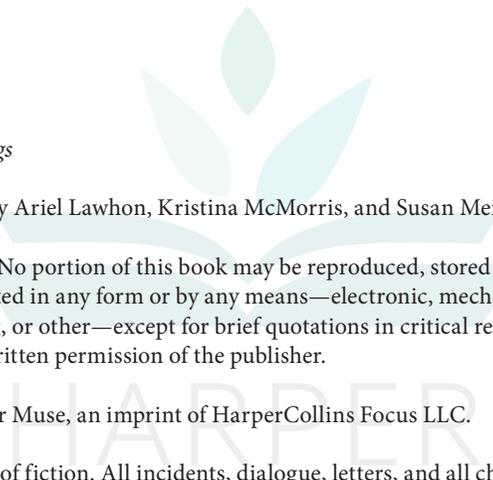


W H E N
W E H A D
W I N G S

ARIEL LAWHON, KRISTINA MCMORRIS,
AND SUSAN MEISSNER



HARPER MUSE



When We Had Wings

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Published by Harper Muse, an imprint of HarperCollins Focus LLC.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

[CIP TO COME]

Printed in the United States of America

22 23 24 25 26 LSC 5 4 3 2 1

For Elisabeth, our friend and champion



HARPER
MUSE

*When you go home
Tell them of us, and say
For your tomorrow,
We gave our today.*

—PATRICK K. O'DONNELL, *INTO THE RISING SUN*



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MANILA

August 1941

A sultry and sweetly fragrant breeze swept across Manila Bay as Eleanor Lindstrom walked carefully down the gangplank of the just-docked naval transport ship, mindful that her land legs might be slow in returning. A band was playing a cheerful Benny Goodman tune as she and other disembarking servicemen and women stepped onto solid ground. Filipino nationals on the other side of a rope held up by stanchions were waving hello and hawking maps of the islands or taxi rides or paper bags of sweets or bouquets of aromatic frangipani blossoms. The late-afternoon air was thick with their excitement but also with humidity that rivaled anything Eleanor had felt back home on a Minnesota midsummer's day.

The mood all around her was festive, despite the stifling heat, and she wanted to linger, to take it all in, and let the buoyant atmosphere energize her. Fortify her. Calm her. Crossing the Pacific, especially for a twenty-three-year-old Midwesterner who had never even seen the ocean before, had been challenging, yes, but it wasn't just the fatigue of travel that made her want to stop and fully embrace the novelty of her new surroundings. It was far more than that.

It was deciding on a whim to apply to the Navy and getting accepted so quickly. Leaving for training barely three weeks after signing on the dotted line. Saying goodbye to civilian life. Leaving her friends and fellow nurses at Abbott Northwestern Hospital in Minneapolis. Hugging her parents and sister farewell and knowing a three-year-overseas assignment meant it would likely be several years before she saw them or the family dairy barns again.

And all this change because she'd fallen in love with a man who loved another.

Eleanor set down her suitcase, closed her eyes, and breathed in deep the smells and sounds and feel of her new world, a world so far from all she knew, all she loved, and the part she needed to stop loving.

It hadn't been a mistake to join the Navy Nurse Corps, she knew that. Eleanor had nursing skills they obviously needed, and she needed an abrupt change in her day-to-day life. Both she and the Corps had gotten what they desired.

She loved being a nurse, had wanted to be one since her earliest childhood memories of pretending her dolls were sick or hurt and needed her kind attention. She loved her country, too, and was proud to now be serving in the Corps. And she'd always hoped to one day travel to a foreign land and experience a vastly different culture. But she knew these were not the real reasons she was standing at that moment on an ocean pier, thousands of miles from home.

Eleanor felt a hand on her arm and opened her eyes. A fellow naval officer was standing in front of her. The single gold bar on his lapel indicated he was an ensign; the lowest ranking of officers, so fairly new to military life, like she was. He carried a clipboard in his hand.

"Hey, are you feeling alright? Do you need to sit for a moment?" Concern etched his face.

Standing with her eyes closed after just getting off the ship had surely suggested she was about to faint. "I'm fine." She laughed nervously and he withdrew his hand. "I was just . . . enjoying the fresh air."

"Oh. Okay." He peered at the name tag on her uniform. "Nurse Lindstrom. Good. I found you. I'm Ensign Mathis from Command, and I'm here to make sure you and the other new Navy arrivals get to where you're supposed to be today. You are the only new Navy medical staff on this transport, yes?"

"Yes. Just me. I was told someone would meet me dockside. Thanks for being here."

"Certainly. Headquarters has arranged a driver for you." Ensign Mathis pointed to a shiny black sedan parked just on the other side of a chain-link fence.

“What about my trunk?” Eleanor held tight to her hat as a breeze kicked up.

“It will be brought up from the hold and taken to the Yard.” He referred to the Cavite Naval Yard the way all the sailors and naval officers had during her days aboard the ship. “You’ll find it waiting for you when you arrive at your quarters later tonight. Right now, you’re expected at the ANC for this week’s welcome briefing.”

He picked up her suitcase and walked toward an opening in the fence.

“The ANC?” Eleanor rushed to keep up, feeling like her legs were made of rubber.

Ensign Mathis looked back. “Sorry.” He slowed his pace. “The ANC is the Army Navy Club.”

“A club?”

“For officers of the U.S. Armed Forces, active and retired, and for service nurses too. And a few carefully screened American businessmen living here. It’s a pretty popular place. Big. Ballrooms, bars, a tearoom, a couple restaurants, hotel rooms. Very nice. And not far.”

The ensign handed her suitcase to the Filipino driver who’d stepped out of the car as they drew near. “Alright, then, you’re all set. From the ANC you’ll be driven to the Yard to get settled in whenever you’re ready to leave the club. After the briefing a lot of people stay for drinks and dinner. The food is really good. It’s pretty much a party atmosphere there.”

She glanced down at her uniform. “I’m not exactly decked out for a party.”

“It won’t matter. A lot of people go there in uniform, so you’ll be fine. Trust me.”

The driver closed the trunk and then came around to open her door.

“Thanks for your help, Ensign Mathis.” Eleanor turned to get into the car.

“Enjoy your tour at the Yard,” he replied with an easy smile. “You being a nurse, I sort of hope I don’t see you again. If you know what I mean.”

She grinned in return as she got inside. “How about only at the . . . uh, ANC now and then?”

“You’ve got a deal.”

He shut the door, waved, and then turned back for the ship, no doubt to assist other naval newcomers.

In a snap the driver was behind the wheel, then pulled the car out onto a street full of vehicles, people walking and riding bicycles, sailors milling about. Vendors in stalls were selling prepared food with names on the signage she had no idea how to pronounce. Palm trees and flowering vines abounded, and birdsong drifted in through the car's open windows, the likes of which she'd never heard before.

For a moment Eleanor wanted to hightail it back to the ship. She was out of place here, a stranger to this city, an alien to its way of life.

And yet the magical view on the other side of the window was welcoming. It was as if Manila was opening its arms to her, as if the island on which it lay yearned to soothe the ache of having lost what had never been hers, that it was already promising it would. She hadn't known a place other than home could do that. The desire to bolt evaporated as quickly as it had stolen across her.

"First time in the Philippines?" The driver cast a warm glance back at her.

"First time anywhere." Eleanor nodded.

Punctuality had never been Lita Capel's strong suit, and sadly today was no exception. As she wove her way down the bustling sidewalk headed for the ANC, a typical chiding from her oldest sister—make that all three of her sisters—echoed through her mind: *"Daydreaming again? What a dillydallyer you are. I swear, bunso, only you could make turtles seem quick."*

An endearment in Tagalog for the baby of the family, *bunso* inadvertently carried the needling reminder of where Lita, even at twenty-two, stood in the pecking order of four children. In fact, the nickname appeared at the start of every letter her sisters sent from New York, where together the siblings were building exciting new lives while working as nurses at some fancy hospital in a city called Brooklyn. Always included in their updates were assurances that their petition to the American government,

requesting permission for Lita to immigrate and join them, would meet approval any day.

Of course, they'd been saying this ever since she graduated from nursing school more than a year ago. Rising tensions between America and Asia seemed to have slowed the process. Still, she prayed her sisters were right, now more than ever given the recent onslaught of headlines—like those being shouted at this very moment, in both English and Tagalog, by paperboys as Lita passed by.

“Emperor Hirohito condemns U.S. embargo!”

“Japan refuses to surrender airfields in Indochina!”

“President Quezon implores keeping peace!”

The Filipino leader, unlike Lita, was surely old enough to remember when the U.S. acquired the Philippines from Spain, setting off a bloody, three-year-long conflict with Filipino rebels.

Needing to cross the street, Lita waited anxiously for a break in the near-constant flow of motorcars. Honks punctuated the rumbling of engines and exhaust fumes choking the air. Holding her nurse cap atop her head, she dashed through an opening and away from the newsboys' warnings that intensified her brewing dread.

Over the past two weeks, as punishment for the Japanese invasion of Indochina—a reality reinforced even now by the throngs of Chinese refugees mixed within the crowd—America had not only frozen Japan's assets but also established an embargo on its oil and gasoline exports. Should the countries go to battle, a violent tug-of-war would surely ensue for control of the Philippine Islands, thanks to their strategic locations for bases, communications, and supplies.

The Great War was meant to end all wars, she'd heard since childhood. And yet with Hitler's forces wrangling for domination over all of Europe and now invading the Soviets' lands, was another world war looming? If so, would Lita be trapped here, caught in the cross fire?

“Oh, stop already,” she muttered. As life had mercilessly taught her, there was no point in dwelling on things beyond her control. A social evening would serve as a fine distraction.

Plowing onward, she cut through a waft of spices from a vendor hawking

empanadas and adobo. As she rounded the corner, between hats and heads she spotted the familiar three-story building, stately and elegant with its thick columns and a circular drive teeming with vehicles. Potted palms and climbing bougainvillea adorned the front, along with a sign identifying it as the Army Navy Club. Servicemembers and civilians—of which she was one, though cross-trained with U.S. Army nurses—filtered in and out of the entrance.

Finally there herself, she trailed impatiently behind a trio of American sailors. The fairest of them turned and grandly kept the door open for her. With a polite smile she stepped past him to enter. Whether from his carelessness or her own, his arm brushed the chest of her uniform, and she bristled.

“Sorry about that.” He looked genuinely abashed, and Lita realized she’d flashed him a glare. Not intentional. A reflex, and for good reason.

Being a *mestiza*, the product of a Filipina mother and an American-missionary father—or “half-breed” according to the crueller girls in school—she’d learned long ago that many American boys viewed girls like her as easy. Either way, considering her future plans, there was no reason to invest in any courtship when she wouldn’t be sticking around.

Thus she merely nodded at the sailor before continuing into the large foyer. Waved through by a familiar receptionist, Lita reapplied her usual cheerful veneer. It wasn’t difficult in light of her surroundings.

Although beautifully appointed with fresh flowers in vases, ample sitting areas, and plush carpeting, the space’s most marvelous feature was its air cooler. Despite being a good fifteen minutes late to meet her friend, she couldn’t help but pause in the midst of passing an icy breeze from an overhead vent. A pleasant shiver ran the length of her back, making her aware of the sweat dampening her blouse.

A native of a fishing village on the island of Leyte, where air-conditioning was unfathomable, she couldn’t imagine ever taking the luxury for granted.

“Are you lost, dear?” a woman asked, a floral dress draping her matronly form.

Lita felt a bit foolish for lingering. “Oh. I’m just heading toward Salon B.”

“Well, in that case, you’ll want to take this hallway to the end, make a left, and you’ll run smack-dab into it.”

Lita was tempted to explain that she wasn’t new to the place, that since first befriending Penny, a sweet yet feisty U.S. Army nurse, a month ago at the hospital, they’d made an occasional habit of meeting here for chit-chat they didn’t have time for when their paths crossed during their daily rounds. Rather, she replied simply, “Thank you.”

“No, no, my dear, thank *you*.”

Bewildered, Lita tilted her head.

“If it weren’t for nurses like you, my husband wouldn’t be up and walking about. You girls are doing the Lord’s work.”

At that Lita issued a grateful smile. But as they parted ways, she felt the recurrent burden that never failed to accompany such compliments. For when it came to the devotion and selflessness of her job, in all truth, she remained an imposter.



Penny Franklin needed a drink. She angled toward her favorite table in Salon B. It was nestled in the back corner beside an open window, a convenient distance from the watchful eye of her supervisor, Maude Davison, who was sitting near the front. Since claiming it for herself weeks earlier, Penny thought of her spot as the “bad behavior table,” a place to whisper and gossip with Lita when attending a required meeting in Salon B.

She smiled at the young soldier who stepped forward to pull out her chair.

“Thank you.” She tried not to laugh as a blush crept across his face.

He cleared his throat. “Ma’am.” When he bobbed his head in greeting, she noticed the thin silver scar that ran through his left eyebrow, splicing it neatly in two.

The boy was sixteen if he was a day. Just another kid who lied about his age and ran off to join the Army looking for adventure. Not so different from her, perhaps. Except for the age. Penny had at least a decade on him. At this point in her life, however, sixteen felt as long ago and far away as Texas.

Three more upholstered chairs were situated around her table, and like all the others in the room, it was topped with a pressed linen tablecloth. Glinting chandeliers hung from the high ceiling. Several naval officers in day dress were arranging papers at the front of the room at a tall, carved podium. Four dozen people were already in the room in little groups, most in uniform, some sitting, some standing around and laughing as they waited for the briefing to begin.

Once settled in her seat, Penny leaned toward the vase and inhaled the scent of jasmine. A month in Manila and that rich, exotic scent still hadn't grown old. Nor had the feel of cool air against her warm skin. Her mother's patio in Houston was covered in geranium-filled terra-cotta pots, and even though she loved their wet-earth smell, they didn't compare to Philippine jasmine. So yes, perhaps the other side of the world wasn't such a bad place to lick her wounds after all.

"Franklin," came a deep, familiar voice. "Sleeping on the job again?"

Penny opened her eyes and turned to find Captain Charley Russell, quartermaster, source of unrelenting aggravation, standing in front of her. As ever, his face was unreadable and his presence unwelcome. Penny swept an imperious glance over the highball glass in his hand.

"Better than drinking on the job."

It wasn't so much a smile that danced at the corner of his mouth—he had never once smiled at her in all the weeks she'd worked with him—but acknowledgment of a barb well traded. Tit for tat. He was in civilian clothes after all, clearly off duty, so the remark could hardly be considered impertinent.

"Why bother just fighting a war when you can fight a hangover at the same time?" he said, voice so dry and humorless she couldn't tell if he was joking.

Penny scowled. "That sounds like a lot to handle at once."

He wiggled his fingers. "Ambidextrous."

Penny lifted a glass of water in a half-hearted salute and noticed that his eyes, as they had many times before, fell to her ring finger and the ghost tan line that resided there. She'd taken her wedding ring off before leaving Texas, but the truth was there for all the world to see: Lieutenant Penny

Franklin had once been married but no longer was. And *oh* the assumptions that always came with *that* realization. She waited for Russell to finally broach the subject. Instead he held her gaze for one long, curious second until she broke the connection and looked toward the door.

Salvation walked through in the form of Angelita Capel.

“Lita!” She waved her friend over.

Penny ignored Captain Russell as he slipped away to join a group of fellow officers at their table near the front.

Penny had arrived in Manila thirty-seven days earlier, and Charley Russell had been a thorn in her side for thirty-six. On her first full day, Maude Davison gave her the task of submitting the hospital inventory requests to the base quartermaster. Once a week she delivered the paperwork and once a week he rejected it. It didn’t matter how carefully she went over the forms; he always found an error, a typo, a misspelling and required her to resubmit them before he would sign off on the orders. Not even in nursing school had her superiors been such sticklers for immaculate handwriting and perfect spelling.

Penny was certain of very little in her life other than Charley Russell would infuriate her for two hours every Friday afternoon. Was it any wonder then that she enjoyed a cocktail at the ANC every Friday evening? Sometimes, when she was lucky, Lita was able to join her.

“I’m so sorry I’m late.” Lita dropped into a chair at the table, where Penny greeted her with a hug.

“Nonsense. You’re precisely on ‘Lita time.’”

After a wince from embarrassment, Lita joined Penny in a laugh, then asked, “Who’s the fellow, by the way?” She motioned toward the back of Russell’s head.

“My nemesis,” Penny said.

Lita’s brow arched. “*That’s* the quartermaster?”

“In the flesh.”

“Gee, from what you shared about his being such a grouch, I guess I thought he’d be older.”

“Satan has no age.” Penny broke into a wide grin when her friend laughed.

Lita glanced around the rapidly filling room. “Why are we meeting here instead of the bar?”

“Welcome briefing. There’s a new Navy nurse coming in today. I volunteered to greet her. And you, my dear, are along for the ride.” Penny stuck her tongue out. “Happy hour will have to wait a bit.”

Lita shrugged. Then she scrunched her nose, tentative. “Dare I ask . . . any word from home yet?”

“No,” Penny said. And she didn’t expect it either.

Lita looked at her, those clear brown eyes filled with confusion. Though she swiftly attempted levity. “Well, it does take a while for mail to cross the Pacific. And you’ve only been here five weeks. Did you write to them again?”

“Once a week, every week. I even tried phoning. Since they’re always home on Sunday afternoons, I got up at four o’clock in the morning because of the time difference. But when the operator said she had a call from the Philippines, my mother hung up.”

Lita blinked, unable to hide her startled expression. “It . . . must have been an accident. A poor connection, maybe.”

The melancholy tone of their conversation was a direct contrast to the laughter-filled buzz that radiated through the lounge. Penny was grateful that Lita didn’t mind her somber mood. As a matter of fact, there seemed to be little that bothered Lita. She often appeared perfectly serene, her face the picture of untroubled waters. No frown. No pursed lips. Only acceptance and a seemingly bottomless well of patience.

“I’m sure they’re not ignoring you,” Lita insisted.

“Oh, that I know for certain.” Penny rubbed a bead of water off the rim of her glass. She balanced it on the pad of her thumb before she flicked it onto the crisp, white tablecloth. “They’re *punishing* me.”

After a moment Lita’s gaze fell—the way Captain Russell’s had—to the ghost line on her finger. Penny had noticed Lita staring at it several times before, but her friend had never asked for an explanation and Penny had never offered. But Lita’s curiosity must have finally gotten the better of her.

“Is it because you got divorced?”

And that made Penny smile because she'd known that's what everyone assumed. "I'm not divorced."

Lita's eyes darted up, widening in surprise.

"I'm widowed."

Lita's mouth fell open and she covered it with her fingertips. "They can't be angry at you for that!"

"No. Not for that. My parents won't forgive me for joining the Army and leaving them. They feel abandoned. Betrayed." Penny looked away from Lita and the sympathy pooling in her eyes. She glanced around the room. "But I couldn't stay there any longer. I . . ."

She let her words drift away when she saw the woman standing in the doorway. She was in a Navy uniform and young, like many of the other nurses in the Philippines. She had blonde hair like Penny always wished for and watchful blue eyes. The way she moved, the way she scanned the room, radiated a kind of wariness that immediately caught Penny's attention.

"What?" Lita asked.

"There's our nurse." She tipped her chin toward the door. "Poor thing looks lost."

After handing off her purse and suitcase at the club's reception table, Eleanor stood in the salon for several seconds. Should she just snag any chair?

A uniformed Army nurse arose at a nearby table and waved to her. Seated beside the gal was a pretty Filipina, also in uniform but that of a civilian nurse.

Eleanor made her way over, grateful she'd been noticed.

The standing nurse smiled at her. "Hi there. I'm guessing you're Eleanor Lindstrom?"

"I am."

"Penny Franklin. I'm here to officially welcome you to the nursing community on Manila."

Eleanor saw that she and Penny were about the same height, but Penny's

light brown hair was cut in a far more stylish bob. She also had a confident air about her that Eleanor immediately found inviting.

Penny nodded toward her tablemate, the Filipina nurse, who had also risen to her feet. “And this is my friend Angelita Capel. I offered to look out for you since all of your Navy compatriots are across the bay and we’re right here.”

“Everyone calls me Lita.” The Filipina smiled wide and reached out to shake Eleanor’s hand. She was small boned, with ebony-black hair in a low bun and graceful Asian features.

“Thanks so much for calling me over.” Eleanor pulled out a chair and sat down.

“Lita’s from here, as you might have guessed,” Penny said. “But I asked her to come because we’re getting cocktails after this. We’re both at Sternberg. You’ll be at Cavite of course?”

“Yes. At Cañacao Hospital.”

“So where’s home for you?”

“Minnesota. You?”

“Texas.”

They engaged in a bit more small talk, and then the briefing began. Eleanor and the other new arrivals were informed of where everything was located, what local customs and traditions they needed to be aware of, and what sections of Manila to avoid. They were told how to engage with the territorial residents, what to say, what not to say. And then they were dismissed.

“Let’s get that drink!” Penny said happily. “You will join us, won’t you, Eleanor?”

“Sure. I’d love to.”

Eleanor followed Penny and Lita as they made their way to an elegantly appointed bar on the main floor. It was a few minutes before five o’clock, and the room was beginning to fill with Friday after-work patrons.

Penny selected a table for three along a wall with an ample view of the rest of the room, and they ordered frothy daiquiris at Lita’s suggestion. Eleanor had never tasted anything so delicious. Or strong.

For several minutes she listened as Penny told her about her arrival in

Manila and how she'd met Lita on her first day on the island. As they got to know each other better, Eleanor sensed a surprising affinity growing already for her two new friends.

A party of naval officers in dress whites entered the room along with several smartly attired young women on their arms. One of the couples, clearly in love, was being congratulated by others already at the bar. Hank and Marlene, as everyone was calling them, had just gotten married. Bottles of champagne appeared at the table the bridal party had chosen, and more congratulations were being extended by those seated nearby.

Eleanor could barely take her eyes off the couple. They looked so incredibly happy. She must have said this out loud because Penny laughed.

"Well, I should hope so! They're newlyweds."

Lita laughed lightly too.

Heat rose to Eleanor's cheeks. The strong drink must have loosened her tongue.

"So, tell us," Lita said. "Any special fellow back home you're missing already?"

Eleanor had no idea how to answer. When she didn't reply right away, Penny cocked her head in curiosity. "Come on. We're all friends now. Who is he?"

Eleanor didn't know if it was because of the excitement of being in a new place or making new friends or starting out on a great adventure, or maybe just the effect of the cocktail, but when she opened her mouth, what she hadn't shared with anyone spilled out. "There *is* someone back home, but he's not actually mine to miss. Or love. He's engaged."

Lita exchanged a look of surprise with Penny that quickly gained an overtone of sympathy, and asked, "Does he know how you feel about him?"

Eleanor laughed. "Oh, he knows. I made the mistake of telling him when I thought he might have feelings for me too. What I took for the beginnings of romantic interest was just him being nice. Reverend John Olson is an extremely nice person." She shook her head as tears sprang to her eyes. "What a fool I was."

Silence hung over the table for a moment. Then Penny laid a gentle hand on Eleanor's arm. "Clearly *he's* the fool if you ask me."

“I second that,” Lita said. “A real dope.” Both women smiled, and though Eleanor’s heart remained in tatters, she felt the mending of a single stitch as she smiled in return.



Through another round of drinks, Lita learned a great deal about her new friends. Eleanor shared more details about her heartbreak and John Olson, as well as about life on her family’s dairy farm. Penny spoke about her parents and even a bit about the tragic loss of her husband. Lita, of course, described following in her sisters’ footsteps, both in nursing and in her hopes of moving to the States. And while she rarely shared private matters, she did touch upon the passing of her parents—her father when she was a child, her mother five years ago—though, granted, not the guilt she harbored regarding the latter.

The compassion Lita received from Penny and Eleanor felt as warm and genuine as the words of comfort they continued to trade throughout their uniquely open conversation. She couldn’t explain exactly why their connection felt so effortless. But in a few short hours, it seemed they had known each other for years. Lita dreaded the night ending, having found a sense of sisterhood she hadn’t realized until now how much she missed.

On the other side of the room, voices burst out in celebration. A layered cake was being delivered to Hank and Marlene’s table. More champagne flowed, and with it a thrilling idea.

“You know what I think?” Lita said. “The next time Eleanor is on our side of the bay, we have our own celebration—right back here for another daiquiri toast. Cake, too, for that matter,” she added in jest.

“I’d love that.” Eleanor smiled.

But Penny shook her head. “The way life can get away from us? I’d say we make it a standing date. How about . . . the last Saturday of every month? Assuming our duty days allow. We’ll call it HAM Day!”

Lita joined Eleanor in looking at her with a puzzled expression.

“Hank and Marlene Day,” she explained, as if it couldn’t have been more

obvious. All their smiles broadened as Penny raised her nearly empty glass. “Everyone in?”

Eleanor held up her glass. “Absolutely.”

They turned expectantly to Lita, and a notion dawned on her.

She had been feeling pensive of late, a restlessness in her soul that everything about life as she knew it was about to change. But here, in this moment, she also sensed a solidifying bond in these newfound friendships.

Warming at the thought, she lifted her drink. “To HAM Day,” she said, and their glasses clinked.

The sealing of a pact.

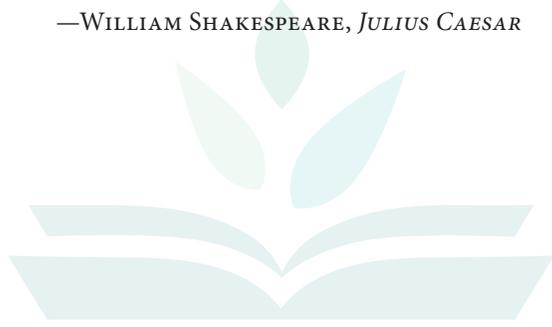


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1941

Cry "Havoc" and let slip the dogs of war!

—WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *JULIUS CAESAR*



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ONE

ELEANOR

Cavite Navy Yard
December 1941

Eleanor awoke to the sounds of rapid footsteps in the hallway outside her quarters and then heavy pounding on her door. Her room was still bathed in darkness; the day had not yet begun.

“Out of your beds!” The urgent voice belonged to Laura Cobb, the chief nurse, a longtime Navy veteran and Eleanor’s direct supervisor. “Get dressed. Don’t turn on any lights!”

Eleanor sat up. Something had happened. Or was happening. And it wasn’t good.

The unease that came over her as she swung her legs over the side of her bed was immediate and foreign. In the four months that the naval base had been her home, she’d only experienced a sense of surprising calm. Everything she’d heard about Manila being a paradise assignment had proven true. The weekend parties in the city, the lazy afternoons on the beach, the long bicycle rides, and the HAM Days with Penny and Lita had all combined to make her off-duty hours seem as though she were on a perpetual vacation.

The same pounding fell upon the door directly opposite hers—Peg’s—and with it the same pressing command. “Out of your beds. Get dressed. Don’t turn on the lights.”

Eleanor fumbled for her wristwatch and squinted to read it in the splash of moonlight falling across her nightstand. Four in the morning. She grabbed her uniform from yesterday with trembling hands and opened her door. Peg Nash, a fellow Navy nurse and her closest friend at the Yard, was standing outside her quarters with her uniform in her hand, too, and her curly brown hair in a tangle from sleep. Laura Cobb was moving down the hall from them, knocking on all the doors and repeating identical instructions.

“What’s happened?” Peg called out to their commander.

“Japan attacked Pearl Harbor,” Laura said urgently, turning to them. “It’s been destroyed. Get dressed as fast as you can. The fleet surgeon has ordered us to evacuate the hospital.”

Laura pivoted quickly to resume her task as a few more doors were opened, and several other nurses in their pajamas looked about in alarm in the dimly lit hallway.

Eleanor couldn’t make sense of the news. She’d stopped at Pearl on her way to Manila. It was as beautiful a paradise as the Philippines. Laura’s words echoed in her head as she turned to Peg. “*It’s been destroyed. It’s been destroyed.*”

“Why are we evacuating the hospital?” Eleanor asked, somewhat dazed.

Peg began to unbutton her pajama top. “If Japan has attacked Pearl Harbor, the U.S. will declare war. You can count on it. We’re going to be at war.”

Again words spoken to her in clear English had defied her comprehension. “*We’re going to be at war.*”

“But . . . the hospital? Why are we evacuating the hospital? Hawaii is thousands of miles away.”

“It’s a U.S. military hospital. On a U.S. military base. No base anywhere will be safe from an attack, but especially not ours. Nothing separates us from Hawaii but water. And the Philippines are a strategic Pacific location. We wouldn’t be here if they weren’t. You’d better get dressed. And don’t forget to modify your flashlight.” Peg disappeared into the darkness of her quarters, peeling off her pajama top as she did so.

Eleanor slipped back into her own dark room, pulled off her nightgown,

and donned her uniform. Her heart thumping in her chest, she wrapped a bit of blue cellophane over her flashlight to make it safe for blackout.

She stepped out into the darkness seconds later, just behind Peg and a few of the other nurses for the short walk to the hospital. Rain had fallen while they'd been sleeping and the air was thick with a heavy, moist veil. Across the bay the pinprick lights of Manila glittered from eight miles away.

There were only eleven other Navy nurses under Laura's command at Cavite, but as they made their way quickly to the hospital, dozens of corpsmen joined them. The enlisted medics had also been awakened and were hurrying out of their barracks. Eleanor overheard two of them discussing the order to evacuate.

"How can the Japanese attack a hospital? That's against the rules of warfare in the Geneva Convention."

"Japan didn't ratify the latest agreement. They never formally agreed hospitals were off-limits."

As soon as they reached the three-story building, Laura dispersed her nurses to different positions to administrate the evacuation, while sailors got to work stacking sandbags around the building. Eleanor was assigned to help assess which patients could be safely discharged and allowed to return to duty and which would have to be transferred to a safer location. Every sailor-patient who stood in line to be evaluated, chart in hand, begged to be allowed to return to his assignment.

"It's just a little bump on the head!" one sailor pleaded. "It's nothing. Let me go. Let me defend our ships."

"You suffered a concussion yesterday," the doctor replied. "You really should be on bed rest one more day."

"I'm fine. Let me go, please. Let me help."

"I'm not convinced that's a good idea."

"But, sir. My brother's stationed at Pearl Harbor. I don't even know if he survived. The planes that bombed Pearl are surely coming here. Please release me."

The doctor sighed and then signed off on the young man's discharge order. The sailor spun away from them and headed for the exit.

Eleanor watched him go. Would she ever see that man again?

Several hours later, with the evaluations complete, a Filipino porter brought the nurses coffee and warm *pan de sal*—slightly sweet and fluffy bread rolls, and a Filipino breakfast staple—and they had their first moment to rest since being startled from sleep before dawn. It was also the first moment to hear the extent of what had happened in Hawaii. The sneak attack on the U.S. Pacific Fleet anchored at Pearl had been catastrophic. Eight battleships had been destroyed, including the USS *Arizona*, which had sunk so quickly after being torpedoed that hundreds of sailors were still trapped inside. The casualties and injuries from the attack were still being counted.

Eleanor had reached for a second pan de sal as Laura began to brief them of these details, but tears burned at her eyes and she could not eat it. As she set the roll down, she saw that all the other nurses were crying too. Hawaii was a territory just like the Philippines and full of Americans. An attack on a U.S. military installation was an attack on America. But there was little time to grieve the impact of the countless lives that had surely been lost.

An air-raid siren wailed a mournful, soulless sound. The nurses ran as one outside.

With shaking limbs Eleanor crawled under the hospital—which had been constructed with space between the ground and the building in case of flooding. While they waited in the muck for bombs to fall, an unexpected and bizarre calmness began to envelop Eleanor, even as the mud seeped into the bleached-white fabric of her uniform. She could see in her mind's eye her parents in the dairy barn in the tawny light of daybreak, the barn cats following them from stall to stall as roosters outside crowed to welcome the day. Her little sister Lizzie was riding her red bicycle down the dirt path to town, pigtails flying behind her, to get the latest copy of *Hollywood* magazine. And there was the beloved farmhouse in springtime, its porch framed by blooming forsythia and lilac and climbing clematis. She could see long summer nights dotted with firefly light, the endless golden sky in autumn, the diamond-bright first snow, and all the people she loved back home.

Before she could sweep it away in her mind, she saw John Olson in a blue flannel shirt, painting the rectory lemon yellow and humming a happy

tune. That was the day she'd fallen in love with him. For the first time in months, she smiled when she thought of him. She closed her eyes and waited for whatever would come next.

The minutes ticked by and there was no drone of enemy planes, no bombs, nothing at all. Within an hour the all clear sounded, and Eleanor and the other nurses climbed out, covered in mud. The calming images faded. How many times might she have to call upon them in the days ahead?

Back inside the empty hospital, Laura dispatched two of the nurses to assist at Sternberg. As they left, Eleanor asked them to say hello to Lita and Penny if they happened to encounter them. And to tell them to stay strong and well and she'd see them on HAM Day.

"They will know what I mean," Eleanor said to her puzzled colleagues.

Laura brought out dark blue dungarees and work shirts—the male sailor's typical uniform. "Obviously our white dresses aren't practical right now. We're going to be wearing these."

One of the nurses held up a pair of dungarees. They were huge. "You could fit two of me in these!"

"They're one-size-fits-all, ladies. Make them fit. No complaints."

In the nurses' dayroom Eleanor took off her soiled dress, put on the new "uniform," and cinched the dungarees around her waist as best she could with her uniform belt. The nurses looked at each other and their oddly fitting new clothes and laughed for the first time that day. It felt good and wrong at the same time, and as they walked back into the hospital halls, the light moment slipped away as if falling upon the pile of now-useless white uniforms.

Eleanor spent the rest of the day readying the emptied patient rooms and medical stores should Cavite come under attack, her thoughts wandering every few minutes. There were nurses at Pearl. She could have been one of them. How many had survived? How many of them were hurt? How many of them had to rush to tend to the terrible wounds of bombing victims? Where in the world had they found the strength to do it?

That night she fell into her bed exhausted. The long day had been physically draining to be sure, but mentally as well. As tired as she was, though, anxiety energized her. Eleanor realized she was afraid; not of dying—she'd

found a calming solace under the hospital—but that she wouldn't be able to keep her solemn word. She'd taken an oath, pledging not only to defend the United States but to bear true faith and allegiance to her country and obey every order given her. She didn't want to break that promise. With all her heart she did not want to.

But she had not considered that a Navy nurse would see war, not even when she had gotten the assignment to Cavite. She was not a warrior. She'd only wanted to escape the pain of a broken heart and chart a new purpose for her life. She hadn't really considered what she might be asked to do, only what she was asking her new life in the Navy Nurse Corp to do for her.

Eleanor prayed a simple prayer as she closed her eyes against the darkness of the blackout conditions and her own fear. "Give me strength to do what I said I would do," she whispered. "Please give me strength. And watch over Penny and Lita. Please keep them safe."

Eleanor awoke at first light to the news that the United States had declared war on the Empire of Japan.



On Wednesday the air-raid siren sounded as Eleanor was eating lunch. Several sirens had wailed since Monday's devastating news of the attack on Pearl. She rose from her chair and took her toasted salami-and-cheese sandwich with her, as did the other nurses and commissioned staff eating in the quarters' wardroom. It could be an hour or more before the all clear sounded.

The mood was slightly less than urgent as they all made their way outside, past the sandbags and then under the barracks. Even though the U.S. was now at war, Eleanor had slept better the previous night than she did on Monday when everything about their situation was new. Still, she wished she'd brought her coffee, too, as she watched one of the nurses maneuvering into the crawl space with her cup, coffee sloshing onto the dirt.

As she settled in along with corpsmen, cooks, and a few other hospital personnel, Eleanor became aware of a sound she'd not heard during

the other air-raid alerts. A low and steady hum. An arrow of panic shot through her.

Planes were overhead. Lots of them.

One of the cooks still standing outside the crawl space dropped to his knees and scooted under the building, yelling, "They're coming!"

Eleanor instinctively drew her knees up to her chest, dropped her head, and covered it with her arms, the sandwich abandoned. She could hear anti-aircraft guns firing from afar and the pounding of her own heart.

No bombs fell.

"What's happening?" Peg asked the cook, who was now peering out from underneath the building.

He paused before answering. "They're . . . circling back. They're coming back!" He slid underneath again and everyone waited. This time Eleanor kept her head up.

But not for long.

Bombs rained down, detonating on impact with thunderous roars. Each one seemed to fall closer to their sheltering place than the one before it. If the building took a direct hit, they would die in a flattening instant. Explosion after explosion rocked the earth, followed by a stretch of moments when the pounding ceased, only to return after the enemy planes had come back across the bay for another pass at Cavite.

The ground under Eleanor heaved as the next rounds met their targets. *Boom! Boom! Boom!* She hoped the end would be quick. She hoped there would be only one intense moment of dizzying pain, as short as a blink of an eye, and then the sweet halls of heaven. She'd see Grandma Lindstrom again. How she'd missed her.

Near Eleanor someone was whispering, "Pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death." A hand closed over her own. Peg's perhaps. None of them would die alone. That was a tremendous comfort. She suddenly remembered it was Eldene Paige's twenty-eighth birthday. Eleanor looked over at her.

"Happy birthday, Eldene," she said softly, strangely wanting to make sure her coworker heard these words before the end came for them.

“Thanks,” Eldene replied in a hushed tone that suggested she had needed to hear it.

For an hour they waited for the bomb to fall that would kill them all. But it did not come. And then the booming ceased. The earth stopped quaking. The drone of aircraft faded.

The all clear sounded and Eleanor and her nurse comrades crawled out from underneath their shelter to see what was left of Cavite.

Acrid smoke billowed in every direction from great bulbous pillars of fire. Cavite Naval Yard had been all but obliterated. Across the bay Manila looked much the same. Torched and on fire. It made no sense to Eleanor. Manila was mostly a city of civilians.

There was no time to contemplate the destruction. Laura Cobb yelled for them to run to the hospital, which had not been hit. There would be wounded coming to them, there had to be. They needed to prepare for those arrivals. Eleanor dashed past the hulks of buildings ablaze and flattened structures, her lungs filling with a chemical smoke that made her chest burn and her eyes water as they ran to the hospital. It had not been a target. She could only hope Sternberg hadn't been either and that Penny and Lita were safe.

When she and the rest of the nurses and corpsmen arrived, the injured were already there with more soon coming. Eleanor staggered to a stop before Peg grabbed her arm and pulled her forward. She had never seen such injuries, not even in the training manuals—shattered arms and legs bent in impossible positions or missing altogether, lacerations down to the bone, blackened flesh from horrible burns. The sounds of human anguish punctuated the air.

Laura barked out instructions, sending some of them to see to the bleeders, some to the burn victims, and some to administer morphine to ease the suffering of those whose injuries were not life-threatening. Eleanor was given vials of the painkiller, all the while worried that she would run out of the drug before she'd seen to every injured person in the triage area. The nearby medical dispensary had been bombed, and nothing was left of it.

One battered sailor, whose legs were twisted at unnatural angles, grabbed Eleanor's arm as she slipped the needle into his skin.

“Is my mother alright?” His eyes were glassy, his voice weak.

“I’m sure she’s fine,” Eleanor soothed, as she taped a tiny piece of gauze over the injection site.

“But she’s in her bedroom! How will she get downstairs? What if the stairs have been bombed?”

The poor young man thought he was back home, wherever that was, and Eleanor couldn’t linger to help him understand. Too many others needed her attention.

“She is fine, I promise. Rest now.”

Eleanor went on to the next wounded man who begged to know if his bunkmate had come through. They’d been together. Where was he?

Another begged for her to put him out of his misery.

Another, missing an arm, was attempting to rise from his stretcher as she reached him. Blood oozed from his tourniquet as he struggled to stand.

“You need to lie still.” Eleanor eased him back down with effort.

“Let me go to my ship!” he shouted. “I outrank you. Let me go! That’s an order!”

“You are wounded, sir. You are bleeding. You mustn’t move about.” She gave him the injection of morphine even as he threatened to inform her supervisor of her insubordination.

The next wounded sailor she sped to care for had already expired when she reached him, his wounds worse than what had been visible.

The hellish hours wore on, without electricity to sterilize the instruments or the elevator to send the most injured to surgery on the third floor. Civilians—the young, the old, men, women, children, and babies—flooded the hospital, too, and had to lay on the floor on blankets, if one could be found, because there were no available beds.

With no way to chart the care they were giving, one of the nurses had a corpsman bring her a box of morgue tags that she and Eleanor and Peg filled out with the names of the injured and what medication had been administered. They placed the grim cards meant for the dead on the wrists of the injured living.

As the day drew near its end, Eleanor and the others were tasked by Laura with recording the details of every person they had seen to, every

injury they had dressed, every patient sent up to surgery, every injection they'd given, and every person who had died in their care. Family members back home needed to know what had become of their brave sailors. Wives needed to be made aware they were now widows. Mothers and fathers needed to know their sons had given their lives for their country.

"Don't think about it, just do it," Eleanor told herself repeatedly as she bent over the paperwork. She couldn't let herself consider that some of what she was writing would make its way to commanding officers who would then set about writing death notifications.

While they worked, news came down from the captain. Communication from the Japanese forces had arrived. The hospital had thirty-six hours to evacuate its wounded. If it didn't comply, it would be bombed. This news was nearly impossible to comprehend. Where were they supposed to go?

Eleanor fell to her bed that night achingly tired but unable to sleep soundly. She had seen too much suffering, too many horrific injuries, too much sadness.



After a fitful night, morning arrived oppressively humid. At breakfast Eleanor and the other nurses were told to pack and be ready to leave for good in an hour. They were bound for Santa Scholastica, a Catholic girls' college across the bay that had been transformed into a makeshift hospital. Sixty minutes later, she was on a small transport vessel loaded with the injured from Cañacao. Eleanor stood at the bow and surveyed what had been a paradise. In every direction she looked she saw smoldering ruins.

The mood aboard the vessel was somber. U.S. Army and Navy installations all over the Philippines had been bombed or were still being bombed. Was anything still operational with which to wage war against the enemy? Even with her limited military training, Eleanor didn't see how the U.S. could continue to hold its positions. It seemed they were not so much at war as preparing to be occupied.

Eleanor wondered crazily if perhaps that would be less terrible. The occupying forces, if they came, would surely allow them to continue to see

to the needs of the sick and wounded and dying, wouldn't they? Had her parents heard that Manila had been attacked? And would she be able to get word to them that she was alright? She hoped she could.

But her worst worry she hadn't allowed herself to fully ponder—not in the immediate hours after the attack and not now. No one had been able to tell her if Sternberg Army Hospital was still standing. Were Penny and Lita injured? Or worse? Would she get to Manila only to learn her friends had been killed?

Eleanor set her face against the wind as the port drew nearer, refusing to entertain the notion.



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