

## Chapter One

**M**arch 1944.

"Pull her up, Hank! Pull her up!"

Henry's arms were locked through the steering wheel of his B-24. He was yanking with all he had, but the wheel was stuck solid. "I can't! She won't budge!"

The bomber was in a death dive. Henry's pilot had hurled them into the dive to put out a fire in the plane's engines. The fire had erupted after a Nazi fighter shot up their wing. The force of the winds against the bomber as it hurtled toward the ground was the only thing strong enough to snuff out the flames. Still, Henry knew the pilot's strategy was a real gamble. There was no guarantee that once the plane was rocketing to earth her two pilots would be able to wrestle her level again. Right now the plane was bucking and rattling enough to shake a guy's teeth loose.

Over the intercom Henry listened to the panic of the crew: "We're going down!"

"Do something, Hank! Please! I don't wanna die!"

In his mind, Henry heard the distant growl of his father: *Do something, you idiot.* The surly voice slapped him into action.

Henry had learned to cheat death at the very last second during flight training. Hadn't he repeatedly yanked his plane up just before smashing into something, forcing out a big-man guffaw to hide the fact he'd almost wet his pants, he'd been so afraid? He could do this. Just yank the wheel, Henry, yank it hard, to level the plane off.

*BANG-BANG-BANG-BANG.*

A German Messerschmitt zoomed past to strafe the bomber's cockpit one last time. Henry couldn't believe the pilot would take the trouble to target a plane already in flames. Ha, you missed me, he thought.

"Do something, Hank! Pull her up."

Henry looked down at the wheel. He stared at the metal half-circle. *Put your hands on it, fool.*

But he couldn't. The Messerschmitt's bullets must have ripped his arms clear off. He stared. He couldn't find them anywhere in the cockpit.

Henry looked up through the shattered window and saw the green, leafy domes of treetops racing toward him. Closer, closer. There wasn't anything left to do but die. He tried to scream.

With a choking gasp, Henry lurched up. He clenched his hands. They were there. He felt every finger. Henry rec-

ognized the stink of burning coal, wet woolen socks hung up to dry, lingering cigarette smoke. He was in his Nissen hut on base in England. It had just been another nightmare. He was awake. He was alive.

Quietly, Henry eased himself back down on his cot. He was grateful not to have woken up the other fliers who slept in the cold hut. They could be tough on a fellow if they smelled his fear. It was hard enough being the youngest copilot there. Henry was just barely nineteen.

He rolled over, still trembling. He wanted to get up and walk off the nightmare, but he couldn't without waking everyone. So he flipped onto his back, whacking his ankles against the cot's iron rails. It creaked loudly. With embarrassed irritation, he wiped leftover dream sweat from his face and stared up at the bottom of the shelf over his head. On it, where no one else would see it, he'd taped a poem called "High Flight." A nineteen-year-old American pilot, flying with the Royal Air Force, had written it just before he'd been killed. Henry knew every word.

He closed his eyes and tried reciting it silently to ease himself back to sleep:

Oh, I have slipped the surly bonds of earth,  
And danced the skies on laughter-silvered wings;  
Sunward I've climbed and joined the tumbling mirth  
Of sun-split clouds—and done a hundred things  
You have not dreamed of—wheeled and soared and swung  
High in the sunlit silence. Hov'ring there,  
I've chased the shouting wind along and flung

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My eager craft through footless halls of air.  
Up, up the long, delirious, burning blue  
I've topped the wind-swept heights with easy grace  
Where never lark, or even eagle, flew;  
And, while with silent, lifting mind I've trod  
The high untrespassed sanctity of space,  
Put out my hand, and touched the face of God.

That's how Henry had thought flying would be—dancing the skies, skating the winds, playing tag with angels. But flying bombing missions hadn't been anything like that. The missions had been teeth-gritting beelines to targets, dogged all the way by men shooting at them. He didn't know how many planes he'd seen explode, scattering debris and bodies through the clouds, how many screams of pain he'd tried to ignore during the past few months.

With a groan of frustration, Henry put his hands over his eyes and rubbed his forehead to clear his mind. That's no way to go back to sleep, he told himself. He listened to the deep, steady snores of his bunkmates. See, they're not afraid.

*Suck it up, boy. A whiner won't last long in this world.*

Henry pushed his father's voice out of his head. He was sick of that voice and its harsh assessments. It had been a real struggle for Henry not to see himself the way his father seemed to. He'd thought he'd be free of his father here, overseas, in a war, a chaotic world away from their isolated farm. But the voice haunted him still.

Henry made himself think about blueberry pie. To

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smell his Ma's blueberry pie—that would calm him down. It always did. He drifted home to Virginia and dreamed of his mother, Lilly, standing by the kitchen sink. She was awash in Tidewater sunshine:

"Get your fingers out of my pie, you sneak," Lilly chided. "It'll be cool soon enough. Then you can have a proper slice and sit down to the table like civilized folk." Her dimples showed as she said it, though, so Henry knew he could push it. He pulled out another small wedge even though it scalded his fingers. He popped it into his mouth.

Grinning, Lilly picked up a wooden spoon and shook it at him. "You're a hambone," she said and caught him for a hug.

"Lieutenant Forester?" A voice cut through the bleary warmth of Lilly's kitchen. "Get up, Lieutenant. You're flying today."

Henry forced his eyes open. Sergeant Bromsky stood by his bunk, shining a flashlight. The blueberry pie evaporated.

"I'm up, I'm up," Henry said and stretched himself awake. He was used to arising at 4 A.M. on his family's chicken farm. But most of the other fliers weren't. Sleepy groans filled the Nissen hut as the sergeant and his flashlight beam moved from bed to bed to rouse fifteen other pilots, navigators, and bombardiers—the officers of four bomber crews.

"Where we heading, Sarge?" Henry asked. "Any idea?" Sergeant Bromsky came back to Henry's cot. It was

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next to the small black stove that heated the thirty-foot-long hut. Built like a tin can cut in half and turned onto the ground, the hut had only one door and two windows at each end. It was dark and damp. Winds from the nearby North Sea found every crack. Even right beside the stove, the airmen shivered.

Sergeant Bromsky faced his backside to the stove. "The word is Germany, pretty far in. But keep it to yourself. You know the rules, Hank."

Henry ground his teeth. That meant about a thousand miles round-trip under attack by enemy fighter planes and anti-aircraft guns on the ground. They'd just hit Berlin and lost almost half the base's crews.

"What number is this, Hank?" the sergeant asked.

The sergeant always asked Henry what number the day's mission was, as if he were rooting for him to get home. His support helped Henry. In return, he gave Sergeant Bromsky his cigarette rations, even though the other guys in the hut made fun of him for not smoking them himself. Henry had been born and raised in tobacco country, and he just hated the stuff.

Today, though, superstition slowed Henry's answer. To finish his tour of duty and go home, Henry had to survive twenty-five missions. But every airman had figured out that the average life span of an Eighth Air Force bomber crew was only fifteen. Everyone was afraid of the fifteenth mission. It was a make-or-break flight.

"It's my fifteenth," Henry said quietly. He watched the sergeant's face tighten.

"Yeah?" Bromsky looked away. His eyes fell on a pho-

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tograph pinned to the wall beside Henry's cot. A pretty teenage girl smiled back at him.

"I hadn't noticed her before," Bromsky changed the subject. "Who's the dame?"

"Oh, she isn't a dame, Sarge. That's Patsy. We grew up together. Her family has the farm next to ours. She's almost like my kid sister."

Sergeant Bromsky leaned forward to get a better look at Patsy's thick, wavy hair, heart-shaped face, and serene smile. "Wow. She's a real looker, Hank."

Henry was mortified to feel himself blush. He tried to seem nonchalant. "To tell the truth, Sarge, that picture kills me, because she looks so ladylike. What I love about Patsy is that she's no sissy. She's a real spitfire. We could use her fighting the Germans."

Henry could tell from the Sarge's smile that his attempts to seem indifferent to Patsy's beauty were failing. He was just so confused about Patsy these days. Until right before he'd joined the Air Corps, they'd been buddies, best friends. But somehow their relationship had changed when he'd received his orders. And her letters, well, her letters brought out a longing in him he'd never felt before. Henry couldn't sort out if the longing was for her or home or just peacetime. But it was a strong feeling. She wrote him and he answered every week. He started to ask Sarge what he thought about the wisdom of romancing a girl through letters, but changed his mind.

"When I was about ten I was in a fight in the school yard," Henry continued. "This dopey boy, Jackson, was giving me trouble because my family raises chickens and

the farm smells of them. He thought he was better than all us farmers. His dad hauled cargo at the Norfolk docks and didn't have to work the dirt the way we did. He was yelling: 'Henny Penny, what a chicken.' Well, I'd given him a sharp punch like my dad showed me. But he'd knocked me down and was kicking me good. Patsy came tearing up out of nowhere. Her face was red as a tomato. She kicked Jackson's shins so hard he cried!"

Henry paused to look at Patsy's face and felt his own flush again. "Anyway, she's . . . special, you know, Sarge?"

Before Bromsky could reply, Henry rushed to wrap her up with a safe comment. "I mostly appreciate how Patsy checks up on Ma for me. Dad doesn't talk much except when he's mad. Living on a hundred and fifty acres all alone with him and two thousand chickens could drive anyone crazy."

"Two thousand chickens! I'm not sure I've ever even seen one live chicken," said Bromsky, who was a native of New York City. He gave Henry a quick clap on the back. "Good luck today, Hank. I gotta roust the rest of the crews."

Henry dressed hurriedly to prevent the concrete floor's icy cold from seeping up through his entire body. He kept his blond head low as he pulled on his mission gear. The ceiling was eight feet high in the center of the Nissen hut but it curved downward to the ground from there. Henry was a lanky six feet tall and still stretching, as his ma always said.

Over his long johns, he pulled blue flannel underwear

that was wired to connect to the airplane's electrical system and protect him from severe frostbite. If thick clouds and enemy flak forced them to fly at 24,000 feet—four and a half miles up—the temperature inside the bomber's open bays could be thirty below zero.

Next came wool pants and shirt, plus a black wool tie. Over that, Henry pulled flying overhauls and fleeced-lined boots. Finally, he picked up his fleeced-lined bomber jacket and strapped on a .45 pistol. He'd need the gun if he had to bail out somewhere over Nazi-controlled Europe.

Across the aisle, Billy White, another copilot, was inspecting his beard. Dark haired Billy was just six months older than Henry, but his beard grew thick. Henry had to look close to find anything to shave. Still, he did it. During a flight even the slightest stubble caught condensation that could freeze and leave a string of icy beads right where the oxygen mask gripped his face.

Billy rubbed his smooth face and grinned. "Gotta be close, boys," he said to a bunkmate who cat-whistled at him.

Billy was peering into a tiny mirror hung next to a sultry photograph of movie star Rita Hayworth. He caught Henry's dimpled, babyfaced reflection in the mirror. He tapped Hayworth's photo and said, "Hey, Hanky, this is a real woman, no prudish kid sister. But would you know what to do with a real woman if you ever caught one?"

Henry straightened up. He'd gotten used to the raunchy humor around the barracks. He'd also flown a lot more missions than Lieutenant White. "You know what,

Billy," he said. "I've learned a thing or two flying *all* my missions. When guys are scared, they talk big."

"Whooaaa," laughed a few of the men as they scrambled to get ready.

Billy White shrugged. "We'll see who flies the most missions, farm boy."

"All right. Save the spit for the Germans," interrupted Henry's pilot, Dan MacNamara. Dan was twenty-five years old, married, and the father of a baby girl named Colleen. He'd been the oldest brother in a rowdy clan of seven Irish siblings in Chicago. He could control the barracks and crew with just a few words.

"Billy," Dan said. "We'll let it stand that you've danced with every girl this side of London. Of course, whether you've gotten anywhere with them, we don't know."

He turned to Henry. "Hank, you're one hotshot pilot. Nobody flies a tighter formation than you do. Let's just get over there, drop our bombs, get home, and I'll buy you both a beer. That's root beer for you, right, Hank?" Dan winked at Henry as he said it.

"Yeah, yeah," Henry said and smiled.

Today would be Dan's twenty-first mission. He had even survived the legendary raid on the Ploesti Oil fields in Romania the previous August. Dan had told Henry how the bombers had gone in at treetop level to avoid detection as long as possible. They didn't know about the antiaircraft guns hidden behind haystacks. A third of the planes went down in flames, too low in altitude for any of their crews to bail out.

After hearing that, Henry was certain Dan could

survive anything. Henry's first four raids had been under a different pilot, last name Cobb, a real wildcat flier. He'd bled to death on their fourth mission, as Henry fought on alone to get their plane up and over the Dover cliffs and crash-land on English soil. Only then had he realized he was covered with Cobb's splattered blood. Henry had crawled out of the cockpit and vomited for fifteen minutes solid.

With Dan in command, no matter how bad the flak or fighters were, Henry knew he at least had a chance.

Dan threw open the door to a wet wind and a sea of slippery, icy English mud. "Let's get to Group Ops," he said. "Briefing's in ten minutes."

"Jeez," said Billy, pushing his way out past Henry. "It musta poured last night."

"Isn't it always raining in England?" muttered Dan. "Let's hope the weather officer knows what he's doing."

They all looked up at the black sky, trying to assess the clouds. No stars visible and no sunrise yet. The only lights were on the distant airfield. Out there, the ground crews were loading bombs and fueling the aircraft. If it wasn't mechanically perfect, a B-24 loaded with 2,000 pounds of bombs and glutted with gasoline was a flying deathtrap. "God bless the ground crew," murmured Henry aloud, without thinking.

Then he wanted to kick himself for opening the door to a put-down. He'd been dismissed as "a Boy Scout" before and knew some of the older fliers were merciless with a devout Baptist gunner who got down on his knees

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to pray before getting into his plane. Henry could see a jeer forming on Billy's face and braced himself.

But instead Billy agreed: "Amen to that." The ground crew and their work were sacrosanct for everyone.

"Hey, didya hear Lord Ha Ha last night?" asked Henry's navigator, Fred Bennett, as they slogged across the mud-washed base.

"Naw, I never listen to that guy," said Henry, even though he did. "He's full of baloney." Broadcasting in English almost every night, Lord Ha Ha was a Nazi trying to unnerve the British and American fliers.

"I don't know, Hank," said Fred. "He seemed to know we'd be flying today. He said the Luftwaffe would be waiting for us."

Fred was a small guy, a washout from flight school, a real worrier. He'd finished two years of an English literature major at Harvard before volunteering. He was always quoting some writer named Thomas Hardy—very depressing stuff. But he was a great navigator. He seemed to have a sixth sense for direction, even in heavy cloud cover. And Henry just liked him. "You know what we can do tonight when we get back, Fred?" said Henry.

The navigator shook his head.

"I'd love it if you'd read aloud some more of that Dickens, that *Tale of Two Cities*. I've got to keep up my studies, you know. Virginia said they'd keep my scholarship active for me for two years as long as I don't go stupid on them."

"I didn't know you were going to be a college boy, Hank," said Dan.

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"When I get home. I promised Ma. It about killed her when I joined up two weeks after graduating high school. Schooling is real important to her. She's the one who taught me there's more to the world than chicken coops. She used to read to me even when I shelled peas and beans, so my mind was working too. The Bible, Sherlock Holmes, a poet named Emily Dickinson she loved. My personal favorite is Jules Verne, *Around the World in Eighty Days*."

"Good for you, Hank," said Dan. "I dropped out of high school when the Depression hit. I needed to work to help Da. Seven kids need lots of shoes. Read to us, Fred. Gotta get me some book education to impress my baby girl when I get home. Rose wrote that she said her first word."

"What was it, Dad? *Goo-goo blah-blah*?" It was Henry's turn to tease.

"No," said Dan goodnaturedly. "It was wa-wa."

"Wa-wa?" Henry laughed. "I don't seem to have wa-wa in my vocabulary, Captain. What's it mean?"

"She was asking for water," Dan said, laughing at himself. "A budding genius, she is." Then he grew quiet. "I tell you what, though. The first word I'm going to work on her saying when I get home is *Daddy*."

"You guys are making me sick," Billy interrupted. "You know what I did last night? Some important scientific research. I figured out that these flight getups have thirty-six feet of zippers. I'm getting mighty good at unzipping fast. That'll come in real handy with the girls someday soon, boys, if you know what I mean. Do you have any idea what I mean, Hank?"

Patsy's pretty face came to Henry. He knew how much Billy's off-color jokes would insult her. And he was startled and mad with himself that for a few fleeting seconds Billy's crude comment had sent Henry imagining Patsy in a vivid, not particularly respectful way.

"Stow it, White," Henry snapped. "I feel sorry for any girl who gets stuck with you."

The group had reached the operations building. Billy turned to ridicule Henry in a forced Southern twang: "And whom do you all date, farm boy? Some bucktoothed swamp queen?"

Henry's nightmare had left him feeling thin-skinned and homesick. He stepped in front of Billy to block his path. Leaning toward him, Henry whispered in a menacing manner, "Y'all want to see some swamp-boy boxing?"

"Hey! Cut it out," yelled Dan. He pushed them apart with a big, practiced shove. "Remember what you're here for. Shake hands."

"No way," muttered Billy. "The guy's a lunatic."

"Shake hands. That's an order."

Reluctantly, Henry extended his.

Reluctantly, Billy took it.

As their hands touched, Henry regretted his outburst. That was the kind of threat his Dad would have made. Henry had always promised himself that he'd never be like his volatile father. He took a deep breath and tried looking at things from Billy's side, the way his ma forever told him to. Heck, Billy was probably just as nervous as he was. And what could you expect from such a jerk on a morning like this, anyway?

"Tell you what," Henry said as he let go of Billy's hand. "When the war's over, I'll come to Philadelphia to meet those country-club lady friends of yours. Then you come to Richmond. My ma will fix a meal that'll melt in your mouth and teach you some manners without your ever realizing she's doing it."

Billy seemed to relax. "Done." He opened the door and whistled as he walked through. "Off we go, into the wild blue yonder. . . ."

Dan followed behind Henry. "What's the matter with you, Hank?"

"Sorry, Captain." Henry's green eyes hit the ground. "I don't know what's wrong with me this morning. Got the jitters, I guess."

"Don't get flak-happy on me, boy," Dan said, putting his hand on Henry's shoulder. "I mean it. You're the steadiest copilot I've ever seen."

Henry nodded, bolstered.

"I want to get home, too, Hank. I've only got four more to go. Let's make sure we both get back today."

The pilots' eyes held each other's for a moment. Dan's belief in him made Henry feel years older, stronger. He wasn't just a scared farm boy away from home for the first time. He was someone Dan could trust. "I'm with you, Captain," Henry answered.

Dan smiled. Then he resumed his flyboy swagger. He called after the group, "Okay, boys, let's see what part of hell we're visiting today."



## Chapter Eight

**F**our weeks later, Henry sat, rattling, on a train to Adelboden. The doctors had cut off his cast the previous morning. His ankle was paper white, his calf thin, but his leg had held his weight. It was stiff, but solid. They'd ordered him to internment.

Next to Henry sat his escort, an aging Swiss soldier, reading. He seemed to Henry to be studiously inattentive. All that identified Henry as a transporting prisoner was a white tag around his wrist. He wore a civilian suit of clothes that had arrived at the hospital from the American consulate. But Henry hadn't talked again with Uncle Sam about his escape. He had no idea what he was supposed to do. The train had just passed through the city of Thun. Adelboden was only two stops away, at most an hour's worth of travel, maybe two. Henry wiped beads of sweat from his upper lip.

A crowd of passengers had boarded at Thun and

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elbowed their way down the aisle, looking for seats. All were already taken. One after another, people lined up, squared their legs to brace against the train's swinging, and opened their newspapers. Henry noticed a delicate pregnant woman enter the car, lugging a hatbox and small suitcase. She sighed and shielded her round tummy as she tried to slip past the standing passengers, their newspapers, and bags.

What kind of men are they, thought Henry, who wouldn't give up their seat to this woman? She obviously didn't feel well. Henry stood and motioned to her. He looked down at the soldier, who assessed the woman, and then nodded to Henry. The woman smiled gratefully.

It took her a moment to wade through the passengers to him. "*Danken*," she said. As she brushed past him to the seat, she seemed to stagger. She clutched Henry's sleeve and whispered in his ear, "Leave your crutches. Go to the toilet one car back." Then the woman sat down with a plop and "*Tut mir leid*," to the Swiss soldier.

Had Henry heard right? The words had been breathed so quietly. Had he imagined it? He stood, hesitant, swaying with the motion of the train. A small foot began to nudge his. He looked down. It was the woman's. He must have heard right.

Henry leaned over and said to the soldier, "Toilet?" He pointed to the back of the car.

The soldier grunted, annoyed, and closed his book. As he started to get up, the woman piled her hatbox and suitcase onto her knees. The soldier would practically have to pole vault to get out into the aisle. He scowled

and waved Henry on. "*Schnell*," he ordered.

Henry nodded. He'd hurry, all right.

Henry lurched down the aisle to the back door of the train car. He opened it to wind and racket. He watched trees and scrub whisk past. He'd break his leg all over again if he tried to jump. He opened the next car door, passed a row of private sleeping compartments, and found a narrow toilet door at the very end of the car.

It was open just a crack. As Henry approached, the door swung open. A fat, middle-aged man pressed past.

Henry slipped into the tiny bathroom. He only had to wait a moment before an envelope slid under the door. Hands shaking, Henry opened it. Inside was a ticket to Montreux plus a note. It read: *The train will stop in ten minutes. Remain in the toilet until you feel the brakes. Step off the train quickly. Walk into the station. Cross the street to Café Spiez. Destroy this note.*

Henry reread it three times, memorizing the sparse thirty-four words. He tore the note into bits, ripped off his wrist tag, and flushed them down the toilet. He crammed the ticket into his pants pocket.

**SQUEEEEEEEAKKKK!**

Henry fell against the bathroom wall as the train began to brake. He took a deep breath and walked out. People were crowding out the back door onto the black steps between train cars. Henry lost himself among them and quickly hopped to the ground as the train stopped moving.

Keep your head, now, Henry steadied himself. Don't

look around like you're lost. Walk like you know exactly where you're going.

He spotted a pair of Swiss soldiers idly propped up against the wall, watching the push and hurry of passengers. Henry stepped beside an older couple to block himself from view. He entered the small station through ornate doors, passed rows of wooden benches, and emerged on the other side. Across the way was Café Spiez, its door open to the warming spring air. Waiters were setting tables outside for lunch.

Henry's heart was pounding in his head. But so far, so good. He checked for traffic and jogged across the street, limping only slightly. Where to now?

A waiter looked up as he smoothed out a tablecloth and fussed at Henry. "*Schon wieder spät! Ab in die Küche. Schnell!*"

Henry had no idea what the man was saying. But he could tell it was part of some playacting. He fought the instinct to look back over his shoulder to make sure the waiter wasn't really talking to someone else.

Henry skittered into the café. There was a huge curved bar inside, its wooden grain carefully polished and shining. On the back wall, large beveled mirrors reflected the scene outdoors. A thick, bald man stood behind the bar. Several people sat at the scattered tables. At the sight of Henry, the bartender slammed his fist to the counter and threw up his hands. He hurled a torrent of angry words at Henry, "*Noch einmal und du bist deiner Stelle los! Ab in die Küche!*"

He came out from behind the bar to hustle Henry through swinging doors to the kitchen. Hastily the man

yanked off Henry's coat and wrapped a huge white apron around him. "Off tie," he whispered to Henry. "Up sleeves." Henry ripped off his tie and handed it to the man. He rolled up his sleeves.

When the man shoved him toward a huge sink, full of steaming water, Henry understood. He was to appear as if he were kitchen help, late arriving. He must need to blend in for a while before catching the train to Montreux. Henry nodded. He stuck his arms deep into the soapy water and began scrubbing.

"No speak," was the man's final gruff instruction before disappearing.

Henry could feel the eyes of two old cooks on him. He tried not to look back. Waiters began to drift in and out, pinning scraps of paper on a board, and barking orders at the cooks. The griddle sizzled with fat sausage.

With a heartstopping thump, the doors into the kitchen flew open and crashed against the walls. The soldiers Henry had seen at the train station entered and slowly scanned the room. His hospital escort accompanied them.

Henry stared down into the soapsuds and tried not to panic. Surely the old guard would recognize him. He stepped away from the sink, and rubbed his face with his hands to shield it. Maybe he could slip out the back. Was there a back door?

Henry bumped into one of the waiters who shoved him brusquely toward the sink and yelled at him. "*Zurück zur Arbeit!*"

Henry gaped at the man. Did he really expect an answer? Henry had no idea what he was saying. The man shook his head and continued angrily, "*Dummkopf!*" He shoved Henry's hands back into the water.

Every inch of Henry screamed for him to run, to fly. But there was something about the waiter's urgency. *It's part of the ruse, Henry. Get a grip.* Henry nodded, trying to look as subservient and stupid as possible. He kept his hands in the water, to hide their shaking.

The soldiers began to circle the room. They paused by each man, waiting for the hospital escort to look him over and shake his head no, *nein*. They were getting closer. Closer. Henry quivered from head to foot.

"*Guten Tag.*" The soldiers stood beside him.

Henry bit his lip to keep from answering. He simply bowed his head to these army superiors and continued washing dishes as if his life depended on it.

The waiter who had shoved Henry bellied up again to talk to the soldiers. He pointed at Henry and unleashed another flood of abuse. "*Ein idiot*" the man called him. His voice was loud, agitated, dismissive. The soldiers smirked and laughed. They strolled away.

Only his train escort lingered beside the sink. Henry couldn't help it. He looked up and caught the old guard's eye. The guard gave a slight nod of his head and then just walked away.

"*Nein, nein. Nichts,*" he said to the soldiers, holding his arms up in a shrug.

So his train escort had been in on his escape all along! Relief made Henry's vision grow black, speckled with

dancing white dots as the soldiers left the kitchen.

An arm steadied him. The bartender had appeared with a tray full of dirty dishes. "Wash," he muttered. "One hour."

The hour felt like a day. Finally, the lunch dishes stopped appearing and the cooks took a break. Only then did the bartender reappear. He motioned Henry to follow him to the men's room. Henry was given an elegant double-breasted tweed suit, hat, and well-polished shoes. He was also handed a copy of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse*. The bartender opened the book to page 100. False identity papers were tucked between the pages. Henry was to be Gaston Sieber, a student of the University of Geneva.

A girl awaited Henry in the café. When she smiled, Henry recognized her as the pregnant woman, no longer pregnant. She too was clad in a sophisticated suit. "*Viens, chéri.*" She continued in French—something about saying good-bye. "*Nous devons dire nos adieux.*"

She slipped her arm through his and sauntered toward the train station. As a bus blew by on the street, belching smoke and backfiring, she whispered in English, "Board the train. Stay on the aisle where you can move if you need to. You will be met in Montreux. Once there, make sure the book is visible."

The very same guards who had searched the café loitered by the awaiting train. Now she spoke to Henry in German, something about his journey. They reached the platform. As he pulled out his ticket and papers to show

the conductor, the girl embraced him passionately. Her lips caught his for a long, insistent kiss. Then just as abruptly she shoved him away and slapped him playfully with her white gloves, saying, "*Auf, geh heim.*" She turned to walk flirtatiously toward the soldiers, who had begun to approach Henry.

He hurried up the steps, passed the inspection of the conductor, and threw himself into a seat just as the train began to roll away from the station. Through a window, he could see the girl laughing and talking with the soldiers.

Henry felt breathless from the secretive whirlwind of the day's events, the multitude of unannounced players. He'd been handled, just like a hot potato. He was a package no one wanted to be caught holding.

## Chapter Nine

**O**n the train to Montreux, Henry alternated between gazing out the window, avoiding eye contact, and burying his head in the Rousseau novel. He worked on recognizing as many French phrases as he could. But he couldn't understand as much as he'd hoped. Individual words popped out at him, but each page remained a jigsaw puzzle with only half of its pieces in place. He could make out, however, that the novel was set in Montreux, which explained why he carried it. The book would be a clear signal to whoever was watching for him.

The train chugged over an ocean of cliffs, swelling into the sky, cresting in rock and snow. Occasionally long streaks of smooth green sliced down the mountains' alpine forests. Ski runs, Henry reckoned, even though he'd never seen any before. The pell-mell slopes impressed him. And they called pilots daredevils.

As the train began consistently chugging down, rather

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than up, the conductor passed through the cars announcing that Montreux was the next stop. "*Montreux, Montreux, prochain arrêt,*" he called.

French had replaced German as the public language. Henry felt safer. But what was he to do? Getting off the train was obvious, but then what? Wait by the platform? Walk through the station? What if no one claimed him?

It ended up being worse than Henry had feared. No one met him at the terminal. No one signaled him inside the station's vaulted waiting room. There was no one in the men's room, no one in the coffee shop, no one by the newsstand—absolutely no one.

Dinnertime came and the crowds dissipated. A thin farmboy in a man's suit, wandering about aimlessly, became more and more obvious. Only the number of soldiers pacing through the station remained constant.

Sit down, Forester, Henry berated himself. Sit down by the door and read your stupid book. Henry sat, forced his foot to stop tapping, forced his eyes to scan the pages, forced his fingers to turn them at appropriate intervals.

Another half hour passed. Henry's stomach began to grumble loudly. He was now the only person sitting on his long bench. Brisk steps thundered into the emptied, marble-floored lounge. A half dozen new soldiers arrived to replace the others. Great, thought Henry, fresh eyes.

Just as the off-duty soldiers exited through the front doors, a woman fluttered in. She was middle-aged and chic, still capable of turning heads. Her glossy dark hair

was swept up under a mocha-colored cap, festooned with pheasant feathers. Her brown suit was cut long and close, her shoes were suede and high. A diamond brooch glittered on her lapel and a long, silk scarf draped her right shoulder. In her left hand, she carried a tiny, fluffy dog against her heart. A chauffeur shadowed her.

For a brief moment the grande dame scanned the room before squealing, "*Chéri!*" She rushed to Henry with open arms.

Henry was too startled to respond. The woman embraced him, enveloping him in flowery perfume, silk, scratchy tweed, and squirming poodle. She whispered: "You are my nephew, visiting from school."

She pulled him to his feet and made a fuss over kissing him on both cheeks, then wiping off the lipstick imprints with a lace handkerchief. She burred in a breathy voice, something about being late, having a chocolate *soufflé* with a talkative cousin that Henry was supposed to remember: "*Je m'excuse d'être en retard. J'étais prise au restaurant avec ton cousin Ernst, tu te rappelles de lui? Il est tellement bavard! En plus, le chef a préparé un soufflé au chocolat tout à fait superbe. . . .*"

As she prattled on, the woman thrust the dog into Henry's hands, put her arm through his, and led him toward the door. Henry tried to bolster her charade. He nodded and smiled, nodded and smiled, as he'd always done with his chatterbox Aunt Barbara.

"*Bonsoir, messieurs,*" the woman greeted the soldiers with a broad smile and a flood of praise about their protecting the country. "*Mais qu'est-ce qu'on deviendrait*

*sans la protection des jeunes hommes forts comme vous qui nous gardent sains et saufs . . . ?*"

The soldiers preened under her compliments. She and Henry glided through the station, out the entrance, and into the backseat of a Mercedes sedan. Her chauffeur closed their door. They roared away.

Henry still clutched the poodle. The woman smiled and rescued the dog, kissing it on the nose. "I am sorry to be so late, young man. I was not contacted until this afternoon. And there were many arrangements to be made. Your friend Mr. Watson knows me as Madame Gaulloise, but in public you must call me Tante Héloïse, *d'accord?*"

Henry nodded. He assumed *Gaulloise* wasn't her real name, being a brand of French cigarettes. But was *Héloïse*? Probably not either, since that was the name in Rousseau's book.

"How is your French? *Tu parles français?*"

"*Un peu, Madame. Je comprends un petit peu.* My accent is not great."

She smiled again. It was a generous, warm smile. She must have been breathtaking when she was young, Henry thought fleetingly. "No, my dear, your accent is less than perfect. But perhaps you will pick up a bit? At least this madness can afford you some linguistic education, *non?*"

Henry nodded.

She pulled off her gloves and explained, "We are heading to the Grand Hotel Excelsior for a few days. I live in Annecy, but frequently visit Montreux and Lausanne. My late husband was Swiss. His business was

here. I have a kind of courtesy citizenship. So my coming is nothing out of the ordinary. And fortunately, the Swiss are more sympathetic to the French in this region. France is just across the lake, you know." She pointed through the window to a glistening, wide swath of blue that bordered the city. "But it will still be a trick to get you across the border. I plan to visit the casino tonight to see if I can stoke our fortunes in case a bit of persuasion is needed. It usually is."

That night, Madame left Henry. She had managed to talk them into their rooms without his having to so much as nod at anyone. The management and busboys seemed completely accustomed to her drama. But what if someone came to the door looking for her? He supposed he'd just hide in the bathroom and not answer.

Henry circled his room. He'd stayed in hotels twice before—once in New York City before being put on the boat for England, once in London. But they'd been nothing like this.

He flopped onto the big, soft bed and ran his hands over the crisp linen and fluffy duvet covering. They were so much nicer than the coarse cotton sheets and wool blanket at home. Henry reached for a gold-foil circle on his pillow that a maid had left earlier when she'd come to turn the bed down—another thing at which he had marveled.

He opened it now. "Wow, chocolate!" He popped it in his mouth and smiled as it melted in his mouth.

Still antsy, Henry stood up to pace and ended up in the bathroom. His footsteps echoed on the shiny black-and-

white tiled floor. He stopped in front of the strange contraption he'd asked Madame about earlier. It was the size of a toilet, but had a faucet. He'd reckoned it was for washing feet, but Madame had laughed at him and called it a bidet, a bath for his *derrière*, his behind.

Henry snorted. Europeans were just plain different. He wished he could write Patsy about it all. She'd think it was so funny. What was she doing tonight? Ma must have gotten the telegram by now. Would Patsy still be writing letters to him in her head? Would they be as beautiful as the ones she'd sent? She wouldn't stop thinking about him, would she?

He climbed into the white porcelain tub and stretched his legs all the way out. What a huge tub. Henry picked up delicate pink soaps to sniff them and pulled his head back in surprise. They smelled like strawberries. Wouldn't Patsy love them and this tub? She'd never had anything this nice. Her father had just added a tiny indoor bathroom to their little cottage. Before, her family had always used an outhouse and bathed in a big old tin tub they dragged into the kitchen and filled with boiling water.

When he got home, he was going to buy Patsy some bath soaps like the ones in the hotel and tell her all about Switzerland.

Hearing Madame's dog scratch at the door that connected his room to hers, Henry climbed out of the tub and opened it. The poodle danced around him, begging for attention. "All right, all right," muttered Henry, picking it up. What use was such a little scrap of dog? He

couldn't hunt, like Henry's pointer, Speed. And he was nothing like poor old Skip.

Madame's room was round, part of a turret, encircled by French doors that opened onto a wrought-iron balcony. He carried the dog out into the night air. Montreux was lit up, stretching itself out in a twinkling line along Lake Léman. You could almost forget the war here, thought Henry, almost.

It was just past 1 A.M. How much longer would Madame play the tables? She'd left swathed in mink stoles, their tails dangling. She'd donned a great deal of jewelry. Wasn't it dangerous for her to be out this long, by herself? Henry looked to the street, three stories down. Only a few cars rolled along the avenue. An elderly man in a tuxedo arrived at the hotel, a too-young woman on his arm. As Henry watched, Madame's car arrived. Behind it came a car flying tiny German swastika flags!

Out popped a portly German diplomat. He darted to Madame's car, pushing past her chauffeur, to open her door. Had she gotten caught? Was she turning him in? Henry's heart sank. No, he couldn't believe that. She'd been too gracious. Besides, only the Swiss had jurisdiction here. Henry flattened himself against the hotel's wall and watched.

Madame placed her gloved hand into the German's and rose out of the car. He didn't let go, although Henry could tell that Madame was firmly shaking his hand, trying to say good night. Henry could hear no voices. He saw Madame pat the German's chest and step back, shaking her head. But the German persisted. He followed her into the lobby.

Henry darted back into the room, dropping the dog, which barked at him angrily. "Shush," he warned it. What should he do? Should he try to surprise the guy? Should he just go into his room and lock the door behind him? That didn't feel right, though. It'd looked pretty clear to Henry that Madame was trying to get rid of the German.

He flipped off the lights and went into his own room. Putting his ear to his door, Henry listened for their approach.

The German was speaking in rough English. Henry guessed he didn't know French and Madame had told Henry earlier that she refused to speak German unless absolutely necessary. "Such a harsh language, unlike French," she'd said, and then added that she didn't much like English for that matter. "Too many words for the same meaning. And too many meanings for the same word."

In the hallway, Madame was chattering: "Really, Herr Schmidt, you have been too kind. I am certainly capable of making my way home. My chauffeur is very reliable. But I do appreciate your concern." She made a great rattling with her room key. Was she trying to signal Henry?

"It is pleasure, Madame. When I see you at casino, I knew I take you home. Beautiful ladies need German protection."

"Indeed? Switzerland is a peaceful country, is it not, Herr Schmidt? The war does not exist here. Everyone is safe here, yes?"

"Switzerland would do well to invite German protection. *Der Führer* would make it a better country, more clean. No Jews, no Poles, no Czechs, no Yugoslavs." The



German leaned close to Madame. "But I waste time talking politics to a beautiful woman."

Madame's voice was icy. "Oh, no, not at all. I find it fascinating. But I am tired. It is really time to say *adieu*."

Again, she rattled her keys loudly. This time her poodle began to yap and throw itself at the door.

"Oh, dear," said Madame. "*Mon pauvre petit*. I have left him shut up way too long." She opened the door and out dashed the little dog, yip-yapping and jumping. It raced round and round the German. In its excitement, it urinated all over his trousers.

"Philippe, you naughty dog." Madame barely suppressed a laugh. "Oh, Herr Schmidt, do forgive him." She scooped up the poodle. "Please send me the bill for cleaning. What a wretched end to a lovely evening." And with that she glided through her door, slammed it shut, and bolted it tight.

The German stomped down the hallway. When all was quiet, Henry knocked lightly on the door connecting their rooms.

"*Chéri*," Madame greeted him with a sigh of exasperation. "Wasn't that just awful? The Germans have taken over the best cabarets and restaurants, especially in France. The casino here is littered with them. That one has been hounding me all night."

Playfully, she rattled her keys once more. "Isn't it a shame that poor Philippe gets so overwrought and has accidents like that, just at the sound of keys?" She cradled the poodle and petted him. "Such a clever boy." The dog licked her face.

Henry laughed. "You are quite an actress, Madame."

"But of course, *chéri*. One must be these days." Her triumphant smile faded. "We leave in the morning. I made only a little money tonight, but we must depart before that bore shows up again. I play a high-society coquette to disarm my enemy and to keep myself a mystery. Women have had to cloak themselves in this way forever. But it is especially useful with the Reich. Nazi Aryans can be such fools for a well-made dress, well-bred manners, and witty cocktail chatter. They all want to be aristocrats. But the price is, they think they know me for something I am not. That man will be back and we must not be here when he returns. I would have a hard time ridding myself of him a second time."