

“I know!”

“WHO THE HELL ARE YOU?” shouted Pavlov. Ingrid replied in a voice dripping with hatred.

“I am your death, you monstrous bastards.”

Before Pavlov or any of the other men could shout an alarm to the guards posted outside of the room, Ingrid unleashed a barrage of energy balls which vaporized the eight men, on top of turning half of the big room into smoking and burning debris. With her job done, Ingrid then disappeared again, jumping back to the waiting Time Patrol scoutship before the first guards could rush in.

**02:40 (Washington Time) / 10:40 (Moscow Time)**

**Monday, May 15, 1989 'C'**

**Attic space, 326 Sough Grove Street, Aurora Hills**

**Arlington, Virginia, U.S.A.**

Nancy was sleeping beside Leonardo, with both of them naked under the bedsheets, when a strong mental message woke her up with a startle.

*'NANCY, COME DOWN TO THE COURTYARD: WE HAVE MANY WOUNDED PEOPLE TO HEAL.'*

*'I'm coming, Mommy!'* replied Nancy at once, realizing that now was not the time to waste time by asking questions. Not bothering to put clothes on, she ran down the attic's staircase, then down the main staircase leading to the ground floor, running across the lounge and the kitchen before bursting out through the house's rear door. What she found in the courtyard was Ingrid, surrounded by close to twenty men and women lying on the grass and moaning. Ingrid was actually in the process of healing one of the women when Nancy arrived and she shouted at her daughter.

"Can you do a healing burst, Nancy?"

"Yes, I can, Mommy!" replied Nancy, who then came to a stop in the middle of the group of wounded people and closed her eyes while concentrating. Half a second later, a bright explosion of white light emanated from her body, extending into a radius of some fifteen meters and persisting for a few seconds before dissipating. Ingrid then smiled to her daughter as the people on the ground started looking around them, utterly disoriented and confused.

"Good job, Nancy. Now, you better go get some clothes on, before you offend some of our new guests."

"Okay, Mommy!" said Nancy, not sounding convinced, before returning into the house. The woman whom Ingrid had treated first got up on shaky legs and looked at her with confusion in her eyes.

"Where are we? How did we get here?"

"Where we are is in the rear courtyard of my house in Arlington, Virginia. How you and the others got here was through my supernatural powers. I am Ingrid Dows, ex-General Ingrid Dows. Welcome back to the United States, Miss Kasparova."

Completely overwhelmed and still a nervous wreck, the CBS reporter glued herself to Ingrid and cried without shame.

### **18:39 (Washington Time)**

**Tuesday, May 16, 1989 'C'**

#### **Ingrid's lounge**

Ingrid had squeezed herself between her three Soviet guests on her largest sofa facing her television set, while Nancy sat in the lap of Leonardo on another, smaller sofa. The set was switched to the CBS channel and they were all watching the evening news program, in which Ingrid and Nancy featured prominently. Right now, news commentator Dan Rather was interviewing Maria Kasparova, previously the Moscow correspondent for CBS.

"First, Maria, let me tell you how happy we all are to see you back safely in the United States. As you just heard, the situation inside the U.S.S.R. is now chaotic, with anti-coup forces trying to eliminate the few military and police units still supporting the now dead leaders of the coup which are said to have actually committed the bombing in Red Square which killed Secretary Gorbachev and President Yeltsin. Unfortunately, we

don't know if the very brave judge who declared you 'innocent' despite the heavy political pressure on him to conduct a sham trial is still alive or not. Can you tell us what you felt when he pronounced that verdict?"

"To put it simply, I just could not believe my ears at first. He was the first Soviet official since my arrest to talk to me with kindness and consideration and I will never forget him. His name is Spasschuk, I believe."

"Then, tell us what happened after he pronounced that verdict, Maria."

"The state prosecutor started protesting it but Judge Spasschuk rule him out of order and ignored him, then declared all the charges against me and the others as void due to irregularities and use of torture to extract our so-called confessions. That was when the state prosecutor ordered the KGB soldiers present to arrest Spasschuk, claiming that the judge was in league with us. Thankfully, the MVD guards present, who by the way form the regular Soviet police, defended Judge Spasschuk and shot the KGB soldiers, then freed us up."

"And what happened then?"

"Then, the MVD guards carried us to two of their trucks in order to bring us to the nearest hospital, so that we could get some medical treatment. That was the last time I saw Judge Spasschuk. Once in the MVD trucks, we started rolling towards the hospital. However, things got fuzzy after that. Somehow, I and the other accused lost consciousness while sitting in the back of those trucks as they were rolling. The next thing I saw when I regained consciousness was General Ingrid Dows, wearing a dark gray coverall and kneeling beside me on the lawn of her Arlington house's courtyard and with her hands glowing. She later told me that she was then healing me via her powers of touch-healing."

"What about the other Americans who had been arrested and tortured, where they with you, Maria?"

"Yes, Dan! All of them were lying on the grass of General Dows' courtyard. It was night then, since there is an eight-hour difference between Moscow and Washington. Then, Dows' young daughter, Nancy, ran out of the house, placed herself in the middle of our group and produced a burst of white light that nearly instantly healed all of us."

At that point, Dan Rather became even more focused as he asked his next question.

"You are saying that six-year-old Nancy Dows, who was already known to be able to fly by herself and throw balls of energy, healed all nineteen of you in an instant?"

"She actually healed eighteen persons with her burst of light: General Dows had already healed me when her daughter came to us."

"And how do you explain that a young girl could do that, Maria?"

Maria Kasparova's expression then became solemn and her tone of voice became nearly reverential.

"The only way I could describe that beautiful young girl is as an angel, Dan. There is no other word for her and the way she healed our group. General Dows also deserves to be called an angel, the way she healed me and, most importantly, because she was the one who transported all of us instantly from Moscow to Arlington."

Dan Rather was left speechless for a moment then before he could ask another question.

"Wait! You say that General Dows somehow transported you and eighteen other persons instantly over thousands of miles, from Moscow to her house in Arlington?"

Maria nodded gravely her head in response.

"That is what she told me after I woke up and was healed by her. I must emphasize that she and her courtyard were the first things I saw after losing consciousness in the back of the MVD truck in Moscow. All the other defendants with me told me the same afterwards, thus I have no other explanation to our miraculous rescue than that General Dows used some fantastic and quasi-divine powers to extract us from Moscow and bring us to her house. There is also something else I noticed about her."

"And what would that be, Maria?"

"That, last night, she looked even younger than usual. In fact, she now looks like a sixteen-years-old teenager, an extremely beautiful teenage girl to be more exact. Just remember that we all know that she was officially born in Berlin in September of 1925, which makes her to be 63 years old. She simply can't be called a simple woman, Dan, the same as her daughter can't be called a simple girl."

"Maria, some of our reporters sent to her house this morning to interview General Dows took pictures and films of her and also reported her enhanced youth. Our archivists have then compared old archive pictures of General Ingrid Dows to those morning pictures. Here is the result, dear viewers, with five pictures of her shown side-by-side."

Five color pictures then appeared in the background, with years and an age attached to each of them.

“Dear viewers, the first picture to the far left is General Ingrid Dows as she appeared in 1941 and at the true age of sixteen, as she started fighting in the Pacific as a fighter pilot, first as part of the Filipino Air Force, then as an American Army Air Force fighter pilot. She then quickly became our top air ace of the war, with a total confirmed of 132 victories by the time Germany capitulated and Japan was struck with British nuclear missiles. Here, I have to add that, during the Battle for Guadalcanal, then Major Dows was shot down and was gravely wounded. She ended dying on the operating table at the American field hospital in Henderson Field but was promptly resurrected by what can only be described as a divine intervention. The next picture to its right shows Ingrid Dows, now a major general, as she commanded in 1953 our Indochina Task Force. Here, her face mostly reflects her actual age of 27. On the third picture from the left, we see General Dows shortly after she was miraculously healed from serious burns to her face and upper torso in Israel in 1955. Please note that she again looks like a teenager of sixteen. On the fourth picture, taken in 1985, she has apparently aged by only a few years and looks to be about 24 or 25 years-old, although she was then in reality 59 years-old. Finally, on the fifth picture, taken of her this morning, she definitely looks again like a teenager of about sixteen, and this at the age of 63. You add to that her proven ability to remember 7,000 years’ worth of past incarnation, her demonstrated powers of telepathy, telekinesis, levitation, touch-healing and now the ability to move instantly between distant locations, and you end up with someone who you could hardly qualify as being a normal woman.”

“Dan,” cut in at once Maria Kasparova, “I would object to insisting only on the supernatural aspect of General Dows. More than anything in my mind is the fact that she is a genuine American national heroine, our most decorated ever military member and an incredibly brave woman full of compassion and kindness towards the innocent persons around her. She has already been instrumental or pivotal in bringing to an end or preventing many wars in the past decades. Now, she may just has saved us from possibly ending up in a nuclear war with the Soviet Union. Let’s admire her for the human being she is, rather than simply being in awe of her superpowers.”

“Wow! I like this Maria Kasparova.” said Ingrid, smiling to herself, just before Dan Rather spoke again.

“Well said, Maria. Now, there is another part to the fascinating history of General Ingrid Dows: her daughter Nancy, born in Space near Jupiter aboard the spaceship U.S.S. PROMETHEUS. She was born in November of 1982, a fact recorded by the

chief medical officer aboard the PROMETHEUS. One year ago, at the age of five, she became famous when she went to the rescue of a classmate who had been kidnapped at his school by a group of mobsters. Revealing that she could fly by herself, like her mother, and while demonstrating a stunning level of maturity, later explained by the fact that she can also remember her past incarnations, she caught up with the kidnappers, shot dead six of them and captured the last one. Then, a few days later, as another group of mobsters tried to assault her mother's house, she vaporized them by throwing at them balls of pure energy. Finally, young Nancy Dows healed in seconds last night up to eighteen adults. Here is a picture of six and a half years-old Nancy Dows, taken this morning."

"Ooh boy!" said softly Nancy when her picture appeared on the television screen. In turn, Ingrid gave her a sarcastic look.

"You can say that again, Nancy. I think that we should be resolved in seeing riots form wherever we will go from now on. I just hope that religious yahoos won't try to enroll us to become their new priestesses or goddesses."

That attracted to her a funny look from Natalia Smirnova, sitting against her left side.

"I wouldn't exactly blame them for that, in view of your fantastic powers, Ingrid. How else but through the will of God could you explain your powers?"

"The One is not God as you mean it, Natalia. Yes, he is a spiritual being with incredible powers but he did not create the Universe. Universe created itself. But let's hear the rest of what Dan Rather is saying."

"...thus safe to say that both Ingrid Dows and her daughter Nancy have God on their side, if they don't actually do his biddings."

"Aw crap! Why did you have to say this, Dan?" protested Ingrid, shouting at her television set. What Maria Kasparova said next did a bit to calm Ingrid down by amusing her.

"Maybe we should consider Ingrid and Nancy Dows as the first actual superheroes we know, with them being in the same class of our comic books superheroes? After all, Nancy has gained the nickname of 'Supergirl' at her school. May we should consider her mother to be a real life 'Wonder Woman'."

As Ingrid rolled her eyes at that, Nancy exploded in laughter. However, Lilya then said a few seconds later something that made Ingrid think deeply.



“Ingrid, if you and Nancy truly can heal people nearly instantly just by touching them, why not use that power to do some good and cut a lot of suffering by healing sick or wounded people as you go around?”

Ingrid, now looking very serious, thought her answer for a few seconds.

“Lilya, I would effectively love to do that, but then what would stop all kinds of people to hound me everywhere, imploring me to heal them or people they knew? I would never be able then to do anything else and God knows I want to continue working with technological projects.”

“Then, let’s do it anonymously, Mommy.” proposed Nancy, who had stopped laughing at once on hearing Lilya’s suggestion. “If you won’t do it, I will. In fact, I should start with a night visit of hospital intensive care wards for premature babies and those for sick children.”

That got Nancy a tender kiss from Leonardo.

“Nancy, I love it when you talk like this.”

Finally convinced, Ingrid nodded at her daughter.

“Then, take care of the children’s and babies’ wards around Washington, Nancy. Since I can teleport around, I will roam other countries around the World. Foreign babies and children deserve to be healed as much as American ones.”

## **CHAPTER 17 – TREASURE HUNT**

**08:48 (Washington Time)**

**Saturday, June 15, 1991 ‘C’**

**Airport shuttle minibus approaching**

**Miami Beach Marina, Florida**

**U.S.A.**



“Why didn’t Nancy’s mother travel with us to Miami?” asked to nobody in particular thirteen-years-old Lucy Wong. Nancy, sitting in the seat in front of her in the airport minibus, took on her to answer her friend and school classmate.

“Because she is already here in Miami, buying supplies and extra equipment for the boat she rented for our adventure sea trip in the Caribbean.”

“And what kind of boat did she rent, Nancy?” asked Thomas Blackburn, a black fourteen-years-old teenage boy who was part of their group of sixteen people, seven of which were parents and the rest teenagers or preteens. Jason Holloway, the father of another of Nancy’s seventh-grade classmates, who was the adult in charge of the group for their trip from Arlington to Miami, spoke up.

“She kept that a secret, Thomas. The only thing she told me was that we shouldn’t expect luxury or even modern comfort aboard our boat. I thus gather that it must be some kind of old or well-used boat, maybe even a fishing boat.”

“And why not rent a better boat then?” asked his daughter Elizabeth, another classmate of Nancy. “We are supposed to go on this trip to have fun. Why not be comfortable at the same time?”

Jason Holloway, a United States Navy commander presently chained to a desk at the Pentagon and who was truly looking forward to this sea trip, smiled in response.

“Because it wouldn’t be an adventure if you spent it while sunbathing on deck in a long chair and with a cold cocktail in your hands, Elizabeth. Part of learning in life is by going through some rough times. However, I am confident that Ingrid has not rented the

equivalent of a slave ship or some fishing trawler stinking of rotten fish. Aah, here is the marina ahead!”

All eyes went at once to the collection of boats docked to the multiple piers of the Miami Beach marina. Both the eyes and the mouth of Nancy then opened wide in shock at the sight of the largest boat docked in the marina.

“OH MY GOD! IT’S MY SHIP!”

“Your ship, Nancy?” said Mary Holloway, the mother of Elizabeth, William and Jane Holloway. Nancy was now nearly jumping up and down with joy while staring at the three-masted ship now visible in the harbor.

“IT’S A REPLICA OF THE GOLDEN HINDE, MY SHIP WHEN I WAS SIR FRANCIS DRAKE. SIR FRANCIS WAS ONE OF MY PAST INCARNATIONS.”

“Well, I’ll be!” said Jason Holloway, who was a history buff on top of being a navy officer. “If this is an exact replica of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century galleon Sir Francis Drake commanded, then expect really rough living conditions aboard, guys and girls. On the other hand, I can’t wait to get to sail it.”

That earned him at once a fierce rebuke from Nancy, now eight-years-old but looking like a stunningly beautiful and sexy thirteen-year-old teenager.

“Watch it, mister! That’s MY ship!”

“Uh, sorry, Captain!” quipped Jason, making the others in the minibus giggle at the exchange.

As soon as the minibus stopped at the foot of Pier ‘E’, Nancy jumped out of it and ran down the pier, past a double row of moored yachts and speed boats of various sizes, to finally stop next to the three-masted galleon. Looking up at the open deck of the ship, she saw her mother, standing beside two men she didn’t know.

“Mommy, you should have told me about this.”

“And ruin the best surprise I could give you? No way! Now, are you going to force your classmates to carry aboard your own luggage? We will talk once you are all aboard and ready to leave.”

“Uh, yes Mommy!” could only reply Nancy, chastised. She thus returned to the minibus and helped to unload the dozens of suitcases, bags and instrument-carrying cases in it, then carried her own backpack, kit bag and three instrument-carrying cases, which contained her qanun zither, barbat lute, tombak goblet drum, harp and flute, making two trips to carry all that aboard the GOLDEN HINDE. There, one of the nine

crewmembers, men ranging in age from nineteen to 35, directed her down to the underdeck, where she nearly had to bend over in order not to hit her head on the massive wooden beams supporting the upper deck. Ingrid was near the bow end of the underdeck, telling to the newly arrived where to put down their things. Ingrid told Nancy to keep her backpack and kit bag with her after dropping off her carrying cases, then pointed at a group of hammocks suspended from the ceiling beams of the underdeck.

"This is the section reserved for women and girls. Choose a hammock and drop your two bags next to it, then go back on the upper deck, where I will talk collectively to our group."

"Understood, Mommy! Uh, those crewmembers mostly seem to be British. How so?"

"Because this replica ship of the GOLDEN HINDE, while registered in Oregon, belongs to a British-based company that makes it tour various ports to attract paying visitors. However, business has not been very good lately for the owners of the ship, so they were more than happy to accept to rent it to me for our Panama treasure hunt. Apart from renting it, I also acquired much extra latest technology equipment to make our trip safer and less rough and also bought ample supplies for our voyage. You must have noticed a few large objects covered by canvas sheets on the deck, right?"

"I did, Mommy. Wasn't one of them your aircar, folded for storage?"

"Yes! Along with two modern zodiacs motorized inflatable boats also stored on the top deck, it will allow us to easily move between ship and shore."

"But this ship is way too narrow and obstructed by ropes and cables to allow your aircar to fully deploy and fly off directly from the deck, Mommy." Objected at once Nancy, making Ingrid nod.

"True! That's why you will find solidly hooked to one side of the ship a folded floating pontoon with inflatable airbags, which I have had especially made for this trip. Once off the Panama coast, we will put that floating pontoon on the surface of the sea, unfold it and inflate it, thus giving us a large, ten by twenty meters landing platform directly attached to the ship. We will then hoist down my aircar on that platform, along with our two zodiacs, and will then be in business."

"Mommy, you're brilliant! But all this must have cost you a small fortune, no?"

"Maybe, but making you happy by offering you this dream sea voyage is priceless, my sweet Nancy."

“Oh, Mommy, I love you so much!” replied Nancy before kissing her mother. She then went to the nearest hammock not yet taken and tied her kit bag and back pack inside her rolled hammock, the way past sailors had done with their personal kits, before going up on the upper deck.

A crowd of 25 men, women and children made up of both the crewmembers and the passengers was soon assembled on the upper deck, facing the stern-end poop deck, on which Ingrid and a mature man were standing. Ingrid started speaking by presenting the man next to her.

“Welcome all for this adventure trip to the Caribbean. I am ex-General Ingrid Dows, for those who haven’t read newspapers or listened to the radio during the last few decades, and I am the one who chartered this ship for this adventure trip. Next to me is the managing director of the GOLDEN HINDE, Mister Roddy Coleman, who commands the present regular crew of nine men. I will first let him tell you a bit about this most unusual ship. Mister Coleman?”

“Thank you, Misses Dows! The GOLDEN HINDE you presently stand on was built in Devon, England, in 1973 and is an exact replica of the original GOLDEN HINDE, the ship used by the famous English corsair and navigator Sir Francis Drake, starting in 1570. The only anachronism you would have found aboard, until that is four days ago, is a small diesel engine powering one screw and which helps us get in and out of harbors and maneuver when the wind is head-on. This ship has been touring various ports around Europe and the Americas, offering visits and day tours to paying visitors in order to finance the operations and maintenance costs of the ship. We were thus happy and thrilled to accept to give your group the chance to live an experience at sea that you will probably never live again.”

What Coleman didn’t say was that, with the way his business was going, the GOLDEN HINDE was probably going to be docked for good in a few years’ time, unable to afford the costly refit it would need in order to stay a safe ship to operate. The 60,000 dollars paid by Ingrid Dows to rent his ship for this long tour, not counting what she had spent on extra equipment and supplies, was going to go a long way to add a few more years of service to the GOLDEN HINDE. Ingrid then took over from him.

“Me and Mister Coleman have come to an amiable understanding about the operation of his ship during this tour. He will stay in overall command of the ship in terms of sailing and navigation, while his usual crew will operate and maintain the ship.

As the paying customer, I will liaise with him in deciding where we go and stop, both at sea and on land, and will offer him the services of those among the passengers who are willing and eager to help operate the ship, if those passengers have enough notions about how to operate a sailing ship to help out in a safe manner. We are lucky in having with us U.S. Navy Commander Jason Holloway, presently chained to a desk at the Pentagon, who can assist by functioning as a relief deck officer and pilot. We also have another passenger who is fully qualified to take the helm of this ship. Mister Coleman, I am sorry if I have hidden this from you until now, but I wanted to make sure that no hordes of reporters and TV crews would descend on this ship before its departure. My own daughter Nancy, while only eight-years-old biologically, holds like me a number of superpowers, including the ability to remember in full details her past incarnations. During the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, Nancy's soul lived in the body of Sir Francis Drake himself, the commander of the original GOLDEN HINDE. While she doesn't have a modern sailing license to prove it, my Nancy is thus fully capable of acting as an alternate captain to this ship."

Ingrid then paused for a moment as the crewmembers exchanged stunned looks and exclamations. Once relative silence had returned, she continued her speech.

"Having my daughter's memories as Sir Francis Drake will also help us in another way during our treasure hunt adventure. Contrary to what you may have believed up to now, this will be a true treasure hunt, guided to buried treasures in and off Panama by the memories of Sir Francis Drake himself. Now, before you start dreaming about all becoming millionaires, I must warn you that the laws about treasure troves in Panama state that everything found goes to the state of Panama. However, before you have thoughts of shutting your mouths and grab some of the gold and silver before returning to the United States, something that would expose you to legal pursuits from the Panama government, I was able to discuss with Panama government representatives about our adventure quest. Probably thanks to my reputation, I was able to obtain a derogation from the usual rules about found treasures, a derogation signed by no less than the President of Panama himself. Instead of grabbing everything, the government of Panama agreed, as a very special favor, to let us keep two percent of what we will find, with the rest going to the Panama Maritime Historical Foundation."

"Two percent? That's not much really, Ingrid." Objected Elizabeth Holloway, making Ingrid smile enigmatically.

"Elizabeth, how much does two percent of twenty tons of gold and silver represent?"

Gasps greeted those words, among the crewmembers and passengers as well as with Roddy Coleman. With now the undivided attention of the whole group, Ingrid continued on.

"If we are successful and actually find some or all of that gold and silver, half of that two percent finder's fee, minus what I already paid him for renting his ship, will go to Mister Coleman's company, to help put his ship into an extensive refit. The rest will be split between all the passengers and crewmembers, save of course for Mister Coleman, who will already have received a full one percent of our finder's fee. That is not all, however!"

With her listeners now hooked to her every word, Ingrid then spoke in a most sober tone.

"While off Panama, we will do more than simply search for treasures, ladies and gentlemen: we will also search for the last resting place of Sir Francis Drake, who died of dysentery on his ship on January 27 of 1596. He was then buried at sea off Portobello, Panama, tucked inside a lead coffin and reputedly while wearing his armored breastplate. This is why I also brought aboard complete sets of diving gear, so that we could search for his coffin. If we ever find it, then we have the express permission of the President of Panama to carry his coffin back to England, so that he could be buried there as a national hero."

Coleman and the British sailors of his crew greeted that announcement with wild cheers.

Less than one hour later, after a command meeting between Ingrid, Roddy Coleman, Jason Holloway and young Nancy, called in order to discuss their route and the meteorological conditions predicted along the way, the GOLDEN HINDE left the Miami Beach Marina under diesel power, its square sails still unfurled. For that occasion, Roddy Coleman proved a true gentleman and let Nancy take the helm and command the ship while it sailed out of the harbor, with hundreds of spectators along the shore and on surrounding boats taking pictures of her and of the galleon. Ingrid, standing with the other passengers on the main upper deck, nearly felt ready to shed tears on seeing the happy expression on her daughter's face as she was at the helm of the GOLDEN HINDE. Ingrid then added to the dramatic sense of the moment by firing one of the fully functioning cannons of the galleon, using a blank black powder charge to salute the Miami Coast Guard station as they passed by it.

As their ship started following the coast once out of the harbor, sailing South-southwest along the Florida Keys, Roddy Coleman stayed near Nancy, who was manning the ship's wheel, ostensibly helping her by reading the local nautical charts and warning her about sandbars and shallow waters. In reality, he was standing near her in order to quickly correct her or take over from her if she did a serious mistake. However, she proved to be in need of no help by showing herself to be at least as good a sailor and ship handler as Coleman, who especially appreciated how expert she proved to be in adjusting the angles and surfaces of the ship's sails in order to use the available winds with the utmost efficiency. Thoroughly impressed by her level of seamanship, Coleman let her stay at the wheel until nightfall, when they were halfway to Key West, with only short breaks for her for eating and going to the ship's latrines.

At about seven in the evening, with the Sun getting low on the horizon, Ingrid took a waterproof cover off one of the extra pieces of equipment she had bought in Miami to make life less rough on the replica ship: a propane-burning combined BBQ grill-stove-oven with pivoting protective cover, which had been solidly attached to a protected part of the upper deck rather than inside the underdeck, in order to minimize the danger of causing a fire aboard the wooden ship. While she lit up the grill, Commander Jason Holloway enlisted the help of the two teenage boys of the group, Leonardo Dows-Bocelli and Thomas Blackburn, to go down in the hold, where they took a quantity of meat and cold drinks from a small refrigerator powered by solar panels during sunny days and by battery power at night, with a portable diesel generator providing backup power. The eyes of the ship's regular crewmembers lit up on seeing the dozens of cold beers brought up to the upper deck for supper. With both passengers and crewmembers able to enjoy a nice sunset and a calm sea while eating, the mood was already high when Thomas Blackburn took out his big radio/tape player and cranked up the volume to play a collection of the latest pop and rock songs, starting a teenage dance party on the upper deck. Since there were only two teenage boys for six teenage girls among the passengers, four of the younger crewmen were invited to dance as well, something they accepted with glee. The older crewmen were not forgotten either, since there were six mothers aboard but only one father. The only crewman that ended not dancing was Roddy Coleman, who stayed at the wheel of the ship while the party went on. He was



however not forgotten, as Ingrid came up on the poop deck to bring him a cold beer, which he accepted with a smile.

"Thanks, Ingrid! I must say that this voyage is starting on the right foot: moderate seas, good food, cold beer."

"And lots of pretty girls?"

"Well, those teenagers are nice-looking but really a bit too young for me."

"And me? I'm 65, after all."

Coleman sighed heavily as he contemplated the youthful face and well-curved, sexy body of Ingrid.

"It is nearly impossible to believe that you are 65, Ingrid, not with your teenage body and face. But someone must stay at the helm of the ship, so I must pass duty first, although I would love to have a dance with you."

"Well, we still could do a slow dance, glued to each other, Roddy."

Ingrid then slipped under his extended arms, which were holding the ship's wheel, and rested her back against it before rolling up her T-shirt, exposing her nude breasts and making the man's eyes pop wide open. Next, she passed her arms around his torso and pulled him against her, sandwiching herself between the wheel and Coleman.

"How are you now, Roddy?"

"I'm in heaven!" replied the tour manager, all smiles.

"You don't need both of your hands on the wheel, you know. Explore as you wish while I do the same with you." said Ingrid as she unzipped his fly, then inserted both hands inside his shorts, making him suck air in as she started to play with him. It was then Coleman's turn to become active, first fondling with one hand her right breast, then slipping it inside her bikini bottom's front to rub her clitoris. Doing his best to at least keep the ship on course while they stimulated each other, Coleman's breathing became heavy as Ingrid's fingers expertly worked on him while also pinching the base of his penis, preventing him from ejaculating before she could herself attain orgasm. Only after she climaxed did Ingrid release her hold, making the man's knees nearly collapse as he groaned with pleasure. They then exchanged a kiss before Coleman smiled to Ingrid.

"Helm duty is much more fun this way, I must say, Ingrid."

"Glad to be of help, Roddy." Replied Ingrid before going back down on the main upper deck, leaving the ship's manager to his helmsman's duties.

On Nancy's part, she also didn't limit herself to dancing that evening and left the upper deck after the first few dances. Half a minute later, fourteen-year-old Thomas Blackburn, a solid, athletic teenage boy who liked to play football, joined her inside a small storage compartment near the bow. Thomas couldn't help have an immediate reaction on seeing that Nancy had already removed her bikini and lay naked on top of a pile of folded canvas sheets. She then invited him in a soft voice to come closer.

"Come and join me, Tom. Did you ever sleep with a girl before?"

"Uh, no!" replied the boy, his eyes glued to her naked body.

"Then, let me teach you a few things about girls."

### **10:19 (Washington Time)**

**Sunday, June 16, 1991 'C'**

**Poop deck of the GOLDEN HINDE**

**Exiting the Florida Strait, past Key West**

**Entering the Gulf of Mexico**

Commander Jason Holloway was at the wheel of their ship as Key West, the last island of the Florida Keys, was disappearing on the northeast horizon. Roddy Coleman was still sleeping, after being at the helm all night, while young Nancy was on the main upper deck, teaching her classmates on how to operate a sailing ship. That scene made Ingrid, standing with Mary Holloway next to Jason Holloway on the poop deck, smile in amusement.

"When I gave birth to Nancy on the PROMETHEUS, I would have never believed that I would see her one day show to other kids how to operate the sails of a galleon."

"Yeah, it does look quite out of the ordinary." replied Jason. "Can you do me a favor, Ingrid, and check our position with your GPS unit, then mark our position on the chart?"

"No problem, Jason!"

Going to a large plastic crate fixed to the guardrails separating the poop deck from the main upper deck, which was some 1.5 meter lower than the poop deck, Ingrid opened it and took out a hand-held GPS locator unit. Powering it and waiting for a latitude and longitude position to appear on its small viewing screen, Ingrid then noted that position down, along with the precise time, then marked it with a colored pencil on the nautical

chart laid on a small table near the ship's wheel and covered by a transparent plastic pane meant to protect it from rain and seawater.

"Okay, Jason! We are here, some 32 nautical miles southwest of Key West, on course and well within international waters. Keep our present course on 250 magnetic."

"250 magnetic, aye, Captain!" replied Jason, being facetious.

Some four minutes later, as Nancy was still teaching the art of orienting sails to the wind to her classmates, Jennifer Wong, the mother of Lucy Wong, shouted down from the crow's nest up the main mast, where she had been playing look-out with the help of a pair of binoculars.

"SMALL BOAT APPROACHING FROM OUR NINE O'CLOCK! I CAN ALSO SEE ANOTHER BOAT SOME DISTANCE BEHIND IT, ALSO APPROACHING FROM NINE O'CLOCK."

"That's bizarre!" said Jason as he tried to see the approaching boat in the distance, but without success. "Normally, the ship traffic in the Florida Strait is along an East-West line, not along a North-South line. There is only the Cuban coast to our South and there is no ship traffic between Cuba and the United States, due to our embargo on Cuba."

A thought then struck Ingrid's mind.

"What about refugee boats, Jason? Cuban refugees are still accepted automatically inside the United States, no?"

"Those that make it, yes. However, many of those would-be refugees seeking asylum in the United States and coming by boat drown at sea, or are intercepted by Cuban patrol boats and forcefully returned to Cuba."

Ingrid then took a decision and gave an order to Jason before running down the deck towards the main mast.

"Turn hard port to go meet that first boat, Jason. I am going to go up the main mast to better look from the crow's nest."

Ingrid was already starting to climb the rope ladders leading to the main mast's crow's nest when the GOLDEN HINDE started to turn hard to port. Nancy also reacted to that and shouted orders at her classmates and at the crewmen present on deck.

"UNFURL ALL SAILS! TACK THEM TO TWO-THIRD PORT WINDS!"

Somehow, the hard turn woke up Roddy Coleman, who came up on the poop deck as his ship was heading southwards at best speed.

"What's up, Jason? Why did we change course?"

"A small boat is approaching from the direction of Cuba, with another boat behind it in the distance. Ingrid thinks that the nearest boat could be transporting Cuban refugees. She went up the main mast to better see what we are dealing with."

Just as he had said that, Ingrid shouted down from the main crow's nest.

"THE NEAREST BOAT LOOKS LIKE SOME OLD FISHING BOAT AND ITS DECK IS POSITIVELY CRAMMED WITH PEOPLE. THE SECOND BOAT IS AN ARMED PATROL BOAT, PROBABLY CUBAN. YOU BETTER PASS THIS BY RADIO TO THE COAST GUARD, JASON."

"WILL DO RIGHT AWAY, INGRID!"

Roddy Coleman then patted Jason's shoulder.

"Go make that call, Jason. I will take the wheel."

"Thanks!"

As Jason went down into the officer's wardroom, where their radio set was, Roddy shouted orders to his crewmen on deck.

"DEPLOY BOTH OUR PORT AND STARBOARD SIDE ACCESS LADDERS! JACK, BILL, GO GET SOME FRESH WATER, BLANKETS AND OUR FIRST AID KIT AND BRING THEM UP TO THE UPPER DECK. EVERYBODY, BE PREPARED TO RECEIVE POSSIBLE CUBAN REFUGEES."

A few minutes later, the GOLDEN HINDE was turning again, this time to hard starboard, while furling its sails in order to stop. The fishing boat, which was filled with people to the point of nearly sinking, soon got side by side with the galleon, with Coleman's crewmembers immediately throwing mooring ropes down to help the two boats stay together. Nancy then shouted down in Spanish to the people on the fishing boat, which included small children and even babies.

"START CLIMBING ABOARD, QUICKLY! WE WILL LOWER BASKETS FOR THE BABIES AND SMALL CHILDREN."

The muffled roar of the auxiliary diesel engine starting up was then heard, telling Nancy that Coleman was standing ready to speed away at a moment's notice. Unfortunately, she could see already that the Cuban patrol boat, coming at full speed, would be here well before all the refugees aboard the fishing boat could climb aboard the GOLDEN HINDE. She thus looked up to shout at Ingrid.

“MOTHER, THAT PATROL BOAT WILL BE HERE SOON. WHAT SHOULD WE DO!”

“WAIT, I’M COMING DOWN!”

Instead of climbing down via the rope ladders of the ship, Ingrid simply jumped out of the crow’s nest platform and used her power of levitation to break her fall at the last moment, making quite a few refugees shout with horror, having expected her to break her legs on landing. As she was running to join Nancy at the port side bulwark, she shouted an order to Coleman.

“TELL THE COAST GUARD THAT WE ARE RESCUING CUBAN REFUGEES BUT THAT A CUBAN PATROL BOAT IS NOW APPROACHING US IN INTERNATIONAL WATERS. GIVE THE COAST GUARD OUR LATEST POSITION AT THE SAME TIME.”

Next, she looked down at the crowded deck of the fishing boat, where some of the adult refugees, near panic, were pushing away the mothers with babies and small children in order to climb first aboard the ship. That actually didn’t surprise her one bit: fear and panic often made the worst of a person come out in the open. Something had to be done to accelerate the boarding. She thus looked at her daughter.

“Nancy, use your power of telekinesis and lift those children and babies directly to our main deck. I will do the same.”

“Got it!”

However, Ingrid shouted a warning in Spanish at the refugees before starting to use her powers.

“DO NOT PANIC IF YOU SEE YOUR CHILDREN FLY UP AND LET THEM GO UP: WE ARE PULLING THEM UP.”

Ingrid then concentrated on a small baby held by a woman on the fishing boat and made it fly up towards her, attracting exclamations from the stunned refugees. The moment that the baby was in her arms, she passed it to Sung Park, the mother of Kimi Park.

“Hold that baby for the moment, Sung!”

Ingrid then concentrated on another baby, bringing it up aboard while Nancy did the same with a small toddler girl. In the meantime, Roddy Coleman had grabbed a signal lamp and was flashing a message to the approaching Cuban patrol boat.

TO CUBAN PATROL BOAT: YOU ARE IN INTERNATIONAL WATERS. TURN AROUND IMMEDIATELY AND DO NOT TRY TO INTERFERE. THE U.S. COAST GUARD HAS BEEN ALERTED.

A few seconds later, he got a response, also by signal lamp, from the patrol boat, which was now less than 600 meters away.

STOP TAKING CRIMINALS ABOARD YOUR SHIP OR WE WILL OPEN FIRE.”

“The bastards!” muttered Coleman to himself. “They know that they are in the wrong but are trying to scare us into abandoning those people and running away.”

He thus sent a second message by signal lamp.

“TURN AWAY NOW, OR THE U.S. COAST GUARD WILL BE FORCED TO SINK YOU. RETURN TO CUBAN WATERS AT ONCE.”

This time he didn't get a response message. However, the patrol boat continued to approach at top speed. Coleman calculated that they still had maybe two minutes at most before the patrol boat came alongside the fishing boat. That wouldn't be long enough to complete the transfer of refugees, by a far shot. Ingrid understood that as well and decided to change tactics. Stopping to pull up babies and children for a moment, she concentrated her power of telekinesis on the approaching patrol boat, making an invisible hand push against one side on the bow of the motor boat. To the dismay of the Cuban helmsman, he suddenly felt his boat escape his control, veering to starboard by itself as if it was some kind of haunted ship with a will of its own. The invectives from his furious captain didn't help one bit as he kept turning his wheel to the left, with no apparent effect. The captain then pushed the helmsman aside and took place behind the wheel, trying to turn towards the GOLDEN HIND. Enraged at not succeeding himself, he then gave an order to his sailor manning his bow heavy machine gun.

“FIRE A WARNING SALVO AT THAT SHIP!”

The forward gunner obeyed him at once, firing a three-round burst from his 14.5mm heavy machine gun. The heavy bullets zipped by the galleon's bowsprit sail, making young Nancy stare angrily at the patrol boat.

“So, you want to play that game, you assholes? Then let me play too!”

She then concentrated her mind on the forward machine gun of the Cuban boat and on its gunner. The Cuban captain, still trying to steer his boat back towards the galleon, suddenly saw his forward heavy machine gun swing around and point directly at the pilot house, where he was with the helmsman.

“Ay, coño<sup>16</sup>!”

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<sup>16</sup> Ay, coño! The Latino equivalent of saying ‘Oh shit!’

He and the helmsman just had time to throw themselves on the deck before the 14.5mm machine gun opened fire in an apparently uncontrolled pattern, shattering all the windows of the pilot house and reducing that superstructure to Swiss cheese. The next long burst from the heavy machine gun was directed at the deck of the patrol boat, with the slugs easily piercing through and through its thin hull and creating multiple major water leaks. Before the forward gunner could try to defend his actions with his captain, the latter, totally infuriated, shot him dead with his pistol. That however did not save the patrol boat from sinking quickly afterwards, with the Cuban sailors having to scramble in a hurry aboard a rubber life raft.

Aboard the GOLDEN HINDE, Roddy Coleman watched that strange spectacle with stunned disbelief at first, then burst out in laughter.

"Those idiots mutinied and shot at each other! GOOD FOR YOU, ASSHOLES!" He then told Jason Holloway about the whole episode when the Navy commander came back up on the poop deck. Jason also laughed on hearing that story, then pointed at the Cuban sailors in their life raft, floating some 300 meters away from the galleon.

"By the laws of the sea, we would be obliged to rescue those Cubans as well, Roddy. We just can't abandon them in the middle of the ocean."

"After they shot at us and then sank their own boat? Do we really have to retrieve them, Jason? Once aboard, they could well try to seize control of our ship and force us to go to Cuba."

"Hum, you are right about that. Let's stay here and wait for the Coast Guard to show up while keeping them away from our ship. I will go send another radio message to the Coast Guard. At least, this will give us plenty of time to transfer those refugees aboard our ship."

"Agreed! I will keep an eye on these idiots in the meantime."

The first U.S. Coast Guard boat, a small fast patrol boat armed with machine guns, arrived on the scene two hours later, followed another two hours later by a much larger cutter armed with medium guns. That gave ample time to the crew and passengers of the GOLDEN HINDE to prepare and eat lunch, feeding as well the over 74 refugees who had been cramming the decks of the old fishing boat they had used to flee Cuba. A Coast Guard team led by a young lieutenant then visited the GOLDEN HINDE to take the depositions of its crew and interview quickly its newest passengers,

while the Coast Guard fast patrol boat picked up the stranded Cuban sailors, putting them under arrest for acts amounting to piracy on the high seas. Roddy Coleman, in accord with Ingrid, then decided to turn and sail for Key West, in order to replenish their reserves of food, depleted by the need to feed the 74 refugees. Ingrid actually saw a good side to that delay.

“Hey, maybe you will be able to give a tour of your ship to paying visitors while I go buy food in Key West, Roddy.”

“Hell, you’re right, Ingrid!” replied the ship manager, breaking into a grin.

### **17:03 (Washington Time)**

#### **Galleon Marina, Key West**

#### **Florida**

The GOLDEN HINDED ended up docking at the end of the afternoon at the most aptly-named (in this case) Galleon Marina of Key West, the southernmost part of the continental United States. A happy Roddy Coleman saw at once a crowd of curious onlookers and tourists gather on the dock at which he moored his ship, with many coming aboard as soon as he put up on display his big sign advertising paying tours of the galleon. As for Ingrid and her group of students and parents, they disembarked and went to take rooms for the night at the nearby Key West Harbor Inn, where they were going to be able to enjoy hot showers, an amenity not found on 16<sup>th</sup> Century galleons. Ingrid then undertook a wild shopping trip to a local supermarket, helped by the mothers in her group while Jason Holloway took charge of the teenagers and preteens at their hotel. With Ingrid paying the bill, they bought a lot of frozen meat, canned and non-perishable food, plus some extra thermos camping food containers and dozens of bags of ice cubes, bringing the lot back to the ship for storage in its hold. Ingrid also visited a liquor store before departure the next morning, when it reopened after its usual Sunday closure. Thus fully resupplied, the GOLDEN HINDE took to sea again in mid-morning on Monday, June 17.

Two and a half days later, on late afternoon of Wednesday, the GOLDEN HINDE entered the Yucatan Strait after turning South-southeast once the coast of Yucatan had appeared on the horizon and sailed down the Caribbean Sea, heading towards the coast of Panama. Sailing while keeping some distance with the coasts of Honduras.



Nicaragua and Costa Rica, the galleon finally arrived after sunset at its intended destination, the small town of Nombre de Dios, on the northern, Caribbean coast of Panama, after a 1,200 nautical mile-voyage from Key West that took them a good seven days.

### **06:03 (Panama Time)**

**Monday, June 24, 1991 'C'**

#### **Floating landing platform of the GOLDEN HINDE**

**Anchored off the coast to the northwest of Nombre de Dios**

**Caribbean coast of Panama**

With the Sun now providing enough light to be able to see clearly around, Ingrid took place in the pilot's seat of her aircar, now resting on the floating landing platform they had inflated and deployed last night after arriving off Nombre de Dios. The platform had been deployed on the starboard side of the ship, which faced the shoreline and thus provided some protection to the platform from the wind and waves coming from the open sea. Young Nancy, Leonardo, Thomas Blackburn and Jason Holloway also took place inside the aircar, with Nancy taking the front passenger seat, so she could have a good field of view for this first aerial reconnaissance flight. As Ingrid switched on her 700-horsepower piston engine and made her four ducted propellers start to turn, Thomas asked her a question from his rear seat.

"Why did we have to leave so early in the morning, Ingrid?"

"To fly off as discretely as possible, Tom. That is also why we didn't anchor off in direct sight of the town of Nombre de Dios. We don't want to attract a crowd of curious onlookers while we search for Drake's treasure, Tom. We will keep our searches as discrete as possible, and that until we are ready to go present our finds, if any, to the Department of History in Panama. While the understanding between the local government and me is for us to be able to keep a two percent finder's fee on our finds, I insisted on being able to complete our searches before we bring our finds to the capital, and this to avoid very possible indiscretions which could attract the unhealthy attention of some very unscrupulous people. Believe me, Tom, when I say that a lot of people would be ready to kill for a few kilos of gold and silver, let alone a few tons. The Panamean official with whom I discussed this deal was also very conscious about the risk of such indiscretions, which is why he agreed to our deal and put it on paper, with

his President signing in on it. Now, our task this morning is to do an aerial reconnaissance of the ancient trail, now a dirt road, where Sir Francis Drake ambushed a caravan of mules carrying twenty tons of gold and silver from the city of Panama to Nombre de Dios. Until the start of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, the port of Nombre de Dios was the only port available on the Caribbean side of Panama, then called 'The Spanish Main' by the English, where the Spanish galleons could pick up the gold and silver mined in Peru and brought by sea to the city of Panama, on the Pacific coast. The Spaniards later switched their main port to Portobello, which was a lot easier to defend."

"Uh, no offense to you, Ingrid, but did that official really had enough confidence in you not to secretly put away part of the treasure before you brought it to Panama City?" asked Jason."

"He did, Jason, because of my supernatural link with The One. The day I will commit a serious crime, like theft or murder, or will abuse my powers for my personal profit, will be the day when The One will strip me of my powers. The same goes for Nancy. Call it the 'Fallen Angel Clause' if you will. The One spoke directly to that official and affirmed that to him."

"Oh, I see!"

On that, Ingrid made her aircar take off and take some altitude while flying towards the coast, watched by the other occupants of the GOLDEN HINDE.

Flying at a fairly low speed and staying in helicopter mode, so that Nancy had a chance to orient herself while searching her souvenirs as Sir Francis Drake about where he had hidden his treasures, Ingrid headed inland until they saw the dirt road called the 'Carretera Nombre de Dios', which roughly followed the old royal trail used by Spanish mule convoys in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century.

"How are you doing, Nancy?"

"Well, I must say that my souvenirs are quite old, Mommy. The countryside has also changed quite a bit, so I am going mostly from the hills I remember. However, the general shape and contour of the original mule trail seems quite similar to this present dirt road. Also, I remember that the site where I buried the coffers too heavy to be carried by my men was a known distance from a small river west of the town of Nombre de Dios which ran on a North-South axis. I can see that river, on our eleven o'clock."

"Good! Let's go to the junction of that river and of the present dirt trail, then I will follow slowly the trail westward."

"Sounds like a plan." replied Nancy, sounding satisfied. They had time to slowly overfly maybe three kilometers of jungle while following the dirt road before Nancy excitedly pointed to a large hill near the road.

"That hill! I recognize its horseshoe shape. We are getting near! Slow down further and go down to about fifty meters, Ingrid."

"You're the boss." replied Ingrid while obeying her. As she was flying barely above the treetops, Nancy suddenly pointed at a giant tree which dominated its part of the jungle.

"THAT GIANT KAPOK TREE! I REMEMBER IT! I BURIED THE TREASURE CHESTS AMONG ITS ROOTS. LET'S LAND AND SEARCH AROUND IT!"

"Well, you will have to walk a bit then: there is no opening in the jungle around it and it is a good hundred meters from the road. Are you sure, Nancy?"

"As much as I can be, Ingrid. I see no other similar tree in this area."

"Alright, I will land on the road and will let you step out. However, I will have to stay with the aircar, in case someone shows up on the road. Remember what I said: if you see me take off and fly away while you are searching or digging, that will mean that someone else is close by. In that case, stop searching at once and hide. Once the danger is past, you can send me a mental message and I will then come back to pick you up."

"Understood, Mommy. We will try to be both discrete and quick."

Ingrid had to maneuver carefully as she landed on the dirt road: as compact as her aircar was, it still barely fit between the branches from the trees nearest to the road. Nancy, Jason, Leonardo and Thomas then stepped out of the aircar, grabbing five metal detectors and a collection of machetes, shovels and pics from inside the aircar, plus three shotguns, before entering the jungle. With Ingrid staying with the aircar, the group made its way through the jungle towards the giant Kapok tree. They quickly started to sweat heavily in the hot and humid jungle climate, while they had to constantly chase away flying insects of all kinds. It took them a good ten minutes to arrive at the Kapok tree, where Nancy put down her pic and shovel and grabbed her metal detector, switching it on.

"Remember, guys: search between the roots of that tree, close to the central trunk: that's where we buried the chests of gold and silver. Since there were dozens of such chests, I had my men bury them all around that tree."

“Well, one thing is for sure.” said Commander Jason Holloway as he started sweeping with his metal detector. “Without the souvenirs of Sir Francis Drake, I don’t think that anybody could have found that treasure: this jungle is really not an inviting place for visitors. No wonder that the Spaniards decided to move their port to Portobello after a few decades. I would...”

His metal detector then started beeping as if it had gone mad.

“Already? This is too easy.”

“Shhh!” admonished Nancy, an index over her mouth. “You will bring us the Jinx! Okay guys: let’s grab our pics and shovels and dig there. I will use my pocket mini-metal detector to refine our search.”

Kneeling over the area of grassy ground where Jason’s detector had beeped, she swept her stick-like mini-metal detector over the surface and got a multitude of clear signals.

“Holy shit! I have at least four distinct, strong metallic signatures. Let’s dig here, here, here and here.”

All four grabbed shovels and started digging at once. Despite being only half the size of Jason Holloway, she managed to dig at least as fast as him and was the first to hit something solid, some thirty centimeters below the surface.

“I’ve hit something!”

“Me too! Added Jason a few seconds later. Now continuing to dig feverishly, the group soon had four very old-looking chests made of wood with iron fittings. The fittings were thoroughly rusted out and were nearly falling apart, while each chest weighed a minimum of forty kilos. Her heart thumping hard, Nancy extracted the chest she had dug out from its resting place and put it down on the grass. The two boys and one man with her all stopped digging to come and watch her with anticipation as Nancy undid the lock holding the cover of her chest closed.

“Ready for the big moment, guys?”

“Please, Nancy, just open it.” said Thomas. “The suspense is killing me.”

“Patience, my dear boy!” replied Nancy, who then slowly opened the chest.

“Holy shit!” exclaimed softly Leonardo. “We really hit the money this time...and on the first try.”

The four of them could now see that the chest was filled with hundreds of large, oxidized silver coins bearing inscriptions in Spanish which Nancy easily recognized.

“Spanish silver Pieces of Eight coins. There are hundreds of them just in this chest. You better finish digging your own chests, guys. In the meantime, I will contact my mother.”

As the three others resumed digging with renewed ardor, Nancy sent a telepathic message to Ingrid.

*‘Ingrid, we found the hiding place of the treasure. It was effectively buried around that big Kapok tree. We have by now found four chests, each weighing about forty or fifty kilos. Once all four will be out of the ground, we will carry them to the aircar, so that you can airlift them to the ship while we continue our digging.’*

*‘Got it! Congratulations, Nancy: you did a hell of a job of locating quickly those chests. I am going to run quickly to your location to help you carry those four chests.’*

With the message passed, Nancy went to help the others in pulling out of the ground their heavy chests, each of which proved to be full of old Spanish silver coins. Ingrid then arrived at a run and quickly loaded two of the heavy chests on her shoulders, stunning Jason with her incredible strength. The poor Jason then saw young Nancy load her own chest on one shoulder without apparent difficulty and nearly run towards the aircar. He himself groaned when putting his own treasure chest over one shoulder, while Thomas and Leonardo had to team up to carry the last chest. Fifteen minutes later, the four chests were inside the aircar, which flew off at the vertical before heading back to the ship. Nancy smiled with triumph while watching the aircar fly away: their adventure was now paying off, big time!

“Alright, lets find the rest of that gold and silver, guys!” said Nancy while nearly running back to the Kapok tree.

The four of them were soaked with sweat and dirty from the shoveling as Ingrid’s aircar returned to the site at about one in the afternoon, after a seventh round-trip to the ship, each time while carrying a dozen chests weighing in total about 400 kilos per trip. This time she came back with five of the ship’s crewmen to replace Jason, Leonardo and Thomas, who were now utterly exhausted. As for Nancy, while not as fresh as a rose, she still had plenty of energy in her and insisted on staying, only taking a couple of energy bars and a water bottle from Ingrid before the latter left with the latest batch of chests. Up to now, only chests full of silver coins had been found, with no gold in them, something one of the crewmen wondered about out loud, prompting an explanation from a smiling Nancy.

“That was because I told my men to carry to the beach only the most valuable chests, meaning the ones filled with gold. Mind you, we took so many chests from those Spanish mules that we didn’t have time to all check them out thoroughly, so I may still be mistaken about that, guys.”

The crewman, who was the older one in the crew at 35, pondered that for a moment, then bowed in genuine respect to Nancy.

“You were truly Sir Francis Drake four centuries ago. I thus salute you, Sire.”

After another three hours of digging and three return trips by the aircar, and with apparently still plenty of chests in the ground, Nancy’s remark about Francis Drake having missed a top value chest came true when a crewman dug out a chest similar in both appearance, size and weight to the others, which was probably why it had been left here. However, when Nancy opened it, the five crewmen gathered around her opened their mouths wide in shock.

“HOLY SHIT! IT’S FULL OF EMERALDS!”

“But, how could it then weigh so much if it contains only emeralds?” asked another crewman, making Nancy look up and smile at him.

“I like the way you said that these are ‘only emeralds’, Jack. I think I know why this chest weighs this much.”

She then brushed aside a number of the large, uncut emeralds, uncovering a layer of shiny gold ingots under the emeralds. The older crewman shook his head in disbelief.

“No wonder the Spanish Empire was so rich. I could not have even imagined such riches before.”

“Well, maybe there are more such chests containing gold and emeralds still in the ground around this tree. Let’s continue digging, guys.”

While the majority of the chests they found afterwards contained ‘only’ silver coins, they did find two more chests containing a mix of gold bars and gems. Those extra chests were loaded in the fourteenth round trip of the day, at which point Ingrid took a decision.

“Look, guys, we already accomplished an awful lot today and more day flights will end up attracting some attention. I will thus quickly carry those chests to the ship, then will come back for you. Don’t dig up or even mark the locations of more chests in the meantime, as I will load you up aboard at my return, along with our tools. However,

we may do a few night flights once the Sun has set, when it will be harder for others to spot us.”

“But, how are you going to fly at night and find your way, General?” asked a crewman, making Ingrid grin.

“Easy: I have night vision goggles and my car is equipped with an infrared night camera. So, until I return, stay out of sight and don’t make noises. I am already surprised that nobody has reacted yet to all our activity.”

“I’m not!” replied Nancy, looking serious. “During this whole day, I counted a grand total of THREE cars or trucks which passed on this road. This place is actually the perfect definition of a ‘hole’, no disrespect intended to its inhabitants, of which there must be no more than a few hundreds.”

Her remark made Ingrid nod her head once slowly.

“Well, maybe you’re right, Nancy. Still, I should be back here in twenty minutes at the most.”

Ingrid then throttled up her engine and took off one more time, leaving Nancy with the four crewmen.

“Alright, guys: let’s gather our tools and bring them close to the road while leaving them out of sight. Then we will also hide while resting and waiting.”

“Some rest will be good indeed: I haven’t been this tired in a long time.”

“But I’m sure that it feels like good fatigue, Jack.” replied Nancy, a big smile on her face.

True to her word, Ingrid was back within seventeen minutes, with Nancy and the five crewmen jumping in with their tools in order to return to the GOLDEN HINDE. Landing smoothly on the floating platform attached to the ship, they covered the aircar with a large canvas tarp and fixed it solidly in place, in order to protect the precious vehicle from rain and sea waves, then wearily climbed aboard. However, the first thing Nancy did once aboard was to go see Jennifer Wong, the mother of Lucy Wong and a professional accountant, who had been elected yesterday as their accountant in charge of any treasure they would find. Nancy found Jennifer Wong in the officers’ wardroom of the ship, one of the larger and better lit rooms aboard, with old chests surrounding her and one more chest opened by her side and empty. Nancy then saw that the original content of the old chest had been poured in a modern stainless-steel bucket, with

Jennifer using a pocket calculator and a scale to count and weigh the silver coins filling the bucket, progressively refilling the old chest with counted coins.

“Hello Jennifer! How much did we bring back up to now?”

“Well, I am still doing the inventory for this last chest, but the actual count I have is already astronomical, Nancy. If I go only by the weight, not taking account of the historical value of those silver coins, we have up to now dug up 12,320 pounds of silver coins representing a value of 1.24 million dollars, according to the present rate for silver. However, those three chests you found containing gold and emeralds have by themselves a staggering value, again not counting the historical value of the objects. The 264 pounds of pure gold you found are worth by themselves 4.1 million dollars, while those emeralds, if we go strictly by carat weight, are worth a minimum of sixteen million dollars, depending on the quality and size of each gem, something only a good jeweler could ascertain. So, we are now sitting on a treasure worth a minimum of 21 million dollars.”

“Wow! When I think that half of the original loot from 1573 is still in the ground, we could easily attract tons of bad guys if word of this treasure goes out.”

Jennifer Wong then gave a very sober look to Nancy.

“Now is definitely not the time to go get drunk in some local bar and brag about this. My husband is into the import/export business and I have heard about people having their throat cut for a tiny fraction of what we are sitting on right now, so I would urge everyone aboard to clam up...tightly.”

“Oh, I realize that fully, Jennifer. Remember: I was one of those cutthroats some 400 years ago.”

### **05:42 (Panama Time)**

**Tuesday, June 25, 1991 ‘C’**

**Female sleeping quarters**

**Underdeck of the GOLDEN HINDE**

**Anchored off Nombre de Dios, Panama**

“COME ON, GIRLS! TIME TO WAKE UP! WE HAVE WORK TO DO!”

While Nancy woke up at once and jumped down from her hammock, the other girls and women reacted in a much less alert fashion, with Sarah Weissman opening one eye and weakly protesting.



"What do you mean, Ingrid? The guys have been doing the digging, not us."

"Well, that is changing as of this morning, Sarah." replied a smiling Ingrid, already fully dressed. We have to change tactics and procedures from yesterday, due to the sheer amount of stuff we still have to dig up. We want to get everything on this ship before the people in Nombre de Dios and around this coast start suspecting that something is going on. Thus, we will have to intensify our digging and searching. The guys will continue digging around the Kapok tree in the jungle, while you girls will search and dig near the beach under the direction of Nancy. Come on, wake up! I'm serious!"

"Okay, okay, I'm getting up."

"And dress for rough, dirty work."

"How are you going to manage the transport of chests between two separate digging sites, Ingrid?" asked Kimi Park, who had just slid down from her hammock. "Yesterday, you could barely keep up with your aircar, and that was for one site only."

"We will change our tactics in that aspect as well, in order to minimize attention on us. Instead of flying trips each time we have a dozen chests dug out, I will fly you out to the digging sites, then wait at the ship while you and the guys dig everything out. Once we have dug up everything, then I will start ferrying the chests found at the Kapok tree, while our zodiacs will go fetch whatever we will find near the beach. If we don't hurry this job, we may well end up with plenty of onlookers, some of which could be tempted to steal a few chests of gold and silver for themselves. I want to avoid as much as possible such a confrontation, which could have tragic consequences for some of us."

"Okay, I get it!" said the Korean-American teenager, who then started putting her clothes on.

Some forty minutes later, Kimi was dropped on a beach some two kilometers west of Nombre de Dios by one of the two zodiacs embarked on the GOLDEN HINDE and piloted by Roddy Coleman. Also dropped on the beach with Kimi were Nancy, Alicia Blackburn, Elizabeth Holloway, Mary Holloway, Sarah Weissman and her mother Judith. They unloaded a collection of tools and metal detectors, plus some water and food, before Roddy returned to the ship with his zodiac. Young Nancy then looked at her six female companions and spoke in a sober tone.

"Girls, we will have less stuff to find and dig up than the men and boys do, but what was buried near this beach will have a lot more value than the silver they will find,

as the chests Drake's men carried to this beach contained gold and emeralds, not silver. I can tell you from my memories from Drake's time that we are looking for exactly 32 chests, all buried in a single hole. Once I find back that spot, we will dig out and extract from the ground all of the chests, then will call in our zodiacs for pickup. Questions?"

"Yes!" said Judith Weissman. "What do we do if someone shows up while we are digging?"

"Then, we will tell them that we have the local government's authorization to search and dig. If that someone becomes hostile or violent, then I will handle him. One last thing: while digging, talk, don't shout out loud at each other. We want to attract as little attention as we can while working. Now, follow me with our equipment and let's find that gold."

Taking the lead, Nancy marched along the beach for some distance, searching for familiar points that could guide her, then veered off into the jungle, walking for maybe twenty meters before stopping and facing her six companions.

"Finding the right spot may take some time, since recognition points are far and few. Sarah, you stay here with our tools and act as our marker for the start of our first search leg. The others will each grab a metal detector and form up in extended line, with three paces between each of us. I will walk in front of the line, to guide you and keep the line straight. If you find something, then stop at once and announce it to me. Today, slow is better than hurried, ladies."

The group then spread out and started walking slowly while scanning left and right with their metal detectors.

Finding the buried chests actually proved more difficult than Nancy had expected, mostly because of the lack of adequate markers she could recognize. Along the first fifty meters of their advance, they found only a meager collection of small objects, like rusty nails, a lost knife and a rusty coffee mug. The group was starting to feel discouragement after more than one hour of searching when Kimi Park's detector went suddenly wild as she was walking around a large tree. Making the line stop at once, Nancy then knelt over the spot Kimi had just scanned and used her pocket, pencil-like metal detector to refine her scan. Her detector then beeped as well, and this over an area of more than two square meters, making her exclaim excitedly.

"This is it, girls! Let's go get our tools!"

While the others went at a run to get their pics and shovels, Nancy, who had kept a shovel with her, started digging an exploratory hole at a pace that would have quickly exhausted a strong man. She then hit something hard at a depth of about forty centimeters and started enlarging her hole, uncovering what looked furiously like the top of an old wooden chest with iron fittings.

"It's the treasure alright, girls. Let's dig it up!"

The excited four girls and three women went at it with gusto, uncovering in fifteen minutes the tops of sixteen wooden chests placed tightly together.

"I can see a second layer of chests under these sixteen chests. We have our count, ladies! Let's pull the chests out of this hole. Don't strain your backs and use four girls per chest to do the lifting."

Once the first chest was out of the ground and on the grass, Nancy undid its locking bolt to check its content while the others formed a circle around her to watch eagerly. Gasps and exclamations followed when she opened the cover of the old chest, revealing glimmering gold bars inside.

"Oh my God!" said softly Elizabeth Holloway, a true history buff. "Look at the Spanish royal seal on these gold bars."

"I have never seen so much gold before in my life." added Judith Weissman, mesmerized by the sight of the gold bars. Nancy nodded, then grabbed the hand-held radio she was carrying and pressed the 'send' switch before speaking in its microphone.

"Nancy to Ingrid! Nancy to Ingrid! Come in, please!"

She got a reply from Ingrid, who was waiting on the GOLDEN HINDE, after her second call.

"Go ahead, Nancy!"

"From Nancy: surgery is a success. I say again: surgery is a success. You can send both zodiacs in forty minutes, over."

"Forty minutes, understood, out!"

Pocketing back her small radio, Nancy looked at the women and girls surrounding her.

"Let's pull out of the ground all the chests and pile them over here on the grass. Then, we will start carrying them towards the beach, but we will drop them inside the jungle, at the limit of the beach line, so that they will not be visible from afar. Sarah, you will stay with the dropped chests while we go get the rest. Once you see our zodiacs leave the galleon, step out on the beach and wave at them, so that they can land as near as possible to the chests."

“Got it!”

The group then resumed its work, pulling out of the ground the heavy chests, with four women or girls working in concert to pull each chest up from the large hole they had dug up. Some 25 minutes later, the first team of four girls was carrying the first chest towards the beach, with Nancy helping her two remaining companions to carry a second chest. By the time that the two zodiacs sent from the GOLDEN HINDE had beached themselves, they had already carried to the limit of the jungle six of the chests. Ingrid, who had traveled on one of the zodiacs, along with Roddy Coleman and one of his crewmen, then joined up with Nancy’s team to help carry the chests, lifting by herself one chest at a time. They loaded twelve chests in each zodiac before Roddy decided that they were sufficiently loaded. Ingrid patted Nancy’s shoulder before leaving with the zodiacs.

“Well done, Nancy! We will go unload the zodiacs at the ship, then will come back for the rest.”

“We will have the last chests on the beach by the time that you come back, Mommy.” promised Nancy, who then helped push back in the water the zodiacs before turning around and giving an order to her companions.

“Okay, girls, let’s go get those last chests to the beach!”

Forty minutes later, the whole group was on its way to the GOLDEN HINDE, along with its tools and the remaining chests full of gold. While dirty and tired, the women and girls exchanged happy high-fives between them as the zodiacs sped towards the anchored galleon.

“WE DID IT, GIRLS! WE GOT DRAKE’S HIDDEN TREASURE!” exclaimed Nancy, attracting cheers. Another five minutes and the zodiacs were at the ship and started transloading the precious chests on the floating platform and into a waiting cargo net hooked to the ship’s hoist. Nancy led her companions inside the ship and placed them in position around the ship’s capstan, which powered the hoist.

“One last effort, girls! We still need to store safely those chests aboard.”

Guided by Jennifer Wong, who was standing on the upper deck and watching Ingrid and Roddy Coleman put the chests in the cargo net, the team pushed on command on the wooden bars inserted radially in the capstan’s central axis, in a scene reminiscent of pirate movies, minus the cracking of a whip, of course. They had time to finish putting the 32 chests of gold inside the hold before the male team working at the Kapok tree

announced by radio that they had dug up the last chests of silver and were ready for pickup. Ingrid thus jumped into her aircar and flew off to start ferrying those chests.

Nancy was watching Ingrid lift again from the floating landing platform after unloading twelve chests full of silver when Roddy Coleman shouted out a warning.

"BOAT APPROACHING FROM SEASIDE!"

"Aw shit! Who could that be?" swore Nancy, who went to the poop deck to examine with Roddy the approaching boat, which was still a good two kilometers away.

"What do we have here, Roddy?"

"That looks like some large private motor yacht, Nancy. It is flying the Panamean flag."

"The Panamean flag? And why would that yacht come here, to Nombre de Dios?"

"I don't know, Nancy, but we better hurry and lift those chests aboard the ship before the occupants of this yacht can see what we are doing. Keep an eye on that yacht while I go accelerate the loading of those chests."

As Roddy walked away, Nancy swore at this piece of bad luck: a couple hours more and everything would have been finished here, with all the precious chests loaded aboard and out of sight. On the other hand, they could count themselves lucky for not attracting attention much sooner than this. It now remained to be seen who these newcomers were and what their intentions were.

Thankfully, the loading up inside the ship of the chests on the platform was completed before the yacht came close enough to allow conversations out loud via megaphones. Nancy had at once a bad feeling on detailing the dozen or so men visible on the decks of the yacht: while all of them appeared to be Latinos, she was able to spot weapons on many of them. She thus looked at Roddy Coleman and gave him an order in a tone that precluded discussion.

"Get everybody underdeck, quickly! Those men are not here for a friendly chat. And break out our remaining shotguns."

"On it!" replied Roddy, who had learned not to underestimate Nancy because of her youth or sex. As he was walking away while shouting orders to those on deck to go take shelter inside the ship, Nancy grabbed one megaphone and spoke in it in Spanish

while pointing it at the yacht, which had slowed down and stopped and was now fifty meters away.

“AHOY, M.Y. MARGARITA! ANNOUNCE YOUR INTENTIONS!”

A man, also using a megaphone, answered her in Spanish after a few seconds.

“AHOY, GOLDEN HINDE! I AM THE CHIEF OF FEDERAL POLICE IN COLON AND I WAS INFORMED OF A SHIP ANCHORED OFF NOMBRE DE DIOS AND ENGAGED IN SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITIES. I AM GOING TO SEND A BOARDING PARTY TO INSPECT YOUR SHIP.”

Unfortunately for that man, he was close enough from the GOLDEN HINDE to allow Nancy to telepathically read his mind and what she read was nothing good.

“M.Y. MARGARITA, HOLD ON THAT BOARDING PARTY! THE PANAMA GOVERNMENT IS ALREADY IN THE KNOW ABOUT US AND OUR PRESENCE HERE, WHICH HAS BEEN PRE-AUTHORIZED. IF YOU WOULD TRULY BE THE CHIEF OF POLICE IN COLON, YOU WOULD KNOW THAT TOO, SO PACK UP YOUR LIES AND LEAVE NOW.”

Nancy instantly felt anger flare in the man's mind, something confirmed by his harsh reply.

“WE ARE GOING TO SEND A BOARDING PARTY WHETHER YOU LIKE IT OR NOT, YOUNG GIRL. IF YOU RESIST, YOU WILL REGRET IT.”

“SPOKEN LIKE A TRUE FAKE CHIEF OF POLICE, ASSHOLE. HERE IS MY WARNING: IF YOU DON'T DEPART NOW OR PUT A BOAT IN THE WATER, YOU WILL BE DESTROYED.”

The man broke out into a mean laughter before speaking again.

“WHO DO YOU THINK THAT YOU CAN SCARE, GIRL?”

“THIS IS YOUR LAST WARNING: LEAVE NOW OR DIE!”

“YOU ASKED FOR IT, GIRL.”

The men on the deck of the yacht who had been trying to hide their weapons then openly showed them, pointing a collection of rifles and pistols at Nancy and the GOLDEN HINDE. Now left with no other choice and being unwilling to allow those men to open fire first, Nancy put down the megaphone, then pointed both of her arms at the yacht, palms facing the boat. Realizing that she had to take out all of those gunmen before they could open fire and possibly wound or kill someone on the Galleon, she unleashed all of her firepower capacity and started shooting energy balls in rapid fire mode. Each blue energy ball, the size of a marble when it left her palms, shot out at

hypersonic speed with the crackling sound of lightning and exploded on impact with the yacht in six meter-diameter blue plasma spheres with the noise of an exploding medium caliber shell. Her first salvo of four balls swept the open deck of the yacht on which the gunmen stood, vaporizing them all and creating huge holes with melting steel around their edges in the port flank of the M.Y. MARGARITA. Her second salvo then hit at the level of the waterline, opening up holes there and creating huge water leaks, while her third salvo was reserved for the superstructures and bridge of the big yacht, where a few men stood. By the time that the yacht capsized and sank, the M.Y. MARGARITA was little more than a deformed, burning hulk. No one survived to jump from the yacht and into the water. The holed up and smoking hulk was in the process of sinking under the surface of the sea when Roddy Coleman joined up with Nancy, armed with a shotgun. He stared with big eyes at the sinking yacht, then at Nancy, awe on his face.

“My God! You possess the firepower of a heavy cruiser, Nancy! Who were these guys?”

“Criminals from a drug cartel, who tried to pass off as Panamean police officers. When I challenged their pretended identity, they brought their weapons in the open and threatened me, so I vaporized them.”

“Damn! How are we going to explain this to the Panama government?”

“Basically, we won’t!” replied Nancy, surprising Roddy. “Those men were not sent by the Panama authorities, so their presence here is probably not known in Panama City. If someone...”

Nancy then stopped speaking and closed her eyes, as if concentrating. After a few seconds she opened her eyes again and looked at Roddy.

“Ingrid just called me telepathically, asking me what just happened. I explained the incident to her and she said that she will come back in a minute or so, as soon as the guys finish loading the last chests aboard her aircar.”

Roddy could only shake his head in disbelief at all that.

“God! I sure am going to remember this cruise all my life.”

#### **14:40 (Panama Time)**

**Building of the Ministry of Government and Justice**

**Old District, Panama City**

As Ingrid had expected, the landing of her aircar in front of the ministerial building in the historic part of Panama City did not go unnoticed, as she suspected that Hiller AIRCARS were not a common sight in this part of the World. Folding up her ducted propellers and rolling on her four electrically-powered wheels, she parked in front of the building housing the Panamean Ministry of Government and Justice, then stepped out with Roddy Coleman, who had come in the quality of owner and operator of the GOLDEN HIND. Before entering the building, Ingrid grabbed the two old chests stored inside the aircar and, putting first a pair of folded towels over her shoulders, loaded up the two chests on her shoulders and followed Roddy inside. With Roddy opening the doors for her, they went first to the receptionist's desk in the entrance lobby, where Ingrid spoke in fluent Spanish to the young woman sitting behind the desk.

"Good afternoon, miss. My name is Ingrid Dows and I'm here with Mister Coleman to see Minister de Alba. Tell him that we found Sir Francis Drake's treasure."

"Uh, one moment please, miss." replied the receptionist, struck by the words 'Sir Francis Drake's treasure', before grabbing her telephone receiver and pushing a button. After a few seconds, someone answered her, making her speak briefly. After a short conversation, the receptionist hung up and smiled to Ingrid.

"Someone will come down to guide you to the minister's office, miss. It shouldn't be long."

"Thank you, miss!"

A man in his early thirties effectively came down to meet them in the lobby mere minutes later, bowing his head politely to Ingrid, whose both hands held on to the old chests, and shook hands with Roddy.

"Miss Dows, Mister Coleman, I am Luis Vasquez, personal aide of Minister de Alba. If you may follow me."

As Vasquez led them to a nearby elevator, he glanced with curiosity at the two chests carried by Ingrid.

"Those chests look quite old, Miss Dows. Are they..."

"Yes, they are part of Sir Francis Drake's buried treasure. We brought those two chests to prove to Minister de Alba that we indeed found the treasure. I can tell you that these represent only a very small part of what we found.

Vasquez' eyes lit up at those words, his imagination going into overdrive. He however didn't ask more questions on the way up, leading her and Roddy to a secretarial



anteroom and crossing it before knocking on a large wooden door, getting a muffled response in Spanish.

“Come in!”

Vasquez then pushed the door open and spoke to the man with gray hair sitting behind a large work desk.

“Mister Minister, Miss Dows and a Mister Coleman are here to see you.”

“Let them in, Luis!”

“Yes, Mister Minister!”

Invited in by the aide, Ingrid and Roddy walked in the big office of the Minister of Government and Justice, which equated roughly to that of a minister of the interior. Augusto de Alba got up from his chair and walked around his desk for a handshake while Ingrid put down her two chests with the help of Roddy.

“Miss Dows, Mister Coleman, I am happy to learn that you succeeded in your search for Drake’s treasure. Was it hard to find?”

“Let’s say that, without the special past memories of my daughter Nancy, finding that treasure would have been close to impossible, short of a long and massive search. We brought those two chests, along with an inventory list of what we found, so that you could see that we really found the treasure. Ready for some emotions, Minister de Alba?”

“For those kinds of emotions, always! Go ahead and open those chests, miss.” Even when forewarned, Augusto de Alba felt his heart jump inside his chest when Ingrid opened both chests, revealing piled up bars of gold and a pile of oxidized silver coins.

“Dios Mio! And how much silver and gold did you find?”

“Here is an inventory list of the chests we found and of their content, Mister Minister.”

Taking the inventory offered by Ingrid, de Alba took a look at the numbers on the list and became pale.

“Madre de dios! You found that much gold and silver?”

In response, Ingrid shrugged while smiling to the minister.

“Hey, when Sir Francis Drake was in mind of taking gold from the Spaniards, he never did things in a small way. I however must caution you about our final value estimate, Mister Minister. We were not able to evaluate precisely the true value of the emeralds we found with the treasure, as none of us is a certified jeweler. We thus went strictly by weight, which is notoriously inaccurate to evaluate the true value of emeralds.

Here is one of those emeralds we found: it weighs sixteen carats, thus has an absolute minimum value of about 5,000 dollars, but could be worth as much as 140,000 dollars if proven to be of top quality. So, our count could still change a lot, just because of those emeralds.”

De Alba admired for a moment the big, uncut emerald, then added it to the chest containing the bars of gold.

“Your find is truly staggering, apart from being historically a major event. You and your team did an incredible job finding this lost treasure. Where is your ship now?”

“It has raised anchor after we took off and is now sailing towards Portobello, where we intend to search for the lead coffin containing the remains of Sir Francis Drake, Mister Minister.” answered Roddy Coleman. “Do we still have permission to carry his remains back to England if we find them?”

“Yes, you have, Mister Coleman.” replied de Alba, his expression turning sober. “He deserves to be interred in his country of birth. We will only ask to have a chance to photograph and examine it briefly before you sail with the coffin. Now that you fulfilled your part, it will be time for my government to fulfill its part. I will send tomorrow a team of historians and expert jewelers to Portobello. That team will go aboard your ship and will then do an official inventory of the treasure you found, including expert evaluations of the actual value of the emeralds that you found. The value of those two chests you brought here today will of course be added to the value that my experts will evaluate on your ship. Miss Dows, how much did it cost you to rent the GOLDEN HINDE and finance this expedition?”

“Renting the galleon for four weeks cost me 60,000 dollars, Mister Minister. Added to that was a total of about 26,000 dollars to buy extra equipment for the ship and to buy provisions.”

Augusto de Alba thought over those numbers for a moment, then bent down and took out two heavy bars of gold, each weighing a good three kilos, from their chest and gave one bar each to Ingrid and Roddy.

“Miss Dows, our understanding was to give you as finder’s fee and to help you cover your costs for your expedition the equivalent of two percent of the value of the treasure found. However, what you found was well beyond our wildest dreams. You will still get the two percent promised by us to you, but to that I am personally adding those two bars of pure gold. I will make sure that my experts who will calculate the value of those two chests will count as well the value of those two gold bars as still being part of

them. I believe that such an extra premium is only just, as the treasure you found will give a significant boost to our national economy. I intend to travel to Portobello with my team of experts tomorrow, as I must see your treasure by myself. I will also have a security team made up of men I consider incorruptible, in order to discourage any attempt by criminals to steal that gold and silver. I will see you in Portobello tomorrow morning. Thank you again for your fantastic find, Miss Dows and Mister Coleman.”

They then exchanged handshakes before Ingrid and Roddy walked out of the minister’s office. As Roddy was admiring his bar of gold and trying to evaluate its exact weight and thus its value, Ingrid watched him for a moment before speaking softly to him.

“Roddy, we originally had an understanding that you would reimburse me up to 60,000 dollars out of your share of the finder’s fee paid by the Panamean government. However, I had not expected that generous premium given by Minister de Alba. Forget about reimbursing me and keep all of your share of the finder’s fee, plus of course that gold bar. My own premium gold bar will more than cover all my expenses for this expedition.”

A big grin came to Roddy’s face on hearing her words: that extra money for him was going to help a lot to pay for some badly needed repairs and refitting on his GOLDEN HINDE. He thus shook enthusiastically Ingrid’s hand, then hugged her tight.

“Ingrid, you are a fantastic girl! Dealing with you is a true pleasure.”

“Thanks, Roddy. In turn, you proved to be a first-class seaman and a fair and honest partner. Now, let’s go back to the aircar. I am anxious to return to our ship.”

### **09:41 (Panama Time)**

**Wednesday, June 26, 1991 ‘C’**

**Upper deck of the GOLDEN HINDE**

**Anchored off Isla Drake, at the entrance to the Bay of Portobello**

Minister Augusto de Alba came to the GOLDEN HINDE aboard two Panamean Coast Guard armed patrol boats, to ensure the security of the huge treasure he was about to take delivery of. Accompanying him were two historians from the Panama City National Museum and three expert jewelers who were frequently used by the government for evaluation work, plus a news team from the national television channel, complete with cameras. What they saw and heard on coming side-by-side with the galleon did surprise them but in an agreeable way: on the poop deck, three teenage girls

were playing music with two violins, a lute, a flute, a drum and a sort of triangular plank-like string instrument, with one of them alternating between the last four instruments while also singing in a lovely voice. More teenagers and a few adults were dancing to the music while others were watching on the sides while drinking an assortment of cold drinks, including beer. Roddy Coleman and Ingrid Dows were on hand to greet the minister when he stepped on the deck of the galleon.

"Welcome on the GOLDEN HINDE, Minister de Alba," said Roddy while shaking the minister's hand. "You have indeed come with a strong escort."

"I had to, considering the staggering value of the treasure we will be taking charge of today. By the way, do you mind if a television news crew films our visit aboard your ship for the benefit of the Panamean viewers?"

"Not at all, Minister de Alba! They can do as they please while aboard our galleon."

"Talking of galleon and treasure, let me present Doctors Bartolomeo and Velasquez, from the Panama City National Museum, and misters Chavez, Peralta and Ramirez, three expert jewelers who will evaluate your emeralds."

Roddy and Ingrid exchanged handshakes with the five men while the television crew filmed the moment. Next, Ingrid led de Alba and his team of experts, plus the television crew, down to the officers' wardroom, under the poop deck, where the treasure chests had been transferred in order to facilitate the counting and evaluation work. With cameras filming, she opened wide the covers of the chests positioned on the top layer of piled up chests, exposing to direct view the silver coins, gold bars and uncut emeralds contained in the chests. A wave of soft exclamations went around the Panameans as they stared with awe at the fantastic fortune now under their eyes. Augusto de Alba himself grinned with glee despite having known in advance what he would be looking at today: such a sight simply could not be imagined to its real extent until you could look at it. Also, news of this treasure's recovery could well attract more tourists to Panama, something that could not hurt the Panamean economy. Closely watched by both Ingrid and de Alba, the television crew then approached the pile of chests in order to film from up close the gold, silver and emeralds. Adding to the effect, Ingrid took between two of her fingers one of the largest emeralds and raised it to face level, to give to the cameramen a scale of its size, attracting more exclamations. She then handed that emerald to one of the jewelers, who quickly took out his precision scale, lenses and measuring instruments in order to evaluate the gem. Two minutes later, that expert

announced in a voice shaking with emotion that the emerald in question was worth a minimum of 54,000 dollars, making both de Alba and Roddy Coleman grin with satisfaction and launching the head reporter of the television team into a passionate description of the treasure. Withdrawing to the back of the wardroom to let space to the historians and jewelers to do their work, Ingrid joined up with Roddy and the minister and smiled to the latter.

“Happy, Mister Minister?”

“Hell yes, Miss Dows! And so will the President, when we will report to him the final value of this treasure. So, what are you going to do next, you and Mister Coleman?”

“We are presently anchored at the same spot the original GOLDEN HINDE was anchored off Portobello when Sir Francis Drake died of dysentery in 1596. Our bet is that his crew then sank his coffin directly off the ship. Since it was made of lead, it probably sank like the proverbial stone, thus should be close to us, somewhere on the bottom. We will spend the next few days diving around and searching for that coffin with the help of waterproofed metal detectors. We promise to inform your office the moment we will find it, so that your national television channel can send a camera crew to document the moment.”

“Excellent! Let me just inform the television crew producer of this.”

After whispering with the producer in question for a moment, de Alba returned to Ingrid and Roddy with a question.

“The producer is asking if he could stay after this treasure evaluation aboard this galleon, along with two cameramen, in order to document your search for Drake’s coffin.”

“I see no problem with that, Minister de Alba.” replied Roddy. “In fact, we will be happy to host them aboard for a few days. They could then film as well our group of school teenagers as they live through their Summer adventure excursion. If they ever need to send quickly to Panama City some recorded footage, then I am sure that Ingrid will be most happy to fly them in her aircar.”

“Great! He should love that.”

The group then settled as comfortably as possible in the wardroom as the Panamean experts counted and valued the content of the chests, a job that was going to

take many hours. As soon as the content of one chest had been counted and valued, that chest was then sealed with ribbons and a government wax seal before being transferred aboard one of the two patrol boats. At around eleven o'clock, the noise of cheers and applause from outside attracted them to the windows lining the starboard side of the wardroom, with de Alba, Ingrid and Roddy being in time to see young Nancy, wearing only the bottom part of a bikini and equipped with a diving mask, a snorkel, a pair of fins and a harpoon gun, dive into the ocean, encouraged by the titillated sailors on the two patrol boats. Ingrid shook her head while also smiling at the same time.

"My perverted young daughter is at it again! She loves to excite men and boys."

"That could prove dangerous for her in certain places I know." cautioned de Alba, making Ingrid nod once.

"Agreed! God knows how many times I already told her that. I hope that this will not result in your film crew having to censor part of their report."

De Alba nearly laughed at that.

"Well, us Panameans are not as prudish as you would think, Miss Dows, but you may be right about that."

Some six minutes later, a concert of applause then attracted again the trio to the windows. This time, they saw Nancy, still half in the water, pull a huge fish from the water and onto the floating landing platform, where two crewmen promptly grabbed the fish to carry it aboard the galleon, while Nancy disappeared again under the water after reloading her harpoon gun. De Alba whistled in appreciation while eyeing the fish she had caught, which measured at least a full meter in length.

"A Grouper! She harpooned a Nassau Grouper! That's quite a catch!"

"Well, it seems that we will have some fresh Grouper meat to cook for lunch on top of our BBQ grill." said Roddy. "Would you like some of it for your lunch, Mister Minister?"

"I would accept with pleasure, Mister Coleman: Grouper flesh is excellent."

Another five minutes later, Nancy came back to the floating platform with a big Redfish, then dove under again. A second big Redfish followed ten minutes after that. However, she had no fish with her when she emerged after another minute-long dive. Instead, she shouted at the top of her lungs to her classmates on the galleon's deck.

"I THINK THAT I FOUND DRAKE'S COFFIN. GET ME A METAL DETECTOR!"

Leonardo hurried to bring down a detector from the ship, handing it to Nancy, who then dove under again as a pair of crewmen started donning their scuba equipment. Before they could dive into the water, Nancy returned to the surface to shout triumphantly.

“IT IS DRAKE’S COFFIN! WE WILL NEED TO DIG IT OUT OF THE BOTTOM SILT.”

With the Panamean television crew all but forgetting the experts working on the treasure and focusing instead on Nancy in the water, they filmed as more divers went into the water, including two Panamean divers from the patrol boat. Ropes and inflatable floatation bags were also brought down to the bottom by more divers. After half an hour of teamwork, a dark rectangular box finally appeared from the depth, supported by floatation bags. It took the efforts of over twenty men to finally pull it out of the water and put it down on the floating landing platform. A crowd formed at once around it, looking and filming the corroded metallic box, but no one dared at first to open it. It was Nancy who finally did so, undoing the cover’s retaining bolts and cautiously raising it as the water filling the metallic box leaked out via holes in its corroded bottom. Everybody held their breath when a skeleton became visible inside. Roddy Coleman nearly swore when he saw that the dead man wore a rusted out steel breastplate.

“Sir Drake was said to have been buried at sea while wearing his personal breast plate armor.”

Doctor Juan Bartolomeo, standing next to him, nodded his head at that.

“You are right, Mister Coleman. I think that your young passenger did find Drake’s remains. Everything about this correspond to the stories told about his death.”

Nancy then raised one hand of the skeleton out of the coffin, showing to the onlookers a large ring worn on one finger of the body.

“Sir Drake’s coat of arms, on this ring.”

She then got up on her feet and straightened up while raising her voice.

“Ladies and gentlemen, here is Sir Francis Drake, loyal servant of the Crown of England. I demand that we keep a minute of silence in his honor.”

Everybody went silent then, with those wearing hats removing them in signs of respect. Nancy then invited Doctors Bartolomeo and Velasquez to approach and examine in detail the skeleton and coffin, while the Panamean camera crew hurried to take some footage from close in. Nancy looked somber as she stepped back, prompting Ingrid into going to her and passing an arm around her shoulders.

"Finding the remains of a past incarnation is always a troubling moment, Nancy. Take this as an important lesson: that we all have to die one day. Even I, despite my apparent eternal youth, will eventually die. Use the time you are still alive to do as much good as you can and help the others around you to the best of your abilities. Then your life will have been meaningful."

"I will do that, Mommy." promised Nancy in a soft voice, deeply moved, while staring at the skeleton in the lead coffin.

While the treasure's inventory continued aboard the GOLDEN HINDE, Ingrid flew out in her aircar to Panama City, returning Minister de Alba to his ministry office and then visiting the city's morgue to get a suitable thermos crate large enough to contain Drake's coffin, along with a good reserve of dry ice. Minister de Alba then helped her by contacting on her behalf the British government, to arrange the return by air of Sir Francis Drake's remains to Great Britain, as a return trip by sea would both take too long and would also expose the precious coffin to the possibility of being lost again if the GOLDEN HINDE sank in some Atlantic storm, which was a real possibility in view of the small size and relative flimsiness of the galleon. When Ingrid returned to the galleon in late afternoon with the thermos crate and dry ice, she went to see her daughter and handed her a flight reservation and airplane ticket from Panama City to London, plus an air cargo voucher.

"Pack your bags, Nancy. Tomorrow, you will fly out of Panama City while escorting Sir Drake's remains to London."

"And you, Mommy? You are not going to go with me to London?"

In response, Ingrid stared softly in silence for a moment at her daughter.

"Nancy, you have now proven that you don't need me constantly at your side to accomplish things in your life. Escort Sir Drake to his final resting place in England. You deserve that honor."

Ingrid then gave an emotional hug to her daughter, who returned it with passion.

The final, official tally of the treasure came up to a staggering 98,400,000 dollars, thanks a lot to the value of the top-quality emeralds which were part of the treasure. Of that total, Ingrid and Roddy were able to keep the two percent finder's fee agreed to by the Panamean government and split in two the 1,968,000 dollars of that fee, to which both of them could add the extra gold bar given to them by Minister de Alba. Ingrid next



split her part of 984,000 dollars in seventeen equal parts, one for each child, teenager and adult who had participated to the adventure excursion. She thus kept for herself, Nancy and Leonardo 173,647 dollars. The biggest winner in this split was the Holloway family, which counted five members in the expedition and thus got 289,411 dollars. Commander James Holloway then attracted the approval and appreciation of Ingrid when he vowed to her that he would use that money to pay for the future university education of his three children, an example Ingrid fully intended to emulate with Nancy and Leonardo.

## **CHAPTER 18 – AIR BIKES AND HIGH SCHOOL**

**09:51 (California Time)**

**Tuesday, June 02, 1992 'C'**

**Hiller Helicopter Corporation main plant**

**Firebaugh, California, U.S.A.**

Stanley Hiller was anxiously waiting just outside the prototype hangar of his main aircraft assembly plant to hear what Ingrid Dows would say about her initial test flight of their new Hiller AIR BIKE, which Ingrid had designed for him. While her landing on return from her flight was smooth, he didn't like the expression visible on Ingrid's face when she stepped out of her air bike.



"Uh oh! It seems that something didn't go the way she wanted." said Stanley to his chief production engineer, who was standing by his side. Both men stayed silent afterwards as Ingrid walked at a quick pace towards them, her flying helmet under one arm. Stanley spoke only when Ingrid stopped one pace in front of him, still looking glum.

"Uh, I hope that things went okay, Ingrid."

"Things were not okay, Stanley..." replied coldly Ingrid, making Hiller's heart sink. Her expression then completely changed, going from glum to enthusiastic as she shouted the rest of her answer in a joyous tone. "...THIS FLIGHT WAS FANTASTIC! IT WAS THE MOST FUN I HAD IN DECADES OF FLYING!"

Stanley felt nearly tipsy as emotions overwhelmed him and he had to use Ingrid's shoulder as support to help his wobbly legs.

"Please don't do this again, Ingrid: my poor heart nearly gave up. So, everything went fine?"

"If things went fine? Stanley, just imagine that you were flying in a pocket-sized MUSTANG fighter which could take off and land vertically. That's the kind of flying sensation our Hiller AIR BIKE gives to its pilot and passenger. You want to take the back seat for another test flight?"

"Hell yes, Ingrid!"

Stanley Hiller nearly ran to the air bike, which was about the length of a small sports car. Opening the left side door, which hinged upwards seagull wing-style, he took place in the rear bench seat, which was wide enough for two persons of normal size, and buckled his safety belt, then put on one of the two light headsets reserved for the passengers of the air bike. Ingrid sat in the pilot's seat situated in front of the rear bench seat and closed the side door, then restarted her engine, an Avco-Lycoming flat-six rated at 260 horsepower. Because his seat sat on top of the engine compartment and stood higher than the pilot's seat, Stanley was able to look ahead over Ingrid's head.

"So, Ingrid, what kind of top speed were you able to attain in horizontal flight mode?"

Ingrid smiled to him via her rear-view mirror while answering him.

"First, you must remember that our air bike has roughly the same power to weight ratio than a World War 2 fighter aircraft. It in fact equals in that aspect such planes as the Grumman HELLCAT and even surpasses the North American P51 D MUSTANG and the Vought F4U-A CORSAIR, so it ain't a pussy for starters. Second, it is much smaller and more compact than those fighters, thus generates much smaller amounts of aerodynamic drag. To answer your question, I did a speed dash at 10,000 feet and was able to clock a maximum air speed of 450 miles per hour, or 720 kilometers per hour if you prefer the metric system. That is equal to the top speed at altitude of the Vought CORSAIR and the SPITFIRE MARK XIV, while it is faster than the P51 D MUSTANG and the Focke-Wulf FW 190 D-9 'Long Nose', while the Grumman HELLCAT, the Messerschmitt Bf 109 F, the Lockheed P38 J LIGHTNING and the Curtiss P40C WARHAWK are all left behind in the dust of our air bike."

"But that's positively fantastic!" replied Stanley, who had not hoped for this much. In truth, his lack of frequent access to a proper wind test tunnel had forced him and Ingrid to work designs based on their experience and instincts, rather than through extensive wind tunnel testing. They had expected their air bike to be a fast machine, but this was well beyond his wildest dreams.

"And how about its handling, Ingrid?"

"It is about the most agile aircraft I have ever flown, thanks to its combination of forward and aft elevons surfaces and its vectoring flaps downstream of the four ducted propellers. The fact that you can pivot at different angles the ducted propellers in order to tighten a loop or dive and climb more steeply makes our air bike an ideal aircraft for an aerobatics pilot. That it can also take off and land at the vertical is just the icing on

the cake. I predict that all the military fighter pilots and civilian aerobatics pilots who will see our air bike will want one. But enough talking: let's demonstrate that to you."

Gunning her engine to maximum power and then setting the propellers' blade pitch from 'idle' to 'hover mode', she made the air bike zoom upward with an acceleration which glued Stanley to his seat. Then, Ingrid transitioned to horizontal flight while taking both speed and altitude and turning towards a group of hills visible in the distance. She stayed low at first while continuing to accelerate, making the ground below them roll past at incredible speed.

"We are now approaching our maximum low-level speed, which is about 410 miles per hour at sea level. Once at those hills ahead of us, I will do some high-speed terrain following, so you better hang on to your padded handle bar, fixed to the back of my seat."

Already feeling an incredible sensation from their fast and low flying, Stanley obeyed her and firmly gripped the padded handle bar meant to steady the passengers in case of air turbulences.

What Stanley Hiller soon experienced made air turbulences appear like some minor shaking, with Ingrid basically flying the way she would while doing a military low-level, high speed penetration mission through enemy airspace, hugging the ground and jumping over hill crests and transforming their flight into the most extreme roller-coaster ride he had ever experienced. He was breathing hard and fast when Ingrid suddenly threw their air bike into a vertiginous zoom climb which forced Stanley's back against his seat's backrest, rising to an altitude of 3,000 feet in less than one minute. Once at 3,000 feet, she decreased her climb rate and went into level flight at 5,000 feet, where she gunned her engine to maximum and accelerated, finally announcing their speed.

"WE ARE NOW AT 453 MILES PER HOUR, STANLEY. SATISFIED?"

"HELL YES! I THINK THAT WE CAN NOW GO BACK TO THE PLANT, INGRID. THIS FLIGHT WAS INCREDIBLE."

Returning to the Hiller plant at a more sedate pace, Ingrid made their air bike land smoothly on its two motorcycle wheels, with two small outrigger balancing wheels keeping the air bike standing upright. Stepping out of the machine first, Stanley then enthusiastically shook hands with Ingrid when she also stepped out.

"Ingrid, this was one hell of a fun ride. I concur with you that this will be a winner. Once in series production, it should sell like hot cakes."

"Which brings us to my payment for designing and developing our air bike. Getting the first series air bike will be plenty for me as payment."

"No!" replied at once Stanley Hiller, surprising Ingrid.

"No? What do you mean, no?"

"Just that, Ingrid: I refuse to let this go for one air bike."

While his tone was friendly, Stanley's serious expression told Ingrid that he meant what he said next.

"Ingrid, thanks to your air car design, I was able to revive the fortune of my company, which had been close to go out of business at the time, and got orders for hundreds of air cars, both from private customers and from various government agencies, from municipal, state and federal levels. I had to expand my plant like crazy and use sub-contractors to be able to fill all those orders and I still have a hard time keeping up with new orders. Then, you designed our air bus, a twenty-seater machine which we sold by the dozen, mostly to the military but also to companies doing work in isolated or rugged areas, like in Alaska. I am now a rich man with a prosperous company thanks to you and I refuse to exploit you further by simply paying you with a mere air bike. It is high time that I reward you with a decent salary commensurate with your achievements."

"Uh, okay!" said Ingrid, taken somewhat aback. "What are you offering me, then?"

"An honest cut from my company's future profits, plus a complimentary air bike and a bonus of 30,000 dollars for successfully designing this air bike. You either take it, or I will fire you as designer...after giving you a cheque for 30,000 dollars and one air bike."

"Well, if you put it so nicely, how could I refuse such an offer, Stanley?"

Stanley, grinning, then shook hands with Ingrid.

"I knew that you would see the light, Ingrid."

**14:38 (Washington Time)**

**Friday, August 14, 1992 'C'**

**General Aviation parking apron, Washington National Airport**

**Western shore of the Potomac River, opposite Washington, D.C.**

"A nice, smooth landing, Miss Dows. Congratulations: you just passed the solo flying test for your private pilot's license on Hiller AIR CAR."

Nancy, sitting in the pilot's seat of the Hiller AIR CAR belonging to the flying school based at the Washington National Airport, shouted out in triumph, then exchanged a strong handshake with her flight instructor.

"Thank you, Mister Redmond: you can't know how happy this makes me."

"Well, I suppose that, with your mother being such a celebrated pilot herself, you must have felt some pressure to pass your own pilot's license, Miss Dows." said the instructor, smiling at her while secretly admiring her profile and deep cleavage.

"Oh, I would probably have blown my brains out rather than go tell my mother that I failed my flying test. Mind you, that would be strictly me acting out on that, not her: she has always been a reasonable and understanding mother to me. What's next now?"

"We go inside my company's office, so that I could sign your pilot's license and register it with the FAA<sup>17</sup>. Then, you will be free to fly as much as you wish."

Cutting the engine and the main switch of the air car, Nancy then stepped out and started walking with her instructor towards the flight school's office, which was part of the general aviation terminal of the airport. Both of them however had to slow down and change direction to walk towards a most fantastic-looking compact machine painted a fiery orange-red. A small crowd of curious onlookers was in fact already assembled around the machine. Nancy sucked air in when she saw the painted name on the side of the machine, which said 'LADY HAWK'.

"My God! It belongs to my mother, but I never saw it before: it must be brand new."

"A Hiller AIR BIKE?" said her instructor, reading the make and model logo. "I never heard of it, but it certainly looks fantastic. It appears to be using many of the design features of the Hiller AIR CARE you just qualified on, Miss Dows. Ah, I think that your mother is coming towards us."

Turning her head, Nancy smiled on seeing that Nancy was effectively coming their way, apparently from the flight school's offices. She wore the kind of shiny leather adjusted

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<sup>17</sup> FAA: Federal Aviation Administration. The federal agency charged with administering civilian and commercial aviation in the United States.

coveralls worn by racing cars and motorcycle drivers, with the one she wore being a flashy orange-red color and with 'Lady Hawk' embroidered on her chest. She also had her flying helmet under one arm.

"Wow! You really wanted to attract attention today, Mother."

"And what's wrong with that, my sweet daughter? From your happy looks, I suppose that I can conclude that you passed your solo flying test with flying colors?"

"She certainly did, Misses Dows." Peter Redmond took on him to answer. "I had nothing to say about her flying today. We were on the way to my company's office, so that I could sign her new pilot's license, when we saw your machine. It must be brand new, no?"

"It effectively is, Mister Redmond. This is the first serial production copy of the new Hiller AIR BIKE, which will start to be officially offered for sale next week. Like for the AIR CAR, I designed it and I must say that I am extremely proud of it. Every aerobatics and military pilots will soon want one."

"It certainly looks like a hot machine, Misses Dows. What is its top speed, if I may ask?"

"Oh, it is indeed a hot machine, Mister Redmond: I broke through 453 miles per hour during one test flight in California."

There was a collective gasp around her then, followed by a deluge of questions about her air bike. In response, she opened its left luggage compartment door and searched inside it for a moment before taking out a pile of what looked like sales pamphlets.

"Well, now that I am officially a board member of the Hiller Helicopter Corporation, let me hand around a few of those sales pamphlets on the Hiller AIR BIKE, which will answer most of your questions about it, including about its sales price."

Her pamphlets were gone in seconds, with Peter Redmond being one of the takers and with Nancy also taking a pamphlet, making Ingrid smile.

"You too would be interested in a Hiller AIR BIKE, Nancy?"

"Who would not be, Mother? That machine looks truly hot!"

"Well, you will be able to dream about it while I give you a ride back home in my new air bike. Now, go get your pilot's license: I will wait for you here in the meantime." Encouraged by that declaration, Nancy nearly ran towards the flight school's offices. She came out some twelve minutes later, proudly holding her new license, which she showed to Ingrid once sitting in her air bike. Ingrid kissed her to congratulate her, then started her air bike, watched from a distance by a growing crowd of onlookers.

“This machine doesn’t have dual flight controls, but it is piloted exactly the same way as an air car. The only real differences are in its superior performances in nearly all aspects, save for its smaller carrying capacity. I will fly out at a moderate speed, so that I could explain how it is piloted as we go.”

Nancy, bent forward and watching over Ingrid’s head, watched carefully what her mother did as she took off vertically, then flew to their house while staying in helicopter mode, so short was the distance between the airport and their district of Aurora Hills. They finally landed in the courtyard of their house, the front driveway and garage becoming quite crowded thanks to Ingrid’s air car and Firebird TRANS AM and to Leonardo’s new Porsche 911 Turbo. Parking the air bike under a lightweight plastic and aluminum shelter set in one corner of their courtyard, Ingrid then surprised Nancy by leading her to the rear door of their garage and entering it. Nancy had to stop at once when inside, her eyes popping wide open at the sight of the gold and silver Hiller AIR BIKE with the name ‘SUPERGIRL’ painted on its sides.

“MOTHER, YOU DIDN’T!”

“Yes, I did! But if you don’t like it, I can always return it.”

“Mother, if you do that, I will kill you!”

“I thought so!” said Ingrid, grinning from ear to ear.

### **07:39 (Washington Time)**

**Tuesday, September 01, 1992 ‘C’**

**Parking lot area of the Northern Virginia International High School**

**9431 Silver King Court, Fairfax, Virginia**

Lucy Wong was chatting with Kimi Park, Sarah Weissman and Karl Wienermeyer, all good friends and old classmates from their mutual years at the Congressional school, when Leonardo Dows-Bocelli rolled into the parking lot of their new, small private school, at the wheel of a shiny red Porsche 911 Turbo convertible sports car. Lucy and her friends, like many other students present around the parking lot area, moved at once to come admire the apparently brand new sports car as Leonardo stepped out of his Porsche after unfolding the top of his convertible. Leonardo beamed with joy when he saw Lucy, Kimi, Sarah and Karl approach him and, his school briefcase in one hand, went to meet them to give them warm hugs.



"Lucy, Kimi, Sarah, Karl! It is nice to see that we will again be together after our years at the Congressional School."

"And it is nice to see you again, Leo." replied Kimi, adding a kiss to her own hug: over the years, she had become probably Leonardo's best friend, having a mutual interest in sciences and technology. She also had a crush on the handsome Italian-American teenage boy, with whom she had started to develop a serious relationship during their mutual adventure in Panama. Ungluing herself from him, Kimi then admired his Porsche 911 Turbo.

"Nice car you have, Leo. When did you get it?"

"Last month, after I got my driver's permit. Since I had plenty of money left from my part of Sir Drake's treasure, I decided that I wanted a really nice first personal car."

"It is certainly a beautiful car, Leo. Is Nancy also going to come and study here at this new private school?"

"Yes, she is!" said Leonardo while smiling. "She should arrive soon on her new bike."

That piece of news thrilled the rest of the group, who were all good friends with Nancy and positively revered her, especially after their adventure trip to Panama on the GOLDEN HINDE. Lucy Wong in particular was happy to learn that Nancy would be studying with her, for many reasons: she, like Nancy, loved music and playing instruments and Nancy had proved to be a kind, generous and open-minded girl. Nancy was also one of the rare few non-ethnic Chinese students she had known with whom Lucy could converse in Mandarin Chinese. However, one other reason why she was fond of Nancy was one she dared not reveal publicly: Lucy was a closet lesbian, something that would infuriate her parents if they ever learned about that and something that could even get her disowned by her own family. Her attraction to Nancy had only grown with the years, as Nancy's body developed and became more and more feminine and sexy. Lucy's shyness and fear of being outed had however stopped her from confessing her love to Nancy. Now that she knew that Nancy would attend this school with her, Lucy promised herself mentally that she would garner the courage to reveal her true feelings to Nancy during this school year.

The sudden noise and passage at low altitude over the school of a very fast propeller plane made many students duck, while the rest snapped their heads up to see what had just overflown them. What they saw then was a really small and compact

plane with four ducted propellers like those of Ingrid Dows' air car. The machine, painted gold and silver, then flew back towards the school, describing a wide half-turn, to next start slowing down while descending towards the parking lot area, followed by the eyes of the fascinated students and school staff present outside the school. Only Leonardo stayed unphased, speaking to his friends while also watching the air bike approach.

"That's Nancy, arriving in her new Hiller AIR BIKE. Ingrid gifted her with it once she passed her private pilot's license, two weeks ago."

"And how is your adoptive mother, by the way?" asked Karl Wienermeyer. "Is she going to show up today in her air car to meet with our teachers?"

"No! She is in California for the week, to work on a new project at Hiller. She also had some business to do at her old Space Corps base in Vandenberg."

Lucy's ear rose on hearing that piece of news: so, Nancy would be alone with Leo at their house for the whole week. Maybe that would be a good time to speak in private with Nancy and be open with her.

Nancy landed her air bike on its two main wheels at some distance from the cars parked next to the school, in order to prevent small rocks or objects blown off the ground by the downwash from her four ducted propellers from damaging their car paint. She then rolled to a parking spot in motorbike mode, watched by the fascinated onlookers. The truth was that the Hiller AIR BIKE was still quite a novelty and was not widely known. However, this was probably going to change quickly in the coming weeks. Leonardo and his group were the first to assemble next to the air bike as Nancy stepped out of it and retrieved her school briefcase and box lunch from the luggage compartment behind the rear bench seat. Kimi Park was particularly taken by the air bike and went slowly around it while examining every detail of it.

"Nancy, this machine is positively fantastic! How fast can it go?"

"Oh, just a measly 450 miles per hour at altitude, or 412 miles per hour at sea level. It can cruise at 400 miles per hour while on a 1,300-mile trip. Mind you, my air bike has the optional enlarged fuel tank. With a standard fuel tank, an air bike still can cover about 930 miles before you have to land at a gas station and refill it with Super grade gasoline."

"Wow! Could I bother you for a ride in it sometimes this week, Nancy?"

“Could I have a ride too, Nancy?” pleaded Lucy, quickly followed by others, making Nancy grin.

“You will all have a turn at riding with it, but I have only place for two passengers in it, so you will have to be patient. Kimi, Lucy, you asked first, so you will get the first ride.”

“YAY!” shouted both girls at once while jumping up and down. One male teacher who had approached the air bike to admire it then spoke up after looking at his watch.

“ALRIGHT, KIDS! IT IS NOW FIVE TO EIGHT: TIME TO HIT THE CLASSES!”

The students assembled around the air bike broke up with some regret and walked into the school to join their classes. The Northern Virginia International High School was actually small for a high school, with a normal capacity of only 130 students from Grade-Six to Grade-Twelve. That small capacity was however intentional, as the two-year-old private, non-denominational school was intended to cater to gifted students and to foreign students, typically children of foreign diplomats serving in Washington, thus charged hefty tuition fees. While the school capacity was small, so was the average class size of ten students, something which helped promote high-quality, more personalized education.

Leonardo and Nancy actually ended up in two different classes, although both were dedicated to grade-nine students. Nancy’s class turned out to be that of the ninth-grade arts and music group, while that of Leonardo was the ninth-grade mathematics and sciences Group. There was also a third ninth-grade group, that of history and social/political science group, which regrouped the majority of the foreign students of ninth level. Nancy’s senior group teacher, an ethnic-Indian music teacher named Rajiv Modi, did the opening statement to her group, which included Lucy Wong, Sarah Weissman, Karl Wienermeyer and a beautiful Latino teenage girl named Carmen Estrada, the daughter of a Mexican diplomat.

“Good morning to all of you and welcome to the Northern Virginia International School. My name is Rajiv Modi and I am the senior teacher of the arts and music department. You were all selected to this class group because you expressed a special interest or talent for arts or music, or both. Contrary to primary school, you will not have all or most of your classes in this local, as you will move as needed to the various specialized classrooms. While you will have a number of classes dedicated to arts and

music, that will not exempt you from having to attend basic matters' classes, like mathematics, English, physics, chemistry and history. So, if you were hoping to escape mathematics, like me when I was young, forget it!"

There was some short laughter before Modi, a 42-year-old man with brown skin and receding hairline, continued speaking.

"Your teachers in the arts and music department will be Misses Winifred Gleason, our singing teacher, Miss Jennifer Wainwright, our dance and ballet teacher, Miss Tanya Rutzinsky, our sculpting, drawing, painting and ceramics teacher, Miss Nora Campbell, our drama teacher and, finally, me, your instrumental music teacher. Now, I would like you to get up one at a time and present yourself while stating which type of art or musical instrument most interests you. Miss Wong, you may start first."

Lucy, doing her best to fight her timidity, got up and spoke up in her singing voice while looking at the other nine students of her group.

"Hello! My name is Lucy Wong and I am fifteen. My parents came from Hong-Kong some eighteen years ago and my father is in the import/export business. My interest is in music and my favorite instrument is the violin. I can also play the bass." She then sat back as Modi nodded his head.

"Very good, Lucy! Miss Sarah Weissman, you're next."

The Jewish teenager readjusted her glasses before getting up and facing her classmates.

"Good morning to all of you. I am Sarah Weissman and I am fifteen years-old. Music is my passion, particularly classical music, and my favorite instruments are the piano and the violin."

Modi nodded again, then pointed at the one student he was most interested into, thanks to her celebrated past exploits and public demonstrations of paranormal powers.

"Miss Dows, it's your turn to present yourself."

Nancy got on her feet and did a short pause before starting to speak: she was still hoping to avoid becoming the center of attention at the school, something that her public fame and name recognition would make hard indeed.

"Good morning to all! My name is Nancy Dows and, while I appear to be fifteen, I am biologically nine-years-old. To those who are still wondering about that, yes, I do possess a number of paranormal and supernatural powers, but I wish to avoid talking about them while here in the school. I am simply here to learn, like all of you. I love singing, dancing and playing musical instruments. My favorite instruments are the

qanun, a Persian variant of the zither, and the lute, but I can also play well the harp, the flute and the goblet drum.”

Modi applauded her as she sat down, having appreciated the modesty of her presentation.

“Well said, Nancy. To all of you, I will urge you to respect Nancy’s intimacy and not hound her with questions about her powers. Instead, please treat her the way you would treat the other students of this school: with respect and kindness. Karl Wienermeyer, I believe that you are next...”

**09:49 (California Time) / 12:49 (Washington Time)**  
**Main access gate, Naval Amphibious Base Coronado**  
**San Diego, California**



Ingrid, at the controls of her Hiller AIR BIKE, landed on the access road to the Naval Amphibious Base Coronado, then continued rolling in ground bike mode, stopping just short of the steel barrier and guardhouse of the main access gate to the naval base. The four U.S. Marines guarding the gate stared at her air bike, fascinated, then at her, as she opened upward the left side door of her canopy and presented her reserve officer’s military identity card to the sergeant in charge of the gate.

“Good morning, Sergeant! I have a scheduled meeting with Rear Admiral Smith, at the Naval Special Warfare Command.”

The Marine sergeant took her identity card and examined it carefully, stiffening a bit when he saw that she was listed on the card as a general-grade officer. Her name also came back to his memory and he gave her back her card before coming to attention and saluting her.

“You may proceed, General. Do you know how to get to the NSWC headquarters, ma’am?”

“Uh, no, not exactly.”

“Then, give me a second, General.” replied the Marine NCO before quickly walking into the guardhouse to go fetch one of the small base maps given on demand to legitimate visitors. As he was getting one map from a drawer of his duty desk, a young corporal asked him a question in a low voice while eyeing Ingrid through the window of the guardhouse.

“How could this chick be a general, Sarge? She’s only a teenager.”

The NCO gave a dubious look at his subaltern and replied in a low but firm tone to him.

“That ‘chick’, as you just called her, is General Ingrid Dows and she was fighting wars for the United States while you were not even born yet. She even fought alongside the great Chesty Puller, so don’t ever show disrespect to her again. Understood?”

Uh, yes, Sergeant!” said the young marine, thoroughly chastised. The sergeant then went back out with his map, giving it to Ingrid and explaining to her how to get to her destination before saluting her again. She returned his salute, then rolled through the opened gate, keeping her air bike in ground mode bike. That capability of the Hiller AIR BIKE to act exactly like a regular motorcycle was one aspect she had intentionally designed into her air bike and was one of the reasons why it was now selling like hot cakes around the country, with the caveat that only people with a valid private, commercial or military pilot’s license qualified as potential customers. With its 260-horsepower engine, the Hiller AIR BIKE could easily rival with about any commercial bike on the market in terms of road performances and had plenty of torque power on top of that. The only point one had to be careful about when rolling on a road with it was to stay conscious of its unusual width of 170 centimeters, the result of its four ducted rotors and front and rear elevon surfaces not having the capability of folding up for a diminished width. That was actually one thing she and Stanley Hiller were still debating about: to offer or not a variant of the air bike with folding elevons and propeller assemblies. Still, since the current model air bike’s overall width was well within the legal road limit for a standard vehicle, that had not proven yet to be a real problem, as a version with folding surfaces and ducted propellers would inevitably cost a lot more to produce, thus could hurt the sales of the air bike. Even while rolling in ground bike mode instead of flying around the base, Ingrid still attracted a lot of attention on her passage, even more so now that she had removed her pilot’s helmet, letting her hair fall freely down. Being able to let her hair grow long and being allowed to change its color was actually one of the advantages she truly enjoyed as a retired military officer. Before leaving the military service, she had to keep her hair to a regulation neck-length cut or tie her hair in buns, something that the wearing of a pilot’s helmet made impractical. She now had her hair, bleached blond these days, fall down to her shoulders, something that, allied with her renewed teenager’s look and her freedom to use makeup according to her own taste, only attracted men to her even more.

Following the map given to her at the main gate, Ingrid soon arrived at the group of four-story-high buildings on Tulagi Road housing the command and administrative offices of the Coronado Naval Amphibious Base, which included the command offices of the Naval Special Warfare Command, her destination. Parking her air bike and stepping out of it, she locked it and then took a moment to examine the building complex, shaking her head. The complex was actually formed by four L-shaped buildings built around a central point. Unfortunately, when viewed from the air, the complex had the distinct shape of a swastika, a rather unfortunate look for an American military installation. With a light briefcase in one hand, she walked to the main entrance of the building housing the headquarters of the NSWC, making all heads turn on her passage. Today was a hot day in San Diego and she had dressed casually and light, thus wore a very short skirt leaving her long legs uncovered, while a light blouse with short sleeves and a deep cleavage covered her torso. A pair of running shoes completed her outfit. Once through the main doors of the building and into the main lobby, she went to a reception desk manned by a Navy NCO, with a pair of armed Marines standing on guard behind the desk, ready to challenge any undesirable visitor. That did not surprise Ingrid, who knew that the NSWC, which was in charge of the Navy special forces units, the famous Navy S.E.A.L.s, dealt with many highly classified matters. Walking to the reception desk, she presented her I.D. card to the NCO.

“Good morning! I am General Ingrid Dows and I have an appointment with Rear Admiral Smith at the NSWC.”

While baffled at first by her youthful appearance, the NCO got up and saluted her as soon as he checked his list of expected visitors.

“Welcome to the NSWC, General! I will have somebody guide you to the command office of Admiral Smith.”

The NCO then signaled a young female sailor to approach and gave her an order.

“Seaman Rountree, please guide General Dows to the office of Admiral Smith.”

“Yes, Petty Officer!”

The female sailor, a pretty woman with brown skin, then turned towards Ingrid and saluted her.

“If you will follow me, General.”

“After you, Seaman Roundtree.”

The two women then walked together to an elevator bank in one corner of the lobby and used a cabin to go up to the top floor of the building, where the seaman led Ingrid to a

set of double doors. Entering ahead of Ingrid, the seaman then went to a civilian secretary typing a document in one corner of a small waiting room cum anteroom.

"Excuse me, miss: can you tell Admiral Smith that General Dows has arrived to meet with him?"

The secretary, who was probably waiting already for Ingrid, did not make a comment about her teenager's appearance and used her intercom to talk to her boss before smiling to Ingrid.

"You may go in, General."

"Thank you, miss. Thank you as well to you, Seaman Roundtree." replied Ingrid before opening the door to Rear Admiral Smith's office and entering it. Rear Admiral Raymond Smith, a tall and lean but fit man, was already walking towards the door and stopped at once at her entrance, coming to attention and saluting her.

"General, it is a true pleasure to have you here today."

Ingrid smiled and also came to attention for a moment.

"Well, it is the Hiller Corporation which is pleased to have received an invitation from you, Admiral. I understand that the Navy is in need of a new type of vehicle for its special forces' operators, right?"

"Exact, General! But please, let's go discuss in my coffee corner. Would you like something to drink, General, maybe a coffee or tea?"

"A cup of strong coffee would be nice, Admiral: I just flew in from Washington in my air bike and had to leave early in the morning there."

"You flew to here all the way from Washington on your air bike? That's impressive!"

"Not really, if you count that I needed to land and refuel twice at roadside service stations along the way. Being able to use common gasoline is indeed one nice advantage of the Hiller air cars and air bikes."

Smith nodded his head in understanding, then took a moment to pour a cup of coffee for Ingrid from the coffee percolating machine sitting on a small corner table. Putting the cup in front of Ingrid on a low table, he sat facing her in an easy chair but waited for her to have taken a first sip from her cup before speaking.

"General Dows, I am sure that you are well aware of the kind of missions given to our S.E.A.L. operators. Suffice to say that they mostly get to their targets from the sea or from the air and then may either use land vehicles or walk to do their final approach to their objectives. Up to now, they have been using a variety of vehicles and



means to do that, be they small boats, mini-submarines, helicopters, planes to parachute from or light ground vehicles. As you may easily imagine, using many different vehicles for the same mission only complicates the planning and execution of the mission: the more things used, the more chances of some breakdown or mishap happening. The recent development by Hiller of its air car and then its air bike has made me wonder if it would be possible to design a vehicle unique to the S.E.A.L.s, able to carry them in the air, on the water, under the surface and on land. Hiller's initial response to our request said that it could possibly be done and that they would send you to review our mission requirements and see if it would be possible to design such a vehicle."

"And I would be truly pleased to try my hand at designing such a vehicle, Admiral. First, however, I would need to know what are the mission requirements expected by the Navy from such a special vehicle."

"Of course, General! I must say that I had to rein in some of the more overenthusiastic Navy senior commanders, telling them not to try to 'gold-plate' the design the way it happened too often in the past, leading to costly program failures. The list of requirements I have for you is thus considered by me to be reasonable and truly needed. Here is that list, General."

Ingrid took the paper offered by Smith, who had extracted it from a classified file resting on the low table, and read it quickly before nodding slowly her head.

"Your list is indeed a reasonable one, Admiral, although what your S.E.A.L. operators need is a truly astounding machine. I see that the two main requirements are, first, for a machine able to operate in the air, on the water, under the water and on the ground and, second, to be able to carry at least four and ideally five or more fully equipped combat divers. While those two requirements alone are extremely demanding ones, I do believe that Hiller could produce a machine that would fulfill those requirements. Since we are not trying here to design something economical in terms of acquisition costs or to be mass-produced, that will allow me to use a few solutions I would not normally consider for a commercial design. I however would need you to precise what kind of options you would like to see incorporated in my design, in order to better fill the needs of your operators. I am asking this because experience showed me that one little gadget or extra capability sometimes could make a big difference in terms of mission success. So, if you need things like high speed on water, seafloor crawling capability and the carrying of weapons systems, don't be afraid to ask for them now, so that I can consider them while thinking about my future design. One thing I would like to

do right away is to use the nickname 'Supercar' when talking about this future machine. That would avoid us using terms that could reveal the future uses intended for that machine and would help keep the secrecy about this project."

"Supercar... I like it! Sold! Now, in terms of extra requirement which would be desirable but not absolutely needed, I can already think of a few. However, how about if we go ask the men who would eventually operate your supercar during mission what their opinions are on this?"

Ingrid smiled at once at those words and nodded her head once.

"Asking the advice of the operators is always a smart move, Admiral. Would I also be able to look at one of your actual swimmer delivery vehicles at the same time? I would like to see what we are trying to improve on."

"Certainly, General! Our SDV Team One is based here and we will be able to visit it at once. Let me just call for a car to go to their training facility."

"No need to call a car, Admiral." said quickly Ingrid. "We can go there in my air bike."

Her suggestion was met with an instant grin from Smith.

"Hell, I always wanted to ride in one of those since they were offered on the market. I'm taker!"

"Excellent! My air bike is parked outside, in the headquarters' parking lot."

With Smith first calling by phone his SDV team to warn his men of his coming visit and retrieving his service cap, he then followed Ingrid down to the ground floor and out of the building, walking with her to the adjacent parking lot. When they arrived at Ingrid's air bike, they found it surrounded by a small crowd of curious onlookers, which Rear Admiral Smith promptly told to disperse and return to their work. He appeared a bit surprised by the generous width of the rear passenger bench seat.

"Wow! I was expecting something a bit more cramped. You were quite generous with your passengers' space, General."

"Well, I do care a lot about the comfort and practicability of the users of my designs but, in this case, the rear seat is so wide mostly because I needed a large engine to be able to fit under the rear seat in terms of width. If you will please buckle up, Admiral."

"Uh, sure! We are going to the docks area at the northeast tip of the base, where our Naval Special Warfare Group Three and our SDV Team One are lodged.

Just take the Rio Road, then you will turn right onto Tarawa Road and roll until the end, at the junction with Inchon Road.”

“Damn! Those road names remind me of my fighting time in the Pacific during World War Two. Okay, let’s go!”

Starting her engine and powering her ducted propellers, Ingrid then surprised Rear Admiral Smith by flying to their destination rather than simply roll on the ground. While short indeed, that flight was enough to turn Smith into an enthusiast of the Hiller AIR BIKE and he was grinning like a little kid who had just completed a rollercoaster ride when they landed in another parking lot of the base.

“I love your air bike, General. Was Hiller able to sell some of them to the Navy, or to another of our armed services?”

He didn’t miss in the rear-view mirror the way Ingrid frowned at his question.

“We were truly hoping to attract the attention of senior officers at the Pentagon on our new air bike but, unfortunately, we hit a crust of old-fashioned Navy admirals who basically put up multiple red tape roadblocks to the Navy acquiring some of our air bikes. We can’t prove it, but we suspect that those admirals were influenced by some big congressmen, who in turn have been paid off by commercial rivals of the Hiller Corporation.”

It was Smith’s turn to frown then.

“Damn political corruption and lobbying! They have cost us plenty over the decades in terms of bloated contracts and overpriced, underperforming weapons systems. How much is the selling price of one basic air bike on the civilian market right now, General?”

“Well, it is a bit pricey for a bike but, as you can see, it is no ordinary bike. Presently, the basic price of a new Hiller AIR BIKE stands at 36,700 dollars, about the same as a high-end, high-performance European sports car. Why do you ask, Admiral? You want to buy one for yourself?”

“Not for myself, General: for my command. As a special warfare command, we do have a special discretionary budget which enables us to acquire non-standard equipment and weapons in order to fulfill special, urgent operational requirements. The limit to single contracts for that discretionary budget is 100,000 dollars, just enough to buy two of your air bikes for, uh, ‘operational testing’.”

Ingrid twisted her head to look at Smith directly, her expression most serious.

"Admiral, let me call Mister Stanley Hiller after we visit your men: I believe that I could then arrange a special package deal at cut prices for you which will be within your special budget."

"General, that would be much appreciated. We definitely could have used one or two of your air bikes during a couple of our past missions. Well, let's go visit my SDV team now."

Before they could close the doors of the air bike, Smith and Ingrid were met in the parking lot by a Navy Commander and six men in unmarked camouflaged uniforms and wearing non-regulation beards and long hair. Ingrid then knew better than berate those men for their unorthodox appearances: she was now looking at six of the best fighting men the United States had. The Navy Commander, whose hair was also on the long-side, saluted both Smith and Ingrid, then shook hands with Ingrid.

"General Dows, it is an immense honor to be able to greet you to my sub-unit. I am Commander Randolph Skinner, commander of the Naval Special Warfare Group Three, and these are the members of my SDV Team One."

"Pleased to meet you all." replied Ingrid, shaking hands with all seven men before grinning to one of them. "And yes, I am only days away from reaching my 67<sup>th</sup> birthday."

The man she had addressed then stiffened with surprise and shock.

"Uh, how could you know that I was wondering about your age, General?"  
In response, a smiling Ingrid touched her right temple with her index.

"Telepathy, my dear Petty Officer One Tomkins. But let's jump to the reason of my visit to your sub-unit. Admiral Smith has asked me to design a successor to your present SDV Mark 8 and I came to seek your informed opinions about what you would like to see in terms of capabilities and special equipment in my future design."

"Then, I believe that the best place to discuss this would be in front of one of our SDVs, which is kept here for training purpose." said Commander Skinner. "If you and Admiral Smith would follow me..."

Walking as a group inside a nearby hangar, they soon stopped at the side of a rather ugly machine painted matte black and laid on a wheeled transport trailer. If anything, it looked a lot like a big, black pencil eraser with a screw propeller at its back. Commander Skinner then showed it to Ingrid by sweeping both of his arms.

“Our SDV Mark 8. It can carry six men, weighs about sixteen tons, has a top speed underwater of six knots and a range of fifteen to eighteen nautical miles fully loaded. It has its flaws, but it helped us accomplish a number of difficult missions in the past, General.”

Ingrid slowly nodded her head while eyeing carefully the SDV.

“Admiral Smith already briefed me on the requirements he expects from my future design, but I wanted to learn from your men about what you would like to see in my new machine. First off, though, please tell me in all frankness what you don’t like or find questionable about your present SDV Mark 8, Commander. I also want to hear from your men.”

Skinner glanced at Smith, who nodded once his head, before answering Ingrid.

“Well, there are really four main problems with our SDV Mark 8, General. First, it is slow and not very maneuverable. Second, its range underwater greatly limits our abilities to attain targets up rivers or inside wide, defended harbor areas. Third, that lack of autonomy limits a lot the way it could be transported to close to its targets. Right now, we have to carry it piggy-back inside a pressurized chamber fixed to the deck of a submarine, or must be put in the water by a ship near enemy shores. Fourth, it is cramped and claustrophobic, to the point that many of our divers hesitate to ride inside it. The Navy had initiated a program to develop a better SDV, but that program was aborted after its costs ballooned up and after a few mishaps with the prototype.”

“I see! Would it be possible for me to sit in it for a moment, to experience what your divers feel inside one?”

“No problem, General! PO1 Tomkins, could you open one side of the riding compartment and get a ladder for General Dows, please?”

“Just open that hatch, PO: no need for a ladder here.”

“Uh, okay, General.”

Tomkins actually had to stretch his arms up to open one of the rear hatches for Ingrid. The latter then surprised and shocked the S.E.A.L. members by levitating off the ground and floating up to a position above the opened hatch, then lowering herself in a sitting position inside the SDV.

“Alright, PO Tomkins: you can close that hatch over me now.”

Tomkins obeyed her and closed shut the access hatch, plunging at once Ingrid in total darkness. There was not even a porthole or window to look outside, while the space she

was in had to be cramped for a fully-equipped male diver. In all, it had to create a strong claustrophobic feeling in about anyone.

"Damn! The ergonomics of this thing are basically non-existent." she said to herself before banging against the hatch.

"YOU CAN OPEN THE HATCH NOW!"

Tomkins promptly opened the hatch, allowing Ingrid to stand up in the open compartment while she shook her head.

"This must have been designed by someone with no care whatsoever about the men who would have to operate it. How could the Navy accept such a flawed design?" Admiral Smith shrugged his shoulders in response.

"As you said, big bureaucracies and Washington politics had their hand in this, General. So, you think that you can design something markedly better than our Mark 8?"

"Admiral, I will hang myself if I can't do much better than this."

She then levitated again, flying down to the ground and landing in front of the S.E.A.L.s. She then smiled to the men while rubbing her hands together.

"So, guys, what would you like to see, apart from my naked body?"

### **17:18 (California Time)**

#### **Astronauts Training Center**

#### **Vandenberg U.S. Space Corps Base, California**

Having flown on her air bike to the Vandenberg Space Corps Base, Ingrid found her old friend, Lilya Litvak, in the process of getting out of her spacesuit after a training session in the big, deep training pool of the training center. Both women happily exchanged hugs and kisses on the cheeks then.

"Ingrid, it is nice to see you again. How are Nancy and Leo doing?"

"Just fine, Lilya. And you?"

Ingrid didn't miss the short look of sadness which then showed up on her friend's face.

"The training is going well and I am really anxious to leave for Uranus and Neptune aboard the PROMETHEUS in six weeks, but I cruelly miss Russia. I mean of course my country itself, not the bunch of irresponsible politicians and generals presently busy dismembering and ruining everything there. I had really hoped that the failure of that coup in Moscow three years ago would eventually bring better days to my country,

but I was wrong. Everybody was wrong, as we all underestimated the amount of greed for power, corruption, venality and administrative incompetence that had been eating at the Soviet Union for decades. Now, it has all but degenerated into a widespread civil war inside the Soviet Union, with many of its republics seceding and proclaiming themselves independent and with a portion of the old Soviet forces trying without success to force them back under Moscow's control but only succeeding in making the situation worse and more chaotic. Right now, I have no assurances at all that I would not be imprisoned or even executed the moment that I would set foot back in my country. It is basically the same situation for Sasha and Natalia. Fortunately, with your help, they were able like me to be accepted officially as political refugees by the United States and were hired by your Space Corps as civilian scientific staff members. They are also going to leave with me on the PROMETHEUS in six weeks. Hopefully, by the time that it will return to Earth orbit in six years, things will have settled down in the U.S.S.R., or whatever will remain of it by then, but I am not holding my breath for that.” Seeing the very real sadness in her friend's eyes, Ingrid hugged Lilya again for a long moment while speaking softly into her ear.

“It will eventually get better there, Lilya. Even nightmares have ends, believe me. I will do my best to help improve that situation while you are in deep Space, I promise. If things really get too bad there, I may just invoke the help of The One: he is not ready to allow the risk for another nuclear exchange which could exterminate Humanity. Now, how about going out with me and the Smirnov's to a good local restaurant for supper? I would like very much to spend a nice evening with all three of you.”

Lilya wiped out a few tears which had come out of her eyes and nodded her head.

“I would like that very much, Ingrid. I wish that I knew more friends like you.”

“Well, I am afraid that I am a bit unique in many aspects, Lilya.” replied Ingrid, smiling with malice.

## **CHAPITRE 19 – HUMAN TRAFFICKING**

**21:15 (Washington Time)**

**Thursday, September 3, 1992 ‘C’**

**Nancy’s air bike, overflying the New York City Eastside docks area**

**Manhattan, New York City, New York State, U.S.A.**

A happy Lucy Wong, sitting in the rear seat of Nancy’s air bike, affectionately passed her arms around Nancy’s pilot seat and bent forward to kiss her on the left side of her head.

“Thank you again for accepting me as I am, Nancy. You are my best friend, really.”

Nancy smiled while still keeping a watchful eye around her air bike for other low-level air traffic.

“It would have been quite hypocritical on my part to reject you because you are a lesbian, when I am myself a bisexual girl, thanks to my past souvenirs. By the way, you can lower your hands a bit, if you want to.”

“Oh, I certainly want to, Nancy: your chest is divine.” replied Lucy before lowering her hands and covering Nancy’s breasts with them before starting to fondle them. Nancy, who had just profited from Ingrid’s prolonged absence from home to invite Lucy for an intimate supper and private time together, moaned with pleasure before speaking up.

“So, where is that warehouse which belongs to your father, Lucy?”

“It is next to Pier 36, along the East River, close to Chinatown. I can see it down to our left and ahead. You can land in the big parking lot next to that row of old warehouses.”

“I see it! I am going to start my descent now. You are sure that your father will be there?”

“Yes! I called my mother before leaving to know if my father was home and she told me that he was in New York, taking care of an import shipment that had just arrived at his company’s warehouse. I thought that it would make a nice surprise for him to see



me visit him in New York. With luck, he will accept to return to Washington in your air bike, instead of having to use his chauffeured car.”

“It would indeed save him from a long drive home, Lucy.” said Nancy, who then concentrated fully on her approach and descent towards the parking lot pointed by Lucy. While there were quite a few semi-trailer trucks and other heavy trucks backed up to the various loading quays lining the western side of the warehouse block, there was still plenty of room for her to safely land close to the Wong’s warehouse. As she was still some 300 meters away and some 100 meters up, Nancy suddenly noticed a few things which intrigued her. One was the presence of a half dozen men simply standing around the company’s loading quay and looking outward while not helping in loading the big van presently backed up to the quay. Another unusual thing was that there was a group of persons being led inside the rear box of the van. That, over all things, triggered a mental alarm in Nancy’s brain: you normally would use a bus or cars to move a group of people, not a windowless van. Also, the attitude of the men standing around the quay reminded her of that of sentries on watch. She then decided to temporarily abort her descent and instead flew directly towards the loading quay while accelerating, attracting a surprised question from Lucy.

“What are you doing, Nancy? You are going to pass my father’s company’s loading quay.”

“I am seeing something suspicious, Lucy. Please trust me and stay quiet while observing things on the ground around that loading quay.”

Nancy then switched off her landing and position lights, becoming that much harder to spot in the dark sky, and adjusted her low-level light goggles over her eyes while continuing in level flight towards the loading quay. The men on watch around the quay did raise their heads upward on hearing her propeller noise but were not able to spot her. However, there was a couple of lights on at the adjacent loading quays, which were presently empty, so Nancy had plenty of illumination with her goggles to clearly see what was going on at the quay as she overflew it. What she saw made her swear.

“Fuck! I see a good dozen women with gags on their mouths and with their hands tied in their backs, being forcibly led inside that truck van by armed men. Is this your father’s company’s loading quay, Lucy?”

“Yes: I visited it a few times in the past and I can see the company’s logo over that gate. What is going on, Nancy?” asked Lucy in a hurt voice. Nancy bit her lips and

continued to fly straight, taking some distance from the warehouse in order not to rouse suspicion among the armed men on the quay.

"Lucy, I hate to say this to you, but it seems that your father is implicated, either voluntarily or not, into human trafficking."

"Human trafficking?" said her friend in a horrified tone. "That's impossible!"

"Maybe somebody else is forcing him into allowing this to happen at his warehouse, Lucy, but either way this has to be stopped. Please keep quiet while I call the police on my CB radio."

Slowing down and going into hover mode before pivoting her air bike around, so that she could face the loading quay and van truck from a safe distance, she then switched her CB radio to the police channel and spoke in her helmet microphone.

"New York City Police, this is private aircraft number WD 003, urgent call, over!" She had to repeat her call before a male voice answered her.

"WD 003, this is the New York City Police air dispatch, state the nature of the emergency, over."

"New York City Police air dispatch, from WD 003, I am flying in a Hiller AIR BIKE over the area of the warehouses located along Pier 36, on the East River. I am seeing suspicious activities at the loading dock of the Wong Import/Export Company, with over a dozen gagged and tied up women being forcibly loaded in the back of a big van truck. That truck is painted white and brown and wears the logo of a 'Cathay Imports' company. I have by now counted a minimum of sixteen women being led into the back of that truck. Be aware that about six armed men are visible around the loading quay. I urgently need some police presence at Pier 36, over."

"Wait one, WD 003." said the police dispatcher, who then returned on the air after a few seconds. "WD 003, from NYPD dispatch: a police helicopter on patrol over Manhattan has been alerted and is on its way towards your position. It should be there in about two minutes, over."

"Thank you, NYPD dispatch! Advise your helicopter that I am presently hovering some 200 yards to the North of the Wong's Company loading quay and will have my positioning lights on. I intend to keep an overwatch position from a safe distance, over."

"Understood, WD 003. Advise us if something new happens, out."

By the time that Nancy terminated her conversation on the radio, Lucy was close to hysteria.

"How could my father be involved into something this monstrous? He is a good man, Nancy, not a criminal!"

"Lucy, I sincerely hope that you are right about that and that someone is simply forcing your father to allow them to use his warehouse for their criminal activities. God knows that the Chinese Triads are both powerful and violent. Maybe they were threatening your father, or even threatening you and your family, in order to blackmail him. Anyway, we will soon know more about this, once the police will arrive and investigate. Now, I will ask you to calm down and to have confidence in me. The police should be here in a few minutes."

Some two minutes later, Nancy saw the blinking lights of a helicopter approaching the warehouse loading quay area. She then went back on her radio.

"New York City Police air dispatch, I now see your helicopter approaching. Be advise that there are now a minimum of 27 women and girls inside that white and brown delivery van. The way those women had to be helped to walk suggests that they have been drugged. Those six armed men are still posted around the loading quay. One of them is now starting to react to the approach of your helicopter and is apparently giving orders around him, over."

"Understood, WD 003: we are advising our helicopter of this, out."

Nancy, still keeping her air bike in a hover position at an altitude of a hundred meters, anxiously watched as the police helicopter slowed down and lit on its powerful searchlight while approaching the loading quay. From the air, Nancy could also see the gyro lights of two police cars racing along the FDR Drive towards Pier 36.

"Come on, guys, catch those bastards in the act."

Things then escalated...fast! The first indication of that was when Nancy spotted what had to be multiple gun muzzle flashes from the men posted around the quay. The second indication was when two men hurriedly closed the rear doors of the van and made signs to its driver to roll.

"Oh no! You ain't fleeing like this, buster!" said Nancy before concentrating mentally while staring at the front right-side wheel of the truck. Just as the van was about to drive off, that tire blew up, heated to boiling point by Nancy's power. She then started to fly her air bike towards the truck, in order to be in position to be able to see its other front tire, so that she could also blow it up and thus immobilize the truck. She could see two men inside the front cab of the van, who were getting quite agitated by

now. While approaching the truck, Nancy made the rear right-side tire blow up as well: that truck was not about to escape the police now. However, things were not going so well for the police helicopter, which was taking some heavy gunfire from the area of the loading quay. With smoke coming from its engine, the police helicopter was forced to fly away and do an emergency landing some distance from the warehouse, out of range of the armed men. Nancy had now seen enough and landed her air bike behind the protection of a building standing between her and the loading quay. Shutting off her engine, she then opened her side door and pointed firmly her right index at her friend.

“Lucy, you stay here and you don’t move! Understood?”

“But you...”

“YOU DON’T MOVE!”

With Lucy thoroughly intimidated by her firm tone, Nancy then closed the side door and started to run around the building in order to get close to the loading quay of the Wong’s Import/Export Company. One police car was now screeching to a halt in front of the van truck, blocking its path, while another police cruiser stopped behind the protection of a parked vehicle, with the two policemen inside stepping out in a hurry with guns drawn. As for the armed men around the loading quay, they were now retreating inside the warehouse while taking potshots at the police. Nancy could now hear more police cars approaching with sirens blaring: this area would soon be awash with policemen. However, the two men inside the truck’s cab apparently had not intention to surrender and started firing handguns at the two policemen in the patrol car blocking their path. To Nancy’s fury, she saw one of the two policemen getting hit and falling to the ground with a grunt of pain, while his partner hurriedly took cover behind the opened door of his patrol car and started returning fire. While walking quickly towards the truck, Nancy stared hard at the gunman who had hit one of the policemen, concentrating her power of telekinesis on him. The man, who was standing on the right-side foot rest of the cab, was suddenly catapulted high into the air, rising up to a height of fifty meters while screaming wildly, then falling down as Nancy released her telepathic hold on him. The man then splattered himself on the asphalt of the loading area and became inert. Both the intact policeman and the truck driver stared with disbelief at the dead gunman as Nancy concentrated her attention on the truck driver. The latter, still sitting behind his wheel and firing through his opened side window, was suddenly projected forward violently, with his face smashing into his windshield and cracking it. The man, his face bleeding, was then projected again twice against the windshield, ending up unconscious

and sprawled over his steering wheel. While he couldn't believe his eyes, the intact policeman took that chance to run to the cab of the truck and open its door, then roughly pulling out the driver and making him fall on the asphalt. As he was putting handcuffs on the truck driver, he saw Nancy, wearing a leather suit and a flying helmet, approach his wounded partner. Quickly finishing to handcuff the driver, the policeman then drew again his revolver and pointed it at Nancy while shouting at her.

"STOP! DO NOT APPROACH MY PARTNER AND RAISE YOUR HANDS!"

Nancy then stopped, but kept her hands low while sending a telepathic message to the policeman, who clearly saw that her lips didn't move.

*'Do not be scared of me, Officer. I am here to help. I can heal your partner.'*

"WHAT KIND OF BALONEY IS THAT? WHO ARE YOU?"

*'My name is Nancy Dows, but I am also called by many 'Supergirl'. I have the power of touch healing, along many other powers, and I just took out those two criminals. Now, please let me heal him before he dies.'*

The policeman, now completely overwhelmed, debated things for seconds before lowering his revolver.

"ALRIGHT, MISS. YOU MAY GIVE FIRST AID TO MY PARTNER, BUT I AM WATCHING YOU."

Nancy did not reply to that and kneeled next to the wounded policemen, who was bleeding profusely from a bullet in his guts and was in intense pain. She then spoke to him softly while approaching her hands to his wound.

"Do not be afraid, Officer. I came to help and heal you."

Her hands then started to glow, with the glow then enveloping progressively both her and the policeman. A police van screeched to a halt nearby at that moment, with the S.W.A.T. members coming out of its back at a run then staring with disbelief at the scene. Their squad leader, going over his shock, then shouted an order.

"COME ON! WE HAVE RATS TO SMOKE OUT OF THIS WAREHOUSE! FOLLOW ME!"

The S.W.A.T. members then left at a run, leaving Nancy free to finish healing the wounded policeman. The latter, not feeling pain anymore, touched his blood-soaked shirt and looked with disbelief at the blood on his hand. Nancy helped him to sit down, then put one hand in his back to support him.

"Careful, Officer: you are now healed, but you lost a lot of blood. You will still need to make a visit to a hospital after this, in order to get a blood transfusion."

"Harry, are you okay?" asked his partner, coming at a run.

"I, I think so, Jack. I don't feel any pain now but my head is spinning a bit."

Both policemen then watched as Nancy got back on her feet and started walking towards the back of the van truck, negligently stepping around the criminal splattered on the asphalt on the right side of the truck.

"Hey, where are you going, miss?"

"I was the one who alerted the police about an apparent case of human trafficking: I am going to make sure that the women and girls in the back of this truck are safe and sound."

"Go with her, Jack. I will be okay." said the now healed policeman.

"Alright, Harry, but something tells me that I will need a stiff drink at the end of our shift. This whole business is unreal!"

"Tell me about it, Jack."

The said Jack then followed Nancy to the back of the van truck and helped her open the large double doors at the back. Shining his flashlight inside, the policeman saw about forty young women and girls sitting on the floor, gagged and tied up.

"Shit! This is indeed a case of human trafficking."

"I am going to climb aboard, to untie those women and check that they are okay."

"Go ahead, miss: I will call for backup help for them in the meantime."

Climbing inside the truck, Nancy started undoing the gags and ropes tying the women and softly asked them a few questions as she proceeded down the double file of captives. It however became quickly evident to her that they were under the effects of some drug that left them incoherent. However, they said enough to make Nancy understand where they had come from. Her expression grim, she returned to the doors at the back of the van and spoke to the policeman waiting there.

"There are 37 women and girls in here, some barely in their mid-teens and with the oldest being 25 at the most. All are at least pretty and all speak in Russian. While I could recognize Russian, I can't really speak it, so we will need someone with a working knowledge of Russian to come and help those girls. This smells like those girls were kidnapped in Russia, then smuggled to here by Triad gangs, so that they could be forced into prostitution. By the way, did you notice that the two gunmen from this truck were both Asian men?"

"Yes, I did notice that, miss. You are probably right about those Russian girls being brought here for forced prostitution. We have had quite a bit of such cases recently."

"That's not surprising, in view of the present chaos inside the old Soviet Union. Organized crime gangs are having an easy time to do as they wish there."

The policeman nodded his head, then looked her in the eyes.

"Miss, I thank you for healing my partner and for signaling this in time for us to react. You however will understand that I will have to ask you to come to our precinct after this, so that you can make a deposition."

"I understand, Officer. Just let me go get my air bike, which I parked behind a nearby building. I have a friend still inside and I would like to go check on her."

"Then go, miss. What is your name again?"

"Nancy Dows. I reside in Arlington, Virginia. If you will now excuse me."

She then jumped out of the truck and walked back to her air bike. Thankfully, Lucy was still inside the machine, although she was now a near nervous wreck.

"My God! You are okay! Please tell me what the hell happened here, Nancy."

"Well, it is now a confirmed case of mass human trafficking involving Russian women and girls kidnapped in Russia and then smuggled to here, probably to force them into prostitution. I hope that your father will have some good explanations to give to the police. If not, he will be in some big doodoo. I am now going to fly my air bike to closer to the warehouse, so that I can watch on you while answering questions from the police. I am afraid that this will be a long night for us."

#### **04:11 (Washington Time)**

**Friday, September 4, 1992 'C'**

**New York Police Department Headquarters**

**1 Police Plaza, Manhattan, New York City**

New York Chief Detective Joseph Borelli shook his head after finishing to read the deposition signed a few minutes ago by Nancy Dows. He then looked at his police command team in charge of this human trafficking case.

"Wow! If not for a number of our officers being witnesses to what happened, I would have a hard time to accept this deposition as accurate and truthful. I heard about that girl in the past but what do we really know about her?"

In response, one of his assistants, who specialized in archives and databanks research, passed to him a thin file containing a few sheets of texts and pictures.

"Here is all the info and stories I found about this young Nancy Dows, Chief. I however must qualify my use of the term 'young', as her case is completely out of the norm. Officially, she is nine-years-old, while physically she looks more like fifteen, a very sexy fifteen. However, she is already a highly mature individual, thanks to the fact that she can remember her past life incarnations. When you speak with her, you feel like you are talking with a very experienced and seasoned person. While she admitted not to be able to speak Russian, something she told us from the start, she does speak over a good dozen languages, including Mandarin Chinese. Another aspect in which she is completely out of the norm is her having a number of superpowers. A number of our officers witnessed her last night demonstrating some of those superpowers, notably touch-healing and telekinesis. Publicized past incidents and episodes concerning her, which are well documented by those press clips and public interviews she did, shows that she can fly by herself via levitation, is a strong telepath and can fire devastating balls of pure energy. She gained, quite rightly I must say, the nickname of 'Supergirl' at her previous school, after thwarting in spectacular fashion the attempted kidnapping of a classmate in Arlington in May of 1988."

"And...do we know how she happens to have gained all of those superpowers?"

"That article about a media interview she gave in the past years does tell us about that, Chief. Basically, she says that she holds her powers from what she calls 'The One', a supposed spiritual entity of immense power which I would tend to equate to what we call 'God'. Her mother, the famous Ingrid Dows, also possess supernatural powers and claims to be a 'Chosen' of this 'One'. Basically, this girl could be considered to be a sort of angel on Earth, Chief. This is no joke by the way."

Borelli needed a few seconds to digest that information, then looked at a senior detective in charge of Chinese Triad gangs' cases.

"This Nancy Dows says in her deposition that she was going to that Wong Import/Export Company warehouse with her friend so that this friend, a Lucy Wong, could pay a surprise visit to her father. Was this verified?"

"Yes, Chief! That Lucy Wong was interviewed and corroborated what Dows said to us. By the way, she is fifteen and also a classmate of Dows, apart from being a good friend of her. When we called her mother, a Jennifer Wong who resides in Washington D.C., she told us that her daughter had called her from Nancy Dows' residence, asking if



her father was at home. The mother then told her that her father was taking care of a late arrival of imported goods at his New York warehouse. The daughter then told her mother that she was going to surprise her father by making a quick trip to New York aboard her friend's air bike."

"A quick trip from Washington to New York in a bike? How fast is that bike?"

"The Hiller AIR BIKE has a top speed of 450 miles per hour, Chief. Basically, that meant a trip of less than forty minutes, with the air bike able to land vertically about anywhere."

"Damn! Maybe we should get some of those air bikes ourselves."

"We tried, Chief!" replied the officer in charge of the aviation unit. "The answer was 'no budget available for that'."

"The usual song," replied Borelli, a bitter smirk on his face. "Okay, let's look at what we have on the bastards who are responsible for this human trafficking and the night's shootout. What do we know about them so far?"

"They are definitely part of the Chinese Triads, Chief." answered the head of the Manhattan South District's gang squad. "Three of the men either killed or captured had lengthy criminal records and were known Triad members. All of the men arrested were also ethnic Chinese. Furthermore, the lawyer who showed up one hour ago to represent these gang members is no other than Lee Kwang Ming, 'Mister Triad Lover' himself. When he shows up, this normally means that we are getting too close to Triad business for their comfort."

Borelli couldn't help make a sour face then: Lee Kwang Ming was undoubtedly a very talented lawyer, but he was also corrupt to the bone and was a creature of the Chinese Triads in New York."

"That Lee bastard! I would love to be able to put him behind bars and throw the key away. Okay, what about the father of this Lucy Wong, the owner of the warehouse where the shootout happened?"

"John Wong was found and arrested by our men some two hours ago, Chief. He was actually hiding inside his warehouse and it took a detailed search to find him. By the way, that same detailed search revealed an illegal shipment of automatic firearms made in Russia."

"And what did this Mister Wong say when he was found?"

"That he had been forced by Triad members to let them use his warehouse for their illegal traffic. However, nothing supports his claims, on the contrary. He had not

been tied up or gagged and was found to be hiding by himself in a basement boiler room of the warehouse, well away from the area in which the Triad gunmen had barricaded themselves. My strong belief is that he is knee-deep into this traffic, Chief.”

“Agreed! Let’s investigate his finances and bank dealings, to look for illicit or unexplained money transfers. Where is he now, by the way?”

His legal affairs subaltern sighed audibly at that question.

“We had to release him minutes ago, after this damn Lee Kwang Ming came and paid his caution. He should be presently on his way to his Washington home.”

In that, the legal affairs officer was partially incorrect, as John Wong was still in the headquarters building, escorted by Lee Kwang Ming. They were in fact approaching Nancy Dows and Lucy Wong, who were still waiting in a police lounge to be let go after having made their depositions. Lucy was actually lying on a bench, with her head resting on Nancy’s left upper leg and sleeping, tired by a long and agitated night. On seeing John Wong approach, Nancy gently shook her awake.

“Lucy, wake up! Your father is here.”

Lucy, quite groggy from fatigue, woke up slowly and sat up as her father stopped in front of her. The look she gave him was however tainted with doubt and suspicion.

“Father? How could you let those men do such evil things in your own warehouse?” she asked him in Mandarin Chinese. John Wong also spoke in Mandarin, so that the few policemen around them could not understand their conversation.

“It is all a big mistake, Lucy. I was tricked into this. Now, let’s go home together.”

“No!” replied at once Lucy, surprising her father. “I prefer to return home in Nancy’s air bike. What I saw last night was unsettling and I need some time to sort things out.”

“And sort what exactly, Lucy? You are my daughter and I am telling you to go home with me.”

“I saw 37 young women and girls, drugged and tied up, being loaded in a truck and coming from inside your warehouse, and you are telling me that you were not involved at all in that? Please don’t take me for an idiot, Father.”

That was when John Wong let show his growing irritation.

“Lucy, you are my daughter and you are also still underage, so you can’t defy my parental authority like this. Come with me!”

That was when Nancy got up and faced John Wong while eyeing him severely and speaking in Mandarin Chinese.

“Or else what, Mister Wong? You know that I am a telepath and, right now, I can clearly sense that you are lying about the extent of your involvement in this sordid affair.”

Nancy’s words alarmed Lucy, who threw a dark look at her father.

“Is that true, Father? Tell me the truth!”

“Your friend is talking nonsense, Lucy, and is also meddling into our family’s affairs. Now, stop arguing and come with me!”

John Wong then tried to grab Lucy’s left forearm with his right hand but suddenly found his right arm immobilized by some kind of invisible force. He was still trying to move his arm when Nancy spoke in an icy tone.

“You will leave Lucy alone, Mister Wong. I will not allow you to take her by force.”

“WHO THE HELL DO YOU THINK THAT YOU ARE, DOWS? I AM HER FATHER AND SHE WILL DO WHAT I SAY!” nearly shouted in Mandarin John Wong, making the heads of the police officers present in the lounge snap around.

“What I am is her best friend, Mister Wong. She is also a sworn witness in this affair, while you are a suspect in it. She could in all legality seek the legal protection of the police, as you could well try to convince or force her to change her testimony while going home with her.”

“What you are saying amounts to pure slander, young girl.” warned Lee Kwang Ming, also speaking in Mandarin as three policemen now watched intently the exchange.

“What I am saying is a simple fact, Mister Lee. Your soul is most dark indeed: be careful not to attract higher justice on you.”

“And what is that supposed to mean?” shot back Lee, becoming angry. He however had to back away in fear when Nancy’s eyes then became two intense spots of white light.

“I am an instrument of that higher justice, Mister Lee. Now, you and Mister Wong will leave Lucy alone and depart this police headquarters without further delay. NOW!”

Utterly intimidated, both John Wong and Lee Kwang Ming left the lounge in a hurry while looking back with fear at Nancy. The latter’s eyes then became normal again before she looked down at her friend.

"Lucy, I was able to read your father's mind and what I saw in it was truly ugly. He is no innocent man in this affair and, in fact, made lots of money from that traffic and from other trafficking done in league with the Triads."

In return, Lucy could only stare with stunned disbelief at her best friend and school classmate.

"Nancy, what happened with your eyes? What did you mean by being an instrument of higher justice?"

"Exactly that, Lucy. I am your true friend and the biological daughter of Ingrid Dows, but part of me is Celestial, for the lack of a better term. Come, let's see if we can leave the police headquarters now."

Nancy then took Lucy's right hand and led her to the police counter behind which a young female police officer stood, while the two other police officers present watched Nancy. The female police officer, having clearly seen Nancy's eyes turn temporarily into brilliant spots, watched her approach with some apprehension. Nancy felt her tension and smiled to her in return once at the information counter.

"Excuse me, Officer, but we would like to know if we are now free to return home? We signed our depositions half an hour ago. My name is Nancy Dows and my friend is Lucy Wong."

"Uh, just let me call the detective in charge of the case, Miss Dows. Could you please return to your seats while I make the call?"

"No problem, Officer." replied in a polite tone Nancy, who understood at once why the policewoman wanted her away from her counter. She thus returned with Lucy to their bench seat as the policewoman picked up her telephone and called her supervisor.

"Sergeant, this is Pringle, at the witnesses waiting lounge. Miss Nancy Dows is asking if she and her friend Lucy Wong can go home now."

The policewoman then lowered her voice to a near whisper and turned her back to Nancy.

"Sergeant, something happened here in the last few minutes. Lucy Wong's father came in with that Chinese lawyer, Lee Kwang Ming, and tried to force his daughter to return home with him. The young Dows then interposed herself and, at one time, her eyes became bright spots of lights, and I mean literally! Jordan and Marinelli also saw that. That girl is not normal! What do I do?"

There was a silence on the line for a few seconds before she got an answer back.

"Is that Nancy Dows threatening or agitated?"

"No! In fact, she seems supremely calm and confident."

"Then, leave her alone and tell her that someone will come down to speak to her. I will call the Chief Detective about this. Understood?"

"Perfectly, Sergeant!"

With her supervisor cutting the line, the policewoman put down her own receiver, then looked at Nancy and Lucy.

"Someone will soon come down to speak with you, miss. It shouldn't be long."

"Thank you, Officer." replied Nancy, who had passed a reassuring arm around Lucy's shoulders.

About four minutes later, Joseph Borelli entered the waiting lounge and walked directly to the two teenage girls, who got up from their bench at his approach. While keeping a calm appearance, Borelli couldn't help tense up as he got closer to Nancy: the policewoman had been right about Nancy Dows not being a normal girl.

"Misses Dows and Wong, I am Chief Detective Joseph Borelli and I am in charge of the investigation on what happened last night at the Wong's warehouse. I was just told that Mister John Wong came here with a lawyer and tried to force you, Miss Wong, to go with him. Is that true?"

"Yes, it is!" answered in a timid voice Lucy. "He wanted me to return home with him in his car. I refused to accompany him and he became insistent. That was when Nancy interposed herself."

Borelli then looked at Nancy.

"And what did you say or do, Miss Dows?"

"I told him that I was not going to let him take Lucy by force. That was after he tried to grab Lucy's arm in order to drag her out. I then stopped him and told him that, since Lucy is a sworn witness, that it would not be appropriate for him, a suspect in this affair, to force Lucy to go with her. That would have allowed him to convince or even force his daughter to change her declarations as a witness. You must know how strong paternal authority is in traditional Chinese families."

"I do, Miss Dows. You acted correctly in this case and I thank you for that...again. What did Mister Wong do then after you rebuffed him?"

"Then, a lawyer who was with him tried to push me verbally, saying that I had no rights to interfere in family matters and also accusing me of slander. I basically told him

to back off. He and Lucy's father then left. Now, could we finally go home, Mister Borelli? Technically, we are due to return to school this morning in Fairfax, Virginia."

"Your depositions have been signed and registered, so we don't need you anymore today. However, you will most probably be called again, either to answer new questions or to appear as witnesses in front of a judge once this affair will go to court. I am however worried, as you rightly did, Miss Dows, about the undue influence that Mister Wong could exercise over his daughter. Where do you intend to stay in the next few days and weeks, Miss Wong?"

It took only a couple of seconds for Lucy to take a decision and answer Borelli.

"I will stay with my friend Nancy at her mother's house in Arlington. I will go first to my family house in Washington and pack a couple of suitcases, then will go to Nancy's house with her."

"Sounds like a good plan. May I have the address and phone number of your house, Miss Dows?" asked Borelli while taking a notepad and pen out of a pocket.

"Sure, mister! My mother's home is at 326 South Grove Street, Aurora Hills, Arlington, Virginia. Our phone number is (703) 228-4623."

Borelli quickly noted that down, then smiled to the two teenagers.

"You are free to go. Again, thank you for helping us thwart this evil human trafficking."

"Talking of human trafficking," Nancy hurried to ask, "what will happen to those unfortunate Russian women and girls? How are they doing right now?"

Borelli couldn't help show some discouragement, as dealing with that point had proved quite frustrating to date.

"I am afraid that their case is quite complicated, Miss Dows. Right now, they are being treated in hospital for the drugs they were forcibly injected with by those criminals in order to keep them quiet during their trip to New York. Since they arrived illegally in the United States, even though it was against their will, they will have to be flown back to the Soviet Union once they will be able to testify against their kidnappers."

"But the Soviet Union is presently in chaos, mister!" objected Nancy. "Furthermore, I wouldn't be surprised to learn that some government or even police officials there are directly implicated in their kidnapping."

"You may be right about this, Miss Dows, but that is out of the hands of the NYPD. The FBI and the State Department will take charge of those Russian girls once they are out of hospital, as this city has no jurisdiction in foreign matters."

Nancy couldn't help shake her head in frustration at that.

"So, they may just be sent back to the same places and people involved in this. I realize that the city of New York can't do a thing about that, but I wish that we could take better care of those poor women and girls. Oh well! Don't hesitate to call us if you need our assistance again, Mister Borelli."

"I certainly will, Miss Dows. Have a good trip back home. Miss Wong, please call me at once if your father tries to pressure you into changing your deposition. Here is my card."

Giving a calling card to Lucy, Borelli thought about it and also gave a card to Nancy, who pocketed it before walking out of the lounge with Lucy. Borelli followed Nancy with his eyes, mentally wondering how the judicial system would deal with such a huge anomaly as her.

Once out of the police headquarters building, Nancy and Lucy were immediately confronted by a large crowd of reporters and photographers who converged towards them and pressed against them while shouting questions and snapping pictures. Half blinded by the multiple flashes and assaulted with questions while microphones were nearly jammed against her face, Lucy started feeling panicky at once, something Nancy felt. She thus decided to act at once and concentrated for half a second. The tight crowd of reporters and cameramen around them was suddenly thrown back as if pushed backward by a giant invisible hand, with the media men and women ending with their backs on the concrete pavement of the entrance, confused and half knocked out. With her way now cleared, Nancy hurried with Lucy towards her parked air bike while shouting a warning around her.

"NEXT TIME YOU WANT AN INTERVIEW, DO IT POLITELY INSTEAD OF ACTING LIKE A BUNCH OF SHARKS SMELLING BLOOD."

Nancy and Lucy had time to get in their air bike and take off before the bruised and shaken reporters and photographers could pick themselves up and fully regain their senses. A female press photographer employed by a tabloid newspaper rubbed her bruised elbow while getting back on her feet with the help of a male colleague.

"Ow, ow, ow! Can you tell me what the hell just happened, Jerry?"

"I frankly don't know, Amie: there were a bunch of other reporters in front of me who partially blocked my view. Those same reporters ended up pushing us back down when they somehow recoiled in a real hurry."

"Hey! I did not recoil: I was pushed back." protested the reporter who had smashed into Jerry's face.

"Then, who pushed you?"

"I don't know, but I could bet that this young Dows did it somehow. Remember: that girl is said to be like a witch."

One of the policemen posted near the entrance watched all that with stunned incredulity, then grinned to his partner.

"I don't know how she did this, but I am starting to like that girl."

### **05:29 (Washington Time)**

#### **The Wong's residence, Northwest Washington**

Hearing somebody enter the house in the early morning, Jennifer Wong got up from her bed, where she had been trying nervously to find some sleep, and put on a robe before leaving her bedroom. She nearly shouted when she encountered her daughter Lucy halfway down the main staircase.

"LUCY! MY GOD! WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN ALL NIGHT? I WAS WORRIED SICK ABOUT YOU!"

"I was at the central police headquarters in New York, Mother. Don't worry: I was not hurt, nor was I attacked. I simply had to fill a deposition as a witness to a crime."

"A crime? What kind of crime?"

It was Lucy's turn to throw a questioning look at her mother.

"What do you mean, what kind of crime? Didn't Father call you from New York to say that he had been arrested?"

"WHAT? What are you talking about? John did not call me at all since he left for New York yesterday. Explain yourself!"

"It will be Father who will need to explain himself, Mother, to both you and the police. When me and Nancy arrived by air bike at Father's warehouse in Manhattan, we saw a group of men forcibly loading 37 women and girl into a van backed to Father's warehouse. Nancy then called the police by radio to report that but, when the police arrived, these men started shooting at the police. A gunfight ensued and a number of those men were killed or wounded, while the remainder were arrested. They turned out to be Triad gang members who were about to transport kidnapped Russian women and



girls between Father's warehouse, where they had arrived by ship, and some house of prostitution in Chinatown. When the police searched in detail the warehouse, they found Father hiding in a basement room, along with an illegal shipment of automatic firearms. He was then arrested and charged by the New York Police. However, he was released on bail some two hours ago with the help of a lawyer named Lee Kwang Ming. He should now be halfway to here in his car. And you say that he didn't call you at all to at least inform you of all this?"

"No, he didn't! Damn! With all that, you probably have not slept at all, yet you have school this morning. You better try to at least have a nap before leaving for school, Lucy."

"Forget the nap, Mother: I am way too agitated for that. What I am going to do is to pack a suitcase, my school bag and my violin, then I will leave for Nancy's house."

"But, why go to Nancy's house?"

Lucy then threw a frustrated look at her mother and raised her voice.

"Don't you understand, Mother? Father was implicated in the human trafficking of foreign women kidnapped by Chinese Triads. He is an official suspect in that case, while I am a witness, and he already tried to lie to me about his implication in that traffic. The fact that he didn't even call you once after his arrest should tell you a lot about his guilt or innocence in this. I for one don't believe him to be innocent and I certainly am not going to change my testimony to the police in order to protect him. So, I will move temporarily to Nancy's house until this mess becomes clearer. Father better not try to take me back by force, because I will refuse to go with him. Those men with whom he made a deal with actually shot at the police and wounded one officer. As for the poor Russian women and girl who were the victims of that odious traffic, they had been severely drugged and were tied and gagged when we found them. You can tell Father where I went but tell him also that he or his Triad buddies better not try to force me back home. I'm sorry but I now have bags to pack."

Lucy then walked past Jennifer, going to her bedroom in quick steps. Confused and not knowing what to believe, Jennifer Wong went down the last steps of the staircase and briefly opened the main entrance door to look outside. She saw Nancy Dows' air bike parked in front of the house, with Nancy at the commands and waiting. Now seriously needing to fully wake up her mind, Jennifer went to her kitchen and started preparing a strong cup of coffee. By the time that her cup was ready, Lucy was coming down the

stairs with a large suitcase, her school bag and her violin case. Jennifer went to meet her at the door and exchanged a hug with her.

“Please come back soon, Lucy: I love you!”

“I love you too, Mother! Don’t worry about me: I will be perfectly safe at Nancy’s house. I will call you daily.”

Lucy then left after giving her a kiss on the cheek. Jennifer watched her get inside Nancy’s air bike, which then flew off towards Arlington. Now both depressed and anxious, Jennifer returned to her kitchen to get her cup of coffee. Somehow, the first sip of strong coffee made her think about something and she hurried to the family lounge, where she sat in front of the television set after switching it on and tuning it to a national news channel, wanting to see if what Lucy had talked about would have already made the news. It did! In fact, it was the top news of the morning show. Jennifer watched the few minutes of coverage on the incident, growing more shocked and filling with doubts as the reporting went on and with her hearing the initial police public declaration, which clearly named her husband and Chinese Triad gangs as being those involved in human trafficking. By the time that the report was over, Jennifer felt devastated: their family name was now going to get trashed and smeared in the medias for the weeks and months to come, as the judicial case and trial for such a type of accusation typically dragged on for months in the courts. Her next thoughts were about what to think of her husband. If he truly was guilty of this, then it would mean that he had been hiding his true nature to her during over eighteen years of marriage. Or was he simply a victim of some blackmail or threat from those Triad gangs?

### **06:07 (Washington Time)**

#### **Courtyard of 326 South Grove Street, Aurora Hills**

#### **Arlington, Virginia**

Nancy cut off her engine as soon as her air bike landed on the small padded surface built as a landing platform in the courtyard of her family house, then stepped out with Lucy. Helping her by grabbing two of her three pieces of luggage, she then went to the rear door of the house and unlocked it, entering the house with Lucy. Going with her to the main staircase and climbing it, she led Lucy to her bedroom, where she dropped the suitcase and school bag she had been carrying and faced her friend.

"Start placing your things in here, Lucy. I am going to pay a quick visit to our neighbor, Gregg Loomis."

"The retired federal prosecutor? What for?"

"Because I need some legal advice about the case we are mixed into. I won't be long."

Nancy then walked out of her bedroom but came to a halt nearly at once on seeing both her brother Leonardo and Kimi Park coming out of Leo's bedroom. Both wore only their underwear.

"How come you are returning home this late, Nancy?" asked Leo, still barely awake. Nancy gave him an apologetic smile in response.

"Let's say that me and Lucy were witnesses to a major crime in New York and had to make depositions at the police headquarters there. By the way, Lucy's father is implicated in that major crime."

"Lucy's father? And what kind of crime are we talking about?" asked Kimi, who was actually topless.

"Human trafficking of Russian women and girls by Chinese Triads gang members using Mister Wong's New York warehouse. In view of her father's implication in this, Lucy decided to stay here for a while in order to avoid her father, who already tried to force her to go with him. I am going to see our neighbor for a few minutes, to seek some legal advice from him."

Nancy then threw a serious look at Leonardo.

"I see that you used well Ingrid's absence from home, Leo. I have only one thing to say about that."

"Uh, what is it?" asked Leo, becoming a bit worried about what she would say or do.

"That I hope that you used a condom, right?"

Both Leo and Kimi reddened in embarrassment at that question, even more so as Lucy had stuck her head out of Nancy's bedroom and was now eyeing them with a mix of surprise and amusement.

"Uh, I did, Sis."

"Good!" said Nancy before running down the stairs and leaving the house via the front door. Walking quickly to the house next door to the left, she pressed once the buzzer, then waited. Carolyn Loomis, now 66 years-old, answered the door after a bit less than a minute, dressed in a robe and night gown.

"Nancy? I hope that you are not coming here this early in the morning because of some emergency. Is everything okay on your side?"

"Unfortunately it isn't, Misses Loomis. Is your husband up? I am in urgent need of some legal advice."

"Oh! Come in: I will go get him for you."

"Thank you, Misses Loomis."

Stepping inside the Loomis' entrance lobby, she waited there patiently until Gregg Loomis showed up from the kitchen, wearing pajamas, a robe and slippers. The now retired federal prosecutor looked at Nancy with concern when he stopped in front of her: Ingrid Dows had been his neighbor for long years and he had been a witness to many violent attempts against Ingrid and her children in the past years and decades.

"What's up, Nancy?"

"A friend of mine and I are in urgent need of some legal advice and opinion, Mister Loomis. Lucy Wong and I went last evening to pay a surprise visit to her father in New York, where he was doing some kind of work at his riverside warehouse in Manhattan. However, we arrived there only to witness a case of human trafficking in progress involving Russian women and girls kidnapped by a Chinese Triads gang and brought to the United States via Mister Wong's import/export warehouse. We alerted the New York Police, which then thankfully reacted quickly and arrested those gang members after an intense gunfight. However, Lucy's father was also arrested in that incident and is now a suspect charged with human trafficking and illegal weapons contraband. My problem, or rather Lucy's problem, is that she signed a witness deposition at the New York Police Headquarters before her father tried to force her to go home with him. She refused to follow him and instead came back with me, fearing that her father would try to either convince or force her to change her testimony in an attempt to protect himself. Gregg, you know how strong parental authority is in traditional Chinese society. Lucy is only fifteen and I am worried that her father could be legally allowed to force her to return to his home, in which case I would fear for her health and security. I want her to stay here, in my house, until things clear up. What does the law say about Lucy's right to refuse to obey her father?"

"Hum, I agree with you that, normally, Lucy would have no choice but to obey her father, as she is still underage. However, the fact that her father was arrested and charged and is now officially a suspect, while Lucy is a sworn witness, changes many things. For one, returning to her family home would raise the possibility that her

testimony could be considered as tainted and without legal value because of the possible influence of a suspect, her father, on her testimony. You said that this is a case of human trafficking across international borders, which means that this will, or at the least should become a federal case under FBI jurisdiction. That taking over of the case by the FBI should in fact happen soon, possibly today. Your Lucy Wong would then become a federal witness, in which case she would be entitled to FBI protection. As such, her father would then be barred from attempting to influence her and would probably not be allowed to force her to stay with him. There is also the part allegedly played by the Chinese Triads in this case. The Triads are reputed to play very dirty and violently when it comes to protect their interests. Lucy thus could very well become a target for them...and so would you, Nancy.”

“Boo ooh! I’m really scared by that!” replied Nancy in a sarcastic tone before becoming serious. “Look, Gregg, I know that you have retired as a federal prosecutor but you must still have some contacts in the FBI and at the Department of Justice. Could I ask you to check for me what legal protection Lucy could get from her father? A lawyer in the pocket of the Triads was with him in New York and paid his bail. He also threatened me.”

“What was the name of that lawyer, Nancy?” said Gregg, worry appearing on his face.

“Lee Kwang Ming.”

From worried, Gregg Loomis became downright alarmed.

“Lee Kwang Ming?! That bastard is the legal right-hand man of the Triads in New York. He also defended in the past some Triads big wigs in the Washington area in the past. If Lucy’s father is associated with Ming, then he is far from innocent.”

Nancy gave Gregg a somber look then.

“Gregg, John Wong IS guilty: I was able to telepathically read his mind when he came to see me and Lucy and he is as guilty as sin in this case of human trafficking. His pretense that he was simply forced to let the Triads use his warehouse was just that: a pretense. Now, I fully expect him to come to Arlington today or tomorrow, armed with some kind of legal paper that would force Lucy to go with him. If you could find for us a legal argument to resist such an attempt, I would be eternally grateful to you, Gregg.”

“Nancy, I will be more than happy to help you in this. Your mother saved my two children from being kidnapped by the Mafia nearly four decades ago, so I am just returning the favor now. Are you and Lucy going to stay home today?”

“No! We intend to leave for school in about one hour and will be back around four in the afternoon.”

“Then, go and don’t worry: I will take care of this.”

“Thanks, Gregg: you are a real friend.”

Nancy then kissed Gregg on both cheeks before leaving, feeling a lot more reassured now.

### **15:05 (Washington Time)**

#### **Music classroom, Northern Virginia International High School**

#### **Fairfax, Virginia**

“Very good, boys and girls: this was a nice repetition. I heard only a few wrong notes but that is most understandable and common this early in the school year. Let’s now...”

Rajiv Modi was then interrupted by knocks on the door of the musical practice classroom, followed by the entrance of the school’s director, James Truscott, and of three more persons. Nancy, who had been playing her lute for this practice, immediately felt apprehension on recognizing the three persons following the director: they were FBI agents. Furthermore, those agents, which included Special Agent-in-Charge Allen Cumberland and female Special Agent Marilyn Turnbull, all harbored somber expressions. Truscott first whispered in the ear of Rajiv Modi before looking at Lucy Wong.

“Miss Wong, these people are from the FBI and would like to speak with you in private. Could you please follow them?”

First throwing a worried look to Nancy, Lucy nonetheless put down her violin in its carrying case and closed it, then started to walk towards the FBI agents. Nancy, quickly putting down her own lute, then started to follow her, attracting a comment from Truscott.

“Just Miss Wong, Miss Dows.”

Nancy gave a dubious look to the director, a man of rather weak and pliable will, but continued to follow Lucy.

“Where Lucy goes, I go, Mister Truscott.”

The director was about to protest but was cut by a sign from Cumberland.

“Miss Dows is also concerned by the reason we came here, Director Truscott. For the benefit of those of you present in this class, Misses Wong and Dows are simply

witnesses in a criminal case and are not accused of anything. I would thus urge you not to start any wild rumor that could stain their reputations.”

Nancy actually appreciated that gesture from Cumberland: rumors indeed flew quickly out of control among a young student population. She, Lucy and the three FBI agents then went to an interview room and sat around a table, with Special Agent Samuel Jenkins closing the door behind them and guarding it. Lucy, now quite worried, listened on as Cumberland presented himself and his agents to her.

“Miss Wong, I am Special Agent-in-Charge Allen Cumberland, senior agent of the FBI’s Fairfax County field office. With me are Special Agents Marilyn Turnbull and Samuel Jenkins. I am afraid that we came here with some very bad news: less than two hours ago, your father and mother were both assassinated at their home by a number of unknown gunmen, who then fled and escaped. I am truly sorry, miss.”

For a moment, Lucy was too petrified to visibly react. Then, she cracked and shouted hysterically.

“NOO! NOO!”

Tears followed the shouts, with Nancy doing her best to comfort her by hugging her, with Lucy crying on her shoulder. It took a long time for Lucy to quiet down a bit but Nancy could clearly see that she was in no state to hold a coherent discussion, thus spoke up in her place, addressing Cumberland.

“It wouldn’t take a genius to figure out who could have done that, Special Agent Cumberland, or what the reasons for assassinating Lucy’s parents were. This must be the work of the Triads, done in order to silence a business partner who could become a potentially damaging witness against them. If that is the case, then Lucy and me are now also at risk from the Triads.”

“You are correct, Miss Dows. That is why I came with two agents, who have been tasked to help protect you two until further notice. For your information, I sent another two other agents by car to your house, to start watching it and prevent any criminal from entering it. By the way, when is your mother due back to her home? Mister Loomis told us that she has been absent for a few days already.”

“She is due to return home this evening: she is presently in California, working on a classified project contracted by the U.S. Navy.”

“Good! I will definitely need to brief her about this case.”

“And how exactly is this case going, mister?”

Cumberland couldn’t help make a grimace then.

"Rather slowly, I am afraid, miss. The FBI took over this case from the NYPD this morning, but the gunmen arrested at the Wong's warehouse have clammed up like oysters, while nobody around Chinatown is willing to talk to us."

"Surprise, surprise." said Nancy in a sarcastic tone. "What about that rotten lawyer, Lee Kwang Ming?"

"We are still working to obtain a search warrant for his office and house, but we are still not assured that we will obtain that warrant."

"So, basically, you are telling us that we are now targets and that you have little hope of finding and arresting the bastards responsible for the murder of Lucy's parents, is that it?"

Cumberland seemed to be a bit stung by her words and looked at her crossly.

"Miss Dows, I assure you that we are doing everything possible to catch those criminals. However, finding people ready to give information about the Chinese Triads and their activities is extremely difficult, while witnesses against them tend to disappear or end up dead. By the way, forget about possibly using your paranormal powers to try to solve that case. Any extralegal involvement by you in this affair could corrupt the little we already have and blow our chances in court, on top of possibly attracting legal pursuits against you. Maybe you and Miss Wong would be better to disappear for a while, to avoid any possible assassination attempt against you."

The way Nancy's head abruptly snapped towards him, with her eyes staring hard at him, made Cumberland regret at once his words.

"Mister Cumberland, i will not go into hiding because of a bunch of cowardly jackals. The day I will hide from those jackals will be the day when justice will be truly dead. If the Triads come for us, then I will gladly vaporize them to the last! Me and Ingrid will protect Lucy for as long as it will be needed."

Cumberland, like his two agents, understood that Nancy was not bragging, since she had already proven that she could vaporize groups of men with her energy balls. He thus did his best to backtrack a bit.

"Okay, okay, miss: I understand your point of view. However, what I said about any extralegal involvement or actions on your part still holds. The lawyers used by the Triads, including Lee Kwang Ming, would be too happy to seize on such involvement and throw lawsuits at you. Then, you and your mother could end up fighting those lawsuits in courts for years, lawsuits which could bankrupt you."

"And you find such a situation normal? Where is justice in all that?"



"Miss, I fight for justice with the weapons I am allowed to use. Unfortunately, changing the laws in order to make it easier to take down those criminal groups is the business of Congress."

"Great! Then, we are truly fucked!"

Marilyn Turnbull, who was listening to all that, couldn't help think then that young Nancy was quite right about all this. Nancy then changed the subject somewhat.

"What will happen now with Lucy, Mister Cumberland? She is now an orphan and I believe that any other family relative of Chinese ethnicity could well be vulnerable to Triads' influence or pressures. If I would be my mother, I would adopt her at once, the way she adopted Leonardo after his family was massacred."

"That will depend a lot on what she wants, miss."

Lucy, who was in a near-catatonic state, then got a telepathic message from Nancy.

*'Come live with us, Lucy. We will take good care of you.'*

Coming out of her near-trance, Lucy looked at Cumberland, tears in her eyes.

"I want to go live with Nancy and Ingrid Dows, Special Agent Cumberland. Right now, I can't possibly trust anyone from the Wong family tree and going to live with them would only expose them to Triads' actions."

"Very well, miss. I will advise our legal department of this, so that they could counter any attempt by one of your living relatives to force you to go live with them. On the other hand, I would counsel you and Miss Ingrid Dows to arrange for your adoption as quickly as possible. Special Agents Jenkins and Turnbull will now escort you home and will stay with you for the next few days."

"Then, I can give a lift to Special Agent Turnbull in my air bike," proposed Nancy, "while Special Agent Jenkins could get a lift in my brother Leo's sports car. Did they bring a suitcase or two with them?"

"Their things are in the car that drove to your house to protect it, miss."

"Then, we could leave once we pick up our things in our classrooms. Did you have anything else for us, Special Agent Cumberland?"

"No! The FBI will however keep your mother informed about any future development in this case."

"Fair enough! Let's go, Lucy: we will get our bags and instruments, then will go to our home."

"Thanks, Nancy: you are a real friend." said Lucy in a weak voice while getting up from her chair and following Nancy out of the interview room.

**20:36 (Washington Time)****Courtyard of 326 South Grove Street**

Having just landed on the paved surface reserved for her air bike in the courtyard, Ingrid shut down her engine, then opened her side door and stepped out on the ground. Collecting her two pieces of luggage from the baggage compartment situated behind the passenger seat, she closed and locked her air bike and walked towards the rear entrance door of her house while carrying her bags. Once inside, she used the secondary staircase near the kitchen to get to the upper floor. That was where she met Nancy and Leo, who were coming out of Nancy's bedroom. Dropping her bags in the hallway, Ingrid went to happily hug in turn her two children.

"Nancy!... Leo! It is nice to see you again after a week away on work."

She then noticed the restrained expressions of her children, particularly in Nancy.

"What? Is something wrong?"

"Quite, Mother." answered Nancy in a subdued voice. "Lucy Wong's parents were assassinated today by the Chinese Triads. I brought Lucy here for her protection and we also have FBI agents in the house, tasked with protecting us from the Triads."

Nancy then took a few minutes to tell Ingrid about the events of the last 48 hours, with Ingrid growing more somber as Nancy spoke. At the end, Ingrid slowly nodded her head.

"This is indeed a very serious situation: the Chinese Triads are very powerful and also ruthless. Where are those FBI agents right now?"

"Two of them are downstairs, in the living room. Two more are presently sleeping in the beds set up in the attic, where they installed themselves. Special Agent Samuel Jenkins is in charge of their group."

"Okay! Let me first drop my bags in my bedroom, then I will go see Lucy. Where is she right now?"

"In my bedroom, Mother: she is still quite despondent."

"I certainly can understand that. Poor girl! I'll be back in a minute."

Once her bags were dropped in her bedroom, Ingrid went with Nancy inside her daughter's bedroom, finding Lucy Wong lying on the bed, rolled into a ball and crying. Ingrid went to her and gently caressed one of her shoulders while speaking softly.

"Lucy, I just heard what happened to your parents. First, let me say how sorry I am about that tragedy. Second, know that we will do everything to help and support you."

"Thank you, Ingrid." managed to say Lucy between sobs. "But what can we do against the Triads? They are so powerful. Also, the FBI forbade Nancy from using her superpowers to punish the Triads."

"Well, the FBI may say that but we are not obliged to stay passive and simply wait for Triads' assassins to come for us. If we do that, then they will eventually succeed in the long haul. We thus have to preempt them."

"What...what can we do, Ingrid?" asked Lucy, choking her tears as best she could.

"Let's say that I have friends, very powerful friends. The Triads will soon regret bitterly to have crossed swords with us, Lucy. I will however leave it at that for the moment. Now, you and Nancy, tell me in detail what happened, where it happened and when it happened. The times and locations will be especially critical for me to know."

With Nancy about as mystified as Lucy, the two teenagers did their best to recollect every detail they could remember, which was a lot, especially in the case of Nancy, who had an incredible memory. Ingrid actually wrote down notes as they spoke, filling a good two pages in the process. With that done, Ingrid then went down to the lounge, where she found FBI Special Agents Samuel Jenkins and Marilyn Turnbull, who were watching the outside via the front windows of the lounge and entrance lobby. Ingrid chose to ask her questions to the male agent, not because she thought that Marilyn Turnbull was less competent but because the FBI still was a very misogynistic organization, where the female employees were often treated as a second thought and were not necessarily told everything of importance.

"Agent Jenkins, I just spoke with Nancy and Lucy upstairs. Can you give me some details about the assassination of Lucy's parents?"

"Of course, Misses Dows. It happened at the Wong's residence in Northwest Washington, at about one forty this afternoon. Apparently, gunmen entered the house by a backdoor, then killed everybody in it, including two maids and a chauffeur employed by the Wongs. Nothing was apparently stolen, even though there were a few valuables in evidence in the house, so it was not the work of simple thieves. The neighbors said that they didn't see or hear anything suspicious then. The Wongs and their domestics

were found only when two of our agents showed up to ask more questions to Mister Wong.”

“And that lawyer, Lee Kwang Ming, was he questioned seriously?”

“Well, that lawyer is quite slippery and also happens to have powerful connections around New York and Washington. We thus have to thread lightly with him and he certainly isn’t what you would call cooperative, miss.”

“I see! Have you guys had supper yet?”

“Uh, no, miss. We were kind of busy arranging our watch rotation.”

“Then would you guys prefer chicken or pizza, or a mix?”

“Uh, I would have to ask the others, but I am partial to chicken, miss.”

“Then, a mix it will be. I will order enough for everybody.”

“Thanks, miss: you are too generous.”

“I simply practice good hospitality, that’s all.” replied Ingrid before going to her kitchen, where she consulted a few restaurant delivery menus she had, then placed an order by telephone. With that done, she went up to her private study and locked the door behind her. With the notes she had taken in one pocket, she noted as well the time on her watch, then concentrated and disappeared in a brief flash of white light. Exactly five minutes later, she reappeared at the same spot from which she had vanished, a satisfied smile on her lips: the Triads were going to soon feel the weight of the Time Patrol on their shoulders. As the Time Patrol’s resident agent for the 20<sup>th</sup> Century of Timeline ‘C’, anybody threatening her did so at their own peril.

Going back down to the lounge, Ingrid switched on her television set and tuned it to an all-news channel, to see if there were more news about the Wongs’ case. Some 25 minutes later, a deliveryman showed up at her door with nice-smelling boxes. Paying for her order and adding a generous tip, Ingrid then brought the boxes to her dining room and put them on the dining table.

“SUPPER IS SERVED!”

When Samuel Jenkins objected that somebody had to keep a watch on the surroundings, Ingrid smiled and gently patted his bum.

“I will keep watch. Go eat, young man!”

Jenkins was about to protest her use of the term ‘young man’ but then remembered that this apparent teenage girl was in reality in her late sixties. Sending Marilyn upstairs to

go wake the two other agents, so that they could also eat, he opened one of the boxes on the dining table and eyed hungrily the half chicken with fries and BBQ sauce inside.

“Boy, this is going to be good!”

### **22:43 (Washington Time)**

**Luxury apartment, Chinatown, Lower Manhattan**

**New York City, U.S.A.**

Leaving in his bed the (very) underage prostitute he had been enjoying this evening, Lee Kwang Ming walked to his bathroom, intent on taking a quick shower. Being already naked, he didn't need to undress, thus went at once to his shower stall. He was about to open the water and adjust its temperature when a sort of electric shock knocked him unconscious. A small cylindrical object then flew down to his inert body and glued itself against him before both the object and Lee Kwang Ming disappeared from the bathroom in a brief flash of white light.

### **08:07 (South Pacific Time)**

**January 01, 12,000 B.C.E.**

**Island of Guadalcanal, Solomon Archipelago**

**South Pacific**

Lee Kwang Ming was still naked when he woke up. However, instead of being in his bathroom, he found himself lying on a sandy beach. Completely confused and disoriented, the lawyer sat up and looked around him: he was on a beach of some sort of tropical island or shore.

“What? What the Hell happened?”

Only then did he notice the jute bag resting on the sand behind him. Going to it and opening it, he found inside six bananas, a bottle of water, a machete, a small box of matches, a fishing line with hook and bait and a small piece of folded paper. Grabbing the paper and hurriedly unfolding it, he then read the few words written on it in English.

YOU ARE NOW ALONE AND ON YOUR OWN FOR THE REST OF YOUR  
NATURAL LIFE. TAKE THE TIME TO REMEMBER ALL THE PERSONS WHO  
SUFFERED OR DIED BECAUSE OF YOUR ACTS.

At first, Lee Kwang Ming just couldn't believe what was happening to him. He then again looked around him, trying to identify the place he was now in. Both the hot and humid weather and the tropical jungle lining the beach suggested some place in the Pacific, but he just couldn't be more precise than that right now. Rereading the text on the paper, he then threw it away and screamed out loud in utter despair.

**08:03 (Washington Time)**

**Saturday, September 05, 1992 'C'**

**Office of the Chief Detective, New York Police Department Headquarters**

**1 Police Plaza, Manhattan South District, New York City**

Joseph Borelli was about to enter his office, having just arrived from his home, when one of his assistants came to him, quite agitated and with some document in his hands.

"Sir! Sir! The shit hit the fan last night concerning the Wong case."

"What do you mean exactly by 'the shit hit the fan', Parkhurst?"

"We received multiple complaints and reports of disappearances, all concerning known or suspected members of the Chinese Triads in and around the city, sir. Our police dispatch also received numerous anonymous tips by telephone that directed our policemen to nine locations where we found large caches of various drugs and illegal weapons, plus one cache where we found over three million dollars in used dollar bills." Borelli froze where he was for a second, trying to digest all that.

"Wait! All this happened last night? And it all concerned the Triads?"

"Yes sir! According to our dispatchers, the anonymous calls were made by persons speaking with a distinct Chinese accent."

"And...how many members of the Triads were reported as disappeared?"

"A total of 349 to date, sir, but calls keep coming in."

"THREE HUNDRED AND FORTY-NINE?! Are we sure that they didn't just simply fled somewhere in order to avoid our attention or that of the FBI?"

"That is a possibility, sir, but the relatives who called to signal disappearances also said that they apparently left everything behind, as all their belongings are still in their respective homes."

Borelli scratched his head at that.

"Uh, these 349 men, are we talking about low-level gang members or about bigwigs?"

"A mix of both, sir. By the way, Lee Kwang Ming is among those who have disappeared."

Borelli suddenly became angry and banged one fist on the wall.

"THE RATS ARE JUMPING SHIP BEFORE WE CAN ARREST THEM! ALERT THE PORT AUTHORITIES AND CHECK WITH THEM IF ANY OF THOSE BASTARDS FLEW OUT OF THE COUNTRY OVERNIGHT!"

"Yes sir! Right away, sir!" replied the aide before running away, leaving a fuming Borelli standing next to his office door. The idea that maybe that young Nancy Dows could have been involved in this with her superpowers came to his mind, but he quickly dismissed it: with 349 disappearances signaled all over the city, there was simply no way that Nancy Dows could have had time to cause even half of those disappearances. It was thus a lot more plausible to think that those Triad members simply fled when they found that the water was getting too hot to their taste. This was going to turn into one gigantic manhunt indeed.

Borelli learned later that day that the street value of the drugs seized in the caches signaled via anonymous calls was in the tens of millions of dollars, while over 300 illegal weapons and tons of ammunition were also found. A full week later, despite massive efforts by both the NYPD and the FBI, none of the 407 men who were ultimately declared missing had been found. While that frustrated Borelli to no end, he consoled himself at the thought that the Triads gangs in New York City had all but been eradicated, with all the known gang leaders and upper bosses gone and vanished. Part of those 407 men were also the four Triads gunmen arrested at the Wong warehouse, who had vanished overnight from their prison cells. Their scheduled trials were thus postponed for the duration, saving the young Nancy Dows and Lucy Wong from having to make testimonies in court.

**14:50 (Washington Time)**

**Thursday, October 08, 1992 'C'**

**Arlington County Family Affairs Courthouse**

**Arlington, Virginia**

The female judge presiding in the county's Family Affairs Courthouse spoke out loud, in order to be heard by all present in her court of justice.

"Guardianship of the said Lucy Wong is thus granted to Miss Ingrid Dows, who will have the full legal powers of a parent from now on. This case is now closed!"

She then concluded with one bang of her gavel on top of her wooden bench. Both Ingrid, Nancy and Leonardo ganged up to hug and kiss a crying but happy Lucy.

"Welcome in our family, Lucy!" exclaimed Nancy while kissing her. "We will have a marvelous life together. Maybe we should form a family band after this, with me at the lute, harp, flute and drum and you at the violin and piano. I am sure that we would have a lot of success together."

"I think so, Nancy." said Lucy, struggling to cut her tears. "I would certainly love that."

"Well, we can discuss all that once back home." Cut in Ingrid. "For now, let's go see the court registrar and collect the legal adoption and guardianship documents."



## **CHAPTER 20 – SUPERCAR**

**15:27 (California Time)**

**Wednesday, March 17, 1993 'C'**

**Main assembly plant, Hiller Helicopters Corporation**

**Firebaugh, Fresno County, California**

**U.S.A.**

Ingrid was discussing with Stanley Hiller how her second test flight of the Hiller SUPERCAR had gone when two surprise visitors showed up in the engineering office of the Hiller main assembly plant. Ingrid tensed up at once on seeing the grim looks of the two U.S. Navy senior officers who entered the office.

"Rear Admiral Smith? Commander Skinner? To what do we owe your visit today?"

"We came to see if you could help us face a grave national security situation, General Dows." replied Smith, who then looked at Stanley Hiller while presenting his right hand to him. "Rear Admiral Raymond Smith, commander of the Naval Special Warfare Command. This is Commander Randolph Skinner, commander of S.E.A.L. Team One."

"Stanley Hiller, owner and founder of the Hiller Helicopters Corporation. Have you come to see our latest prototype, Admiral?" replied Hiller while shaking the hands of both Navy men. Smith shook his head in response.

"No! We came to see if it would be ready to be used in an operational mission, Mister Hiller."

"An operational mission? But our prototype has flown only twice and dived underwater for the first time only today. What would be so pressing that would force you to ask to use our Supercar at such an early stage?"

"I unfortunately can't answer you on that, Mister Hiller: you do not hold the necessary security classification for that. However, General still does have a Top-Secret clearance level. Do you mind if we discuss with her in private?"

"Uh, no, not at all, Admiral. You can use the office of my chief engineer, which is presently unoccupied."

"Thank you, Mister Hiller."

"I will show you to that office, Admiral." cut in Ingrid. As she was leading Smith and Skinner towards the said office, which was adjacent to the engineering design office, Ingrid twisted her head to ask a question to the Navy men.

"Did you come by helicopter, Admiral?"

"Not exactly, General Dows: we came in one of the two Hiller AIR BIKEs my command acquired recently. Commander Skinner happens to be a qualified helicopter pilot."

"I see!"

The trio soon entered a medium-sized office cluttered with blueprints and technical documents, with Ingrid closing the door behind them before looking at Rear Admiral Smith.

"I am listening, Admiral. What is this national security problem that is concerning you?"

"Basically, we need to go rescue the crew of one of our strategic reconnaissance planes which just crashed inside Soviet territory, near Rostov-on-Don. That plane, a RF-83D, apparently suffered a major engine failure while on a reconnaissance of a Soviet mobile ICBM<sup>18</sup> base near Volgograd. Its crew of two then tried to turn back South to exit Soviet airspace, but their plane caught fire, forcing the pilot and radar officer to eject over the area of Rostov, near the Gulf of Tangarog, at the northeast tip of the Sea of Azov. They barely had time to send a distress call before they ejected. The last time we had a contact with them was when they briefly activated their emergency locator beacon unit to signal their point of landing. Unfortunately, they had to cut that signal off after only twenty minutes, as the local forces were starting to react to the crash. That was some ten hours ago. In response, the Pentagon has just asked my command to be prepared to send a S.E.A.L. team to rescue our two downed aviators. The problem is that my only options right now are a near-suicidal parachute drop over the Rostov area...and your Supercar. So, could we possibly use your Supercar to effect this rescue mission, General?"

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<sup>18</sup> ICBM: Intercontinental Ballistic Missile.

Ingrid sat on the edge of the work desk set inside the office as she thought furiously about the problem presented to her. She finally spoke up some fifteen seconds later while looking at Smith.

“Admiral, please understand that there are a few problems of concern for me here. First off, our prototype is still largely untested and none of its systems have been certified yet. Second, none of your people have had a chance to see our prototype, much less get qualified to operate it. Third, if it breaks down during transit to the Rostov area, we will have next to no spare parts available to repair it. May I ask why a RF-83D was sent on such a risky mission over Soviet territory, rather than use a spaceplane to take pictures of that area?”

Smith made a grimace before answering her.

“I agree with you that a spaceplane would have been a much safer mean to collect strategic data, General, but the mission given to our Air Force RF-83D was very specific: to collect radiation signatures from low altitude. We suspect that some of the mobile ICBM launchers which had belonged to the Soviet Union are now in the hands of a breakaway territory of the old U.S.S.R., which calls itself the Caucasus Independent Republic. That new republic is formed by the old oblasts of Krasnodar, Stavropol, Rostov, Maikop, Astrakhan, Dagestan, Chechnya and Cherkassy, plus the old Kalmuck Republic, thus forming a strategic mass bordering directly on the Sea of Azov, the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea. The bad news is that this Caucasus Independent Republic is controlled by an autocratic and militaristic regime with links to Islamic extremists in Chechnya. That such a regime could control a number of mobile ICBM systems is worrying a lot of people in Washington.”

“And rightly so, Admiral.” replied Ingrid, thoughtful. “Even with our Supercar, this rescue mission would be both difficult and extremely risky. Added to that is the fact that our two downed pilots may have moved from their last know location, or may even have been captured since then, in which case they can only expect the worst in terms of treatment at the hands of the local regime.”

“I agree with you a hundred percent, General. The problem is that our aviators hold some vital information which cannot be allowed to fall into the hands of the Caucasian authorities. Our pilots were told to commit suicide rather than let themselves be captured alive.”

That instantly brought an angry look to Ingrid’s eyes.

"How convenient for some commander stuck safely behind a desk at the Pentagon to say that! In my opinion, that plane should never have been sent and a spaceplane should have flown that mission instead. The President did authorize such a risky mission over old Soviet territory, I suppose?"

Her question made Smith visibly uncomfortable.

"Uh, no! President Perot was not informed about this mission, which was decided at the level of the Chiefs of Staffs."

That made Ingrid instantly angry.

"THE FUCKING IDIOTS! Such risky strategic missions should always be done with presidential consent, or at least presidential knowledge. The geo-political consequences of such a mission failing are simply too great. Why was President Perot not informed, Admiral?"

"Because the Pentagon leaders expected him to nix that mission. In truth, the generals and admirals at the Pentagon do not trust President Perot, who doesn't belong to a political party and governs as an independent."

"And that gives them the right to hide such an important decision from the President of the United States? President Perot was elected by the American people, while none of those generals and admirals were voted in. They are supposed to serve the nation, not run it according to their personal whims, dammit!"

Still furious, Ingrid paused for a moment before speaking further while staring into Smith's eyes.

"Despite what I just said, I am ready to help you get back those two aviators, Admiral. However, I will want to have the prior approval of Mister Hiller on this, as the prototype belongs to his corporation and not to the Navy. Also, I must pilot our Supercar for that mission: you have anyway nobody else qualified to operate it. Finally, while your S.E.A.L. personnel will do the fighting part, I want to be able to plan and direct that mission. I believe that my past record in operational mission planning would amply qualify me for such a role."

"I certainly agree with your last statement, General. I personally have no qualms about letting you plan and direct this rescue mission."

"Then, let me go talk to Mister Hiller, to see if he authorizes the Navy to use his prototype for this mission. It shouldn't be long."

Ingrid then walked out of the office, leaving Smith and Skinner alone for a few minutes. Randolph Skinner looked sideways at Smith, some reserve visible in his expression.

"The Joint Chiefs hid that strategic reconnaissance mission from the President, sir? Who told you that?"

"The CNO<sup>19</sup>, who is one of those who don't trust the President and who asked me to prepare a rescue mission. But keep that to yourself, Commander: the CNO would relieve me of command if he learned that I informed others of this, particularly concerning General Dows, who is a retired officer."

"Admiral, with all due respect to the CNO, he is an ass! General Dows repeatedly saved our nation from military disasters in the past and is the best strategist and field commander we ever had. With her being the sole qualified operator for the Hiller SUPERCAR, Dows HAD to be told about this."

Smith, instead of chastising his subordinate, sighed while lowering his head.

"You are right, Commander, but politics now controls the Pentagon as much as anything else."

"Yeah, and maybe it would be time to change that, sir." fired back Skinner, saying what he was thinking. Smith kept silent afterwards, until Ingrid returned inside the office and closed the door behind her.

"So, what did Mister Hiller say?"

"He agrees to the Navy using his prototype on this rescue mission, at the condition that the Navy would compensate his corporation if it is ever damaged or lost during that mission."

"I believe that the Navy should easily agree to that, General."

"It better do, because this mission will be a no go if the Navy refuses to abide by this condition."

"I will call the CNO as soon as I am back in San Diego, General Dows. When could you launch onto this mission?"

"As soon as I can pack my things here and fly to San Diego. I would counsel you and Commander Skinner to fly back at once to your base, in order to contact the CNO and to alert your S.E.A.L. team to prepare their equipment. By the way, I will need 2,000 rounds of 7.62mm ammunition to be readied, so that the two gatling machine guns of our Supercar could be provisioned before departure. I would also like you to have a C-152 cargo plane made ready to transport our Supercar and your team to Turkey, so that we could get close to the operational area. If a Navy ship with a helicopter platform is

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<sup>19</sup> CNO: Chief of Naval Operations. The title given to the commander of the United States Navy.

already within the Black Sea, then I will want to be able to land our Supercar on it, so that we could get as close as possible to the Sea of Azov before launching on the tactical leg of the mission.”

“I will check on that as well, General.”

“Good! You better fly out now, Admiral: those two aviators are definitely in dire need of a quick rescue.”

Smith and Skinner didn't object to that and quickly walked out of the office to return to their air bike. On her part, Ingrid also went out of the office to talk with Stanley Hiller.

“Stanley, I am going to pack my things upstairs, then will fly to San Diego in our prototype. Could you please have it filled with fuel and also put inside the few spare parts we have for it?”

“I will go take care of that right away, Ingrid.”

As Stanley walked away to get his mechanics moving, Ingrid went up to the small lounge she had turned into a temporary bedroom and quickly packed her single suitcase, adding inside a copy of the Supercar's draft technical manual, which she had written. Next, she called her home in Virginia and left a brief message for Nancy on her answering machine, telling her that she was leaving for a few days on a military mission. Once that was done, she went back down to the ground floor level and walked into the prototype's hangar, where she found five mechanics and technicians busy completing a quick checkup and filling of the Supercar. She also found a number of small to medium-sized boxes containing the few spare parts for the Supercar that they had, loaded on the equipment racks of the vehicle. Adding her suitcase to the lot, Ingrid then went to Stanley Hiller and shook his hand.

“Well, hopefully this mission will go well, in which case the Navy should decide to buy our Supercar. If not, then we will at least have tried our best to save two of our aviators.”

Stanley Hiller felt a lump in his throat as he shook hands with her and couldn't help hug her as well.

“Ingrid, you are the bravest girl I ever met. Please be careful.”

“I will...as much as the mission will permit, Stanley. Goodbye!”

“Goodbye, Ingrid!”

Stanley then watched Ingrid take place inside the Supercar and, once the technicians backed off it, start the engine and roll outside on the paved tarmac of the facility. One minute later, the Supercar was airborne and speeding towards the Southwest, followed by the eyes of Stanley and his technicians.

Flying low but fast in order to avoid the commercial air traffic around the Los Angeles area, Ingrid took only fifty minutes to cover the some 500 kilometers between Firebaugh and San Diego, landing her Supercar in the parking lot next to the building housing S.E.A.L. Team One. One S.E.A.L. team member, Petty Officer 2 Tony Grimaldi, ran out at once from an opening large garage door and came to her, shouting above the noise of her propellers.

“GENERAL, YOU MAY ROLL INSIDE VIA THAT GARAGE DOOR.”

“THANK YOU!”

Switching her Supercar to ground rolling mode, Ingrid drove her vehicle inside a large hangar which contained among other things one SDV Mark 8. Stopping her vehicle and switching off its engine, Ingrid then stepped out of it and gave an order to PO2 Grimaldi.

“Petty Officer Grimaldi, I will need a dry suit that will fit me, plus a complete set of diving equipment and a weapon. I will also need an underwater helmet with integrated night goggles.”

“Then, follow me, General.”

Grabbing first her personal suitcase, Ingrid followed Grimaldi to a locker room adjacent to the team’s quartermaster’s section, where a Navy technician started selecting and giving her pieces of combat and diving equipment. The technician however hesitated when the time came to give her a diver’s dry suit of the right size.

“Well, what’s the hold, Petty Officer?”

“Uh, we don’t have a separate changing room for you to try this dry suit, General. The men simply use this locker room to change in and out of their diving suits.” That attracted a frustrated growl from Ingrid, who grabbed the dry suit presented by the Navy man.

“Give me that suit! I am not some kind of offended virgin.”

Grabbing the large equipment bag now filled with equipment and going to one empty locker, she put the bag next to it, then started to unceremoniously undress, watched with bulging eyes by the quartermaster man and Grimaldi. She was down to her bras and

panty when the men of S.E.A.L. Team One entered the locker room with the intent to collect their combat and diving gear. They all froze at once, prompting a sarcastic question from Ingrid.

“WHAT? YOU NEVER SAW A NAKED GENERAL BEFORE? GET YOUR STUFF AND GET READY TO LEAVE!”

Somehow, the Navy commandos managed not to reply with some sexist remark and went to their individual lockers. P.O.1 Robert Tomkins' locker was however next to that used by Ingrid and he had to force himself not to look directly at her but couldn't help give her a few sideways glances to admire her young, sexy body and firm breasts. Once his own kit was assembled in a large carrying bag, he went to report to Commander Skinner, who was also packing his gear near another locker some distance away.

“I am ready to go, sir. What's next?”

“You go load your things inside the Supercar, P.O.: General Dows will pilot it.”

“Yes sir!” replied Tomkins before whispering a few more words. “That's the nicest looking naked general I ever saw, sir, no disrespect intended.”

Skinner glanced quickly at Ingrid, then sighed.

“I'll second that opinion, P.O.”

The five S.E.A.L. members and Ingrid soon had their equipment piled inside the Supercar and returned to the quartermaster's counter to collect their air and oxygen bottles. Ingrid also took the time then to get quickly fitted with a set of camouflage field uniform, complete with boots, cold weather coat and combat web gear, receiving a combat knife, a pistol and five full magazines as her personal armament. They were about to sit inside the Supercar when Rear Admiral Smith entered the hangar, a leather briefcase in his hand, and went to speak with Ingrid and Commander Skinner.

“A C-152 is waiting for you at the nearby North Island Naval Air Station. Here are detailed maps of the area around Rostov-on-Don, along with reconnaissance photo-maps of the same area and general maps covering the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea areas. You will also find a briefing file on our crashed reconnaissance plane's route and pictures of the two missing aviators. You will be flying west towards the Philippines, where your cargo plane will refuel before continuing westward to our base of Incirlik, in Turkey. General, I have good news for you: the destroyer U.S.S. SPRUANCE is presently navigating inside the Black Sea and will be able to function as your forward base of operation. The SPRUANCE is also equipped with satellite communications gear



which will allow it to stay in direct contact with Washington during your mission. If we get any updated info about our missing aviators, then you will be able to get that on the way.”

“Excellent! We are ready to leave, Admiral.”

“Then, good luck to all of you.” said Smith before coming to attention and saluting Ingrid, who saluted back before stepping inside the Supercar and buckling her pilot’s seat harness. Switching on the 1,300-horsepower lightweight diesel engine of her Supercar, she made it roll in reverse, taking it out of the garage, then deployed her four ducted propellers and lifted off for the short trip to the nearby North Island Navy airfield. After watching the vehicle go, Smith then walked back to the building’s secure command center and, after a short hesitation, composed a number on a secure encrypted telephone. This call could very well cost him personally, but the remonstrance Ingrid Dows had served him in Firebaugh had hit him hard and had decided him to finally disobey a directive that he had always felt to be questionable at best.

## **21:52 (Washington Time) / 18:52 (California Time)**

### **Presidential Apartments, The White House**

#### **Washington, D.C.**

Ross Perot was about to relax from the day’s work by starting to read a book in the presidential lounge when his vice-president, retired Vice Admiral James Stockdale, entered the lounge after knocking on the door. Perot, still sitting and holding his book, looked up at the man he considered as much as a friend as a partner in politics.

“Yes, James?”

“Ross, I am afraid that we have a problem...a big problem. One Navy officer whom I know personally just called me to alert me about something truly alarming. Basically, he told me that the Joint Chiefs ordered a high-risk strategic reconnaissance flight over the Caucasus area of the old Soviet Union while conscientiously deciding not to inform you or seek your permission before launching that flight.”

“WHAT?!” shouted Perot, instantly angry. Stockdale then went on.

“Things got even worse some twelve hours ago, Ross: that reconnaissance aircraft crashed inside old Soviet territory following an engine fire. The two crewmembers were able to eject safely but they are now stranded inside hostile territory,

far from any friendly state and with local military forces probably hunting them down. If they get captured, then they can only expect the worst.”

“Can we extract them without causing a major international crisis, James?”

“Normally, I would qualify any attempted rescue mission as near-suicidal and next to hopeless but the Joint Chiefs still ordered our Naval Special Warfare Group to prepare to send a Navy SEAL team on a rescue mission to the Caucasus. The commander of our Naval Special Warfare Group then made what I would qualify as an inspired move: he enlisted the help of retired General Ingrid Dows, who was developing for the Navy a new model of SEAL delivery vehicle, or SDV, at the Hiller Helicopters Corporation. SEAL Team One and General Dows are presently flying to Turkey with the prototype of the SDV Mark 10.”

“But General Dows retired from the service seven years ago and is now a civilian. Why did the Navy take her on this rescue mission?”

“Uh, the Navy brass doesn’t know yet that she is part of the mission, Ross. She volunteered for it because she designed our new vehicle and is the only person qualified to pilot and operate the prototype of the SDV Mark 10. Rear Admiral Raymond Smith, who commands our NSWG, accepted her offer of help but has not yet informed the CNO that she left with our SEAL team. By the way, Dows still retains the status of inactive reserve officer and has kept her various flight certifications valid by periodically effecting training flights in military aircraft. She has even flown a few flights to orbit in spaceplanes of our Space Corps and is still a fully qualified astronaut, on top of being still qualified as a fighter pilot. And I won’t even talk about her celebrated superpowers. Overall, Rear Admiral Smith took an excellent decision by accepting to include her in this rescue mission, as Dows’ participation has greatly boosted its chances of success.”

“Dows...” Perot said in a dreamy tone. “She is probably the most fantastic person to have ever served this nation. I wish that I could have her in my cabinet.”

The President then shook himself back to the present moment and looked again at Stockdale.

“How long before our rescue team arrives near the operational area?”

“The cargo aircraft carrying our SEAL team and the SDV prototype left San Diego a bit over one hour ago, flying towards our base of Incirlik, in Turkey. With the need for that cargo aircraft to stop and refuel in the Philippines, I would say that our rescue team will arrive in Turkey in another twenty hours or so. Once there, our team will fly in the prototype to one of our destroyers presently sailing in the Black Sea, which

will become their forward base of operation. Overall, I would say that our rescue team could enter Soviet territory in a bit over 24 hours from now.”

“Then, I will want to follow its progress as it flies off our destroyer to head into Soviet airspace. I want the Situation Room to be ready in 24 hours to follow the situation in real time.”

“What about the Joint Chiefs? Do you want them to be present in the Situation Room?”

Ross Perot was strongly tempted to say ‘no’ to that but thought better of it.

“Well, they still are supposed to be my military experts, so I can’t in good conscience lock them out of this. If the mission fails, the geopolitical consequences could be severe and we will have to manage them at once. By the way, what was the goal of that strategic reconnaissance flight, James?”

Stockdale made a bitter smirk at that question, as he suspected that Perot was not going to like his answer.

“It was sent to take air samples and radiation readings from low altitude over the Volgograd and Rostov areas, to try to confirm if a number of ex-Soviet mobile ICBM launchers and missiles are now controlled by the new Caucasus Independent Republic. If that turns out to be true, then it will mean that a bunch of tinpot dictators with links to Islamic extremists now control a number of operational ICBM systems.”

While Perot reddened with anger on hearing that, he managed, barely, not to shout out in frustration.

“And the Joint Chiefs didn’t want me to know about that reconnaissance mission? What were they thinking?”

“Uh, Rear Admiral Smith told me that the CNO confided to him that the Joint Chiefs don’t trust you, Ross.”

“I see! Remind me after this rescue mission to do some vacuum cleaning among the Joint Chiefs. I was elected in office, not them!”

**02:16 (Turkey Time) / 19:16 (Washington Time)**

**Friday, March 19 (Turkey) / Thursday, March 18 (Washington)**

**Helicopter landing pad of destroyer U.S.S. SPRUANCE (DD-963)**

**110 kilometers north of Sinope, Black Sea**

Commander James Little, Captain of the destroyer U.S.S. SPRUANCE, was standing against the railing atop the helicopter hangar of his 8,000-ton ship when the announced special warfare aircraft landed in the dark on the ship's helicopter platform. Little was struck at once by the strange aspect of that aircraft, which reminded him of the now popular Hiller AIRCAR VTOL commuter machine. With the freshly arrived aircraft shutting down its engine(s), Little quickly ran down the steep ladders leading down to the landing platform, arriving there in time to see six dark silhouettes stepping out of the craft and starting to take out a collection of bags and boxes of various sizes. Because the ship was sailing in a tactical setting, the platform was not lit and he had only the light from a half moon to see what was happening. Still, he gave an order to six of his sailors who were standing at the ready inside the hangar.

"GO HELP THEM UNLOAD THEIR EQUIPMENT, MEN!"

As his sailors ran on the platform, Little walked quickly to the men who had come out of the unusual craft and announced himself to the first dark silhouette he encountered.

"Ahoy! I'm Commander James Little, Captain of the U.S.S. SPRUANCE. Welcome aboard!"

The man facing him then saluted him while speaking up.

"And I'm Commander Randolph Skinner, in command of SEAL Team One. I am afraid that we won't be able to stay for very long before flying off towards the Kerch Strait, Commander Little: we have to pass through the strait while it is still dark. We will only take the time to unload our spare parts, refuel our vehicle and change into our dry suits. However, we will certainly use your hospitality on our return. You do have reserves of diesel fuel aboard, I hope?"

"Certainly! Our ship is equipped with a number of auxiliary diesel generators. How much diesel fuel will you need?"

"About eighty gallons of diesel fuel. My pilot will show your technicians how to refuel our Supercar."

"A 'Supercar'?"

"Yes, that's the nickname we use to designate our prototype special warfare craft. It was built by Hiller but this is actually the only copy of it existing right now. We are on what you could call a 'Hail Mary mission'."

"I can believe that, in view of how short a time our warning order came. What are those boxes you just unloaded from your Supercar?"

"They are the only spare parts that Hiller had at the time for its prototype. Believe me: this is truly a case of 'do or die'."

"Well, my ship will do everything possible to support your team in your mission. Come with your team inside the helicopter hangar: we will be better able to speak once inside."

"Okay! TEAM ONE, GRAB YOUR BAGS AND FOLLOW ME INSIDE THE HELICOPTER HANGAR!"

Little then led the SEAL team leader towards the access hatch to the starboard side helicopter hangar of his destroyer. That hangar was still in red light mode when they entered it, in order not to have any visible light spill out and reveal the presence of the ship to outsiders. While dim, that red light was sufficient to reveal to a shocked Little the fact that one of the SEAL team members was a woman, and a very young one at that.

"What the... Commander Skinner, how come you have a teenage girl as part of your team?"

"She is our pilot and is the only person presently qualified to fly and operate this Hiller SUPERCAR, Mister Little. She also happens to have designed it. You are presently looking at retired four-star General Ingrid Dows, ex-Commander of the United States Space Corps, who is presently 67 years-old."

Little was left speechless for a moment, then shook himself back to reality and faced Skinner.

"Uh, I'm sorry if I showed a lack of respect towards her, Mister Skinner. Still, she is quite an unusual sight, I must say."

"I won't contradict you on that," replied Skinner, smiling in amusement. "She is anything but conventional. We will now put on our dry suits over our combat uniforms. Could you have that diesel fuel brought up in the meantime?"

"Of course! PETTY OFFICER STURGIS, BRING UP EIGHTY GALLONS OF DIESEL FUEL TO THIS HANGAR, PRONTO!"

"YES SIR!"

The SEAL team members then went with their large equipment bags behind the folded helicopter occupying the hangar and started putting on their thick dry suits. With the waters of the region at temperatures near zero degrees Celsius, those suits were

going to be a vital protection against hypothermia once underwater. With the precious Hiller spare parts stored inside an equipment locker of the hangar, the only thing left to do was to refuel the Supercar, an operation that took only a few minutes. While that was done, Little showed to Skinner the latest radio messages he had received concerning this night's mission.

"We basically haven't heard more news about our two down pilots. However, we have intercepted radio traffic from military units of the Caucasus Independent Republic, saying that they had found the crash site of our plane and are now searching for our aviators. I am afraid that our pilots don't have much time left before they are found and captured."

"Which is why we have to depart as soon as possible for Rostov-on-Don, Mister Little. We will do so as soon as the refueling is completed. We will do our best to send periodic situation updates via encrypted satellite communications."

A few minutes later, the refueling was declared completed and the six team members took back their seats inside the Supercar. Little and a few of his sailors and officers stood next to the hangars and watched the fantastic machine rise from the deck, then take speed while staying low, flying towards the North.

"May God help them!" said to himself Little before ordering his men back inside the ship.

With her Supercar flying in blackout condition at an altitude of only sixty meters above the ocean, Ingrid used both the night vision goggles attached to her helmet and the images from six infrared cameras set at angles providing her a night vision over a horizontal frontal arc of thirty degrees and a downward frontal arc of twenty degrees. Commander Skinner, who was seated in the forward seat to her right, also had repeater screens showing the thermal pictures and was able to appreciate how expertly Ingrid was piloting their Supercar at speeds of 700 kilometers per hour and at low altitude, all in near total darkness.

"This machine is incredible, truly. We are going over twice as fast as the fastest helicopter I ever flew. With the present altitude we are flying at, combined with the waves from this agitated sea, any radar will have a hard time to pick us up, General."

"That may be true, but keep watching our radar warning receiver set, just in case, Commander."

Skinner nodded and glanced at the small display of the said receiver set. Thankfully, the only radar signal they were detecting now was that from the main surveillance radar of the U.S.S. SPRUANCE. While flying to Turkey aboard their C-152 cargo plane, Ingrid had taken a good four hours to review and explain the systems of her Supercar to the five Navy SEALs of the team, helping them become at least proficient in the use of these systems. The fact that most of the sophisticated electronic systems cramming the Supercar were standard U.S. military equipment had helped a lot the Navy men in learning how to use them. The only major difference with the systems of the Supercar was that they were sealed into pressure-resistant transparent containers, with special watertight buttons and switches to activate them. She had also explained to Skinner, who was a qualified helicopter pilot and who was also trained on the Hiller AIR BIKE, how to fly and operate their Supercar, which could basically operate in six different modes: aircraft mode; helicopter mode; surface catamaran mode, submersible mode, submarine mode and ground car mode. Just that had turned Skinner into a Supercar enthusiast, seeing what it could bring to his SEAL commandos in special operations.

### **03:04 (Turkey Time)**

#### **Supercar, flying sixty meters above the waves**

#### **Ninety kilometers south of the Kerch Strait**

#### **Black Sea**

“We have now a total of nine radar signals which we can detect, but none are at detection level yet. Two of them are military-type, medium range radars, while the others are short-range civilian radar sets.”

“Does one of those civilian radars emit from ahead, in the direction of the Kerch Strait, Commander?”

“Two of them are, General.”

“Then, we will try to use one of those civilian ships to hide our approach and cover our underwater noise by staying close to it while under water. I am now going into helicopter mode and deploying our inflatable skids.”

Skinner, like his five SEAL commandos watched on anxiously as Ingrid slowed down their Supercar to a speed under 200 kilometers per hour and pivoted the four ducted propellers into near horizontal position. At the same time, she made a pair of what looked a bit like skis with inflatable bags pop out under the belly of the Supercar. With

her speed gradually diminishing, Ingrid finally put down her machine on the surface of the Black Sea, with the inflatable skids basically turning the Supercar into a floating catamaran. While she could navigate around at speeds of up to sixty knots on the water in catamaran mode, she chose to limit her speed to twenty knots and started pursuing a civilian ship visible ahead and in the distance, thanks to its lit position lights. It soon became clear that it was a big ship and that it was heading for the Kerch Strait, the passage linking the Black Sea with the Sea of Azov.

"All but two of the radar signals are now well below detection levels: we are too low to be detected except from close range." announced Commander Skinner.

"Excellent! That big ship ahead of us appears to be some kind of tanker ship. It will be ideal to cover our passage of the strait. Everybody, put on your masks and open your air regulators: we are about to go to submersible mode."

Using a number of switches and buttons, Ingrid first declutched her engine from her ducted propellers, then deployed her two telescopic snorkel masts, which were contained inside her two vertical rudder structures. Those snorkel masts contained in turn an air intake pipe for the Supercar's diesel engine, an exhaust pipe for the hot gases from the diesel and a number of cameras, electronic sensors and antennas. With that done, she retracted and deflated her skids and opened the free flooding vents of the Supercar's body, making her machine sink under the surface. She couldn't help herself shout out the famous command associated with submariners as the inside of the Supercar quickly filled with seawater.

"DIVE, DIVE, DIVE!"

That got her chuckles from the SEAL commandos before the Supercar sank under the surface. Once under the waves, her fore and aft elevon surfaces automatically kept the Supercar level at a depth of three meters, while her extended snorkel masts allowed Ingrid to continue on diesel power. Engaging her aft pair of ducted propellers on very low gear and pivoting them to the vertical, she turned them from aircraft propellers to ship screws and quickly accelerated her machine to an underwater speed of twenty knots in order to catch up with the tanker ship ahead. She could have gone to an even higher underwater speed but she was leery about being possibly detected by some warship sonar set. A speed of twenty knots was anyway more than sufficient to close in on the stern of the tanker ship within minutes. The vibrations created by the latter's two large screws started making the Supercar shake more and more violently, while the noise level from the tanker's screws churning the sea covered all other noises save the



commandos' voice as they communicated via the underwater microphones integrated to their special divers' full-face masks.

"Sorry for this egg-beater episode, guys, but we need that big bugger close to us in order to cover our acoustic and sonar signatures."

"That's alright with us, General." replied Randolph Skinner. "Up to now, your Supercar is performing incredibly well. I can already see a flotilla of them replacing our present SDVs Mark 8. Maybe the Marine Corps will also choose to acquire Supercars."

"Stanley Hiller won't say no to that. Now, let's hope that this tanker won't choose for some reason to delay its passage into the Sea of Azov. I am really worried about our two downed aviators: they have already been hiding on the ground for too long, that is if they have not been captured yet."

Skinner did not reply to that but felt renewed anxiety about the fate of the two pilots. Their plane had by now crashed a good day and a half ago, a long time indeed when you were trying to evade soldiers hunting for you. PO3 Wayne Harrington suddenly let out a surprised exclamation from his rear seat.

"Hey, there is a fish inside our Supercar! It must have entered through one of our free flooding vents."

"Great! Our first catch of the day!" replied PO2 Jerry Abbot, making the other occupants of the Supercar chuckle briefly in their full-face diving masks. That short exchange seemed to relax somewhat the occupants of the machine, as they fell mostly silent from then on.

With Ingrid checking her position relative to the tanker ship via a swiveling camera mounted on one of her snorkel tubes, she concentrated during the next two hours on keeping her Supercar level at a depth of three meters, so that a wave would not fill her snorkel tubes with seawater or would not temporarily choke the air supply to her diesel engine. Despite having an automatic depth control system to help her, it was still a stressful, tiring job and she let out a sigh of relief when they transited the Kerch Strait and entered the Sea of Azov.

"We are now past the Kerch Strait, guys. We will soon be able to part with that tanker ship and go our own way towards Rostov-on-Don."

"That was some nice piloting on your part, General." said Skinner, looking sideways at her across from the large watertight cylinder running nearly the whole length

of the Supercar and which contained their diesel engine, batteries and electronic systems. Ingrid smiled at that compliment.

“Funny that you would say that, Commander: most of my radar officers who flew low-level, high-speed penetration strike missions in my F-83 said afterwards that they had become as sick as a dog.”

“Pah! Air Force wimps, all of them!”

Ingrid, who could not pull her tongue out in response instead gave Skinner the royal finger, making the SEAL commandos laugh again.

A few minutes later, as the Sun was still down, Ingrid veered on a new course, letting the tanker ship continue on its merry way. With the waters of the Sea of Azov being quite calm, she was able to increase her underwater speed noticeably, making Randolph Skinner look with disbelief at their speed indicator.

“Twenty-six knots?! I would never have thought that possible, General. Is this the top underwater speed of your Supercar?”

“Well, this is its first full underwater test, so you tell me, Commander. Right now, we are at 85 percent of maximum diesel power, so we probably could approach a top speed of 28 knots, as long as the sea stays calm. Our problem is that, even at this high underwater speed, we would need nearly ten hours to get to the area of Rostov-on-Don, a very long time for our pilots to wait to be rescued. I believe that we should surface and pass into helicopter mode, in order to arrive in our target area before the Sun is up. What do you think, Commander?”

“That I concur with you, General. Time is precious now.”

“Then, let’s surface!”

Pulling on her control stick, she made her Supercar climb to the surface, then injected pressurized air inside the fuselage, emptying it of the seawater filling it the same way a submarine would do. Her next step was to deploy and inflate her skids, an essential step to take before lifting off from a water surface. If not, she risked the danger of a wave crashing over a propeller rotating at high speed, something that could only end in a disaster. Randolph Skinner again watched her do that maneuver and change in operating mode and could only admire her apparent assurance and expertise as a pilot. They were soon flying at very low altitude, accelerating gradually to a speed of 300 kilometers per hour. After some twenty minutes of flying in the dark, Ingrid consulted their digital map display and GPS unit and spoke to Skinner.

"Commander, do you feel up to piloting our Supercar for a while? I would like to start listening to the radio traffic between units of the Caucasus forces, to see if we could learn something about the status of our pilots."

"I would be happy to, General. My aircraft!"

"Thanks, Commander!" said Ingrid, who then concentrated her attention on the sophisticated electronic warfare suite of the Supercar. The usual electronic equipment of a standard series Supercar would actually be considered meager compared to that of the SEAL variant. However, the actual electronic suite she was now using was no frivolous 'gold-plating'. Rather, it had been designed to provide as many tactical advantages as possible to its occupants, who were routinely tasked with the most difficult and risky missions given to American military units. Right now, their electronic warfare suite, apart from helping them evade detection, was their best chance to find where the two downed pilots could be. Thankfully, Ingrid was fluent in Russian, along with dozens of other languages, so she had no problems to start filtering military channels from the numerous civilian ones she could detect with her radio frequency scanner.

Some eight minutes into her listening of select channels, Skinner saw Ingrid suddenly tense up and listen even more intently.

"You got something, General?"

Ingrid immediately raised her hand to call for silence, then consulted their inertial/GPS navigation unit before speaking.

"Commander, take the heading 032. We are now going to Kagal'nik. It is situated at the mouth of the Don River, just southwest of the town of Azov."

"What did you hear, General?" asked Skinner, becoming worried at once. Ingrid's expression was somber as she answered him.

"An order to all Caucasus ground units to converge on Kagal'nik and the marshlands to its immediate North: our pilots were just spotted by local farmers. Go to top speed now: minutes will count!"

"Putting the pedal to the metal now!" replied Skinner.

**08:45 (Moscow Time)**

**Marsh area on the left bank of the Don River delta**

**Near the town of Kagal'nik, Caucasus Independent Republic**

“Stay down, Rhonda! That damn helicopter seems to have seen something and is coming towards us.”

Captain Rhonda Fleming, wet, freezing and famished, did her best to hide in the tall grass of the marsh she and Major James Cooper were in, but she knew that this helicopter was eventually going to spot the two of them. She and Cooper had walked strictly at night while hiding during daylight and had been hoping to find some kind of small motor boat that they could steal and use to try to at the least get away from the area in which their aircraft had crashed. Instead, they had wasted a lot of time going around the dispersed farms of the area in order to avoid being spotted by a local peasant. Unfortunately, their luck had run out some two hours ago, when farmers had spotted them when they had tried to steal a few eggs from the chicken coop of their farm. Now, Rhonda could see a column of military trucks approach in the distance, while that damn helicopter was liable to spot them in the minutes to come. Rhonda then thought about their instructions about what to do if about to be captured during this mission: to not fall alive in enemy hands. She and Cooper had been briefed about what to expect from the Caucasus authorities, which was nothing pleasant. Looking at Cooper, a man she admired as a top pilot and a fine officer, she spoke in a resigned tone while putting her right hand over the retaining flap of her pistol’s holster.

“James, I think that our luck has truly run out now. Maybe we should end this before they could capture and torture us.”

Despite being a brave man, Cooper couldn’t help let despair show on his face.

“I believe that we are now cooked, Rhonda. However, I would like to get some of those bastards before they could get their hands on us. First, though, make sure that you have nothing left on you that could give away classified information. How many bullets do you have for your pistol?”

“I have a total of three full magazines on me, James.”

“The same for me. That should be enough to sell ourselves dearly. Now, check your pockets one last time.”

Rhonda did so and shook her head afterwards.

“I have only my dog tags left on me, James.”

“Good! Now, grab your pistol and get ready to defend yourself, but wait for my command before opening fire.”

With the two American aviators crouched down in the high grass and holding their pistols, they watched with growing alarm as the military helicopter, a type large enough to carry a whole squad of soldiers and with clearly visible door gunners manning machine guns, approached them. After turning twice around the pilots' hiding place, that helicopter then came to a hover at low altitude, some 150 meters away from them and while presenting its right side. With the door gunner on that side now pointing his machine gun at Cooper and Fleming, an amplified voice speaking poor English with a strong accent was then heard.

"ATTENTION, AMERICANS! SURRENDER NOW OR WE WILL KILL YOU! THROW AWAY YOUR WEAPONS AND STAND UP WITH YOUR HANDS IN THE AIR."

"Damn!" raged Cooper. "They are too far for our pistols to be effective. I also see another helicopter approaching from the Southwest."

Ten seconds later, the helicopter door gunner fired a short burst that whizzed well above the heads of the two pilots.

"THIS WAS A WARNING SHOT! SURRENDER NOW!"

Rhonda instinctively crouched even lower, trying to find some illusory cover in the marshy ground, but she couldn't help lower her head in fear when a long, dense burst of machine gun fire resonated in the air. A triumphant shout from James then made her look up in surprise.

"THE CAVALRY HAS ARRIVED, RHONDA!"

What she saw was the enemy helicopter, thoroughly peppered by some dense machine gun fire, falling to the ground, where it crashed and caught fire. Twisting her neck and looking westward, she then saw a most strange machine the size of a light helicopter, painted a dark blue-green but without any visible markings on it. It was now coming down and approaching like a helicopter would do but was something else entirely. She was still wondering what it was when James grabbed her by one arm and forced her up on her feet.

"COME ON! LET'S RUN TO THAT THING!"

Rhonda did not have to be told twice and ran as fast as she could on the marshy terrain as the strange machine was landing a mere ten meters from her. A side door popped open, while a man wearing a dry suit half emerged from a roof hatch and shouted at them.

"GET IN! QUICK!"

With fear making her run even faster, Rhonda nearly dived inside the vehicle, where a man helped her get up and sit down on a padded seat.

“STRAP YOURSELF IN, CAPTAIN: THE RIDE OUT COULD BE ROUGH.”

With James also aboard, the side door was closed and the machine started zooming up at the vertical, then picked up forward speed very fast, demonstrating a level of performance and agility that left Rhonda stunned.

“What is this machine? Who are you, guys?”

One of the men in diving suits sitting in the seat on the other side of a sort of big cylinder running down the centerline of the vehicle answered her with a proud grin.

“We’re the Navy’s SEAL Team One, ma’am, and this is a Hiller SUPERCAR, also to be soon called the SDV Mark 10.”

Rhonda, feeling her fear and despair evaporate, passed an arm over and across the centerline cylinder and shook the man’s hand.

“Thank God for the Navy! What’s next?”

Another man occupying the forward right-side seat of the machine twisted his head to answer her, his expression dead serious.

“Now we do our best to fly out of Dodge without getting shot down, Captain. You better hang on for the next few minutes. You too, Major!”

Rhonda didn’t need to be told twice and quickly buckled the safety harness of her seat. The machine, still flying barely above the ground, quickly accelerated to a speed she would not have thought possible for a propeller aircraft. The pilot of their machine also proved to be incredibly good at such flying, with Rhonda tensing up as the nearby ground went by at dizzying speed while the machine jumped up and down in the air in order to avoid the top of trees. She was surprised to hear some three minutes later a female voice coming from the pilot’s seat.

“INCOMING FIGHTERS AT FOUR O’CLOCK!”

Snapping her head around to her right and rear, Rhonda swore on recognizing the two small shapes approaching rapidly: they were two MIG-21 supersonic fighter jets. They were of an old design but they were still dangerous opponents.

“Shit! TWO MIG-21s APPROACHING ON INTERCEPT COURSE!”

The pilot of their Supercar kept hugging the ground at high speed then, but also started moving as well her machine left and right in rapid, unpredictable fashion, like a crab would do. Rhonda just couldn’t figure how she managed that but that tactic worked, as Rhonda saw two separate streams of cannon shells miss their machine by wide

margins. The MIG-21s, built for speed at altitude rather than for dogfighting, proved to be outclassed by a wide margin in the agility department by the Hiller SUPERCAR and also missed with their second cannon bursts before speeding past the Supercar, one on each side. What followed bot stunned and surprised Rhonda. Instead of continuing to flee at low level, the pilot of the Supercar suddenly threw her machine in a gut-wrenching climb and turn maneuver to place herself behind the MIG-21 fighter which had passed to the right. Two machine guns hidden inside the forward corners of the fuselage then spit out dense streams of bullets typical of multi-barrel gatling weapons. To her astonishment and joy, Rhonda saw the quickly aimed bursts actually connect with the MIG-21, making pieces fly off it before the fighter jet transformed itself into a giant flying torch. Rhonda did not have the time to cheer that victory before their pilot reversed her turn and went after the second MIG-21. The pilot of that interceptor, stunned and enraged at seeing his wingman go down in flames, then started to perform a tight U-turn to the right in order to come back at the Supercar. The pilot of the latter, apparently anticipating that move, flew sideways to the right, placing itself in the trajectory of the MIG-21, ending up facing him as the enemy fighter pilot was completing his U-turn. The surprised fighter pilot did not have time to react to the small craft now facing him on a collision course before his cockpit canopy exploded from multiple impacts by 7.62mm bullets which also killed the pilot instantly. Aboard the Supercar, Rhonda could only watch with disbelief as the second MIG-21 flew past them on a downward arc, to finally explode in a ball of flames on impact with the ground.

"JESUS! TWO MIG-21s SHOT DOWN IN LESS THAN TWENTY SECONDS? I CAN'T BELIEVE IT!"

"You better, Captain Fleming!" replied their female pilot while glancing briefly at her. "Those two were respectively my 168<sup>th</sup> and 169<sup>th</sup> confirmed air kills."

"Your 168<sup>th</sup> and 169<sup>th</sup> air kills? But I know of only one fighter pilot with such a high kill count: General Ingrid Dows!"

"That's me!" replied with a big grin the teenage girl at the controls of the Supercar before returning her full attention to her flying and diving in order to return to ground-hugging altitude. Rhonda exchanged a befuddled look with James Cooper, who was as stunned as her.

"But General Dows must be in her sixties right now. I don't understand."  
One of the SEAL commandos then cut in, grinning widely.

"It's her alright, Captain, and she is 67 years-old. However, she is apparently able to rejuvenate herself and now looks like a high-school teenager."

"Alright, people," said Randolph Skinner from his front copilot's seat, "cut it out! We still have to fly away from this hornets' nest. We will celebrate and discuss this once back aboard the U.S.S. SPRUANCE."

That prevented Rhonda's next question and she stayed silent as their fantastic machine kept flying at tree-top level and at speeds of about 700 kilometers per hour. She doubted that any radar could detect them at such altitude, thus felt much better as they flew south over the terrain of the Krasnodar Oblast<sup>20</sup>. She however couldn't help cheer loudly when their craft passed the coast and started flying over the waves of the Black Sea.

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<sup>20</sup> Oblast: Administrative regional unit of the Soviet Union and Russia.



## **CHAPTER 21 – THE PENTAGON MASSACRE**

**01:46 (Washington Time) / 09:46 (Moscow Time)**

**Friday, March 19, 1993 'C'**

**White House Situation Room, Washington, D.C.**

**U.S.A.**

The White House Military Liaison Officer, who was listening to radio reports from the U.S.S. SPRUANCE, suddenly broke into a wide grin before looking at President Perot, who was sitting with the members of his National Security Council around the long conference table of the White House Situation Room.

"Mister President, the U.S.S. SPRUANCE just reported that our Supercar has landed safely aboard with its full SEAL team and our two downed pilots. All of them are healthy, with no casualties declared."

Perot, like the other men present in the Situation Room, cheered wildly on hearing that. However, their reaction changed to stunned disbelief when the liaison officer spoke again a few seconds later.

"Uh, the SPRUANCE is also reporting that our Supercar shot down one Caucasian helicopter and two MIG-21 interceptors during its mission. More details will follow in about one hour, when our SEAL team commander will send his mission report."

"They shot down two MIG-21s and one helicopter?" exclaimed General Joseph Rawlington, the commander of the U.S. Air Force. "How could that be possible?" General Edward White, the commander of the U.S. Space Corps, gave him a dubious look while replying to his remark.

"With General Dows at the controls of our Supercar, you better believe it, General Rawlington. She has been our Ace of aces since World War 2 and still is by a wide margin. If she claims to have shot down those planes, then don't insult her by doubting her claims. From what I know about that Supercar prototype, it is armed with two Minigun 7.62mm gatling machine guns, enough to shoot down those planes."

"We will discuss that in depth once we get the mission report from our SEAL team commander, gentlemen." cut in Perot. "Right now, we better deal with the possible fallouts from this situation, particularly the reactions to be expected from the

leaders of this Caucasus Independent Republic. General Walters, I want our forces around the Caucasus region to go to DEFCON 2 and to be ready to repeal any hostile move or action coming from the Caucasus Republic or from other parts of the Soviet Union.”

Perot then let the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and his service deputies time to call their respective service headquarters to pass the change to the U.S. Defensive Condition before speaking again, addressing his Secretary of State, Daniel Inouye.

“Dan, if the leaders of this Caucasus Republic call up to either protest about our rescue mission or to threaten some retaliatory move against us, you can tell them that any hostile action from them against the United States, its citizens or its interests will be met with a massive military response. Emphasize the word ‘massive’ in particular: right now, I am sorely tempted to force back into line all those tinpot dictators around what was the Soviet Union.”

“Yes, Mister President. I believe that we should also publish an advisory to all our citizens to avoid traveling to the Soviet Union and its satellite states.”

“A good idea, Dan. In fact, make that advisory an interdiction, plus order any of our citizens presently inside the Soviet Union to leave at once. Call your State Department now to transmit that order.”

“Right away, Mister President!”

As Inouye made his call, Perot looked in succession at his military service chiefs present around the conference table. Due to the seriousness of the situation, those who had been absent from Washington had been urgently recalled for this meeting. A review of the classified minutes of the more recent meetings of the Joint Chiefs had told Perot and his vice-president, Vice Admiral James Stockdale, that not all of the service chiefs had been present at the meeting where the failed reconnaissance flight over the Caucasus area had been decided. In particular, the commanders of the Space Corps, the Coast Guard and the Army were not in Washington at the time, either visiting or inspecting units around the United States or even overseas. Perot thus eyed with a dark expression the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General Walters; the CNO, Admiral Jackson; the Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Mundy; and the Commander of the Air Force, General Rawlinton. All of them now appeared nervous, and for good reasons.

"Gentlemen, now that we are mostly out of the shit pit some of you put our nation in by deciding to send this doomed strategic reconnaissance plane over the Caucasus, I believe it is time to reset the clock. General Walters, please tell me why you deemed that letting me know about that reconnaissance mission was not necessary? Even more, why did you reject the advice of your own deputy, General Herres, who wanted me to be advised of that proposed mission, so that I could give my authorization to it?"

"Because I deemed that reconnaissance mission to be a routine one not worthy of your attention, Mister President." replied Walters, doing his best to look confident. Perot nearly exploded on hearing his excuse.

"A routine mission? You consider sending a reconnaissance plane on a low altitude mission over hostile territory while searching for mobile nuclear missile launchers a routine affair? Who are you trying to kid, General? Sending such a mission was clearly up to me to authorize!"

Perot then looked collectively at Admiral Jackson, General Rawlington and General Mundy, anger in his eyes.

"You three were present at that meeting of the Joint Chiefs where this mission was ordered launched, yet none of you insisted on the need for me to be informed. May I remind you that I was elected as Commander in Chief of the United States and not you? You are supposed to advise me, not to decide in my place in matters that could result into a significant threat to this country. If you judge that potentially attracting the ire of a bunch of tinpot dictators who possibly control nuclear ICBMs is not a significant threat to the United, then that leaves me with no confidence about your advice or judgment. General Walters, Admiral Jackson, General Rawlington and General Mundy, I am relieving you of your posts effective tomorrow at noon. You will then pass command to your respective deputies. Since this whole affair is of a classified and very sensitive nature, I forbid all of you from making public declarations about it or divulge anything about it, except to your deputies and relevant operational staff."

Perot next looked at the commander of the U.S. Army, General Vincent.

"General Vincent, while you were not present at that meeting and learned of this reconnaissance mission only a few days after it was authorized by General Walters, you did not insist with him that I should have been informed of it. While you can keep your present post for the time being, I will expect some better judgment and backbone on your part from now on."

Looking back at Admiral Jackson, Perot aggressively pointed an index at him.

"It took the initiative and good conscience of a Navy officer for me to know about this screwup. If I hear that you or your deputy retaliates in any way against that naval officer, which I will leave unnamed, then there will be consequences. Do you understand me, Admiral?"

While keeping a facial expression that was close to arrogant, Jackson answered the President at once.

"Yes, Mister President!"

"Very well! Commander McKinley, where is the U.S.S. SPRUANCE presently?"

"It is still in the Black Sea, some fifty nautical miles from the coasts of Turkey, but is now sailing at top speed towards the Bosphorus. Once in the Mediterranean, it will sail east to the port of Tarsus, where our SEAL team and our two rescued pilots will fly out and go to our airbase of Incirlik. Once there, our people and their Supercar will get into a cargo plane and fly back to the United States, Mister President."

"Excellent! I can't wait to meet with these heroes. I now declare this meeting over. This was a long day and evening and we could all use some sleep."

As the participants started to file out of the Situation Room, the Vice-President came to Perot and spoke to him in a near whisper.

"Ross, there is something I would like to discuss with you early tomorrow morning, concerning this crisis. There is something broken in our military chain of command and I believe that it will take more than a few dismissals to rectify the situation in the long term."

"Very well, James. Come and see me at nine in the morning. We will then discuss privately in the Oval Office."

### **09:24 (Washington Time)**

**Wednesday, March 24, 1993 'C'**

**Secure meeting room of the U.S. Senate**

**Capitol Building, Washington, D.C.**

The 37 senior members from both the U.S. Senate and from the U.S. House of Representatives called in to the secure meeting room were wondering between themselves why they were there when the Vice-President, who was also the president of

the U.S. Senate, Vice Admiral James Stockdale, entered the room, making them all get up from their chairs as a sign of respect for his position.

"Please, sit down, lady and gentlemen!" said at once Stockdale before going to the chair reserved for him. Once sitting down, he looked around at the persons present, composed of the leaders of both the Senate and the House and of the members of the two armed service committees of the Congress.

"As you must know now from yesterday's newspapers front pages, the President fired on last Friday the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, the Chief of Naval Operations, the commander of the Air Force and the Commandant of the Marine Corps. This is now commonly called 'The Pentagon Massacre' by the news medias. The reasons for this grave but justified decision stemmed from a highly classified military incident which happened a week ago. Basically, those members of the Joint Chiefs decided to send one of our reconnaissance planes on a high-risk, low-level mission over the Caucasus region of the old Soviet Union, and this without informing the President of it or seeking his approval for such a mission. Captain Merrick, first slide, please!"

The Army officer standing by next to the retro-projector of the meeting room then dimmed the lights and put on the first slide of Stockdale's presentation. Exclamations went around the room when a map of the Black Sea and Caucasus area appeared on a wide wall screen, with the itinerary of a flight path on it, along with a number of symbols.

"Wait!" nearly shouted Sam Nunn, the Democrat chairing the Senate Armed Service Committee. "You said that our plane flew at low level over this tinder box? We were never informed about that mission. And what was the exact goal of that mission?"

"Our plane was tasked with taking air samples and radiation readings, in order to find if a number of mobile ICBM launchers were now inside the territory of the so-called Caucasus Independent Republic, which has proved up to now to be little more than a breakaway region of the Soviet Union led by a group of tinpot military dictators. While the goal of our plane's mission may seem reasonable to you, it could have been filled in a lot safer manner by the reconnaissance spaceplanes of our Space Corps. Unfortunately, the Air Force chief, General Rawlington, apparently wanted to show that his own planes could do the job and thus pushed for that at a meeting of the Joint Chiefs where the Commandant of the Space Corps was not present. It was also decided at that same meeting not to inform the President of this mission or seek his approval for it. As you can see on this slide, things didn't end well for that mission once launched. While the exact causes are still under investigation, our aircraft caught fire and crashed in the

area of Rostov-on-Don, at the northeastern tip of the Sea of Azov. The two pilots of our plane were able to eject and then transmitted briefly a distress signal, but had to hide and evade Caucasus ground units which were then sent to find and capture them.”

The sole woman present in the room, a member of the House Armed Services Committee, then asked a question as many of her colleagues were shaking their heads while looking at the slide on the wall screen.

“And were our two pilots able to escape from the Caucasus?”

Stockdale then smiled for the first time during his presentation.

“Thankfully, yes! A SEAL team sent to the rescue arrived just in time to extract them minutes before they could be captured by Caucasus soldiers. They are now back in the United States, along with their saviors.”

“Well, at least those idiots at the Joint Chiefs had thought of a plan ‘B’ to go with this ill-advised mission.” Said Sam Nunn, the chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee. However, that made Stockdale slowly shake his head in response.

“No, they had not, Senator Nunn. That SEAL team was alerted to this situation only AFTER our plane crashed in the Caucasus. The SEAL team then had to improvise very quickly a plan to get our pilots back.”

“But...wasn’t there some backup or contingency plan in case that our plane went down during the mission?” asked a scandalized John Kasich Jr, a member of the House Armed Services Committee, making Stockdale shake his head again.

“No! The only special directive, given in person to the pilots by General Rawlington, was for them to commit suicide rather than let themselves be captured alive.”

That last sentence created at once a wave of scandalized exclamations among the Congress members sitting around the table. Senator John Warner, himself an experienced military veteran, then resumed the thoughts of the majority.

“Our Air Force had no better contingency plan than to tell our pilots to commit suicide if in danger of capture? That’s chicken shit!”

“Oh, I fully agree with you, Senator Warner. That’s why the President is planning to have General Rawlington and General Walters court-martialed on charges of negligent performance of duty and of gross incompetence connected to this affair.”

“And those charges seem to be most warranted, I would say. How about those downed pilots and the SEAL team that rescued them? It sounds like they would deserve to be rewarded for their courage, in my humble opinion.”

"Again, I fully agree with you on that, Senator Warner, and so does the President. Before naming them all, let me show you how the rescue mission proceeded. Captain Merrick, second slide, please!"

The members of Congress were then able to see a slide on which a second itinerary, traced in green, went from Turkish territory, then to the Black Sea, then to the Sea of Azov and to the Rostov area. Senator John Warner involuntarily opened his mouth as he eyed the itinerary of the rescue team.

"My God! This looks to me like a near-suicidal operation. How did our SEAL team manage to pass through the Kerch Strait without being detected?"

"By passing through while submerged, Senator Warner. They were using the prototype of a new machine meant to replace our actual swimming delivery vehicles. That machine, the Hiller SUPERCAR, had only been flight-tested twice before the head of our Naval Special Warfare Group went to Hiller and asked if he could use it. The designer of the Supercar and Mister Hiller agreed, with the said designer also offering herself as a pilot for the mission, as no Navy member had yet been trained on that new machine, which is of a truly revolutionary design."

"Wait!" shouted at once Patricia Schroeder. "You are saying that a civilian woman participated directly in that rescue mission?"

"Yes, but that woman is no ordinary person. Third slide, please!"

A new slide appeared on the screen, showing a most unusual type of craft in the center, surrounded by eight small pictures with captions distributed along the sides. Patricia Schroeder's eyes bulged on examining the picture of a teenage girl in civilian outfit near the top left corner of the slide.

"General Dows? But she retired from the service years ago! And she designed this machine?"

"Like she designed the now famous and popular Hiller AIRCAR and Hiller AIR BIKE, Congresswoman Schroeder. I however must correct you about one detail. While General Dows retired from active duty some eight years ago, she is still a reservist officer on inactive status and still periodically flies training missions on military planes in order to keep her pilot qualifications current in case a future conflict would force us to activate our reserve forces."

"So, General Dows came to the rescue...again." said John Warner. "That woman is pure gold."

"But she is also pure poison for our enemies, Senator Warner." replied Stockdale, smiling. "Captain Merrick, put on Slide Number Five, please."

The assembled Congress members were soon able to look at a slide with three photos shown on it, which Stockdale then described with a gleeful smile.

"The Hiller SUPERCAR, while already a fantastic machine, also happens to be armed with a pair of medium machine guns meant to support the SEAL commandos it can transport. When our SEAL team arrived where our two pilots were hiding, a Caucasus forces helicopter was already hovering near our pilots and ordering them to surrender, while a column of military trucks was approaching. Our two pilots were about to commit suicide when our Hiller SUPERCAR arrived on the scene and intervened to save our pilots. The top picture you see, taken by the gun camera slaved to the machine guns of our Supercar, shows that Caucasus Air Force helicopter being shot down by General Dows, who was piloting her Supercar for this mission. The two photos below that first picture show the moments when two MIG-21 fighter jets which tried to intercept our Supercar were downed by General Dows."

"SHE MANAGED TO SHOOT DOWN TWO SUPERSONIC JET FIGHTERS?!" exclaimed Warner, incredulous. Stockdale nodded his head once at those words.

"Yes, she did and thus showed that she is still our Ace of aces, with that helicopter and two MIG-21s bringing her lifetime air victory score to 169. While that Hiller SUPERCAR proved to be a fantastic machine with some incredible performances, General Dows' expert handling of it made that rescue mission a success."

"Damn! I would gladly recommend her for a medal, but she already has about all of them, including two Medals of Honor and the Medal of Freedom."

"Yet, the President firmly intends to reward her, along with the SEAL commandos who went with her, plus our two downed pilots, for escaping capture for nearly two full days while inside hostile territory."

"And I will be happy to support any recommendation for medals, Admiral Stockdale. I hope that, after such a performance, the Navy will buy a number of those fantastic Hiller SUPERCARs?"

"Oh, we definitely will, Senator Warner. That machine could in fact be used by combat rescue teams of all our armed services, meaning the Army, Air Force, Navy, Marine Corps, Space Corps and Coast Guard. It is just too good to be passed over for acquisition. I will now pass to the second part of my presentation, which deals with the aftermaths of this rescue mission. Captain Merrick, put up Slide Number Six, please."



The Congress members then saw an organigram showing the overall command structure of the American armed forces, which Stockdale proceeded on commenting and explaining.

“What you see is the present command structure of our armed forces, as it has been since 1947, when the U.S. Air Force was split from the Army. At the top is the President, who is the Commander in Chief of our military. Directly under him is the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, who acts as the President’s top military advisor, while the Secretary of Defense and his service deputies administer our forces and plan their growth and evolution. As for the members of the Joint Chiefs, they act as administrators of their respective services and as military advisors to the President, under the direction of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs. Then, we have our various theater commands and specialized logistical and technical support commands. While the United States has prevailed in all our past conflicts, except for the Korean War, that is despite of that command structure, not thanks to it.”

“Uh, what do you mean by that, Admiral?” asked a confused Robert Byrd, the President Pro Tempore of the Senate. “What is wrong with that command structure, in your opinion?”

“What is wrong is that there is no direct, unified strategic and operational command for our forces in times of war. Let’s use a hypothetical scenario to explain my point. Imagine that we suddenly and simultaneously faced military hostilities in both the Pacific and in the Middle East, which is far from being an improbable scenario. If that happens, then our theater commanders in both the Pacific and in the Middle East will fight with their combat units, each on their own sides. If they needed reinforcements or support from other commands, then they would have to ask the Pentagon, meaning the Joint Chiefs and our National Military Command Center, or NMCC, for that support. In the case of a direct military threat against the continental United States, like the threat of a nuclear war, then our various combat units based in our country would fight off that threat under the direction of the Pentagon. This may sound like a functional arrangement but, in reality, it is not.”

“And what problems do you see about that, Admiral?”

“The main problem is that there is no single combat senior officer in charge of all this. The job of the Joint Chiefs is mostly to coordinate the daily activities of the various armed services, while designing contingency plans for possible future conflicts. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, while nominally above the service chiefs, is of the same

rank as them and has to discuss with his chiefs and establish a consensus on what to do about a particular situation. That is where the age-old problem of interservice rivalry can clog things, like in the case of this failed reconnaissance mission over the Caucasus. Basically, our Space Command could have done the job in a much safer way, but the Air Force pushed for the use of its own planes, profiting from the fact that the head of the Space Command was absent from Washington at the time, inspecting our orbital space station. General Walters agreed to let General Rawlington do things his way, but did not inform either the President or our various theater commanders around the World about this mission. As a result, when that plane crashed inside the Caucasus area, there were no American forces nearby ready to react to that. It took the initiative of a lowly rear admiral, who contacted on his own the Hiller Corporation and asked to use their prototype Supercar, to see a SEAL team sent with some chances to succeed on what was very nearly a suicidal mission. As for our NMCC, its commanding officer is only a brigadier general or rear admiral and, while he can help coordinate the actions of our various theater commands and units, he has only a very limited capability to give orders to these commands. Basically, for anything major, he has to contact the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs and wait for the latter to take a decision after discussing the situation with his Joint Chiefs. Do you see the problem here?"

"I do!" said at once John Warner. "This may have been acceptable in the past, when weapons did not have intercontinental ranges and when there were no true instant global communications, but not today, with intercontinental ballistic missiles able to hit us in minutes and with jet bombers and tactical missiles able to strike our forces quickly. Our present command arrangement wastes a ton of precious time by having to communicate between various headquarters and by having a group of men at the Pentagon being obliged to come to a group consensus before they could issue orders. There is no true unity of command in all this and we certainly can't expect or even want to see the President issue combat orders directly from his Oval Office."

James Stockdale nodded his head slowly, happy to see that at least one member of Congress had been able to see that problem.

"Very good, Senator Warner! You hit the nail right on the head."

"But what could we do to correct that problem, Admiral?" asked Ronald Dellums, the chairman of the House Armed Services Committee.

"I believe that the solution would be to have one senior, combat-experienced commander atop our military command structure, who would have the authority and

competence to directly command all of our theater commands and combat units in a truly coordinated and unified way, free of the usual interservice rivalry. Furthermore, that top military commander should have a higher rank than four-star general or admiral, so that he could bypass the Joint Chiefs and their lengthy discussions and act quickly to counter new threats. For this, we would have to revive the rank of five-star general, which faded away after World War 2, with a combined operational staff under that commander to execute and pass his orders. As for the role of the Joint Chiefs, it should be limited to organizational, training, support and budgetary matters.”

“So, you are basically proposing to create the position of a five-star military commander-in-chief with direct and instant authority over all of our armed forces, is that it, Admiral?” asked John Warner

“That is exactly what I am proposing, Senator. The times for combat decisions by committee should end now.”

“And who would decide on who that military commander-in-chief would be? How could we ensure that the candidate for such a powerful position is both competent and suitable for the job?” asked Bob Dole, the Senate Minority Leader.

“The President would choose that candidate, based on his joint command military experience, high degree of initiative and demonstrated past competence in command in times of war. That military commander-in-chief would serve at the pleasure of the President, but could hold the position as long as successive presidents approve of his or her performance in the position. That would ensure that we would not create some sort of American military Caesar. Also, such candidates should be vetted and approved by the Congress, with the hope that base politics will not corrupt such vetting proceedings. What we want is a highly competent military strategist, not some political sycophant or partisan demagogue.”

“Hum, I would tend to agree with your views, Admiral,” said Tom Foley, the Democrat House Speaker, “but do we even have someone worthy of that position right now?”

“Come on!” said at once Patricia Schroeder, anger flashing in her. “It should be obvious who could fill such a position as our military commander-in-chief, unless of course you would refuse to contemplate her simply because she is a woman. General Ingrid Dows has saved the bacon of this nation many times during the past decades and played a vital role in winning many of our past wars. She helped General MacArthur defend successfully the Philippines in 1942, devised our Europe landing plans in 1944

and its subsequent push to the Rhine, was next to the only senior commander in the Korean War to show true competence in both air and ground combat, commanded our expeditionary forces in Vietnam and in Israel, devised the tactical air campaign which stopped dead the Soviet invasion of Poland in 1955 and averted many more wars thanks to her diplomatic and strategic savvy. She also opened Space for us and traveled as far as Jupiter and Saturn. She also worked directly under both democratic and republican presidents and never showed political partisanship, always working for the good of our nation. To top the cake, she is basically ageless and could fill the post for the decades to come. I say: let's name General Dows as our military commander-in-chief, serving at the pleasure of the President."

"Wait a minute!" objected James Strom Thurmond, the Republican ranking member of the Senate Armed Services Committee. "That Dows has interfered many times in the past with internal affairs of our Southern States and..."

"YOU WOULD REJECT HER BECAUSE SHE IS AGAINST RACISM, IS THAT IT, SENATOR THURMOND?" exploded Schroeder, who intensely disliked the old segregationist politician. "HOW ABOUT THINKING ABOUT THE GOOD OF THE WHOLE NATION RATHER THAN CONTINUE JUSTIFYING YOUR DESPICABLE JIM CROW LAWS?"

"PLEASE, LET'S STAY CIVIL!" shouted James Stockdale, before he gave a dark look at Thurmond. "Senator Thurmond, what I am proposing is to name a military commander-in-chief, not some toady of your Southern States. That military commander-in-chief will solely act as a top strategic military commander and will have nothing to do with the national political affairs of this nation. I thus find your argument both disingenuous and, to say frankly, downright crass and bigoted. Now, what I need from you, members of the Congress, is your approval in principle to create such a new position, revive the old rank of five-star general and revise the role of the present Joint Chiefs. Do I have such an approval from you?"

The 37 politicians looked at each other for a moment, exchanging comments and opinions before a wide majority of them declared their consent, with the notable exceptions being Strom Thurmond and Newt Gingrich.

**13:28 (Washington Time)**

**Friday, July 01, 1993 'C'**

**White House Grounds, Washington, D.C.**

President Ross Perot, assisted by Vice Admiral James Stockdale, was all smiles as he pinned on Ingrid Dows Space Corps uniform the golden insignias of a five-star general.

"General Dows, I now name you Military Commander-in-Chief of all the American military forces, with the rank of five-star general. Congratulations, General!"

"Thank you, Mister President." replied Ingrid, filled with pride. Perot then pointed at the nearby microphone set on the grass of the White House Grounds, facing the large crowd of government dignitaries and media representatives, including numerous television camera crews, some of whom were from foreign channels.

"Would you like to address the spectators, General?"

"With pleasure, Mister President."

Placing herself behind the microphone, Ingrid then scanned slowly the crowd of spectators, in which Nancy, Leonardo and Suzy stood in the front rank while grinning widely.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I would like first to thank the President and the Congress for placing such confidence in me. Second, I would also like to reassure those who may have or still feel discomfort or doubts about me being named to this new position of Military Commander-in-Chief. While I will be serving at the pleasure of the President, both the actual one and the future ones, my first loyalty will be to the Constitution of the United States and to its people...all its people. I will do my best to hone our present military forces to the highest degree of efficiency, not in order to use them to unilaterally attack other nations but to protect the people, territories and interests of the United States around the World. I will also do my best to eliminate waste and trim the bureaucratic fat in our military machine. Right now, we have way more men and women busy pushing paper or taking care of supplies than we have actual fighting men and women available for service in the frontlines. This costs a lot to the American taxpayers, while doing little to improve our combat efficiency, especially in times of war. That will change, I promise you that. Another thing that I will push for is to improve the lot of the lower ranking members of our armed forces. Presently, too many of our valiant enlisted personnel and junior officers, those actually doing the direct fighting in wars, live in substandard conditions, with pay grades close to the official poverty line or even under it, especially in overseas postings where the cost of living is high and the military accommodations are limited or substandard. Paramount in this problem is the way we

treat the families of our lower-ranked personnel. We need to stop treating our fighting men and women like cheap labor, sending them on frequently-changing posts while treating their families as afterthoughts. Our service personnel need to know that their loved ones will be treated with both care and consideration, and not like simple camp followers while they see their senior commanders enjoying perks like chauffeured cars, government-provided mansions and other luxuries. I myself will continue living in my privately-owned home in Arlington and will eat the same food as our lowest-ranked men and women. Finally, I will make sure that every service member, irrespective of gender, race, ethnicity or personal beliefs, is treated equally and with respect, wherever they serve within the United States or overseas.”

That barely hidden allusion to the harassment of black service members in the Southern States was not lost on the spectators, with some of the Congressmen present who represented those southern states practicing racist Jim Crow laws tightening their jaws in irritation. However, Ingrid ignored them and continued on.

“Lastly, I will say this to our allies overseas: you can count on our help if you are ever attacked or threatened by some hostile neighbor. Since I believe in efficiency and not in long, flowery or pompous speeches, I will thus end my presentation now. Thank you for your attention.”

As a last gesture, Ingrid then pivoted around and saluted the American flag floating over the White House as the crowd of spectators applauded and cheered, with Nancy being one of the loudest in the lot.

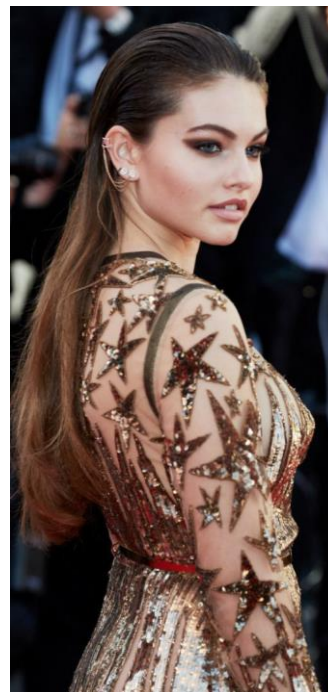
## ANNEX 'A' – INCARNATIONS OF NANCY DOWS



Nancy at age three



Nancy at age nine




Nancy at age 17

**Born November 4, 1982 'C' aboard the U.S.S. PROMETHEUS, in deep Space between Jupiter and Saturn. Returned to Earth on March 20, 1985 'C', when she was 2 years, four months and two weeks old.**

1. **Nancy Dows (Nov 4, 1982 'C' - ):** Born aboard the spaceship U.S.S. PROMETHEUS. Mother: General Ingrid Dows 'C'. Father: Archangel Michael. Dark blond hair, blue eyes. Will grow to adult height of 178 centimeters. Of extraordinary beauty. Born with a number of paranormal powers already active (telekinesis, empath), will develop more powers, including super-strength, super-speed, levitation, touch-healing, telepathy and more, as she grows up. will also see her mind open up to the souvenirs from her past incarnations. Very high IQ (159) and phenomenal memory. Very talented singer, dancer, actress and musician.
2. **Andrée Raymonde Borrel (Nov 18, 1919 – Jul 6, 1944) :** Born in Bécon-les-Bruyères (Paris region), France. Reputation of tomboy. Became member of the French Résistance in WW2, then became a British S.O.E. agent. Parachuted in France in 1942, but captured in 1943 and tortured by the Germans. Sent to the Natzweiler-Struthof concentration camp in 1944 and executed on Jul 6, 1944. Spoke French, English and German.



3. **Ali Pasravi (Jan 9, 1822 – Dec 11, 1873):** Born in Isfahan, Iran, to parents of modest means and origins. Proved at a young age to have a special talent for music. Became a professional musician, played for the rich and powerful in Isfahan. Finally married a local girl at the age of 29, had four children from his wife. Died of a cancer in Isfahan. Favorite instruments were the Tombak goblet drum, the Barbat lute and the Qanun zither. Spoke Farsi and Arabic.
4. **Lyang Ziyi (Oct 27, 1769 - Mar 7 1780):** Chinese peasant girl born in the region of Kunming. Died from starvation at the age of ten, during a local famine. Spoke a local Chinese dialect.
5. **Buwayo (Jun 16, 1660 - Apr 30, 1704):** Warrior in the service of the King of Togo. Married, with five children. Killed in a short battle with an enemy tribe. Spoke a local tribal dialect.
6. **Sir Francis Drake (1544 – Jan 27, 1596):** Born in Tavistock, England. Became a sailor at the age of 12. Famous corsair, explorer and politician. Completed an Earth circumnavigation voyage between 1577-1580. Got a knighthood from Queen Elisabeth the First in 1581 and became Mayor of Plymouth and Member of Parliament. Fought off the Spanish Armada in 1588. Died of dysentery off Panama in 1596. Married to Mary Newman from 1569 to 1582 until her death, then married Elizabeth Sydenham in 1585. No children. Spoke English, Dutch, French and Castilian. 
7. **Aroha (1426 – 1488):** Maori girl born near Christchurch, in New Zealand. Daughter of a fisherman, became known as a beautiful, talented dancer. Married to a son of the local tribe leader at the age of 16. Had six children. Died of an infected wound after a travel accident. Spoke a Maori dialect.
8. **Arjun (1330 – 1363):** Born in Northern India, in a village at the feet of the Himalayas. Became a hunter and top notch archer often employed by the local rajah. Married, had three children. Killed by a tiger during an organized hunt for a man-killer. Spoke Hindi.
9. **Amalia Kupinski (1216 – 1270):** Born in Radom, Poland. Daughter of a well-to-do merchant. Married to a Polish knight (Sir Vladimir). Had five children. Lived through the 1241 Mongol Invasion. Died from pneumonia. Spoke Old Polish, Latin and Saxon.
10. **Mistibis (1129 – 1165):** Huron girl born near the future site of Trois-Rivières, Canada (then Huronia). Married to one of the tribe's hunters and warriors. Had three children. Died during her fourth labor. Spoke a Huron dialect.
11. **Balapang (1028 – 1071):** Filipino fisherman. Born in Mindanao. Married, with four children. Drowned at sea in a sudden storm. Spoke Old Cebuano.



12. **Frida (916 – 971)**: Norse girl born near Stavanger, Norway. Married Rolf, a sailor and a merchant, had three children. Killed by marauders while helping to defend her village. Spoke Old Norse.
13. **Toklat (823 – 856)**: Mayan artisan from the city of Tikal, in the Yucatan Peninsula. Produced obsidian blades and artefacts. Married, had two children. Died of a tropical fever as his city was in its final decline. Spoke the Mayan language.
14. **Mabele (702 – 749)**: Nomadic hunter-gatherer who lived in Southern Africa. Married, with four children. Killed by lions during a hunt. Spoke a local tribal dialect.
15. **Yoko (598 – 632)**: Born in a small farming community near Kyoto, Japan. Married to a local farmer, had five children. Died in labor. Spoke Ancient Japanese.
16. **Leon of Norcia (467 – 526)**: Monk and scribe. Lived in a monastery near Ravenna, Italy. Erudite man, could speak, read and write in six languages. Spoke Latin, Greek, Romansh, Occitan, Tuscan and Lombard. Stayed single. Died of a cancer.
17. **Priti (345 – 401)**: Indian dancer and singer. Sold as slave at the age of nine to the Rajah of Patura by her parents to pay a debt. Became a favorite of the Rajah, who emancipated her and made her a concubine. Gave five children to the Rajah. Died of an illness. Spoke Sanskrit.
18. **Chaco (239 – 271)**: Andean stone cutter and mason. Lived in Tiahuanaco. Married, with three children. Killed by a falling rock in a carry. Spoke Old Andean.
19. **Marcus Sylvanus (125 – 163)**: Roman centurion. Served under Emperor Antonin the Pious. Single. Killed by German barbarians near Osterburken (east of modern Heidelberg). Spoke Latin, Koine and Germanic.
20. **Tschou Li (2 – 58)**: Chinese imperial administrator in the city of Wu (East Coast). Well educated mandarin of the Oriental Han Dynasty. Served under Emperor Kouang Wou-Ti. Had a wife and two concubines, plus six children. Poisoned by a jealous rival. Spoke Mandarin Chinese and Cantonese.
21. **Hypsicratea (94 B.C. – 43 B.C.)**: Nomadic Sarmatian horsewoman from the Caucasus. Met King Mithridates of Pontus around 69 B.C. and became his groom, then his lover and close companion. Strong, intelligent, brave and adventurous. After Mithridates' death in 63 B.C., she was captured by Roman soldiers around 47 B.C. but was freed by Julius Cesar and became his personal historian. Died of a fever. First incarnation on Earth of Nancy Dows. Spoke Sarmat, Greek, Latin, Armenian and Thracian.

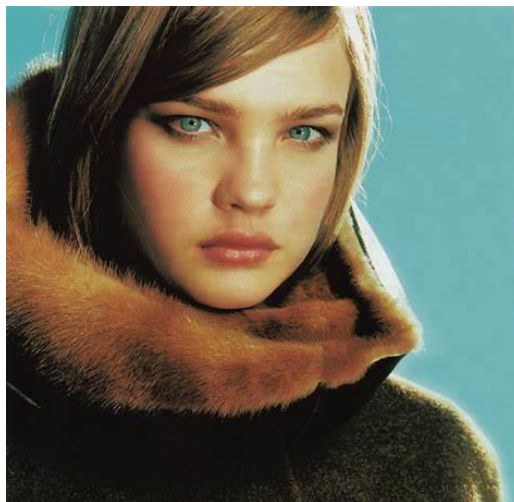
**Known languages (spoken/read/written):**

- English (s/r/w)
- 16<sup>th</sup> C. English (s/r/w)
- French (s/r/w)
- 16<sup>th</sup> C. French (s/r/w)
- Castilian (s/r/w)
- Modern German (s/r/w)
- Saxon (s)
- Old Norse (s/r/w)
- Southern Germanic (s)
- Medieval Polish (s/r/w)
- Modern Farsi (s/r/w)
- Classical Arabic (s/r/w)
- Chinese Mandarin (s/r/w)
- Cantonese (s/r/w)
- Old Central China dialect (s)
- Hindi (s/r/w)
- Sanskrit (s)
- Latin (s/r/w)
- Classical Greek (s/r/w)
- Thracian (s/r/w)
- Old Armenian (s/r/w)
- Koine (s)
- Occitan (s/r/w)
- Tuscan (s/r/w)
- Lombard (s/r/w)
- Romansh (s/r/w)
- Sarmat (s/r/w)
- New Zealand old Maori dialect (s)
- Old Cebuano (s)
- Ancient Japanese (s)
- Old Andean (s/r/w)
- Mayan (s/r/w)
- Huron dialect (s)
- South African tribal dialect/Old Zulu (s)
- Old Togolese tribal dialect/West African (s)

**Nancy's ancient skills (Master/Expert/Proficient/Beginner level):**

- **Horse riding (M)** (Sarmat female warrior, Roman Centurion, English aristocrat, Polish wife of medieval knight)
- **Archery (M)** (Sarmat female warrior, Hindu hunter and archer, multiple African hunter and warrior)
- **Musician (M)** (19<sup>th</sup> C. Iranian professional musician who mostly played the Qanun zither, the Barbat lute and the Tombak drum. 13<sup>th</sup> C. Polish aristocratic woman who played the flute and the harp)
- **Sailing & boat handling (M)** (Famous corsair and sea explorer Sir Francis Drake, Filipino fisherman, wife of Viking merchant)
- **Fieldcraft and survival techniques (M)** (Sarmat female warrior, Hindu hunter and archer, multiple African hunter and warriors, Roman Centurion, Norse woman, Huron woman, Filipino fisherman, Maori woman, English seafarer and explorer)
- **Hunting (M)** (multiple African tribal hunter and warriors, Hindu tiger hunter, Sarmatian horsewoman and warrior)
- **Fishing (E)** (Filipino fisherman, English sailor, Norse woman, Maori woman, Huron woman)
- **Animal butchery, skinning and pelt tanning (E)** (Sarmatian horsewoman and warrior, Hindu hunter, multiple African hunters, Huron woman)
- **Sword fighting & fencing (E)** (English sea corsair and aristocrat, Roman Centurion, Sarmatian warrior)
- **Gunpowder weapons handling (E)** (16<sup>th</sup> C. English corsair)
- **Axe throwing (E)** (Sarmatian female warrior, Togolese warrior)
- **Modern firearms handling (P)** (WW2 French Resistance fighter and S.O.E. agent)
- **Stone cutting & sculpting (E)** (Tiahuanaco Andean stone cutter and mason, Mayan obsidian blades and artefacts artisan)
- **Dancing (E)** (4<sup>th</sup> C. Indian palace female dancer, Maori female dancer)
- **Singing (P)** (4<sup>th</sup> C. Indian palace female dancer, Norse woman, Huron woman, multiple African hunters)
- **Calligraphy (E)** (1<sup>st</sup> C. Chinese mandarin, 5<sup>th</sup> C. Italian monk and scribe)
- **Weaving and knitting (P)** (Norse woman, Polish medieval aristocrat woman, Japanese peasant woman)
- **Farming (P)** (Japanese peasant woman, Norse woman, 20<sup>th</sup> C. French farm girl)

## ANNEX 'B' - CAREER AND AWARDS OF INGRID DOWS 'C'




### Military career, achievements and dates of ranks:

**September, 1940 'A':** Ingrid Weiss enrolls in the Luftwaffe as a female auxiliary (Helferin) at the age of 15, after being orphaned in a British air bombing on Berlin.


**January 2, 1941 'B':** Ingrid captured in Wissant, France, by British commandos led by Nancy Laplante 'A'. She is then interned with other German female auxiliaries in the Tower of London. Later, she is secretly adopted by Nancy Laplante and Mike Crawford, becomes a U.S. citizen.

**July 18, 1941 'C':** Ingrid pardoned and released by the British, marries U.S. Marine Corps Major Kenneth Dows and becomes Ingrid Dows, follows her husband to his new posting in the Philippines. There, she will earn her civilian private pilot license.

**September 18, 1941 'C':** Ingrid is hired by General Douglas MacArthur as a civilian auxiliary air situation plotter at his Manila headquarters.

**October 21, 1941 'C':**  After interceding with General MacArthur, Ingrid is accepted in the Philippine Air Force as a fighter pilot, with the rank of 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant, and sent to the 6<sup>th</sup> Pursuit Squadron in Batangas, will fly on Boeing P-26 PEASHOOTER.

**October 24, 1941 'C':** Ingrid flies her first combat mission on P-26. She shoots down two Japanese planes.

**October 25, 1941 'C':**  Promotion in the field to 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant. Ingrid is given a Curtiss P-40E WARHAWK.

**October 27, 1941 'C':** Ingrid becomes a double ace, is given the nickname of 'Lady Hawk' as a fighter pilot.

**October 28, 1941 'C':**  Promotion in the field to Captain.


**November 4, 1941 'C':** In a desperate fight alone against 300 Japanese planes, Ingrid shoots down seven Japanese planes but is herself shot down and has to parachute out, suffers serious burns. She is now the top American air ace in history, with 26 confirmed air victories.

**November 6, 1941 'C':** Ingrid is sent by air to Australia for medical treatment.

**November 19, 1941 'C':** Ingrid is given command in Brisbane of the 17<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron (Provisional), flying on Curtiss P-40F. She sails next night for the Philippines with her squadron and her planes on the Pensacola Convoy, arrives in Manila on December 2.


**January 14, 1941 'C':** Ingrid's squadron contributes greatly in repelling an attempted Japanese invasion of the Philippines, but she then learns that her husband Ken has been killed in combat. Her air victory score is now at 68.

**February 22, 1941 'C':** Ingrid arrives in Havre, Montana, for a long overdue rest period, stays at the Crawford Family farm.

**March 9, 1941 'C':**  Ingrid is called to Washington by General 'Hap' Arnold, who enrolls her in the U.S. Army Air Force as a fighter pilot, with the rank of Major. Ingrid is tasked by Arnold to form an all-female combat air group to be named the 99<sup>th</sup> Composite Air Group (The 'Fifinellas').

**September 2, 1942 'C':** Ingrid and her 99<sup>th</sup> C.A.G. arrive in Espiritu Santo, in the South Pacific.

**September 10, 1942 'C':** Ingrid and five of her female fighter pilots, flying on Lockheed P-38N, land in Guadalcanal, start intercepting Japanese air raids. Ingrid's air victory count climbs to 76.

**September 30, 1942 'C':**  Ingrid is promoted in the field to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel.

**October 7, 1942 'C':** Ingrid is shot down and gravely wounded, dies on the operating table but is then miraculously resurrected by The One, becomes a Chosen.

**January 15, 1943 'C':** Ingrid and her air unit, now a full-sized air wing (99<sup>th</sup> Composite Wing), are transferred to Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, under the command of General MacArthur.



**February 01, 1943 'C':** Ingrid promoted in the field by General MacArthur to the rank of full Colonel, following the successful taking of Lae by air assault.

**June 19, 1943 'C':** Ingrid is told that she will be posted to a staff position at the Pentagon. She says goodbye to her female aviators.

**June 28, 1943 'C':** Ingrid arrives in Washington with General MacArthur, attends a strategic command conference.

**July 5, 1943 'C':** Ingrid starts working at the Pentagon as the head of the USAAF Joint and Combined Chief of Staff Subject Plans Section, helps rewrite USAFF air combat tactics.



**January 4, 1944 'C':** Ingrid promoted to the rank of Brigadier General by General Marshall and given command of the 9<sup>th</sup> Tactical Air Command, located in England. She is given a new Lockheed P-38NC fighter as her personal plane.

**January 7, 1944 'C':** Ingrid arrives in her P-38NC in Middle Wallop, England.

**January 11, 1944 'C':** Ingrid is unjustly relieved of command by Lieutenant General Vandenberg, for protesting about a decision to continue using inefficient, costly air tactics. General Eisenhower backs her up. General Marshall relieves Lieutenant General Vandenberg and reinstates Ingrid in her command.

**June 6, 1944 'C':** Ingrid commands from the air in an EC-142E flying over France at the start of Allied landings along the South coast of France.

**June 11, 1944 'C':** Ingrid launches her 9<sup>th</sup> Tactical Air Command into a massive heliborne operation to take the bridges along the Southern Rhine River. She lands in Karlsruhe and establishes her advanced headquarters there. The British then destroy Berlin with a nuclear bomb, without warning their U.S. allies. They also devastate Japan with ten nuclear missiles. The war abruptly ends. Her air victory count stands at 126.

**June 14, 1944 'C':** Ingrid, along with General Eisenhower, is recalled to Washington to help assess the situation. She then returns to Germany as Military Governor of the Baden State, with headquarters in Karlsruhe.


**September, 1944 'C':** Profiting from the G.I. Bill, Ingrid starts studying at the Boston M.I.T. to obtain a degree in aeronautical engineering. She is now a reservist officer serving on part-time basis.

**June, 1948 'C':** Ingrid graduates with honors from the M.I.T. as an aeronautical engineer. She is however recalled at once into active service and given command of the Korea Air Task Force, or K.A.T.F.

**June 19, 1948 'C':** Ingrid and her K.A.T.F. arrive in Korea, establish their base in Suwon, near Seoul.

**June 25, 1948 'C':** The Korean War starts, with North Korea invading the South with the help of 'volunteer' Soviet combat pilots. Ingrid and her pilots react at once, but the rest of the American command in Korea is disorganized and incompetent, resulting in repeated instances of units withdrawing in panic and without orders.

**August 16, 1948 'C':** The defeated American forces withdraw in disorder from Korea. The K.A.T.F. is one of the few units to hold firm and leave in good order and with all its equipment. Ingrid is last to fly out of Korea as the enemy approaches her airfield, flies to the Philippines with her air task force. That military disaster results in the impeachment of President Truman for incompetence and abuse of power.

**August 25, 1948 'C':**  Ingrid is called to Washington and is named by new President Joseph Martin as his Special Presidential Advisor and is also named Director of Air Force Aircraft Development Programs, with the rank of Major General.

**September 21, 1948 'C':** Ingrid arrives in Niigata, Japan, as Plenipotentiary Envoy of President Martin, negotiates with Emperor Hirohito a U.S. help package in exchange for basing rights in Japan.

**October 7, 1948 'C':** Ingrid launches multiple new aircraft, engines and missile development programs for the U.S. Air Force, using knowledge from the future imported by Nancy Laplante in 1940.

**November 10, 1951 'C':** First test flight of the prototype XF-83 out of Muroc, with Ingrid at the commands.

**January 29, 1952 'C':** Ingrid named by President Dewey to be part of a U.S. military assistance and assessment team (M.A.A.T.I.) to be sent to Indochina.

**February 5, 1952 'C':** Ingrid and the M.A.A.T.I. team arrive in Saigon, Indochina, liaise with the French military command. Ingrid tours the French airfields, flies two combat missions with the French.

**March 11, 1952 'C':** The M.A.A.T.I. team leaves Saigon at the end of its mission.

**May 2, 1952 'C':** Ingrid sets new unofficial World speed record (classified results) on the XF-83, reaching a speed of Mach 3.96. General Vandenberg decides to use the 99<sup>th</sup>

Composite Wing (The Fifinellas) as Operational Testing Unit for all the new aircraft developed by Ingrid.

**November 15, 1952 'C':** Ingrid named by President Dewey as Commander of the Joint Task Force – Indochina, with Marine Corps Brigadier General Puller as her deputy.

**December 20, 1952 'C':** Ingrid flies into Vietnam in her F-83A fighter-bomber, encounters a Soviet air raid on Haiphong and shoots down twelve Soviet aircraft, then lands in Da Nang. Ingrid's air victory count now stands at 150.

**December 24, 1952 'C':** First meeting of Ingrid and little Hien in Da Nang.

**December 27, 1952 'C':** Ingrid named by President Dewey as his Plenipotentiary Envoy in Indochina, cutting off Secretary of State John Foster Dulles.

**December 29, 1952 'C':** Devastating air raid on Beijing by Ingrid's planes, while a vertical air assault liberates American P.O.W.s held in a labor camp in Northern Manchuria.

**January 27, 1953 'C':** Ingrid is able to adopt little 5-years-old Hien in Da Nang, thanks to new regulations concerning American female military service personnel.

**February 21, 1953 'C':** Ingrid accepts to take command of a peace force to be sent to Israel/Palestine.

**March 15, 1953 'C':** Ingrid arrives with her task force in Ramat David, Israel. The same day, she is forced to relieve of command and replace her deputy, Rear Admiral Felt, for insubordination.

**March 24, 1953 'C':** Ingrid is forced to sink the cruiser H.M.S. TIGER, which was jamming her radars and radios during an Arab air attack. Long-term consequences for UK/US relations.

**July 3, 1953 'C':** Ingrid transferred to Germany with a number of her female pilots and personnel, becomes Commander of the 3<sup>rd</sup> U.S. Air Force, with headquarters in Stuttgart.


**August 1, 1953 'C':** Stalin sends an ultimatum to President Dewey: do not use nuclear weapons to stop an impending Soviet invasion of Poland, on pain of seeing American cities nuked (bluff by Stalin). Dewey calls his military commanders in Germany, learns that Ingrid already has a plan ready to be executed. President Dewey gives the go ahead to Ingrid. Start of the Eastern Europe War.

**August 8, 1953 'C':** Ingrid leads a raid on Moscow by F-83 squadron, flattens both the Kremlin and the Lubyanka headquarters of the Soviet secret police, killing all the Soviet leaders except for Khrushchev, who then grabs power with Soviet Army leaders.



**August 19 – 21, 1953 'C':** Armistice talks in Helsinki, Finland. Ingrid is part of the U.S. peace delegation. A peace treaty is signed.

**July 01, 1955 'C':** Ingrid is posted back to the U.S.A., returns with little Hien and buys a house in Arlington, near the Pentagon.

**July 29, 1955 'C':**  Ingrid, now a lieutenant general, presented to the Joint Chiefs of Staff as Commander of the new United States Military Space Command, tasked to open Space to the U.S.A.

**October 30, 1956 'C':** Launch in orbit of first American artificial satellite, EXPLORER 1.

**January 16, 1957 'C':** First successful test of a U.S. ICBM.

**March 23, 1957 'C':** First human flight in Earth orbit by Ingrid aboard her SP-10A spaceplane. The British attempt to shoot her down with missiles when she overflies the UK on her flight back home.

**April 16, 1957 'C':** Activation in Vandenberg Space Base of the 1<sup>st</sup> Space Squadron of the U.S. Military Space Command.

**April 24, 1957 'C':** Ingrid flies to orbit in her SP-10A spaceplane in order to rescue two Soviet cosmonauts (Lilya Litvak, Yuri Gagarin) stuck in orbit in their defective capsule. Ingrid shot at by British missiles over Australia, has to crash-land in the Central Australian Desert. She and the two Soviets are rescued the day later by American planes.

**January 23, 1961 'C':** Ingrid tasked by President John F. Kennedy to prepared a manned Moon mission.

**October 10, 1961 'C':** A SP-10C piloted by Gertrude Meserve lands on the Moon, starts building a permanent Moon base.

**October 27, 1961 'C':**  Ingrid promoted by President John F. Kennedy to the rank of full general.

**May 2, 1962 'C':** Ingrid leaves Earth for a two-week mission on the Moon, in command of the fourth lunar mission.

**August 10, 1964 'C':** Ingrid tasked by President John F. Kennedy to prepare a manned Mars Mission.

**September 28, 1968 'C':** Successful launch and flight to Earth orbit of the spaceship U.S.S. CONSTITUTION.

**May 6, 1971 'C':** The U.S.S. CONSTITUTION boosts out of Earth orbit, heading for Mars, with Ingrid as the expedition commander.

**September 16, 1971 'C':** The U.S.S. CONSTITUTION arrives in Mars orbit.

**September 27, 1971 'C':** The Mars Lander touches down in the Capri Chasma. Ingrid is the first Human to step on Mars.

**September 30, 1971 'C':** Life found on Mars, in underground brine aquifers.

**April 11, 1973 'C':** Ingrid and the Lander team return to the U.S.S. CONSTITUTION.

**April 29, 1973 'C':** The U.S.S. CONSTITUTION boosts out of Mars orbit, returns to Earth via a risky slingshot maneuver around Venus.

**November 9, 1973 'C':** The U.S.S. CONSTITUTION arrives back in Earth orbit.

**December 8, 1973 'C':** China attacks Taiwan, nuke Taipei and attempts to invade by sea. President Robert Kennedy orders limited nuclear strikes from orbit on the next day. The Chinese reactionary leadership is then swept out by a revolt of young Chinese Red Army officers, who put Deng Xiaoping back in control.

**January 1, 1974 'C':** Activation of the new United State Space Corps, with Ingrid as its commander.

**May 8, 1975 'C':** First test flight by Ingrid of the new ASP-100 space interceptor.

**August 2, 1975 'C':** The U.S.S. LIBERTY boosts out of Earth orbit, on its way to Mars.

**September 23, 1975 'C':** A stolen Chinese H-bomb hidden inside an unsuspecting Soviet container ship explodes inside Honolulu Harbor, destroys Honolulu, severely damages Pearl Harbor and renders the Hawaii Islands uninhabitable for decades. A second hidden H-bomb is discovered and neutralized close to New York.

**September 25, 1975 'C':** Ingrid leads a squadron of F-83Es on nuclear strikes against North Korean command and military targets.

**June 3, 1976 'C':** Ingrid pilots a Universal Orbiter launched by the new mass driver ramp in Vandenberg Space Base, starts assembly of the AURORA Orbital Space Station.

**December 4, 1976 'C':** Official inauguration of the AURORA Orbital Space Station.

**December 5, 1976 'C':** Ingrid goes to the Middle East as Plenipotentiary Envoy of President Robert Kennedy, in order to prevent a new war there.

**May 6, 1980 'C':** Ingrid gives to President Ronald Reagan and his wife a tour of the newly completed spaceship U.S.S. PROMETHEUS in Muroc.

**June 18, 1980 'C':** Ingrid takes off at the commands of the U.S.S. PROMETHEUS, climbs to orbit.

**August 7, 1980 'C':** The U.S.S. PROMETHEUS boosts out of Earth orbit, with Ingrid as mission commander, on its way to Jupiter and Saturn.

**November 17, 1981 'C':** The U.S.S. PROMETHEUS arrives inside the Jupiter System. Will find tardigrade lifeforms on Europa.

**January 29, 1982 'C':** Ingrid uses her healing power to save a crewmember horribly burned in a kitchen fire. At night, she has sex and is impregnated by Archangel Michael.

**November 4, 1982 'C':** Ingrid gives birth to her daughter Nancy as the U.S.S. PROMETHEUS is closing in on the Saturn System.

**Mars 28, 1983 'C':** Tardigrade lifeforms found on Enceladus.

**July 10, 1983 'C':** Ingrid personally pilots the U.S.S. PROMETHEUS through the thick atmosphere of Titan and lands safely on that moon of Saturn. Flying medusa-like lifeforms found on Titan.

**March 20, 1985 'C':** The U.S.S. PROMETHEUS is back in Earth orbit. President G.H.W. Bush convinces Ingrid to keep on serving, but she asks first for a few months of vacation. President Bush accepts her request.

**April 18, 1985 'C':** Ingrid passes command of the United States Space Corps to General Eugene Cernan and leaves active military service, but stays as National Director of Civilian Space Program and as Special Presidential Advisor. She then goes on a long vacation with her daughter Nancy, who is close to three-year-old.

**May 7, 1987 'C':** During one of her periodic training flights in a F-83C as a reservist officer, Ingrid play an enemy plane, manages to penetrate the U.S. East Coast air defenses and photograph the White House, the Pentagon and the Capitol Building.

**June 27, 1988 'C':** After her house sustains significant damage during a gunfight with a bunch of Mafiosi, a worried Ingrid tells President G.H.W. Bush that she has no choice left but to quit her job at the White House, so that she could care for and protect Nancy and young Leonardo Bocelli, whose parents were just assassinated. President Bush accepts her decision.

**May 13, 1989 'C':** At the special request of President Bush, Ingrid attends a NSC meeting at the White House, following a bomb attack in Moscow that kills progressive and moderate Soviet leaders and places in power a group of hardline Communists who try to put the blame on the U.S.A. Lilya Litvak and two Soviet scientists attending an astronomy conference in Washington take refuge at Ingrid's house, ask for political asylum.

**May 14, 1989 'C':** Seeing no other way to save the innocent American civilians unjustly accused of terrorism in Moscow and fearing a possible nuclear war, Ingrid decides to

seek the help of the Time Patrol, of which she is still a field agent in place for Timeline 'C'.

**May 15, 1989 'C':** The fifteen Americans and four Soviets who had been tortured into 'confessing' of being CIA spies are saved and instantly transported through space-time to Ingrid's courtyard in Arlington, while Ingrid vaporizes the war-mongering clique of Soviet dictatorial leaders. The Soviet Union then sinks into civil war.

**September 1, 1992 'C':** Ingrid visits Coronado Amphibious Base, in San Diego, at the request of the commander of the Naval Special Warfare Command, Rear Admiral Raymond Smith, who asks her to design a new SEAL delivery vehicle for his command. Ingrid accepts, will liaise with the Hiller Corporation, for which she has been working as a design engineer, producing both the Hiller AIRCAR and the Hiller AIR BIKE. The new vehicle is to be called the Hiller SUPERCAR.

**March 17, 1993 'C':** Rear Admiral Smith pays an unexpected visit to the Hiller Corporation in Firebaugh, California, and asks Ingrid if he could use the prototype of the Hiller SUPERCAR. Ingrid accepts, but states that she is the only person presently qualified to operate and fly the prototype. She thus leaves with the Supercar for the Coronado Amphibious Base to get equipped and team up with five SEAL commandos, then leaves with them by cargo plane for Turkey.

**March 19, 1993 'C':** Ingrid manages to penetrate the Sea of Azov and get to the Rostov area, just in time to save two stranded American pilots about to be captured. In the process, Ingrid shoots down one helicopter and two MIG-21 fighter jets (kills # 167, 168 and 169 in her career). She then flies her Supercar out of danger and back to Turkey.

**March 24, 1993 'C':** Tired of the inefficiency, slowness of reaction and disjointed decision-making process of the Joint Chiefs, President Perot gets his VP, Vice Admiral James Stockdale, to petition the Congress to drastically change the command structure of the U.S. military forces and create the position of American military commander-in-chief, with the rank of five-star general.



**July 01, 1993 'C':** Ingrid returns to active military service as the first U.S. Military Commander-in-Chief, with the rank of five-star general.

**Military and civilian awards won by Ingrid Dows 'C'**



**Astronaut's Wings**

**Congressional Medal of Honor (X2); Distinguished Service Cross: Navy Cross (X2)**  
**Defense Distinguished Service Medal; Army Distinguishes Service Medal (X2); Silver Star (X4)**  
**Legion of Merit (Officer); Distinguished Flying Cross (X10); Purple Heart (X2)**  
**Presidential Unit Citation; Presidential Medal of Freedom; Congressional Space Medal of Honor**  
**Space Distinguished Service Medal; Space Flight Medal; Army Reserve Component Medal**  
**American Campaign Medal; Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal (X2 stars); Europe-Africa-Middle East**  
**Campaign Medal (X2 stars)**  
**World War 2 Victory Medal; Army Occupation Medal (Germany); Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal**  
**Indochina Service Medal; Korean War Service Medal; Légion d'Honneur (Officer, France)**  
**Croix de Guerre 1939 (with palm, France); National Order of Vietnam (Grand Cross); Order of the**  
**White Eagle (1st Class, Poland)**  
**Palestine Interposition Force; Presidential Unit Citation (Philippines); Defense Medal (Philippines)**