

THE SAGA
OF THE
ELLEN JANE

VOLUME I:
INVENTING A LEGEND

TIMOTHY KLEIN

To my mother, Ellen Jane.
You were right, typing class was a good idea.
And thanks for making me diagram all those sentences.

To my wife, Marlene Kay.
The perfect blend of Sarah and Jeni.
And who dared me to write.

This book is the result of the author's overactive imagination and all characters and events are fictitious. Any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

However, the reader may note certain similarities between the Ellen Jane and a Beech AT-11 Kansan. This resemblance is not coincidental. Anyone wishing to donate such an aircraft to the author's personal collection should contact him immediately.

Scripture quotations taken from
The American Standard Version of the Holy Bible (1901)

Paperback: ISBN 978-0985808204
Kindle edition: ISBN 978-0985808211

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Prologue

Jake's Cafe Northern Brazil, September 1939

“**I** doubt the U.S. Army could put together a decent parade, much less stop Hitler from invading Brazil,” Jeni said, her French inflection just strong enough to sting. She surveyed the others at the table. No one looked surprised, maybe a little unsettled by her honesty, but not surprised.

“I take issue with that remark,” Gerald said. “I’ve personally seen them put on some rather impressive parades.” He paused for a gulp of beer. “However, your assessment of their military readiness is, unfortunately, most accurate.”

Mark was too distracted by the slit in Jeni’s infamous red skirt to comment. After forcing himself to refocus, he managed to join the conversation. “Congress has ignored the military for years. A result of the optimism surrounding the League of Nations. Nuts, even the Dutch can outgun us now.” He looked at the gentleman across the table. “Don’t mention that to your friends back in Deutschland.”

“I have no friends back there,” Hans replied, his intonation betrayed his German heritage and instilled a disconcerting edge to his rebuttal.

“Oui, then France will have to stop him,” Jeni said. This time her words oozed with all the confidence that her French accent could muster. “We defeated—” she almost said *you*, “—the Germans before and now we have the impenetrable Maginot Line.”

“Nein,” Hans sneered. “Hitler's generals won't attack such heavily fortified positions. Besides, they need to pursue strategic resources.”

“Hans is right,” Mark injected. “Hitler will attack somewhere else.”

“And British Intelligence fears that it could be Brazil,” Gerald said. “Hitler sees Brazil as an easy target; a stepping stone to all of the resources of South America. It has everything his modern army needs: oil, rubber, valuable minerals and plenty of food for a growing Fatherland. Germany may be over 5000 miles away, but with his fleet of ships and submarines, that distance isn't a significant obstacle.”

“Don't forget,” Mark said, “the Brazilian Army is still in shambles from the last revolution and what troops it does have, are garrisoned in the south. If the Nazis established a beachhead in the north, it would be almost impossible for the Brazilians to rout them.”

“You are assuming they would even try,” Hans replied. “Brazil has a large population of German immigrants, many would welcome Hitler with open arms.”

“Oui, and many Italians,” Jeni added.

“True and with Brazil's dictator sitting on the proverbial political fence, it's almost impossible to know whose loyalty lies with who,” Mark added as he took a deep breath.

“This is getting depressing. It sounds hopeless,” Jeni said.

“It's not. Not yet,” Gerald answered. “I am confident that the U.S. will eventually join the fight. But no one knows when.”

The group sat staring at their drinks. Finally Jake said, “If you can't beat 'em; bluff 'em.”

“He's right,” Mark said after another moment of silence. “We have to bluff the Nazi's into holding off invading Brazil long enough for America to wake up. And we have do it without involving the Brazilians.”

1

Brazil, October 9th, 1939

Even from a hundred yards and in the last of the evening light, he could tell she was mad. It had been a long and stressful flight: four thousand miles of thunderstorms, headwinds and low clouds, and now it looked like the worst turbulence was still ahead. Oh, he was glad to see Jeni waiting for him, not that he'd admit it to her. *Nuts*, he swore to himself, *she's wearing that red skirt*.

When he had begun his trek back to the States to fetch a fighter-bomber, he knew it would be challenging. With Britain and Germany declaring war just weeks earlier, and the United States trying to pretend that everything was still okay, there would be some dicey political maneuvering required. However, he had been confident that he could work the system to his advantage. After all, he had dealt with the military bureaucracy before and he knew what obstacles to anticipate.

What he hadn't anticipated was how much he would miss her. Every red skirt he saw was hers. At first these unexpected emotions amused him, but the amusement turned to bitterness when he realized just how deep they went. So deep that he had to switch cars on the train to Wichita since some other woman had the nerve to stink it up with the same perfume she wore. It wasn't that Jeni was unattractive; indeed, she might just be too attractive, if such a thing as that was possible. Her face danced the boundary line between a girlish

cuteness and a more mature loveliness. It seemed to change with the admirer's mood.

Her short hair, cut just above her shoulders, was usually a dark blond but would shimmer with hints of amber in the right light. She had seriously serious eyes, a deep blue that kept most men, him included, confused. At five-foot-seven and 140 pounds, she had what was considered to be just shy of a full figure. Her chest was plenty full enough and her waist slender enough, but her hips were just not quite round enough to qualify her as a pin-up girl. Not that he rated that as important. Well, not highly important anyway.

He taxied the plane past her, letting it roll to a stop with her positioned just past the left wingtip, almost even with the rear door of the plane. She ignored the prop wash messing with her hair and continued to just stand there, staring. He couldn't tell if she was staring at the plane or at him. He applied the parking brakes, casually turned off the electrical systems and then shut down the big radials, first the left one, then the right one; he didn't want to appear hurried. So distracted was he that he found himself fumbling the flap switch and almost flipped the gear switch by mistake.

He stretched out of the pilot's seat, moseyed to the door, and lowered the stairs. As he descended, he noticed something odd: silence. It was deafening. It was louder than the last seven hours he'd spent sitting between those two nine-cylinder noise makers. There was enough light left for him to decipher from her facial expression that the situation would test his diplomatic abilities.

"Mark." She hadn't even waited for his feet to hit the ground. "That is most definitely *not* a B-17." Her voice was deadpan. "It's not even a B-18 or B-20. It's not ... not a B anything!" Her tone had shifted to flabbergasted, and betrayed more than just a hint of her native French inflection.

Finally, as she remembered to breathe, she put her hands on her hips and took a deep, deliberate breath. He liked that. It caused her breasts to heave and he could see just enough cleavage to be momentarily distracted from the coming storm. Then he noticed that her lips were tight together, to the point of being curled inward just a tad. *Time to deploy a good offense*, he thought.

"I know that." He paused for effect. "And, of course, I knew that you would know that." He continued with all the

confidence of an experienced used-car salesman. "However, when we get done with her, Gruber's not going to know that. I doubt he'd know the difference between a DC-2 and a Sopwith Camel anyway." He moved a bit closer to her. She had her head tilted down and was glaring at him through a blond curl that hung down in front of her left eye. He could see the ice starting to melt in her pupils and her lips were relaxing just a bit as she folded her arms across her chest. More accurately, underneath her chest, which resulted in more heaving. There was a short lull as Mark refocused again; after all, it had been a long flight. He took a chance, reached out and held her gently by her shoulders, making sure to keep his eyes on hers this time.

"Listen Jeni, it was all I could get, and I just about didn't even get it. No one knows what that crazy kraut is going to do next, but they all know they need more airplanes. Hell, the Brits are placing orders after just looking at blueprints still pinned down on a drawing board. Anything rolling off a production line has a crew ready to fly it to Europe, they aren't even waiting for the paint to dry."

"Probably true, so what?" Her French accent always re-emerged when she got angry, and it was getting thick. She was standing closer to him than she liked but found she couldn't move, fixated by the faint but lingering scent of his Canoe Cologne mixed with the aroma of aviation fuel and sweat. At nearly six feet tall, he could be a bit intimidating to other women, but not to her, or so she told herself. His average looks and speckled brown hair concealed the phenomenon of a man who she longed to understand. But that would have to wait – her mission came first. "It does not help us at all. We need a war plane."

"Quiet, you'll hurt her feelings." He rushed to hush her in an overtly serious manner and continued the charade in a whisper. "I've spent the entire flight telling her what a magnificent warbird she is. She's convinced that she's completely invincible, the most dangerous plane in the sky."

Jeni just stared, not actually surprised. "She? I suppose that you have christened her with an appropriate name?"

"The *Ellen Jane*." He stated it as a known fact, slightly surprised at his own answer. He hadn't been thinking about it; it was just the right answer. Besides, it would have been pretty embarrassing to admit that he had shared such a long

and intimate adventure with her without knowing her name. Jeni continued to just stare at him.

He didn't relish the silence so he offered her a small flashlight. "Take a look," he said in a voice that blended together just the right amount of self-confidence and sarcasm. "You'll find that it is exactly what you've been waiting for."

She marched defiantly over to the door and started up the short stairs. *Got to love that skirt*, he thought, as she bent over to peer inside. She probed the interior with the flashlight beam, then backed down the stairs and strolled over to him. The frown was gone but he wasn't sure that her smirk was any improvement.

2

“It appears that you have brought us a model airplane kit. Are we to build our own warbird?” she asked.

She was clearly disappointed. What she didn't want Mark to know was that she was mostly disappointed that he hadn't jumped out of the plane and then jumped her.

No. She had to remind herself. Remember the promise you made to yourself on your sixteenth birthday? And the vow you took as you sat in that empty church at Mother's funeral? You did not come this far to screw things up by getting involved with a man. The wrong man. Especially one that you have to work with to accomplish the mission that brought you to Brazil. And a pilot? An aviator ruined your mother's life. Don't let one ruin yours. Her head once again won the battle against her heart and hormones, this time anyway.

“Like I said, I couldn't get a fighter or bomber but I could get a lot of parts.” He was starting to sell her and they both knew it. “Look at it.” He spun her around by her shoulders to face the plane. “Imagine her in war paint with a machine gun turret ...” he pointed to the spot just above the door. “Right there. Sven will rig up a bomb rack. It will look like a bomber, sound like a bomber and even drop bombs.” Another spin and she was facing him again. “It will work,” he said confidently.

She wasn't really concerned about the airplane anymore. He had closed the sale, mostly, anyway. First, because she knew that he was a very creative guy who didn't make many

mistakes; and second, most importantly, because they'd be in a lot of trouble if this didn't work. They'd have to make it work. But she was getting uncomfortable looking into his hazel eyes, and the twilight wasn't helping. Somehow, even the scent of the hot engines was affecting her.

So she turned around and moved over in front of the left engine, its massive cylinders moaning as they cooled down, and pretended to be concerned about the oil dripping onto the tarmac.

Now Mark knew that Jeni knew that there are two types of radial engines: those that leak oil and those that are out of oil. Thus, this was just one of her diversionary tactics, as was her fiddling with her hair that had been rearranged by the Beech's prop wash.

So he stood back, letting the floodlight from the adjacent hangar help him admire that red skirt, or more honestly, what it was wrapped around.

There was more here, much more, than raw physical attraction. He genuinely enjoyed her sharp wit and her charm, and she could hoof it with the best of them. What little remained of her French accent had actually grown on him. Had they met in a nightclub some years earlier, back when a long-term relationship meant nothing more than giving the girl his real name, then sure, he would have pursued her with near reckless abandon.

However, he sincerely hoped that he had matured past that stage. He was now after the kind of girl you could take home to Mom. Yes, it was an old cliché, but one that eventually slaps most men in the face. And she was not it. Moreover, he was looking for the kind of girl that he could actually see as a mom. Someday, no rush.

Officially, she had joined the team as a grifter; she had friends in all the wrong places, rubbed elbows with the top hats, and always seemed to come up with information, reliable information, that no one else could. The fact that she could kill a Nazi as casually as most housewives would stomp on a cockroach didn't bother him. Indeed, it actually endeared her to him (probably by conjuring up some subconscious image of a mother bear and her cubs).

No, it was her means to an end, and not the end itself, that concerned him. Her reputation was, well, rather colorful. For none of her victims had been found completely dressed, and

on the few occasions that she hadn't managed to slip away before the body was found, neither was she. True, there was never any solid evidence that she was responsible; the poor bastard died from a heart attack or just fell over the railing from the third floor. Or, having decided to go for a leisurely drive in his sports car, at three o'clock in the morning, ran it right off a cliff.

Now, he wasn't endorsing society's double standard regarding a woman's virtue and a man's right to sow his wild oats. Personally, he felt that virgins were overrated; he appreciated a girl with a little more, say, self-confidence. But Jeni was just so nonchalant about using her feminine charms that he couldn't see even the possibility of building a healthy relationship with her. He certainly wouldn't want her raising his future daughter.

Of course, Mom wouldn't have to know all the details, now would she? It's not like she'd pipe up at the Thanksgiving table someday and ask, *"So, Jeni, how do you get a man to talk in bed? I can't get a word out of Mark's father and we've been married forty years."* Then again, his mom might.

And Jeni would certainly answer, probably something like: *"Oh, I just offer them a little special attention down below, if you know what I mean. They sing like canaries and don't even remember what they said. Can you pass me the dressing, please."* That would give his sisters something to gossip about.

Besides, while he trusted Jeni with his life, some of the facts about her just didn't fit right. He often found himself laying awake at night trying to decipher her. Frankly, he couldn't decide if she was an opportunistic whore who had signed on in the expectation of some future payoff, or an idealistic slut, willing to do anything to advance a noble cause. Not that the two were mutually exclusive.

He waited until she was done fussing with her hair and had turned to reevaluate the aircraft before he approached. "Well, if it drops bombs and has a machine gun turret," she conceded quietly, "it might fool him. What is it again?"

"It's a Beech 18 executive transport. The only reason they let me have it was that everyone else wants a Lockheed." He was quite proud of his acquisition. "This poor bird had been ordered by some big shot and he canceled the order after he saw the new Electra."

Jeni let out a rather indignant and boisterous huff. “A passenger plane? It's not even a real combat plane? And Ellen Jane – just who is this fearsome example of airborne terror named after anyway?”

“My mother,” he said rather quietly, standing in almost reverent silence. Now he could feel a lump starting in his throat, followed by the almost tangible taste of his mom's thin pancakes, rolled up with peanut butter and homemade jelly.

“Hmm, what will she think of that, naming a warbird after her?” Jeni had heard quite a bit about his mom and was curious to know just what this woman was really like. They had never met, but Jeni knew that this woman, somehow, could be a major obstacle between her and Mark. Of course, there were bigger obstacles than a mother four thousand miles away. First and foremost was Mark's indifference toward her as anything other than a comrade-in-arms. She had a pretty good idea what he thought about her. Building a real relationship would be hard for her with any male, impossibly hard with one who thought he knew all her secrets.

“Oh, she'd probably think it was flattering in a funny sort of way.” He chuckled. “At least until she saw the nose art I have in mind.”

“I suppose we have to paint a *nudie* on the nose?” She pretended to be exasperated, looking at him with her head tilted and the *oh men* expression on her face. The French accent was almost completely tucked away by now. “I'll be insulted if you ask me to pose for it.”

That started him imagining her, in just her red skirt, sitting on her knees provocatively facing away from the artist with her arms folded modestly across her bare chest and her head turned over her shoulder to leer back at him. *Yeah, that would work.*

“Jen.” It was his *we both know the truth* voice. “You'd be offended if I didn't ask. Besides, it will only be half nude, we've got to keep it tasteful.” When it dawned on her that he wasn't joking, she decided that she might just be both offended and insulted.

Before Mark could begin arranging a studio session, Sven, the engineering guru of the team, arrived with several volunteers from the cafe down the field. The men pushed the plane back between two hangars.

“Worry not, I've readied a stencil and a paint sprayer. By

sunlight, she'll be a proud member of the *Western Brazil Charter Service*." Sven was boasting in his typical low-key manner, his Irish brogue amplifying the effect.

Yeah, Sven McCormick, from Tulsa. He was such an anomaly that Mark hadn't even even tried to unravel him. The best aircraft mechanic that Mark had ever known; but he wouldn't fly. You could hardly get him into a plane. An Irishman who brewed beer but didn't drink? At five-foot-five and 150 pounds, you'd assume he was a wimp. Larger men had made that mistake and had paid for it with the embarrassment of actually being hoisted up and physically tossed like a rag doll. The guy couldn't figure out the amount for a tip in his head, but could redesign a turbo charger on the back of a napkin. His English was clear but, as Sven would say, "with a unique sentence structure at times it had." Since he spoke at least four languages, maybe he just got confused? It always surprised people when a thirty-something kid, with a baby-smooth face and wearing an unironed work shirt, would start swearing in Latin. Luckily, Mark had learned just enough to help translate.

"Take a look at what's in the back, then join us over at Jake's. I'm starving." Mark started down the tarmac with Jeni in tow. About a hundred yards away stood two nondescript metal buildings, aircraft hangars by design, but they now housed Jake's Cafe, the best restaurant within seventy-five miles.

3

Jake's Cafe had been started by accident – well, a near accident. About seven years earlier, an engine on an airliner decided that it was being pushed too hard and pushed back, shoving a connecting rod right through the side of the case. The crew then discovered that overloaded twins don't fly very well on just one engine. As they descended over the not-so-inviting carpet of trees, rocks, and other things that tend to bend airplanes, with everyone praying for a miracle, they spotted a miracle.

For there, carved out of the middle of a coffee plantation, was what appeared to be an airstrip. The copilot argued that it was just a mirage and asked the captain why he was winding the clock on the instrument panel. The captain said that it was as good a crash site as any, let's go for it. Regarding his winding of the clock – he insisted that it was an essential step in any emergency situation; he'd expound on it later. The copilot didn't appreciate the sarcasm but was relieved that the pilot had stopped winding and resumed flying. They had just enough power to drag the wounded bird to the happiest landing of the copilot's life.

The mirage turned out to be a private airstrip belonging to a guy named Jake. He was pushing fifty back then, but what was left of his hair was as black as the day he was born. If your scale read anything over 140 pounds, you needed a new

scale. Downright scrawny at five-foot-eight. He always needed a shave, and his skin was as dark as it was tough, a side effect of farming coffee most of his life.

But his true love was aviation. He had built himself his own private airstrip and started fixing airplanes part-time.

On this particular day, he was standing just inside the hangar with the door open, patching a rip in a wingtip, when nine people came rolling up in what was nothing more than a single-engined propeller-driven taxicab. The angry engine hadn't decided if it should stop smoking or not. The other engine, either out of sympathy for its mate or from the frustration of having to carry the load alone, was starting to.

The passengers egressed the smoking craft with no regard to social status, gender, or personal modesty. One so-called gentleman was in such a hurry to get on the ground that he managed to take a lady's skirt with him as he dove out the door. The woman, a widow in her mid-forties, was left standing on the stairs in her garters and hose. She decided to make the best of it by assuming the part of a burlesque dancer. She pranced on down the stairs and retrieved her skirt as if it was just part of an act. Old Jake perked up for that show.

Now Jake was known as a man of few words and who was often just a tad too honest in his assessment of any given situation (which might have explained why he was still a bachelor). So when the crew asked if he could fix an engine, all he said was "probably." When they asked if they could use his phone, he said "certainly." And when they asked if there was anything to eat, he said "pancakes."

Really good pancakes. They should be; he'd spent decades perfecting the recipe because it was about the only thing the old bachelor knew how to cook. Jake fired up his griddle. Bette, the inadvertent burlesque dancer, who had studied the culinary arts at some elite school in Europe, whipped up some extra fancy omelets to complement the meal. Afterward, Jake found a case of beer, tied his Jenny down outside, and they had a bit of a party. Must have been a pretty good party, since everyone ended up sleeping on the hangar floor. Everyone except Jake and Bette that is.

One of the big shots from the airline's headquarters flew in the next day to assess the situation and to haul out the passengers. He congratulated the pilot on an outstanding landing, and then promptly fired him for ignoring the engine

operating handbook. There was also a brief discussion regarding the appropriate time to wind the instrument clock, which the now-former captain insisted was a vital step in any emergency situation. But, mainly due to the adjective *former* having been added to his title, he refused to elaborate.

The boss also figured that Jake's would be a great place for a refueling and maintenance stop. It was located just outside the city on a good road and was near a rail line. Jake figured that making pancakes and fixing airplanes would be a lot less work than picking coffee beans. Besides, considering what the price of coffee had done since the price collapse of '30, who could blame him?

Bette, claiming to be too traumatized by the near disaster, refused to continue by air. She also claimed that a car was coming from Sao Luis to get her. Evidently the driver must have gotten lost. A month later, Bette was still there making omelets.

Truth be told, old Jake saw it coming and didn't bother to duck. First, her cooking was a huge hit in the new cafe, and besides, he was tired of pancakes. Second, and almost as important, well, most people had a pretty good guess but were too discreet to actually ask. In the end, all he said was "I do."

Now, word spreads quickly in the aviation community, be it good or be it bad, and soon pilots from all over were stopping in for food and fuel. And, depending on their flying skills, repairs. Hence, Jake's Cafe and Aeroplane Repair Depot was born.

As Mark and Jeni approached, one of the waiters was sliding open the hangar door on the lounge to give the dancers some fresh night air. The lounge was the smaller of the two buildings and Bette had tried to convert it to a European bistro, which was quite a challenge considering that it started life as a pole barn. She had wanted Jake to lathe and plaster the interior, but all he said was "don't think so." So she settled for paneling improvised from cedar siding and a coat of paint. It had cute little tables with semi-formal tablecloths, padded chairs, and even a wine list. It boasted a small but adequate dance floor and a stage big enough for a quartet as long as they didn't bring a piano with them.

Attached to the right side of the lounge (as you looked from outside the hangar door) was the main hangar that Jake had to put up as the cafe grew. It was plenty big enough to house anything up to an Electra or a Beech 18 with ease. Now no man is going to complain when his wife forces him to build a bigger game room, but when she started using it for overflow customers, Jake put his foot down. While he appreciated the customers, it was just that this was an airplane hangar and was going to stay that way. In what was the longest sentence anyone could remember Jake uttering, he declared, "She can decorate her side how she likes and I'll decorate my side how I like." Some were surprised that he even knew that many words.

Jake's approach to décor was strikingly different. He started with a dozen tables built from the large wooden cable spools used by the utility company. The tables dotted the floor and mingled with the air compressor, valve grinder, and welding tanks. He added the requisite pool tables and a dartboard. Of course there was a bar. It ran the length of the back wall and featured a wide selection of beers and hard liquor. It even had its own wine list – red or white – although Sven's most recent brew was always the most popular.

This conglomeration extruded an ambiance unmatched by any European restaurant. Its location was perfect. Just far enough from town to be left alone, close enough that businessmen could dash out to Jake's for a quick, or maybe not so quick, lunch. Men loved the machinery, their women loved the dancing, and both loved the food. Credit for this incomparable atmosphere would have to be given to three unique characteristics.

The first was the aforementioned hangar door. Constructed in four independent sections, built of miscellaneous lumber and scrap plywood, the doors hung from a track bolted to the front truss and could be slid open in good weather to allow the patrons a view of the runway. Bette had promised Jake sexual favors that even Jeni hadn't heard of to get him to remove it. "Don't think so" was his only response. Pilots could literally taxi right to their table. Of course, doing so usually meant that the pilot was going to buy dinner for at least half the patrons since he had just blown over their tables with his prop blast.

The second was a truly unique artistic display. As part of

her remodeling, Bette had covered the walls with fashionable watercolors of places that none of the locals recognized. Now over the years, Jake had taken to hanging spare parts up in the rafters and along the same walls. One must bear in mind that Jake's definition of spare parts might include, for example, an entire Detroit Flier fuselage, a set of wings off a Cessna of some kind, and the carcass of any engine, propeller, or airframe that might yet yield salvageable components. In other words, pretty much the remains of anything that had crashed at the field. It finally dawned on Bette that the only prints that didn't end up behind an old tire or nose cowl were pictures of airplanes, scantily-clad women, or, ideally, scantily-clad women posing with airplanes. She conceded the fight, gave away most of the artsy prints, and went back to the kitchen.

Mark and Jeni entered via the hangar door in the lounge. Mark nodded to Marie, the head waitress, as they passed by. She didn't bother to take their order but just yelled "M and J" at the cook. He knew that meant one chicken cordon blue, extra cheese, heavy on the ham, easy on the breading but well done, and fruit on the side if it's fresh enough. Mark would take a Dagwood: surprise him with anything but anchovies.

They proceeded to the main hangar and directly up the stairs to the section called the Flight Deck and took a table on the far end, away from any ears.

This was the third and most incomparable feature of Jake's Cafe. Always the pragmatic one, Jake had added a second floor across the back of the main hangar, deep enough for two rows of tables. It became so popular that he added catwalks down each of the sidewalls. They extended the length of the hangar and were each wide enough for an additional row of tables. Both provided an unhindered view of the action below and raised the dining experience to a new level, pun intended. The resulting effect was a hybrid of an aviation museum, art gallery, and baseball game, with an occasional rampage from a rodeo bull. These were the premium seats, only available to members of Jake's private club.

It was soon so popular that Jake had trouble finding room to actually wrench on airplanes. He solved this the only way he knew how. He just built another fifty feet of hangar. The catwalks stayed as originally installed, stopping at the massive beam that had supported the original door. It was too

low to comfortably walk under and moving it wasn't an economical option.

The conversation stopped as Frantz, one of the newer waiters, brought Mark a beer from Sven's latest batch and Jeni a glass of ginger ale. He was a young kid who couldn't decide if he idealized Mark or despised him. His attitude was indubitably related to his jealousy of Mark's relationship with Jeni. He was also the only employee at Jake's that hadn't been cleared regarding the Ellen Jane project.

Sven joined them just as the food arrived. At the same time, the side door of the main hangar opened and a muscular, intense-looking gentleman stepped inside and scanned the room. An untrained observer would assume that he was casually looking for an empty table while digging in his jacket for his wallet. Actually, he was trying to determine if he could take his hand off the pistol in his shoulder holster. Having so decided, he headed to the stairs at the far end and skipped up, two steps at a time, and headed toward Mark and Jeni's table. He pulled up a chair and sat down, back to the wall.

"There appears to be a slight change of plans?" His slight German accent misled many regarding his loyalty. Though his name was Hans Schultz, he was actually born in southern England. His German father moved his family back to the Fatherland after the stock market crash to join in the Hitler movement. While Hans had been a member of the Hitler Youth, his enthusiasm died quickly when he saw the true direction that the Fuehrer was heading and the horrendous impact that it would have on Germany. He had actually come to Brazil to escape both the Nazis and his father.

When the local Nazis started recruiting him, he humored them so as to not make any unneeded enemies. But as he learned the true nature of their mission, that is, to help pave the way for either an invasion or a revolution, he decided that he had to stay involved. He had inadvertently recruited Jake, who then invited Mark to join the team. Mark had contacts in both the Brazilian military and the U.S. Army that would prove very useful. Somehow, they had found Jeni at a local gin mill, discovered that they shared a common dislike of Nazis, and decided that they should work together.

"Afraid so, Hans, anything with a machine gun is getting lent to the Brits. That Beech 18 is the only thing I could find that has any chance of passing for a bomber." Mark finished

his beer just as Marie was bringing one for Hans and, of course, a refill for him. "We'll have to roll our own. First, we have to make sure it looks like it came in for repairs. Sven, get out there and ding up the belly before any of the Germans see it. Make it look like someone ran it off a runway and into the weeds. You know what it needs to look like." Mark stopped as Jake joined the party.

"Aye, now that's a new one," Sven said with a wide grin. "You flyboys always get the fun of bendin 'em and I get the work of straighten 'em out. Well, when I get done, people will just figure that Jeni had been flying it." Everyone enjoyed Sven's sense of humor as much as they admired his courage; however, none were personally brave enough to laugh.

Jeni was actually becoming a fairly accomplished pilot and could handle Mark's Stinson Reliant. But along the route, there had been some rather exciting events. She just sat there all ladylike, legs crossed, giving Sven that look of hers that they all feared but no one understood, while sipping her ginger ale. In spite of a reputation as a lush, Mark had personally never seen Jeni drink anything stronger.

This left Sven stuck with some rather uncomfortable thoughts, so he prodded the discussion along. "I saw the toys you stuffed in the back of her: a couple of Brownings, 30 cal, a bubble of some sort, and an assortment of servo motors, electrical parts, cables, gears, and other goodies. I suppose you expect me to cobble together a machine gun turret?" He wasn't complaining, but just wanted to make sure everyone would appreciate how much talent this would require. "We can do all the interior work right here at Jake's, but as soon as we put in that turret, she'll need a new home."

"How long will it take to cut some holes in it?" Mark was slightly disturbed by the thought of hacking away on a practically brand-new airplane.

"Oh, cuttin' holes is easy." He grinned at the thought. "And quite fun. Now if you're particular regarding just where ya want them, that takes a wee-bit more time. I'd guess we'll need four weeks or better."

"And bomb racks," Jeni added. She was warming up to the plan but Mark could tell that she had a little ways to come. "We are not just dropping pumpkins."

"Hans. How long before the Germans get suspicious?" Mark was mostly focused on his sandwich, curious as to just what the

chef had concocted, but mostly searching for confirmation that it was anchovy-free. More than once, someone thought it would be humorous to slip in a little salted fish to see if he'd notice; he had.

"Probably the four weeks that Sven wants." He shrugged his shoulders slightly and continued, "Everyone knows that it takes about three days to drill off some bad panels, two weeks to get parts in, and another week to put it all back together. Maybe you can stretch it for another week or so if you blame the weather or an incompetent clerk that messed up on the part numbers, but after a month, they're going to wonder why it's still here. If Sven can get it painted before the local Germans see it and it's bent up a bit, they won't pay any attention to it."

Lufthansa operated a small regional terminal out of Jake's. The bad news was that their personnel were very German. As staunch supporters of the Third Reich, they would report anything suspicious to the local Nazis. The good news was also that they were very German, meaning that they would arrive at precisely 8:55 a.m., eat in the back office at 1:00 p.m., and leave for home promptly at 5:05 p.m., five days a week. They had never been seen at the airport on the weekends and they never wandered off their corner of the tarmac unless something earthshaking was taking place.

"But what if they do ask questions?" Jeni was not convinced that hiding a plane in plain sight would work. It wouldn't fool her for long; she noticed everything about everyone. Especially if it looked too normal. This personality trait had an undesired, and unknown to her, side effect: Mark was always a bit suspicious of those that seemed too suspicious themselves.

"Why would they?" he replied in a tone that made it obvious why the Germans didn't usually get along with just about everybody. "A pilot makes a bad landing, creases some sheet metal, so they bring it to Jake's Aeroplane Repair Depot. What's there to ask about?" Hans was confused by her suspicion. How could she question Germans acting logical? "But Sven is right, once you install the turret, that will be another matter. Until then, no questions, no problems."

"No, we still have a problem: we need a safe base to operate from." Mark had summarized their dilemma. They all knew that they couldn't operate out of any public airport. They

needed one close but not too close, one with easy access for them but no public access. He knew of only one that met all those criteria, and it came with serious complications of its own.

4

Introducing Jeni to Sarah wasn't his first choice. It wasn't even his second choice. It was just that there was no choice. Sarah was the only one he knew who could help them hide an airplane with nearly a fifty-foot wingspan and a machine gun turret.

They had taken Jeni's car. It was larger than his and more comfortable. Of course, that meant she got to drive, which always bruised his ego just a bit. He had to admit that she handled the shifting rather well, especially considering she was doing it in heels.

They had been discussing the mundane details of Sven's progress on the Ellen Jane when she suddenly asked, "So, how long have you known this girl?"

"Oh, about six years." He didn't read anything into her question. For he had first known Sarah's father, Joe, an overly devout missionary who had arrived from Texas in a three-piece suit, planning to build a traditional church, convert everyone, and then head back home. This would only take, "four, maybe five years," Joe had prophesied. It took about three weeks for Preacher Joe, as the locals called him, to figure out that you couldn't get stained glass windows in this part of the country, hymnals were useless since no one could read anyway, and that the people's favorite Bible stories were the ones where Jesus healed someone or provided supper.

Joe had also started a ministry to a semi-nomadic tribe of the natives back in the jungle. While a river ran near their village, it wasn't navigable in anything larger than a small boat and was far too narrow for a float plane. Depending on the weather and water levels, it could take several days to get in or out by water. So, Joe traded steel axes with the men of the village in exchange for hacking out a runway.

That's when he found Mark. The original routine was to drop Joe off on a Monday and come back on Friday or Saturday, depending on the weather. He'd also fly supplies in and patients out to a larger hospital, on an occasional basis. He never charged Joe his full rate and he would often lend a hand with other projects. Not that he was a religious man, but it couldn't hurt to pad the heavenly bank account once in a while.

After a year or so, Sarah showed up. She had been attending a private college to study creative writing or some such nonsense when Joe telegraphed her and told her to high-tail it down to Brazil. God spoke to father, father spoke to daughter, and daughter obeyed. He had signed her up for a six-week nursing course in Dallas and then brought her to a small village outside of Maraba to run the clinic.

Joe had decided that if he wanted to reach people's spiritual needs, he needed to meet their physical needs first. He had stayed just as devout as ever but became far more pragmatic, except for his wardrobe. He never did figure out how impractical a necktie was.

"Well, I don't remember you ever mentioning her before. How old did you say she was?" Jeni inquired.

"She just turned twenty-seven about three months ago. Her dad threw a surprise party for her at Jake's Cafe."

"I suppose you attended?"

"Sure, of course I did." He pointed with his right arm, "take the next left." She slowed down in time, but to his surprise she slipped with the clutch and ground the gears – not badly, but it was certainly not her normal finesse.

"Her father and I are pretty good friends. I even helped plan the party." Now she revved the engine too fast and almost blew another shift. *What's wrong with her driving all of a sudden?* he wondered.

"Really. So you must spend a lot of time with this girl?" She thought that sounded suspicious so she added, "It's good that you understand her, it should help us sell our plan."

“Understand her?” He laughed the mandatory *what man understands a woman* laugh. “No, I don't really understand her. But I have spent a lot of time with her, fly her back and forth almost twice a month.”

To be honest, Sarah was the the other reason he'd often volunteered at the mission. He was actually quite fond of the woman, in a younger sister sort of way. While she refused to play with the “Devil's Deck” (referring to any card game), she did play a mean game of chess. The three of them had had some rather candid discussions regarding the afterlife and how we should be living this one. At first, both Joe and Sarah were a bit uppity: not really snobbish, not a real live holier-than-thou attitude, but just rather smug.

Then, without warning, that aspect of their personalities just vanished. He had returned to pick them up on a Saturday morning; the two people waiting at the airstrip where not the same two he had dropped off on Monday. Mark didn't know just what had transpired but he learned that it involved a young mother and a dying infant. All Joe would later tell him was “God's mighty voice shouted at me from the whimper of a little child.” Soon, he noticed that talking with Preacher Joe was really no different than talking with just any old Joe. And he did enjoy Sarah's company even if she refused to let him take her out for dinner and wouldn't even consider letting alcohol touch her lips. He never did bother to ask her to go dancing.

Now if Jeni was the kind of girl you don't take home to Mom, then Sarah was the kind that you don't take home to Dad. She was offended at even the thought of sex before marriage and she probably wasn't too sure about it afterward either. On that note, it wasn't clear to him just how much carnal knowledge she really had, in the strictly intellectual sense, of course. Obviously, she knew where babies came from because she had helped deliver half the kids in town; but did she really know how they got in there in the first place? Her naiveté was actually a bit astounding to him. Any time the conversation careened toward anything even remotely concerning romance or the propagation of the species, she'd tap the brakes and steer it away. He had once started telling the old joke about “What do virgins have for breakfast?” She got up and left the room.

“Describe her to me, what else should I know about her?”

Jeni said as she revved the engine, hoping that the extra noise would mask any jealousy in her voice.

"She's a very nice girl, woman really. She's older than you are." He smirked at Jeni, but she missed it; she was too focused on not looking at him. "She's very, very smart. Has a habit of thinking too hard. Not too concerned about fashion. I know there's something else, something important that I wanted to warn you about, but I just can't remember what it is. There's the church, pull over behind the building."

"This is going to be interesting. Haven't been to church in years," Jeni stated calmly as she swung the car around and parked.

A true gift for understatement, on several fronts, Mark thought. But he could tell she was a bit nervous, as was he. He wanted to ask Jeni if she was more worried about Sarah or about being in a church. She should probably be worried about both, he reasoned. Then again, he didn't know the details surrounding her last visit to a house of worship.

It hadn't been a particularly uplifting experience, as it was just her, a priest who couldn't wait to get the service over with, and her mother's coffin.

The church part didn't bother him. His only apprehension was convincing Sarah to join forces. Again, there was something truly important that he knew he was forgetting.

They had approached the old church by the side door to avoid attracting attention. He stopped with his hand on the door handle and turned to face Jeni.

"Remember," he said in a near whisper, "we need to play this carefully. I'm pretty sure I can convince her father Joe to let us use the strip even if she objects. But everything will be a lot easier if she's on board. There's something else I wanted to warn you about but I still can't remember what it is." He opened the door and followed Jeni into the church.

"Church" was a strong word for this building. It was actually an old run-down tavern that Preacher Joe had bought years earlier and converted into the Gospel Light Bible Church and Hospital. His goal was to use it to convert the rest of the town. As a convenient side effect, by buying it, he'd shut down the only drinking hole around. Preacher Joe didn't come to town much anymore. He had appointed a local convert as lay pastor, who conducted the worship services on Sundays and Wednesday evenings. Sarah usually kept the

clinic open during the first and third weeks of the month; she spent the rest of the month tending to missionary work back in the jungle. Mark would often fly her there in his Stinson. Two hours by air sure beat the fourteen or more in a motor boat.

They found her standing by the desk in the side room that passed for the pharmacy. Her light brown hair was, as always, pulled back into a nondescript bun. She was wearing her favorite off-white blouse that featured hand-embroidered roses on the collar. The cotton fabric was thin enough that he could easily see the outline of a white, industrial-strength brassiere underneath. It provided much more support than her thirty-four-C breasts required. Her drab, khaki skirt hung to about the mid-calf and her shoes were clearly intended for walking and nothing more. She wore no jewelry except for a simple silver chain that held a cross and a gold ring. He had never seen her in silk stockings, makeup, or anything considered flashy. He wasn't sure of the formal definition of a prude, but one would get you twenty that she was one.

She greeted them with what passed for her smile and suggested that they move to the private garden behind the building. He had sent word that he would be coming; thus, she had tea and cookies waiting on the garden table. How quaint. He didn't know if he should sigh or chuckle, so he combined them.

He sat so that he could observe both the gate in the fence and the back door to the church. Sarah took the chair to his right, and Jeni sat across from him. It was clear that the two women were sizing each other up, and he could feel some friction starting to heat up the evening air.

Women don't dress to impress men, he told himself, they dress to impress other women. He and Sarah had occasionally discussed fashion. He had once, and only once, suggested that maybe, just maybe, she should modernize her wardrobe. Her only response was a Bible verse that said something about how women should dress modestly.

Clearly, Jeni had skipped Sunday School that day. Her flashy silk blouse was cut so low that he had no trouble spotting the black lace of the flimsy undergarment that served as her bra. They were now sitting in the shade and an unusually cool light breeze made it obvious just how nippy she felt. She noticed him noticing and seemed pleased about it. Her straight red skirt

was too short to cover her knees, and the slit in the side was too high to entirely hide her garter when she sat down wrong (or right, depending on one's gender). The one-inch heels were modern but not awkward. They were also red.

On the way over he had suggested that the red of the shoes clashed with her red skirt. He didn't really know if they did or not. Besides, he was a man, he didn't really care. But he knew it would irk her to think she had committed such a blunder. He enjoyed teasing her like he would one of his sisters; doing so helped keep any romantic thoughts at bay. At least on his part.

She wore enough jewelry that, except for her watch, it all became a blur of gold, silver, and miscellaneous colored rocks to him. However, the timepiece caught his eye. Most women's watches didn't feature a second hand.

So here he sat. Between a lamb of God and a whore of Babylon. He might be overstating the situation, but this could explode into an argument of Biblical proportions. For he had just remembered what he knew he had forgotten. That one minor detail regarding Sarah: she was, more or less (with the emphasis on more) a pacifist. And he'd brought a tramp dolled up like a cheap showgirl to persuade her to assist a military operation. And a clandestine one at that. He took a deep breath and tried to console himself with the fact that he had no other options.

5

Jeni finished a cookie and broke the silence. “Tell me, do these shoes clash with my skirt?” *Ha*, Mark wanted to laugh but held it in. *I must have really gotten to her!*

Sarah finished her sip of tea and peered over her cup. He could see her eyes follow the curves of Jeni's over-exposed legs down to the footwear. “No, I think they match quite nicely.” She wanted to add, *I wouldn't fret much about it, men don't hire a prostitute for her shoes*. But she didn't.

“See,” she snapped at Mark, “I told you they looked fine. You have the fashion sense of a water buffalo.” She spoke with an artificially indignant tone, clearly trying to establish some level of rapport with Sarah.

Great, he thought, *two women who don't know each other, and probably wouldn't even like each other, are already ganging up on me*.

“Your message said that you needed my help. How?” Sarah put down her cup and saucer and sat perfectly upright with her hands folded, oh-so-ladylike, in her lap.

“Before we continue,” Jeni's voice was curt but not rude, “do you have a Bible around?”

“Certainly, why?” Sarah replied. That was probably one question that neither Sarah nor Mark had ever expected Jeni to ask.

“Oh, just a formality, but we need you to swear that you will

keep our plans in total and unyielding confidence,” Jeni said. Mark couldn’t stop from rolling his eyes. Not only was Jeni going too far, she was taking the completely wrong approach.

“I’m sorry,” Sarah replied calmly, “I never take an oath. The book of James says not to swear by anything. You’ll have to trust that my *no* will be *no* and my *yes* will be *yes*. Besides, if you’re involved in some illegal activity, you’ll not want to inform me of it. I will do nothing that could jeopardize our mission, either in town or in the jungle.”

He had known that he should have made the first visit alone, but time was not a luxury he could afford. Damn, now to clean this up.

“Sarah, can I ask a dumb question?” He didn’t bother waiting for her reply; he had asked her plenty of dumb questions before. “Do you want the Nazis to win?”

“Of course not, but they’re not anywhere near here.” She hesitated, sat for a second with her lips apart, wondering why he would ask that. It was clearly not a question intended to start a casual conversation. He was leading her somewhere and she didn’t like the implications. She glanced quickly at Jeni and then turned back to Mark and added, “Are they?” Her voice betrayed her apprehension about the possible answers.

“No.” He paused, purely for theatrical effect. “Not yet.”

The three sat in silence. Jeni knew that she had started to botch it and that she needed to let Mark handle this phase of the negotiations. Mark knew that he needed to let Sarah digest the implications as long as she needed to. Sarah knew that she had to ask some questions and that she probably wouldn’t like the answers.

She had picked up her cup of tea and was staring into it. She finally took a long sip, put down the cup, and replied as maturely as she could. “When, then?”

“Soon, if Hitler gets his way.” Mark tried to keep his voice calm and dry, as if discussing the possible outcome of an upcoming baseball game.

“The Brazilian government would never stand for that!” She tried to instill certainty in her response and failed.

Jeni decided it was safe to join in. “Neither did the Polish Government, nor the Czechoslovakian.” She took another sip of tea to appear casual, and then added, “You do know that there is a large German population in Brazil? Many are very sympathetic, if not openly supportive, of the Third Reich.”

Mark pulled his chair over to the side of the table near Sarah and leaned forward in it, resting his elbows on his knees. He looked her in the eyes. He liked those eyes, deep brown, calm, relaxing, hinting at a sense of something even deeper. "Do I have your *yes* that you'll keep this very, very secret?" She swallowed hard and then nodded.

"There is little doubt that Hitler has his eye on this continent." He stopped and sat up. "We have it from very reliable sources that he's planning to sign a non-aggression pact with Stalin. With the Soviets out of the way, it's only a matter of time before he attacks somewhere. Someone has to make sure it isn't here. If the north coast of Brazil appears to be an easy target, he'll go for it. With the British just barely keeping their island afloat, and the U.S. not officially involved, that someone is us."

"How?" While the question was honest, the tone revealed an underlying pessimism.

"If we can dupe the German decision-makers into thinking that the Brits have a major, albeit secret, military presence in the area, then they may decide it isn't worth the risk." Mark knew her face well enough from all those chess games, which she usually won, to anticipate the next question. "Remember the U.S. isn't officially in the war, so any official actions by the Americans would be considered an act of aggression. There would also be serious political ramifications back home. Most Americans aren't ready to get involved in another war. Also, Vargas hasn't decided whose side he's really on. We're pretty sure that he's going to join the Allies, but as long as he remains uncommitted, Brazil will do nothing. In fact, the Germans are counting on this indecisiveness. Once they get established, not only can they interrupt the supply lines from the U.S. to Brazil to Europe, but they'll be very hard to dislodge."

"And how can I help?" Sarah's pessimism had changed to suspicion.

"By letting us base the 17th bomber squadron of the British Royal Air Force at your airstrip." Mark stated casually, as if he were expecting her to respond, *Oh, the 17th squad – those gents are always welcome, can I make them some tea?*

Jeni was dumbfounded. To a professional grifter, it seemed way too early to lay this out on the table. But Mark knew Sarah. If he had led her gently to the final request, she would

have spent too much time evaluating, processing, and analyzing every aspect. *Heck*, he remembered, *she once tried to analyze why she analyzed everything*. But by intentionally dropping this into her lap like a grenade with the pin pulled, she wouldn't have time to overthink it. She'd just have to react. And react she did.

"There are plenty of airfields around!" Sarah bolted upright and lurched toward Mark. She had been barely on the edge of her chair to start with and now found herself standing, having pushed back her chair in the process. It was not in keeping with the self-controlled ladylike image she spent so much energy cultivating. "What's wrong with Jake's runway? Our airfield is tiny, how many planes in a squadron anyway?"

"Well, actually, in this particular squadron, one," Mark said, trying not to make it sound silly. It was always hard to explain a truly ingenious plan to people who weren't at the original planning meeting. Especially if that meeting had been held in a bar on the second floor of an aircraft hangar.

Sarah looked at him, then at Jeni, then back at Mark, then, having decided he wasn't joking, she retrieved her chair, pulled it back into position, and sat down.

"So, you're planning to stop the German army with one plane?" Her sarcasm was understandable. "You'll need a miracle on the order of Gideon's."

"You needn't concern yourself with such details." Jeni, always the cautious one, wanted to spill no more than needed. Besides, she was baffled as to what hotel room Bibles had to do with any of this.

"Oh, no." Sarah had recovered and was quite firm, and convincing. "I must concern myself with exactly such details."

Mark exchanged eye contact with Jeni, letting her know that if they wanted to be trusted, they would have to trust first, and that it was her turn to talk.

Jeni was caught just a bit off guard at being handed the floor. But she was good at thinking on her feet (and according to rumor, in other positions as well), and jumped right in.

"Basically, we're playing a rather serious game of poker. You see, the plane only needs to make its presence known at key times in front of certain German agents. If they see it flying around their secret bases, patrolling the coast, bombing their secret weapons caches, they'll naturally assume that there are dozens of planes watching them. They'll probably suspect that

they're based in British New Guinea or launched off an aircraft carrier. Doesn't matter. Their spies will search but not find. Of course, we will be sure to, shall we say, supplement the reports."

True, she had left out some details, but she hadn't actually lied. Probably close enough to the whole truth for now. "If the Ellen Jane can put up enough of a bluff, they'll fold rather than risk raising the bet. They don't know what other cards we hold."

"Mark, what does your mother have to do with this?" Sarah inquired.

So she knows his mother's name, Jeni thought. His mom would be thrilled with little Miss Goody-Goody-Two-Shoes. She added the extra "goody" to the traditional label for her own amusement.

"It's traditional for pilots to name their airplanes. I was going to name it the *Sarah Marlene*, but I wasn't sure how that would go over," Mark jested. Jeni didn't laugh. *So he knew Sarah's middle name as well.*

Sarah just rolled her eyes. "So, anyway, you're not planning to actually kill anyone then?"

Ah, the pacifist was joining the party. Mark smiled.

"It would be ... less complicated if we don't have to," Jeni reassured her.

"But you can't guarantee it?" Sarah inquired. Her expression suddenly shifted to one of confusion and she continued, "I should have asked earlier but just who is this 'we' that you keep referring to?" She turned from Mark and stared at Jeni, "And I don't mean to be rude, but just who are you and how did you get involved with Mark?"

6

Jeni looked over at Mark. He motioned for her to answer. “I’m a member of the EPS. Have been for months. Our mission is to keep the Nazis out of Brazil. I thought that Mark had explained all that,” Jeni replied, tilting her head back just enough to appear smug about it.

“The EPS?” Sarah asked. “The Erie Pilot’s Society, isn’t that just the private club at Jake’s Cafe? I thought all they did was sit around and drink beer? Though I never understood what it had to with Pennsylvania.”

“It has nothing to with with Pennsylvania. And there’s a lot more to it than just a beer swilling social club. It’s a rather long story actually, rather funny, but long,” Mark said.

“We’ve got all evening,” Sarah replied solemnly.

Mark shifted to get more comfortable and took a deep breath. “Well, it all started several Halloweens after Jake opened his cafe. A bunch of us were hanging around after closing. It was the regular crowd: several guys from the States, a few from England and the rest, like a lot of guys in Brazil, weren’t all that keen on being from anywhere.

“Anyway, someone started talking about the Halloween tricks they’d played when they were kids and how much fun it had been to throw pumpkins and watch them explode. Of course it didn’t take long for someone to suggest throwing pumpkins from an airplane.”

"I can guess who that was." Sarah interrupted with a smirk.

"Funny, I can't seem to remember," Mark replied, also smirking. "Anyway, we snuck over to Pedro's farm next door and gathered up enough ammo for several sorties.

"Jake claimed he was still mostly sober, and since his airplane was right there, Bette jumped into the back seat and we covered her with pumpkins. Mac, who was also still reasonably sober, loaded a buddy into the front seat of his plane, also armed with pumpkins, and off they went, just looking for targets of opportunity.

"I should mention that it was almost dark by then, but since Jake's field had runway lights and a beacon, no one considered that to be an issue. However, even with a full moon, it was difficult to identify drop sites."

Mark started to chuckle. "Let's just say that not all the pumpkins landed exactly where intended. To be honest, I don't think any of them did. Whatever the case, the local police were soon getting reports of pumpkins falling from the sky and the chief had a pretty good idea how they got up there. He headed out to Jake's."

By this point in Mark's story, previous listeners had already started to laugh along with him. Sarah just sat there. *Maybe it's funnier if you've been drinking?* Mark thought.

"Anyway, the chief arrived just as we had finished tying the planes down. Of course, none of us knew anything about falling pumpkins, but we promised we'd let him know if any landed near the field. Now the chief is a very suspicious individual. Comes with the job description, I suppose. But he's even more superstitious. He was pretty upset and threatened to arrest the lot of us if anything else fell from the sky. I can still hear him," Mark shifted to a reasonably good Brazilian accent, and trying to sound very serious, said, "'This is a very eerie night and you are some very eerie pilots.'

"Well, we all took that as a high compliment, and the name stuck. It was so much fun that we have a pumpkin dropping contest every Halloween. Of course, now we takeoff well before dark. Anyway, the Flight Deck at Jake's became our official meeting ground and soon Jake put up the sign limiting access to 'members only.' If you know Jake, you'll know that spelling isn't exactly his strong suit; he left the second 'e' off of *eerie* and nobody's been able to get him to take the time to correct it."

“A private club for all you scofflaws. What does that have to do with my airstrip? Are you hoping to open a second branch?” Sarah asked. It wasn't clear if she was joking or not.

“On the surface, the EPS is just a very exclusive private club. Of course, it's open to just about anyone who has a strong interest in aviation. Provided that they met Jake's criteria for membership. Meaning, that they're willing to spend enough at the bar.” Mark grinned at his own commentary.

“However, hidden within this group of beer-swilling socialites, is a secret society. Something that Jake envisioned years ago. You probably know that his airfield was started by accident ...”

“Yes, I've heard the story, hard to imagine accidentally starting an airport,” Sarah interrupted. (The story is included as Appendix I for the interested reader.)

“Not really, not if you know Jake,” Mark replied with a chuckle but quickly shifted back to a serious tone. “This is probably the one significant thing in Jake's life that was of his own intentional design and what I'm about to tell you, you must promise to keep secret.” He waited; she nodded sheepishly.

“About a week before the Halloween adventure, a guy named Hans was in the bar, drinking. He had been taking flying lessons for a while, and after discovering that Sven's beer is as good as any to be found in Germany, he became a regular customer. That night the guy was unusually depressed. Now normally, if a guy wants to cry in his beer, we just let him. It usually involves a woman anyway.” Jeni and Sarah exchanged glances and then both glared at Mark.

“Well, it usually does,” Mark replied. “Anyway, since no one else understands you females any better than the guy crying does, we just leave him alone. But this was different. Jake knew that whatever was bothering him hadn't been inflicted by a woman. So he told Hans to 'start talking.' I guess Hans went on for over two hours. By the time he had finished, he had ratted out the Nazis and everything they were planning to do to Brazil. Two weeks later, and Jake put up the misspelled sign for the EPS.”

“What does this have to do with the Nazis?” Sarah asked.

“The organization is much more sophisticated than it appears,” Jeni interjected and then paused. She glanced at

Mark for his approval, he nodded and she continued. "There are several levels. First, there are almost a thousand 'line boys,' or as the case may be, 'line girls,' scattered across Brazil. At just about any airport, in any major city or port, there is at least one person, who either by personal connections or personal actions, has earned enough respect and trust to be inducted in."

"Line boy?" Sarah asked.

"Line boys are the guys who work on the flight line at an airport. They do all the dirty work; washing planes, pumping gas and all the other jobs that pilots and mechanics don't want to do," Mark replied. "It's the nickname we've given to the general membership. These guys know that the EPS is camouflage for something bigger and more mysterious. They love being in on the secret, even though they don't really know what it is. All they know for sure is that we don't like Nazis. Very, very few know *anything* about the Ellen Jane. But when given a task or asked for help, they don't ask a lot of questions, things just get done."

"Certain line boys, or girls, have been promoted to *flight crew* status. They know what is happening and usually, but not always, why. Most have been briefed on the Ellen Jane but few know where she's based. Their main job is to direct the line boys. Sometimes they're consulted during decisions, and most know who the directors are."

"Directors?" Sarah asked.

"Yes, there's a small group, five to be exact, that runs the organization," Mark answered curtly, not mentioning that he was one of them.

7

Sarah just sat there, pretending to be studying her cup of tea.

“So it's all been a facade? You've been part of an underground organization all along?” Sarah asked Mark, sounding more than just a little disappointed.

“To be honest, it has been more of a social club until recently. Now that Germany and England are at war, it has taken a more ... serious tone,” he replied.

“But then why all the cloak and dagger drama? Sounds like you've been reading too many cheap spy novels,” Sarah countered.

“It should be obvious,” Mark interjected. “You must also remember that the Brazilian Government must not be implicated in any way ...” He paused. *Need to keep this friendly and informal*, he reminded himself. *I'm not talking to a bunch of military brass*. “Let me start again,” he said as he refocused.

“The German's have been slowly establishing a spy network throughout Brazil, over the last several years. They have a lot of official agents, many that are unofficial and even more people that don't realize that they're being used as agents. It would be darn near impossible to base the plane at a known airport without at least several kraut spies reporting it. The ruse would be up before it started.

“Also, like I was saying, the Brazilian Government must not be connected to our operation in any way. For them to allow the British to base a warplane on their soil could be considered a declaration of war. You've got the only airstrip that is isolated enough that the Germans won't find it and yet close enough that we can reach the coast without too much effort.”

“That airstrip was built for peaceful purposes. Not for war,” Sarah decreed.

“True,” Mark said as he nodded in agreement. He had plenty of experience discussing complicated topics with her. *Just like landing an airplane*, he thought, *you've got to have the right approach*. “However, aren't you supposed to help the good guys? What about being the salt of the earth?” He let the question linger. Jeni was privately extending the analogy toward open wounds but held her tongue.

After reflecting for a moment, Sarah countered, “I fear that you may not appreciate my first calling. After all, 'our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.' This isn't my battle.” Sarah was truly sympathetic but also somewhat confused. She needed to talk to her father about this. Or maybe even discuss it with Mark without the harpy present. *Oh, it's not up to me to judge this woman*, she thought to herself, *maybe she's not as lost as she appears*.

There was a disconcerting silence as none of them was sure who should speak next. Finally Sarah announced, “I must consider this overnight. Can you return tomorrow around, say, four-thirty?” Mark knew that was her code for saying she wanted to pray about it. Fine. He had already told Jeni that this would probably take more than one conversation. In the worst case, they'd appeal to Joe.

They got up to leave and Mark gave Sarah a brotherly hug. As he reached the gate he stopped and turned back toward her. She was standing by the table, expressionless. Then, in his wise-older-brother voice, he said, “History tells us that those 'spiritual hosts of wickedness' are usually marching in lockstep with some very flesh and blood ones. We may be fighting different battles, Sarah, but it's the same war.”

With that they quietly returned to their car and snuck off.

As they drove away, Jeni remarked, "She didn't seem all that friendly there at the end. Will she help us?"

"I can tell she's a bit confused. I've seen this before when playing chess with her." Mark was getting a little uncomfortable with Jeni's driving; she seemed careless tonight. "Anyway, she'll need to really think things over and then have a long talk with her father. Actually, he's the one we must convince."

"Do you play with her often?" Jeni asked.

"Usually after supper." He had begun to relax but then Jeni started to swerve off the road. She caught herself before he could comment on it. After he recovered his composure, he continued, "She makes a mean fettuccine, probably not as good as you French girls could make, but it's almost good enough for Bette's kitchen."

"Fettuccine is Italian, I don't cook Italian." Actually, she couldn't cook anything, but why advertise it.

8

Jeni had a rather nice apartment on the second floor of a newer house and a landlord that knew better than to ask too many questions. Maybe it had more to do with apathy. After all, if her money was good, why should he care if an attractive single woman wanted to rent the entire floor.

Mark arrived to pick her up around four o'clock. Everyone at the house knew him, so they let him in and didn't even blink when he went straight up to her apartment. He knocked and received a "come in." As he entered, she was turned slightly away from him, fussing with her skirt. Once she was satisfied with it, she turned toward him. At least it was a bit longer than last time, even if it did have a slit, this time in the front. He liked the slit. *Fashion*, he thought. Then he thought again.

"So, and I mean this as a serious question with no innuendo regarding your feminine anatomy, *whatchya got under that skirt?*" She smiled both at his clever wording and his even cleverer detection of her hidden cargo. Setting her foot on a nearby chair, she deftly grabbed her skirt at the slit and pulled it aside, immodestly revealing a holstered pistol strapped to her inner thigh and hints of a lot more as well.

"Hmm, interesting," he said, hoping she'd think he was referring to the firearm. He recognized the make and model instantly, but had pretended to study it inquisitively so as to prolong the view.

She could tell that he liked what he saw but when she found herself enjoying his gaze, she put down her leg and redressed her skirt. To be honest, she would like to show him more, but there were vows to keep and open wounds that would have to heal before she'd risk new ones.

"Looks like a Walther PPK. Where did you get it?" Obtaining a German gun in this part of the world wasn't easy. The compact, .32 caliber autoloader was a good fit for a garter holster. Everything else down there looked like a good fit too.

"I found it in Fredrick Meier's coat pocket, I did not figure he'd need it anymore." Well, she was right, Meier wouldn't need it anymore. He was dead.

"Are you really that afraid of a missionary girl?" He asked half seriously.

"Don't be silly, I've never met a pacifist that could fight worth a damn. She'd never get close enough to lay a hand on me. I am, however, very afraid of the friends she could have waiting for us if she has decided that we are endangering her 'first calling.'" Her sarcasm was unjustified but not surprising. He hadn't expected those two to become great friends.

"She may not support us, but she won't turn on us either. Of that I am completely confident."

"Really?" she reached around him and slapped him on the small of his back. Just hard enough for the Colt .45 to dig into his skin.

"I'm always armed these days. Has nothing to do with this particular meeting. Besides," he said, wanting to change the subject. "We need to convince her father, Joe. He's the key. But things will go much smoother if she's on-board."

They arrived a few minutes late; Jeni had insisted that they take the long route, double back at least once and then park two blocks from the church. Not that she was paranoid.

Sarah met them at the door. From her demeanor, it was clear to him, as he had expected, that she hadn't made a decision. After silly and insignificant social banter they arrived back in the garden. They took the same seats as before.

"I'll tell you up front that I cannot make this decision. You will have to discuss this with my father. However, I'd like to know exactly what you are asking for." Sarah was polite, unemotional and firm.

“We need to lengthen the runway at Yale and want you to build a new clinic at Bethel,” Mark replied. “It will help provide cover for our activities.” Since Jake's Flying School was advertised as the *Harvard of Aviation*, it seemed reasonable to nickname the remote strip Yale. No disrespect intended, but the pilots involved did enjoy bragging that they had been to both Harvard and Yale.

Bethel was the name that Preacher Joe had given to the cabin built in the village near the airstrip. As Mark remembered, it was only two rooms with a tin roof. He'd actually only visited it once, and concluded that he'd rather stay in the bunkhouse at the airstrip. He didn't figure it was worth the three-mile walk even if the women did run around topless. Back when he was fifteen, he would have walked twice that far to see some tits; but he had higher standards now. No, now he liked firm, full breasts, just big enough ...

“Mark. Maaarrrrk!” Sarah was calling him back to reality.

“Oh, sorry, I was trying ... to remember ... um, just how long is the airstrip?” Nice save. Not that he could have actually forgotten, for it was one of those runways that a pilot couldn't forget. One thousand, one hundred and twenty-seven feet long with sixty-two-foot trees at the end. He had paced it off at least a dozen times. A one-wayer. You had to land to the southwest and take off to the northeast regardless of the wind. You flew the approach from the northeast, slowing your bird down to just over stall speed to establish a nice gentle descent over the water before setting down on the grass – all the while trying to ignore the trees blocking any attempt to go around while worrying about just how worn the brake shoes were. At least you didn't have time to contemplate the piranha-infested river underneath and the equally dangerous trees on each side.

Sarah piped in. “If I recall correctly, it's around eleven hundred feet?”

“Let's look it up,” he said as he pulled a ratty old notebook from his crocodile-skin flight bag. He laid a map with hand-drawn annotations on the table. He tapped his finger on the runway.

“See how the river turns sharply, flows to the south and then cuts back again, forming a horseshoe with the runway in the middle? If we cut down the trees from the southwest end all the way to the river,” using his thumb and index finger as

draftsman's divider, he projected the map scale onto the section in question, "see, we'll have another fourteen hundred feet. Plenty of runway. Besides, then we could take off and land in either direction."

He engaged his most endearing tone, because the worst was yet to come. "We need to move in food, fuel storage and put up a large hangar. And to complicate matters, we need it in less than a month. I know that this will be a herculean effort."

"We wouldn't be counting on Hercules. We have access to a higher power." She wasn't tossing it in their faces; just stating her position. "You mentioned providing cover?" She was anticipating this would involve lying, sneaking around, and other such dishonest activities. It could be a bigger moral dilemma than providing the runway.

"We'd like you to start building a clinic at Bethel. Have a fundraiser, send out prayer letters, whatever you would normally do." This time he was soft selling the plan. No grenades. "Behind the scenes, we'll provide the materials and labor to help make it happen."

This moral dilemma was clearing itself up fast, but she was mature enough to remain skeptical. "Sounds very simple, why the generosity?"

"There's a kraut in town, Herman Gruber, he keeps very close tabs on everything." Mark made no effort to disguise his disgust.

"Should I have heard of him?"

"Probably not. He's officially the 'Director of Lumber Development,' or some other made-up title, for a German front company. He took over recently after the death of a Mr. Meier, also a spy." Sarah noticed that Jeni had looked startled at the mention of the name but had recovered gracefully.

"That was in the paper. Fell over a railing, I believe? Another victim of the evil of alcohol." Sarah interjected, looking at Jeni for her reaction.

Jeni replied consolingly while maintaining her best poker face. "Oh, yes, I did hear that."

Mark almost announced, *I'll say she heard it*, but he kept his bemusement to himself. Oh, Jeni had heard it alright. Heard him go *splat* on the Italian marble when he nose-dived from the third floor.

Supposedly, the man had been listening to a soccer game on the radio in his den on the second floor. The newspapers

didn't say why, but he apparently wandered up to the third floor and somehow, *accidentally*, fell over the railing at the top of the stairs that overlooked the atrium. Minus his pants.

Fortunately, his wife was visiting friends on the other side of town and was spared having to help clean up. But in a twisted bit of luck, his brother, sister-in-law, and several guests were playing bridge in the dining room adjacent to the landing zone. They found Jeni waiting for him in his bedroom, wearing his jacket. Just his jacket. While reports differed regarding exactly what else she was wearing, all agreed that her dress had somehow fallen off.

His brother, to avoid a scandal, loaded Jeni, still holding her dress in her lap and wearing Meier's jacket, into a car and had someone (possibly the local chief of police, but here again, the unofficial witnesses weren't sure) drive her back to her apartment. By the time the newly minted widow returned home, they had retrousered the body and straightened up the bedroom. His brother then used a combination of a little bribery and a few threats to keep Jeni's name from ever appearing in the papers. The official cause of death: Mr. Meier had gotten drunk, accidentally fallen over the railing, and plunged to his death. Two weeks later, Meier's butler appeared at Jeni's place to retrieve the jacket. The widow was starting to wonder why it had been at the cleaners for so long.

What none of the krauts bothered to ask Jeni was, "Did you happen to see our plans for invading northern Brazil? We seem to have misplaced them." Good thing for her no one thought to unfold the dress she was clutching.

Mark reasoned that Sarah didn't need to know everything about Jeni, so he skipped the details and continued. "Gruber has agents everywhere, even one of Jake's waiters is on his payroll. If we were to start shipping supplies, fuel, anything to Yale without a good reason, they'd investigate. Then they'd make a list, cross-check it with other lists and report it to Berlin."

"You want to turn our peaceful airstrip into a military base? And use it to deceive others? My father wouldn't allow that." Sarah digested her own comments for a second and then announced, "I need to go out to the village tomorrow anyway, Mark can fly me out and we can discuss this with my father."

"Okay, fair enough." Jeni was trying to be reasonable. "We can meet at Jake's and leave first thing in the morning."

“Only Mark needs to bother coming.” Sarah caught herself being almost surly and retreated. “But I guess there's room in the Reliant for all of us.”

9

Sven just stood there, staring. It was one of those moments when the artist stands alone, looking at the blank canvas, brush in hand, palette ready, anxious to start, knowing full well that the time of dreaming has passed and that the images he has so clearly contrived in his mind must now, somehow, be made real, and the canvas sneers back at him.

He knew that if he does not stand resolute, then the doubt instilled by a simple inanimate piece of fabric, will be replaced by panic. For he knows all too well that the possibilities are endless. But so too are the possibilities for disaster and embarrassment. What if the images that are so inspiring in his internal landscape cannot be wrestled out for him to display to others?

Worse yet, what if he succeeds in reproducing his vision with meticulous accuracy, only for his audience to ridicule it? It is neither self-confidence nor arrogance but rather courage, the raw courage to dip the brush and make the first stroke, that separates the Rembrandts and da Vincis from those whose names have never been remembered, much less forgotten.

Of course, Rembrandt had it easy. If he was not happy with a particular rendering, a quick swipe of the palette knife and it was gone; he could try again. Even a finished painting, judged not worth the purchase price of the canvas, needs just a coat of white paint and the artist can try again.

Poor Sven had no such luxury. For he stood before the pristine work of another artist, metal shears in hand, ready to slice the sensual aluminum curves into a new, and hopefully even sexier shape, fully aware that the fragile skin, once deformed, could not easily be restored. Welding it was impossible. Patches and rivets would be the only repair; there would be no hiding his mistakes.

There was an additional fear as well. One that the mere painter, author, or composer cannot even imagine. Sven's masterpiece would actually have to *work*. Failure to account for the unyielding laws of physics and mechanics would undoubtedly cause his creation to rend itself into scrap metal, most likely at the most inopportune moment, killing all those who had trusted in his judgment. Creating art under such constraints is not for the faint of heart.

Fortunately, Sven was not a philosopher. Any such concerns were dismissed as soon as they uncrated the new ten-foot hydraulic shear and an equally impressive finger brake that Jake had bought for this job.

Sven had been in his third year as a mechanical engineering student when he had gotten fed up with studying the thermodynamics of the Carnot cycle in archaic steam engines and quit. He'd decided he wanted to wield both a welding torch and a slide rule and founded McCormick's Mechanical Services. How he ended up at Jake's had never been adequately explained, but it had something to do with a very fast car and an equally fast woman.

"I've never seen him this excited about anything," Jeni said as she looked down from the catwalk. Sven was practically dancing around on the shop floor below them.

"Yeah, he's been up late every night at his drawing table with his T-square and triangles. Practically wore out his slide rule," Mark added.

Just then Marie walked up to Sven with a plate and bottle of Coke.

"Bette must have noticed that he hasn't eaten all day," Mark said with a laugh. "Sometimes she thinks she's everyone's grandmother."

Sven actually gave the girl a quick kiss on her cheek as he took the plate and sat down on a shop stool next to the Ellen Jane. Holding the plate in his lap, he tilted his head back to take a swig of the Coke and noticed that he had an audience.

Deciding he deserved a more formal break, he headed up the stairs and joined Mark and Jeni.

"Not trivial, fitting in all the warrior features that you insist on," he said to Mark as he sat down.

"Come on, Sven," Mark replied. "Nothing's too hard for you. What's the problem?"

"First, ya can't just hang those bombs wherever you want. That heavy load has to be exactly on the center of gravity or the effect would be a disaster on the aerodynamics, it would," Sven replied in his version of English. "Second, and of even more import, ya can't just drill and tap holes into the main spar at will. At least not if you hope it will keep holding the wings on."

"I only need five bombs," Mark replied. "I'm sure you can figure it out."

"Gave you seven bombs actually," the engineer answered between bites. "Took designing some rather clever rack assemblies, it did, if I say so myself. We'll rivet them to the ribs, bulkheads, and formers between the gear legs."

"Seven," Jeni repeated with satisfaction. "That is more than enough for our propaganda mission. But when will you be done?"

"Oh, I've got a half dozen assistants cuttin, bendin, and rivetin," Sven replied a bit nervously. Any conversation with Jeni put him on edge. "She'll be ready to fly soon."

Six days later, Sven invited Hans and Mark in for a tour. Jake and Jeni tagged along.

"I made it really simple, as I knew pilots would be using it." Sven was introducing his customized bombardier's control panel. "Only three things to remember, can you boys handle that without a checklist or do I need to write one up?"

Without giving them time for a snide comeback he went on, "First, seven switches you have. One switch for each bomb on the belly, I even arranged them in order. Flip the switch up to select that bomb. But wait, even more exciting, it gets. This knob decides how far apart they'll be released. All the way counter-clockwise and they'll all leave at the same time; clockwise all the way and you'll get one second between them. I even took the extra time to label it in eighth-second intervals. Then just press and hold the bomb release until they're all gone. Did I go too fast for you? Questions, gentlemen?"

“Nein, but you didn't tell us – which bomb drops first?” Hans inquired.

“Just as they're labeled, starts with number one on the port wing, then all the way to number seven on the starboard wing.”

“Gotta change that,” Mark replied.

“Change what?” Sven was dumbfounded, no one ever had to fix his creations.

“I know you're an engineer, so I'll try and make this as complicated as possible.” That gave Hans something to grin about while Mark was thinking with his eyes closed.

“This configuration would result in an unacceptably asymmetrical distribution of mass should the operator choose not to jettison all the warheads. The effect would be exasperated during crosswind landings, thus increasing the probability of losing control of the aircraft. Which could result in severe damage to the aircraft and injury to the crew.” Mark was pretty smug, having actually remembered some of the fancy words that Sven liked to throw around.

Sven just stared. He wasn't about to ask for a translation and Mark wasn't about to offer one. Hans was patient.

After about forty seconds, Sven replied, “I should have seen that, I should have. By dropping the bombs starting from one wing first, it could leave a lot of weight hanging way out under the other wing. That would throw you off balance, make flying harder and landing more risky. Fixed by morning, it will be.”

The few times that Mark had gotten one on Sven, it was something obvious.

Anxious to change the subject, Sven took them to the back of the plane and pointed just in front of the tailwheel. “Well mates, whatcha think?”

“Looks real to me.” Jeni was impressed.

“Real it certainly is, donated by a Vought SBU-1,” Sven replied proudly. “I mounted it a bit further forward and away from the fuselage on purpose. Want to make sure everyone can see it.”

“Does it work?” Jake asked.

“No, strictly ornamental, bolted in place, purely for the purpose of deception.”

“Doesn't need to work. Krauts see a plane sporting a tail hook and they'll start looking for an aircraft carrier. Paint it a

different color, something contrasting, make sure they can notice it," Mark told him.

"Have you figured out how to work the tail numbers?" Jeni asked.

"Might have, I think," Sven went to the workbench and returned with a box of sixteen-inch-high, cutout aluminum numbers, painted black, and a screwdriver. "This is all we need to do." He demonstrated, selecting the numbers 1 and 4. Lining the 1 up with some pre-drilled holes on the vertical fin, he inserted a screw and tightened it down; four more screws and the port side of the Ellen Jane was now labeled 14. He moved to the other tail fin and Jeni handed him a 2 and a 1; soon the starboard side was marked 21. "That's all there is to it," Sven said "Cut four complete sets, we did. We can change her numbers after every sortie."

More propaganda. If the Germans bothered to record the tail numbers of the planes threatening them, and Hans was certain that they would, they'd have a whole squadron to worry about. Granted, the scheme depended, to some extent, on the chaos and confusion of combat, but that seemed a reasonable assumption.

The machine gun turret was considerably more complicated. It required a fair amount of machining, both on a lathe and a milling machine. Sven decided to mount it in the bed of a truck. This would allow them to transport it to a remote location where they could test fire it before mounting it on the plane.

In the meantime, they spread tarps between the catwalks and improvised a paint booth. This protected the Ellen Jane from dust as well as prying German eyes. They covered her top with a dark olive drab, her belly in a light bluish-gray, and the engine cowls in red.

The red matched Jeni's skirt, both the one she often wore and the ones that now adorned each side of the nose. Jeni had never actually been asked for permission to use her image, much less posed for it. But apparently, Sven had paid more attention to Jeni than she had realized. And no one had any idea that his skill with an airbrush extended so far beyond just painting flames on the side of a roadster.

Just as Mark had envisioned, she was sitting on her knees with her bare back to the viewer, her arms folded across her chest and her head turned to leer over her shoulder. Even Jeni, after initially being infuriated about it, had to agree to

its artistic value. Besides, Sven had given her the slightly more rounded derriere that she had always wanted.

10

You can't accessorize an airplane with something as snazzy as bomb racks and not expect the chief pilot to invent an excuse to take it for a test run the first chance he gets. Mark argued that it only made sense to test the Ellen Jane's bombing capability, and get in some practice, while waiting for Sven to complete the turret.

When they met for the test flight, Mark confided to Hans that he was a bit nervous. That was obvious – he was wearing a parachute. Soon Hans was too, both nervous and wearing a parachute. After all, the riskiest flight in any airplane is the first one after it leaves the repair shop. The biggest question on the pilot's mind is: *What did they break while fixing it?* It doesn't help any if the repair involved slicing the belly open to install bomb racks.

It was a Saturday afternoon when they rolled the Ellen Jane out on the ramp. The local krauts were gone, and except for Jeni's image on the nose, the Ellen Jane looked like just another big green passenger plane. Assuming you didn't notice the seven U.S. Army Air Corp M38A2 one-hundred-pound practice bombs, filled with sand, hanging on her belly. (They knew better than to ask Jake where he had gotten them.)

The plan was simple: with Hans as his bombardier, Mark would depart Jake's and fly out the hundred miles to the

bombing range that Jake had arranged with an old rancher friend of his.

They'd make seven passes at various altitudes and airspeeds to see just how well everything worked. Jake and his buddy would be the judges.

They arrived over the target area right on time. "Over there, that must be the target area," Mark said.

"How do you know?" Hans had expressed concern earlier about practicing in the wrong field. Drop one pumpkin in the wrong yard and it scars a man for life.

"Well, unless someone else has plowed a big dot in the ground with two rings around it, that must be it." Mark pointed to the target area. Additionally, Jake had planted a rusted-out old truck in the middle to make it interesting. "He promised us dinner and beer if we hit the truck. Besides, there's Jake's plane on the other side of the hill and I think that's him standing by that old wagon."

This would be the easy part of the entire operation. After all, how hard could it be? Galileo had worked this all out centuries earlier. Well most of it. Since everything falls to earth at the same speed, if you know how high you are and how fast you're moving, you can easily calculate when to drop your payload to hit a given target. That's basically all a Norden bombsight really did anyway.

Mark had tried talking some of his old army buddies into letting him *borrow* a Norden but they had laughed him out of Army headquarters. Even though the basic theory of operation had already been published in numerous magazines and the benefits of the device had been publicly debated in Congress, the military was still pretending that no one knew about it. So Sven had prepared a neat little chart with everything they needed to know. Just start with your airspeed, find the altitude, and look up how far ahead of the target to release the load.

Now, in the theoretical world, there is no difference between theory and practice; however, in the real world, theory usually isn't worth the napkin you scratched it out on.

The first run was at a cruising speed of 170 mph and 5,000' Above Ground Level (or AGL in pilot lingo). The bomb missed by a mile, literally. Six bombing runs later, the closest they'd ever gotten was just under 400 feet. They had dropped lower on each pass and on the final one, they could see that Jake

was laughing at them, probably to keep from crying.

So the Ellen Jane, with her twin tails tucked figuratively between her retracted landing-gear legs, headed back to base. Maybe this was going to be a lot harder than dropping pumpkins.

Upon landing at Jake's, she was escorted back to her privileged home. Mark and Hans went upstairs to the flight deck where Sven and Jeni were waiting.

"Jake called," Jeni began dryly as she eyed them over the top of her glass of ginger ale, taking a sip, "said the safest place to be was sitting in the truck in the middle of the bulls-eye."

"You can't see anything!" Hans was exasperated. Germans don't like to get beat, especially by old American-built trucks. For the entire flight back, he and Mark had discussed every possible issue and solution. "The visibility is awful, we don't know exactly how high above the ground we are, any change in barometric pressure affects our altimeter, the airspeed doesn't equal ground speed due to the winds aloft. It's impossible!"

The conversation was caught in a tailspin. They knew that they had to get a better bombsight. Sven relished the challenge of building one, but that would take far too long. Mark knew that getting anything useful from the U.S. Army was nearly impossible and suggested asking the British. Hans thought that with enough practice they'd get better. But no one had a solution that could solve the problem fast enough to be of any practical use.

Then Jake came up the stairs. He had flown out to the bombing range and had been about a forty minutes behind them. He sat for minute listening to the debate. When Jeni started in for the third time on her idea of stealing a Norden, he interrupted.

"You kids are thinking too hard. It's just like dropping pumpkins." He got up and headed to the kitchen. For the best food in the house was served at a small table in the back, but you had to be on intimate terms with the cook to get an invitation.

That shut them up, except for Jeni, who spouted off, in her snide and redundantly arrogant French accent, "What is that supposed to mean?"

"It means that he sees something that we don't see. And it

will take him way too many words for him to explain it to us. We'll have to figure it out ourselves." Mark had been in this situation before.

Each sat staring at whatever was in front of them. Sven was back to sketching out an improved version of the Norden; Hans was trying to figure out what Sven had added to this batch of brew that made it so smooth; and, of course, Mark was distracted by Jeni's cleavage. It reminded him of a valley that ran between two rounded hills back home that provided some rather exciting flying. That girl had some nice hills and valleys herself. He was sure that they'd provide some exciting flying as well.

"Hills and valleys!" He exclaimed. "That's it."

The blank looks prompted him to continue. "We're going to be flying down in the hills and valleys. We don't want to attack from 15,000 feet. We don't need to dodge anti-aircraft fire. We want to be seen. We're going to attack from 500 feet. This *is* just like dropping pumpkins! Pumpkins that explode, but still, what's the secret to good pumpkin bombing?"

"Clear view of the target is the key to success," Sven insisted.

"True, but you still need your ground speed and altitude." Hans still blamed an altimeter setting for an errant pumpkin that had resulted in his winning the "Most Likely to Hit His Own Hangar" award the previous year.

"For most of our missions, we'll either just use the true airspeed or, if the winds aloft are too strong, just calculate the ground speed from landmarks as we approach the target. It should be close enough anyway." Jeni was right. *Must be reading some of those aviation books I lent her*, Mark thought.

"One problem at a time," Mark said. "Sven, I'll bet we could get an old artillery rangefinder, could you optimize it for say, a five-hundred to one-thousand foot range? That would give us a precise altitude."

"Almost certainly, I could." Sven was contemplating the complexity of such an endeavor. "But you still can't see anything. Next, you'll be asking me to chop off her nose and a glass bubble install."

He had started to chuckle at his own joke but then noticed that everyone else was looking at the Ellen Jane.

"Gents, I was only joking, serious you can't be?"

"All the new bombers have glass noses, why not the Ellen

Jane?” Mark inquired seriously. “Chop off her nose, put in some plexiglass panels and you've got the perfect pumpkin dropping perch.”

“Sounds great,” Jeni said as she turned to Sven, “but put one scratch on my picture and we'll need a new mechanic.”

11

There's an old adage regarding weather and aviation: it is better to be on the ground, wishing you were in the air, than in the air, wishing you were on the ground. Mark was experiencing the antithesis of this axiom for the first time in his flying career. For the skies were clear, the air was smooth, a tailwind was pushing him along and the engine was running like an oversized Swiss watch, but boy, did he wish he was on the ground. No, wait, he wished that *they* were on the ground. Jeni or Sarah or both; wouldn't matter. For even over the roar of the Reliant's nine cylinders, he could hear them biting at each other. He would have preferred an all-out fight; let 'em scratch and pull hair and slap each other, get it over with and move on. This polite bickering was driving him insane, mainly because he had no idea what it was about.

The trip had started out okay. Sarah met them at Jake's, on time as usual. She loaded her bags into the back with Jeni's stuff. The ladies seemed to be getting along, chitchatting and such, maybe because Jeni wasn't dressed like a expensive hooker. Instead of the short red skirt and heels, she was wearing a pair of tame slacks, practical boots, and a denim blouse. He really wasn't paying much attention to them as he added the six quarts of oil to the engine, or did he only add four quarts? Did he forget to add the other two quarts? *Damn*. He tapped the oil pressure gauge. It looked okay but this Wright

engine drinks oil faster than Hans drinks beer. That's when the argument had started, Jeni had been upset about ...

A sharp poke on his shoulder interrupted his own segue.

Sarah was poking him in the shoulder while yelling in his ear. "Well, which would come first?"

"Which what?"

"I would want the generator installed right away, Jeni wants to build the hangar first."

Good, at least they're fighting about something important, he thought sarcastically. Of course, neither has any control over any of it. The generator won't be here for at least a month; can't even fly it in until the trees are cleared. Then he realized that he had just derailed the first interruption of his segue from his original train of thought.

"We need to clear the trees first," he yelled back, hoping to give them something else to think about. Moving backwards in his thoughts, he convinced himself not to worry about the oil since he couldn't exactly land and add any anyway. Actually, he'd like to send them both out on the cowl to check it for him. *How can two women make more noise than a four hundred and fifty horsepower engine?* he wondered. *Neither was this loud when they flew alone.*

Ah, that was it! Sarah had gotten into the front seat, probably out of habit, before Jeni could. Jeni had stopped him after he'd emptied the gallon jug into the engine, as he was starting down the ladder, and told him to "tell your girl to move." He told her not to make a big deal of it. He then remembered saying, "You can ride up front on the way back. Hand me those two quarts down there." Yes! He had put them in. So, this was all about who got to sit up front! They were as petty as his two nieces fighting over the wishbone at Thanksgiving. This could be a long trip. But at least he remembered that he had put in all six quarts of oil.

He wasn't flying directly to the airstrip but had headed out on a more northerly course. By doing so, he could intercept a bearing off a local AM radio station and follow it, via the Radio Direction Finder, RDF, to right over the field. Very handy in the often lousy tropical weather.

Mark pointed at the RDF and handed Sarah the headset. "Start listening," he commanded gently. After all their trips to Yale, Sarah had become a fairly proficient navigator. She could tune in the stations that gave directional guidance

better than he could and had figured out how to plot intercepts from other stations. She always got him within a couple of miles of the destination. She had no interest in actually flying the plane, but she seemed to enjoy the puzzle work involved in keeping track of its location over the uniform sea of green below. Or more likely, she just enjoyed telling him what to do.

Mark handed Jeni a map and told her to practice her navigation skills as well. After all, if you're going to be a pilot, you'd better know how to find your way home.

This inadvertently spawned a new rivalry. Each woman was afraid that the other would win this game of *find the airstrip*. Thus, they both became so focused on the task at hand that Mark began to enjoy flying again. About an hour later they were over the field. Of course, they then started arguing about who saw it first. Mark announced that he had already spotted the field five minutes earlier but hadn't said anything so that they could further hone their navigation skills. He then added that they both found it at the same time. The truth was that Sarah found it first but he wasn't admitting it.

He made the standard low pass over the runway from the southwest, staying well above the trees but close enough to inspect the runway for new obstacles, such as any twenty-five-foot anacondas that might be napping in the sun. It also notified the villagers nearby that they had arrived. By the time Mark had turned around and set up his approach, Preacher Joe could be well on his way to greet them.

The approach end of the runway crept up to the edge of the river bank, with a thirty-foot drop to the water below. Though Mark had described this to her earlier, Jeni hadn't thought much about the implications until the Reliant dipped below the trees and was skimming along just above the water on a short final approach. She could see that the airspeed was just a few clicks above the stall speed. Now she understood what Mark meant when he said, "screw up on your final approach and it will be your final approach."

Come in too low, and, if you're lucky, the steep river bank will act like a dartboard and you're the dart. But at least it shouldn't hurt much. If you're not lucky and get even lower, you'll catch a wheel in the water and the plane will get sucked into the river, probably cartwheeling if one of the wingtips decides to join the landing gear for a swim. The really bad

news is that the impact probably won't kill you, but good luck out-swimming the piranhas.

Come in too high and you won't be able to stop before the trees at the end shred your fragile craft into scrap metal and tattered fabric. And turn you into jaguar chow.

Even if you get the main gear planted at the right spot on the runway, if you veer off the center line, or heaven forbid, ground loop it (that is, lose control and let the tail swing around in front of the nose – a seldom fatal, usually expensive, but always embarrassing mistake), the trees on either side will reach out and tickle you. At least you might survive that. Of course, it could be days before help arrives. All in all, it was a pleasant little airfield. It certainly kept the riffraff and sightseers away.

But none of that was relevant today, for Mark had nailed the landing and brought the Reliant to a smooth stop by the buildings at the end of the strip.

12

They rolled to a stop in front of the bunkhouse. Twenty-four feet long and ten feet wide with a shed roof, it had enough room for six or seven guys to bunk down. A door on each end and four windows. Assuming it had rained lately, it even had running water. Since the roof sloped in only one direction, the boys rigged up a rain gutter that routed the water to a couple of barrels that were six feet off the ground. You could even take a shower if you weren't too modest and didn't mind cold water. The most important building at the site, the outhouse, was about forty yards further north.

On the southwest side of the bunkhouse stood the remains of the first hut that Preacher Joe had built. It consisted of six posts standing in a hexagon with a tin roof and a fire pit in the middle. It was almost twenty feet in diameter from post to post. The walls were gone but they maintained it as an outdoor living room. A chimney of sorts, fabricated from an old barrel with the bottom cut out and with a corrugated steel umbrella for a hat, stuck through the peak of the roof. It wasn't very fancy, but it vented the smoke and allowed them to keep a fire going even in the rain. The fire pit was ringed by flat stones that served as chairs, with large logs for backrests. All in all, the compound was pretty fancy for this neck of the woods. Then again, none of the local judges awarded points

for artistic expression, only for the compulsory routines. It rated a nine-point-five.

They unloaded the plane and hauled the stuff to the hut. Sarah was becoming animated, like a kid waiting for Christmas. Jeni was amazed at how happy she was to be there. Mark was unfazed; he had seen this transformation before. Indeed, it was one of the aspects of her personality that he found both intriguing and perplexing.

Jeni, on the other hand, was realizing that the Reliant was a virtual time machine and she had just jumped backward about a hundred years. Not comforting for a woman who considered a hot steamy bath an inalienable right.

Sarah and Mark commenced their standard routine. Mark started building a fire while Sarah cleaned off the small table that ran between two of the posts and started setting out plates and tableware. After noticing Jeni's bewildered looks, Mark explained the protocol.

"We provide the fire and Coca-cola, and the men of the village will provide the main course." His smirk was too blatant, even for him.

Jeni just stood there, unusually quiet.

"Oh, it won't be up to Bette's standards, but it will be fresh and, shall we say, unique," Sarah chimed in, rather cheerfully, and then added, "and it's always Chef's Surprise."

Mark could tell she was enjoying this, as she made no attempt to conceal her laughter as she described past menus. Jeni sincerely hoped that the men had felt like fishing rather than hunting. Roast Mickey Mouse, no matter how big, plump, and perfectly grilled, didn't appeal to her sensitive palate.

It was not her lucky day. Preacher Joe and several tribesmen arrived about an hour later carrying a fifty-pound rat. The young capybara looked more like a pig than a rodent and at least they were polite enough to butcher it out of her sight, behind the outhouse. Of course, this had more to do with not wanting to attract predators to the entrails than any consideration for a squeamish white girl. Still, she couldn't imagine eating Mickey's overgrown cousin and figured that going hungry for one meal just meant that she'd appreciate Bette's chicken cordon bleu that much more when she got home that evening.

Sarah and her father wandered off for a few moments, no

doubt so Sarah could brief him on the conversations of the day before. Jeni was a bit surprised, for like Mark had said, he seemed like just a regular Joe.

It would take several hours for the main dish to be ready. The men who came with Joe took turns tending to the homemade rotisserie and arguing about how much wood the fire needed.

The foursome settled down on the stone chairs at one end of the shelter.

“Sarah has filled me in on the basics of your plan and your requests,” Joe started in a dry and businesslike manner. “I must say that it sounds rather audacious. I understand that you need to start immediately?” Jeni tossed a quick look at Mark and made eye contact. It sure sounded to her like Joe had already decided to help. Mark raised his eyebrows just a bit and nodded subtly.

“Father, don't we need to discuss things and make sure we understand the important details before we can agree to such an operation?” Sarah sounded more than just a bit surprised. After all, if Mark and Jeni had picked up on Joe's intent, then there could be little doubt that Sarah had as well.

“What else is there to understand? Evil is planning to set up camp in our neighborhood and we need to help stop it.” Joe was quite definite in his stance. He turned to Mark. “I'll do whatever I can, just short of carrying a firearm, to help you. The firearm restriction is negotiable but only in an extreme situation.”

Sarah just sat, not really glaring at her father but watching him in total consternation. He couldn't resist teasing his daughter, “Now, I think we should all stop and enjoy this rather rare moment; after all, Sarah isn't speechless very often.” He smiled at her, but it didn't help. Her earlier look of confusion turned into a full-blown glare.

“Father, how could we allow ourselves to get involved in such questionable activities?”

“Sarah, what's questionable about it? I'm surprised that you're so surprised. How did you expect me to reply?” He was trying to gently calm her down.

“I thought we'd keep to a pacifistic position? I had no idea that you'd be willing to take sides?” She wasn't answering, she was asking. The poor kid was seeing a new side of her father. It disturbed her.

“Sarah, you'll find that in most cases, the right of a pacifist to practice their beliefs has been paid for in blood; and more often than not, by someone else's blood, someone willing to fight in their stead.”

Mark and Jeni just sat back and observed. They both knew that while they were in the same war, this wasn't their battle. Joe would have to handle his girl himself.

“My daughter is still at that youthful idealist age.” Joe wasn't teasing her this time.

“If that's what you want to call sharing God's love, then so be it.” Sarah was digging in her heels.

“Sarah, this isn't about God's love but Satan's evil.” That was his fire and brimstone sermon voice. He wasn't shouting, but the inflection was clear to the point of being raw. “If we see men perpetrating evil and do nothing to stop it, then we share in their guilt.”

“But Father, vengeance belongs to the Lord ...”

“Yes, it does. And we must never act in a vengeful or retaliatory manner. Nor must we ever use violence or force to impose our values on others. But we must always be ready to use whatever force is needed to protect the innocent.” He closed his eyes as he paused for a second. “It isn't as clear of a choice as most theologians would like.” His voice indicated that he had distracted himself with his own argument. “Now tell me, how do you interpret God telling his people to go and annihilate their enemies?”

“That was different, it was in the Old Testament.”

“Oh, I didn't know you were a dispensationalist?” Mark tossed his editorial remark out casually, without even thinking about it. Jeni, unfamiliar with the term, didn't know if she should be impressed, but she could tell that Sarah was. That wasn't a term typically batted around by pilots.

Joe didn't give it any real notice and continued. “No, child.” That was his equivalent of Mark's use of the word “babe;” endearing and slightly condescending at the same time. “Evil hasn't changed and never will, not until the end of time itself. My goodness, even Prime Minister Chamberlain has finally recognized that such evil must be met by force.”

“Lord Chamberlain did his best to avoid war. Shouldn't we do the same? We could jeopardize everything we've worked for here.” Sarah was becoming indignant, approaching acrimonious.

"I fear that Chamberlain's actions may have done more to encourage war than prevent it. But I'll let the historians debate that. Regarding us, how could this jeopardize us?"

"What if the Brazilians find out? What if our sponsors find out?" Her tone was sarcastic; not something her father was used to dealing with.

"So they find out? What have we done wrong? Mark and his friends offered to lengthen our runway, helped us build a clinic, so what?" Now Joe was getting agitated.

"And they find we're keeping a warplane here?" The sarcasm continued.

"We're not keeping a warplane here. Mark is. Remember, we don't exactly own this land. If someone keeps a plane here, that's not our responsibility."

"But you're known for the company you keep. We can't claim ignorance when we knew all along what was going on."

Joe turned to Mark and Jeni, "Maybe you should give Sarah and me a moment alone?" That was a relief to both of them, as the tension between father and daughter was reaching an uncomfortable level.

"I'll give Jeni the grand tour of the area," Mark said. He and Jeni headed off.

13

To make themselves scarce, Mark and Jeni had gone off to explore the trail that led to the village, going only so far as the footbridge. By the time they returned, Sarah had regained her composure and was serving lunch. Good thing too; the aroma of the grilled meat had been calling them for some time. She stoically handed Jeni a plate with fried sweet Manioc strips, a bunch of berries – Jeni wasn't sure what kind – and several generous slices of roast pork.

Mark had brought the customary case of Coca-cola. Joe joked that it was the only vice that he had introduced to the village. The tribesmen loved it as much as he did. They straddled the logs and ate using the log for both a seat and a table. It wasn't until Jeni looked over to the table to see if there was enough for seconds that she remembered that they weren't serving pork. She had seconds anyway.

Joe restarted their conversation. “Sarah now understands my position, and is working through her own. I'm sure we'll be discussing this in the future.”

He continued between bites. “Building a clinic in the village actually makes a lot of sense. Many of the natives here are semi-nomadic. We'll see an entirely new community of patients every few weeks. It would be like having a mobile hospital except that the patients move around rather than the doctors. Plus the village is on the river, accessible by their

small fishing craft. This is really an answer to a prayer." Jeni wasn't so sure about that, but she wasn't going to risk jeopardizing his support over a minor theological point.

"The biggest issue is the trees," Joe continued, sounding a bit skeptical. "Remember what it took to clear out this much?" he waved an arm around to indicate the length of the current runway. "It's one thing to look at a map and decide to clearcut fourteen hundred feet of trees. It's entirely another matter to actually do it."

"Things have changed," Mark announced. "One of our people has a connection with a lumber company and has rounded up a couple of Dolmar chainsaws." Like everyone knew what they were.

"We don't need to cut chains." Joe was playing with the words, but his tone made it clear that he didn't actually understand.

"It's a new invention out of Germany. They've got a long bar," he held his hands about three feet apart, "and they have, well, imagine a bicycle chain running around it with saw teeth on the outside. It has a small gas engine. Takes two men to handle it, but it will slice through trees like a hot knife through butter."

"How fast?" Sarah was trying to get involved on a non-controversial topic.

"Oh, Hans says about four to five minutes a tree. Two saws, if things go right, we could have the trees down in less than a week. We'd still need to cut up the trunks and dynamite the stumps."

"Will you behave with the dynamite this time?" Sarah was giving Mark that *don't let it happen again* look. Joe was chuckling to himself, Mark was trying not to and nodding, semi-seriously, to Sarah.

"Sounds like a story I'd like to hear," Jeni requested.

Sarah huffed, sounding very upset and serious in an artificial way. "We were building that footbridge when someone," she made a face at Mark, "thought it would be funny to drop a stick of dynamite in the water as I was walking across! Covered me with water and mud and who knows what else!"

"It was only a quarter of a stick."

"Scared me half to death." She was trying not to laugh. Frankly, she had enjoyed the attention from Mark. It was one

of their first meetings and she'd had a slight crush on him. Jeni suspected that this crush still lingered and was probably stronger than either of them knew.

"Okay, you'll get the trees cut, I can provide at least thirty men to help clear things out. Probably just burn most of it in place," Joe said. "We publish a newsletter every three months. We'll announce the clinic project in that. I'll also spread the word around town."

"Father, the newsletter went out only five weeks ago, the next edition isn't due for months." Sarah was getting tied up in details.

"Doesn't matter. We'll just send out a short one telling about an anonymous donor who is helping us with the clinic." Joe wasn't going to let a few details slow down the construction of his new clinic. "It's perfectly true," he added with a slight grin directed at his still skeptical daughter.

"I do have one, possibly delicate, question that I must ask." Joe suddenly took on a businesslike tone again. "I don't want to sound like the preacher who's only interested in your wallet, but I would like to know – just who is paying for all this?"

"Let's just say that some Brazilian nationals are very concerned with the direction that things could go. It would be difficult or awkward if they were found to have a direct involvement, so they called us." Mark was skirting the issue.

"Of course, an unofficial Foreign Legion of sorts. They can't be blamed if a bunch of wild foreigners set up camp in the jungle, now can they?" After pondering the political issues, he returned to a more mundane one. "You know, we may be able to raise some funds ourselves. Any harm in that?"

"No, of course not." Jeni jumped right in on that idea. "In fact, it would help with the cover story." Her mind started to drift for a few seconds and returned with an enthusiastic smile. "You know, I have social connections in numerous cities. Most of the ladies are involved with charities already, I'm sure that one more would be welcomed. True, none of these people are particularly religious but many would like to help the natives. Even those that don't truly care about such issues want to be seen as caring. Would you be willing to attend a few social fundraisers?"

Joe had been straddling the log with his plate between his legs. He sat for a second, chewing and thinking about this

offer. Then in an instant, he swung his leg over the log so he could turn and face Jeni, knocking his plate to the ground. Ignoring the plate, he exclaimed "Kodachrome!" He didn't usually point at people, but he had his index finger aimed right at Jeni.

Both Jeni and Mark looked at Sarah. She just shrugged her shoulders.

"It's the latest film from Kodak. It lets anyone make full-color transparencies that can be projected almost like a movie! Just one picture at a time but in full color! *National Geographic* is shooting everything in it. The colors are brilliant. We've been taking black and white photos because that's all there was and they just go in our newsletters anyway." He was standing now. "We'll rephotograph the village in full color and project the pictures at these fundraisers. We can even provide post-by-post, beam-by-beam updates as the building progresses."

"Father, that sounds rather frivolous, doesn't it? I mean, does it matter if it's in color or not? Do you have time to go dashing around the country?" Now Sarah wasn't asking, she was telling.

"That's not the point, dear." Joe had a vision, or maybe the vision had Joe, it was hard to say. "Remember our motto, 'all things to all people?' Soon, all the motion pictures will be in color. If they can show color, why shouldn't we? Of course, I'll need a new camera." He rushed over by Jeni and sat down next to her. "Everyone's shooting something called thirty-five millimeter, I read about it last month. Listen, Sarah can run things here alone, she does it all the time. I'll fly back with you and Mark, get the equipment we need and then come back and start photographing. In the meantime, you can set up some of these fundraisers you're talking about. I'm used to doing presentations in a church setting, but I'm sure I can adapt."

Sometimes a plan just comes together bigger and better than anyone could have anticipated. Everyone agreed that having Joe attend a few Ladies' Aid Society meetings and visit a country club or two was an excellent idea. Everyone hoped that they might pull in some extra cash, but figured that if nothing else, it would add a great deal of credibility to the program. Everyone except Sarah – she seemed unusually quiet.

Joe continued, his enthusiasm undampened, "I'll hurry back to the village and get what I need; we can leave right away."

"I guess we'll have to hurry if we need to get to the village and back in time for you to leave." Sarah was sounding too businesslike.

"No reason to rush." Mark raised his arm and pointed into the distance. "Cumulonimbus, a whole line of them, right between us and Jake's. We aren't going anywhere tonight. Go get your stuff. If you sleep here with us, we can leave at first light. Storms should be gone by then. Don't worry about supper – I've got my emergency supply of Mark's Marvelous Stew in the bunkhouse."

Sarah groaned. "Oh, please, couldn't we just find some grubs or insects or maybe some small rodents? Anything but that stew."

"Now Sarah," Joe protested in Mark's defense, "Mark's stew is actually quite, well, satisfying in a rustic, manly sort of way." Turning to Jeni, he remarked, "I'll be back shortly, no reason that we can't start discussing our plans tonight." With that he headed to the trailhead and into the jungle.

Sarah had complained about being tired and decided to stay with Jeni and Mark. Mark went to check on the Reliant, while Jeni decided to check on the accommodations. Secretly, he wondered how she'd do without room service.

Soon, Sarah had wandered over to the plane as well. She picked up a rag and started to help him wipe oil from the cowl.

"So, how long have you known this woman?" she inquired in a casual voice while cleaning the same clean spot again and again.

"Oh, about a year and a half, I suppose. Really got to know her after she started taking flying lessons." He didn't realize how his casual answer irritated Sarah.

"Really, flying lessons?"

"Yeah, she can handle the Reliant quite nicely now, but there were some rather exciting moments," Mark said with a chuckle.

I'll bet there were, Sarah thought, and they probably didn't have anything to do with an airplane either.

"So she's a pilot as well as a cheap slut?" She managed to keep the "cheap slut" part to herself.

“She's getting there, needs to work on her navigation skills, though.”

Mark had retrieved a short stepladder out of the Reliant's baggage compartment and climbed up to check the oil.

“I don't remember you mentioning her before. Do you work with her a lot?”

“Well, she's part of our team, so we usually bump into each other several times a week. She's a heck of dancer too.” He had finished cleaning off the dipstick and returned it to its tube, pulled it out again, and then asked, “Can you get me a quart from the baggage area?”

She returned with the oil only to find Jeni standing next to Mark's legs, supposedly to help steady the ladder. She handed him the can of oil and the opener/spigot that had been laying in the box with it.

“We'll make a mechanic out of you yet, knew just what I needed,” he commented, innocently, as he added the oil. Jeni moved a bit closer to the ladder. She was now standing so close that his thigh brushed against her breasts as he descended. *I can see how you bump into each other, alright*, Sarah thought.

“Let's keep that fire going, we should probably find some more wood while it's still light out.” The three of them collected enough firewood for a good-sized bonfire. To be fair, the women actually collected most of the wood, each trying to outdo the other. Mark was relieved to see the two women working so well together; *maybe they'll get along after all*, he thought.

14

About three hours later, Joe re-emerged from the trees carrying a small duffel bag. The tension between Sarah and him was no longer noticeable, but she hadn't yet relaxed. But then again, Mark wasn't sure she ever really did.

Now, after eating her first *rattus gigas*, Jeni wasn't too worried about anything that Mark could cook up. Turned out that his special stew was nothing more than three cans of baked beans, a can of tomatoes, and as much chopped spam as one could stomach. It wasn't ever going to make the menu at Jake's Cafe, but it was edible, in that rustic, manly sort of way. They soon settled around the fire, watching the thunderstorms in the distance and drinking coffee of a quality that people back in the States didn't even know existed.

"So, obviously you have sources of information that aren't available to the general public. What's going to happen next?" Joe queried Mark.

"No one knows for sure, but it would be hard to believe that Hitler is going to be satisfied with what they've already conceded to him. I think it's just a matter of time before this 'phoney war' becomes all too real."

"Of that, I have no doubt. But I must confess that I find it ... surprising that you expect him to attack Brazil. Some would consider that farfetched," Joe said, trying not to sound too skeptical.

"It's not as farfetched as you might think. Remember, we live in modern times. We can cross that ocean in only hours by air; a day or so by ship. And don't forget Hitler's U-boats," Mark countered.

"And do not forget the *Bismarck*," Jeni added. "It is one of the largest dreadnoughts ever built."

"Or the *Tirpitz*, its sister ship," Mark added. "And the krauts are building a monster of an aircraft carrier, the *Graf Zeppelin*."

"Granted, Hitler has quite a navy and the U-boats pose a special threat, but could he supply an army all the way across the ocean?" Joe asked.

"He wouldn't have to. At least not for long. Once established in the north, Vargas's army isn't equipped to push him out and by the time the US got involved, assuming that they did, he'd be too well established. By then he could raid the oil fields in Venezuela. Brazil has lots of resources ripe for his picking," Mark explained. "In fact, his plan would probably be to export supplies and materials back to his bases in Europe. He has a shortage of oil, you know."

"None of that is very comforting." Joe became quiet, lost in thought.

"If he does not attack Brazil, then he will attack France next." The French accent in Jeni's voice betrayed her concerns. "Many fear that this war will become another world war, except worse."

"Isn't that a bit of an exaggeration? Really? Worse than the Great War? Most of the men who fought in it are still alive, well, the ones that survived. Mankind can't be stupid enough to make that mistake again, so soon?" Sarah seemed more interested in contradicting Jeni than actually making a point.

"I'm afraid that, yes, mankind can be that stupid." Joe's voice had just aged thirty years and his eyes looked even older than that. "It's not an issue of intelligence actually, but of pride. I've argued for years that all sin comes down to pride. But that's a sermon for another day." He was leaning back against the log, his eyes were still open but seeing things that none of the rest could. All they could see was the blank expression on his face, exaggerated by the flickering light from the fire, for the sun had abandoned them.

"Sarah, I must confess that I haven't completely explained how I arrived at my present philosophical position and why

I'm so compelled to enlist in Mark's army." His expression was back and his eyes and voice, while not completely back to the present, were getting younger. "War seems to bring out the true man, the best of him or the worst of him. And it changes all who even get near it."

Jeni looked at Mark only to find him looking inquisitively at Sarah. She was looking back at them both with eyebrows raised. The group stare was interrupted when Joe resumed speaking.

"This issue is not just a hypothetical question for me. You know, Sarah, I was once a pacifist myself. Until I faced evil for the first time. And, God damn it, and I mean that literally, I will not let it surprise me again." At this, Sarah perked up, and Mark and Jeni looked at each other in anticipation. Neither Mark nor Sarah had ever heard Joe invoke the wrath of God in such a manner before.

"Sarah, you know that as part of my seminary training I spent six months in southern Africa?" Joe casually laid the foundation for what was clearly going to be an intense story.

"Of course, you worked at a clinic among the tribesmen; you even met Mother there, briefly, you were on the same train together for an afternoon." She turned to Jeni, temperially forgetting the context of the conversation and her loathing of the other woman. "Mother said she knew right away that he was the one for her. Must have been terrifically romantic. Of course, they didn't start courting until they had both returned to the States."

It was probably Jeni's lack of response that knocked the merriment from Sarah's voice as she turned back to her father. "What about it?"

"There are details of those events that I have never mentioned to you. I was waiting. Waiting until I thought you were mature enough to understand. If you're not ready now, then you never will be." Joe didn't seem sure where to begin.

"I was there in 1902."

He looked at them like that should mean something to them. Then, in a somber and detached tone, he continued. "The Boer war was raging near us. The British and the Dutch had been slugging it out for years. They used typical tactics for the time but both sides left us pretty much alone. I was helping a missionary called Brother Mike at a school and clinic for the tribesmen. Neither side really relished the idea of

getting the natives involved. Things were complicated enough without them.

“But soon we found ourselves treating bullet wounds – both Boers and British. We were impartial, we'd help anyone who needed help. We'd nurse them back to health. When they got well enough to travel, we'd send a message to their comrades and someone would come get them. We operated in an unofficial neutral zone.”

He paused again with a look of anger spreading across his face.

“Then Lord Kitchener arrived. The Brits had taken the main cities but couldn't control the countryside. So the despicable wretch implemented a scorched-earth policy.”

“What's that?” Sarah asked, her hesitant tone betraying that she wasn't sure she really wanted to know.

“They'd burn the crops and farms. Destroy any supplies that the locals could use. But Kitchener took it even a step farther. He actually rounded up the women and children and locked them in internment camps. Tens of thousands died from disease and hunger.” He had to stop and rub his eyes.

He took a deep breath, closed his eyes and, in a much younger voice, continued. “One morning two young girls showed up at our door. Sisters, one seventeen, the other nineteen, half-dressed, hadn't eaten in days and scared to death. Said that their farm had been burned by the British. They feared that their parents had been taken to a camp and they didn't know what to do.” Joe stopped to think; no one could have interrupted had they wanted to.

“Brother Mike let them in. No reason not to – we were there to help everyone. We fed them and told them they could hide with us until they decided what to do. I don't have any idea how or who but somehow, the British found out. That evening two British soldiers showed up just after dark. I remember that they were both lance corporals. They said that they had been sent for the two girls that we were sheltering and we needed to turn them over to them.”

He paused. His manner was gradually becoming more confident, more self-assured, the emotions running stronger. “This was very odd, the British are big on protocol, they wouldn't send such low-ranking soldiers to arrest civilians. They'd include at least a lieutenant in the squad. Brother Mike had been around a long time, good grief, he must have

been pushing sixty. Doesn't seem that old now that I'm almost there. Anyway, he knew something wasn't right. He said 'No, bring your captain back tomorrow and we'll discuss it with him, but I will not give them to you.'

"They hadn't seen me. I had been in the back room when he answered the door but I was watching through the crack between the jamb and the door and could hear everything. Even from back there, I could smell the liquor on them. They argued, the soldiers claiming that they were following orders, needed to get back, et cetera. We both knew what these vermin wanted."

"What?" Sarah inquired with an almost comical innocence. Jeni and Mark looked at each other, amazed at how naive she could be.

"Rape them, and then probably kill them. We had found dead civilians before. As I said, war brings out the worst in a man." Joe was disappointed by having to explain the obvious. He took a deep breath and took his time restarting. Mainly this was to give Sarah a chance to contemplate the situation. She had turned an interesting shade of white.

"Brother Mike stood his ground. He was not a large man, maybe five-foot-five, a little chubby, certainly no serious threat to these two. The one who had done most of the talking suddenly pulled a bayonet and stuck the point right here," Joe pressed his chest in the middle of his diaphragm. "Then he said 'now, we're taking the girls even if I have to step over your dead body to get them. Why not be a smart preacher and just get out of my way?' Brother Mike just puffed out his chest and shook his head no."

Joe reached down and picked up the canteen at his feet and took a long drink. They all wished he'd drink faster but he didn't seem to be in a rush. He continued in silent thought for a moment before forcing himself to continue.

"Then in an instant, the soldier pulled back the knife and started to plunge it into Mike's stomach. I didn't have much time ..."

Sarah had slid forward on her rock and yelled in a whisper "What ... did you do?"

"Well, I charged through the door with my Bible in my hand and yelled 'Stop!' The men froze. Then I preached the best sermon of my life. Told them of God's love, his coming wrath, and his offer of grace. Oh, it took almost fifteen minutes but

in the end they both repented and left as changed men.” He was nodding his head in satisfaction.

“You must be kidding? That’s incredible.” Sarah was truly amazed.

“Of course I’m kidding.” He made no attempt to hide his sarcasm of her comment. “Sarah, by the time someone draws a weapon, the time for talking is over.” He let that sink in for a minute. His rebuke had been harsh but not as harsh as the truth to follow.

“No, I charged though the door all right. But I had a Colt Bisley in my hand. The same one that you carry in your backpack, Sarah. I fired. Put a bullet in that man’s chest, knocked him back and he was dead before he hit the floor. His comrade in crime was drawing his own sidearm, so I had to put a bullet in him too.”

“Oh Father, now you must be joking?” She really, really hoped that this was a really bad joke.

“No, most certainly not. I killed them both. I had always wondered how I would respond in such a situation. I don’t suppose anyone knows for sure until they’ve been there. For me anyway, pulling the trigger was amazingly easy. Once face to face with evil, I just knew I had to stop it.”

Mark had been holding his breath and expelled it all at once, then started to breathe again. Jeni refused to let herself be surprised by anything and acted as dispassionate as always. Sarah just sat, leaning forward, resting her elbows on her knees and squeezing her hands together like she was afraid to let go of herself.

“Then what did you do?” Jeni’s French accent was betraying her true emotions.

“Brother Mike and I carried the bodies to our makeshift morgue behind the mission. The next morning we sent a messenger to the nearby British garrison simply telling them that two of their men had died and they could come claim the bodies. A sergeant and a couple of privates showed up later and took them without any questions. Just two more casualties of war. He did make one comment. He said, ‘These two, they’ve been trouble since they got here; I’m surprised they weren’t shot in the back by some of our own.’”

“And the girls?” Mark inquired quietly.

“We moved them right away that night, to a hut in the village. The British wouldn’t even consider looking for white

girls there. We waited a few days to determine if they really were wanted. No one else inquired about them. We managed to round up some decent clothes for them and Mike took the three of us to the train depot. I rode with them to the nearest port and put them on a ship. If anyone asked about us, I presented my American passport and minister's credentials and they ignored us. When I got back to the States myself, about nine weeks later, there was a letter waiting from them. They had made it to safety and were staying with an uncle in the States."

Mark and Jeni had been so focused on the storyteller and his tale that they hadn't noticed the suppressed gasps coming from Sarah. Her short quick breaths were now too loud to ignore. By the time they looked, she was starting to tremble, staring off intently at her father.

It took her three hard swallows before she could answer her own question, "Mother would have been seventeen in 1902."

Joe nodded silently.

"And Aunt Birdie, she would have been nineteen." She looked up at her father, her jaw now trembling.

"Yes, this is not just a hypothetical question for you either, I guess."

Sarah jumped up and moved to the edge of the shelter with her back toward them, one arm across her chest, holding her other elbow with her hand over her mouth, not crying but wishing she could.

It's hard to accept your parents' blatant violation of your principles, especially after realizing that your very existence depended on it.

She stood still with the light from the fire dancing on her back and the dark shadows it created dashing around, taunting her in her nightmare.

Mark stood up and motioned with his head to Jeni, signaling that Sarah needed some alone time with daddy and they should vamoose. She rose and followed him in silence over to the hut. When they looked back, Joe was standing, hugging Sarah, who had remembered how to cry.

15

Mark and Jeni retired to the bunkhouse and lit a lamp at each end. The building consisted of one large room with three sets of bunks down one wall, two small tables, and a half dozen chairs. It had started life as a small storage shed, adjacent to Joe's old cabin. When they decided to build a runway, the first thing they did was to expand it and toss up some simple bunks. It even had wooden floors. This gave the numerous volunteers who came to help a reasonably dry place to sleep. Once Joe finished the bridge and trail to the main village, he spent most of his time there. The bunkhouse was now back to being a storage shed. Mark kept miscellaneous parts, engine oil, and other incidentals there since he was out this way almost weekly and the Stinson required some attention at about the same rate.

"Should I string up a blanket to give you ladies some privacy?" Mark asked.

"Only if your prissy girlfriend needs it." Jeni had already stepped behind the end of a bunk, turned her back and removed her shirt and bra. She then put back on the shirt. "This will be comfortable enough for me. However, you can walk me to the outhouse. I'm not too keen on getting eaten by a big kitty cat." She had heard all the jaguar stories, some of which were even true. After they returned, they chatted for a few minutes about the events of the evening. It soon became

apparent that Joe and Sarah weren't anywhere near finished, so Jeni took a top bunk at one end of the building and Mark at the other.

Mark awoke the next morning to find Sarah still asleep in the top center bunk. Mark wanted to talk to Joe alone anyway, so he left the women asleep and headed out.

Joe had a fire going and coffee brewing. Breakfast consisted of rice and fried Spam. After all, no one came to the Yale airstrip for the cuisine.

Joe started the conversation with the very topic Mark wasn't sure how to address. "So, what did you think of my confession last night?"

"A man's gotta do what a man's gotta do." Mark replied as dryly as he could. "Probably would have done the same thing myself. The big question is, what did Sarah think of it?"

"Well, she's still sorting through it. It was probably more of a shock to her than she deserved. I just never seemed to be able to find the right time to tell her." He paused, nodded silently to himself. "She's more adaptable than you give her credit for, Mark. She'll be okay."

Then Joe jumped to the other topic that Mark had been trying to figure out how to broach to him.

"Sarah tells me that Jeni's not exactly a choir girl."

"I'll bet Sarah's description wasn't that polite." Mark laughed.

"True, though I don't think my daughter's evaluation is completely objective, if you know what I mean?"

Mark nodded and smiled.

"I'm not too concerned about it; after all, my boss hung around with some rather questionable characters himself. I think she and I will get along just fine." It took a second for Mark to figure out which "boss" he was talking about.

Jeni emerged from the cabin first. She came over, helped herself to some breakfast, and sat down next to Joe, both of them on the log to avoid the damp ground. When Sarah came out a few minutes later she skipped the breakfast and just grabbed a cup of coffee. To Mark's surprise, she came and sat unusually close to him, her hip almost touching his.

Now Jeni and Joe had been discussing nothing of importance, but as soon as Sarah showed up, Jeni got quiet. "I suppose we should be going soon, shouldn't we?" Jeni asked Mark, looking at the narrow gap between Sarah and

him. They finished their meal in relative silence; only Mark and Joe exchanged the odd word or two.

As they loaded the plane, Joe turned to Jeni and asked, "Would you like to sit in the front?"

"Oh, I don't really care, go ahead." She was taken aback by his offer; few men really considered her feelings, unless they were pursuing something else.

"Why don't we both sit in the back? It would be easier to continue our conversation that way," Joe suggested. Sarah took a deep breath at his response and was getting ready to huff, quite unhappy with that idea. Mark could tell she was trying to devise a means to derail it. Before she could contrive something, Joe gave her a hug. "Be careful out there, keep praying and I'll see you in a week." He kissed her cheek and added, "I love you."

"I love you too and I'm always careful." She gave him a quick kiss back.

As Sarah gave Mark a hug as well, he noticed that Jeni seemed unusually uncomfortable with this display of affection. She had climbed into the plane and was staring out the opposite window.

Joe got in the back next to her and buckled in. For a second, Mark wondered if Sarah was going to jump in as well, but she backed away and stood just past the wingtip as he started the engine. There she stood, arms folded across her chest and no expression on her face. *Need to keep these two women as far apart from each other as I can*, he thought.

Soon they had cleared the trees and were climbing to altitude. Mark thought it was downright ironic how Joe and Jeni could be getting along so well when she and Sarah couldn't go three minutes without snapping at one another.

Jeni was equally surprised. For obvious reasons, she had had little contact with religious professionals. She assumed he would only want to discuss spiritual matters and would soon be diving into her past and offering all sorts of advice. Probably in a rather supercilious manner. But Joe didn't bring up anything of the sort. He had a wide range of interests, including an almost professional understanding of photography. He was more experienced in medicine, at least the practical aspects of it, than most doctors she had met. There was very little regarding the current political mess in Brazil or the events happening in Europe that he wasn't

familiar with. His knowledge of history was astounding. Not only was he fluent in German, but his French was quite good, especially considering how little he had used it lately. They even exchanged childish jokes in her native tongue, just for his practice.

But the biggest thing she noticed was his eyes. Joe was one of the few men who looked at her face, not her chest or legs, when he spoke to her. When she talked he actually listened. They were laughing, joking, and conversing in a tenor that she had not experienced before. It baffled her completely. While she enjoyed it just as completely, she was disturbed by the unfamiliarity of the situation. Maybe it was some religious ploy to gain her trust?

It seemed like only moments later they were in the pattern at Jake's field, turning base-to-final, getting ready to land.

After landing they unloaded the plane and decided to grab a quick bite to eat at Jake's.

They gave Joe a tour of the Ellen Jane and as they were leaving, Joe noticed the nose art. With a smirk, he commented, "When did you find time to pose for the artist?"

For the first time, Mark saw Jeni start to blush. She started to stammer, but regained control and replied, "I didn't pose, nor was I even asked about it. Some juvenile boys thought it would be humorous."

Joe just laughed a bit. "I can guess who." He looked at Mark. "Oh well, boys will be boys, won't they?"

They enjoyed a quiet meal on the Flight Deck, while discussing the unique approach that they would have to take on this fundraising tour. After all, the goal wasn't actually to raise money, it was to maximize exposure to minimize suspicions. This led to Joe's primary concern, which was a combination of basic honesty and the unintended impact that they could have. "I don't want to mislead people into making financial sacrifices for this project," he insisted.

This was one military operation where doing exactly what people would expect was exactly the right strategy. They would start by visiting the local churches that were already aware of Joe's ministry. Here, Joe would present the latest developments and acknowledge the anonymous donor that was making this possible. If someone wanted to contribute, fine, they'd accept the donation but there would be no overt requests for cash.

“That's going to really confuse a lot of people,” Joe said with a smile. “It's a sad commentary, but a lot of people are used to hiding their wallet when a guest preacher comes to church. Sadder still, I suspect most will be relieved that someone else has been generous enough that they don't have to feel guilty about not contributing.”

A similar approach would be used on the social clubs and ladies' groups. Jeni would arrange the event and Joe would present his slide show followed by a low-key appeal for support. Again, he'd emphasize that most of the costs were already covered by the mysterious donor. Everyone would assume that someone else was kicking in enough cash so that they wouldn't have to.

The real message was to emphasize all the infrastructure that had to be put in place to support the clinic. This would include flying in building materials and fuel for the generator, lengthening the runway, and performing numerous other essential tasks. Once this message got around, it was hoped that the Germans wouldn't pay much attention to all the supplies actually being used for the Ellen Jane.

“The nice thing about the Nazis, they're so self-centered and over-confident that if it looks remotely logical and doesn't impact them, they'll take it at face value,” Mark suggested. “Then they'll ignore it.”

Soon they split up and went their separate ways for the night. Joe and Jeni were to meet again in a few days after they each contacted their respective audiences and Joe had bought a new camera.

It had been one of the most unique days in Jeni's life. She had met a lot of men over the years and could usually outthink most of them, but she couldn't for the life of her figure out Joe. It wasn't until she was locking the door behind her in her apartment that it hit her. And it hit hard. There was one and only one explanation for Joe's odd behavior toward her. She had observed it in others at a distance, but never experienced it. *He was treating her like a daughter.*

She cried herself to sleep that night.

16

Everyone knows that a bomber must have a machine gun. However, there was not enough clearance on the belly for a turret. It would have to be mounted on the top of the plane. Besides, Mark rationalized, it would look more like a regular bomber that way. This gave Sven a fair amount of room to work with, but reinforcing the roof around the required opening wasn't exactly straightforward.

The turret was a self-contained unit, temporarily mounted on the bed of an old truck for reasons that were completely pragmatic. Sven had built most of the unit in Mac's hangar at Jake's strip. To test it they would just cover the whole bed with a tarp and drive it down to the range. And who would have foreseen just how much fun it would be to drive around a field while spitting lead in all directions with two .30 caliber machine guns? Well, they all had.

This was Sven's favorite creation, as it was the perfection of a design that he had started a decade earlier but had not been allowed to complete, or at least not allowed to complete the way he had envisioned it.

One of his first commissions as an independent consultant was for an amusement park back in the States, Andy's Fantasy Land. A new owner had just bought the park and wanted to transition from the old California mining theme to a modern airplanes and rockets theme, but he didn't have the

courage. He couldn't commit to anything new, always shifting back to whatever the previous owner, who stayed just involved enough to cause trouble, suggested.

When the previous owner talked him into dropping the plans for the wild Space Fighter roller coaster and replacing it with a harmless kiddie ride called Coal Miner's Creek, Sven's Irish temper got loose. He gathered up his tools while cursing out the proprietor, in Latin of course, and stormed out. Sven figured that that was the end of it; he was upset that he was out a chunk of change, but mostly angry that he had been too new to the business aspect of business to catch the warning signs earlier.

The next day, the young owner showed up at Sven's workshop, hat in hand. His father had been a language professor and the kid knew enough Latin to have gotten Sven's message. He also confessed that he was approaching bankruptcy. "I'd rather go down charging forward than stumbling backwards. Let's do it." He had changed the name to Joe's Carnival and sent the former owner packing. He then gave Sven *carte blanche* to move forward with what resources were left. Sven managed to finish a simplified version of the ride, now called the Space Gunner, and saved the park. He still owned the fifteen percent stake that he had received in lieu of cash.

But this time, the machine guns would be real.

The result was a double-barreled carousel for one. The gunner would sit with just his head in the bubble, grasping two handles to control the rotation of the unit and the elevation of the guns. Each handle also had a trigger that would fire both guns. It provided 360 degrees of free rotation and almost 90 degrees of elevation. He had mounted it high enough that it could actually shoot just below the plane's own wings. A cam mechanism kept the gunner from shooting off the tail and wingtips.

"I confess that I'm mighty proud of this creation," Sven announced as Mark, Jeni, Jake, and Hans entered the old barn. They had set up shop about twenty miles away from town at an old farmhouse situated down in a valley. There were very few people around and those that were around wanted nothing to do with anyone firing machine guns. It was the perfect test range.

Mark got in the contraption without waiting for an invitation.

He twirled clockwise and then counterclockwise, ran the guns to their azimuth limits and asked, "You're sure that it won't hit the airframe? I don't mind shooting off my mouth, but I sure don't relish the idea of shooting off my own tail."

"Worry not about it," Sven reassured him. Jake and Hans took their turns, all smiles. Then Sven turned to Jeni. "Madam, would you like to be the first lady to try it?"

Jeni looked down at her high heels and short skirt, surveyed the gunner's seat with its control/power pedestal located directly between the operator's knees and replied, "Maybe next time. We have a bigger issue to discuss. What do we do about Frantz?" That took the fun out of everything.

"What do we know?" Jake asked no one in particular but looked at Jeni.

"Well, I've had plenty of chances to listen to him. All I have to do is dine alone and he won't leave the table. I think he'd spoon feed me if I asked him to." *Hell, most men would do that*, Mark thought.

"Like most of you men, he loves to talk about himself. I suppose he thinks it impresses us women. By the way, guys, it doesn't. Anyway, he's second-generation Brazilian but still all German, and doesn't really have any strong political motivations."

"So he's just in it for the money?" Hans asked. Purely mercenary agents offended him.

"No, I don't think so, I think he's in it for the excitement, the thrill of being involved; anything that seems exotic excites him."

Jake glanced at Mark, who nodded quietly. *Oh yeah, they both had the same thought.*

"Lots of places to hide a body," Sven suggested. Engineering types like to eliminate problems as soon as possible. A very practical solution in most cases.

"No, use him." Jake said.

"I agree," Jeni commented immediately. "He could be very useful. Anything we tell him goes right to the Germans and from a source they'll believe."

"He has access to the communications room at the office." Hans was talking to himself.

"Really?" Jeni caught that implication before any of the others. "So he could get us inside to the encryption machine?"

This could solve a major dilemma for the team. Hans had

collected copies of numerous encrypted messages that had been sent between Gruber and Berlin. These clearly contained important details, but they could only be decoded on a special typewriter known as the Enigma.

“Ja, but we still need the code book to set up the machine. Hauger keeps it in his coat pocket at all times. He claims that he sleeps with it under his pillow,” Hans commented.

Sven needed to clear up the conflicting details. “These messages are of such import that they leave them just laying around?”

“The Germans are so confident of their encryption technology that they aren't concerned about anyone finding the coded messages. That's why Hans was able to sneak out copies of what Hauger bragged were the most important ones,” Mark explained. “Let's hope we can use their overconfidence against them.” He paused. “Okay, we've got the messages, and I'll bet that Jeni can trick Frantz into giving us access to that code machine. We just need to borrow a code book.”

“Well, it's not as if you can just check one out from the library, is it?” Jeni added, Mark couldn't tell if she was being sarcastic or just skeptical.

17

Mark hadn't actually expected her to say yes. After all, he had invited her at least three dozen times and had always been turned down. It wasn't as if his invitations had any off-color motive; he invited a lot of women to the Flight Deck. Now that he thought about it, there usually was an ulterior motive, but not with Sarah. She was more of a kid sister than a potential girlfriend. A kid sister that he actually got along with and who didn't gossip about everything and everyone around.

Joe had just called from the train station and he and Jeni would be there in twenty minutes. Mark went ahead and ordered two pizzas. The first would be Bette's famous Meat Monster. The second would be half beef and mushroom, the other half pineapple, ham, and sauerkraut (they were also expecting Hans to arrive).

Why did she come, he wondered? She was obviously uncomfortable. He couldn't really blame her. After all, there were people dancing downstairs, the waitresses were running around laughing and serving beer, and an informal poker game was being played only three tables away. Good grief, what if someone saw her hanging around with people having fun? It could ruin her reputation! That had been her excuse for not going to see the movie *Dawn Patrol* with him the year before. Now he realized that that was a rather dark and

somewhat disturbing movie. But she wouldn't go see *Bringing up Baby*, *Boys Town*, or *Robin Hood* either. She had to protect her precious reputation at any cost.

They were sitting almost side by side. Just to be funny, he set his beer bottle down directly in front of her. So close that anyone walking by would assume it was hers. First she glared at it, then at him. Then she raised an arm, planning to return it to his side of the table, but realized, just in time, that someone might see her with it in her hand.

Instead, Sarah picked up her glass of water and said, "Mark, move your beer or I'll pour this in your lap; explain that to all your friends." She meant it. He moved the bottle. She did grin a bit, once the safety of her reputation was ensured.

"Have you heard anything about how it has been going?" he asked.

"I've received letters from the first churches they've visited. Seems to have gone ... rather well." There seemed to be confusion in her voice, and it was compounded by frustration.

Just as Mark was trying to decipher exactly what "rather well" meant when delivered in that tone, Joe and Jeni appeared on the catwalk. Joe was wearing his typical short-sleeved shirt with a tie, which at least was bright red and not the usual dreary brown one. Jeni was dressed in a longer dress, a rather light shade of turquoise, showed no cleavage at all, and her sleeves stopped short of the elbow and puffed out. The ruffles around the collar added class. The narrow belt accented her figure without being slutty. That had to be a new dress.

Joe greeted Sarah with a kiss on the cheek and sat down next to her. Jeni sat between Mark and Joe.

"Well, how did the tour go?" Mark inquired, not directing the question to either one in particular.

"I would have to say that both Jen and I were quite surprised. How did you put it earlier?"

"I used the word *normal*. I had to admit that the church people Joe introduced me to were much more normal than I expected. But then, I really didn't know what to expect."

They both laughed. Joe continued, "And I must admit that the socialites that Jeni introduced me to were equally normal." More lighthearted laughter.

"We visited six churches and five social clubs. And the three

lesson points,” Joe turned to Mark, “I’ve already explained to Jeni that as a preacher I must have three points for any sermon, the habit carries over to other areas as well. First, people were genuinely interested in what we’re doing. Second, a half dozen –”

Jeni interrupted with, “Actually, I counted eight.”

“Oh yes, eight people thanked us for our low-key appeal. Then they made generous, very generous in fact, donations. We raised far more than I expected.”

“I can guess at his third point,” Jeni said. Joe raised his hand, motioning her to continue. “At two of the social clubs, we were approached by members of the German underground.”

“How do you know that?” Mark asked.

“Well, I was able to deduce it by analyzing their questions, listening to the subtle tone of their particular German accents, and, of course, certain facial expressions,” Joe explained seriously.

“That, and they had Nazi swastikas on their tie clasps. Oh, and one of them introduced himself as Herman Gruber’s cousin. The other’s last name was Meier and he mentioned his uncle’s recent death by falling over a railing,” Jeni stated smugly.

“Well, of course, those facts only confirmed my suspicions.” Joe was trying to act serious, but everyone knew better. “Okay, but on a serious note, there can be no question that they both attended only to evaluate our activities.”

“I won’t argue with that. They were clearly checking us out,” Jeni insisted.

“However, my comments about facial expressions, analyzing their questions and the tone of their voices – I am sure that they believed us. After all, the story we told was true, it just wasn’t the whole story.” Joe’s confidence was genuine.

“Again, I won’t argue. I can tell if someone has bought my story; they bought it.” Jeni was equally confident, but her voice expressed more excitement than Joe’s. What not even she was aware of was that most of her excitement was due to her close proximity to Mark.

Sarah was sitting with her arms across her over-brassiered chest, looking – no she was staring – at her father’s necktie. It appeared that she hadn’t bothered to hear a word they had said.

"Is that a new tie, father?" She was unusually curt.

"You noticed, yes, Jeni thought we needed to jazz things up a bit. I can't believe how many compliments I got on it; no one has ever said anything about my other ties." *Your other ties, the ones I bought you*, she fumed to herself. Her emotions weren't as private as she thought, both Mark and Joe had no doubt as to her state of mind. But neither knew why.

Sarah picked up her purse. Mark couldn't help but comment, partially out of hope that a little comedy would ease her mood, "You know, my Army duffel bag was smaller than that purse; probably more fashionable as well." No one laughed, Sarah opened the monstrosity and retrieved a letter.

"This came from one of the churches you visited." She handed the letter to her father.

"Really, already?" He glanced at the envelope and remarked, "Hillside, the first church we visited." He removed the letter and started reading to himself while providing editorial comments to all. "They are very excited about the new clinic, even plan to add support for it into their budget, oh," he stopped, grinned at Jeni and then looked at Sarah. "They hope that I and my *daughter* can visit them again soon."

"Your daughter?" Jeni remarked. She sounded surprised, but Mark knew that faux-shocked voice well.

"His *daughter* was busy back here." Sarah retorted. Well, at least now they knew what she was mad about.

"Sarah, we were only there for a few hours, it's a logical mistake. Some of those dear old women barely remembered my name only ten minutes after the service." He started to laugh, "One of them actually thought she had come for a wedding. Probably thought it was supposed to be hers. Please, Sarah, don't let this upset you."

The pizza came just in time; so did Hans. He pulled a chair over, squeezed between Sarah and Joe, and promptly grabbed a slice of his favorite: pineapple, ham, and sauerkraut.

Like many of the idiosyncrasies of Jake's Cafe, this rather unique pizza was a long-lasting effect of a short-term event. Mark, Hans, Jake, and no one remembers who else, but a bunch of the guys at any rate, were playing pool and discussing food, women, beer, women, airplanes, women, and so on. Hans mentioned his mother's homemade sauerkraut; someone boomed, said that rotten cabbage was inedible. Of course Hans, and, surprisingly, Jake, took offense. They both

insisted that good sauerkraut would improve any dish. Mark, with a slice of his favorite beef/mushroom in hand, joked about a sauerkraut pizza.

Hans thought that with sausage or ham it would be excellent, Jake suggested including pineapple, mainly because Bette was overstocked on it. The order was rushed to the kitchen; Bette rushed back, "Just how much have you boys been drinking? Or do you think I've been drinking? Is this a joke?"

It took some fancy talking to convince her to make one; even then, she only agreed since it was after hours and no one would see or smell it.

It turned out to be quite tasty, had a sweet and sour tang to it. Even made the menu. While it may be considered an acquired taste, don't knock it until you've tried it.

Hans didn't have to order a beer, it just appeared. Looking over at Jeni's dress, he commented, "That must be a new dress; you almost look respectable."

"Yes, it is new, Joe got it for me. He thought that a slightly more traditional outfit would help sell our story. Don't panic, I still have my red skirt."

Sarah, who had slowly regained her composure and had appeared to be enjoying the conversation, suddenly looked furious again. For a second or two, Mark wondered if she was planning to rip that dress right off Jeni. Now that would be interesting. He decided that fashion was too dangerous a topic for the night and took the floor.

"Listen, we've anted up to the game. The story has been published and Sven is almost done with the turret. Soon the Ellen Jane will be ready. In fact, I hope to be holding auditions for the machine gunner role in a few days; we'll even drop some steel pumpkins using Sven's new bomb sight. But once that turret is installed, she can only stay here for short periods and even then she'll have to come and go at night. We've got to finish that airstrip." All eyes turned to Hans, who was caught with a mouthful of pizza.

Mark was curious as to how Hans's report would compare to the animated reports from the volunteer lumberjacks. It was no surprise that their reports included some rather salty descriptions of their foreman. Hans was driving them hard. So hard that one or two had threatened to quit, and Jake had to reassign them to other tasks to keep them on the team. True,

Hans was pushing himself just as hard, but he wasn't making any friends at the airstrip.

The German swallowed quickly, washed it down with a swig of beer, and replied, "The chainsaws are going faster than we expected, all the trees are down. They've even cleared it wider than planned, you'll be able to land a DC-3. The other good news is that it's been dry enough that they've been able to burn off most of the stumps, haven't needed to use much dynamite. If we could get a large number of men with shovels to smooth the ground, you'd be able to land there, now."

While Hans had been talking, Jake arrived. He must have smelled the sauerkraut pizza.

"Well, I can bring forty or fifty of the village men down in a day or two. They'd be glad to help, if you can find enough shovels," Joe said.

"How's the hangar coming along?" Mark asked while snitching the pepperoni off the other pizza and adding it to a beef/mushroom slice.

"That's more of a problem. Building that large of a building with hand tools will take too long. We really can't start until we get the generator in to power the sawmill. And we can't install the generator until we get the runway cleared for a larger plane. In fact, it won't even fit in the Ellen Jane, we'll need a bigger plane than that." Hans stopped for more beer. "We do have your office finished."

Mark's office was a sixteen-by-sixteen room located in what would eventually be the back corner of the hangar. Right now it would be used for storage and as an extra bunkhouse, but later it would be the operations center and radio room, with space for a cot.

"Got a buddy with a DC-2," Jake replied. He and Hans were both staring at the last slice of sauerkraut pizza. Hans spun the tray around, positioning the slice in front of himself and took it, without even looking at Jake. Jake then took a piece of the meat monstrosity for himself, without bothering to hide his lack of surprise at Hans's egocentrism.

"How long to finish the hangar after the generator is up and running?" Jeni asked.

"At least another month; that's a big building, a lot of work, even without a door," Hans replied. The door was considered an unneeded luxury for now. The main purpose of the hangar was to provide a dry place to work and keep the Ellen Jane

from being spotted should a plane wander over the airfield. No one but Joe and Sarah had any reason to actually land there, but occasionally other pilots would use the strip as a navigational landmark when overflying the area.

Mark sighed loudly and leaned back in his chair, hands behind his head. "We don't have another month."

"We've got fishing nets and burlap bags," Jake said, between mouthfuls.

Sarah took her eyes off of Jeni just long enough to toss her father a confused glance. He just shrugged his shoulders.

Mark caught the exchange and volunteered an explanation, "It's an old trick. You weave strips of burlap through the holes in the fishing nets and you have a poor man's camouflage net."

"Oui, it was invented by the French in the Great War," Jeni just had to comment. Sarah just gave her a polite but insincere smile.

"Yeah," Mark added. "They used it to hide large artillery, trucks and even entire airfields." That would have to work. It was decided to push the Ellen Jane back into the trees and cover her with tarps and camouflage netting while the hangar was being finished.

"How much do you think those nets weigh anyway?" Mark asked.

"Not much, more net than camo," Jake replied.

"You know, there's a very real possibility that someday we'll have to land somewhere other than here or at Yale. Bad weather, engine problems, whatever. Once we get the hangar built, it might be a good idea to keep those nets in the plane, in case we need to hide her somewhere unexpected," Mark suggested as his mind drifted off. "I have a feeling that someday, I'll be glad that I have them along."

18

She was, without reservation, the best copilot he had ever flown with. Mark watched Sarah double-check the altimeter setting and then compare the directional gyro to the magnetic compass. Of course, she adjusted for the magnetic deviation, just as you're supposed to. Then she started the count-down timer on the Davtron M807 Advanced Chronograph; every fifteen minutes she'd recheck the heading, just like the procedures told you to.

He could focus on the fun part, punching through the clouds ahead, knowing that Sarah had reset the flight timer just after the engine start. In thirty minutes she'd remind him to switch fuel tanks. Now she was dialing in the Radio Direction Finder. They'd be within a couple of miles of their desired course the whole trip.

The only downside, if you could call it that, was the added distraction of her boobs bouncing around next to him. But, that was a small, and actually pleasant, price to pay for her assistance.

He had occasionally wondered why he was so preoccupied by mammary glands. Of course, he wasn't alone in this regard. Some guys had a much more serious case of *gotta see some tits* than he did; cost them a lot of money. Personally, he felt that such burlesque shows made bigger fools of the men attending them than of the women performing. He had given

up trying to resolve this dilemma and decided he'd just have to live with the addiction.

And the best part of her copilotting? She had no interest whatsoever in touching the flight controls. None of that typical copilot whining about not getting enough stick time. Or trying to impress him with their knowledge of aviation trivia. Oh, she'd let him know if he wasn't holding his altitude or had bounced a landing; but in general she left the flying to him and she happily handled all the administrative garbage that he disliked.

They were straight and level at exactly 4,000' above Mean Seal Level (or MSL in pilot talk). He always did his best to hold his altitude and heading as precisely as possible with her on board. She was all too happy to remind him if he deviated. They were well above the widely scattered clouds, which were imitating salad dressing splattered on monster-sized broccoli and acres of lettuce. Their shadows, randomly visible through the gaps, confused the scene but added depth.

Joe was in the back seat, sorting his latest batch of color slides, as they were called, by holding them up to the light and then putting them carefully into slots in a box. Mark grinned: if he wasn't so fond of Joe, he'd push forward sharply on the yoke, diving the plane and sending all those slides up toward the ceiling. A new version of the old fifty-two pickup game.

However, there was enough tension in the plane already, left over from the night before. The arrival of the pizza had allowed them to avoid continuing the uncomfortable conversation involving Jeni, Sarah, and Joe. Mark had assumed that Joe would have fixed things by now. He hadn't.

Soon it was time to duck out of the clouds and line up on the Yale airstrip. Simple to spot the strip now – not only was it twice as wide and twice as long, but the stumps being burned provided quite a smoke signal. It was exhilarating to make the low pass now. It didn't feel like his wingtips were scraping the branches. He turned around and lined up on final.

“Don't mean to be a backseat pilot, but are we a bit higher than normal?” Joe asked, sounding about as worried as he ever got – a level that most people wouldn't have even detected as anything but idle curiosity, but Mark knew him well.

“Don't need to make as low of an approach now that the trees are down. We can go around if we need to,” Mark replied, and Joe nodded in approval.

After what he considered an almost perfect landing, Sarah commented that he wasn't quite as centered as he could have been. Mark taxied over to the buildings, spun the plane around and pulled the engine back to an idle.

"I'm not going to shut down; I want to get back before this weather changes," he yelled over the engine.

They had already discussed this, so Sarah and Joe grabbed their bags and climbed down. They carefully followed the trailing edge of the wing past the wingtip before heading for the hut. They had long been warned that the spinning propeller always won. Mark waved, they waved, and he took off.

"We need to hurry if we're going to make it to the village before dark," Sarah commented.

"I think we should spend the night here." Joe's reply surprised her and her face expressed it, so he continued, "There are issues that we need to discuss, and by the time we get back to the village, greet everyone, have supper, we'll both be too tired."

That was sort of true. However, she also knew that his real reason was more Biblical, as in "do not let the sun go down on your anger." Her father knew that letting her wounds fester on the long trek back to the village would only make them worse. She conceded without an argument and carried her stuff over to the hut. She was soon glad they had stayed; a light rain was falling so they had a cold snack and sat in the hut watching the sun set.

Joe broke the deadlock. "So, you don't care for Jeni very much, do you?"

"And you're surprised by that? I've told you about her. How can you stand to be around her?" Sarah made no attempt to disguise her disgust with Jeni or her disappointment with her father.

"Sarah, most of what you and others have told me is unsubstantiated. In fact, most of it is clearly nothing more than gossip." Joe was as calm as ever.

"Father, you can't be serious? She's a French whore who came to Brazil to find the man that killed her mother and then kill him."

"I'm not going to try and defend her virtue or lack thereof. But as far as I'm concerned, most of that's just gossip and you shouldn't repeat it. After all, do you know if it's true?"

Have you asked her? Even were it true, you shouldn't spread it around."

"No, I haven't figured out how to word the question and ask her if she has actually prostituted herself. Any suggestions?"

"Yes, don't," Joe replied curtly.

"Aren't you worried about spoiling your reputation? And mine? People will think she's me!"

"Sarah, an old woman got confused. No one really thinks she's you. I actually was pleasantly surprised by how well Jeni fit in. Unless people are told the rumors, they'll suspect nothing unusual about her."

"Father, she's a con artist. She'll fit in anywhere."

"Maybe, but we are not to judge those outside the church; only to love them. Jesus was famous for associating with women of ill repute himself, you'll remember."

"Oh, I know, but that was different," she hoped her father wouldn't ask *how so*. "I'm only concerned about our reputations. We're hosting a bomber of some kind in our hangar and you're dashing around with this hussy ..."

"Sarah," he interrupted strongly, "you will not refer to her in those terms. It simply isn't right, much less is it loving, and it borders on gossip. You know my thoughts about that."

"I know," she said complacently and then preceded to quote his oft repeated mantra: "if you're not part of the problem or part of the solution, don't repeat it.' But still, you are known by the company you keep and we're not to associate with such people."

"Wrong and you know it." Joe was getting just a bit frustrated. "We're not to associate with those who claim to be *Christian* but live as if they weren't. Jeni has made no such claim. And the goal is to draw people back into the fellowship, not to push them further away. You need to examine your real motives here."

That plunged them into silence. They relaxed in it for a few minutes. Joe got up and lit one of the lamps, and then startled her with, "Does this have anything to do with Mark?"

"Oh, don't be absurd!" She forced a laugh. "Mark isn't my kind of man and you know it. Besides, if he wants that slut, then they deserve each other."

"Sarah!" his voice approaching a shout, "I've warned you about what you call her." He now shifted to a more fatherly voice. "You're not too old for a spanking, young lady."

“Sorry.” But she had to grin. That was a threat he had routinely thrown at her since her last spanking, at the age of six. It was intended to defuse the situation. “But the way she dresses, the things she talks about, places she goes, it’s just so, so ungodly. And she doesn’t seem to care about her soiled reputation at all, in fact, I think she’s proud of it. Have you seen the picture of her on the side of the plane?”

“Yes, I’ve seen the picture. I imagine that she could have made them change it. But none of this should surprise you. She wasn’t raised the way you were.”

“But someone has to set her straight,” she said with a sweet and loving voice full of righteous indignation.

“Yes, and that someone is not you.” Joe was emphatic. “In fact, it is impossible for you to do, not properly anyway. Your only responsibility is to love her, be her friend, maybe even a sister to her.”

“Sister? You must be joking. I know that God loves her and I’ll try to. But sisters? That would take a bigger miracle than I have the faith to believe in.”

19

Once again the artist stood before the canvas, anxious to begin. This would be a technically inspiring project. Sven would get to experiment with the new plastic material known as *plexiglass*. It supposedly could be heated and then formed into just about any shape. He had finished all the calculations, even drawn up some rather impressive and detailed blueprints. All the material was on hand and the tools ready.

However, this time, the canvas didn't just sneer back at him; it *glared* back, daring him to even start. This presented such an enormous and impossible constraint that so overwhelmed him that he couldn't even begin to begin starting. Panic had already tightened its grip on him, muddling his thoughts so severely that he took drastic action. He called Jake, Mark, and Hans in for consultation.

"Gents," he began in a capitulating tone. He had the drawing laid out on the bench in front of him. "Here's the problem." He pointed to a section of the drawing. "I have to cut right through here, no other way to do it."

As is often the case, the technical issues were overshadowed by the political ones. They could see his dilemma and it was a serious problem. To add enough room for a bombardier to sit up front, he'd have to significantly alter the curved lines of the existing nose. This would require slicing right through Jeni's

image. Sven had taken her threat seriously. And none of the rest wanted to try and find another engineer either. After proposing numerous ideas, some bordering on the ridiculous, Jake finally said, "Just replace the panels and repaint."

Of course! Sven could move back to the first bulkhead, drill out all the rivets and save Jeni's images. Surely she couldn't complain about that? Besides, they'd look great framed and up on the wall. He could just repaint new images on the new nose. Just to put Sven's mind at ease, Mark agreed to float the idea past her that evening; he'd let Sven know right away if the threat still applied.

The next morning, having received the all-clear, Sven, once again joyous and enthusiastic, began the rhinoplasty on the Ellen Jane. After, of course, carefully removing the panels that contained Jeni's image with the care of a museum curator handling a Michelangelo. The challenge was to complete the work before Monday morning, as the Ellen Jane needed to be back at Yale before the krauts returned to Jake's field.

Sven did his best to maintain the sleek lines of the Ellen Jane, but there are times in the world of engineering when form must follow function. Rather than the sleek pointed nose she had been born with, the Ellen Jane now sported what could best be described as half of an egg sliced lengthwise. Five clear panels, held together by a grillwork as in a stained glass window, now comprised the nose. Of course, the frame was aluminum rather than lead and the panels were clear plastic.

The top two panels formed a quarter of a slightly distorted sphere. The resulting bubble was the width of the airframe and consumed the top half of the Ellen Jane's new nose.

A flat panel angled from the front bottom edge of this bubble back to the floor of the fuselage. This was to give the bombardier an undistorted view of the target.

But it was the two lower side panels that contributed most to the egg-ness of the form. It had taken a fair amount of heating, bending, and swearing on Sven's part to fill the complicated space that remained between the flat panel, the bubble on top, and the fuselage.

The real challenge wasn't in adding a greenhouse to the front of the Ellen Jane, but in providing a means to get in and out of what was already being called the "pumpkin dropping perch." The original designers at Beech hadn't envisioned

someone wanting to sit in *front* of the pilots and had therefore made no such provisions. Always opting for the simple and straightforward solution, Sven just installed a hatch in the floor to let the bombardier enter from underneath.

All was fine until Mark saw it. "I don't want someone trapped up front if things go wrong," he insisted. Since their mission profile was almost exclusively low-level operations, leaving via parachute wasn't always going to be an option either. This literally sent Sven back to the proverbial drawing board. The only real choice was a complete reworking of the right side of the instrument panel. Complete *removal* would be more accurate.

"Sometimes you just get lucky," Sven announced as Mark and Jake entered the cockpit. This time, he had called them in for a design review before he started drilling rivets and cutting sheet metal. "We've got to thank the designers at Beechcraft, we do. I'll just start right here to the right of the right subpanel, right there on the floor, and cut right through everything to the right. Right?" Sven asked, pinning his finger just past the halfway point on the panel.

That was too many rights for Jake, but he got the idea. Mark liked the plan right away. "So you'll just relocate all the instruments from that half to new homes on the left and we'll have a nice clear passageway for our bombardier. I'd like to see you try that on a Cessna!"

For those unfamiliar with aircraft cockpit configurations, the straightforward, everyone-does-it-this-way engineering solution for a control yoke resulted in the shaft of the control yoke going directly into the instrument panel, just like the steering wheel in a car. The control elements, all the bell cranks, pulleys, and push rods would be concealed behind the panel. This probably made life easier for designers, but miserable for avionics installers and the poor mechanic who had to fix things. It would also make removing half an instrument panel nearly impossible.

Beech was different, really different. Their engineers took a more radical approach and mounted the yoke on a pivoting arm that protruded straight up from the cockpit floor alongside the cabin walls. It then angled over and placed the yoke in front of the pilot. All the control cables, and in Beech's case, the drive chains, were under the floor.

This meant that Sven was free to chop away at the right

side of the panel without involving any of the flight control cables, pulleys, or other such rather important items. Granted, it was a tight squeeze, with not much room to maneuver, but it was a rather clever solution to the problem. Even though the copilot would probably need to get out of their seat if anyone wanted to enter or exit the nose.

However, it was now obvious that the work would not be completed by Sunday night, and with the Ellen Jane missing her nose, she couldn't be flown back to her hiding place.

So Jake staged a fight between himself and Bette. He had her come storming out onto the shop floor, screaming about how the fumes from his spray gun were ruining the ambiance in her bistro. Truth was, the fumes were rather annoying to the non-aviation crowd and she relished the chance to be an actress. Of course, Jake, claiming he needed to save his love life, conceded the fight and announced that he'd build the paint booth that Sven had always wanted anyway.

Those who have visited Jake's Cafe would remember that the catwalks only went about halfway down the side walls before encountering the beam that had supported the original door (before the addition). Now Jake added a lightweight bi-fold door covered in canvas. It was attached at the top by hinges to the original beam, another set of hinges ran the horizontal length of the door halfway down, and a set of rollers at each bottom corner ran in tracks up the side of the building. It could be easily cranked up and out of the way or lowered to divide the large building in two.

They installed a couple of heavy-duty ventilation fans, a wall-full of filters, and the transformation was complete. A heavy pedestrian door with a deadbolt lock was added along the side wall on each side to limit access to authorized personnel when required.

It was perfect. They could now hide the Ellen Jane, if only for a few days, in a reasonably secure manner. The krauts at Lufthansa's terminal didn't give it second glance.

By late Sunday, the following week, the modifications to the Ellen Jane were complete. The rangefinder was installed and the bomb release controls moved next to the seat in the nose.

There was one major enhancement: Sven salvaged a joystick from a wrecked biplane that had been hanging from the ceiling over the dance floor. He tied it into the Ellen Jane's

autopilot and it allowed the bombardier to maneuver the plane while approaching the target.

Mark was not thrilled with the idea of someone else being in control of his baby. Only after Sven added a disconnect switch on the pilot's subpanel and limited the bombardier's input to slight course corrections did he approve it.

The boys took turns playing bombardier and they all loved the new and improved artwork on the side.

Regarding that particular topic, Sven was still a bit nervous. That evening, just before the Ellen Jane was to head back to Yale, he heard the summons that he had been fearing.

"Sven, you miserable little twerp!" Jeni's voice pierced right through the canvas wall that isolated the Ellen Jane from the rest of the hangar. "Get in here, you can't hide forever!" None of the other men would accompany him and he had to approach the queen bee alone.

There she stood, ten feet away from the Ellen Jane, staring at the nose. She didn't even turn to look at him, which was actually a relief. She just asked in her quiet, artificially soft, *you better have a really, really good explanation for this voice*, "Sven, where's my skirt?" The strength of her French accent unnerved him further.

Her red skirt. That was the one minor change he had made to the painting. Instead of replicating her red skirt, the one she was wearing right now in fact, he had portrayed her in just her undergarments.

All agreed that Sven had managed to improve on his original work. He attributed the artistic enhancement to practice, but most believed it had far more to do with the fear of upsetting his unwilling model. Whatever the motivation, the image so completely captured Jeni's essence that the boys found it irresistible and yet terrifying.

Just as before, she was portrayed with her back to the audience with her arms folded across her chest. Though she was now wearing a brassiere. She was still sitting on her stockinged legs with her knees pointed modestly away. Her head was turned as she leered out over her shoulder at the viewer. But no skirt.

Granted, her panties were cut in the full-brief style and almost reached down to the welt on her stockings, but she was still skirt-less.

"Well, the red paint, I can't find it," Sven claimed. She could

see the sweat on his forehead and noticed that the shop was now empty; all the other mechanics had disappeared. "I had just enough left over after the first job, it was right over there," he pointed to the bench by the plane, "but it's gone. I was going to use another color but you had told me that it had to be that exact shade of red and ..."

"It just disappeared?" she interrupted suspiciously while glancing sideways at him. "Someone broke in and stole half a can of paint?"

"It might have been my fault." They turned to see Mark standing just inside the door, relaxed as ever. "Frankly, I like the new look, Jen."

"Your fault?" Sven's voice was full of hope.

"Yeah, Sven remembers, I was joking with the boys the other night, said something about 'maybe Sven will run out of red paint; he'd have to paint her in just her undies.' Guess someone took matters into his own hands. Don't worry, Jake will order more. Sven will just add the skirt later, right now I need to get the Ellen Jane home."

Jeni stood glaring at him. Of course, she was well aware that it didn't have the same effect on him that it did on Sven. Oh, she knew that he respected her, but she also knew that he just didn't fear her like most normal men did. And she knew he was speaking the truth. For she had been standing, unnoticed, just outside the door when that conversation took place the night before ...

Jeni had approached the half-open door that had been added for the paint booth conversion. Her intention was to bawl them out for leaving it open. It should have been locked. They were getting sloppy with their security.

She could see Sven, Mark, Hank, Mario, and a couple of the other guys standing around by the nose. Sven had previously removed the panels with her likeness on them and set them carefully upright on the floor, leaning against the workbench that had been moved under the wing. He was just finishing up riveting the replacement panels in place.

She was starting to walk in when Sven said, "This is all the red paint I have left, damn hard to get too. I think there's just enough for two more skirts." That's when Mark started everything by saying, "If he runs out of red paint, he'll have to

paint her in just her undies. I wouldn't complain about that." She started to yell out a rebuttal but stopped. Instead, for reasons she couldn't explain, she stepped back behind the door where she could see through the crack and still hear them clearly.

Then one of the younger boys said, "Sven, this time paint her in the nude, that would really spice things up!" The others laughed.

She thought it was Hank who said, "Yeah, I'd love to see those big tits of hers hanging out while I'm changing the oil!" More laughter.

"Dare not, I say. Be a safety hazard, it would. You'd be so distracted that you'd fall off the ladder." That was Sven's comment.

"And she'd probably want to charge you every time you looked at them! Instead of air *warfare* it would be air *whorefare*," an unknown voice added. The rest laughed.

"Hey, cut it out!" Mark yelled. "Enough is enough. I don't mind you teasing her a little bit, in fact, I think she enjoys it. But this is going too far. Oh, she's no choir girl, but there's not one of you here that can prove she's a whore, can you?" He paused, letting the sting from his words sink in. Then shifting to a mellow yet briskly condescending tone, he added, "Well, can you?" They knew Mark's *don't mess with me* voice; so did she, and he was steamed. The directness of his question highlighted their immature behavior. "She's a valuable member of this team and I won't be having you badmouthing her like that. It's late; we'll finish tomorrow." That completed their humiliation. With their spirits now deflated, they all meandered out the other door and headed up the stairs to Jake's Flight Deck for a beer.

She stood there quietly for several minutes before entering the hangar, pulling the door closed behind her and approaching the bench where the men had been belittling her. Jeni just stared at her own image airbrushed onto the curved aluminum canvas as it sat on the floor. To be honest, it was a pretty picture.

But what were those spots? Looking closer, she could see hundreds of tiny spots of engine oil all over her picture. Of course, it had been in line with the swing of the propeller. Those constant-speed props used oil pressure from the engine to automatically control the pitch of the blades. One of them

must be leaking a bit and slinging oil onto the side of the fuselage. *How appropriate, she thought, matches my reputation perfectly. Beautiful from a distance but all messy and slimy up close. Thanks a lot, Ellen Jane. Even Mark's airplane is teasing me.*

True, Mark went well out of his way to defend what was left of my reputation. But he certainly wouldn't have to ever do that for Sarah and her spotless image, now would he? Skinny little jungle bitch with her ridiculously tight body from running around helping people all the time. Glancing at her picture again, her thoughts shifted. *I wonder if my backside really is that big?*

Now even more depressed, she caught sight of the butchered nose of the Ellen Jane. "Well, Ellen Jane, maybe we have more in common than I thought? Men are always tearing us apart and they never seem to know what they want us to be, do they?"

She turned to leave but stopped. Turning back around she saw the panels where her picture would soon go. They had just been riveted into place and the new aluminum was as polished as a mirror. In fact, it was a full length mirror with the convex surface distorting her figure, stretching it until she looked seven feet tall. She had to laugh.

Mark doesn't know it, but his view of me is just as distorted. So what does he really think of me? Does he really want to see me in just my garter belt and bra? She laughed at the silliness of her own question. Of course he does, but why? Am I just a pair of tits with a nice ass to him? Maybe he just needs a little encouragement to make a move toward me. Or is he looking for an excuse to avoid such a move? Do I even want him to?

She double-checked the hangar, making sure that everyone really was gone. Turning sideways to the aluminum mirror, she pulled her skirt up to her waist. She laughed quietly again at her reflection. *I know Sarah's legs aren't this long.*

Well, if that's what he wants, she thought. She put down her skirt and walked over to the workbench. There, labeled as engine cowls/jeni's skirt, was a quart-sized can of paint. She picked it up; it just barely fit in her purse.

"Well, Ellen Jane, I'd appreciate it if you'd keep this just between us girls ..."

“Whoever took it better hope that I don't find out who he is,” she announced loud enough for the rest to hear as they were cowering just outside the door.

20

The conversation had petered out and so had their pizza. The five of them continued to sit staring at the empty pan, unsure how to resolve this latest dilemma.

“Why not just spread the word that we're looking for a machine gunner and let guys apply?” Jeni asked after the silence had bored her long enough. The guys present, Mark, Jake, Hans, and Sven, just looked at each other. When they realized that she was serious, they started laughing.

After they recovered from her unintentionally comic comment, Mark replied, “Jen, you must not understand men as well as you think you do.”

Now *that* she considered a serious insult, and she fired back a really sarcastic, “Really?”

“Yeah, *really*,” Mark replied. She hated it when he imitated her French accent. She had worked hard to get rid of it and most people thought she was from the States. But, when she got mad or excited, it snuck out.

“Don't have that much ammo,” Jake added dryly.

“No kidding. Jeni, any man I know would jump at the chance to cut loose with twin machine guns from a low-flying airplane. We'd have five hundred applicants. I'd bet even Pedro would sign up for that flight.”

Pedro was Jake's farming neighbor and, while he had grown friendly toward airplanes (partially because Bette bought a lot

of his produce), he wasn't too keen on actually flying in one. Everyone also knew that he couldn't see the back end of his own horse even when sitting in the wagon. Good thing the horses knew where he wanted to go.

"No, this needs to be an invitation-only event. We know the guys around here, I guess we just need to figure out who we should ask. I'm more concerned with how they fit into the team. Frankly, firing a machine gun isn't that hard; we can probably teach anyone to do it," Mark commented.

"Isn't that what you said about dropping bombs?" Jeni wasn't going to let his previous attack on her go unrebuted. Mark ignored her.

After kicking it around, they came up with six candidates: First, Hank, already a member of the team and pretty fair with a shotgun; Mario, a local line boy who had been in the Brazilian army; Mac, an old friend of Jake's, who had accompanied him on the first pumpkin raid years earlier; Barbosa, another line boy whose fast reflexes had earned him great respect on the soccer field; João, also ex-army, claimed to be an expert marksman; and finally, Frank, a bit older at forty-five, but who had actually been a machine gunner in the Great War and was credited with shooting down a blimp.

They launched on a Saturday morning. Mark in the front left seat, the traditional location for the pilot-in-command, with Jeni in the right seat. She really wanted the experience of flying a twin and Mark was tired of listening to her complain. The gunner/bombardier candidates were busy boasting about their gunnery skills.

All except Frank. When someone asked him why he was so quiet, he just replied, "It isn't as easy as it looks." This from a guy who shot at blimps. That shut them up for about eight minutes and then the bragging started again.

In fact, there were two significant wagers placed. For the machine gunner competition, each tossed in 50,000 Brazilian Reis, winner take all. That was over four dollars in U.S. currency; a considerable chunk of change for guys making twenty-five cents an hour. For the bombing contest, the two farthest from the bullseye would be buying supper and drinks at Jake's that evening for all.

They were to use the same bombing range as before, but with an interesting enhancement. Since the Ellen Jane would be attacking moving targets in combat, they needed a moving

target for practice. Jake's buddy had an old farm wagon with steel-spoked wheels and a bed that was too rotten for hauling anything. They fixed the tongue so it would track straight and plowed two furrows down a low hill and out into the field. They'd just push the old wagon down the hill and the furrows would act as railroad tracks to guide the wagon while the ground crew took cover.

The gunnery candidate would take his best shot at it, literally, while Mark flew in a large half-circle around the target, banking the plane to give the top mounted guns a clear view. The bed of the wagon was covered with butcher paper and Jake would count the bullet holes in it and mark them off with a wax pen while his buddy, whose name Jake never bothered to mention to anyone, would tow the target back up the hill. The gunner with the most holes would win round one. To keep things simple and fair, each gunner was given only 200 rounds per gun, with most of the younger men claiming that they'd score at least 398 hits. Frank was more modest, said he be happy to get fifty.

After gunnery practice, each candidate would get to drop one bomb on the old truck that was still sitting in the middle of the circles from the earlier bombing tests. The truck didn't seem too worried.

The men had drawn straws to determine the competition order and Hank won the first seat. As the Ellen Jane came into position, Jake and his unnamed buddy gave the wagon a push with a truck, dived for cover, and waited for the wagon to reach the bottom of hill and head out into the field. He then called on the handheld radio, "Okay, fire away."

It was over a lot faster than Hank had envisioned; 400 rounds gone in ten seconds. It didn't look too bad, most of the tracers seemed to be hitting near the wagon, which meant most of the other bullets would be landing near there as well. Everyone was pretty impressed with the first act.

That is until Jake called back with the score, "One two, twelve hits." Now that was depressing. Frank was right, this was going to be harder than they thought.

None of the next four even got twelve hits.

Frank surprised them: the old guy scored a remarkable, for them anyway, twenty-three hits. He also now had Rs\$300,000 in his pocket.

Now for the bombing practice. Since Frank won the first

round, he got to go first. Jeni set the plane up on a straight and level run at 500 feet and 170 miles per hour, flipped the Nose Joystick Engaged switch to *ON*, and told Frank, "She's all yours."

They felt the plane yaw left, then right and then more right as Frank was over-correcting. Finally, he yelled, "Bombs away." They soon spotted a cloud of smoke from the bomb's small powder charge, well short of the target. But when Jake measured it off, his score of 233 feet was considerably better than anything Mark and Hans had managed earlier. It looked like Sven's bombsight held promise.

Both Hank and João hit within 130 feet; Hank overshot and João undershot. Hank thought he had won with a distance of 97 feet after both Mac and Mario's attempts landed somewhere outside the range of Jake's tape measure. However, Barbosa surprised them all with an incredible 53' near hit.

The problem with Frank winning the shooting competition and Barbosa besting him at bombing was that it resulted in no clear winner for the role of Weapons Officer. Thus the conversation degraded into an argument with half the group claiming that gunnery was more important than bombardiering skills; the other half argued that the turret was strictly for show since the Germans didn't have any fighters in the area anyway and that the Ellen Jane's real mission was to drop bombs.

It soon became apparent that neither side was gaining a strategic edge in this dispute and they declared the contest a draw. Of course, part of boys being boys is finding excuses for why things didn't live up to your previous bragging. So of course, the boys started finding all kinds of reasons why they had missed, either with the machine gun or the bomb. Maybe it was the psychological effect of Hank's performance; maybe the banking and turning of the plane combined with the spinning of the turret. Some blamed the guns; others the ammo; certainly Sven's bombsight needed to be recalibrated.

Finally Jeni had had enough of the whining. Turning around and cranking up her French accent, she yelled back to them, "Maybe it is because none of you are any good?" A mere woman stating something so obviously impossible didn't go over very well, and Mark could see a mutiny in the works. So

he challenged her with, "Do you want to show them how? We've got plenty of ammo and the seventh bomb is waiting for you."

She shrugged her shoulders and said, "Why not, I cannot do any worse." It was a smart move, she had nothing to lose. For should her performance be a complete failure, she could hide behind her femininity. On the other hand, if she got the bomb anywhere near the target they'd be impressed, and even a bullet or two in the wagon would be an acceptable performance, for a girl.

Mark suggested that she start with the bomb drop. That would give Jake time to tow the wagon back up the hill. Since she was in the right seat, she just squeezed past the instrument panel and down into the nose.

A few minutes later and they were on the bombing run. She had watched as Sven explained the bombardier's controls earlier in the day, six times. None of the guys were very good listeners and they had all asked the same questions as the previous guy had asked. She didn't need to ask any.

Right after Mark switched control to the nose, he felt the Ellen Jane veer to the left, too far to the left, but it was Jeni's run, not his. After she announced "bombs away," Mark disengaged the bombardier's controls and banked right, changing course by 45 degrees, and then soon started a hard left turn to give everyone a chance to spot the bomb's impact. No one could see the expected dust cloud and they started chuckling. It must have landed in the trees next to the field, or gone so far over the target that it ended up in the creek.

"We can't see the smoke; where did she hit?" Mark inquired over the radio.

"I owe Jeni dinner," was Jake's only reply. That confused them until one of them remembered Jake's previous offer.

None of the men had even considered looking at the target vehicle itself. It was now laying over on its side and a large hole was visible in the front fender. After all, a hundred-pound steel pumpkin traveling at 170 miles per hour is going to push stuff around when it scores a direct hit.

Beginner's luck was the general consensus. No one mentioned that they were all beginners.

Jeni was rather surprised by this outcome as well, but was more concerned about the unique dilemma now facing her. As she approached the turret, however, she discovered that the

issue resolved itself. The men were so busy fighting over spots at the windows that none were looking as she hiked up her skirt, swung her bare leg over and sat down in the gunner's seat. Once in the seat, the control pedestal between her legs blocked a direct view of anything erotic.

She put on the headset just in time to hear Jake's buddy jest about "Save time and ride down the hill in the wagon ..."

There were several side bets being placed as Mark lined up for the approach. None expected her to beat Frank's score, except Frank. He remarked, "Some guys just had the gift," and promptly bet the entire wad he had just won on Jeni besting his score. All of the other five took the bet.

"Okay, fire away," came from Jake, and a stream of tracers came from Jeni. After about the fifth glowing dot disappeared into the wagon bed, the boys knew they were in serious trouble. Frank just kept grinning.

They watched in disbelief as the front axle and wheels detached and slid underneath the bed. With an unending stream of lead pouring into it, the entire wagon launched itself out of the well-worn furrows, cartwheeled, and disintegrated into kindling.

Jeni stopped firing and complained loudly over the intercom, "Hey, I didn't get to shoot all my bullets." She had fourteen rounds left in each gun.

Nothing more humiliating to a little boy than to get licked by a girl. Except for grown men to get beat at their own game by a babe in a skirt.

They stayed glued to the windows, too embarrassed, too shocked, and too impressed to turn around. Jeni quickly dismounted the gun, laughing to herself. Laughing not about her marksmanship, but that most men had probably dreamed of her bare legs straight up in the air and now they missed it. Except for Frank. He caught part of the show out of the corner of his eye.

Mark was still circling the target site as if he expected the wagon to reassemble itself. When Jeni returned to the cockpit, Mark quickly shifted to the right seat and motioned for her to take the left.

"Let's see if you can fly as well as you shoot. There's your heading, take her to her new home." It wasn't a challenge or a dare, just an honest reward for a great performance. He handed her the chart with a line drawn from the practice

range to the Yale airstrip. As Jeni turned the plane around and started a climb to cruising altitude, Mark asked, "You do know what this means, don't you?"

"What?"

"You, babe, are our new weapons officer."

21

She had worn the red skirt on purpose. Just as she had suspected, Sarah was accompanying Joe. As they climbed the stairs to the Flight Deck, they were chatting about one of the church elders that Joe would be visiting. They were both smiling and relaxed. That is, until Sarah saw that red skirt sitting next to Mark. It didn't appear that she had even noticed anyone or anything else. Exactly the effect that Jeni had hoped for. Instantly, Sarah grabbed her father's arm and pulled him closer, almost causing him to lose his balance.

"Mark," her smile was frozen on her face. Her slighting of Jeni was so obvious that she should have just acknowledged it with something like, *I'm sorry Jeni, but your train doesn't have a sleeper car; how will you make any money?*

Jeni and money. Now that was an interesting topic that never came up in the conversation. For everyone knew that Jeni always had enough cash, her Ford Roadster was not a cheap set of wheels, her clothes were always in style, and her apartment was far bigger than a single girl needed. But no one actually knew what she did to pay the bills. Truth be told, no one was naive enough that they needed to ask.

Now no one thought her a common hooker, maybe more of a high-class mistress. None were brave enough to inquire. Sarah had once, early on, almost broached the subject, but

Mark managed to hush her in time. Frankly, looking back, he wished he hadn't; it would have been pretty entertaining.

The two women just stood facing each other, Sarah clinging to daddy and Jeni moving a bit closer to Mark. Mark waited as long as he could just to see what might develop. Nothing did, so he broke the deadlock. "Joe, this is Hans Schultz, he's in the lumber business and also a pilot friend of mine."

"Glad to meet you, sir. Mark has told me much about you. I sincerely appreciate your support." Hans and Joe shook hands as men do. "This must be your daughter. Sarah, I believe?" His extended hand caught Sarah by surprise, as she had been too busy glaring at Jeni. She shook it as soon as she realized her forgetfulness. Hans said nothing. His lack of facial expression made her wonder if he was even completely awake, but then she noticed that his eyes were dashing about. Not in a suspicious shifty-eyed manner; more like a bird of prey on the lookout.

"Are you just joining us for breakfast, Mr. Schultz?" Joe asked to be polite.

"Actually, I'm traveling with you to Teresina, I have business there as well. I didn't realize your daughter was coming along." Hans's voice betrayed no hint of emotion.

"Oh, no, Sarah's not coming with us. I'm afraid that she has too much to do here and back at the village. Anyway, we need to order our breakfast and eat if we're going to make the train."

So, he didn't want me to come along, did he? Sarah thought despondently. *They're staying in a real hotel, too. I've never gotten such treatment. Whenever we've traveled we had to stay with church members. No fancy restaurants, no room service for us. Eat whatever they put in front of you and make your own bed in the morning.*

Joe and Jeni sat by each other with Hans across from them. Joe looked so happy, like he was proud to be seen with such a vibrant and sensuous woman. Not stuck with his dumpy daughter whom men didn't notice and other women pitied.

Frantz came to take their order and deposited five cups and a large pot of fresh coffee. He'd always swap tables with the other waiters if he could get Jeni as a customer. Not just because she was a great tipper, but his crush on her was blatantly obvious to all. It would have been cute how he poured Jeni's coffee for her and ignored everyone else, had he

been sixteen rather than twenty-something. He didn't look too happy to see how close she was sitting to Mark.

Jeni ordered just a lone egg, over easy with a slice of toast, and Mark went for an omelet loaded with sausage and mushrooms. Both Hans and Joe selected Famous Jake's Famous Pancakes.

Sarah questioned every item on the menu, and even sent Frantz to the kitchen to see if they had fresh strawberries for the waffles. She was starting to analyze the price of items *a la carte* versus the daily special when Joe, to everyone's relief, motioned to the badgered Frantz and said, "She really wants a waffle, lots of strawberries, syrup on the side. Go." Frantz happily left. Sarah just smiled at her father for forcing what she considered an indulgence upon her.

"Oh, while we wait you can look at some of my latest slides." Joe opened his briefcase and took out a small wooden box with a glass top and a box of slides. "You slip the slide in here," he inserted a transparency into the slot on the side, "and then hold it up to the light." He turned slightly to catch the light coming in the side window and held up the viewer. "Yes, some wonderful shots here if I do say so." He passed the device to Jeni. She admired the view and passed it to Mark, then it went to Hans and finally to Sarah. Joe would then reload with another slide and the process restarted.

All was going fine until Joe exclaimed, "This one is too blurry, can't even tell who it is." The others all agreed and Joe removed the slide and said, "Watch this." With a flick of his wrist the unwanted transparency went flying across the room, bounced off the wall, and dropped into the trash can by the waiters' station.

"That was just plain luck," Mark insisted.

"No, I fear it is an acquired skill. I've had quite a bit of practice throwing them away!" Joe chuckled at his confession. "That wasn't my first cardboard-encased failure."

A dozen slides later and Jeni burst out with an exaggerated, "Oh, that's the best one yet! A hot girl with her two dapper men."

Hans barely even grinned as he handed the viewer to Sarah, who rather suspiciously held it up to the light. It was a photo of Jeni in front of the Ellen Jane. In the background, one could see practice bombs on her racks and Hank carrying a case of ammo to the plane's door. But all Sarah could see was

Joe on one side of Jeni, their arms around each other and Mark on the other side, in the same embrace. She was, per Sarah's interpretation, pulling him closer than needed. Probably to press her breast against him. Sarah said nothing.

Joe took out the slide and was about to return it to its place when Jeni said, in a voice clearly intended to irritate Sarah, "Oh please make sure you make a copy of that one for me; and one for Mark too."

Without displaying any emotion, Sarah snatched the slide from her father and with a flick of her wrist she sent it flying toward the trash can. Apparently, she hadn't had much experience in the art of long-distance slide disposal. It didn't go anywhere near the trash can. In fact, it struck the pot of coffee that Frantz was carrying and landed on the floor in front of him.

Sarah was only mildly embarrassed, not so much for her lousy aim, as for her emotional outburst. It was not consistent with her desired reputation.

But when she saw the look of fear on Mark's face, she knew that she had done something much more serious. Hans's right hand disappeared under the left side of his jacket. She started to panic when she caught a glimpse the pistol tucked away in his shoulder holster. None of the men knew what to do. Fortunately, Jeni did.

As Frantz bent over and picked it up Jeni said, "Frantz, be a dear and bring me another napkin, I seem to have spilled a little coffee on my blouse." She had, just then, on purpose, and was now dabbing at it with a napkin while pulling the fabric tight in all the right places. Frantz was on the fritz, completely discombobulated. He could have just as well been holding a stick of dynamite with a lit fuse or the business end of a blow torch.

While he was trying to remember who he was and figure out how to retract his tongue, Hans got up and casually walked over, took the slide and said, "Danke." As he returned to his seat he handed the transparency to Joe. This snapped the overwhelmed sap back to reality; Frantz muttered "napkin" and headed off.

They finished looking at the slides, mainly to avoid talking. Frantz returned with a wet towel, a dry one, and several extra napkins. It was ridiculously obvious that he would like to assist with the cleaning personally, if allowed such liberties.

The food followed and they ate quickly. None of them were discussing the incident, but Hans never completely took his eyes off of Sarah. His formally emotionless face now held a clear distrust of her, bordering on disdain.

Artificial politeness continued to reign as they went to the parking lot and loaded everything into Jeni's car for the trip to the train station. Sarah and Joe kissed goodbye, and the trio left, leaving Mark and Sarah standing alone. Just before Jeni got in the car, Sarah caught her giving Mark the *you'd better talk to your girl* look.

They stood in silence until Mark spoke. "Sarah, do you have any idea what just happened?"

"I assume that we didn't want Frantz to see the slide?" She asked hesitantly.

"That's an understatement." Mark was being more curt with her than ever before. "Sarah, he's on the German's payroll. If he had looked at that image and seen the Ellen Jane, with me and Jeni standing there, and your father? Oh, my God! He'd run to the krauts and they'd have a recon flight out to Yale within the hour." He was clearly upset with her.

"Couldn't you stop him?"

"We would've had to try."

"How?" The implications of her question dawned on her as she asked it.

Mark waited, then looked at her and said dryly, "People die in this business, Sarah. Let's be more careful, okay?" He could see her suppress a gasp as a shiver went down her spine. She nodded. They stood looking at each other for a minute. She wanted to hug Mark and cry, hoping he'd say it was all okay. Hoping that ... she didn't really know, but hoping that something would happen.

"Sorry." That sounded weak, but she didn't know what else to say so she added, "I'll expect we'll be flying out around two?" That was more to clear her mind than to confirm what she already knew.

"I'll see you then, kid." *Kid*, one of his quasi-affectionate tags for her. He'd often refer to her as *kid*, *sis*, *you girl*, or *PK* (for preacher's kid). He had stopped using *MK*, when she corrected him by pointing out that she was now a missionary herself and not just a missionary's kid. But in all the years that she had known Mark, he had never once called her *babe*. True, she had once told him how she found the term

derogatory, but she said that about a lot of things that he said, and that didn't stop him from saying them.

Mark headed to his car. Sarah waited to collect her thoughts before turning to hers. *Great, Jeni's run off with my father, Mark is upset with me, his buddy Hans thinks I'm a dunce, and I'm not even cute enough to be teased about being a babe, what a great way to start the day.* She didn't even try to console herself, she just got in the car and drove off.

22

The train ride was uneventful. Jeni was reading, to Joe's amazement, a copy of the *Wall Street Journal*, while he and Hans passed the time with a game of chess. Once they reached the destination, Hans grabbed a cab and disappeared. Joe and Jeni waited for one of the elders from the church to pick them up. They were soon settled into a nice, but not opulent, hotel.

The itinerary would be a bit unconventional for Joe. There was a meeting scheduled that afternoon with a group of concerned businessmen, with the possibility of introducing Joe to the game of golf. Jeni had other more pressing matters. She needed to survey the wares at several of the local clothing stores. They would meet the next morning with a medical group that was considering volunteering at the clinic. That evening, they would be attending a prayer meeting, but there would be no formal presentation at the church. Afterward, they were to be the guests of honor at a social gathering of the Society for the Betterment of Brazil, a local ladies' aid organization. They'd depart for home the following morning.

When they returned to the hotel for dinner, there was a message from Hans. He had run into some potential donors and thought that Jeni should meet with them that night. Joe didn't figure that she'd be all that comfortable sitting through an hour-long prayer meeting and wasn't surprised when she

accepted Hans's offer. Roberto, a local pastor that Joe had known for years, even offered to let her use his car. He and Joe could ride with another friend.

Everything went as planned, except that Jeni arrived twenty minutes late to the social.

"Sorry I'm so late, but I must have gotten the directions a bit confused," she explained in a surprisingly flustered voice.

"How did it go?" Joe inquired in a moment of solitude.

"I assume we take American money?" she asked rhetorically as she slipped Joe an envelope full of cash.

"Twenty five hundred dollars?" Joe's hands were trembling as he stuffed the envelope quickly into his coat pocket as he scanned the room. He broke into an excited whisper. "My goodness, that was a very good lead Hans drummed up. Who was it?" He hadn't actually expected anything. He secretly suspected that she had arranged the rendezvous to escape from the religious aspects of the charade.

"A very pleasant British businesswoman, very well-to-do, but who wishes to remain anonymous," Jeni answered quietly, secretly enjoying the state of nervousness she had inflicted on Joe.

"Understandable, admirable even. I truly appreciate those who don't donate only to impress their peers. Oh, I'll take their money either way, but still." He was now grinning, more from the shock of the moment than at his own comments.

The rest of the evening went well. Joe's color slides were a big hit as always. People pretended to be shocked by the condition of the village and the medical challenges it presented. While many of these people had been born and raised in Brazil, few had journeyed far enough from their elite social circles to actually visit the more remote regions.

With the formal component of the evening finished, everyone was standing around eating the silly little appetizers that get served at such events. As is often the case, people were discussing other food while consuming whatever was on their plate. In fact, Jeni was having fun describing her first encounter with *Rat a la Bonfire* when the soiree was interrupted by the local police. They were quickly directed to Roberto, who turned slightly pale and escorted them over to Jeni.

"Officer, I haven't driven my car all afternoon. This young woman had borrowed it, but I assure you that she knows nothing of this incident." Poor flustered Roberto, he didn't

know Jeni well enough to have much confidence in that claim, but he did his best to sound convinced, mostly for his own peace of mind.

“Miss, the car you've been driving matches the description of one that was spotted near the scene of a crime about five hours ago.” The officer was being quite polite. He was out of his element in this crowd and equally aware that offending the wrong person, even a guilty one, could be hazardous to his career. “The witness even remembered part of the registration tag. May I ask where you were this afternoon?”

“Well, yes, I visited Mrs. Tromburg this afternoon, is something wrong?” She was trembling, just enough to convince people she was nervous. “Obviously, something is wrong or you wouldn't be here. What happened? Is Darlene okay?” That comment surprised the cop and implied a level of familiarity and honesty that he hadn't expected. Jeni could see the confusion on his face. *Always pays to remember the little details*, she thought.

“You spoke with Mrs. Tromburg?” The cop wasn't on a first name basis with her.

“Yes, obviously, that's why I went there. Is she okay?”

“Mrs. Tromburg is fine. What time did you leave?” the cop asked.

“Around six o'clock, and I came here. Can you tell me what's happened?” Jeni almost stammered. Joe was impressed with her acting ability. But he knew by now that if she was really worried or frightened, her French accent would be evident. She seemed as American as a hotdog at a baseball game. That didn't stop him from expecting the officer to ask about the wad of cash that was now in his pocket.

“What time did you get here?” The officer was looking at the crowd that had gathered around them.

“She got here at six twenty-one exactly,” one of the more snooty women reported. “I remember because I thought it rude of her to be so late, but I guess she got confused by our winding roads.”

“Will you please tell me what's happened?” Jeni was getting insistent.

“Just a few more questions, if I may. Was her husband there?”

“Yes, I think so, no, I'm sure he was, he passed us and went up to his office.”

"Anyone else?"

"No, not that I saw."

"May I inquire as to the nature of your visit?" The officer was approaching a potential landmine and knew it.

Jeni leaned forward and whispered in his ear. "She made a generous donation to our clinic but wished to remain anonymous."

"I see. I expect that everyone here will confirm that you haven't left since arriving."

The crowd murmured in the affirmative.

"We've answered your questions, will you please answer mine?" Jeni insisted.

The officer took a breath, swallowed, and after surveying his audience, took another breath and said, "I'm sorry to inform you but Mr. Tromburg was found in his office, dead, less than an hour ago. It was certainly murder."

Jeni dropped her glass of ginger ale right on cue and gasped. "Oh my God, how?" The glass bounced on the carpet, spewing its contents onto the officer's shoes. He glanced down and decided that he had bigger issues to contend with.

"He was shot once in the head, with a .32 automatic. The shell casing we found indicates it was most likely a Walther PPK. Since he was also partially undressed and tied to the chair, we have ruled out suicide. The coroner believes he was killed before eight o'clock. His wife thinks he was upstairs in his office when she left to visit her sisters around six-thirty but she wasn't positive. She returned with her sisters around nine. That's when they found him. She also reports that his Rolls Royce sports car, some jewelry and a large sum of cash are missing from the house."

A collective gasp swept through the crowd, immediately followed by the first wave of gossip. Jeni looked like she might decide to faint. Joe was rather white himself; mostly from weight of that envelope of cash in his coat pocket.

Just then a waiter from the club came over and whispered to the officer. The officer excused himself and the waiter led him to the house phone. He returned a few minutes later, looking surprisingly relaxed.

"I've just been informed that Mr. Tromburg's car has been found. It was driven into the river just a few miles from his home. I need to go examine it. May I have your address, Miss, I doubt I'll have any further questions but I'll need it

for my records.” Jeni gave him the information and he and his men left.

Needless to say, it was the most exciting social hour the club had ever held.

23

They had a quiet breakfast at the hotel, followed by an unusually quiet trip to the train station. Joe wasn't his usual jovial self, not that he wasn't trying. Most people wouldn't have picked up on the shift in his demeanor, but then again, Jeni wasn't most people; she had no problem perceiving Joe's underlying mood.

The train was mostly empty, and they had the luxury of taking seats in the observation car. The scenery distracted them for a while and provided ample opportunities for mindless banter.

Again, most people, had they even noticed something subtly different about Joe that morning, would have politely ignored it. They'd leave it up to him to address whatever was bothering him or, more likely, hope that it would somehow rectify itself. Not Jeni.

Finally Jeni asked Joe an unexpected question. "So, are you bothered by my story last night?"

He had to chuckle. This girl was full of surprises, direct and to the point, a stark contrast to his "other" daughter.

"With regard to the untimely death of Mr. Tromburg?"

"Oui," She answered politely. *Yeah, that would be the story,* she thought.

"I can usually tell when someone is feeding me a plate full of baloney. And I don't believe you were. But I don't believe you

told the whole truth either.” Joe was somber but gentle. It wasn't an accusation but an invitation. Like a father addressing his child. An opening for her to clear the air, should she so desire.

“It wasn't me. I did go looking for a donation, of sorts, but not exactly the kind you would expect. But I left him very much alive,” she replied just as somberly, “I told no lies, but you are correct, it was not the whole truth.”

“Details?”

“Alright.” She didn't like sharing her secrets, but with Joe it didn't feel risky; in fact, it somehow felt comforting.

“When Hans heard that we were heading to Teresina, he asked if I would be able to help him out down there. We've known that the Germans have a major communications channel in the city. Getting a copy of their communications codes, list of agents, and any related information would be invaluable. My traveling with you was perfect cover. I hope you're not offended?” Joe could read the sincerity in her voice and her eyes.

“No, I knew such events were to be part of the game. Of course, I didn't know how rough the game would be getting.” He spoke softly, like the benevolent and compassionate gentleman he was.

“Oui. Hans arranged to meet with Tromburg the night of the social hour. I met them at the bar along with several other Germans. Hans introduced me and a short time later, he and the rest left. I said I was going to stay at the bar for a moment longer and Tromburg suddenly had plenty of time to hang around. It didn't take long for Tromburg to ask me to his place for a drink. Since I had your friend's car, I insisted on following him home; much safer. Anyway, we got to his house and had a drink. He said his wife was out of town until the next day and that we'd be more comfortable up in his office.”

“Once we got upstairs,” she looked out the window to avoid looking at Joe, “he had the same old line. Said that his wife was as cold and passionate as a sea bass – a dead sea bass, in fact. She hadn't ever really loved him anyway, just married him for his money, et cetera, et cetera.” She paused. She could see that Joe wasn't real comfortable with where this conversation could be going.

“So we went up and I played one of my favorite tricks.” She worded it that way just to gauge his reaction.

Joe's eyes got wide.

"No! Not what you think." She shook her head at him and grinned, "I offer to mix us another drink. They are always more than willing to accept it and they never seem to suspect anything. I guess it's arrogance or hormones. Whichever. After we drink, I just need to keep them busy for about ten minutes until my special additional ingredients take effect."

Joe grinned and interjected, "I guess I'll need to get my own coffee from now on."

"You need not worry." She huffed a laugh. "But Tromburg was a challenge, had his shirt off before he even finished the drink and had mine unbuttoned as well. So I made him play my naughty little boy game."

"Do I want to know?" He just looked at her. She was actually turning just the slightest shade of something other than her normal skin tone. Almost, but not quite a blush.

"I tell him he's been naughty and has to sit still while I get ... shall I say, ready. I make him sit down, then I tie his hands to the chair with his tie and blindfold him with his shirt to keep him from peeking. Then I just talk like I'm having trouble with the zipper on my skirt or something; just keep bluffing until they pass out."

"You're one sneaky woman," Joe said.

"I'll take that as a compliment." She managed to relax and smile back. "Anyway, I found the safe right away. Surprise!" she waved her hands as if jumping out unexpectedly, "it was hidden behind a painting on the wall. Can't anyone think of a better hiding place than that? So, I'm rifling through his desk, since most guys write the combination down somewhere, when I look up and there is his wife standing in front of me."

"Bet she wasn't too happy finding you. Had you buttoned up your blouse yet?" he asked without thinking about it.

"No, I hadn't." Jeni was laughing now, "And you're right, she wasn't happy. In fact, she was pointing a PPK, just like mine, at me and said, 'I suppose you're going to tell me that this isn't what it looks like?'" Jeni did a pretty fair British accent. "She was shaking so badly, I was worried that the gun would go off accidentally. Of course, she couldn't keep it trained on me so she would have probably missed."

"What did you tell her?"

"Hans had told me that Tromburg was only helping the krauts, he didn't actually use the term *krauts*, but was only

helping them for the money. We also knew that his wife had inherited her father's businesses and had plenty of her own dough."

Joe raised a hand to interrupt, "So she didn't marry him for his money then?"

"Probably not. Rumor is that he had some money at one time but also had, or has, a gambling problem. Anyway, I was betting that she didn't know about her husband's moonlighting. So I said, 'If you mean did I let your husband bring me up here so I could drug him, break into his safe, and photograph the Nazi communication codes and contact names inside? Well, then yes, it is exactly what it looks like.' I just kept looking through the desk and added, 'I'm sure he wrote down the combination somewhere, almost everybody does.'"

"What did she say?" Joe was openly admiring her calculated self-confidence and control.

"She just turned whiter, and she had been pretty white to start with. Then she yelled at him, 'Henry!' I told her not to bother, he'd be out for at least another three hours, and I asked her, woman-to-woman, 'You do know that your husband is working for the Germans, don't you?' She replied with, 'That's impossible, my husband is a loyal subject of the British crown!'" Jeni embellished the English accent.

"So I asked, 'Really? I'm just curious, has he bought any unexpected toys lately? Spent a lot of money?' Then, I pulled out a stack of bills that I had found in a drawer earlier and dropped it on the desk in front of her. 'Does he always keep \$2,500 in U.S. currency in his desk?' You would have thought I had tossed a live snake at her. Must have hit a nerve, she started having trouble breathing. Once she caught her breath and stopped trembling she asked, 'How much does a Rolls-Royce Wraith cost?' I laughed and said, 'Oh, they're all custom built, they start at over £1,000, will hit £1,500 before you could drive it home, getting it shipped over here won't be cheap either. You'd easily spend two thousand.'

"Then I just kept rummaging through his desk and she suddenly said, 'Pick up the phone.' I thought she might want me to call the police or something. Who knows what a crazed woman will do. But I looked at her and she had lowered the gun, then she said, 'Look under the phone.' So I picked up the whole thing and turned it over, there on the bottom were the numbers: 03-13-34.

"I got up, buttoned up my blouse, opened the safe, and showed her the code book. I laid out the book on the desk and got out my Minox." Jeni opened her purse and took out the miniature camera. "It's the latest spy camera. Made in Germany, of all places." She said with a chuckle as she handed it to Joe for him to admire.

"By then she was holding the desk lamp for me as I photographed the pages. I put the book back and told her that I would leave and that he wouldn't remember a thing when he awoke. She had put the gun down and had stopped shaking but she had one surprise left for me. She said 'Take the money with you.' I asked 'What?' and she replied, 'I won't have anything to do with his dirty loot. Consider it a reward for opening my eyes. Buy yourself a new wardrobe, give it away, burn it, I don't care. Just get it out of here.'"

Jeni sat waiting for Joe's reaction.

He handed the camera back and asked, "So she killed him? And then got rid of the car too? As the old proverb says, 'a woman scorned.'" His voice reflected the horror that any man would feel when realizing what an angry wife could do to her husband.

"I didn't see her do it and she didn't tell me that she was going to. As you know, I was at the club by the time they found his body." Joe was sorting through the conflicting data; trying to decide which, if any, of his questions he should actually ask.

"I'm not surprised that you seemed surprised."

"You do have a reputation as, how do you French put it, a *femme fatale*."

Jeni sat just staring out the window, not even pretending to notice anything, and then asked, "May I share a deep secret in the strictest of confidence?"

"Absolutely, of course." He almost bubbled with eagerness, "You know that as a minister, I'm forbidden to report anything to the authorities, even if it is a crime?"

She took a deep breath, and smirked as she shook her head, "Then I fear that you'll be disappointed."

"In some matters, I welcome disappointment."

"Then you will be happy, you see," she paused as if to gauge his trustworthiness one more time. "I've never actually killed anyone, well, not on purpose."

"Really." Joe didn't get surprised often but that did it. It added to his confusion, for he had been wondering why she

hadn't kept some of the loot for herself. After all, he never would have known the difference and she clearly was skilled at spending money.

"Oui, really."

Joe just sat there.

"I could understand if you don't believe me, but it is the truth."

"No, I believe you," and he meant it. "My silence is the result of curiosity. If I may ask, what about the story I've heard about Fredrick Meier?"

"He fell."

"Just fell? It really was an accident?" Joe didn't want to question her, but the reports of the incident, or more correctly the rumors of the incident, pretty much implied that she had picked him up and tossed him over the rail. Now that he thought about it, how did a 140-pound woman heave a 225-pound, rather stout kraut over a three-foot-high railing, anyway?

"As I said, I'm curious."

"I don't blame you." She sat up a bit, took a deep breath, and began, "Meier was another German agent and Hans was already looking for the invasion plans for northern Brazil. He had searched everywhere in Meier's home office and den but couldn't find them. We had also searched his office in town. Hans figured he would keep them very close. After all, it would mean a death sentence if Vargas's people were to find them. The only other reasonable place for him to hide it was the writing desk in his bedroom. But trying to search it was impossible for Hans since he had no reason to ever be in there.

"Hans knew about the dinner party, in fact, he'd helped arrange it by suggesting it to Meier's card-fanatic sister-in-law. He also helped pick a night when Mrs. Meier would be on the other side of town and he just added me to the guest list. I guess that she and her sister-in-law would rather not socialize together. Between Meier, his wife, his brother, and his sister-in-law all inviting people, no one realized that none of them actually knew me. Besides, his wife wasn't there to even question it.

"Meier ate dinner with us, but when the bridge games started he went up to his den on the second floor to listen to a soccer game, just as Hans had predicted.

"I drifted around the party and then snuck upstairs to the master bedroom and started looking around. Fortunately, it was on the third floor, so there was little chance of Meier finding me. The plan was to photograph the plans and get back to the party before anyone noticed me missing. They were just so religious – oh, sorry – about their bridge play that I don't think anyone would have ever noticed that I was gone. I had just found the plans when I heard someone coming up the stairs.

"Meier must have gotten excited about some fancy play in the game or something and sloshed beer on his new jacket and his trousers. Turns out that he was always a bit finicky when it came to his clothes and he decided to go up to his bedroom and change. I managed to duck into the private bathroom just as Meier came in. He took off his jacket and pants and," she shrugged, "I guess he decided to get rid of some the beer he had been drinking before getting redressed. He opened the bathroom door and just stood there, in his shorts, staring at me."

"What on earth did you do?"

"I said, sounding like a lost little girl, 'Oh, they said the bathroom was just up the stairs. Did I find the wrong room?'"

He bellowed something about me not belonging in there and headed out the bedroom door. He leaned over the railing to yell at someone ... and just tumbled head over heels."

"So you never touched him?"

"Never even got close. As soon as he hit the ground, his brother and all the guests came running out from the front room. Including the local chief of police who was on the German payroll. I was trapped. There was only one stairway down. The chief was standing by the body and Meier's brother was dashing up the stairs to see what had happened. I didn't know the layout of the house well enough to try and hide. So I went back into the bedroom, exchanged my dress for Meier's jacket and sat down on the edge of the bed and waited."

Joe started laughing and shaking his head in disbelief.

"When his brother charged in and found me he was horrified, and jumped to the very conclusions that I had counted on. I yelled something about, 'You are not Freddy,' and gathered my dress up in my arms and started to sob. He marched me downstairs. They had chased everyone away from the body except for the butler and the chief. I explained

that Meier had invited me to the party and that I had no idea what had happened to him and I just wanted to go home. They wanted me out of there as quickly as possible and the chief didn't want his name to be in the papers either, so he volunteered to drive me home – and off we went.”

“Did you get to photograph the documents?”

“I had no time; so I wrapped them up in my dress and took them.” She chuckled under her breath. “Meier had such a reputation as a playboy that no one questioned anything.”

Joe quickly realized what motivated her concern for secrecy. “I guess in your business, a dangerous reputation would have serious advantages.”

“Oui, but it also has serious disadvantages as well.”

24

She had arrived at the airstrip earlier than usual. Maybe to give herself time to steel herself for their arrival, maybe just to be sure they couldn't get there first and be waiting, though she didn't know why that mattered to her. But her early arrival probably had more to do with a sense of anxiousness to see her father and find out what devilish impact that slutty girl had had on him. This was Father's second trip running around the country with Jeni. *I guess I shouldn't be upset; after all, certainly Father will have more influence on her than she will on him. Then again maybe not, she's probably got him drinking and smoking and ... I really need to stop thinking so hard.*

The place was abandoned. The guys were down at the river fishing, leaving the Ellen Jane alone in her door-less hangar. *What was it about men and fish, she wondered. If they had to work that hard at a job, they'd quit.*

Partly out of boredom, but mostly to keep from overanalyzing, she wandered over to the hangar and stood in front of the right engine of the Ellen Jane.

As she looked at the plane, suddenly, staring back at her, there was Jeni. Well, the airbrushed version. The image seemed to come to life and was smirking at her. Jeni. Wearing nothing but lingerie, her bare back taunting men and infuriating women as she leered so casually over her naked

shoulder. With her perfect round curves and perfect hair and perfect white teeth in a perfect smile that never stopped.

At least you can't see her perfect breasts, Sarah thought. Jeni's got men falling at her feet. Okay, according to rumor, they're falling down dead. But still, I cannot imagine being so nonchalant about my reputation to allow anyone to defame me like that. Guess she considers it a compliment.

To be honest, no one would ever want to paint my image on an airplane, she grieved to herself. Men don't fantasize about running their fingers through this mousy brown hair. Besides, my curves can't compete with hers. Though men have told me that my eyes are pretty. Do they just say that because my boobs are too small and they just want to be nice? Does Mark even know that you've got boobs? True, you've rebuffed any remotely romantic comment he's ever made. But can you really see him living at the village? What would he think of you out here? Why are you so interested in him now? You've known him for years. Is it because he seems interested in Jeni? Do you love him? What if Jeni loves him? What if he loves her?

As Sarah turned in disgust, to avoid having to answer all these questions, and started to walk away, Jeni's image mouthed the words "I'm going to steal your father." She jolted back and stared at the now inanimate painting. *Great, she thought, even his airplane is mocking me.*

The light was just right, and from where she now stood, the entire world of hangar, jungle, sky, and earth was imploding on the curved plexiglass panels of the Ellen Jane's transparent nose. The trees behind her were twisted into monsters. Powered by the breeze, they tangled with the beams of the hangar roof, all joining together and being chased by the clouds as they blew across the sky.

All the once-beautiful colors and clear view of my world are twisted and distorted too, she thought dejectedly. A slight shift of her head and the images would shift into new and more convoluted patterns, never seeming to repeat.

After staring for minute or two, and not feeling any better about things, she started to walk away. She continued until she was directly in front of the plane. Something told her to look back, and without intending to, she stopped. Even knowing it was silly didn't stop her from glancing back over her shoulder. At first, nothing seemed different, then she saw it.

One plexiglass panel told the truth of what it saw. The one

panel that Sven had left perfectly flat. The smallest of them all, only eighteen inches wide by, maybe, twenty-four high. It started even with the bottom of the fuselage and angled upward, forming the epicenter of the nose, indeed of the entire plane. With the Ellen Jane's tail on the ground, it was almost vertical. There, in this unintentional mirror, standing firmly still with a nonsensical universe swirling around her, was the image of a beautiful woman. Sarah was mesmerized for several seconds before realizing that it was her.

The mirror caught her body in a quarter profile. *My breasts aren't too small. No, they're a nice solid C cup, perfectly proportional to my hips.* She turned to admire her own backside. *Besides, Jeni's breasts are too big and she probably isn't even a real blond. Nice slender waist, of course it's easy to stay slim when living in the jungle. Very strong chin line; especially in profile, she thought as she turned her head. Nothing wrong with my smile, though maybe I don't use it enough. True, my nose is just a little bit too small for the rest of my face, but not really noticeable. And my eyes are rather pretty.*

She touched the comb holding her hair back in a bun. *This frumpy hairstyle does make me look older. Maybe I should get it trimmed a bit? It has been years since I bought any decent clothes; maybe a new skirt? Any color but red. A new rayon blouse would be a classy addition to my meager wardrobe. Okay, I'm not the knock-'em dead, dolled-up showgirl kind of pretty, but that is definitely not the reputation I want. This is who I am, as God made me, and I have nothing to be ashamed of.*

The trees and hangar roof and clouds all continued to roll around her image. *Yes, the world may be going mad around me, but I don't have to go with it. I shall stand my ground and stand firm. Besides, I'll bet there are lots of men that would like to rip my clothes off and see me in less than she's wearing in that obnoxious painting. I will stop letting past mistakes ruin my future.*

Now Sarah thought it silly when Mark admitted talking to his airplanes, but she addressed this airplane, out loud and unashamed, "Thank you, Miss Ellen Jane, thank you very much." She half expected a "You're welcome," and when it didn't come, she continued, "Now, the next time you and Mark chat, you'd better tell him to make up his mind, or I'll

just go find myself another man.” She giggled at her own silliness, which was interrupted by the sound of an approaching plane.

25

It was not the Reliant that had stopped Sarah from continuing her conversation with the Ellen Jane. The engine was much quieter and purred smoothly rather than rumbled. As the plane made the obligatory low pass over the field, she was shocked at how small it appeared. The plane climbed out and turned around to land, flying a large half-circle to set up a final approach.

Mark would occasionally commandeer a different plane if the Reliant was down for maintenance. This wasn't a Cub or a Jenny, she could tell those two apart, but a machine she hadn't seen before.

As it touched down, she could see that Mark wasn't flying it. The pilot handled it well and soon taxied up to her. He spun the small, dark green airplane around so the nose would face into the wind. This left the pilot's door facing her. The propeller stopped and her father climbed out the right door. The pilot squeezed his legs out of his door, put one foot on the wheel, and then pulled the rest of himself out. He was shorter than Mark, maybe only five-nine, and much stockier. Certainly not fat, judging from his muscles. He must be an athlete, she thought.

"So, we meet again," he called out in an overly loud voice, as he brushed back his sandy-blond hair with his hand and straightened up once he was out from under the wing. (She

had found that pilots often talked too loud after a noisy plane ride.) Then she remembered him: it was the German, Hans, that had rescued the slide from Frantz. He didn't look happy but at least he had managed to stop grimacing at her.

Joe came around the plane, carrying a small pack. "Sorry we're late. Mark had some routine brake maintenance to do on the Stinson, but when he tore it apart, he realized it was more involved than he had expected. He asked Hans to fly me out. I hope the village men went fishing. I promised him some fresh peacock bass."

"Yes, I even brought a bottle of my family's secret seasonings for it," Hans said, then absentmindedly added, "I didn't notice before that your daughter had such pretty eyes."

Without thinking, Sarah quickly folded her arms across her chest and decided to ignore the compliment. "You're both in luck, the men took our small boat earlier. They heard that the fishing upstream was excellent and should be back by the time we get a fire going. I'll start cleaning up, if you two want to gather some wood?"

"I'm pleading the privilege of age. I'll clean up and you young kids go get the wood. It should be easy, they've just cut down four acres of trees with Hans's chainsaws," Joe said.

"Oh, that's where I've heard your name before," Sarah replied with more enthusiasm than she intended, "you got us the chainsaws."

"Yes, ironically the company I work for provided them. Of course, they have no idea why we really needed the airstrip lengthened," he chuckled loudly.

"What's ironic about it?" she was puzzled by his laughter.

"Oh, Mark hasn't told you? I work for a German lumber company that exports hardwoods to Germany. But it is really just a front; their real purpose is to prepare the groundwork for a future invasion." He suddenly became far more serious than anyone she had ever known. It was the dark and scary kind of serious, well past disquieting, bordering on spine-chilling. "Mark said that I could trust you; I hope he's right."

She almost gasped but caught it in time and replied, "Oh, yes, Mark has mentioned that, oh, and yes, you can trust us completely." So Mark and Jeni hadn't been joking. Of course, with that German accent, he must be the reliable source that Mark had referred to. She was standing face to face with a real live spy, and a double agent at that. Those cheap spy

novels didn't seem so exciting now. In fact, they were downright lame. What was just a minor ethical issue with inconvenient side effects for her was literally a matter of life and death for others. This adventure had become human.

"Let's go get some wood. Do you have anything to cut it with?" Hans asked.

"There's a saw and a hatchet in the hangar," she yelled to him, "I'll go get them."

Hans started off to the other side of the runway where the remains of cut trees lay scattered like a little boy's set of Lincoln Logs. She had watched the men cut down the trees with that noisy new invention, and had decided that it wasn't that much different than little boys playing with their toys.

Joe stopped his daughter, and in a hushed voice he told her, "We'll have to spend the night here. The only reason he agreed to fly me back was to go fishing in the morning. Mark describes him as a dedicated comrade but arrogant and egotistical. Totally focused on the mission and indifferent to any of the social graces. Try not to let him upset you."

With that warning in mind, she scurried to the back of the hangar, ducking under the Ellen Jane's wing to save distance to the tool box in the back. Hans waited for her to catch up. As she was running over she realized that his politeness was self-serving, he was enjoying watching things bounce.

Men, she fumed to herself. *Bad day not to wear a bra*. Of course, she seldom did back here in the jungle heat. Normally, no one would be around and her fairly heavy denim shirt hid any details anyway. She slowed to a quick walk when she got closer and handed him the tools.

"Sorry, this saw doesn't come with a motor. It requires old-fashioned muscle power," Sarah said idly.

"So, do you think that will be a problem for me?" Hans replied imperiously. She hadn't meant her comment as a challenge. Nor was she sure if he had puffed out his chest on purpose or if it was a subconscious reflex.

Without waiting for her reply, he practically swaggered over to the nearest branch and cut through in record time. Sarah realized that the intensity of his effort was scaring her. He seemed to be exacting his revenge against the tree for some offense it had committed.

She decided to start chopping. This was more to force herself to stop watching and to help clear her mind than from

the actual need for fuel. Sarah would chop the smaller twigs for kindling, while Hans sawed larger pieces into manageable lengths. After tying their booty into bundles, they headed back to the camp.

They had hardly spoken but now had no choice but to engage in polite chitchat.

“So tell me,” Sarah asked, “what brought you to Brazil?”

He suddenly got very stiff and intense. “Many things, none of them good.” *So much for lightening the mood*, she thought.

“What brought you down?” he asked in a clearly routine manner.

“Well, I came to help my father in the missionary work.” *How could he not know that?*

“Oh yes, I knew that. Honestly, I don't have much use for churches.”

“Why not?” This was not a major surprise. She hadn't expected him to be very spiritually minded.

“Too many hypocrites, none of them follow the rules that they want me to follow,” he said in complete indifference to his audience.

“I'd like to think there might be some exceptions,” she said with a slightly sarcastic tone.

“Well, it is more of a general comment on religion at large.”

“But I would think you'd be thrilled with the hypocrisy,” she replied.

“Thrilled, why?”

“There's always room for one more hypocrite, sir, I'm sure you'd fit right in.” She actually grinned at him as she dropped her bundle by the fire pit.

Grinning back he replied, “True, I guess we're all hypocrites in one way or another.” Then his grinning stopped. “Hypocrisy is not my biggest vice. I doubt that I'd fit in at all.” His tone took on a seriousness that told her to drop the subject.

They turned their attention to starting the fire. Soon the fishing expedition returned and the three of them walked down to the river to help land the boat. The village men had caught nine nice-sized bass and were proudly holding them up on display.

“I must say, those don't really look like bass,” Hans commented, sounding rather authoritarian. There could be no question as to just how suspicious he was.

“Technically, they're not,” Joe replied. “Actually, they're

from the cichlid family. But they'll put up a fight that makes any real bass feel like a just a snag on your line. And they are very good eating as well. Some claim that it reminds them of a grouper. Personally, I believe that it tastes more like snapper.”

“I used to fish a lot with my brother and grandfather back in Germany. I look forward to catching some in the morning. Care to wager on who can get the most or maybe the biggest?” He was overconfident for a fisherman, even a German one.

Great, Sarah thought, *another fishing nut*. If her father had one vice, it was his love of fishing. Long hours spent in the hot, wet jungle trying to outsmart an animal with a brain the size of a peanut. And usually losing. She did like to *eat* the fish, as long as no one expected her to clean it. She wasn't sure which was worse, having to watch them fillet the things or listening to all the tall tales of the ones that got away. Pretty much a toss-up, she decided, so she got up and headed back to the fire pit.

Hans refused to reveal the secret of the spices he had brought along. As Joe had put it, “I'm *flavorably* impressed.” So was Sarah; however, the village men were not. After a small sample, they decided that German cuisine wasn't for them and grilled theirs plain.

After supper the village men headed for home. As the fire died out and the sun set, Hans started the generator and the trio moved to the hut.

26

Though the conflict had just begun, it was clear to Hans that this would not, could not, end in a tie. There would have to be a winner and a loser. His plan was to attack swiftly and without mercy, depriving his more senior opponent of time to think. He'd force him to just react, thus negating the advantage of his additional years of experience.

Confidently, but with a casual flair, he moved his bishop forward, threatening or pinning several of Joe's pieces simultaneously. Joe just rubbed his chin as he studied the board. He nodded slightly and slid forward a pawn to protect his own bishop.

The noise of the generator, combined with the unfamiliar ruckus coming from the jungle, was unsettling to Hans but didn't appear to be having any impact on Joe. To counter the distraction, he opened a bottle of Sven's best that he had brought along.

"So, I suppose that in the grand chess game of life, you're a bishop, and Sarah, of course, would be a queen?" Hans commented.

"Ha, always moving around at an angle?" Joe laughed. "No, I wouldn't want to be a bishop. Not for me. I'd rather consider myself more of a knight – jumping over obstacles, going around corners. Oh, Sarah thinks she's the queen alright, but frankly she's probably more like the bishop.

Women seldom make a frontal attack, they come at you from the corners.”

Sarah looked up from her book, but didn't comment about the snide insult. She'd wait to retaliate later when they weren't expecting it.

“Tell me, what piece are you?” Joe turned the question back on Hans. The truth be told, Hans hadn't really thought that much about it. He had only brought up the analogy to provide a little distraction for his opponent and hopefully gain the edge needed to win the game.

“I guess I would like to think that I'm the king, of course. Commanding all the other pieces to sacrifice themselves to protect me,” he replied instinctively while sipping his beer.

“Ah, so you're the chess master in your universe?” Joe replied.

“Well, of course, how else could it be?” He was now distracted and confused. Just because he had turned against the Nazis, that didn't expel him from the master race.

“Well, if you're the chess master, who are you playing against?”

“Other people, circumstances, fate?” His goal had been to distract Joe, not himself. He needed to turn things back around. “So what do you believe?”

“Some theologians look at the world as an enormous chess match between God and Satan. The ultimate battle of good versus evil. Your move,” Joe said as he castled.

Now that got Hans's attention.

“So, does that mean we're just the pieces on the chess board?”

“Some believe that, effectively.”

“So, am I just a pawn and you're a knight? How can I get promoted to a rook?” He was half jesting, but only half.

“Actually, most of the subscribers to that point of view would consider us all pawns, but in any case, our assignments would be permanent.”

Hans's game was slowing. As he moved his queen into the fray, he said, “I'm not sure I like that view. Does it mean that God moved Hitler into power himself or that He couldn't stop Satan from doing so?”

“Oh, they would be quick to argue that God could have stopped him but didn't. Just don't ask them why, they get really uncomfortable on that point.” Joe responded with his queen.

“But the chess pieces have no say in where they're moved to. Are we then not responsible for the choices, good or bad, that we make?” Hans's breathing had become surprisingly heavy. *Must have hit close to home.* Joe thought.

“Yes, another problem I have with the analogy. But there are those who believe that man has no free choice in anything at all.” Joe hadn't intended to start a deep discussion on doctrine, but he had never been known to avoid one either. “They claim that the only way that God can be truly sovereign, that is, in absolute control of everything, is if man has no choices.” Joe noticed that his opponent was starting to sweat.

“That seems absurd to me. Do you believe that?” Hans had seldom, in fact had never, actually had such a conversation with someone who had really thought through any of this. His only exposure had been to the secular philosophy in Germany.

Joe moved his rook out to attack. “I think we can look at things, to some extent, as a chess game, but there are some major differences. For example, I believe that each piece gets to decide for itself where it wants to move to. Now, the Almighty clearly has the right to influence its decisions and the fact that he knows exactly what each piece will choose to do, before it knows, gives him quite an advantage.”

Hans was trying to focus on both the game before him and the game that these thoughts were playing with his mind.

“That's not the biggest difference. The biggest difference is in the very nature of the game itself. In this chess game, any of the pieces may be sacrificed to save the king. In God's version, the King made the sacrifice to save the pawns.”

“So, even though I'm just a pawn, I'm still making my own decisions?” Hans wondered aloud while taking another sip of brew.

“Yes, and each piece will someday give an account, to the King, for every decision it has ever made.” Hans's sip turned into a gulp.

Joe moved his queen deep into Hans's territory. After considering things for a moment, Hans took it with his rook that was hiding on the other side of the board.

The final outcome wasn't far away. Hans stared at his opponent, who had put up an admirable fight, far tougher than he had expected, but was clearly backed into a corner. It was almost over and he could afford to smirk; gloating was

half the fun of winning. He enjoyed the last swig of the beer, smugly.

At that point, Joe moved a pawn forward, exposing an attack from his bishop, and said, "Check."

Hans folded his arms across his chest and leaned back in his chair. The smirk was replaced by panic. Joe's next move, one that Hans was powerless to stop, would be to advance his pawn to the eighth rank, resurrecting not his queen but an additional knight, and ending in checkmate.

"It appears that your pieces have made better choices than mine," Hans conceded.

27

Frantz had his waiter's apron off twenty minutes before his shift ended and was planning to head out the door when a subconscious alarm bell echoed inside his head. Something was out of place. He slowly turned and scanned the room. There it was. Or rather, she was. Jeni had quietly entered through the side door and had taken a table in the back corner of Bette's Bistro. He pretended to be sorting menus while casting clandestine glances in her direction.

First, he needed to determine that she was alone; she was. Now to decide whether or not he had the courage to approach her as something other than just the hired help. Thanks to the several beers he had secretly downed while working, he did. He quickly wiped his sweaty palms on a towel and headed to her table.

"Miss Fourier, I am surprised to find you here. I didn't know you ate anywhere but on the Flight Deck." His nervousness was almost cute as he stood by her table trying to act calmer and more mature than possible for him.

"Oh, a girl needs a little variety, doesn't she?" Jeni was playing it cool. Acting so uninterested in him that he would consider it just a defense against her genuine feelings. "It's quieter down here and easier to think through things."

"How interesting." Like most men, once he found himself actually living out a secret fantasy, it was more unsettling

than expected. Much more unsettling. The poor sap had often dreamed of meeting her alone, buying her a drink, and well, take a guess. However, in his dreams, she didn't smell this delicious nor was he paranoid about stumbling through his lines.

Lucky for him, he had rehearsed his part a thousand times. Playing it for real, with help of the aforementioned alcohol, proved to be no challenge once he got past the initial stage fright.

"Are you alone tonight or do you have friends coming?" The question just slipped out since he was running on autopilot.

His only hope was that she wouldn't deviate from the script. To that end, Frantz had written and rewritten many scripts for her in many unique scenarios: some healthy and romantic, many that were simply implausible, several that were downright kinky, and a few that he wouldn't have admitted to under torture. However, he was confident that he had covered any and every eventuality.

"No, I'm alone tonight. Would you like to join me?" She suddenly sounded helpless. Had anyone who knew her been there, they would have been amazed at her acting skills.

"May I ..." By rote, he had started to ask if he could join her in a drink. That was the next line in virtually every script. He caught himself mid-sentence and had to rewrite on the fly, "get you a drink before I sit down?" It wasn't as smooth as he would have liked, but not an unreasonable response from a flustered waiter.

"A ginger ale, please." Frantz helped himself to a beer and a basket of pretzels as he retrieved her drink.

Anna, the waitress at whose table Jeni sat, was clearly surprised to find Frantz at a table as a customer and downright shocked that he was with Jeni.

Jeni broke tradition regarding her normal entree due to the aroma of a fresh cheese souffle that even managed to overwhelm the scent of the rubber tire hanging on the wall next to her. A slice of Bette's best would do just fine. Frantz was satisfied with the pretzels.

At first, they floundered in a pool of awkwardness while trying to converse, having never shared a table as equals before. It would be more correct to say that Frantz was doing the thrashing about, while Jeni was calmly treading water.

Whether it was ego, self-confidence, the booze, or just

months' worth of pent-up dreaming, she couldn't tell, but he slowly became far smoother than she expected. His tongue loosened and he even reached across the table twice to touch her hand. Finally, she played her trump card.

"Frantz, may I trust you with a secret?" she asked nervously as she squeezed his hand.

"Of course, actually, I'm in on many secrets." His ego was running at full power now, supercharged by her unexpected touch.

"I need help finding someone. Someone who can help me find some information about another someone."

"What kind of someone? If I can't help you, I'm sure that I know people that could. What do you need to know?"

"Please keep this very quiet. I'm looking for a British secret agent." She answered in a hushed voice.

This was one of those events where reality outran fiction. Time to toss out the script, fire the writer, and hire a new director. He hadn't included anything like this in the playbook. It seriously upped the ante. Bringing evidence of a British agent to his bosses would significantly raise his standing in the organization. Helping Jeni further her search might be even more rewarding. He would risk just about everything to take every advantage of this fortuitous opportunity.

"Well, I might be able to help. Why do you want to find him?" he asked with obvious elation in his voice.

She waited. Just long enough to let him think that she was thinking about whether or not she could trust him.

"Well, it's a matter of a personal vendetta. You see, he was responsible for my mother's death." She dropped her eyes to her glass of ginger ale and choked back a tear. Then she leaned across the table and whispered, "I've been told that the Germans also have agents in Brazil. One of them might be able to help me. After all, they don't like the British any more than I do."

Frantz looked around the room, took a serious drink of beer, and replied, "I happen to know that there is one in the room right now." He was smug, even for a German.

"Really? Would you introduce me? Do you think he'd help me?" she asked innocently.

"I'm certain that he'd like to help you, but I don't have to introduce him, you already know him."

She glanced around convincingly. "That's silly. I don't know

anyone in here but you." She paused as if the possibility was just occurring to her. "You can't mean ...?"

"Yes, I'm with the German underground myself." She was almost embarrassed by how quickly he revealed himself. A mature agent knew better than to trust a girl this quickly, especially one that was this far out of his league.

"Oh, Frantz. Don't try and impress me. You're a waiter here. Everyone knows that! You're not going to fool me." Her quick dismissal cut him deep. "If you don't know anyone, that's okay, I'm sure someone can help me."

"Nein, I'm really with the German underground. My job at Jake's lets me spy on everything happening at the airport. My real job is for Herr Hauger."

"So, I suppose you're one of his 'trigger men' or something." She giggled as she took a drink.

None of his fantasies had involved her laughing *at* him. Laughing *with* him, yes, but not at him. And nothing so quickly deflates a man's overinflated ego as a woman's ridicule.

"I'm actually more of his communications officer," he said, sounding as serious as possible. It was stretching the truth, but not by much, and what man hasn't given himself a minor promotion when trying to impress a babe?

She just looked at him bewildered. "So you write messages in invisible ink?" She knew what buttons to push and was pushing them fast and furiously.

"Nein. It's much more, hum, what would you say ... sophisticated today. We have special wireless transceivers and can communicate with Germany at will."

"I would wager that the British enjoy listening in on those." She smirked at him.

"Oh, they can't read any of our messages. Our cyphering machines are too advanced to be broken." He was struggling but didn't know it.

"Really, Frantz." She just shook her head and continued, "I'd like to believe you but this is just a bit too much. I had a friend at the university who claimed he could break any code in just a few days."

Jeni sat silently finishing her souffle. Nothing an anxious male hates more than a patient female.

"But please, tell me more about this British agent you are looking for." He decided to risk it and dig in to the meat of the issue.

“No, I’ve probably told you too much already. I should probably be going.” It was the old *pull the offer* con.

“Wait, if I can prove that everything I’ve said is true, will you tell me everything you know about this agent? After all, I’m sure that I can help you.” Frantz was amazed at his own cunning. Surely she couldn’t turn down such a simple offer? Besides, to prove his claims they’d have to go to Hauger’s office, *alone*.

“Well, I suppose, but how can you prove it?” As if she didn’t know.

They took Jeni’s car. It was about a twenty-minute ride to the building that housed the lumber company offices. On the way, Frantz’s desire to impress his new-found lady friend resulted in his spilling some real gems. For example, he casually mentioned they were expecting a large shipment of arms and munitions sometime soon, he dropped the names of several local officials who were on the take, and volunteered his opinion that Hans was too egotistical. She had to agree with that last point.

As they approached their destination, she pretended to misunderstand his directions and then had trouble finding reverse. This allowed her to avoid parking too close to the lumber company’s building. Frantz just interpreted her parking in the wrong parking lot, on the wrong side of the street, as just another blunder of a woman driver.

“Are you sure we’re allowed in?” Jeni inquired, sounding for all the world like a damsel in distress as they dashed across the street to a side entrance.

“It’s no problem. I work here late many evenings,” he said as he took out his keys. They headed to the door and he unlocked it. Once inside, he steered her toward the elevator and they went up.

The entire top floor belonged to the lumber company. After going through a large waiting room they went down a small hallway that dead-ended at a single door. Frantz opened it with an unusual-looking key and revealed another door. This was the safe door that Hans had described. He stepped in front of her, blocking her view, as he dialed the combination. This almost surprised her – after all, he was so lackadaisical regarding other security procedures. *At least he had some sense*, she thought.

As the door swung open, he announced, "Well, here we are."

"And where is that?" she asked suspiciously.

"Our communications center, of course," he replied, the surprise in his voice fading as he realized that she couldn't have known what to expect. "Notice that we have no windows, don't want anyone peering in. These cables go to antennas on the roof."

He proceeded to give her the grand tour. The room was rather large, with one end dedicated to the communications gear and the other set up as a conference room, complete with a bar and several couches. There were maps of agents' locations, shipping routes, train schedules, and other routine espionage items. Nothing new here; she had already seen all this in Hans's photographs.

They stopped at a strange, deformed typewriter. It had a normal keyboard but also sported a set of matching lights along with a cluster of wheels and knobs. They both took a seat in front of the contraption.

"This is our encryption machine, it's called an Enigma Umkehrwalze B." He seemed quite proud of this device.

"I must say, Frantz, this is more than I expected." She was letting her French accent out, for she had learned that it seemed to have a debilitating effect on men of any nationality. "It's a bit overwhelming, I could use a drink." *Perfect*, he thought, *that's what I had in mind*.

"Not a problem. We keep a small bar over on that wall. What would you like?" he asked as he started toward the bar.

"Oh, don't bother," Jeni said, coaxing him back to his chair, "I'll fix us something special ..."

Three minutes and thirty-three seconds. A new record. Frantz was out cold and he hadn't even finished Jeni's special cocktail. She might have over-doped it. *Well, no bartender is perfect*, she rationalized.

First things first. She emptied four beer bottles down the bar's sink and set two of them on the table next to Frantz and the other two on the floor by his feet. She then emptied his glass of the magic juice, refilled it with straight schnapps and dripped just enough liquor on him to ensure that the fragrance would still be lingering when he awoke. After rinsing

her glass, she added it to the collection in the sink. Now to get on with the real work.

Jeni pulled her chair up close to the cypher machine. While the Germans used their own proprietary version of the Enigma machine, the numerous commercial versions all operated in a similar manner. Thus Jeni had been able to practice configuring the device earlier on Jake's machine. Of course, she didn't ask Jake why a restaurant would have such an expensive piece of office equipment.

Decoding each message required setting up a unique configuration of the cross-connect wires like on a miniature switchboard. She also had to insert and align the correct encryption dials in the proper order. Once configured, the operator would press the key of the encoded character and the machine would light up the indicator revealing the decoded character. It would then advance the machine and be ready for the next encoded character in the sequence. Using the code book photographed in Tromburg's office, she soon had nine of the messages decoded.

Frantz had curled up in the chair and was snoring like a worn-out sheepdog. Jeni had just finished decoding the tenth message when she heard the elevator head downstairs.

28

Mark kept glancing at the door. Jake, Hank, and Hans took turns glancing at Mark.

Finally, Mark addressed their unspoken question. “Guys, she’ll be here soon. I know that woman. This is the first place she’ll come if she’s scared. Right now, she’s probably pretty scared. She’ll show up.”

Ten minutes later the lady in question arrived, sneaking in the north hangar door and up the back catwalk steps. She breathed a noticeable sigh of relief to see the men waiting for her and virtually pranced over to them. She pushed past Hans and stood by Hank.

“If you don’t mind, Hank, I’d like to sit by the wall for a moment.” She was out of breath but quickly regained her composure. It was only logical for someone who had just survived such an adventure to want their back to the wall. It was also the closest seat to Mark.

“Sure.” Hank shifted over to the other side of Hans.

Now that she was safe, Mark decided it was acceptable to express a little anger.

“You know Babe, you shouldn’t be taking chances like that without telling someone what you’re up to.” Mark was trying to sound like an older brother but he came across more like an upset husband.

“Oui,” Jeni replied. “But I didn’t have a chance to tell

anyone. I only planned on setting him up for later; never occurred to me that he'd open up that fast. The man is a real amateur."

Mark took a deep breath, any remaining feelings of frustration were vaporized by the scent of her perfume.

"That's one fast set of wheels you've got, babe. I'll bet you hit over a hundred on that straight stretch."

"Was that you following me?"

"Trying to. Didn't have a chance once you got on a good road and opened it up." Mark's anger had turned to admiration. This babe knew how to drive.

"You scared me more than the krauts did, you louse." She wanted them to think that she was ready to slap him. It would keep anyone from realizing that she really wanted to crawl onto his lap for a hug.

"Sorry, just trying to watch out for you."

"So I suppose you followed Frantz and me?" Her indignation wasn't completely faked.

"Didn't get the chance. But we alerted the local line boys to be on the lookout for you. One of them called us." Mark replied.

"Line girl," Hans corrected him. "You know that several of the phone operators enjoy monitoring Hauger's home phone for us. One called an hour ago and told us that she overheard Hauger talking with one of his lieutenants. Someone had noticed that the lights in his office building were on and thought they should go investigate. It seemed logical that you and Frantz had gone there. Mark and Hank went to help if you had gotten caught."

"Oui, Hauger came," Jeni commented, her Yankee accent getting supplanted by her French one.

I've seen this girl shaken before but never this shaken, Mark thought as Jeni took a long drink from his beer.

"What happened?" Jake was unusually curious.

"Things were going just fine. Frantz fell like a drunken sailor and I had just finished the last message when I heard the elevator heading downstairs."

"You would be trapped!" Hans exclaimed. "The only stairs are next to the elevator and I'm sure all the other offices would be locked."

"They were. I ran into the lobby as the elevator was coming up and didn't have time to dash to the stairs. All I could do is

hide under the receptionist's desk that sits at a diagonal in the corner of the lobby." Her breathing was now normal and the French girl was gone.

"Of course, Hauger would see that the communications room door was open as soon as he stepped off the lift." Hans speculated.

"Exactly, he and his two henchmen went running for it. I didn't know that a fat kraut, oh, sorry Hans, could move that fast."

Hans just shrugged off the slur.

"Anyway, I could hear them trying to wake up Frantz. Which wouldn't be easy. I planned the mickey to keep him out for just over an hour but it really seemed to slam him."

"So how did you get down?" Mark asked. "We saw you run away from the building and get into your car."

"Well, I couldn't get to the stairs without going across the lobby and risk being seen from that room. But I remembered that there was a fire escape. Turned out it was right outside the window by the desk were I was hiding."

A ginger ale showed up and Jeni took a quick drink. "Anyway, I unlocked the window, slid it up just enough and tossed out my heels. I didn't want to risk tripping on the stairs. Then I squeezed through. I heard someone coming so I just closed the window and left."

"So you snuck down the stairs, grabbed your shoes, ran to your car and dashed off for here." Hans filled in the rest of the story. "Oh, and, how do you Yankees say it, let Mark eat your dust. Any idea what happened to Frantz?"

"No, I'm sure he's awake by now. He'll probably tell them I was there. I didn't have time ..." She paused, a look of trepidation spreading slowly across her face. "I left the coded messages and my copy of the code book on the desk."

Everyone went silent. The original scheme was to drug Frantz long enough for Jeni to decode the messages and then leave. Frantz would awake a few hours later, accompanied only by his hangover. When, or if, he confronted Jeni, she'd claim he had been drinking too much and after he passed out, she left. She'd then declare that she was so outraged by his drunken behavior that she refused to talk to him again. Or at least until the team needed him for something else.

"Yes, he will tell them everything and try to convince them

that he knows nothing about the code books or messages. Hauger won't know what to do. He'll call Gruber. Gruber won't believe it and will waste no time checking his story. I would expect them to try and find you tonight." Hans's assessment was unanimously accepted and the group continued in silence, waiting for someone to decide what to do.

"Everyone stay." Jake suggested. Actually, it was more of a command.

They all agreed. Frantz would certainly tell his German bosses that Jeni hung around Jake's and it would be the first place they'd look for her. The krauts also knew that Hans frequented the establishment as well. They might try and reach him by phone.

The best plan was to stay in the open and make it blatantly simple for the Germans to try and confirm Frantz's story. Which of course they couldn't since Jake, Mark, and a dozen others would swear that Jeni had been with them all night. Hans's testimony would cinch it. If things went according to this new plan, things should be easy for Jeni. Probably pretty hard on Frantz, but that's the risk of trying to pick up women with the old "trust me, I'm a spy" line.

All this excitement had given Mark an appetite. The group decided on pizza. By the time the pizza arrived, Mark had decided that his curiosity could bear it no longer.

"Jen," he said in his *I'm not sure I want to know* voice, "What happened to your stocking?" No one else had noticed that Jeni's right leg sported a silk stocking but that her left leg was nude.

"Oh, that?" Jeni pretended to be caught off-guard. The other men didn't have to pretend at all. Of course, their first impulse was to look under the table, but none were so brash. This turned into a major act of self-control once she started to actually blush.

"I was going to mention that. I lost it," she said in a sheepish voice that was as unfamiliar to her as to them.

"Babe, women lose an earring," Mark stated suspiciously.

"Or their purse." Jake spoke from experience.

"Maybe even a shoe," Hans added. Hank was so focused on not looking at Jeni's legs that he could barely follow the conversation much less contribute to it.

"But how do you lose a stocking?" Mark asked, somewhat concerned as to how colorful her response would be. By now,

the men's overactive imaginations had conjured up some rather outrageous possibilities.

"As I said, I opened the window just enough to slip my, hmm, upper anatomy out. The fire escape was at window level, so I just squeezed through, sat on the platform and pushed myself backward. My stocking caught on something and my garter strap snapped. I was in a hurry you know. My stocking just slipped off as I swung my legs out the window." She could tell that they all regretted not being there to help.

She tried not to sound embarrassed as she continued, "I could hear someone coming down the hallway, so I closed the window and snuck down several steps and stood still against the side of the building. From the shadows on the platform, I could tell that one of the men came to the desk and sat down to use the phone. I wasn't going to wait around, so I just left it."

"Gotta get that stocking." Jake announced what they were all thinking.

"Hans, will anyone be watching the building later tonight?" Mark inquired.

"No, they have no reason to. They'll be busy with Frantz."

"Well, I guess I'm climbing a fire escape." Mark smirked at Jeni with that *the things I do for you* look on his face.

"No." Jake was firm. "I'll send someone." It was decided that having anyone directly connected with Jake's climb up the outside of a building in the wee hours of the morning wasn't such a good idea. Jake had several associates that, apparently, were rather skilled at such activities.

Just as all this had been resolved, the waiter came over and announced that a Herr Gruber was looking for Hans. Jake told him to just bring the man up. Unusual, but not unheard of. Besides, the more casual they appeared, the better.

Gruber arrived with his policeman in tow. Obvious to all, Gruber had brought the law along just to add a shred of credibility and authority to his own investigation. The officer made far more money supporting the Germans' operation than he did as a public servant.

"Hans, it seems that we've had a burglary at our headquarters tonight." As he spoke, Gruber's nervousness actually overshadowed his arrogance. Not by much, but enough to be noticed.

"Burglary? Our headquarters? Why? What would anyone want to steal from there?" Hans did a great job of sounding

surprised and tossed in a little anger just to sound more German.

"That is part of the mystery," The cop added, figuring he had better earn his payoff. Besides, if this got out of hand and his real boss got suspicious, he'd be fired by both employers. "However," he was stuck for a second, "a witness believes he saw a Miss Fourier near the building around the time of the break-in. He said you might know where to find her. Do you?"

Hans looked at him as if confused. "Miss Fourier is sitting right here." He motioned toward Jeni.

"Oui, that would be me," Jeni replied, turning on the accent just enough to unnerve the kraut and his pet cop. They were now all starting to worry that the cop would pull a ladies' stocking out of his pocket and ask to check out Jeni's gams.

Apparently, they hadn't anticipated Jeni being there nor did they have any questions regarding mysterious hosiery. Gruber and his cop just stood there looking at each other, neither knowing who should speak next. So Mark helped them out.

"Gents, Miss Fourier has been spending the evening with me. Ask anyone here." His tone carried clear implications: *don't mess with my girl*. "Who is this witness anyway?"

"Oh, actually, a young man who works here, Frantz," Gruber replied seriously.

The table broke into chuckles with their heads shaking.

"Was he sober?" Jake asked.

"Why do you ask that?" the cop answered.

"He's been stealing my booze," Jake countered.

"If I may interject, officer," the waiter stepped forward to join the conversation, "Frantz left early, again. I had to cover part of his shift. Oh, and Miss Fourier was here before six." Now, none of that was a bald-faced lie. True, some facts were more amplified than others and numerous details omitted, but the waiter was well on his way up the EPS's organizational ladder.

Hans stood up. "Herr Gruber, may I speak with you alone?" Hans and Gruber headed over to the unoccupied end of the catwalk. The cop, unsure of what to ask to whom, just stood trying not to be obvious while he admired Jeni. Hans and Gruber soon returned.

"Gentlemen, Madam, I believe our investigation here is concluded. Danke. Come," Gruber commanded as he turned to leave. Both the cop and Hans followed him out.

Frantz didn't show up for work the next day. In fact, he didn't show up for anything, ever. Since Hans wasn't part of the security detail that resolved that particular problem, he had only general details. Just as well, since no one really wanted to know. Hans did report that once he questioned the likelihood of a Frenchwoman asking a German to help her find a British agent, Frantz's fate was sealed.

What did show up, in a plain brown box outside her apartment door, sometime in the early morning, was her stocking. The now tattered and ripped hosiery was accompanied by six new pairs, all silk, in various, shall we say, exotic patterns. Who would have guessed that the line boys were so fashion-conscious.

29

The tension between Sarah and Jeni was no longer just a humorous topic of gossip. They had just barely avoided disaster at breakfast a few weeks earlier and Mark knew he had to intervene before the whole program ended in a tailspin, but how and when? First, he needed to find out what the problem really was. Two angry females. Good luck with that. It was also clear that Sarah was more bent out of shape than Jeni, though Jeni seemed to purposely encourage Sarah's fury.

But the place to start was with Sarah. Not only had Mark known her longer, he was also closer to her emotionally. If he could get her alone, she'd probably confide in him.

Hank, as one of Jake's senior mechanics, reminded him that the Ellen Jane was overdue for an oil change. *The boys are always game for a night in the jungle*, Mark thought. *Joe is out with Jeni on another road trip. Perfect. I'll fly Hank and one of the other guys out to the Yale strip in the Reliant. They can change the oil and rotate the spark plugs while I run up to the village. Heck, they can check the brakes as well; the right one's been dragging just a bit. It should give me several hours to work on Sarah alone.*

They spread the rumor that the generator at Yale needed some attention and Hank and Mario were going to look at it. They departed Jake's just after lunch, dodged some

thunderstorms, and arrived about four o'clock. The boys checked the plugs on the generator, just so everyone was telling the truth, and then attacked the Ellen Jane. Any chance to wrench on the Ellen Jane was pure delight for them and they were soon checking things that didn't need checking.

Mark took only his Colt .45 and two chocolate bars. Never hurts to be ready. The .45 was for dealing with any unexpected four-legged problems, the chocolate bars for dealing with the two-legged one waiting at the village.

He found the path much smoother than it had been the last time he visited, and it only took him fifteen minutes to reach the bridge over the stream. The beams looked very familiar and recalled memories of Joe and him slicing them out of native logs with a jerryrigged bandsaw. He approached the village on the main path, trying not to be too quiet. The men back here didn't appreciate surprises, but he was pretty certain he was being tracked. As he got closer he heard singing. He recognized the tune but the lyrics were just gibberish to him.

Soon he identified the song as "Be Thou My Vision" and could see about two dozen women in a circle under the canopy of the new church that Sarah had told him about. It was just a dozen poles with a roof. They were singing as they wove the baskets that Sarah would trade at the market in town. Strips of native palms being turned to salt, beads and other such luxuries. Mothers were nursing their babies, some older women were just looking on and offering their years of wisdom. A half dozen or so, with large red crosses painted on their backs, were performing a dance in the front. They moved in perfect unity, their footsteps and arm movements clearly choreographing a story. Just another ladies' social club. One woman was noticeably lighter skinned with light brown hair. With a nice smile, she looked completely content in the moment. He had never seen Sarah so happy.

He almost grabbed his chest. *Must have a pretty good pump*, he thought, *'cause if I was ever going to have a heart attack, this would have done it.* He was sure of only three things: it really was Sarah, he really was completely sober, and she really was half-naked.

After shaking himself back to reality, he started to retreat back down the path, but several of the little kids had spotted him and started shouting something in their native tongue.

Probably to the effect of *there's a big, confused-looking white guy staring at Sarah*. No retreat now, she had seen him. He expected Sarah to dash off to a hut or at least pull her hair around to the front. But without hesitation she stood up and marched on over, her breasts swinging as she walked. She was wearing only a short canvas skirt that ended just above her knees, sandals that had been fashioned from an old tire, and the silver necklace with the cross and ring. In addition to the large dark-red cross on her back, she had several native words painted on her torso and the letters *1 COR 9:22* on her stomach. Clearly a reference to a Bible verse, but he couldn't recall it. Right now he wasn't sure he could remember his own name.

"This is a surprise." She was surprisingly nonchalant. "I was not expecting you here. You've never visited the village before, that I remember."

"I was hoping we could get a chance to talk about some things." He tried to look her in the eyes but found himself failing often. Evidently, the girl who was uncomfortable wearing a short skirt in town had become rather accustomed to the village attire. So much so that she had forgotten what she wasn't wearing.

Suddenly it hit her and the smile was replaced with a combination of dismay and disbelief at the realization. Her mouth opened but she couldn't put the right words in the right order and stood mute.

"Yes, um ..." Mark commented shyly, "I've never seen you wearing makeup before, it's quite becoming." Sarah smiled, a real ear-to-ear smile, at his misdirection of the obvious topic.

It seemed that she was more embarrassed for him than for herself. "Neither of us must overreact or everyone will wonder why. Could we address this situation back at the airstrip?" She was as calm as if she was fully clothed, but there was a hint of pleading included.

He desperately wanted to make some comment like *Sure, just come as you are; I'm sure the boys won't mind*, but he only pronounced the "Sure."

"I'll be down right after supper, probably an hour or two." She turned politely and walked, maybe just a tad quicker than normal, over to the cabin. He waited for just a second, waved as casually as he could to a man he recognized, and then headed back to the airstrip.

He had always found his feelings for her confounding, and his view of their relationship was now more blurry than ever. She was clearly not the uptight prude that he'd believed.

Granted, he'd probably not tell Mom about her sitting around half-naked with the natives, but still, maybe there was hope for them. He had always found her attractive, even more so now, and not just because he had gotten a good look at the merchandise. He had long respected her mission, dedication, and energy, but he had always assumed that he couldn't adapt to her restrictive religion. Maybe he was wrong? Could she accept him? Maybe, just maybe, this was the girl that he could bring home to both Mom and Dad.

It seemed like a very short trip back. His mind was so busy trying to process what had just happened, that he found himself back at the airstrip with no recollection of crossing the bridge. The boys had just finished with the maintenance on the plane and decided to go fishing. He stayed to finish his flight planning or something; he didn't really remember the excuse he laid out. The truth was, he was afraid that in this distracted state, he'd fall into the river and drown. Less than an hour later, and the guys returned with some nice peacock bass.

They were just finishing supper when Sarah emerged from the jungle, now dressed for western civilization. She was back to wearing her trademark shirt, off-white, she called it *vanilla*, with several small roses embroidered on the collars. He liked how her denim jeans fit, tight but not too tight. The boots were purely practical. She had her knapsack with the .41 Colt as well. She joined the three of them around the fire, chitchatting about topics that no one really cared about. Whether the boys decided that she and Mark needed some privacy or just got bored he didn't know. In any case, they decided to head over to the hut to play some cards and retire early.

This left Mark and Sarah sitting in silence, watching the fire. Both desperate to talk but not knowing if the other shared the sentiment.

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“Do you know what I noticed first this afternoon?” The question slightly surprised her but then she remembered that he was, after all, a man. She just stared back at him, maintaining her silence.

“No, actually those were second.” He interrupted her blushing. “It was your smile. I’ve never seen you smiling like that before.” His voice trailed off into confusion.

“That’s silly,” she replied. “I smile all the time.”

“If by smile you mean, not frowning, then sure.” He didn’t want to push things too far but, after the events of today, he wasn’t sure that was even possible. “You looked, and I’m not referring to the lack of a wardrobe, like a completely different person back there.”

“I guess that in some ways, many actually, I am a different person.” She realized. “I have to be or I have no chance of communicating with them. I have to reach them on their terms, not mine. Let me start at the beginning.” It was more a plea for understanding than an introduction.

“Father had made many trips to visit the tribe the first year or so that he was here, with virtually no impact. Oh, they’d trade for his knives or iron pots, but there was no depth to the communication. That’s when he sent for me, he was hoping that a woman could help break through to them. I was more than happy to come. The university seemed so sterile

and out of touch with anything important. There were other factors too, but anyway, I jumped at the chance.” She let out a deep, soul-felt sigh. “At first, I made a little more progress but they still wouldn't open up.”

“Then one of the infants got sick, we wanted to help but they wouldn't let us.” Even now, the memory brought back tears and she had to pause. “The baby died and we could have saved him. Father was furious; I don't think he slept that night. He just stayed up quietly yelling at God – ‘Why can't they see the truth? Why am I here if no one listens? Why don't You do something?’ It really scared me. I didn't know you were allowed to get mad at God.

“The next morning I awoke in the cabin and he was already gone. Not too unusual. Anyway, I got dressed and stepped out to look for him.” She paused, her eyes drifting back half a decade. “And there he sat, over by the chief's hut, wearing nothing but his boxer shorts. I almost fell over. I had never seen him leave the house without his tie on. I was horrified. I didn't know what to do. I couldn't bring myself to go talk to him so I stayed in the cabin.” She was getting a little giddy. “I'd peek out the window to see if he was still there; he was, I'd hide and then peek again. Then I noticed that he had a large red cross painted on his back and the letters *1 Cor 9:22* in blue.”

“I've seen those letters before myself,” he interjected without thinking.

She got up on her knees and instinctively pulled up her shirt to reveal her stomach. “I recognized that it was a reference but had to look it up.” She sat back down. “It became our theme verse. The apostle Paul writes: ‘I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.’” She sat in silence, rewinding old images in her mind.

“I was hiding in the cabin thinking about the verse when Father came back around dusk. He was ecstatic. ‘The chief, the chief himself, has invited me to his hut for supper! Do you know what this means?’ I knew the answer but I couldn't talk. I just stood there staring.

“Then Father asked me, ‘So, I guess I surprised you?’ He then explained to me that after blaming God for not doing anything, that verse in Corinthians popped into his mind and just wouldn't leave. When he awoke and looked outside the next morning, he realized that he was confusing the message;

in fact, sending the wrong message. We had to join their culture and not expect them to join ours.

"I guess when he first walked out in his briefs, everyone laughed a bit. He told them that his suit was too hot for the jungle and that their garb was much more comfortable. They decided that his white skin would look good in blue or red. What did he want painted on? When they asked why a cross, he told them, and for the first time, they listened. Soon, he said, they were talking about fishing, hunting and all the other stuff men discuss. The barriers were gone. Maybe not completely, but seriously diminished."

"And when did you join in?"

"Father and I discussed things late into the night. He said that he didn't know what I should do, or how I should fit in, and that that decision was between me and God. If I was uncomfortable with his running around in his briefs, then I could stay back in town and minister there. And that's what I decided to do.

"However, you weren't supposed to pick us up for several more days and I wasn't going to canoe back alone. So the next morning, I went back to my normal routine. I got up and went to the river with the other women to get water and to bathe with them. I had always been terrified that one of the men would find me in the natural state and so I would hurry to get in and out of the water as fast as I could. The other women would chuckle at me. That morning I was a little more relaxed, maybe confused, and took my time. I was sitting on a rock drying off, with nothing but a towel around my waist, when I spotted two of the village men walking toward me. I didn't have time to think. I just sat there as they passed in front of me, glanced at me and kept going. I had barely ever even been seen in a swimming suit.

"Then I overheard their conversation: 'Hmm, guess she does look like all the other women. There should be some good fishing by the logs on the other side ...' It wasn't a big deal to him, just to me." She sat back and leaned against the log behind her. Clearly relaxed, more relaxed than he had ever seen her.

"So, I left my hair down, put on my skirt and only my skirt, and marched back to the village, topless and terrified. No one else cared. Oh, I could tell that father was a bit shaken at the first sight of his daughter topless, but he accepted it quickly.

After all, he had gotten used to all the other women being bare-breasted by then anyway. Later we joked that 'if you've seen one, you've seen them both.'

Of course Mark grinned; he was a bit surprised that she did as well.

Sarah continued, "We decided that inside the cabin, we'd follow western convention; outside, the native convention. We both knew that if our supporters back home learned of this, we'd be thrown out." She was sitting cross-legged and leaned forward toward Mark. "I know it seems like I'm a hypocrite, but I'm not. I know that there are many things that are always right or always wrong and I will not compromise on those; but the rest is mostly trivia and we can't let it get in our way. Later, I found that the men of the village had been more disturbed by my being clothed than being topless. They had assumed that I was hiding something or was deformed."

"Well, it sounds reasonable to me, but I'm not much of a theologian. Dropped out, you know."

"What?" Sarah raised both her voice and an eyebrow.

"Guess your father never told you. I dropped out of seminary to join the Army Air Corps." Leaning back, he put his hands behind his head. "Mom is still mad about that. She wanted her son to be in the pulpit, not in the cockpit. She wanted a preacher, not a fly-by-night-flyboy."

"Well, I'm not the innocent little girl everyone thinks I am," she confessed in a quiet voice.

"Oh, on the grand scale of things, I'm guessing that you're pretty innocent. Undressing with the natives doesn't count." He grinned at her presumed promiscuity. *Maybe she has actually kissed a man.*

"Mark, I'm not exactly a virgin." She stated it as if it was just a minor detail. He decided that this would be a good time to be quiet.

"When I was at college, I met a man named Andrew. I thought I was in love. Anyway, he was a graduate student and had an apartment off campus. One night he told me how much he loved me and that he wanted to sail down to Brazil and ask Father for my hand in marriage." She went silent for a few seconds. "I woke up the next morning in his bed. More than once. Anyway, I knew it was wrong but since we were going to get married ..." Even in the fading light he could see her blushing. "Then I got the telegram from Father asking me

to come to Brazil. We decided to surprise Father, he's always playing jokes on others. So I would attend nursing school and then the two of us would show up in Brazil and ask Father to perform a wedding. Seemed funny at the time." She wasn't laughing now.

"Let me guess, you got a letter while at school?" Mark felt ashamed for his gender; it wasn't right to take advantage of a girl that didn't want to be taken advantage of.

"No." Her eyes were sad and she should have been crying, but those tears had long been shed. "I got a wedding invitation from my aunt, announcing the marriage of their daughter to guess who?"

He decided that this would be another good time to just nod his head and be quiet.

"That's why I'm so restrained in town, I'm afraid that if I let down my guard I'll make the same mistake again. I admit it. I enjoyed it. But I don't want to mess up again."

He was a little bit awestruck by her honesty, knowing that they had just shared an emotional evening that neither could have ever imagined and neither would ever forget. He had never felt this connected with a woman before, and the feelings scared him. After a minute she moved over and leaned against his shoulder and they sat watching the fire. He put his arm around her and rubbed her shoulder.

"Where'd you get that hair comb?" he asked innocently.

"Oh, I don't really remember, probably at the local market. It's nothing special." She dismissed his question as one of idle curiosity. She was a little bit awestruck by his acceptance of her secrets, knowing that they had just shared an emotional evening that neither could have ever imagined and neither would ever forget. She had never felt this connected with a man before and the feelings scared her.

Without warning, he plucked the comb from her hair and tossed it into the fire. Her surprise was overtaken by a sense of relief. They sat and watched it burn, its smoke somehow distinct from the rest of the fire. As her hair began to unravel and slowly cascaded down around her shoulders, she knew that some part of her was floating away with the smoke. For reasons that were pure and honorable but not completely understood, she leaned over and kissed him on the cheek.

For other reasons (those they both understood all too well), she soon found herself sitting on his lap, kissing his lips. His

hand started to explore the territory under her shirt, gleefully discovering her bra-lessness.

“Mark, we can't do this here, please stop.” She sincerely wanted him to stop as she continued to kiss him back. He was starting to unbutton her shirt. “We shouldn't be doing this. Mark, Mark, we're outside. One of the guys could find us any second.”

“You're right, we can't do this ... here.” He stood up, scooping her up with him. While she pleaded with him to put her down, he carried her off to the hangar. Her soft cries for release had little effect as she kept nibbling on the very ear that she was pleading to. He maneuvered around the Ellen Jane and back to his office. Without relaxing his grip on her torso he dropped her feet to the floor. She looked at him, confused, but not anxious. With his left foot he kicked the door shut. His arms were still around her waist, restricting her movement.

“Mark?” She wanted to protest more but knew that she didn't have the acting ability to pull it off.

“Scream for help if you want,” he said as he peeled off his tee shirt. “The guys are just over in the bunkhouse.” He advanced toward her with clear intent. “I'm sure one of them will come running, the door isn't locked.”

They each stared at the other just long enough for her to determine that she wasn't going to scream. He started fumbling with the bottom button of her blouse. His impatience won out. Grabbing her shirttails, he ripped open the garment in one motion, causing her now bare breasts to jostle invitingly in front of him. Before she could react, he slid the garment down to her forearms behind her back and used it to loosely tie her arms together. Then he pulled her toward him, her chest against his.

“Mark, please, you must stop, please,” she whimpered to him, trembling as his one hand explored her nipples and the other arm held her close.

“Then why,” he whispered suggestively, “are you still kissing me?” For she was standing on her toes to reach his lips, her tongue exploring his mouth like a little kid trying to get the last drop of ice cream out of a bowl.

Sarah was out of breath. “I don't ... want ... to stop. I want you to want to!” *Like that was going to happen*, he snickered to himself. He ignored her answer and started on the clasp of her

jeans. Having unsnapped them, he sat her down on the cot, pushed her onto her back, then bent down and slipped his fingers under the waist band on each side of the jeans. Like the peel coming off a blue banana, he exposed the soft white flesh underneath. He stood back, and after admiring the scene, he turned out the light, inviting the moonlight to invade the room. She managed to free her arms from their fabric bonds and scrambled to the head of the bed and laid down. She watched him undress and, as he approached, she shifted to the side of the bed to give him room.

The cot was a tight fit for one person but was just right for two. Provided they were friendly with each other. He lay there, looking into her eyes, resting on his right elbow.

“Are you disappointed that ...” she was searching for words and decided on the Biblical approach, “you're not the first to *know* me?” She was timid, and her vulnerability extended far deeper than just the coming intimacy.

“Virgins are overrated,” he said flippantly, “I prefer a woman with a little more, shall we say, self-confidence.”

Afterward, they lay together without speaking, her head on his chest, him stroking her back. She was not his first partner either, but it was definitely and absolutely the most emotionally intense experience in his life. The hot, muggy jungle air seemed almost refreshing after the heat they had generated.

He awoke alone. Her shirt was laying on the desk with a note. “You owe me a new shirt, borrowed one of yours.” *Wonderful, I came up here to straighten things out and now I've literally screwed them up even more.*